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Filicide in Medieval Narrative

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The majority of children who appear in the narrative literatures of the Middle Ages garner attention because they mature into kings, queens, warriors, knights, or lovers. An oft ignored but significant type of literary child is the one who dies - sometimes at the hand of a parent - during the tale. This dissertation explores the purpose of such filicides featured in medieval narratives. While shocking to audiences even today, these killings have received little scholarly attention, and extant studies, though valuable, are hampered by their narrowness of scope.

This study widens the field with a multilingual approach that permits the consideration of works based upon Celtic and Germanic mythology and heroic tales alongside their more famous and frequently studied continental and British counterparts. Primary texts identified through consultation of tale-type indices and reviews of secondary literature were grouped for evaluation by content: medieval adaptations of classical narratives, feudal narratives, Celtic narratives, and Germanic narratives. Historical and legal materials aid in the contextualization of these tales.

These filicide episodes, regardless of origin, serve a dual purpose within their narratives, to captivate with gripping material and to educate through example. Patterns regarding victims and perpetrators transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries. Few females become victims, and all those are adolescents; male victims range in age from infancy to

adulthood. All these deaths, even those where the child's characterization is minimal, highlight social anxieties, including concerns about preserving one's lineage and promoting social order. These narratives further demonstrate a sacrificial ability of mothers that was previously ascribed only to fathers.

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Introduction

In the *Skáldskaparmál* portion of his *Edda*, Snorri Sturluson describes how Gudrun avenges the murder of her brothers Gunnar and Hogni (also known as the Niflungs), whose deaths had been arranged by her husband, King Atli:

> Litlu síðar drap Guðrún tvá sonu sína ok lét gera með gulli ok silfri borðker af hausum þeira, ok þá var gert erfi Niflunga. At þeiri veizlu lét Guðrún skenkja Atla konungi með þeim borðkerum mjöð, ok var blandit við blóði sveinanna, en hjörtu þeira lét hon steikja ok fá konungi at eta. En er þat var gert, þá sagði hon honum sjálfum með mörgum ófögrum orðum. (section 50)
>
> A little later, Gudrun killed her two sons and had cups made out of their skulls, with gold and silver, and then the funeral feast for the Niflungs was held. At that feast, Gudrun had mead, which was mixed with the blood of the boys, served to King Atli using these cups, and she had their hearts, which she had had roasted, given to the king to eat. And when that was done, she then told him this to his face with many harsh words.[1]

Despite gruesome episodes of child murder like the one above, specialists in the field of medieval narrative literature have traditionally focused on the roles of kings, queens, warriors, knights, and lovers, but have largely overlooked the literary role of children.

This lack of scholarly attention may seem surprising if one considers the importance of children to the concept of lineage, something valued in nearly all epochs and cultures. Even today, people pore over archived records, hoping to discover where they and their ancestors have come from by tracing their lineage back as far as possible. Concerns about

1 Translation mine.

lineage are evident in many medieval narratives. The Old French *chansons de geste*, for example, tell the deeds of one's purported ancestors in order to legitimize one's own actions and acquisitions of property. Such attempts to legitimize a people's claim to territory are not unique to the chansons de geste or even to Old French literature. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* traces the English royal line back to Aeneas, through his great-grandson Brutus, and Virgil's *Aeneid* was written, in part, to establish the Roman empire as a continuation of the legacy of Troy. In medieval romance and, to a lesser extent, in epic, anxieties over succession and inheritance manifested themselves in the concern for appropriate courtship and marriage, as seen in Marie de France's lai, "Le Fraisne," in which the vassals of the lord of Dol deem a foundling unfit to become his bride because she is not known to be of noble birth. Because children served not only as heirs but also were somehow seen as the physical embodiment of the success or failure of a conjugal union, they held special significance in a world concerned with lineage.

Why, then, have scholars overlooked the roles of children in medieval narrative? Likely, this negligence derives in part from observations that despite how frequently adulterous affairs occur in medieval romance, these unions rarely produce children (McCracken, *Romance* 119). Some unions, both legitimate and illegitimate, do produce offspring who appear in medieval narrative texts, yet unless children grow to be heroes, they have held little appeal for the modern literary scholar. Some scholars have argued that children in medieval narrative exist merely to aid in the plot; in that way, they lack agency and are considered more as objects than as people. Even Nicole Clifton, whose dissertation examines the role of children in Old French and English romance, claims that, "children with

important roles are fairly rare anywhere in medieval literature" (64). Béatrix Vadin, in "L'absence de représentation de l'enfant et/ou du sentiment de l'enfance dans la littérature médiévale," has also argued that when a child is present, his or her importance is minimal: "il n'est que très rarement promu au rang d'acteur du récit ou même simplement de personnage pouvant prétendre à une vraie caractérisation" (365). Vadin then argues that children were, at most, proto-adults and thus existed at the fringe of adult society and that even in heroic narratives, the child heroes are not psychologically developed as children and are essentially young adults with chivalric skills (365-71, 375-80). While Vadin's assertion that young heroes are proto-adults may appear to be borne out by episodes such as the famous hunting scene in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, in which the young Tristan impresses Mark's men with his ability to break down a hart (lines 2757-3078), other tales of young heroes prove that there are exceptions. For instance, in the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, which includes the *macgnímartha* or "youthful exploits" of the Irish hero Cú Chulainn, the audience is told how the young Cú Chulainn lies to adults in order to take up arms at a very young age and to joyride in a chariot (158-63). Another theory regarding children in medieval narrative is that some children "appear mainly as 'local color,' adding an element of verisimilitude" (Clifton 57). This theory seems reasonable enough to explain some roles of children in medieval narrative, but what of the victims of the child murder depicted by Snorri Sturluson? Are such tales meant to mirror reality? If they are not, then what purpose do they serve in these narratives, and what do they indicate about medieval families and medieval societies?

