Université de Montréal

Bodies, Saracen Giants, and the Medieval Romance: Transgression, Difference, and Assimilation

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Mémoire présentée à la Faculté des arts et des sciences

en vue de l'obtention du grade de maîtrise

en études anglaises

Février, 2012

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Université de Montréal

Faculté des arts et des sciences

Cette mémoire intitulée :

Bodies, Saracen Giants, and the Medieval Romance: Transgression, Difference, and Assimilation

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Résumé de synthèse

Bodies, Saracen Giants, and the Medieval Romance: Transgression, Difference, and Assimilation explore le traitement des corps de trois géants Sarasins dans les romances de *Roland and Vernagu* (c. 1330), *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* (c. 1330), et *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear* (c. 1513-42).Grâce à une étude de la représentation de ces trois géants Sarasin, la signification du corps humain au Moyen Age, et des pratiques de la Chrétienté an accord avec les discours et idéologies envers le Proche-Orient qui existaient dans l'Occident médiéval, ce mémoire de maîtrise juxtapose le géant Sarasin et le héros de la romance pour indiquer une similarité apparente entre leur deux corps et leur religion respective. La romance démontre avec hésitation un désir d'assimiler le géants Sarasin dans le code héroïque ainsi que dans la religion chrétienne, mais souvent rejette avec suspicion le corps du géant par sa mort sur le champ de bataille. Malgré sa mort ou son assimilation dans le code héroïque et la Chrétienté, le corps du géant Sarasin demeure toujours important dans le contexte de la Romance, puisqu'il contribue à la construction de l'identité du héros, de sa foi, et de sa société.

Mots clés : Sarasin, roman médiéval, géants, corps médiéval, Islam, Est, Orient, conversion

Abstract

Bodies, Saracen Giants, and the Medieval Romance: Transgression, Difference, and Assimilation explores the treatment of the bodies of three Saracen giants in the romances of *Roland and Vernagu* (c. 1330), *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* (c. 1330), and *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear* (c. 1513-42). Through a study of the characterization of the three Saracen giants, the significance of the human body in the Middle Ages, and the practices of Christianity in accordance with the discourses and ideologies regarding the near East that existed in the medieval West, this thesis addresses how and why the romance constructs the giant as a physical marker of excess, deviance and evil. Using theories and criticisms of subjectivity and embodiment, this thesis juxtaposes the Saracen giant with the romance hero to underline an obvious similarity between the two bodies and their respective religions. The romance hesitantly demonstrates a desire to assimilate Saracen giants into the heroic code as well as the Christian religion, but it often distrustfully chooses to remove the giant body through its death in battle. Regardless of its death or assimilation into the heroic code and Christianity, the Saracen giant's body forever remains meaningful for the romance, as it always contributes to the construction of the romance hero's identity, faith and society.

Keywords: Saracens, medieval romance, giants, medieval bodies, Islam, East, Orient, conversion

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for Abbu and Ammi

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been possible without the expertise, direction, suggestions, and revisions of my thesis director, Dr. Joyce Boro at the Université de Montréal. I would like to thank Dr. Boro for guiding me throughout my Master's career and deepening my understanding, love and appreciation for all things medieval. I would also like to thank the departement d'etudes anglaises for giving me the opportunity to pursue my passion for the romance and allowing me to write this thesis. Lastly, special thanks is due to my friends and family from near and far who have continuously supported me these past two years, especially my mother, father, Asiya, and Bibi. Without your encouragement and faith in me, I would not have been able to romance the Saracen giant.

Introduction

The idea that the Saracen body is not simply a marker of physical difference, but necessarily a marker of spiritual error is a trope common to the medieval romance. As Suzanne Akbari posits, "Saracens differ from Christians both in terms of soul and in terms of body, their adherence to a false religion [is] mirrored in the appearance of their flesh" (Akbari 4). Where the Saracen is white skinned with a beautiful form, the romance overcomes his or her spiritual misguidance through conversion. Unlike his human counterparts, however, the Saracen giant is commonly marked by difference: he bears an unseemly visage that signals the spiritual and physical deviance inherent in his flesh. In spite of this difference the romance offers the Saracen giant a chance for baptism and assimilation into the heroic-Christian corpus, but his body is a site of transgression that often refuses to be transformed by christening and often results in dismemberment. *Bodies, Saracen Giants, and the Medieval Romance* addresses what the bodies of Saracen giants -- dismembered, nearly christened, and integrated into the heroic and Christian corpus -- narrate through the medieval romance.

In popular medieval narratives such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1350) or Chaucer's the *Tale of Sir Thopas* (c. 1342) the giant serves as the romance hero's rite of passage to knighthood, because overcoming such a marvelous body in size and proportion ennobles the knight. However, Saracen giants of romance symbolize a greater and more realistic threat than Sir Gawain's noble adversary, Sir Bertilak, or Sir Thopas's rock-throwing foe, Sir Olifaunt. "Saracen" is, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "[a]mong the later Greeks and Romans, a name for the nomadic peoples of the Syro-Arabian desert which harassed the Syrian confines of the Empire; hence, an Arab; by extension, a Muslim, *esp.* with reference to the Crusades". The idea of a

military threat to the Western states is embedded in the name of the Saracen. As a result, the male Saracen of romance embodies this military threat in the figure of the Saracen emir, sultan, or champion. However, due to the giant's large body, marvelous strength, and dark skin -- though, this is not always the case, as this thesis will demonstrate -- the Saracen giant most commonly occupies the position of a champion or an errant knight. Saracens are Western representations of the East and of Islam, or those that, to use Edward Said's terms, "symbolize terror, devastation, [and] the demonic" (59). Because the Saracen Muslim body is exemplified as such, the Saracen giant in romance embodies medieval Christianity's fear of the "militant hostility" proposed by the Muslims onto the European Christians (Said 91). The romance, thus, characterizes the Orient's deviance, difference, and irregularity through the giant's resolute faith in "Mahoun", (i.e. the Prophet Muhammad), his abnormal stature, and foul visage.

Though medieval monsters and giants have been written about extensively, Saracen giants, who significantly differ from the non-Saracen giants of romance, have not been a subject of much critical interest. Medieval monsters appear in many shapes and sizes, such as giants, dwarfs, and men; others appear as anthropomorphic beasts and many possess demonic or superhuman qualities[1]. The Saracen giant of the medieval romance differs from these monsters by possessing human qualities, thoughts, and beliefs. He is most prominently distinguishable from other European monstrosities through his similarity with heroic Christian knights and conversion to Christianity. In

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[1] See, Robert Olsen and Karin Olsen, "On the Embodiment of Monstrosity in Northwest Medieval Europe", *Monsters and Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe*, eds. K.E. Olsen and L. A. J. E. Houwen (Leuven: Peeters, 2001) 1-22.

this thesis I interlace various applications of Said's *Orientalism* (2003) by scholars such as Siobhain Bly Calkin and Suzanne Conklin Akbari onto the Middle Ages and the romances produced during the time. Akbari (2009) analyses the various marvelous descriptions of the East that appear in medieval maps, literature and documents that were circulated during the time. Similarly, Calkin (2005) analyses the Saracen bodies in the Auchinleck manuscript (c. 1330) to emphasize the range of characteristics the Saracen exercised in the medieval imagination. I extend these concepts and combine them with theories of the giant's subjectivity and the racial narrativization of the East through Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1999) who maps the history of the giant in relation to the narratives of England and the West, and, in similar respect, with Geraldine Heng (2003) who examines the colonial and racial conflicts of Eastern identities in the romance that open channels for the construction of the English nation and nationalism. Much of this scholarship demonstrates the complexity of the nature of the "Saracen" body in the medieval imagination, because identity, especially in romance, was determined through external characteristics.

Because Saracens embody various roles and their identities are never fixed, the Saracen giants that I analyze appear in their respective romances as the locus of change, alterity and constant fluctuation. As Mikhail Bakhtin notes, the giant body is the grotesque body --"a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed: it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (317). The body of the Saracen giant, thus, is a body in a constant state of fluctuation that challenges the notion of subjectivity for itself and those in contact with it. It can also be looked at as Julia Kristeva's "abject", as a thing "neither subject nor object" (1). When the giant is

defeated and dismembered, the victorious knight increases his prowess and his subjectivity comes into existence, and the knight as a subject is produced. However, the giant also positions himself as the subject when he is admired by the Christian knights for his heroic display of chivalry and during scenes of conversion. The Saracen giant's body simultaneously takes the position of the subject when it helps to produce the knight and also the object in relation to which the knight's subjectivity comes into existence. The Saracen giant's body is, because of his alterity, his inverted Christian faith, his fluctuating subjectivity, his abjection, also "uncanny", as Sigmund Freud states that the *unheimlich*, or uncanny is a space or thing that is marked “unhomely” precisely because it exhibits qualities that are *heimlich,* or familiar (934). The Saracen giant, thus, due to his capacity to convert to Christianity yet instill fear in his Christian counterparts, is a representation of all kinds of binaries. In this thesis I analyze the various theories of bodies and identities that underline the dual nature of the Saracen giant, and his ability to change his chivalric position, characterization and identity to parallels the identity of the Christian knight of romance.

Though the Saracen giant is a frequenter of the French *chansons de geste,* this thesis studies two English romances which survive in the Auchinleck manuscript: *Roland and Vernagu* (c. 1330) and *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* (c. 1330), and a Middle Scottish romance, preserved in a facsimile of a lost manuscript, the *Taill of Rauf Coilyear* (c. 1513-42). In each of the romances, the Saracen giant's binary characterization is demarcated by his head, weapon of choice, performance of chivalry, and attire. With an emphasis on diction, I construct the parallels between the Saracen "Other" and the Christian subject. Unlike the monstrous giants of romance who appear

on the boundaries and outskirts of civilization, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's infamous giant of Mont St. Michel[2] or *Beowulf's* Grendel[3], the Saracen giant of romance embodies the boundaries of the East and brings them to the West. His presence in the romance destabilizes the subjectivities of the Christians he battles, because he is not immutable, but constantly adopting new identities. The Saracen giant, once arrived in the romance, challenges the Christian knight and the Christian faith in a trial by combat where the righteous religion, Christianity, wins and the Saracen's demonic faith always succumbs.

Akbari demonstrates that,

> [f]rom a medieval Christian perspective, wholeness and bodily integrity were seen as fundamental attributes of the Church, mystically united by the sacrifice of the Eucharist; fragmentation and incompleteness, by contrast, were thought to be the hallmarks of Christianity's precursor, now superseded". (123)

In the romance, Islam, too, like Christianity's precursor, Judaism, as its forerunner appears in fragments. The Christian religion becomes the balance between two extremes that the Christian body avoids and attempts to overcome. Ironically, it is Christianity that identifies itself with the unstable body of the Saracen giant by wishing to break it and, simultaneously, assimilate it. Instead of being a balance between two extreme

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[2] The giant of Mont St. Michel is King Arthur's historic foe who kidnaps, beats, repeatedly rapes, kills and devours Helena, the neice of Arthur's good friend and ally, Hoel, duke of Armorica. The giant inhabits a mountain in Spain, on the outskirts of the city. See Book X, Chapter III of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Ed. Lewis Thorpe. London: Penguin, 1966

[3] Grendel, Beowulf's monstrous adversary, like the giant of Mont St. Michel dwells outside in the marches of the city of Heorot, external to the society. See *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*. Trans. Seamus Heaney. Ed. Daniel Donoghue. New York: Norton, 2002. 102-105.

points, however, my thesis views the Christianity performed in the romance as the tip of an equilateral triangle; although it appears to be in the centre, it is alternatively directly connected to its precursor and forerunner, and conjoined with them as they become the base that keeps it balanced and pointed upwards. Although my thesis does not analyze the medieval Jewish body in detail, its presence and significance is definitely observable in the medieval romance's imagination of the Saracen giant. The Saracen, by embodying instability, aggression, excess, and stubbornness exposes the limitations and the myopic vision of the medieval Christian imagination.

Chapter 1

Transgression

Introduction

> [W]here the public and historical sphere of knighthood may be read, the suggestion is readily embedded that a person *is* his body, and that the body is continuous with identity in some intrinsic, quintessential fashion.
>
> (Geraldine Heng 168)

In her study of the bodily interactions between Christian and Saracen knights of romance, Geraldine Heng advocates the idea that the body of the knight, whether it is Christian or Saracen, is the primary marker of his identity. Although the medieval romance immediately demarcates the Saracen body by its religious alterity, his body's "foreignness does not admit military difference" (Heng 171). As a result, the mark of chivalry on the Saracen knight's body serves as a token that aligns him with Christian knights, and often predetermines his assimilation into the Christian faith. Interestingly, the Saracen giant, like the Saracen knight, also possesses characteristics of chivalry, but his false religion, imprinted on his body, refuses to grant him the rank of anything but that of the giant. In this chapter I analyze one such Saracen giant, Vernagu, from the Middle English romance of *Roland and Vernagu*, preserved in the Auchinleck manuscript (c. 1330). The Saracen giant, his physical irregularity or as I argue his body's transgression from normalcy, signals his transgression from Christianity, and the individual parts of his body mirror the Saracen landscape that transgresses from the East over to the West. Vernagu's body determines that the romance problematizes the Saracen giant by necessarily undoing his physical alterity by his dismemberment and removal from the narrative. Alternately, the fragmented body of the Saracen giant also

cultivates the Christian knight's body and, in turn, the chivalric exchange between these bodies unveils the ironic similarity between the Christian and Saracen religions.

The first section of this chapter considers the formation of Vernagu's fragmented identity through various external markers that interact with his body. The second section aligns Vernagu's body, his various body parts and the power they possess with the Saracen landscape. The third section parallels Charlemagne's body with that of the monstrous and draws on the similarities between the monstrous Saracen giant and the noble Christian emperor. The chapter as a whole maps how the various bodies, Christian and Saracen, deviate from the norm and Christianity, and how the giant's body cultivates this transgression.

I. Piecing-Together the Giant's Body

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests that the giant's body, which is marked by a plethora of meanings when whole, becomes a "meaningful little fragment" through its dismemberment (Cohen 67). In Cohen's analysis of giants, from those of antiquity to their modern representations, it is apparent that in most cases, if not all, the very existence of the giant's body in a narrative becomes the precursor to his body's eventual dismemberment, and as the above quotation suggests, it is in death and dismemberment that the giant’s body becomes meaningful. In *Roland and Vernagu* the narrative attaches significant meaning to the various parts of Vernagu’s body before his death. The narrative’s attention to Vernagu’s various giant-sized body parts predetermines his eventual dismantling, because "the giant is a body that is always in pieces, since within the human frame, he can be perceived only synecdochically, never as a totality" (Cohen

11). As Vernagu makes an appearance in the text, the romance describes his body through parts that sum up his physical magnitude, but he is never described "as a totality". His being is accumulated though a blazon of his body that divides it into its various parts from top to bottom: his height was of "fourti fet" ("forty feet"; *Roland* 474), a face "four fet" ("four feet"; 476) in length, his shoulders "fiften in brede" ("fifteen in breadth"; 478), and a nose that was a "fot & more" ("foot or more"; 479). Vernagu's body is divided into portions that attract attention to his irregular form. He is immediately characterized as a giant because of the excessive irregularity of his bodily features. His physical presence exceeds the limits of the human form to such an extent that the Christian emperor, Charlemagne, is unable to adjust Vernagu's totality in his field of vision. He, alternatively, "biheld ich a lim" ("beheld [Vernagu's] each limb"; 494). Vernagu's introduction to the romance, thus, characterises his body as the primary marker of his identity: he is visually quartered by height, length and breadth; next, particular sections of his body, his "limbs" are emphasized, which demarcate the irregularity of his appearance. The giant introduces himself to the narrative as a body out of proportion, a body transgressing the human form. This Saracen body is further ostracized by an appearance that is "loþeliche" ("loathsome"; 482). Through such a magnitude the giant's body appears as a sight of marvel because the blazon that describes it separates each of its parts as if the eyes observing it are mesmerized. However, the blazon simultaneously also dismantles Vernagu's gigantic form and suggests that it is unnatural and undesirable.

The marvel and concurrent undesirability of Vernagu's form in the Christian imagination is encouraged by his performance on the battlefield. The manner in which

Vernagu fights draws attention to segments of his body, as his chivalry is narrated by the actions of his large limbs when he effortlessly collects Charlemagne's men under either of his "arm[s]" and removes them to his castle in Nassers (523-24). Similarly, when Vernagu first encounters Roland in battle he takes "him vnder his hond" ("him under his hand [arm]"; 547-48) and unhorses him. On the one hand, the romance's emphasis on Vernagu's hands and arms gives prominence to the strength that Vernagu possesses, which in the Christian imagination highlights his knightly prowess. On the other hand, his ability to remove so many of Charlemagne's men at once is threatening. According to Heng, the "idea that the truth of a person may somehow be read on his body, or within his body, suggests a certain capacity...to essentialize the body as the ground of reference and truth", especially when the body is performing on the battlefield (168). If this is argued then the truth that Vernagu's limbs narrate is his martial superiority over Charlemagne's men and the danger this superiority poses onto Christendom. Interestingly, the romance hesitantly draws attention to Vernagu's physical finery and suggests that the Saracen giant's body is desirable: a body that can be assimilated into the heroic code and possibly Christianity. However, because in these chivalric exchanges Vernagu's identity is *only* characterised by his body parts and the actions they perform, the romance negatively projects Vernagu's identity as an intermingled set of threatening limbs. These limbs are fearful and threatening because they displace Christian knights. He is, thus, depicted as a fragmented entity of magnificent, yet terrifying strength; he is an object desired and feared at the same time. This forces the enormity of his body and the strength of his limbs to instill fear, and not admiration, in his opponents. The Saracen giant's characterization as martial threat,

therefore, necessarily predetermines his death through a dismantling of the body parts responsible for the displacement of Charlemagne's men, unless he converts to Christianity.