Barbara A. Hanawalt, in her article, "Medievalists and the Study of Childhood," presents an overview of the circumstances that led, in the late twentieth century, to a flurry of

scholarship on the history of childhood in the Middle Ages. She cites, among the reasons, a rising interest in cultural studies in the academic world of the 1960s and 1970s and a corresponding interest in studying the lives of marginalized individuals (440-43). The 1970s saw the founding of journals specifically devoted to the study of childhood, and this enthusiasm has carried through the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. The controversial work of Phillipe Ariès, in which he wrote, "[i]n medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist," (128) also spurred many historians to dedicate themselves to unearthing evidence of a medieval notion of childhood, resulting in an outpouring of scholarship on child-rearing practices, material culture, and even filial affection. In the above-mentioned article, Hanawalt briefly presents some of the evidence in favor of the existence of childhood as an idea in the medieval mindset and evidence that parents did care for their children (443-50, 453-56).

Within the surge in academic interest regarding medieval childhood, some scholars have been debating just how common infanticide was in the Middle Ages. This debate has been complicated by the conflation within many historical studies of the abandonment or exposure of children and various more active and violent means of infanticide, a conflation that John Boswell, by concentrating on abandonment, has sought to end (41-45).

The first two volumes of the *History of Childhood Quarterly* feature a few oft-cited articles that consider the frequency of infanticide in the Middle Ages. In the first article, William Langer provides an overview of infanticide from the ancient world to the twentieth century. He claims that small family sizes and disparate sex ratios, along with Aristotle's commentary on population management, prove that ancient and Hellenistic Greeks practiced

infanticide (with exposure being the most common form); he then extrapolates that the same must have been the case in Rome. The Christianization of western Europe, according to Langer, changed the attitudes of religious and legal authorities, but not necessarily the frequency of the practice. Christian theologians drew from the Jewish legal traditions that equated infanticide with murder and spoke out against it, and early Christian emperors even criminalized it (354-55). Langer writes, however, "there can be little doubt that child murder continued to be practiced, even in the most advanced countries of western Europe" and cites William E. H. Lecky's nineteenth-century *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* as evidence of the frequency of the exposure of children: "It was practiced on a gigantic scale with absolute impunity, noticed by writers with the most frigid indifference and, at least in the case of destitute parents, considered a very venial offense" (355-56). Despite the alleged popularity of exposure, "[i]nfanticide by out-and-out violence of various kinds," Langer writes, "was probably always exceptional" (356). Barbara A. Kellum and Richard H. Helmholz examine the question of infanticide with a much narrower focus; both scholars examine records to determine its frequency in late medieval England. While Kellum admits the dearth of coroners' reports and records of legal proceedings that could verify a high rate of infanticide, she suggests that reported accidents may be hiding a more gruesome truth (371-75). She argues that the vast amount of attention devoted to the practice in penitentials and a disparity in sex-ratio prove the frequency of infanticide in late medieval England (368-70). After mentioning the "astronomical infanticide rates" of nineteenth-century England (presented in Langer's historical overview of the phenomenon), Kellum, like Langer, cites the work of a nineteenth-century historian, in this case, one Luke Owen Pike,

who provides us with a false analogy between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries: "'It cannot be supposed that in an age in which the lives of adults were so insecure as they were in the fourteenth century the lives of infants were more secure than they are in the ninettenth [sic]'" (382). Helmholz, whose work is even more narrow in scope than Kellum's, in that he focuses on the extant records of fifteenth-century Canterbury, examines the *ex officio* Act books and concludes that the scarcity of records and the complicated context surrounding these records should direct us to be conservative in our conclusions about the frequency of infanticide and even about the gender of the victims (384-86).

In the 1980s, infanticide began to find treatment in more general monographs on women, children, and family life. In her book *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, Shulamith Shahar considers the circumstances, as described in some late medieval French letters of remission, in which women would commit infanticide; the women who had done so in these cases were peasant women who had borne illegitimate offspring (118-20). In her subsequent *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, she devotes an entire chapter to "[a]bandonment, infanticide, and accidents" (121-44). She argues that despite the utility of children in all economic strata due to their roles as workers and as heirs, infanticide certainly occurred, though she does not make claims about the frequency of the practice other than to characterize it as "an accepted norm" despite the Church's stance on the matter; she takes care, however, to distinguish between infanticide and the murder of older children by their parents, usually due to the parents' alleged mental instability (126-27). In her final comments on infanticide, Shahar remarks upon the use of mythic literature as historical evidence; she argues that because such literature perpetuates myths circulated in much earlier periods,

medieval works based upon mythic literature should not be used as historical evidence of a contemporary phenomenon (139).

In *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England*, Hanawalt relies primarily upon legal sources in her consideration of whether infanticide was a common practice in the Middle Ages. She explains that, according to Henry Bracton, a thirteenth-century English jurist, abortion was considered a crime and that the exposure of infants was also a crime in most parts of Christian Europe (Scandinavia being the great exception). Despite the presence of laws against practices such as abortion and exposure, Hanawalt argues that neither archaeological evidence nor folkloric evidence substantiates the claim that infanticide was a common practice in the Middle Ages; she also cites her own studies of legal records and those of Helmholtz to help demonstrate that there is little historical evidence of infanticide in late medieval England (101-03).

Nicholas Orme's *Medieval Children*, which considers the life of children in medieval England, with an emphasis on the "high and later middle ages," concurs with the findings of Hanawalt and Helmholtz that there is little concrete evidence of a high rate of infanticide (10). Orme details potential punishments faced by those who committed it (which consisted of heavy penance and even excommunication, depending on the time and place) and explains that as far back as the late tenth century, writers like Ælfic condemned the act and gave it the same weight as the murder of an adult. One of the reasons that this crime was viewed so seriously is that unbaptized children were damned to Hell. Orme carefully notes, "[w]e have no means of reckoning how many infants were deliberately destroyed in medieval England, but it is likely that (as today) the events were abnormal, not normal. The disapproval of such

killings by the Church and the crown is likely to have harmonised with the feelings of most people" (95-96).

Even now, after examinations of legal codes and archaeological records, scholars have not resolved this question, as explained in Hanawalt's brief discussion of infanticide ("Medievalists and the Study of Childhood" 450-53). She notes that, since there is little evidence to support either the position that infanticide was rampant or that it was scarce, historians have divided themselves into what she has referred to as "optimistic" and "pessimistic" scholarly camps (characterized by the works of John Boswell and Lloyd de Mause, respectively) (453). Optimists like Boswell argue that because there is little evidence of infanticide, it is likely that it was a rare practice; in *The Kindness of Strangers*, he concludes that while abandonment occurred in various social strata, for a variety of reasons, the mortality rate for the abandoned children was probably not much higher than the standard child mortality rate of the times until the later Middle Ages, when specialized homes for abandoned children - where contagious diseases ran rampant - became more prevalent than in previous years (417-18, 421-23, 429).

While the historical evidence of infanticide is inconclusive, it is certain that there has been little work done on the various episodes of it in medieval literature. Some historians have examined literary evidence within their works, but this practice must be carried out with caution. Still, as Hanawalt has written, "[a] balance between history and literature would produce more nuanced interpretations" ("Medievalists and the Study of Childhood" 444).

Some of the work on filicide in literature is an offshoot of the interest in feminism in medieval studies. Works like Ruth Morse's *The Medieval Medea* and Joel N. Feimer's "The

Figure of Medea in Medieval Literature: A Thematic Metamorphosis" provide valuable examinations of specific episodes of filicide committed by mothers. However, the narrow scope of these examinations, which focus less on the purpose of the filicide episodes and more on the role of women in medieval literature, is part of what limits their usefulness in answering larger questions about filicide.

Other studies that examine episodes of filicide in medieval literature derive from the interest in the history of childhood. Clifton's 1993 dissertation on children in Old French and Middle English romance examines two important episodes of literary filicide in the Middle English *Athelston* and in narrative versions of the Ami and Amile legend. Her focus is not on filicide itself, but on the literary role of children, including those not subjected to such violence. Daniel T. Kline's 1997 dissertation from Indiana University, "'My Sacrifice with Thy Blood': Violence, Discourse, and Subjectivity in the Representation of Children in Middle English Literature," considers violence against children in a small number of Middle English texts, including "The Physician's Tale" from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Like the work done on women who commit filicide, these dissertations share a narrow focus that makes identifying patterns difficult.

Some of the most insightful work on filicide has been done by Peggy McCracken. In "Engendering Sacrifice: Blood, Lineage, and Infanticide in Old French Literature," she explores the difference between episodes of literary filicide committed by fathers and those committed by mothers and "why a father's murder can be called a sacrifice and why a mother's murder cannot" (57). While she briefly alludes to the Old Norse-Icelandic and Middle High German versions of the Volsung-Nibelung narrative tradition, texts that are

clearly outside of the Old French corpus and the source materials for such Old French works, her work is focused on a narrow segment of medieval narrative (55-56). Even in her more extensive work on this subject, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature,* the corpus of examined filicide texts is not comprehensive, since her focus is not on filicide but on gendered conceptions of blood. Still, she has illuminated valuable patterns in these filicide texts. McCracken writes,"In most accounts of maternal infanticide, this mother who would kill is a monster, an aberration of nature. Although a father may be divinely inspired to kill his child in a sacrifice to a higher good, a mother's murder of her own child is almost never called a sacrifice" (40). She further argues that the "exclusion of mothers from sacrificial practice corresponds to a particular way of conceptualizing lineage. That is, the gendering of sacrifice corresponds to the gendered hierarchy promoted in representations of blood ties between children and their parents" (61).

In an effort to understand more fully how filicide is treated in medieval narrative, the present dissertation examines, in the original languages,[2] episodes from medieval Latin, Old French, Old Occitan, medieval Italian, Middle English, Old Irish, Middle Welsh, and Old Norse-Icelandic narrative texts, chiefly epics and romances, in which parents or close relatives kill their children, and it considers the potential significance of these deaths within the filicide narratives. Relevant episodes from Old High German and Middle High German are also considered, although almost exclusively in translation. The multilingual approach taken here has been specifically chosen to widen the scope of inquiry - in essence, to increase the sample size of relevant texts. The wide view presented here reveals that patterns found in

2 Translations from these episodes, unless noted, are my own, though I owe great thanks to previous translators and to the members of my dissertation committee for aid with these translations.

earlier studies are not as clear-cut as previously believed. This approach also reveals the permeability of some of the traditional regional divisions within medieval literature. Celtic and Scandinavian literatures have long been considered "other" or "foreign" to medievalists despite commonalities found by scholars in the Indo-European myths. English and continental romance is highly influenced by Celtic tales (as evidenced by the Arthurian legends), and the heroic literatures of Ireland and Iceland have much in common with the Greco-Roman epic tradition. The similarities do not end here, and the filicide episodes of Celtic and Scandinavian medieval literatures follow the same imperfect patterns as do their continental and English counterparts.

Before we can proceed, we should first consider what the word *filicide* means. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines filicide, which derives from the Latin noun *filius* and the Latin verb *caedo, caedere*, as "the action of killing a son or daughter."[3] Thus filicide, in a sense, is a specific type of infanticide, which is a much more common term, yet filicide has no built-in age restriction. Infanticide, technically, is the slaying of an *infans*, someone who is unable to speak; the meaning of *infans* has been extended to mean a very young child (Lewis and Short). *Filius*, the Latin word for son, and *filia*, the related Latin word for daughter, can refer to children of any age (Lewis and Short). While the majority of filicide episodes examined in this study are cases where a parent kills a young child, some texts will be considered where older (adolescent and adult) children of both genders are the victims.

3 By the early nineteenth century, the word also applied to the parent performing the act, but to prevent such confusion, the word filicide will be used here only to refer to the action.

Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short record that the primary meaning of the verb *caedo, caedere* is, simply, "to cut," though the meaning of *caedo* has been extended to include violent acts, such as "to strike upon something, to knock at, to beat, strike, cudgel, etc" and "to strike mortally, to kill, murder."[4] The violence intrinsic to this secondary definition of *caedo* is likewise intrinsic to the consideration of filicide in this study. This study generally excludes narrative accounts of attempted filicide, as the corpora of classical and medieval literature teem with such tales. Indeed, surviving a murder attempt ("Die Jugend des Helden wird bedroht") is the third of ten parts that comprise the heroic biographical pattern ("Das Modell eines Heldenlebens") established by Jan de Vries (281-301).