Similar to the binary narratives that Vernagu embodies in the eyes of Christianity, the romance calls attention to the Saracen giant's unstable identity. The instability projected onto the Christian knights by the Saracen giant's partially desired, partially feared, and partially visible body can be determined through the "matter" of his being. Using Aristotle's formulation of the body[4], Suzanne Akbari demonstrates that "when the form and matter [of the body] are inconsistent, the product is a monstrous giant; the giant's great size is neither good nor beautiful, because the matter contained within the body does not correspond to its form" (173). In other words, the giant's body cannot be observed as a mark of prowess or beauty in spite of its marvelous strength, because its "internal matter" does not match its exterior "form". If the internal is unrefined compared to its refined exterior, there is a disturbance in the body as a whole. In this respect, the "form" or the structure of Vernagu's identity is his refined, marvelous body. This "form" is also a mark of his chivalry, as he nobly fights Charlemagne's knights that match him. However, it is his internal "matter", the matter that is contained within Vernagu's "form" that casts him as a site of fear. This "internal matter" is imprinted on his "panim hede" ("pagan head"; *Roland* 475) and his "swart as piche" complexion ("pitch black, swarthy"; 483).

According to Alexandra Cuffel, in the Christian Middle Ages Muslims were commonly "portrayed...as dark depending on the relative 'evil' of the given person"

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[4] taken from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (c. 350 BCE)

(13). Although Vernagu's head and skin colour are both external to his internal "matter", they are, for the Christian body, the key markers of his internal lack: that is, his false pagan religion. This is because Vernagu’s skin is pitch black, a colour that marks his excessive evilness. In addition, Vernagu’s inherent evil is heightened by his monstrous origins, for he is a native of "Babiloun", or Babylon, and has come to the newly Christened Spain to reclaim it from Charlemagne (*Roland* 467). Cuffel explains that the medieval imagination of Babylon was often "bestial, violent, and sexually uncontrolled"; associated with "an unnamed but doubly destructive beast"; and "compared to a series of skin diseases" (52-53). In addition, the medieval Muslim's "dark skin functioned like disease. It was an external signifier of internal moral corruption" (163). Vernagu’s Babylonian birth, coupled with his pitch black skin and his determination to reclaim Saracen Spain from Charlemagne reiterates that his identity is of the evilest kind. Additionally, his internal core, the discourse of his "pagan" Muslim belief, is not only evil but also marred with weakness and disease that is prevalent on his outward appearance. This concept problematizes Vernagu's body further, because he is unable to project an identity that dissociates him from his diseased, "pagan head" that supersedes his equally noticeable chivalric identity. Thus, Vernagu's identity, like his visually dismantled body, is reduced to the colour of his skin and loathly visage, and the strength of his arms, his valour, and chivalry go unnoticed.

Vernagu's head, a marker of his false faith, further emphasizes the reduction of his identity. According to Cohen, the head is "the seat of the soul, [and] the biological and allegorical ruler of the lower limbs" (85). Because Vernagu's head signals the foul "internal matter" of his pagan religion that is disfigured by a swarthy complexion,

Vernagu's body's outward form is transformed into a fear of the "disease" brewing inside him. The marvelous actions that his limbs perform, therefore, transgress into fearful assault, and his skin effaces his chivalry. Thus, the outward appearance of Vernagu's body characterizes him as *only* evil.

Judith Butler in "Subjection, Resistance, Resignification: Between Freud and Foucault" explains that the formation of a "subject", its birth in the symbolic order, is not necessarily a positive construction, because a "subject" comes into being through subjection and subordination by the discourse surrounding it, or the discourse it is born in (235). The process of "subjectivization" is such that the body, when it arrives in the symbolic order, is reduced to a stereotypical category, because the law, the symbolic order, surrounding it pre-exists the body's identification. For example, Butler observes Althusser's concept of "interpellation"[5] that determines that "one who is addressed and cited by...[a] call is also in some important way constituted by that call" (238). This is especially apparent when an interpellation evokes a social category, because the idea that the subject has transgressed and should be rebuked is inherent in the appellation. For instance, Butler notes that in the interpellation of "Jew", the call itself functions as either "politically enabling or paralyzing" (239). As a result, when this theory is applied to Vernagu's body, it appears that the notion of an evil Saracen, "pagan" identity pre-exists Vernagu's chivalric performance in the romance. Butler's theory further proposes that Vernagu, in spite of his chivalric ability is incapable of producing an identity that is not subjected by the significance of his "pagan head", because his identity is predetermined, and visually identifiable as a "Sarraȝin" ("Saracen"; *Roland* 544). The

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[5] See, Louis Althusser, "Ideology and ideological state apparatuses", *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1989) 170-86.

dark impression left on Vernagu's skin from his Saracen-Babylonian origins, in addition, casts Vernagu as a "prisoner" in the Foucaudian "prision"[6], which "acts on the prisoner's body...by forcing the prisoner to approximate an ideal; a norm of behavior" (Butler 230). The "norm of behavior" for a Saracen giant is to be foul and fiend-like. It is through the discourse of Christianity embodied by the "rede" ("rosy-complexioned"; *Roland* 435) Charlemagne that Vernagu becomes the subject of this transgression. He embodies a predetermined monstrosity marked by his skin's darkness, which, in turn, justifies the dismantling of his body at Roland's hands.

II. Saracen Heads, Statues and Land

According to Siobhain Bly Calkin, "[w]hat Saracens reveal...is that Christian characters are troubled by, and react to, the otherness of Saracens only when those 'foreigners' are performing better at knightly functions" (33). Calkin's exposition suggests that Vernagu's body becomes a threat only when he, or his body parts, exceed the Christian knights in feats of arms. This can be deduced from Vernagu's effortless maneuvers in capturing several of Charlemagne's knights. These actions, had Vernagu been Christian would have inspired awe, but they are readily transformed into fear and disgust because Vernagu is tainted by a stamp of falsehood nf his dark skin by his pagan belief. This intermingled desire and disgust for Vernagu's body is illustrated by the romance's attraction and fear for Vernagu's chivalric technique, because he is on occasion described as "a douhti kni[gh]t" ("a doughty knight"; *Roland* 463) who is

[6] Michel Foucault notes that the panopticon is a tower of surveillance in the modern prison, which acts as an agent that cultivates fear in the prisoner's body, because no guard can be seen inside this tower, but symbolically, it represents the prison's constant surveillance of the prisoner's body. As a result, the prisoner disciplines his body in constant fear of punishment by the prison. See Michel Foucault's "The Body of the Condemned" in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage, 1995).

"[s]tout & fers" ("stout and fierce"; 465) and is also referred to as "Sir Vernagu" (546). However, once his dominance in battle is discovered, within twelve lines the romance names him as "loþeliche" ("loathsome"; 482). In the moment when Vernagu is characterized as doughty and fierce, he embodies the characteristics of a noble knight, but once he is shown to be stronger than the Christians he is turned into a loathsome monster.

Cuffel's disease-like ideology of the Muslim religion evokes the transgression that the Saracen giant's body marks from the Christian body. Vernagu's limbs externalize his, to reuse Cuffel's terms, "internal moral corruption" (163) that threatens to transgress from Christianity and the human Christian body. In similar respect, Vernagu's body threatens to overtake and influence Charlemagne's recently conquered Spain. Cuffel suggests that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Christians "invented the grotesque rituals by which Muslims supposedly desecrated Christian holy spaces or objects, the better to prompt their fellow Christians to war and to create a barrier of aversion against conversion to Islam" (10). This idea of "desecration of space" is observed in Vernagu's mastery in manipulating the newly conquered Christian land. In spite of Charlemagne's conquest of Spain, Vernagu comes from Babylon and appears to establish a home with ease, a "castel" ("castle"; *Roland* 505) in which he imprisons and "schame[s]" ("shames"; 506) all the knights that meet him in battle, with the exception of Roland. Although Vernagu does not directly violate Christian sacred places, his body violates the newly Christened land of Spain when he imprisons Charlemagne`s knights in a castle that should be Christian property. His arms, furthermore, that effortlessly carry away several knights to his castle symbolize Vernagu's pagan reach that threatens

to impose its power on Christianity and force a re-conversion of Christian Spain into Saracen Spain.

Vernagu's fluid movement in the Christian landscape suggests his familiarity with the land. In turn, his body resembles the landscape of Spain in which he moves unrestrictedly. When Roland and Vernagu fight, Vernagu's body mirrors the Spanish landscape that Charlemagne destroys and conquers. Twice Charlemagne encounters cities whose "walles so strong were" that he may not overcome their strength ("walls were so strong"; *Roland* 191-92). Similarly, Vernagu's body, particularly his torso, bears the same kind of strength that leaves him unharmed, for Roland asks Vernagu, "Whi þou art so hard / Þat no þing may þe dere" ("Why are you so hard / That nothing may harm you"; 655-56), to which Vernagu responds that his body from the "nauel vpward" is stronger than any man's ("navel upwards"; 660-61). Vernagu's body above the navel evokes the image of his "pagan head" that is the membrane that controls his limbs and the actions performed by those limbs. Vernagu’s chest, like his head, is the powerhouse of his body without which his limbs would not function. This is also the area that like the head, which is protected by a helmet, is protected with a shield and armour, it houses the heart that breathes life into the rest of the body, but also contains the internal matter of Vernagu’s religion. Just like the head that represents the control centre of Vernagu’s body, and simultaneously an internal lack, Vernagu’s chest represents the strength of his core, and also the danger this core poses. The Saracen giant body mirrors the Saracen walls that Charlemagne has difficulty overcoming. Charlemagne prays "to God of heuen" ("God of heaven"; 197) to bring down the walls of the city he wants to enter, and, conveniently, "felle þe walles of þe cite" ("the walls

of the city fell"; 203). Likewise, Roland kneels down and prays to surmount Vernagu's body, and through the "heuen-king['s]" ("heaven-king's"; 822) intervention, Roland is able to dismantle Vernagu's body, beginning with his "arm" that falls to the ground (827). The act of prayer and divine intervention in overcoming the Saracen giant aligns Vernagu's body with the strong exterior of the Saracen communities that are similarly broken into. The divine intervention of God also suggests the unusually strong power of these exterior representations of the morally-polluted, internal bodies of Saracens that the romance insists on dismantling. The fallen walls of Saracen cities, reflected on Vernagu's dismantled body, remind the reader that the destruction of these walls is necessary, because, like Vernagu's powerful exterior, the cities house a malicious interior. The romance intricately ties Vernagu's identity with the architecture of Saracen Spain that Charlemagne has now conquered.

Vernagu's body is further aligned with the landscape of Spain through the presence of the supernatural. The powerful walls of the Spanish cities, like Vernagu's body, are constructed through powerful means, which the romance terms "gines" (*Roland* 194). The *Middle English Dictionary* defines the term "gine" as "ingeniously...by magic", which reinforces the mysterious and cunning aspect of the Saracen interior in the romance ("gin(ne)," def 1a). This image of cunning sorcery that is used to construct the walls that barricade Saracen cities and house the Saracen faith parallel the Saracen giant's marvelous body, because "gines" are also related to the maliciousness of one of Vernagu's pagan gods, Mahoun. Before Vernagu makes an appearance in the romance, Charlemagne overtakes Spain and destroys all the false idols of paganism. One particular idol is said to be built by Mahoun himself, for

"Mahoun maked him wiþ gin / & dede mani fendes þerin," ("Mahoun made him with magical craft / and implanted many fiends within it"; *Roland* 335). The term "gin" manifests Mahoun's ingenious crafting of the pagan statue. If Akabri's assertion of the Aristotalian matter and form of the body is expanded, Vernagu's internal matter should be determined by something that is actually inside his body, and not a deduction of his matter through the external, dark, swarthy complexion of his "pagan head". The only material that escapes from Vernagu's internal matter, as a result, is the spoken word. Thus, Vernagu's religious discourse, his invocation of "Mahoun" (515; 851) aligns his identity with sorcery, such as that which is crafted into the false statue of Mahoun, who is a conniving and malicious pagan god. Calkin suggests that in spite of Vernagu's chivalry he is "still a giant with magical powers," and the sorcery inherent in his being "blurs somewhat the division between monstrous and knightly Saracens" (23). Through the projection of his identity on the landscape that defines him, Vernagu's body appears, at one instance, desirable and ingeniously crafted, but for the same reasons, his body is reduced to an inhuman and fearsome form.

Akbari explains that the medieval conception of bodily diversity was based on the power of the sun, and communities in southern countries had darker skin (162). In these countries "monstrosities -- that is, bodies that are 'horrible, with different faces and monstrous appearance' were also found" (Akbari 162). Thus, Vernagu, a body that is from Babylon and possesses skin that is swarthy as pitch, also embodies "different faces": a body that is always represented through its different parts and the features of the land. Vernagu, thus, possesses a body that is always viewed through its various features, but never as a totality.

The bond between Vernagu and the pagan landscape marked with pagan statues is strengthened during Roland and Vernagu's fight and the two use "stones" as weapons (*Roland* 604). What is important about this exchange is that the stones cause Vernagu enough fatigue that he falls asleep during the battle, and as a result, Roland is influenced to pick up one of the larger stones that he and Vernagu recently used as weapons, and place it "vnder heued,.../ For him þout it lay amis" ("under [Vernagyu's] head / for he thought it lay amiss"; 635-636). In this act, Roland reinstates the object that is missing from Vernagu's body: a stone that elevates his "pagan head". Roland's noble act of providing Vernagu a pillow to sleep on casts Vernagu's body as an extension of a pagan statue. His action marries Vernagu's fragmented body deep into the monstrous and magical by placing his four feet wide head atop a stone pedestal that reinforces the notion that Vernagu's body is a member or limb of the land, something to be conquered and uprooted. Vernagu's body appears in fragments from the beginning of the romance until its end, because the romance conveys that Vernagu's body is actually a fragment of the land, of the Saracen "gines", walls, and statues. It is a body always wrong, always lacking wholeness, coherence and totality.

Roland's act of reinstating Vernagu's head on the stone pedestal where it belongs more importantly determines what follows: a chivalric and religious dialogue. Immediately after Roland replaces the object missing from Vernagu's head, Vernagu is alert, as if stimulated by the touch of the stone: "He stard as he were wode" ("He stared as [if] he were mad"; 639). Vernagu's astonishment[7] leads him to inquire about the identity of the "fre" or noble (645) knight that placed the stone beneath his head. Firstly,

[7] The Middle English "wode" is translated as "insane" (*MED* "wode" def 1a),

Vernagu's desire to identify the "fre" knight resurfaces his previously denied chivalry, for it determines Vernagu is aware of the rules of chivalry and nobility. Then, discovering that the noble deed was performed by Roland, Vernagu inquires about Christianity as he asks, "wat man [Christ] was?" ("What kind of man was Christ?"; 679). Vernagu's inquiry of the Christian faith materializes a desire to learn about Christianity that was not evident in his identity before. Further, Vernagu questions the trinity and upon hearing Roland's explanation asserts that "now y se[e] / Hou [Christ] is god in persones þre" ("Now I see / How Christ is god in three persons"; 719-20). Vernagu later understands Christ's virgin birth, questions Christ's death, and how he rose to heaven and stayed there (746-770). He finally declares that "now ich wot / your Cristen lawe eueri grot," ("now I know / every peice of your Christian law"; 785-86). What follows is the inevitable recommencement of battle where the Saracen giant, Vernagu, is beheaded. However, in the questions that Vernagu poses, he shows a clear understanding, every "grot", which in Middle English denotes every "piece" or every "fragment" ("grot" def 1a. *MED*), of Christianity. His internal matter, represented through his vocal organs, begins to change by the external Christian knowledge he receives, and his approval of the trinity suggests that he understands the faith. Furthermore, Vernagu's outwardly form begins to manifest an inward malleability, a suggestion of an equalizing between the imbalance of his internal matter and outward form. Nevertheless, as previously noted by Calkin, and deduced by Butler's theory of subjectivity, in spite of Vernagu's knightly characteristics he is non-human, which blurs the border between his knightly body and his Saracen monstrosity. These blurred lines

between his partly chivalric, partly monstrous and partly human body, as a consequence, unearth a partly Christian fragment of his identity.