This study confines itself to narrative literature because narratives, by their nature, supply their audiences with more detail than can lyric poems and dramatic pieces. Besides, medieval drama is inextricably linked with Christianity, so the deck is stacked in favor of the miraculous and against the tragic. Narrative, for the purposes of this study, applies not just to epics and romances, but also to works that present within a large framing narrative a variety of short narratives for moral or philosophical purposes. The filicide narratives selected for this study have been identified, in part, through consultation of motif indices, including the *Motif-index of Folk-literature,* the *Motif-index of the English Metrical Romances*, the *Motif-index of Early Irish Literature*, and the *Motif-index of Early Icelandic Literature* (Thompson; Bordman; Cross; Boberg). In the kind of wide-ranging study proposed by this dissertation, it is impossible to be exhaustive, and scholars of specific literary corpora will doubtless note

4 Interestingly, this meaning has been further extended to include "to slaughter animals, esp. for offerings, to kill, slay, sacrifice."

omissions. Perhaps, as we progress further into the digital era, more comprehensive studies will be done on this subject. As older scholarship, especially early critical editions of medieval works, passes out of copyright and finds its way onto the Internet, it may catch the interest of scholars world-wide who wish to build upon that foundation with new editions, translations, and criticisms.

This study reveals a trend in the medieval authors' uses of these filicide episodes within the larger narratives. Whether they chose to write about native or classical matters, nearly all followed a key precept made famous by Horace's "Ars Poetica" ("Poetic Art").[5] He wrote,

> aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae,
> aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae.
> quidquid praecipies esto brevis, ut cito dicta
> percipiant animi dociles teneantque fideles.
> omne supervacuum pleno de pectore manat. (lines 333-37)
> Poets desire either to benefit [their audiences] or to please [them],
> Or to say at the same time words both pleasing and suitable for life.
> Let whatever you set forth be brief, for words said quickly
> Are taken in and retained by the mind easily and faithfully.
> Every useless word flows away from a full heart.

Though many authors did not heed Horace's admonition against verbosity, they did realize the value of mixing education with entertainment. Instruction presented in a pleasing manner was more likely to be both received and retained by the audiences. Tales of filicide may not

5 Horace's poem is also know as the third Epistle of his second book of Epistles. The translation is mine.

please audiences, per se, but they do entertain audiences by captivating them with the horror of what is occurring. Meanwhile, the actions and words of both victims and their killers convey important messages about the nature of their characters and the state of justice in the depicted society.

Victims of filicide fall into four categories: very young children who are either male or whose gender is unspecified, male warriors of unconfirmed identity, adolescent or post-adolescent males who are believed to have solicited the affections of their fathers' mates, and adolescent females, most of whom are virginal. Each category of victim corresponds somewhat to a folkloric model. For instance, in some filicide texts where the victims fall into the first category, one child dies in order to highlight the survival of another child, a heroic child. Heroic children, though exposed, otherwise abandoned, or nearly murdered, escape death, as confirmed by de Vries. The threat of death, however, holds no power unless one sometimes carries it out. Thus, children of vassals, in the Old French and Old Occitan epics, die in the places of their noble-born counterparts, who then grow and triumph over those who desired to slay them. In *Athelston*, the King's murder of his unborn heir throws into relief the survival and adoption of his newborn nephew, who will become St. Edmound. Tristan survives his stepmother's attempts to kill him in the *Prose Tristan*, though his stepbrother does not. Likewise, in *Völsunga saga*,[6] Signy instructs her brother Sigmund to kill each of her sons except Sinfjotli, the only child strong enough to avenge their dead father Volsung and their brothers. Similarly, filicide episodes featuring the second category of victim have been viewed principally as examples of the father-son combat motif, and those featuring the

6 The hooked o used in the edition of *Völsunga saga* is represented throughout this dissertation by an umlauted o (ö).

third category of victims have been viewed as examples of the Potiphar's wife motif. How these motifs have been used, that is the lesson (or lessons) to be learned from the episodes, varies, and when it is possible to place these works within their historical contexts, we can see the authors' views regarding contemporary social mores.

To this end, tales have been grouped into chapters in a way to facilitate historicization, though there clearly are historical and linguistic differences within groupings. I do not gloss over the differences between twelfth-century France and fourteenth-century England. When possible, other works by a given author and even that author's source materials have been consulted to help determine his motivations and the circumstances in which he wrote. Celtic and Germanic literature tend to defy such a historical approach, however, because these cultures relied for so long upon the oral transmission of their narratives. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to establish the genesis of an orally-based text.

Just as the victims of filicide fall into categories, so do those who perpetrate it. These parents can be viewed as those who murder their children, those who commit an act of justifiable homicide, and those who sacrifice their children. Both genders appear in the first and last of these three categories. This view dissents from Peggy McCracken's work, which posits that both genders can murder their children but that only men can sacrifice them.

Chapter One, the Classical Traditions of Filicide, reviews instances of child sacrifice and child murder in the Bible, Greco-Roman literature, and the Indo-Iranian legend of Sohráb and Rostám that are cognate with, and sometimes direct models for, instances of the motif in medieval literature. The idea of *translatio studii*, which Ernst Robert Curtius

explains as the "transferral of learning from Athens or Rome to Paris," accounts for the fact that the classical literatures of Greece and Rome as well as the Bible form the intellectual foundation upon which much medieval literature was built (29). A careful examination of Ovid's works has proved especially critical to this study, not just because these works were used in the formal education setting, but also because several medieval writers explicitly mentioned the debt owed to these works.

Ancient literature is rife with tales of filicide. Chief among the cases considered in this first chapter are the sacrifices of Jephthah and Verginius of their daughters, the murders of Medea and Procne of their sons, and the battlefield slaying by Rostám of his son Sohráb. In the eleventh chapter of the Biblical book of Judges, Jephthah sacrifices his daughter (his only child) in order to fulfill a vow that he has made to God that in exchange for victory over the Ammonites, he would sacrifice the first individual he meets upon his return home. Livy, in book three of his *Ab Urbe Condita* (*History of Rome*), tells how Verginius sacrifices his daughter to protect her virtue from the lustful decemvir Appius Claudius. Both Greek and Roman sources record Medea and Procne's acts of vengeance against their sexually incontinent spouses that result in the deaths of their sons. Medieval writers from a variety of periods and places used these myths and legends as their source material. While this is not the case with the Indo-Iranian legend of Sohráb and Rostám, told in the *Shahname*, this legend holds importance because of its Indo-European mythic/folkloric content. Rostám's killing of his son represents an important variant on the Indo-European father-son combat myth that is found in some medieval Celtic and Germanic filicide texts.

A few key tales of attempted filicide are also considered in chapter one. As Hesiod's *Theogony* and later Greek sources explain, the Greek god Kronos, hoping to prevent the fulfillment of a prophecy that he would be overthrown by his son, devours each of his children until he is tricked into swallowing a rock instead of his son Zeus; the father later vomits up the children he had swallowed who, somehow, have not perished. The desire of a father to preserve his power at the cost of his children is not unique to this tale and is even found in medieval narrative. Similarly, several Greek and Roman sources tell how Agamemnon values the needs of his comrades over the life of his daughter. He prepares to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to Artemis/Diana so that she would forgive Agamemnon for boasting about his hunting skills and would not disrupt their voyage; were it not for the divine intervention of the goddess, who in most versions places a stag in the girl's place, she would have been slain. The version of this tale found in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus is more tragic in that Iphigenia is successfully sacrificed, and this same tragic fate is implied in book one of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*. Agamemnon's willingness to kill his daughter has much in common with the Biblical tale of Abraham and Isaac (from the twenty-second book of Genesis), an attempted sacrifice that prefigures the sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament. Similarities between Iphigenia, Jephthah's daughter, and Verginia are evoked in some medieval filicide tales.

The second chapter of this study, the Classical Traditions of Filicide Revisited, addresses medieval continental and English adaptations of classical filicide texts. Among the most popular classical legends in circulation during the Middle Ages were those concerning the fall of Troy. Medea's aid in Jason's acquisition of the Golden Fleece and his subsequent

betrayal of her were appended to the Trojan war materials, and thus this chapter examines key treatments - and striking omissions - by Benoît de Sainte-Maure, Jean de Meun, Dante, the anonymous author of l'*Ovide Moralisé*, John Gower, Geoffrey Chaucer, and John Lydgate of Medea's retaliation against Jason, her vengeful killing of her children. Other tales recounted within Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and his other works were also well known, since they were studied in medieval schools and were reworked in medieval literature. Notably, the murder of the child Itys, from the sixth book of the *Metamorphoses*, was retold in *Philomena*, now attributed to Chrétien de Troyes, and also treated in some of the aforementioned narratives. The Biblical tale of how Jephthah sacrifices his daughter has much in common with the tale from Livy of how Verginius sacrifices his daughter Verginia and the Greek legends of how Agamemnon prepares to sacrifice Iphigenia. The versions of these tales by Jean de Meun, Dante, Gower, Chaucer, and Lydgate are also considered together, along with hagiographic material that follows this model.

The third chapter of this study, the Feudal Traditions of Filicide, examines filicide in narratives that have not borrowed content from those of the classical age and that are overtly concerned with issues of lineage and loyalty. These include versions of the tale of Amicus et Amelius, known better as the tale of Ami and Amile. Within this tale of friendship most often set during the time of Charlemagne, Amile sacrifices his own children so that their blood can be used to cure his friend Ami of leprosy. Happily, the children are later resurrected. The Old French *Jourdain de Blaye* presents a continuation of the narrative of *Ami et Amile* because the principal hero and villain of *Jourdain de Blaye* are descendants of

those in the Ami and Amile narrative. In *Jourdain de Blaye,* the child Jordain[7] is saved by the vassal Renier and his wife Eremborc when they hand over their own child to be killed by Fromont, the man who killed Jordain's father Girart. Similarly, in the Old Occitan *Daurel et Beton,* the jongleur Daurel and his wife Biatris hand over their child Daurelet to the wicked Count Gui, who murders the child in order to protect Beton, the young nephew of Charlemagne whom Gui believes he has slain. Daurel continues to protect Beton until he grows to adulthood and is able to seek vengeance upon Gui. Like *Jourdain de Blaye* and *Daurel et Beton*, the Middle English *Athelston* involves the substitution of one child for another. In *Athelston,* the title character is a King who believes the false counsel of his sworn brother Wymound against Egelond, another of his sworn brothers, and Egelond's pregnant wife (who is also the King's sister) and children. When the Queen tries to intercede for the falsely accused family, King Athelston assaults her and induces a miscarriage, leaving him with no heir. Eventually, those falsely accused are tested by an ordeal, immediately after which Athelston's pregnant sister-in-law gives birth to Edemound (later to become Saint Edemound), whom Athelston adopts.

The fourth chapter, entitled The Celtic Traditions of Filicide, considers how the filicide motif functions in the traditional narrative literature of Ireland as well as in the narratives of the legend of Melusine and in tales of the Arthurian hero Tristan and the death of King Arthur, which have their roots in Celtic folklore and mythology. While the tales of Melusine as told by Jean d'Arras, Coudrette, and Coudrette's English translator have clear feudal elements, the mythic fairy nature of Melusine coupled with the unearthly appearances

7 Peter F. Dembowski's edition uses *Jourdain* for the title of the chanson but *Jordain* and other variants for the name of the individual. I have adhered to this distinction.