Nevertheless, in spite of Vernagu's understanding of Christianity, he challenges Roland to battle, where essentially, Roland's "right" law deems him victorious, because Roland receives divine affirmation from an angel to “sched [th]e schrewes blod, / For he nas neuer gode” ("shed the shrew’s blood, / For he was never good"; *Roland* 802; 809-810). The Middle English term “shreue” used here to refer to Vernagu is defined as “an evil creature” (“shreue” def 2a. *MED*). Vernagu’s body is directly aligned with the figure of Mahoun, for whose mercy Vernagu pleads, but receives none (*Roland* 851). The predetermined dismemberment of the Saracen giant is finally achieved. Through this final feat of chivalry, Roland eradicates the fearfully powerful arm of the giant that captivates the Christian soldiers and threatens to transgress over their Christian faith. The head, the marker of Verngu's internal foulness, the seat that controls the reach of his limbs, is also finally displaced (864). Christianity seems to preserve itself by dismantling the Saracen giant whose body's irregularity, his large limbs that imprisoned Christian knights, whose dark skin bore the mark of paganism, evil and sorcery, threatened to transgress over Charlemagne’s Spain. However, what is interesting is that Roland "smot[e] ...[Vernagu's] heued in þe place / & to Charl[emagne] it brou[gh]t" ("smote...Vernagu's head / and brought it to Charlemagne"; 864-65). The severed head of the giant becomes a token of Roland's prowess and Christianity's superiority over the Saracens. In this moment, the detested head of the giant begins to cultivate an ironic admiration for the severed body of the Saracen. However, this desire is not for the

assimilation and integration for Saracen giant's living body in the heroic, Christian corpus, but, alternatively, it is a desire for the giant's dead body in pieces.

Heng analyses a similar situation in the romance of *Richard Coer de Lyon* (c. 1300?) and illustrates that the severed head of the Saracen serves to promote England's national identity, for not only does Richard, the Christian king, heartily devour the cooked Saracen head, he also invites Saracen ambassadors to dinner, serving the heads of their family members on platters as a tactic to instill fear (72-74). Likewise, Vernagu's head serves as a token of victory for the Christians over the Saracen monstrosity, for Vernagu's death is followed by a celebratory "procesioun" ("procession"; *Roland* 872) and "miri song" ("merry song"; 874). The romance of *Roland and Vernagu* does not suggest whether Vernagu's head is employed to instill fear in other Saracens, because the severed heads of Saracens in *Richard Coeur de Lion* definitely dramatize fear. *Roland and Vernagu,* however, does present a desire for the severed head of the Saracen giant, just as the desire narrated through King Richard's cannibalism. This desire generated through Vernagu's head becomes a symbol for Charlemagne's victory over a Babylonian giant and his successful conquest of Spain. Although Vernagu's dismantled head does no longer project a fear of transgression from Christianity, it nevertheless maintains that the fear is elsewhere, and pinpoints that fear outside his pagan, Saracen body.

III. Christian Gigantism and Monstrosity

Through the appellation of "Saracen" and "Sir" for Vernagu, in addition to his chivalric mastery and understanding of Christianity, the romance constructs a parallel

between the body of the Saracen giant and the Christian knight. The difference, between the Saracen and Christian warrior, according to Cohen, is chivalry, for it "prevents the knight from becoming the giant that he always in a way, already is" (78). If this formulation is correct, then there is a giant within the Christian knights in *Roland and Vernagu*, but their monstrosity is hidden by the Christian-chivalrous discourse that they are a part of. This concept conspicuously suggests that if there is a monster in every knight, then there is necessarily a knight or human beneath Vernagu's transgressing body. Nevertheless, I would reformulate this statement and suggest that rather than preventing the knight from realizing the monster he is, the discourse of chivalry, in particular, the Christian-heroic discourse in *Roland and Vernagu* masks the knight's inner monstrosity from himself.

The giant's body, as observed in the previous section, is a body that is represented only in fractions. These fragments of the Saracen giant, however, are of a magnitude that exceeds the normal limits of the human body: they are a transgression of the human form. Other giants, unlike Vernagu, and their internal matter, have far more troubling consequences, for Cohen writes,

> [t]he giants body is one that knows neither limit nor control, only immediate...gratification....[T]he desires to which his excessive form gives instant expression mark him as not quite human: men control their appetites..., and the domination over their own body is what constitutes their own humanity. Yet the sins that gigantism writes across the flesh also make the monster all too human. (38)

Cohen's exposition of the giant's body in relation to the human body is striking, because it underlines the non-human qualities of the giant, particularly, his excessive desire for food, and destruction and/or transgression. Ironically, Vernagu appears to possess complete control over his body. It is the outsider's fearful imagination regarding his body that categorizes him as monstrous. If this is to be argued, then Vernagu's body necessarily possesses human characteristics, and the body of the Christian knight possesses monstrous qualities. Vernagu's internal matter, his 'pagan' religion and the fear that it instills in the Christian body is immediately marked as a transgression from Christianity, but because man and monster are a reflection of one another, this monstrous deviance can also be performed by the Christian body. A close look at the imbalance within the giant's body unveils the parallel construction between the bodies of Vernagu and the Christian emperor, Charlemagne.

Vernagu's body, as I have argued above, is desired because it is suited for the heroic code. Charlemagne's appeal for Vernagu's chivalric limbs, his desire to assimilate Vernagu in the Christian heroic corpus has to do with Charlemagne's own body size, for he is "[t]venti fete..[in] lengþe / & also of gret strengþe" ("twenty feet in length / and also of great strength"; *Roland* 431-32). Vernagu and Charlemagne's images are surreptitiously paralleled through the body of the text: as Charlemagne is twenty feet tall with great strength, Vernagu has "tventi men['s] strengþe" ("twenty men's strength; 473). A mirroring structure is revealed in the placement of the lines, as Vernagu and Charlemagne's physical characteristics are separated by twenty-five lines in the text, and the order in which they are described, from height to strength, to the facial features, are also paralleled. For example, as Vernagu is described by his swarthy complexion,

Charlemagne is described by his "Blac...here & rede...face" ("[b]lack hair and red face"; 434). The term "rede" or red is defined as the "ruddiness, rosiness, or redness of complexion" ("red" def. 2.d. *MED*). Charlemagne's complexion demarcates his internal matter as beautiful and rosy, but, ironically, the text undermines itself when constructing Charlemagne's handsome appearance. Cuffel notes that in the Middle Ages Jewish writing often concluded "red" or "ruddy" complexions of Christians as representative of "disease and treachery" (194). It was a manner in which Jewish writers ascribed the colour "red" to signify menstrual impurity onto the Christians, because the Torah, the Jewish law, commanded the Jews to refrain from sexual involvement with women while they were in their menstrual cycles (193-194). Red is further emphatic and destabilizing for Charlemagne's narrative construction, because, Cuffel notes, in medieval Christian art red was often used to differentiate Judas from the rest of Christ's apostles in order to mark his treachery and betrayal (164). Similar to Vernagu whose appearance is characteristic of his dual identity, that is, his chivalry and evil, Charlemagne's skin also suggests his physical prowess and internal impurity. In addition, in spite of Charlemagne's great stature, he is yet twenty feet tall and definitely exceeds the normal height of human beings. Thus, his unusual build and ruddy complexion betray the transgression of his body, just like the giant's body, but because he is a mighty warrior with an allegiance to the Christian law, the romance overlooks the monstrosity intrinsic to his appearance.

Cohen rightfully notes, as mentioned above, that the performance of chivalry by the knight prevents him from becoming the giant he already is. In Charlemagne's case, the romance legitimizes his large body and masks the giant within the Christian hero by

his external form, which is demarcated by his Christian "heued" ("head"; *Roland* 438), that four times in the year wore the "holy croun of þorn" ("holy crown of thorns"; 439). Charlemagne's head is directly aligned with Vernagu's head as a symbol of his internal matter: his religion. Charlemagne's head, the seat that controls the actions of his body, actually serves as a pedestal for Jesus' Crown of Thorns, and quite literally upholds Christianity by placing a relic from Christ's crucifixion on his head. On the one hand, the romance illustrates that Charlemagne's body transgresses the bounds of the normal human body due to its size, which makes him appear as a giant. On the other hand, however, Charlemagne's gigantic body is masked with tokens of Christianity that, in turn, normalize his body. Nevertheless, Charlemagne's ruddy skin and giant-like body is evident beneath his religious form, and the parallel between his bodily irregularity attests that Charlemagne is also, potentially, monstrous.

Similar to Vernagu's various body parts that appear as overpowering due to their excessive size, Charlemagne's body also appears overpowering, but his physical excess is measured by the things that adorn his body, that is, his religious garb. His body is adorned with relics, such as:

> þe arme of seyn Simoun,
>
> ....
>
> & a parti of þe holy crosse
>
> ....
>
> & Godes cloþeing,
>
> Our leuedi smok þat hye had on,
>
> & þe [rod] of Araon,

....

& a spere long & smert

Þat...put to Godes hert,

& a nail long & gret

Þat was ydriue þurth Godes fet

the arm of Saint Simon

....

and a part of the holy cross

....

and God's clothing

Our lady's smock that he had on

and the rod of Aaron

....

And a long and smart spear

That was put to God's heart

....

And a nail long and great

That was driven through God's feet. (111-23)

Firstly, similar to Vernagu's description, Charlemagne's body is described in a blazon that separates each and every part of his body and adorns it with various "parts" of Christianity, for it is enshrouded in Mary's smock and Jesus' clothing. He possesses not only relics from Christ's crucifixion, such as a piece of the cross and the spear that

wounded Christ's heart, but also "Aaron's rod" and the "arm" of Saint Simon. Because Charlemagne's body is adorned with relics, it is, simultaneously, fragmented because of these relics. Strikingly, Charlemagne's body carries not only objects that mantled the body of Christ, apostles and saints, but also the actual parts of these bodies, such as the arm of Saint Simon. Charlemagne embodies Christianity, because the religion is constructed through these relics, and the relics in turn enshroud Charlemagne's body. However, Charlemagne's body is also effaced, because he no longer represents *his* own flesh and bones as he becomes an embodiment of other bodies. In this moment, Charlemagne appears less human and more artificial, and in comparison to Vernagu he does not appear human at all. Vernagu may be a giant but his body actually is comprised of human parts, unlike Charlemagne whose body is hidden in his Christian garb. If Cohen's assertion is correct that the human being is differentiated from the giant because he has control over his own body, then neither Charlemagne's bodily appearance nor his monstrous actions suggest that he is human.

When Charlemagne conquers Spain he comes across various cities that he is unable to overtake, for they possess "dedeli sinne" ("deadly sin[s]"; 289). To overcome these walled cities, Charlemagne "cursse" ("curse[s]"; 293) these cities. The romance narrates that those that enter these cursed cities die of the "smoc" ("smoke"; 296) rising from the towns; the cities' water becomes "red of helle's flode" ("red like hell's flood"; 300); the fish in the water become "blo", discoloured or black ("blo" def 1a *MED*). Charlemagne's cursing of these cities is in striking contrast to the generous, normal human being that a Christian should be. He is even in contrast to the knight who is able to control his bodily aggression, because Charlemagne's body possesses the power to

cause death to human beings and uproot the land. His body appears, or perhaps the relics in which his body is wrapped, appear to transgress from the normal capabilities of human beings, thereby placing him in the realm of the monstrous or magical. As a result, Charlemagne's body, his internal matter, contains sorcery. But the romance legitimizes this sorcery, a transgression of normalcy, in the name of Christianity, because it appears that Charlemagne curses these Saracen cities in order to prevent deadly sins from spreading. However, if Charlemagne's body is a reflection of Vernagu's body, which is projected in the Saracen landscape, then Charlemagne's body is also projected on the lands that he overtakes. Charlemagne is, instead, projected through the "smoke", the bloody water, and blackened fish that shrivel the city. He represents the force that breaks these cities, whereas Vernagu represents the structure that strengthens and forms these cities that are broken into. In other words, Charlemagne appears as the transgressor, and Vernagu as the victim. Charlemagne's body thus raises a concern about the signification of the Christian relics that he is adorned with, because the body that upholds these relics appears to desire transgression, a desire to curse lands, a desire that is not short of greed or gluttony or, in Cohen's words, excessive "immediate...gratification" that the monster's body expresses (38).

Charlemagne's actions very uncannily mimic the monstrous when he transgresses the power allotted to him by the Christian relics. *Roland and Vernagu* begins with a threat from Ebrahim, the Saracen king of Spain, who uses his power and authority to torture the Christians who refuse to convert to his faith. As a punishment for refusing conversion, Ebrahim "lete hem boþe hong & drawe" ("let them hang and draw"; *Roland* 30). The Saracen king takes Christian bodies and hangs and draws them,

physically elongating them to change the shape of their bodies as a rebuke of the their internal, Christian, matter. Interestingly, however, Charlemagne practices the same method as Ebrahim when he conquers Spain, and the form of the foul and evil Saracen king's body is projected onto Charlemagne's identity. In addition to converting ten thousand Saracens to Christianity (207), Charlemagne "lete...hong opon a tre" ("let hang upon a tree"; 210) those Saracens who refused conversion. He exercises the same power as Ebrahim that involves transforming the flesh of the body in order to rebuke what is internal to that body, its Saracen faith. However, the Middle English term "tre" does not only signify "tree", it also refers to the Cross on which Christ was crucified ("tre" def 3a *MED*). Charlemagne, who mimics the actions of Ebrahim, embodies the force that crucified Christ: he transgresses from Christianity by re-enacting crucifixion, and embracing his red and ruddy complexion that demarcates his internal impurity, that is, he represents the red faced Judas who was responsible for hanging Christ on the "tre". What is paradoxical about this construction is that by adorning his body with Christian relics, Charlemagne also embodies Christ.

This reading of Charlemagne's body is particularly problematic, because it suggests that Charlemagne's desire to overtake Spain, curse places and grant death aligns him with the monstrous; his actions that mimic Ebrahim's actions align him with Saracens and Judas; his body that is covered in various tokens of Christianity aligns him with Vernagu, the giant; but most uncannily, his actions of hanging bodies on the "tre" suggest that there is a link between his body, Christ's body, and the monstrous. The body of the giant, thus, in *Roland and Vernagu* underscores the problems inherent in the Christian knight whose body is very similar to Vernagu's own form.

Charlemagne's body is comprised of various fragments from other Christian bodies, but the irregularity and transgression of the Christian knight's body, its inhuman powers, ruddy complexion and actions that appear sacrilegious also resemble Christ's crucifixion. In fact, Charlemagne's body exceeds Vernagu's gigantism. His body brings to light the problems with the way the Christian faith is articulated as a dominating and superior religion that is unified, coherent and whole. But through Charlemagne's body Christianity appears to be radically fragmented. It is a disillusion of the "Self" and "Other" binary where the "Self" dominates the body of the "Other" through the use of the powerful discourse of Christianity. It is through, to use Butler's terms, "the destruction" of the body of the "Other" that the "Self" is formed (236). Butler's theory alludes to how the external body of the "Self", the Christian "Self", destroys the "body" of the marginalized "Other" to validate and affirm its existence.

Conclusion

In a discussion of the similarity between Islam and Christianity, Akbari explores the relationship between idolatry and the Saracens. She suggests that in the medieval narrative, particularly the romance, the Christian trinity is mimicked by the Saracen trinity (206). The images of Vernagu's three gods, that is, Mahoun, Appollin, and Jupiter, "serve as a signal of waning power of the Muslims, who turn upon their gods when they suffer a military defeat" (206). In *Roland and Vernagu* Vernagu invokes "Mahoun" when his body begins to perish and his head is about to be cut off (*Roland* 851-852). However, it is strange that Vernagu also questions and understands Christianity. In doing so, he aligns Christianity with the Saracen faith, with strong

undertones of Islam, Judaism and paganism that suggest that like his body, the Christian corpus is full of transgressions.

The religious dialogue between Roland and Vernagu places emphasis on the problematic articulation of Christianity in the romance. Vernagu's interest in Christ's life cycle and advanced understanding of the "Cristen lawe eueri grot" ("every piece of the Christian law"; 786) refers to the various pieces of Christ's identity, the trinity, that represent one whole and attests that this body transgresses just like the body of the giant. Vernagu's questions relate to Christ's body in trinity, "in persones [th]ree" (720). He also questions how Mary, a "maiden" may bear a child when her body is untouched (735), and a God may die and rise again after his death (750), all of which underscore the three different bodies of Christ: Christ at birth and in Mary's body, Christ crucified and in death, and Christ in heaven and earth as god. However, what Vernagu questions is *why* Christ's body transforms into various forms when its matter remains the same, for Christ is god in three persons, but his form, the outward appearance of his body changes. Through the three Saracen gods, or the Saracen trinity, Vernagu aligns Christianity with his own faith. However, unlike his gods who are made of stone, the Christian god is made of flesh, but even in flesh Christ transgresses from one body to another, and in transubstantiation, from a body into the Eucharist: wine and bread. Interestingly, the consumption of the sacrament involves the amalgamation of Christ's body into the human body. The romance, thus, suggests that the Christian trinity and doctrine are inherently fragmented and transgressive, because bodies can change, and transform into all shapes and sizes. The romance masks the Christian ideologies underneath the guise of the Saracen giant's body. However, in the parallel construction

of the giant and the monstrous Christian emperor the romance suggests that Christ's body is also a monstrosity, for his body is equally transgressive and fragmented as the giant's body.