of her children demonstrate the commonalities that this text shares with others of Celtic origin. The Arthurian material similarly demonstrates clear feudal elements but also key features shared with certain Celtic texts. Within Celtic literature, the most well-known instance of filicide occurs in *Aided Óenfir Aife* (*The Death of Aife's Only Son*), a tale dramatized by William Butler Yeats in his play *On Baile's Strand.* In the Old Irish narrative, the hero Cú Chulainn of the Ulster cycle slays, in single combat, his only son, a remarkably skilled warrior given his tender age. Similarly, in the narratives dealing with his death, King Arthur slays his son Mordred (who is also his nephew) in single combat. Fathers also kill their adult sons in the Old Irish *Cath Maige Tuired* (*The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*) and *Fingal Rónáin* (*The Kin-slaying of Rónán*). A murderous mother unintentionally kills her own son in the Old French *Prose Tristan*, and we see the desire of parents to destroy monstrous offspring in the Middle Irish *Scél na Fír Flatha* (*The Tale of the True Sovereignty*) and in the Melusine narratives. *Scél na Fír Flatha* describes how king Carpre kills his children, all of whom are deformed, except for Morann, who becomes one of the most famous judges of Ireland. In the Old French *Mélusine* and *Le Roman de Parthenay* and in the Middle English *Romans de Partenay*, the otherworldly woman Melusine bears several deformed children and advises her husband to kill the eighth, named Horrible; later in the narrative, he orders his men to carry this out. Finally, the Middle Welsh *Mabinogi* contains two texts which, while not tales of filicide according to the definition set forth in this introduction, prove worthy of examination. The tale *Branwen*, the second branch of the Welsh *Mabinogi*, is a tale of an unhappy marriage and of a war incited by the murder of the child Gwern, the fruit of that marriage, by his maternal uncle Efnyssyen. While this murder

is not a filicide in the proper sense of the word, the relationship between a child and his maternal uncle is such a strong one in Celtic traditions that the tale warrants special examination. The tale of *Pwyll*, the first branch of the *Mabinogi*, is also of interest because it narrates how Rhiannon, the wife of Pwyll, is framed and punished for killing her own child.

The fifth chapter of this study examines the Germanic traditions of filicide as found in Old High German, Middle High German, and Old Norse-Icelandic narratives. Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga,* the first part of his immense *Heimskringla* (*Circle of the World*), includes the tale of King Aun, who sacrifices his sons, one by one, to Odin in order to prolong his own life. The Old High German "Hildebrandslied" and other associated texts present variants on the father-son combat motif. Finally, the body of Volsung-Nibelung narrative tradition, as exemplified in the *Eddas*, *Völsunga saga*, and *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, provides three types of filicide, all tied to a desire for revenge.

In addition to presenting the conclusions of this study, the conclusion briefly considers the relation of sex and gender to the filicide motif, with an effort to avoid retreading the excellent work done by Peggy McCracken. Finally, an appendix provides summaries of the principal filicide texts examined in the second through fifth chapters of the dissertation.

Like McCracken's work, the present dissertation adds to the small but growing body of scholarship concerning the family and domestic life in medieval literature, aptly represented by such works as *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, edited by Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin, and Merrall Llewelyn Price; *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, by Elizabeth Archibald; and *Medieval Family Roles: A Book of Essays*, edited by Cathy

Jorgensen Itnyre. This area of study demands critical attention because an increased understanding of familial ideology contributes to a greater understanding of social mores and thus of the literatures in which these are manifested.

Furthermore, this study challenges the traditionally held national boundaries found in studies of medieval literature. While the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw great advances in medieval studies, the scholarship of these eras was often colored by then prevalent nationalistic beliefs. Academics drew lines between literary works based upon perceived linguistic and geopolitical boundaries. Although, for ease of reading and reference, the chapters of this study have been organized according to the conventional model, it quickly becomes evident that filicide texts share features that transcend these sorts of divisions.

Much work on this issue of permeable borders has been presented recently by scholars using postcolonial approaches to medieval studies. Many of these studies focus on the relations between medieval Europe and the medieval Middle East, and some focus on the complex nature of medieval Britain. Sharon Kinoshita, for example, explains that those who composed, heard, and read medieval French literature lived not just in the nation that we now know as France and in the surrounding Francophone England but also in regions in the Mediterranean and the Middle East (1-3), and her *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* explores seminal Old French texts in the context of intra- and inter-cultural relations. Michelle R. Warren has explored how famed medievalist Joseph Bédier's issues regarding national identity shaped his presentation of the *Chanson de Roland* ("'Au commencement'"), and in *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain,*

1100-1300, she has explored the importance of geo-political liminality to the conception of Arthurian historiography. More work remains to be done regarding the relations between Medieval Ireland, the Medieval Nordic regions, and Medieval Continental Europe. While linguistic differences still pose a practical hurdle, I believe the increased interest in "the other" will draw scholars to make previously marginalized works more readily available in translation, both in print and in more easily disseminated digital form.

Chapter One: The Classical Traditions of Filicide

To illuminate how episodes of filicide found in medieval narrative function, it is helpful to establish how such episodes functioned in earlier myths and legends upon which the medieval storytellers may have based their works. Those afforded the privileges of a university education in this era were familiar with some works of the classical age and could derive some of the source material for their narratives from the myths and legends of Greco-Roman antiquity. The nature of early myths and legends, however, does not make the task of studying them an easy one, as many works have been altered or lost over the ages; others, having been transmitted orally for generations, are difficult, if not impossible, to contextualize. Given this difficulty, it may also prove useful to consider legends that may not serve as source material - directly or through intermediate works - but that may be cognate with potential sources due to commonalities in Indo-European mythology.

Education during the first half of the Middle Ages served a practical purpose by preparing students for "service to the Church," just as education during the Golden Age of Rome and late antiquity was designed to prepare students for service to the Roman republic and then empire (Cobban 3-7).[1] Owing to the enormous influence of the Christian church on nearly all aspects of medieval life and especially on education, many medieval narrators derived source material for their narratives from the Bible, for like other religious texts, it contains examples of positive and negative behaviors for believers. The Bible served as a

1 Alan Cobban notes that while education was sought on similar foundational principles, the educational format differed from period to period; "there does not appear to be any organic continuity between universities which evolved towards the end of the twelfth century and Greek, Graeco-Roman, Byzantine or Arabic schools" (21-22). Claims that the University of Bologna was founded by the fifth-century Emperor Theodosius, that the University of Paris was founded by Charlemagne, that Oxford was founded by either refugee Trojan philosophers or by the ninth-century king Alfred the Great, and other legends of this nature have since been disproved as attempts by these institutions to legitimize themselves (Rüegg 7).

repository for the highest level of truth, according to medieval thinking; it was the "supreme authority" used to guide considerations of any lower form of knowledge in the educational system (Leff, *Paris* 4-5).