The concept of Christ's body as a monstrosity is neatly depicted through Robert Mills' analysis of medieval architecture. Mills asserts that in various medieval texts "the hybridization of identity contained in Christ's body becomes...a locus of imitation" in medieval architecture (30). Similarly, Vernagu's identity is projected off of the architecture of the Saracen landscape. In addition, like Vernagu's very large head and very large nose, Mills notes that Christ's trinity in architecture was depicted "with three faces:...commonly featur[ing] a single head and triple visage" (39). This is not to suggest that Vernagu embodies Christ, or that Christ is monstrous, but rather to show that the romance sympathizes with the Saracen giant and virtually aligns his irregularity with any Christian body. Vernagu is, to rephrase, depicted as a reflection of the human form; he is the "Self" that can be monstrous at times or very natural and human at other times. However, Charlemagne's body, on the other hand, is a body that, hidden behind Christian relics, transgresses over Christianity by embodying Judas.

Judith Weiss explores the concept of the Last World Emperor that was prevalent in several medieval texts. She posits that the Last World Emperor "would, as Christ's representative, for a while successfully fight the forces of evil before yielding to...them" ("Emperors" 91). Charlemagne appears to be a kind of Last World Emperor, for he is not only adorned in Christian relics, he also crusades all over Spain converting Saracens, but also hanging those who refuse to convert. In addition, he also possesses an identity that, like Vernagu, is characterized by transgression, because he is by his

faith a noble Christian, but simultaneously, his actions instill fear and represent actions that the Jews performed over Christ's body. Weiss continues to suggest that medieval emperors may have shown a desire to embody "the Last World Emperor, but their religious and political opponents regularly cast them as Antichrist.... and [t]he formation of the creature -- [is] always imagined as human, not monstrous" (96). In this respect, when Charlemagne's body is aligned with Vernagu's body, he appears to transgress from Christianity much more than Vernagu. The relics that Charlemagne wears are a reminder of Christ's crucifixion and his death, but these relics, such as the Crown of Thorns, the nail that pierced Christ's foot, and the spear that pierced Christ's heart, are, on the one hand, representative of the salvation Christ's body brought to Christianity. On the other hand, they are also the relics that demarcated Christ's five wounds that separated his body, and were the cause of his death. In Charlemagne's hands these relics signify him as the Last World Emperor, and his transformation into the Antichrist. As a result, Charlemagne's comparison with Vernagu narrates his monstrosity, in spite of the fact that he is human and not a monstrous giant, and his desire to transgress beyond borders and peoples. Through the body of the Saracen giant, whose religion appears very similar to Christianity, the romance underscores the human body as the ultimate transgressor of Christianity. In Charlemagne's case, his internal matter, unlike Vernagu's internal matter, is expressed though his religion which is not a reflection of his skin, like Vernagu, but, rather, a mask that veils his monstrosity.

Chapter 2

Difference

Introduction

In an interesting examination of English romances like *Richard Coer de Lyon* and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* (c. 1350-1400), Heng promotes the premise that the genre of the Middle English romance advocates English nationalism through repeated use of violence and cannibalism on the bodies of Saracens and giants among other enemies. As observed in the previous chapter, King Richard from *Richard Coer de Lyon* gleefully devours the cooked heads of his Saracen adversaries to assert his English superiority over the weak, disease-infested, dark Saracens (Heng 115). Richard's cannibalism and violence function as a didactic rebuke for the Saracens to not only fear the flesh-eating, powerful Christians, but also to fear the consumption and obliteration of their bodies and identities. Ironically, in similar respect, Heng notes that the giant, too, like the giant of Mont St. Michel from the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, partakes in acts of violence and cannibalism when he beats, impales, and consumes the bodies of children and men (123). The giant of Mont St. Michel, whose strength surpasses the strength of Arthur's best knights, becomes Arthur's greatest victory when he is finally defeated, because the great English king overcomes the giant's transgressive behaviour through the dismemberment of the body that enacts this cannibalism, torture, and violence. The giant's dismemberment, the distribution of his remains and possessions, as with Vernagu's head from the previous chapter, is a symbolic rebuke through a reduction of his large body and his hyper-aggressive desires. By placing the two texts and the two cannibals, both heroic and the monstrous, together, Heng underlines the paradox in the construction of what is, according to the romance, morally correct: when the English Christian hero is responsible for the obliteration of the Saracen body,

violence and cannibalism are praised; when the monstrous giant enacts cannibalism, cannibalism is condemned and the monster is physically rebuked. In both examples, however, the Christian kings are victorious and the bodies of their enemies are reprimanded for their errant transgression. Heng's observation of the romance's use of violence and cannibalism against Saracens and giants emphasizes the romance's tendency to correct and control bodies through the cutting of the flesh that physically and metaphorically deviates from the actions and mannerisms of the normal Christian body. Although there are no acts of cannibalism in the romance of *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*[8], preserved in the Auchinleck manuscript (c. 1330), this desire to contain and correct the giant's body is neatly demonstrated through the romance's characterization of the Saracen giant, Ascopard, because he is both Saracen and giant.

The giant, as is customary, is a physical symbol of excess, and a body that is external to the boundaries known by the Christian knight. As with all bodies in the romance that oppose Christianity, the Saracen giant's body proposes a difference that the romance instinctively seeks to correct. This chapter explores how the Saracen giant, Ascopard, embodies this difference and how the romance seeks to correct this difference. However, because Ascopard is allowed baptism and integration into the heroic code as the romance hero's page, the romance suggests that he holds the potential to be integrated into the romance hero's society and his faith. It appears that the aggressive, unusually large, and grotesque Saracen giant is a trope of romance without which the romance hero can neither assert his identity nor his religion. Thus, the romance proposes that the giant's body, grossly marked by his Saracen identity, is a site

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[8] Henceforth referred to as *Beues*

of instability that not only produces a threat for those that interact with it, but also the heroic code. The first section of this chapter examines why and how the Saracen giant's body embodies this difference. The second section questions how this difference contributes to Ascopard's unstable identity and his inability to assimilate into the romance hero's society.

I. The Giant's Difference

Ascopard is introduced to the narrative with a terminology that is traditionally used to characterize Saracen giants, for he is a giant "with a lotheliche semlaunt, / ... wonderliche strong, / ... [and] thretti fote long" ("with a loathly semblance, / wonderfully strong, / and thirty feet tall"; *Beues* 2506-08). In three lines the narrative establishes Ascopard's gigantic stature by describing his loathsome appearance, a visible strength that makes the observer wonder, and a height five times of an average, adult human. The Saracen's difference, bodily excess and foreignness immediately position him outside the known boundaries of medieval Christian knighthood and cast him into the category of what Said terms as the "Other" (48). Because experiencing the "Other" is a subjective process for the West, and Western eyes mark the body's difference, Said deems it necessary for the body of the "Other" to be "corrected, even penalized, for lying outside the boundaries of European society" (Said 67). The romance's confrontation of a figure such as Ascopard whose body is emblematic of this difference, evokes a desire in the western knight to defuse, "correct", or "penalize" the Saracen body's monstrosity most commonly through the giant's defeat and death in battle, as proposed by *Roland and Vernagu* from the previous chapter. However, in *Beues*, the romance desires to overcome and resolve the difference in the giant's flesh,

in spite of his obvious false and threatening appearance by his admission into the heroic code as well as Christianity.

Contrary to Roland's encounter with Vernagu who dives into battle, Bevis asks Ascopard if "men of his contré / Were ase meche ase was he" ("men of his country / were as much as he was"; 2515-16). On the one hand, Bevis's question recognizes Ascopard's "meche[ness]", his excessive body size and his subscription to gigantism. On the other, Bevis also regards Ascopard as human when he asks him about other "men" of his country, and categorizes him as one belonging to the human species. Ascopard's 'muchness' paired with an inquisition about his origins is an inspired concern that indicates a desire in the romance hero to explore the Saracen monster. In addition, unlike *Roland and Vernagu*, *Richard Coer de Lyon* or the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, *Beues* grants the hero's adversary an opportunity to correct his moral and physical form, because unlike the chivalric exchange that commonly takes place between Saracens and Christians on the battlefield when they first encounter one another, Bevis and Ascopard engage in a verbal exchange. Furthermore, the question Bevis asks the giant is neither competitive nor does it contribute to conflicting religious discourses, and, as a result, is an inspired concern regarding the giant's marvellous appearance. This act of civility towards Ascopard is an unusual construct, because in this moment the romance appears sympathetic towards a giant whose unseemly flesh poses a physical threat. Bevis's civility towards the giant unearths the romance's attempt to reform, rather than rebuke, the body of the Saracen giant in a manner that does not involve violence.

It is only after Ascopard's revelation that he has been sent from Garcy to retrieve Josian, Bevis's Saracen lover, and slay her lover that Bevis matches the giant (2519;

2531-32), but even then the romance offers Ascopard sympathy and promotes the correction of his deviance. When attempting to hit Bevis, Ascopard comically slips and falls, giving Bevis ample opportunity to strike-off his head. However, in spite of his intuition that Ascopard will eventually "betrai" him (2547-50), Bevis extends Ascopard's life by dubbing him his page at Josian's warrant. The notion of forgiveness is not common to romance when it involves Saracens, let alone Saracen giants. Helen Cooper notes that forgiveness is widespread in, what she terms as, "romances of atonement", where Christian born knights with sinful youths or pasts purge their sins through pilgrimage and devotion to God towards the end of their narratives (88). As I will discuss later, this kind of forgiveness is offered to some Saracens, but it requires several variables to be met by the Saracen body for forgiveness to be achieved, and Ascopard does not possess any of these variables. For Ascopard, ironically, the romance takes an extraordinary turn by allowing the Saracen giant to be in the service of the romance hero, but it does this on condition that the giant converts to Christianity. The desire to convert an unseemly giant without pronounced chivalry or strength is incongruous with the ideals of romance, but in *Beues* it seems like the natural course of action to take following the giant's new vocation as Bevis' page. The act of conversion, of baptism, is a symbolic cleansing of the soul and, accordingly, Ascopard is taken to be baptized alongside Josian, but he refuses to be soaked in a baptismal font that is specially designed for him. He interjects, "Prest, wiltow me drenche? / ... / Icham to meche to be cristine!" ("Priest, will you drown me? / I am too large to be Christian!"; 2594-96). In this moment the romance evokes Ascopard's "meche[ness]", and again problematizes his abnormal stature, difference, and "Otherness". Like Vernagu from the

previous chapter who, in spite of his accelerated understanding of Christianity, remains resolute in his devotion to Mahoun, Ascopard uses his actions and words to give significance to the distance between those that share his body type and those that are Christian. However, unlike Vernagu, Ascopard's resolve is weak because, in order to extend his life, he shamelessly joins Bevis's service, but contrary to his newly formed allegiance with the Christian knight, Ascopard himself imposes his bodily disproportion on the possibility of baptism and defeats the prospect of a successful conversion or assimilation into the heroic code[9]. In addition, Ascopard's refusal to be christened advocates Bevis' intuition regarding the giant's eventual betrayal, because the giant whose flesh is a representation of his religious deviance also deviates from the possibility of a religious conversion. As a result, Ascopard's integration in Bevis' society can never be complete without his conversion to Christianity. Calkin notes that Ascopard chooses to refuse the "right choice" (*Saracens* 51), a choice that, according to romance, is clear to make. In addition to his incorrect judgement, Ascopard stands outside the circle of chivalry, because neither does he possess the chivalric skill to match Bevis, nor does he recognize the "right choice" when he falls and is nearly beheaded. The romance unusually chooses to preserve Ascopard's life when he does not possess the knowledge of the concepts of divine justice[10] or trial by combat, where the right religion determines who is victorious. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, both Roland and Charlemagne ask for divine intervention to overthrow their Saracen

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[9] Meredith Jones (1947) notes that very few Saracens in the *Chansons de geste* refuse the offer of baptism, because when conversion is advantageous or can extend their lives, they "feel no shame at such a conversion" (223). She also proposes that Saracens in the *Chansons* when proven wrong either convert and destroy their false idols and join the Christian side, or die in battle. Ascopard appears to prescribe to half of these two rules, for he joins Bevis's company but refuses to be baptized.

[10] For an exposition of the importance and of the divine in the medieval romance, see Helen Cooper's *The English Romance in Time, Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*. (New York: Oxford UP, 2004).

opponents, but in *Beues*, this divine help is neither present nor are the rules of trial by combat that determine that the giant will be killed for his deviant behaviour. Thus, the romance constructs Ascopard as a body that, on the surface, reflects the fearful Saracen faith and its deviant nature and difference, but internally this body lacks the strength, resolve, and similarity with the Saracen champion common to romance.

Ascopard's unwillingness to be baptized reiterates the disproportion and unchangeable difference in the giant's body. His deviance and departure from the traditional expectations of the Saracen giant, to either refuse and die in battle or to accept baptism and assimilate himself into the Christian and/or heroic code, exemplify his innate instability that forever taints his body and identity as uncontrollable and abnormal, because he, in one instance, demonstrates his allegiance to Bevis, and, in the next, refuses to become Christian like him. Also, through the juxtaposition of the Saracen giant's body and the ideal Christian body, a body that is not "to meche", the romance reinforces the importance of the body's margins in Christianity; that is, in order to be Christian, the body has to be of the right proportion. Ascopard's assertion that he is "too large to be Christian" hints that the ideal Christian body has margins and bounds that it cannot exceed, that Christianity contains and enforces control on the subject that follows its laws. Said notes that through the observation of the difference embodied in the bodies of the East, the West invites itself to "control, contain, and otherwise govern...the Other" (48). In the romance, it is the heroic knight's body that represents these margins, because, according to Cohen,"[c]hivalric selfhood is an identity produced through severe cultural constraint, because the goal of romance is the formation of docile or socially constrained subjects" (Cohen *Of Giants* 102-103). As a

result, Ascopard's refusal to bathe in the baptismal font is a refusal to contain, suppress or confine himself to the bounds of Christian chivalry. Simultaneously, however, Ascopard embodies the body of the "prisoner" in Foucault's concept of the prison discussed in the previous chapter. Where Christian chivalry is the agent that regulates the body and determines its social acceptability, the Saracen faith, according to Ascopard's justification for refusing baptism, demonstrates the 'muchness' of his Saracen religion and ideals. Moreover, because he is a giant with an internal matter that is marred with a false and demonic faith, Ascopard's body cannot be contained by Christianity, as it cannot be contained in a regular sized font, because the deviance of his internal matter from the norm is too 'much' to be purged. Largeness in itself is symbolic of excess, excessive desire, appetite, and sin, as the giant of Mont St. Michel demonstrates.

In addition to the proportion of the body, the romance clarifies that the surface of the skin also has to be of a particular colour to be granted conversion to Christianity. Though, I have argued that the romance's construction of Ascopard is unusually against the tropes of the genre, he is nonetheless presented as a Saracen giant in physical appearance, and his access to the baptismal font but refusal to be cleansed in it underscores the medieval understanding of the Eastern or Oriental body. While exploring the assimilability of Saracens in the *chansons de geste* and romances, Akbari analyses the male and female Saracen bodies in *Fierebras* (c. 1170). She notes that both male and female Saracens hold the capacity to be converted to Christianity, but in order for a successful religious conversion to occur, there are various variables that need to be realized. For instance, Akbari notes that in *Fierebras* the giant-like Saracen, Fierebras,

converts to Christianity on discovering the fallacy of his faith, which is determined by a trial by combat where Fierebras is defeated by a Christian knight (Akbari 168). Ascopard, like Fierebras, loses to Bevis in battle, but does not recognize the falsity of his faith, but like Fierebras, is admitted to be baptized. However, Akbari asserts that Fierebras, although giant-like, and in different versions of the romance a "giant" or a "magnificently built knight" (164), is also beautiful and white-skinned -- two characteristics that Ascopard does not possess, and as a result is able to have his body corrected and reformed because his appearance does not parallel the bodies of Christians. Ascopard's racial decent, that is, his skin colour and loathsome semblance, demarcates his ineligibility to be christened, reformed or corrected, unlike the beautiful and white-skinned Saracen princess, Josian, who is approvingly baptized. Akbari affirms this notion by asserting that Saracens with monstrous bodies, "characterized in terms of aggressive, dangerous behaviour", are not granted an opportunity to have their faiths corrected (166). Ascopard conspicuously falls into this category of inassimilable Saracens, because he "lep" ("leaps"; *Bevis* 2593) away onto a bench from the baptismal font and betrays his aggressive disapproval of baptism.

Interestingly, in spite of Ascopard's aggression and monstrous appearance, the romance offers his body to be spiritually corrected. Akbari proposes that not all dark-skinned and aggressive Saracens are inassimilable: in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330) a dark Saracen king converts to Christianity after seeing the idleness of his faith, when his gods are unable to revive his dark, deformed, still-born child. But through his wife's Christian faith the child receives new life and also undergoes a corporal transformation where he sheds his dark visage and unveils the white skin of the righteous (Akbari 191).

Although Ascopard is similar in appearance to the Saracen king from *The King of Tars*, he lacks the human proportion that the king's body possesses. Accordingly, the Saracen giant's body narrates that Christian identity is solely constructed by the control of the body. If the Saracen body does not fall in the margins defined by the Christian faith, then the Saracen's body cannot be converted to Christianity.

Similar to the medieval ideologies of skin colour and identity, as discussed in the previous chapter, Debra Higgs Strickland explains that medieval religious art also maintained a straightforward "dichotomy of beauty=virtue/ugliness=sin" (29). She elaborates that deformities expressed "negative ideas about the rejected" (30), because it was believed that those belonging to warmer climates, that is, climates external to Europe, were affected by the intensity of the sun. The intensity of the sun did not only exemplify dark skin, it was also responsible for deformities, abnormal statures and a body's moral corruption. Such can be seen through the characterization of Escopart in the Anglo-Norman version of *Beues*, *Boeve de Haumtone* (c.1200-1235).

The romance introduces the Saracen giant, Escopart, in a much more menacing and negative light than *Beues*'s Ascopard. Judith Weiss translates this remarkably different encounter between Boeve and the Saracen giant:

> [Boeve] glanced ahead a little way and saw, reposing on top a hill, a churl who was certainly nine feet tall. In his hand he held a heavy club, which ten men could hardly carry, and by his side a good sharp sword. The space between his eyes was a foot wide, his forehead was as large as an elephant's buttocks, his skin was blacker than ink, his nose was misshapen and knobby in front, his legs

> too were long and thick, and his feet long and flat. He was a hideous fellow, a faster runner than a bird on the wing. When he spoke, he barked as horribly as if he were a vile baying hound (*Boeve* 58).

Unlike the Middle English romance, the Anglo-Norman text mercilessly characterizes the Saracen giant as infinitely "Other". He is immediately described in a pejorative terminology that focuses on his violent difference. His appearance is everything monstrous, ranging from the width between his eyes, his deformed forehead, his misshapen nose and black as ink skin, his excessive body length and feet, his agility, and his horrible barking. He wields a large club, larger than his sword, the weapon that further demarcates his difference, or as Cohen notes, "the stock weapon of the romance giant...bluntly opposed to proper knighthood's keen-edged sword" (77). Escopart appears as nothing short of a horrendous amalgamation of various beasts, and an unusual species as if derived directly out of a medieval bestiary. In addition, he is also characterized as a "churl". The Middle English "cherl" is "any person not belonging to the nobility" or "a person lacking in refinement, learning, or morals" ("Cherl" 1a.; 2 *MED*). The passage not only constructs Escopart's difference, it also initiates the hierarchical difference between humans and giants. The romance does not fail to juxtapose Escopart's bodily disgust with his lowly and "unrefined" origin. Furthermore, like Strickland's observation of deformed bodies and warm climate, Akbari elaborates on the functions of the human body in the Middle Ages as she explains that the human body was popularly observed through Bartholomaeus's acute discussion of climate theory. She summarizes that "[m]onstrosities -- that is, bodies that are 'horrible, with different faces and monstrous appearance' ... are found [in the Southern countries],

where excess of heat affects conception and gestation" (162). This medieval belief proposes that the monstrous body's excess and shortcomings are a consequence of its underdevelopment in the womb. The giant is conceived and born under the undesirable conditions of his country and its climate, leaving him to overdevelop his limbs, but under-develop control over his internal emotions and appetites like the cool, fair European body. In this respect, Escopart and Ascopard are both unable to function in a manner that parallels the average Christian, heroic body, because their bodies are affects of a foul and un-homely, overheated land that causes them to become monstrosities. Moreover, Melissa Furrow observes that the author of *Boeve* refers to the Saracen giant as "l'Escopart" or "the Escopart", as opposed to simply "Escopart" (148). Escopart is not only distanced and dissociated from being a character like any other in the romance, he is given the article "the" before his name, which pushes him further away into the unknown margins of the world. For Furrow, referring to Escopart as a giant belonging to another race suggests that he is the ultimate "embodiment of difference", because by being "the Escopart" he is also representative of another people, and perhaps even species of giants (148). Cohen shares this opinion as he documents that "'Ascopart' is a proper noun that designates 'a desert people of the Near East'" (173). Cohen and Furrow's analyses combined promote Akbari's findings that encourage Ascopard's ultimate difference due to the climate conditions during his conception, birth and upbringing. Ironically, and somewhat disturbingly, regardless of his monstrosity, the giant Escopart from *Boeve* converts to Christianity. The conversion of a beast to Christianity appears absurd, but Furrow notes that when Escopart is defeated in battle, he begs for Boeve's mercy and cries, "'Boeve, don't kill me, I want to be a Christian'"

(148). Escopart gains a Christian identity through his fear of death and projects a fluctuating, unstable personality that reflects his undesirable conception and upbringing. Furrow asserts that the romance "creates a challenging hybrid", for Escopart is not only fiendlike in appearance, but also he is Christian (148). To some degree, Escopart evokes the image of the Last World Emperor discussed in the previous chapter, a body that appears simultaneously Christian and demonic. The Middle English *Beues*, however, does not grant Ascopard such a choice or will. His partial assimilation into Christianity and partial service as page in training complicates his identity, because his motives seem radically different from Escopart's.

Consequently, *Beues* neatly suggests that to be a Saracen suited for admission to Christianity as a form of correction, the body sometimes, if not always, needs to be white and beautiful, and if not that, it needs to be proportionate. The giant's body demarcates an excess that is uncontainable and irresolvable if the giant is not already fair in appearance or has human proportions. However, the performance of Christianity in *The King of Tars* deems that Ascopard, in spite of his aggression and monstrous visage, holds potential for conversion, but his choice to do so otherwise, his refusal to bathe in the baptismal font, is not only a defence of his monstrous condition, it is also a suggestion that the giant body cannot be corrected through a baptism, that conversion will not and cannot change one's difference, even in hybridity. Interestingly, because Ascopard easily involves himself in Bevis's service, his body can be reformed and corrected through the presence of chivalric training, because where chivalry is involved, a difference of skin and colour is not a prerequisite, as proposed by *Roland and Vernagu*. Perhaps it can then be suggested that the romance does not try to explore the

possibilities of an unattractive Saracen giant's conversion to Christianity, but, instead, it seeks to correct the body's difference through its successful assimilation into the heroic code.

II. Ascopard's Position Between the Margins

Given that Ascopard is a monstrous Saracen, the giant's elongated presence in the romance seems more unusual and emphatic. When asked about his origins by Bevis, Ascopard discloses that he was "drive[n] out of [his] town" because he was "so lite" or little in size (*Beues* 2522; "so little"; 2523). Considering that Ascopard is already thirty feet tall with a space of a foot between his brows (2510), the stature of the gargantuan beings he descends from seems inconceivable. To add, Ascopard discloses that he was continuously taunted and called a "dwerugh" ("dwarf"; 2526) or dwarf by his people, a person whose size demarcates his diminutive stature in society. Like the Christian body that needs to be of the right proportion for baptism, the giant needs to be of vast proportion in order to be accepted in his own society. The terms, 'dwarf' and 'little', impressed on Ascopard's body mark him as not only disproportionate among the humans, but also giants. Indeed, it is Ascopard's less than ordinary appearance among his peers that drives him out of his society and into Bevis's service. As a result, Ascopard falls in the margins outside the acceptable borders of his own society, as well as the borders of Bevis's society. He embodies a displacement that is novel for the romance, because he does not have the resolute mindset of a chivalric Saracen giant, such as Vernagu, who dies a noble death by consistently refusing to convert to Christianity. Simultaneously, Ascopard embodies a Saracen that has the potential to convert to Christianity, like the Saracen king or Fierebras, because the romance hero

escorts him to the baptismal font. Through his ineligibility for either society, however, Ascopard embodies what Julia Kristeva terms the "abject", for he is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). He is, like the Freudian "uncanny", one that destabilizes the senses because he is both familiar and strange for the romance. As a result, Ascopard, like Kristeva's "abject", is the "in-between"; the fluctuation of his body between conversion and desiring to remain in Bevis's service is an affect of the actual formulation of his body as he was born in disagreeable conditions. His trajectory, too, in the romance is characteristic of a fluctuation, a disposition that points towards his unstable and deviating identity.

On account of Ascopard's displacement, his occupation of a liminal space, the romance seeks to reform and control the Saracen giant's fluctuating identity, which is characterized by his changing vocations in the narrative. He enters the romance as old king Garcy's "chaumpioun" ("champion"; *Bevis* 2521). As the king's champion, Ascopard is "chosen for his strength and skill to engage in single combat" ("champioun" def. 1b *MED*), but he is soon demoted to Bevis' page. The position of page is inferior to the position of a champion, but as the romance hero's page, Ascopard is given an exceptional honour. In addition, because Ascopard does not belong to a particular society, the formation and disruption of his allegiances to various parties is warranted. By serving the position of page subsequent to being a king's champion, the romance conveys that Ascopard's body may not be suitable for Christianity, but it falls within the limitations of heroic service. However, Ascopard's oscillation between various functions throughout his existence in the romance is concerning. He enters the story as

an exile from his land, and then becomes a champion for a Saracen ruler. Next, when he unsuccessfully challenges Bevis, he becomes his page at Josian's mercy. Along the way, Ascopard becomes a loyal servant for Bevis and Josian, but after betraying Bevis, he returns to service for a Saracen monarch, King Yvor (*Beues* 3591). In this respect, like his excessive body, Ascopard will never firmly hold a position. His identity is in a continual state of instability, just like his body.

As Bevis's page, he is, like Bevis, required to exercise his chivalrous ability, which he clearly possesses. He is, after all, introduced to the romance reader as Garcy's 'champion', and his eagerness to become Bevis's page encourages the notion that perhaps what Ascopard desires is assimilation into the heroic code, rather than Christianity. Ascopard's integration into the heroic code, his body's correction, begins with the tasks he needs to perform alongside Bevis. When Bevis asks Ascopard: "Wile we to the dragoun gon?" ("Will we go [together] to [fight] the dragon?"; *Bevis* 2723), Ascopard dutifully responds, "Bletheliche wile I wende with thee" ("Glady, I will go with you"; 2726). Bevis' use of the first person plural "we" suggests that he recognizes Ascopard as a knight similar to himself, because the two plan to fight alongside each other in this task, which forces a mirror between their chivalrous abilities. Likewise, the first person plural reoccurs in Bevis' diction before the two meet the dragon, when Bevis in his anticipation exclaims, "Hadde we the dragoun wonne, / We hadde the feireste pris under sonne!" ("If we overcome the dragon, / We will gain the fairest prise [highest honour there is]!; 2745-46). Using the first person plural "we" twice more, Bevis recognizes Ascopard as a worthy companion, because he takes pride in the fantasy of gaining honour with Ascopard. In similar respect, Ascopard's eager and

immediate response matches Bevis's enthusiasm and desire to gain honour alongside Bevis. However, Ascopard's use of the verb to "wende" is noteworthy. The verb to "wende" connotes more than the verb 'to go'. According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, "to wende" is similar to "to make one's way", and can be figuratively used as to "continue a narrative" ("wende" 2a). The same entry of the verb to "wende" denotes to "wander, roam; [and] also, [to] stray" (*MED*). Consequently, Ascopard's terminology surfaces a desire to do more than just help Bevis in a linear fashion. He unveils a desire for the opposite: that is, a desire to deviate, wander, roam, and stray. According to Cooper, the knight's journey at first appears as a linear quest, but because the knight's life ends where it begins, by regaining and being restored into his rightful position, the journey becomes rather circular, accompanied by episodic wanderings (46). Ascopard's diction, the meaning beneath the surface of the verb 'to wend', evokes the concept of a circular journey, for he desires to mimic the life of a heroic knight, and wishes to gain some form of continuity through this circular projection. Moreover, circularity also promises a deferral, because "delay in itself is a promise of continuing pleasure" (Cooper 46), or, simply, a promise of continuity. Edward H. Friedman notes that Patricia Parker (1987) relates the Derridean concept of *differérence* with *dilatio*, a renaissance notion meaning "delay". He notes that, interestingly, the term is "also a figure for temporality, for the mediate or earthly, as distinguished from the eternal", and as a result it attempts to "resist" an end (43). If this is argued, then the promise of continuity for Ascopard is in a temporal delay, whereby he can "resist" his end, that is, his eventual death that is determined by his inability to convert to Christianity and his uncontainable and unrefined body. Ascopard, thus, seeks meaning through this delay,

the desire to help Bevis, and through his participation in the first person plural "we", he desires to essentially wend "a narrative" for himself. However, because Ascopard desires to delay, stray, and wander as a knight, he also solidifies his instability, because though he desires embody a knight's life cycle, the abnormality of his body does not allow him the control he needs to become a knight. His internal instability is mimed in his limbs that refuse to perform heroic tasks correctly.

During his service with Bevis, Ascopard mismanages two of the three tasks he is assigned. For instance, in spite of his enthusiastic acceptance to Bevis' question regarding his help to defeat the deadly dragon, Ascopard cowardly excuses himself by feigning he is too "weri" to fight ("weary"; *Beues* 2755). Just as he did not make the "right choice" by bathing in the baptismal font, Ascopard deviates from the task, and participates in a wrong kind of delaying. Whether out of fear or true fatigue, he decides to avoid the battle and, in turn, displays that he does not possess a chivalric demeanour. On another occasion, Ascopard is required to safeguard Josian, but he, instead, foolishly falls into a trap and is locked away in a castle on an island (3143-44). When he realizes his fault, he breaks the castle walls and rushes to save Josian (3270). Ascopard here is chivalrously able to break the walls of his prison, but at another time he is unable to battle a dragon. It seems strange that a giant who has the capacity to break through walls and the advantage of a marvellous height is unable to face a dragon. His lapses in judgment reveal his inability to master his body because what is inside his deformed body is unstable. As a result, the reformation of Ascopard's flesh even through acts of chivalry seem unlikely and difficult to accomplish due to the many errors Ascopard's unstable body commits. His instability and displacement are literally embodied by his

stance when he first encounters Bevis, for he "with [h]is o[ne] fot a slintte / And fel with is owene dentte" ("with his one foot slipped / And fell with his own strike"; 2539-40). By slipping and falling right at his introduction to the romance, Ascopard naturally positions himself on unstable ground and actualizes his metaphoric displacement, for he is neither like Saracen giants such as Vernagu or the giants of his origins, nor is he a giant that is admissible to Christianity on the basis that he cannot fit in a regular baptismal font or complete tasks that he agrees to complete as a chivalric knight. Ascopard appears to have an inherent and unchangeable condition that eradicates any possibility of his assimilation into the heroic code or Christianity, or a possibility to attain a fixed identity. Ironically, however, he always remains in close proximity to this possibility.

In kind, Ascopard's identity cannot be detached from his body or his monstrous condition in spite of his desire to integrate himself into Bevis' society. Ascopard's monstrous excess and desires are all the things that are recognizable about him. He is only able to maintain the identity of the "Ascopardes", "a desert people of the near East", or a term that according to the *Middle English Dictionary* appears in conjunction with Bedouins (def. 1). This term, thus, is very telling, for a Bedouin is a nomad or a gypsy, a person that is landless, a person in constant displacement, disorientation or dislocation. Thus, what is embedded in Ascopard's flesh is his failure to maintain a stable identity. In Bevis' company, the romance reveals that Ascopard is in search for acceptance and belonging, a home or a fixed position, because it is for Bevis' "love" that Ascopard abandons Josian and falls into entrapment (*Beues* 3147). Similarly, it is out of jealousy and the loss of Bevis' 'love' that Ascopard betrays his master, for the romance

relates that he "falle[s] in poverté" ("falls in poverty"; 3592) when Bevis does not choose him to be his "swein" ("squire"; 3586). Ascopard symbolically falls from a position that he thought he had fixed and again loses his society and bearings. Cohen notes that "Ascopart may be of a nature nurture cannot transform, a body that illustrates the ultimate incompatibility of the chivalric subject with that which it defines itself against" (175). The "nurture" that Cohen mentions is Ascopard's physical training as a knight, because he is Bevis' squire, but because of his inability to complete tasks, Ascopard is incapable of gaining or achieving a stable identity such as that of Bevis. Thus, the romance conveys that Ascopard's body is ineligible for a moral and physical correction. His inner, uncontainable monstrosity prevents his outer body from assimilating into Christianity or the romance hero's society, and cannot be refined.

Conclusion

> Tho Saber and his felawes ifere
>
> Aboute Ascopard thai thringe,
>
> And harde on him thai gonne dinge
>
> And hew him alle to pices smale
>
> Saber and his companions together fared
>
> Near Ascpard they pressed
>
> And forcefully struck him
>
> And cut all of him into small pieces. (3884-87)

The concept of belonging is notably recurrent in *Sir Beues of Hampton*. Ascopard's presence, his trajectory, his constant oscillation between vocations and

emotions, his aggression and displacement represent a desire to compete with some form of identity. Ascopard cannot assimilate into Bevis's society because he is precisely what Bevis is not, a dark, monstrous, Saracen giant unable to fully perform tasks because his inner instability overtakes his outer body. The romance eventually eliminates the giant's deviant, fluctuating, and excessive body through a physical rebuke, as he is cut into small pieces (3887). Not only does the romance fear the integration of a giant who embodies this difference, the giant's body itself narrates that it cannot be reformed when it repels the baptismal font. Bevis's trajectory demonstrates that the romance hero's life is also episodic, like the Saracen giant's, but where the Saracen giant fails, the romance hero succeeds.