Those who served the church, at least in Western Europe, needed to be able to speak in Latin, if not write in it (Orme, *Education* 2), and although the Bible necessarily found extensive use in the medieval educational system, this was not to the exclusion of other texts. The early Christian grammarian Priscian, whose *Institutiones grammaticae* was one of the two standard grammatical texts[2] used in the medieval universities prior to 1200, included examples from Roman authors, and students of his work became familiar with the verses of Virgil and others through those examples (Leff, "*Trivium*" 312-13). While the use of Priscian's work declined somewhat, records from Oxford show that students still studied it in the 1500s (313). We know that students at the University of Paris studied the works of "Statius, Virgil, Lucan, Juvenal, Horace, Ovid, Sallust, Cicero, Martial, Petronius, Symmachus, Suetonius, Livy and Seneca" as part of their grammatical and rhetorical curriculum in the late 1100s, but also that the reading lists began to shift during the next century; the curricula at Oxford and Cambridge differed little from the curriculum in Paris (Paetow 10-16; Leff, *Paris* 122-23).[3] The notion of *translatio studii*, which has been credited to the Carolingians and is believed to have been further disseminated by Otto of Freising during the twelfth century, was embraced by the universities of that era, particularly the

2 The work of Donatus served as the other standard text.

3 The movement away from studying grammar through the Roman classics is thought to have been stronger at the University of Paris than at other universities because the study of theology and dialectic were specialties of the Parisian scholars (Leff, *Paris* 121-23). Some Parisian scholars were also concerned about the pagan influences of these texts (122-23). The religious concerns became pervasive in Western Europe so that by the fourteenth century, English school children were more likely to study Christian poems of the previous two centuries than ancient literary works (Orme, *Education* 11).

University of Paris (Cobban 22; Morris 50). This idea that the center of learning had shifted, corresponding to a shift in power, from ancient Athens to ancient Rome and then to medieval Paris, led to great attention being paid to major works of the classical ages of Greece and Rome (Curtius 29; Cobban 7). By the latter part of the twelfth century, however, those concerned about the "disruptive and disturbing pagan morality" found within some classical works pushed for a narrower consideration of pre-Christian literature; only that which proved useful for the promotion of Christian values was deemed worthy of study (Cobban 7-8). Despite these rising restrictions, several well-known classical works continued to be studied in the medieval academy. Louis Paetow identifies several thirteenth and fourteenth-century records that attest to a continued familiarity among scholars with the works of classical greats including Cicero, Seneca, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Livy (101-105). A fifteenth-century reading list from Oxford similarly shows that one was to read "Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, or Book 4 of Boethius's *Topics*, or Cicero, or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or Virgil" for one's training in rhetoric (Leff, *Paris* 146). Clearly, despite efforts to discourage students from reading these materials, the classical works retained a place of authority in the medieval academic canon.

This chapter examines filicide in Biblical, Greek, Roman, and Persian tales. Biblical narratives, with a focus on that of Jephthah's daughter, are presented first, for the Bible would have been the most familiar source for the educated storytellers of medieval Western Europe. A review of these episodes in surviving early Greek texts follows, for the educations of the Romans whose works were studied in the medieval universities were rooted in the Greek classics, with which the Romans continued to be enamored (Fantham 24-34). Extent Greek narratives and compendia of myths demonstrate the abundance of filicide narratives known

in the ancient world. Athenian dramatic works prove equally if not more valuable, however, for they preserve some of the fullest versions of filicides depicted in Roman and medieval narratives. Of these, Euripides' *Medea*, *The Bacchae*, and *Hippolytus* have been selected. Roman literary works, specifically those of Ovid, Lucretius, and Livy, form the third area of consideration within this chapter. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* receives the most attention, not only because it survived the restrictions narrowing the studied pagan texts, but also as it is rife with filicides. Finally, the Persian legend of Sohráb and Rostám from the *Shahname* is examined for its potentially shared mythological content.

Filicide in Biblical Narratives

Within the book of Judges, Jephthah sacrifices his unnamed daughter to Yahweh (*New Jerusalem Bible*, Judg. 10.6-11.40). A Gileadite warrior fighting for Israel, he promises a burnt sacrifice to God in exchange for victory in battle. Unfortunately, he does not choose the words of his promise carefully: "'If you deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then the first person to meet me from the door of my house when I return in triumph from fighting the Ammonites shall belong to Yahweh, and I will offer him up as a holocaust'" (11.30-31). The first person whom he encounters upon his arrival is his daughter, who is his only child, and though it pains him to do so, he sacrifices her with her consent. Scholars, both Christian and Jewish, have struggled greatly with this passage. Some early commentaries have asserted that Jephthah could not possibly have sacrificed his daughter (11.39 n. l), while more recent scholarship has noted that human sacrifice did occur in both that period and region and has concluded that he did perform a human sacrifice (11.31 n. i, l).

Appropriate sacrifice becomes an important Biblical theme early in the Old Testament. Yahweh's preference of Abel's sacrifice to that of Cain serves as the impetus for the first murder, Cain's fratricidal action against Abel, and this shedding of familial blood is condemned (Gen. 4.1-16). Later, when Yahweh tells Moses what laws to hand down to the Jews, he declares, "You must not hand over any of your children to have them passed to Molech, nor must you profane the name of your God in this way. I am Yahweh" (Lev. 18.21). While it is declared in Exodus 22.29, " You must give me the first-born of your sons," it is likely that "give me" here does not mean "kill as a sacrifice to me," but more generally "devote to me," for Leviticus 1.1-3.17 provides detailed instructions on the proper ways to offer burnt sacrifices, and while there are specific instructions for the sacrifices of bulls, goats, turtledoves, pigeons, and more, there are no instructions for the sacrifice of humans. The second book of Kings mentions that in the ninth century BCE, the King of Moab - an enemy of the chosen ones - sacrifices his oldest son because he hopes that this action would gain him favor in his war against the Israelites (2 Kings 3.27). This book also recounts the religious reforms of the Jewish King Josiah, including the destruction of "the furnace [....] so that no one could make his son or daughter pass through fire in honour of Molech" (23.10). These passages indicate that sacrificing one's child is an action that separates those favored by Yahweh (Israelites who follow his commandments) from those who, like the King of Moab, worship other gods.