The romance introduces the concept of belonging and exile during Bevis' childhood. Bevis is, like Ascopard, exiled from his home by his kin. The romance relates that in disbelief Bevis asks himself, "was ich ones an erles sone / And now am herde?" ("was I once an earl's son / And now am [a] shepherd?"; 387-88). The intonation of surprise carried in Bevis' voice emphasizes not only the impact of being exiled, but also falling in the social strata. In stark contrast with Ascopard, or perhaps the Anglo-Norman l'Escopart, who is introduced to the readers of *Boeve* as a "churl", Bevis is introduced as the son of an "earl". An earl is the position of a nobleman ranked "below emperor, king, prince, [or] duke", but is still a superior social standing (erl 1a. *MED*). The romance does not determine Ascopard's social inferiority in his society, but it does distinguish the inferiority of his physical stature. On the one hand, the near homophonic similarity between 'churl' and 'earl' reflects the greater significance of what the romance hero loses, as opposed to the Saracen giant. On the other hand, it also

creates a parallel structure with the homophonic similarity of "earl" and "churl". Instead of distinguishing the romance hero from the Saracen giant, "ear" and "churl" stress their similarity. From being an earl's heir Bevis becomes a shepherd, a position without a social significance, close to the position of the churlish giant.

The young Bevis further aligns himself with Ascopard when, after being condemned to death, he returns to his mother and stepfather's castle. He looks "homward to the toun, / That scholde ben his" (homeward to[wards] the town / That should [have] been his"; *Beues* 380-81), and asserts his resentment and desire to reclaim and re-establish what he has lost. Cooper notes that "power was largely measured in the Middle Ages...in terms of territory" and for Bevis to imagine a home that 'should have been his', the loss of power in terms of his social ranking and territory is emphasized (207). In this respect, Bevis legitimizes Ascopard's betrayal, because by not being granted the position of squire, Ascopard is left without power, and in perpetual "poverté". In similar fashion, Bevis's resentment for what "scholde [have] be[e]n his", again, underscores his similarity to Ascopard, for he too falls in poverty when he is exiled. However, the romance differentiates Bevis from Ascopard when Bevis is later able to attract power by regaining Hampton, and by becoming a knight. The romance determines that due to Ascopard's unfortunate condition, his uncontainable body, he can neither gain meaningful recognition in his social strata nor attain a sense of belonging. Ascopard is "abjected", placed in poverty, and without a home.

Like Ascopard, Bevis also exhibits the physical characteristics of a monster in addition to his social similarity with Ascopard. When Ascopard fights alongside Bevis, his weapon of choice is "[h]is go[o]de, grete stave" or club, which is feared by all of

Bevis's enemies (3372). When fighting in the great battle alongside Bevis against the emperor of Germany, and the king of Scotland, Ascopard uses his great stave or "bat" to attack the King of Scotland (3431). Evidently, as noted in the previous section, the club, bat, or stave is the weapon that differentiates the giant from the knight. Ascopard's monstrosity, his giant identity, is conveyed by way of his club. Interestingly, however, the club appears alongside Bevis during fights more often than it appears in Ascopard's hands. As a young boy experiencing great resentment towards his loss, Bevis is constantly seen using and abusing the giant's weapon of identification. When he arrives at the gate to his mother and stepfather's castle, he uses his club to smite "the porter on the hod" ("porter on the head"; 416). Shortly afterwards he encounters his stepfather, and like an adolescent out of control, he strikes his stepfather thrice on the head (445). This time, however, the romance recognizes the weapon as a "mace" (443). In all these instances, especially during his youth, Bevis uses some form of club to protect himself from his enemies. The romance depicts Bevis wielding the chosen weapon of the giant and parallels him with Ascopard to suggest that he is like the Saracen giant in many respects. Furthermore, with his bat, mace or club, he expresses the uncontained, uncensored emotions that a giant expresses. Bevis' changing body, as a result, dictates that in order to become the hero of the romance and counter his inner monstrosity, the body must be controlled and contained; its hyperactivity must be mastered.

The romance uses the knight's body to reinforce the idea that the giant's body is always external to what the romance desires, for Ascopard's body is "abjected". Although Bevis is not characterized by a magnificent height or particularly beautiful facial characteristics, his corporal perfection is emphasized when his skin becomes

deformed. As Bevis confronts an adder while he is imprisoned, the adder's tail smites Bevis on the face and, the romance laments, he almost loses his "contenaunse" (*Beues* 1561). The term 'countenance' refers to Bevis' facial features, rather than his consciousness. It appears that had these facial features been disrupted, Bevis' identity and chivalry would be threatened, for the narrator of the story explains that because of the scar left on Bevis' face, "that maide ne kneu him nought, / Whan hii were eft togedre brought" ("the maid [Josian] knew him not / when they were again brought together"; 1573-74). Losing his facial features would not change his chivalry, nor would Bevis be characterized as a monster, because Josian accepts him when they meet. However, the romance emphasizes the importance of the beauty of the body as a whole, because during the episode with the dragon, the dragon's venom transforms Bevis into a foul leper (2830). As a result, Bevis experiences the exorbitance of a foul monster as his flesh swells, his neck armour bursts, and "a tho[u]send" links from his chainmail fall apart ("a thousand"; 2832-36). In this moment, Bevis' body not only becomes larger and uglier, but his armour also begins to dismantle, like the inconsistent, deformed and dismembered body of Ascopard. It is two significant components of his armour that fall to pieces, the neck brace and the chainmail that cover his head and torso. Symbolically, Bevis' swelling body and dismantling armour are the literal embodiment of the metaphorical undoing of his chivalry and knighthood. However, by falling in a well where a holy virgin had bathed, Bevis recovers from his leprosy and his status as romance hero is restored (2805-07), because bathing in a well where a virgin had bathed is symbolic of his baptism. The romance does not fail to link the importance of the body's beauty and coherence with knighthood and chivalry. It suggests that without a

beautiful visage, the body cannot achieve a social standing, for leprosy is a condition that "eats away the body" (*OED*). Similarly, without a stable body, there can neither be a hero nor a knight. Bevis' recovery, through bathing in a well where a virgin had bathed, is also a second baptism, which, in turn, links the giant's body to the devil, for Jennifer Fellows notes that "leprosy", in the Middle Ages, was regarded as a punishment of sin" (Fellows "Bevis" 83). A giant's deformed face, contorted and uncontainable body is, thus, dictated by sin, as it is also un-baptized and 'unholy'. Cooper rightfully claims that "[r]omance...celebrates those whom God or fortune or history favours" (Cooper 351), and Ascopard's body, as a result, is most unfavourable, because Bevis receives a second baptism by falling into the well, through divine ordinance, but Ascopard is given a choice which he refuses.

In a comparison between Bevis and the Redcrosse knight from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (c. 1596) Andrew King notes that both knights possess the narrative motif of the "displaced youth" (185). The displaced youth of the romance, King explains, is removed from his native surroundings into an un-tame environment that threatens his maturation, "leaving him ignorant of religion, manners and courtly society" (King 185). Bevis definitely falls into the category of the "displaced youth", because he quite literally is displaced from his land as a youth, which leaves him with an uncontrollable aggression that threatens his chivalric maturation. However, in contrast with the Saracen giant, King's argument suggests that in spite of a rough environmental upbringing, Bevis, the displaced youth of this romance, regains the society and customs that are rightfully his, just as his leprous body is transformed and his true rightful appearance is restored to him through the help of the divine. As a result,

Ascopard's body forever remains in the position of the displaced youth, for it is never able to exercise the control that the human body learns, because it is conceived and born under uncontrollable, excessive conditions. Cohen observes that "giants always perish through the breaking of their bodies, a corporal and symbolic rebuke of the deviance that they incorporate" (153) Thus, in some respect, Ascopard's body is like the body of the leper, slowly disintegrating into nothingness, because it is not baptized and lacks the divine assistance necessary for it to gain stability. Ascopard is, as Furrow claims, "a boy who never grew up" (155), because the tasks that Ascopard fails to complete are masterfully overcome by Bevis. Joyce Boro comments that knights quest out of their home to various adventures so that they can “learn to rule themselves; they therefore prove themselves worthy of returning to positions of leadership and power within their communities” (93). The knight's narrative is innately circular, because it is in his nature to seek challenges and difficulties. Whereas, the romance proposes that a giant whose body and actions are marred by difference cannot seek this circularity, and as a result he begins to delay and resist his end. Ascopard's refinement, the correction of his difference is impossible because his body is inherently problematic. His body is representative of a monstrosity that is greater than his Saracen identity, for it lacks any human quality, because it is "unstable, permeable, and overflowing", which are all characteristics of the female[11] body in the Middle Ages (Miller 2). As a result, Ascopard is a delaying, unstable, and entirely accidental body in the romance of *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*. His resemblance to the female body, difference from Vernagu from the previous chapter, and inability to complete tasks underscores his presence in the

[11] For a complete discussion on medieval monsters and the feminine, see Sarah Alison Miller's *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body* (New York: Routledge 2010).

romance as a narrative delay. He is, simply, an episode in Bevis' long narrative that helps the romance hero regain his social position and home.

Chapter 3

Assimilation

Introduction

While the other chapters in my thesis examine two romances from the Auchinleck manuscript where two Saracen giants refuse christening, this final chapter is concerned with a late medieval Scottish romance in which a religious conversion of a Saracen giant occurs. The *Taill of Rauf Coilyear* (c. 1513-42), a singular printed Middle Scottish text owned by the National Library of Scotland[12], is an alliterative poem written in the style of Old English poetry[13] that deals with a collier's humorous encounter with Charlemagne, Roland, and Magog, a Saracen giant. Unlike the romances of *Roland and Vernagu* and *Sir Beues of Hamtoun,* the *Taill of Rauf Coilyear* is set in two parts: the first a "king-and-commoner" narrative and the second a romance[14]. This chapter examines the romance section of the tale and analyzes the underlying problem of an unsightly Saracen giant's admittance to Christianity, especially when the Saracen's name, Magog, elicits apprehension in the Christian code. In particular, I elaborate on the biblical and historical significance of the name Magog, the monstrous representations of Gog and Magog in medieval cartography, and the relationship between these connotations and the treatment of the giant's body in *Rauf Coilyear*. Moreover, this chapter, in accordance with the methodology I use in my thesis, deconstructs the vocabulary that defines the appearance of the giant's body, the

[12] Alan Lupack notes that there are no surviving manuscripts of the tale. "All modern editions are based on the 1572 edition of Robert Lekpreuik, reproduced in a facsimile edition: *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear: Printed by Robert Lekpreuik at St. Andrews in 1572: A Facsimile of the Only Known Copy*. Keppie Facsimiles No. 1. Ed. W. Beattie. Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland, 1966." However, Sergi Mainer confirms that the original story was recorded in the Asloan manuscript that dates between c. 1513-1542, respectively.

[13] *Ibid,* "The Tale of Ralph the Collier: Introduction," *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), 22 June 2011 <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/collint.htm>

[14] Glenn Wright, "Convention and Conversion: The Saracen Ending of The the Taill of Rauf Coilzear," *Al-Masaq* 14:2 (2010): 106.

implications of what it means to be physically incongruous with the body desired for assimilation into Christianity, and how the Saracen giant's body constructs channels of integration into the heroic and Christian codes. Magog's assimilation, his successful "conversion" (*Rauf* 891) to Christianity is a polemic that not only parodies the heroic Christian identity that romance creates in the Middle Ages, but also it shows the materiality and limitations proposed by the chivalric romance.

I. The Parody of Romance

As this thesis has shown, conversion is a selective process through which romance Saracens with unseemly visages seldom pass. The prospects of an unsightly Saracen giant's admission to Christianity are more unlikely. Like the chivalrous Saracen male of romance, the Saracen giant needs to possess bodily signifiers that hold the promise of his eventual spiritual cleansing, such as white skin or knightly prowess marked by the body's performance on the battlefield. However, romance also conveys that sometimes such physical signifiers are not necessary precursors to the Saracen's conversion to Christianity, as previously discussed in relation to the *King of Tars*. However, it is important to recall that the sultan from the *King of Tars* is not a giant. Where giants are concerned, the passage to conversion becomes narrow. In *Rauf Coilyear*, Magog's description signals that his fate will fall towards death and defeat by the end of the narrative due to his imposing monstrous traits. However, because *Rauf Coilyear* partly contains a king-and-commoner plot and a romance plot, the conventions of romance are parodied, and Magog, in spite of his bodily alterity and excessive Saracen traits, manages to convert to Christianity.

Similar to Charlemagne's encounter with Vernagu in *Roland and Vernagu* and Bevis' encounter with Ascopard in *Beues of Hampton*, Magog's body appears conspicuously gigantic when Rauf "lukit ane lytill him fra / ... / [t]he maist man of all tha / [t]hat ever he had sene" ("looked a little from him / ... / the most [tall] man of all that / he had ever seen"; *Rauf* 800-803). The term "maist", translated as "most" (*MED*), calls attention to the Saracen's extraordinary body size in addition to being the largest of "all" men Rauf had "ever" seen. The terms "lukit" and "sene" emphasize the magnitude of Magog's body, and, furthermore, represent Rauf's lingering gaze that isolates the giant's body from his surroundings. Magog's body, seen through the eyes of the Christian knight-in-training, thus, distinguishes his physical "Otherness" and prescribes him to the category of giant. Moreover, as if describing a blazon, Rauf's gaze deviates from Magog's body and identifies the "unburely, braid and ovir hie" ("unsightly, and very tall in height"; 807) "blonk" ("steed"; *Rauf* 807) he rides as a "cameill" ("camel"; 804). Rauf's eyes list the various anomalies in his opponent's appearance, including the extraordinary presence of the unsightly, large camel he rides, but he neither questions nor is able to distinguish whether the rider he faces is Roland or a Saracen giant. The romance parodies the conventional encounter between the Christian fighter and his Saracen opponent by introducing a camel into the tale, while, simultaneously, mocking Rauf's foolishness for not recognizing the Saracen's Eastern traits.

"Parody", according to Linda Hutcheon, is "a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion" (87). The manner in which Magog's gigantic form is introduced in *Rauf Coilyear* is the "imitation" of the ideal Saracen opponent's entrance in romance, but Magog's encounter with a collier along with the camel form the "ironic

inversion" of romance conventions. On the one hand, the desert animal parodies the conventional romance that ascribes absurd qualities to its Saracen characters, for a camel is not a chivalric horse, and it is highly unlikely to find Saracen fighters riding camels, especially in France or other parts of Europe. On the other hand, the camel also parodies Rauf's culturally inexperienced eyes for not recognizing the markedly oriental character standing before him[15]. In this moment, any notion of chivalry is destabilized because both collier and Saracen giant seem displaced from their social standings (Wright 106): Magog rides a camel when a knight's chivalry is in part discernable by his steed, and an unprepared collier, Rauf, meets a Saracen giant in battle. The camel in the tale also functions to subordinate the Saracen giant from his chivalric position. Richard W. Bulliet notes that, "the camel simply cannot produce the momentum and impact of the warhorse" (Bulliet 99), and Magog's camel's chivalric inferiority, in turn, proposes Magog's inferiority to Rauf, which further plays upon the notion of "ironic inversion", because what can be a power force of the Orient appears subordinate to a common collier.

Hutcheon explains that parody can be redefined as a "repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (88). In other words, she suggests that parody through repetition can undermine the object being parodied and simultaneously reveal a critical truth about it. For instance, although it is true that, since antiquity, the camel for the Arabs and North Africans has been a powerful component of military warfare, Thomas F. Glick warns that "the camel should not obscure the role

[15] Richard W. Bulliet notes that Muslims in the Middle Ages commonly used camels for trade, cavalry, and transportation, but they did so in North African and Arabian climes where they came in contact with European merchants. However, Bulliet confirms that, though scarce, there are records of camels being brought into France and Germany from North Africa for animal husbandry between 600 CE to the late Middle Ages (Bulliet 241).

of the horse, for the Arab tribesman was as obsessed with the horse as was the European knight" (Glick 11). If this is argued, then, the romance's deliberate choice to differentiate Magog by his camel does not only subordinate Magog in relation to the Christian collier, but also it uses parody to mask the threat of the Orient that Magog represents. The repetition of stereotypical "Saracen" characteristics, such as Magog's gigantic features and inferior knowledge of courtly manners displayed through his poor choice of carrier, help elevate the Christian "Self" and, simultaneously, veil what the romance fears; that is, the similarity between the Occident and the Orient.

Similarly, Mikhail Bakhtin explains that laughter,

> overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations....Medieval laughter, when it triumphed over the fear inspired by mystery of the world and by power, boldly unveiled the truth about both.... This laughing truth, expressed in curses and abusive words, degraded power. (90-93)

In *Rauf Coilyear,* the romance inhibits the Saracen's ferocity, his threat, and the trauma of the crusades by constructing Magog as a site of laughter, and, as Bakhtin explains, this site of laughter functions to "boldly [unveil] the truth about both" the Saracen giant and his opponent. The Saracen's truth, his power, and similarity to the Christian "Self" is, thus, degraded and dismissed by an outward display of difference and inferiority, and this inferiority is mirrored in Rauf's own position as a collier in courtly training.

Furthermore, the romance's masked fear of the Saracen giant is not unwarranted, because the symbolism attached to the camel is significant. In medieval bestiaries, the camel has two moods: it harbors jealousy towards the horse for its inferior status in

warfare, and, simultaneously, embodies an uncontrolled hypersexuality that can only be tamed through castration (White 79-80). Magog's camel is the symbolic representation of what the giant is: a body that knows no limitations. To reiterate, Cohen explains that the "desires to which his [the giant's] excessive form gives instant expression mark him as not quite human: men control their appetites..., and the domination over their own body is what constitutes their own humanity" (38). The symbol of the camel from the medieval bestiary demonstrates that in order to contain one's desires, one's jealousy, or hypersexuality, the body must be punished by mutilation. Consequently, Magog's body is introduced to the narrative with various symbols that situate him at the liminal, that is, at the limen or the threshold (*OED*) of society. Just like the giant of Mont St. Michel who exhibited hypersexuality, difference, and monstrosity and dwelled outside the margins of civilization, the romance constructs Magog's body as a site that lacks control, has no limitations, and defies boundaries as I will show below. Magog's connection to the camel and the giant of Mont St. Michel suggests that his body's excessive traits will be disciplined by the cutting of his flesh, for he falls outside the normal, and in the abnormal; outside the Occident, and in the Orient; outside the "Self", and in the "Other". Nevertheless, in spite of bearing these unfavourable qualities, Magog is baptized.

II. Magog in the Middle Ages

In the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, the name Magog appears in the accounts of Gog and Magog, or Ya'juj and Ma'juj in Arabic, and in the mythic narratives of Alexander the Great. The Judeo-Christian and Islamic accounts agree that Gog and Magog, collectively, is an apocalyptic race descended from Japheth, one of the

seven sons of Noah, that is barricaded between a chain of mountains, or walls, in the northern peripheries of the world[16]. *Rauf Coilyear* does not ostensibly term the Saracen as "giant", "monstrous", or belonging to this accursed race, but his appearance, stature, and name confirm his gigantism and monstrosity. However, in spite of the obvious physical and religious signifiers that indicate his inherent deviance, Magog's difference is defused by the romance's insistence on his equally prevalent chivalric demeanor, thereby making the tale a parody of romance conventions. The tug and pull between Magog's Saracen identity and his new Christian identity place his body in a borderline, liminal position, where he either appears barbaric and devious or Christian and chivalric, and in spite of the Saracen's imposing physique and unfavourable presence, the romance constructs an easy passage for his conversion to Christianity.

Emeri Van Donzel and Andrea Schmidt in *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources* map the range of appearances of Gog and Magog in the Abrahamic scriptures and the traditions surrounding them. They explain that in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, variations of a prophecy regarding the devastation of the world at the hands of Gog and Magog exist. The figure of Gog and Magog is best known from the Old Testament accounts of the prophet Ezekiel, in which Gog, the commander of the apocalyptic people of Gog and Magog, is directly addressed by Yahweh, God (Donzel and Schmidt 6). Ezekiel narrates:

> in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel,

[16] Emeri Van Donzel and Andrea Schmidt, *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

> which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them.
>
> Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee. (Ezec. 38. 8-9)

God's words to Gog prophesize Gog's wrath on the people of the world during the Last Judgment. Like medieval monsters that inhabit the outer marshes of civilized societies, such as Grendel from *Beowulf* who lives on the outskirts of Heorot, the people of Gog and Magog will descend from the Otherworld into Jerusalem, a symbol of civilization, plague it with their malice and disrupt order. *Rauf Coilyear*'s Magog, who is typecast as a hypermasculine giant because of his camel, size, and appearance, is again linked with the hypermasculine and disorderly, for his name is a direct replica of a part of the name of the apocalyptic race of Gog and Magog. According to Donzel and Schmidt, "Magog" may be a derivative of Gog, which means that the "Ma" in "Ma-gog" may identify one *belonging to* or *from* "the land of Gog" (3). Magog's identity, thus, is marred with symbols that identify him with monstrosities as well as the ominous, but the parody comes into effect when despite these warnings, *Rauf Coilyear* baptizes the Saracen giant.

In the Alexander traditions, from which the Christian and Islamic narratives of Gog and Magog are influenced, Alexander builds a great wall to contain the uncleanliness and monstrosity of Gog and Magog, for in the *Syriac Alexander Legend*, the people of Gog and Magog cook and devour pregnant women and drink their blood (19). Their cannibalism is reminiscent of the cannibalism of the giant of Mont St.

Michel, who devours women and children in addition to exercising an uninhibited hypersexuality. The underlying meanings of Magog's name gesture towards his inner monstrosity, and suggest the irony in having a Saracen character whose presence and identity is overwhelmed with demonic symbols convert to Christianity.

Furthermore, outside the scriptures, Gog and Magog are found in the *mappae mundi*: the medieval European maps of the world. The maps are a visual representation of the various races that inhabited the known parts of the world, and they usually include illustrations of the three known worlds of India/Asia, Africa, and Europe. External to the borders of the known Christian world and within the borders of the less explored regions of Africa and India/Asia, the *mappae mundi* illustrate figures of the monstrous races that dwell there (Duzer 221). In the Ebstorf *mappamundi* of c. 1235, Chet Van Duzer finds Gog and Magog "imprisoned...in northeastern Asia behind an impenetrable wall...eating each other" (222). Not only does the 1235 map position Alexander's great wall that barricades Gog and Magog outside of Europe, but also the monstrous race is depicted shamelessly engaged in cannibalism, whereby identifying itself with the many features of the monstrous giant of romance.

Similarly, Duzer finds that in Martin Waldseemüller's *Carta Marina* of c. 1516, Gog and Magog are imprisoned behind a chain of mountains in "Tartaria" (223-25). When in *Rauf Coilyear* Roland first asks Magog to revoke his false religion and accept Christianity, Magog refuses to convert on account of being sworn to drive Charlemagne out of France by the command of the "Chane of Tartarie" ("Khan of Tartary"; *Rauf* 904). Magog's appointment by the Khan of Tartary is significant, for the Tartars were a "mingled host of Mongols, Tartars, Turks, etc., which under the leadership of Jenghiz

Khan (1202–1227) overran and devastated much of Asia and Eastern Europe" (*OED*). Although Magog is commissioned by the Khan of Tartary, his camel indicates that he is most probably of Arabian or North African descent. However, he and the Tartars share the same religion of "Mahoun" (*Rauf* 888), and resultantly, the *Carta Marina* imposes the evil and destructive nature of Gog and Magog onto the giant's identity. Interestingly, Donzel and Schmidt explain that in the 9th century Islamic descriptions of Ya'juj and Ma'juj (Gog and Magog), the notorious race is identified with the Turks because nomadic Turkish tribes were responsible for raiding Central Asia (74-75). As Magog desires to "Chace Charlis...king fer out of France" ("chase king Charlemagne far out of France; 903), he embodies the manner in which Gog and Magog have been prophesized to drive out humanity from its secure lands.

The narratives of Gog and Magog in the scriptures and their illustrations in the *mappae mundi* identify Magog as a monster harbouring desires to kill, devour, raid, and destroy the civilized world. The civilized world, though in Ezekiel is Jerusalem, according to the *mappae mundi* is the west, and precisely, the Christian west. Because of the diversity in the scriptural accounts as well as the popularity of the medieval maps of Gog and Magog, medieval Europeans were well aware of the religious significations of the apocalyptic figures. Thus, *Rauf Coilyear*'s naming of the Saracen giant as "Magog" is not arbitrary, but rather an effective use of parody, where, to reformulate and combine Hutcheon and Bakhtin's notions of parody and laughter, repetition deliberately counters and simultaneously unveils the bias of the conventional romance. The deliberate emphasis of Magog's inherent evil is, to use Hutcheon's terms, "a

repetition with critical distance" (88) that reveals the romance's overcompensation for the Occident's virtue and superiority over the Orient.

III. The Interpellation of "Sarasine"

Considering the fundamental meaning of the name Magog, its association with the ominous, monstrous and apocalyptic figures of Gog and Magog, in addition to the popularity of the Gog and Magog traditions in the Middle Ages, it would seem appropriate that Magog appears as a great threat to Christendom. It would also seem appropriate to, following romance conventions, remove Magog's inherent untamed barbarism by defeating him in battle and killing him. However, this is not the case. *Rauf Coilyear* simply continues to heighten the incongruity of Magog's appearance in the tale and encourages the parody of an unlikely Saracen giant's eventual conversion to Christianity.

Siobhain Bly Calkin explains that the conventional Saracen male of romance is "one of two forms; he is either a beast-like source of power to be feared and fought, or a ferocious knightly opponent whom the Christians would like to convert to their side" (22). Magog's body, his carrier, and the symbols attached to his name embody a paradox, because he is able to identify with both the Saracen who is the "beast-like source of power" as well as the "ferocious knightly opponent". However, because the tale parodies the Christian-Saracen encounter in romance by repeatedly emphasizing Magog's strange appearance, his identity results in producing Bakhtin's notion of "laughter", which unveils a critical truth through degradation and rebuke. The laughter and its rebuke are evident in Roland's first words to the Saracen giant, for he interjects,

"Thow art ane Sarasine, I se be my sicht" ("You are a Sarasin, I see by my sight"; *Rauf* 871). Without delay, Roland's words to Magog stress the legible "Otherness" of his stature and overall appearance. They also emphasize apprehension and a concurrent excitement in Roland's intonation, for he easily identifies the foreigner in his territory as well as an opportunity for a challenge to prove the falsity of the Saracen's faith. In this interruption, Roland typifies Magog by "hailing" him with the term "Sarasine", by which, to recall Judith Butler's explication of Althusser's notion of "interpellation", Magog is "subjected" and "constituted" by that call (Butler 238). Magog, paradoxically, is both politically 'enabled' and 'paralyzed' by the term "Sarasine" (239), and embodies Calkin's description of both the "fierce beast-like" Saracen monstrosity that is feared, along with the "ferocious knightly opponent" who is baptized and knighted.

Although, by calling Magog a "Sarasine", Roland ascribes a certain degree of power to his gigantic size, the range of connotations attached to the term "Sarasine" come into play, and following romance conventions, the positive connotations subside. Magog positions himself for the reproachful call of "Sarasine" when he evokes his gods. He swears by "Mahoun...[and] Termagant" (*Rauf* 850) in front of an unsuspecting Rauf, who methodically echoes, "Thow sayis thow art ane Sarasine?" ("You say you are a Sarasin?"; *Rauf* 852) and constitutes Magog's identity as the monstrous, Other, and inferior. As a result, the echo of "thou art an Sarasine" ("you are a Saracen"; 852; 871) unveils the truth the romance conveys about the Saracen character, that because he is a Saracen whose body, name, and identity are impressed with the mark of deviance, difference, and excess, he does not belong in the Christian faith or the Christian court. Evidently, this is the ironic inversion of Magog's presence in *Rauf Coilyear*, because

neither the implications of his name nor the exaggerations of his appearance hinder him from conversion to Christianity and admission to the French court.

Moreover, the notion of "critical difference" in Hutcheon's description of parody and the notion of "subversion" in Bakhtin's description of laughter are observed in the juxtaposition of Magog and Rauf. As the previous sections discuss, Magog and Rauf's encounter in the tale is noticeably unconventional, for it is highly improbable for a camel-riding Saracen giant of romance to face a collier in battle. This moment is constructed in a series of mirrorings that parallel Magog with Rauf, because Rauf believes his opponent is both Roland and a giant, that he is a noble chivalrous knight and a fearful agent of destruction. When Rauf first encounters Magog, his gaze oscillates between Magog and his camel (*Rauf* 806-807), and then from camel to Magog (804-805) as if the body of his opponent and his steed do not correspond with his own body size and environment. Its oscillation characterizes his disbelief in the inversion he faces, that is, the camel-mounted giant that he is sure is Roland. Because Rauf does not imagine isolating Magog as a giant and reducing his Oriental appearance to the rebuke of "Sarasine", the tale not only hesitates to classify Magog as giant or a worthy opponent, but also disregards such a possibility where an unsightly Saracen giant's admission to Christianity would be questioned. Rauf rather notices Magog's "curagious countenance" ("courageous countenance"; *Rauf* 805), or the noble expression on his face. However, simultaneously, Rauf notices that Magog is "cruell to se" ("cruel to see"; 805). To be cruel or savage in sight and equally courageous, proposes a binary that elicits hostility in Rauf, but also an immediate admiration for his opponent's "curagious" and worthy conduct.

Roland typecasts Magog as the feared and hated Saracen "Other", and the metaphorical slander of laughter, for laughter is, according to Bakthin, "expressed in curses and abusive words" (93), is translated in a verbal rebuke by Roland when he exclaims, "I rid that thow hartfully forsaik thy Mahoun; / Fy on that foull feind, for fals is thy fay!" ("I advise that you heartily forsake your god [Mahoun] / Shame on that foul fiend, for false is your faith!"; *Rauf* 888-889). The term "fiend" in Roland's diction is of importance. Saracen religion is commonly described through such terminology that condemns it as sinister and unnatural. When pronounced here, "fiend", along with the alliteration of ""fy", "foul;" "for fals" and "fay", through repetition heightens a sense of apprehension and disgust that immediately dismisses the Saracen and his wrong faith. Likewise, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term "fie" as an interjection "expressing...disgust or indignant reproach" (*OED*). When coupled, "fiend" and "fy" (*Rauf* 874; 889) announce the disappointment Roland feels towards Magog for keeping an alliance with the wrong faith. As a result, the rebuke results in an opportunity to correct the Saracen's false allegiance, as if Magog, like Rauf, is a knight in training, for "fie" was commonly "said to children to excite shame for some unbecoming action, and hence often used to express the humorous pretence of feeling 'shocked'" (*OED*). The rebuke, thus, also evokes the humour associated with the Saracen giant's body, as if he is a large child learning manners and courtesy from an adult.

Similarly, when Roland exclaims, "[f]y on thy fechting! fell hes thow bene. / Thou art stout and strang, and stalwart in fecht" ("Shame on your fighting! You have been foul. / You are stout, strong, and fight stalwartly"; 874-875), not only does he, ironically and systematically, first degrade and politically paralyze Magog for

"fechting", but also paradoxically he next praises and enables him for being stout, strong and stalwart. The ironic inverse of Magog's body unmasks the truth that though he is an embodiment of the ultimate difference, he is also very similar to Rauf.

Cohen notes that "in the Lacanian mirror stage[17], a jubilant image becomes a trap for the gaze, a lure that catches the unwary subject in an estranging identification" (18). Rauf, too, at this point appears to manifest qualities that resemble a child in the mirror stage as he identifies his opponent standing in front of him. On the one hand, Magog's excessive size instills fear in Rauf. On the other, his opponent's same uncanny appearance, that which is frightening but simultaneously familiar, traps his gaze, but also reveals an internal desire to mirror that body's magnitude as he believes it is Roland that he confronts. The two mimic each other's actions as if "thay" (*Rauf* 863) together were reflections of one another, for "[i]n stour stifly thay stand" ("in combat they boldly stand"; 865). Roland, once arrived, too, acknowledges their similarity in battle when he admires Magog's strength and claims "[s]a is thy fallow, in faith, and that is weill sene" ("so is your opponent [Rauf], truly, and it is well observed"; 876). Roland's remark juxtaposes Magog's body with Rauf's as if "thay" are two sides of one coin. By describing Magog and Rauf in the collective use of the third person pronoun "they", *Rauf Coilyear* encourages the paradox or ironic inversion of both collier and Saracen giant's awkward disposition in the romance setting of the narrative, and by doing so, the interpellation of "they" disables Rauf and Magog from candidacy for knighthood in the Christian court. Simultaneously, as Althusser's theory explains, interpellation is also enabling, for the "subject" comes into existence by being hailed, and as a result, *Rauf*

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[17] See Jaques Lacan's *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,* Trans. Alan Sheridan. (New York: Norton, 1977).

Coilyear suggests that because Magog is not Christian, his faith can be challenged and his allegiance changed. Rather than simply making Magog a subject, the tale grants him the opportunity to earn a subjectivity if he converts to Christianity.

IV. Conversion

The romances of *Beues of Hampton* and *Roland and Vernagu* from the Auchinleck manuscript that I have extensively discussed in this thesis exhibit the difficulties that lie in baptizing Saracen giants. Sometimes, like Ascopard, the giant is neither able to be Christened nor knighted, because his intrinsic instability translates to an external failure in mastering feats of arms or inhibiting bodily desires. A ferocious giant well versed in the Christian doctrine like Vernagu demonstrates that his faith and ideologies are unwavering, and that he will forever remain a threat if not converted. However, where in the medieval romance conversions do occur, Calkin observes that the Saracen makes a "direct contact with the divine", and also possesses a "will" to accept or refuse conversion (30; 39). She explains that though conversion is a willed phenomenon, only a few are able to achieve it: "when he [the Saracen] is defined solely by bestiality and color..., the idea of conversion is not usually pursued" (39), such as in Ascopard's or Vernagu's case. From this standpoint, Magog's conversion to Christianity in *Rauf Coilyear* seems extraordinary, because Magog is not handsome, his name carries the burden of the destruction of the world, and the Christian divine does not appear to him. Where *Rauf Coilyear*'s treatment of Magog differs from the Saracen giant of conventional romance, however, is in that it is primarily a king-and-commoner story with romance elements, and as I have demonstrated, the role of parody is significant for its development. Thus, it would be untrue to suggest that Magog does not

"will" (*Rauf* 914; 909) to convert to Christianity, but it is proven through parody that Magog's "will" to convert is solely based on an interest in Christianity, rather than through divine inspiration or his inferiority to Roland.

Because romance proposes that life at court is defined by an economy of honour, a life that is constructed through one's worth and gains, Roland offers Magog riches as a way to mitigate the strength of his will and coax him into conversion: "Wald thow convert the in hy and cover the of sin, / Thow suld have mair profite and mekle pardoun" ("If you convert yourself in haste and redeem your ills, / You will have much profit and pardon"; *Rauf* 921-922). Indeed, Roland advocates the Christian notions of pardon and the purging of sin, but the usage of the term "profit" is noteworthy. The *Middle English Dictionary* cites the term "profite" as meaning "benefit", "spiritual benefit" and also "honour" (def. 1.a.). Consequently, the use of such a term opens the possibilities for a Saracen giant like Magog to become a part of, and flourish in, Christian society. According to Roland's promise, not only will Magog's sins be purged, but also he will have much spiritual and economic benefit. However, the irony of the moment is revealed in Roland's juxtaposition of wealth and religion, because contrary to educating Magog in the Christian doctrine, Roland's diction distances the ideals of religion from the ideals of chivalry by promising Magog material wealth, and the elevation of his status through the accession of "[r]iche douchereis seir to be sesit in, / [d]uring quhill day dawis, that never will gang doun" ("various rich duchies to invest in, / [that will] last until the day dawns and never come to an end"; *Rauf* 923-24). Roland offers Magog interminable social stability and the promise of a dukedom, as opposed to interminable stability in God's eyes or the promise of heaven. Interestingly, Magog is

presented with continuity and wholeness through "profit" in contrast to healing through religious practice, which suggests that Roland is inadequate in being a representative for his own religion as he is unable to motivate Magog through religious vocabulary, and so Roland parodies the conversion process.

Magog's response to Roland is also telling. He explains, "I rek nocht of thy riches" ("I do not care for your riches"; *Rauf* 934), but "gif thy God be sa gude as I heir the say, / I will forsaik Mahoun and tak me to His micht " ("if your God is as good as I hear you say / then I will forsake Mahoun and commit [myself] to Christ's service"; 937-938). Magog simply dismisses any desire for wealth and describes his will to convert on the basis of what he has "heard" Roland say. However, Roland only mentions the concepts of pardon to Magog, and, thus, it is from his previous encounters with Christians that Magog becomes interested in Christian religious practices, as he explains "For I have Cristen men sene, / That in mony angeris hes bene, / Full oft on Him cry" (For I have seen Christian men, / That have been in much trouble, / Often cry on Him [God]"; *Rauf* 944-46). Magog's words to Roland undermine Roland's role as an ideal Christian knight, for he does not possess significant knowledge of Christianity to educate the Saracen giant in his faith. In addition, Magog's disinterest in wealth further distinguishes between Christianity and the heroic code, and suggests that the two operate separately, and cannot be unified into one.

Glenn Wright rightfully observes that,

> faith in "Mahoun"...is not represented as constitutive of any inner sense of self. Saracens (or at least the ones whose prowess makes them suitable converts)

> appear to subscribe to the same ethical and behavioral codes as Christian knights, from whom they differ by virtue of an arbitrary and mistaken allegiance. (109)

When applied to *Rauf Coilyear*, Wright's observation explains that religion is unessential to the heroic code and vice versa, that they operate on different scales and cannot be conflated. The purpose of the Saracen's conversion only bears the significance of a more impressive victory for the Christian knight, and the pretense of the religious discourse, thus, functions as a "political act" (Wright 109). Furthermore, Meredith Jones clarifies that, "[i]n medieval eyes conversion was the sign of the acceptance of defeat, and it was only logical that such a belief should be attributed to the Saracen also" (Jones 223). What Magog reveals, then, is twofold: On one level, he suggests that Roland lacks the knowledge and understanding of his religion, and that his approach to convert the Saracen does not have any religious basis. On another lever, Magog also suggests the universality of chivalry, for his complete disinterest in the wealth that Roland offers him exemplifies that he already is well aware of the functioning of Roland's society, and that he is most probably of a high status, as he is, on several counts, described wearing "ryall array" ("royal array"; *Rauf* 935).

Jones explains that "the Saracens in the Orient were really governed by a feudal system which was so similar to the Occidental one that it surprised the crusaders when they arrived there" (224). Thus, Magog's understanding of the political, social and chivalric system of Roland's society works in Roland's favour. His disinterest in challenging Magog to fight, contrary to the prerequisite of battle as a measure of one's aptitude for chivalric and religious assimilation (Wright 108), suggests that Magog is

already in possession of Western characteristics, for unlike the giant whose identifying feature is a club, Magog wields "birny and...brand" ("chainmail and sword"; *Rauf* 806), the identifying features of a knight.

As a result, *Rauf Coilyear* forcefully separates Christianity from chivalry and recalls Calkin's exposition that chivalry or knighthood exist outside of and separate from the Christian corpus (30); its borders are porous and always express the possibility of assimilation for Saracen giants or knights. Magog demonstrates, however, that conversion to Christianity is a truly willed act, and that without an interest in becoming Christian, the Saracen cannot convert. As a result, the Saracen giants that do assimilate into Christianity are those who will it, but they also need to demonstrate chivalry, for it is chivalry that places limitations on the giant's body and conceals itself behind the pretense of religion.

Magog's conversion in *Rauf Coilyear*, in spite of the apocalyptic relations of his name, parodies the conventional romance in that it exposes the limitations imposed on bodies. It suggests that religion stands separate from the heroic code, especially when a celebrated knight such as Roland is unable to contribute the teachings of his faith to an "Other". The ironic inverse of *Rauf Coilyear* is not only observed in Magog's conversion to Christianity and becoming a part of Roland's society, but also through Magog's help in making Rauf a part of a courtly society for which Rauf has neither prior training in arms nor knowledge of the workings of the nobility. Rauf, while Roland disputes with Magog about conversion, "stands mutely by" (Wright 107), for he does not have the knowledge to make a contribution in such a situation. *Rauf Coilyear* parodies romance conventions when, instead of Roland teaching Rauf the ways of the

knight, Magog steps in to enact the primal encounter between teacher and pupil. Wright notes that through this, Rauf, like Magog, "converts to the upper class, but does so like a literary Saracen: noble status is treated as a simple affiliation, requiring no ideological transformation" (109). Through the integration of a commoner along with the assimilation of a Saracen giant whose name is a cause for concern, *Rauf Coilyear* suggests that becoming a part of the Christian nobility, thus, is not difficult, and that romance conventions are unjustified. As Victor I. Scherb observes, not only is Magog responsible for Rauf's admission to the court, but also "he is ultimately a spokesperson for Christian values -- a convert who testifies to the truth and appeal of faith" (69).

Conclusion

The *Taill of Rauf Coilyear* conveys that when Saracen giants convert to Christianity they do so on the basis of their own wills, provided that they possess the physical prowess and noble countenance that chivalry desires. *Rauf Coilyear* parodies romance conventions by placing a commoner alongside a Saracen giant for candidacy for integration in the heroic code, which undermines romance conventions because both are able to join the code as well as climb up the social ladder of a court where, according to romance conventions, neither belongs. Through the use of parody, laughter, and rebuke, Rauf and Magog's presence in the romance plot of *Rauf Coilyear* conveys that romance is founded on regulating difference between its chivalric knights and characters like Rauf and Magog, who, in the eyes of romance, are socially, physically, and racially/religiously inferior to those found at court. Because of these pretenses, *Rauf Coilyear*'s treatment of Magog unveils the limitations and vanity of the genre, for because Roland is too concerned with what the heroic code represents, he is

neither able to convey the message of Christianity to the Saracen giant, nor is he an effective exemplar of chivalry for Rauf.

It is religious discourse that surpasses the bounds of the limiting chivalric corpus that is adamant on rebuking the bodies and faiths of those outside it. By assimilating into the Christian faith first, Magog is able to be assimilated into the heroic code. The term "assimilation" itself connotes the idea of "incorporation" -- to join in flesh and make one. *Rauf Coilyear* reveals the romance's rebuke of the body or flesh through Roland's offerings of wealth and marriage to a "worthie...wyfe" ("worthy...wife"; *Rauf* 925) for Magog, both of which are imperative for Magog's status and worth, and which will help Magog's body "incorporate" into the heroic code. Marriage will allow Magog access to the social hierarchy as well as a chance of producing offspring -- a promise for the reproduction of one's body, in contrast to its dismantling and mutilation. The offspring will also be a hybrid of Saracen and Christian, possessing both Saracen and Christian bodily features that guarantee the Saracen giant's position in the heroic society. From an economic perspective, becoming Christian is undeniably profitable, for the union with the duchess and the acquisition of Christian lands advocates the birth of new bodies, assimilated flesh, and the newly recognized subject's continuity. Interestingly, Jones notes that the

> Saracen leaders [of romance], despite the fact that Mahomet had promised a martyr's crown to those who fell in battle against the unbeliever, urge their men on by the promise of earthly rewards in the shape of beautiful women..., rewards which, in history, were often proposed to Saracen Arabs (219).

Consequently, *Rauf Coilyear* uses parody again as it prescribes marriage to Magog. It unveils a historical fact concerning the bartering of flesh as a means to regulate friendship and relations between Eastern and Western powers.

What the *Taill of Rauf Coilyear* essentially suggests is that admission to the heroic code is a much more scrutinizing process than a conversion to Christianity, because Saracens that fight, whether they are giants or humans, need to possess the ability to master their bodies, their internal monstrosities and alterities in order to become a part of the heroic body. Conversion is always possible, but because the Saracen giant and the Saracen male are most prominently found in the corpus of the romance, a genre fixed on the performance of the body, the rebuke of the body becomes an integral part before its conversion.

Conclusion

The medieval romance presents the Saracen giant's body as a site of intermingled fear, difference, "Otherness" and evil. Physically marked by the falsity of his faith, the Saracen giant is a trope necessitated by the romance, for where the Saracen giant fails, the romance hero is victorious. The giant, unlike the Saracen male of romance who often fights alongside the Christian knight and bears commendable noble traits, embodies all the qualities that subordinate him in relation to the romance hero. However, the romance also constructs this strange body as a body that is desirable for Christian military advancement, because in spite of its transgression from the norm and its excessive difference, it is oftentimes quite powerful and similar to the bodies of Christian knights. *Bodies, Saracen Giants, and the Medieval Romance* juxtaposes the bodies and characteristics of three different Saracen giants whose chivalric ability, body, and encounters with Christian knights overlap with one another, but the resolution of these Saracen giants' bodies in each romance is slightly different.

In *Roland and Vernagu*, Vernagu is the ultimate embodiment of the Saracen/Muslim threat to medieval West because not only is he powerful and monstrous in appearance, he is also very similar to the romance's heroes. His resolute will, disapproval of Christianity, and the reflection of his internal deviance on his flesh is what makes it necessary for him to be removed from the narrative, but what he also underscores is the romance's critique of Christian practices and Christian knighthood's excessive display of power and destruction. His body, an obvious marker of his transgression from the normal and from Christianity undermines the paradox that is in the Christian knight's worship of his faith, for Vernagu's transgression reveals the transcendence of Christ's being in three persons as well as his transubstantiation into the

Eucharist. Vernagu essentially underlines the significance of the body in defining identities and borders outside of the Christian west, but at the same time, he also defines bodies inside the borders of the Christian west, such as the body of Christ that is not fixed, just like the gaint's body, and can blend and transform from one image to another. It is the romance giant whose body, though it is a conspicuous marker of his excessive physical and religious difference, marks the medieval Christian imagination's objective to fix and contain the Saracen body.

Sir Beues of Hamtoun, on the other hand, demonstrates a somewhat flexible approach towards the different body of the Saracen giant. Though he is not as powerful as Vernagu, Ascopard's body narrates the struggle involved with the conversion of a Saracen giant, and the threat he may pose. Ascopard's eagerness to integrate his body in the heroic code, but refusal to convert to Christianity is an embodiment of the fear in the Middle Ages regarding the instability of the Saracen's temperament, and the rigidity of the West to involve Oriental bodies in Christian military practices. Ascopard conveys that in order for Saracen bodies to integrate into the Christian heroic culture, the body has to undergo a physical transformation, which Ascopard's body refuses. Ascopard's forceful resistance of the baptismal font, inability to successfully complete feats of arms, and excessive behaviours and temperaments force the containing of his gigantism through a physical reproach of his body. His inability to perform according to the romance's expectations as a Saracen giant-in-training positions him as socially inferior, but also, paradoxically, in the position of a young "page" as he is for Bevis. His body parallels Bevis's body when Bevis in his youth was unable to master his emotions and sudden hyperactivity. However, the romance communicates that because the giant body

is large, it situates itself in the marginal or abject, as it is neither able to master its excessive behaviour nor able to master chivalry.

The *Taill of Rauf Coilyear* demonstrates what *Sir Beues of Hampton* and *Roland and Vernagu* convey collectively, that the romance characterizes its Saracen giants as a site of difference. The romance giant in a characteristic encounter with the romance hero is either designated to lose or be disarmed in battle through his death or converted to Christianity and admitted to the western heroic code. Although the romance characterizes Magog in an extremely exaggerated situation, bearing obvious cultural and religious disclaimers that taint his name and appearance, it is within these exaggerations that *Rauf Coilyear* parodies romance conventions and suggests that Saracens and Saracen giants are not very different from their Christian counterparts. It is in an attempt to mask its fear of the Orient that *Rauf Coilyear* displays that the romance ascribes absurd and threatening qualities to its Saracen giants. In addition, it is through Magog's ironic conversion to Christianity and the laughter associated with this moment that the giant's body reveals the limitations, constrictions and borders of the heroic corpus. Magog's body suggests that while Christianity has borders that are porous and able to be penetrated by the Saracen, it is the Christian heroic code that upholds unmatchable and implausible limitations upon bodies. Through the laughter associated with the commoner and Saracen giant's admission to the western court, and Magog's conversion to Christianity, *Rauf Coilyear* conveys the unreasonable ideals of Christian chivalry that are romanticized by the celebrated knights of romance.

As Vernagu and Magog prominently demonstrate, Christian religious knowledge for the giant preexists his arrival in the romance. It is rather due to his

stubborn will that the Saracen giant does not undergo a baptism. Ascopard shows that the romance desires to contain and control the Saracen giant's body by wanting to bathe it in a baptismal font as well as teach it courtly behaviour. Ascopard and Vernagu's bodies in conjunction relate that the ramifications of choosing to remain a Saracen are physical: the giant's body after refusing baptism is not only physically rebuked, but also dismantled and dispersed as if to obliterate the deviance inherent in its black flesh. Similarly, Magog's ironic conversion to Christianity unveils how his body is inept for the chivalrous code, for not only does he lack the physical features that the heroic code desires, but also he demonstrates that conversion is just a pretext that the romance uses to inspect Saracen bodies before they enter the heroic corpus. It is both in the act of conversion and dismemberment of the giant that the romance unveils the limitations imposed by the heroic code onto bodies, for all giants possess Christian knowledge, but lack the physical traits required for knighthood.

However, this does not mean that the Saracen giant is arbitrary to the development of the Christian knight's prowess. The Saracen giant's uncanny body takes the position of the subject when, through its death, reduction to pieces, and conversion, it helps to produce the knight and increases his chivalric worth. It also serves the didactic purpose of educating the romance reader in the ideals of Christian practices and virtue. The giant becomes both an object desired and feared at the same time for his ironic similarity with the Christian knight, as he uncannily worships an inverted Christianity, wears the Christian knight's garb, and vocally conveys the message of the Christian faith.

Saracen giants and the treatment of their bodies reveal that the body of the medieval romance is marred with objects and impressions of Christianity, as well as a unified Western nationalism. Through the body of the Saracen giant, the romance narrates that it is deeply concerned with the display and assertion of superiority and masculinity through the physical scrutiny of bodies. Although I do not discuss the giant's body and its relation to the feminine, the characterization of each of these Saracen giants, their desire to either easily conform or easily fluctuate between temperaments or be too unreasonably resolute, are all qualities of the female body in the medieval imagination. The dominating discourse of chivalry and its rebuke of the body becomes a discourse of masculinity, for it is the feminized body of the giant that harbours excessive emotions, inability to master feats of arms, and irregular temperaments. The giant's weakness and the weakness of the Orient are, thus, characterized as effeminate by the discourse of western chivalric masculinity.

As criticism of the Orient by Said and Akbari, combined with criticisms of bodies and medieval bodies through Bakhtin, Cohen, and Calkin, and theories of subjectivity by Kristeva, Freud, and Butler demonstrate, the Saracen giant of romance embodies a deliberately "Othered" position that helps inflate the position and status of the chivalric Occident. Through a continuous and linear study of the three texts, *Bodies, Saracen Giants, and the Medieval Romance* underlines the medieval romance's fascination with objects, fragments, and the controlling of bodies. Because all these fascinations are fixed upon the body of the Saracen giant, what he represents, and what he brings forward into the Occidental romance, the romance reveals an underlying discourse of colonialism. As Vernagu's head emblemizes Roland's victory over the great

Saracen giant Vernagu or as Ascopard's body is desired to be reformed by a superior knight or as Magog body and identity are deliberately characterized with the absurd, the romance desires to correct and penalize the Oriental "Other" by a physical rebuke, which, in other words, is a desire for the colonization of the East.

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