By this logic, Jephthah's actions ought to be viewed as improper, but certain aspects of the text seem to contradict this. For one, his unnamed daughter allows herself to be sacrificed, and her very words indicate the necessity of his fulfilling the promise: "'My father,

you have given a promise to Yahweh; treat me as the vow you took binds you to, since Yahweh has given you vengeance on your enemies the Ammonites'" (11.36). She understands the importance of the obligation and helps him to fulfill it. Furthermore, he receives no punishment unless one considers the loss of his daughter. While the book of Judges does not reveal God's immediate reaction to his sacrifice, Jephthah continues to do well in battle afterward, and then he "was a judge in Israel for six years" (12.7). A position such as this marks approval, not displeasure. In fact, the author of the book of Judges writes "When Yahweh appointed judges for them [the Israelites], Yahweh was with the judge and rescued them from the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived, for Yahweh felt pity for them as they groaned under the iron grip of their oppressors" (2.18). Again, this suggests a position of favor and seems to contradict our expectations.

Examining a similar episode in the Old Testament may shed some light on this tale.[4] While Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter is the most notable episode of filicide in the Old Testament, one of the most well-known Biblical tales, both today and in the Middle Ages, is a tale of near-filicide. The tale of Abraham and Isaac recounts how God commands Abraham to sacrifice the child miraculously born to the elderly man and his wife Sarah. He obediently prepares for the sacrifice, but at the last minute, God provides a ram as a substitute for the boy (Gen. 22.1-19). Like Jephthah, Abraham is willing to sacrifice his only child to Yahweh.[5] God rewards Jephthah's devotion with the judgeship of the Israelites, and likewise, he rewards Abraham. Immediately after demonstrating his devotion, the father learns that he will be blessed with a fruitful and powerful lineage because of his actions (Gen. 22.17-18).

4 Curiously, while the parallels between these tales have long been noted in Christian commentaries, they have generally been ignored in Jewish commentaries (Baumgarten 184-84, esp. fns. 11-12).

5 Isaac is referred to as Abraham's "only" child in Gen. 22.2 and Gen. 22.16, despite the existence of the bastard Ishmael.

Further parallels are found when examining the children. While Jephthah's daughter and Isaac differ in gender, and she is not named,[6] they are likely close in age. No specific age is assigned to Jephthah's daughter, yet she is likely a young but post-pubescent teenager, since her father allows her to go with friends into the mountains and lament that she will die a virgin (Judg. 11.37-39). No specific age is assigned to Isaac either, though he is young enough to be called a boy (Gen. 22.4) and yet old enough to carry the wood needed for the sacrificial fire (22.6); thus, he is likely a pre-teen or young teenager. The two also react similarly to the prospect of being sacrificed. She urges her father to fulfill his vow after first allowing her to journey into the mountains (Judg. 11.36-38), and while there is no explicit agreement by Isaac recorded in Genesis, no resistance is recorded either. The text of Genesis 22.9 indicates that Abraham "bound his son Isaac and put him on the altar on top of the wood," a feat that presumably would be difficult were the child resisting. Thus, not only do the fathers obey Yahweh without question, but the children do also. Given these clear parallels, it follows that if Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac is meant to illustrate for Jews (and later, for Christians) the limitless devotion to which they should aspire and to prefigure God's sacrifice of Jesus, as has long been held, then Jephthah's sacrifice is meant to do the same.

Filicide in Greek Literature

Ancient Greek epic literature sheds only a little light on the subject of filicide; while the Greek epic composers sometimes allude to tales of filicide, the references are oblique. For instance, in *The Odyssey*, Homer refers briefly to the story of Procne within a description

6 According to Elisheva Baumgarten, in a version of this story that now exists only in a Latin translation and that served as an inspiration for work by Peter Abelard, Jephthah's daughter is named Seila and has a more active role than in the book of Judges (184-85).

of Odysseus' wife Penelope. As she expresses anxiety concerning her future, she compares this to Procne's mourning (with Procne here called "Pandareos' daughter, the greenwood nightingale") for her son: "Itylos, son of the lord Zethos, her own beloved child, whom she once killed with the bronze when the madness was on her" (19.518-23). Similarly, when Odysseus claims (to the Phaiakians) to have seen Tantalus in the underworld and describes his suffering there, the legendary wanderer does not specify the crime Tantalus has committed (11.582-92). Some epic composers even choose to exclude allusions to filicide, even when they may be expected in their works. Though Dares the Phrygian begins *De Excidio Troiae Historia*,[7] his account of Greco-Trojan antagonism, with an episode from the tale of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, he does not provide details regarding Jason's time in Colchis or regarding his further relationship with Medea (1-2). Instead, he refers readers to the *Argonautica* for more information about the quest (1.15). That epic of Apollonius of Rhodes, however, which focuses on the quest and features Medea prominently, ends with the triumphant return voyage, not with Medea's dreaded deed against her children. Dictys of Crete, author of the work known as *Ephemeridos Belli Troiani*, refers to Medea as an abductee from Colchis in a speech by Aeneas to Menelaus and the other Greeks, though he does not name Jason as an abductor or mention the couple's subsequent adventures and misfortunes (2.26.2-3).

This lack of attention to filicide on the part of the Greek epic poets does not mean, however, that filicide did not occur in the early Greek myths and legends. Certain classical Greek works that compiled mythological and legendary tales preserve the outlines of many

7 The works of Dares the Phrygian and Dictys of Crete were composed in Greek but are now only available in Latin.

filicide and near-filicide episodes. Scholars value Apollodorus' *Library*, one of these catalogs of Greek mythology, not for its poetics (Sir James George Frazier describes it as "the dull compilation of a commonplace man" 1:xxxiii), but because it allegedly does not alter the raw material of ancient myths and legends and provides information about texts that have been lost (1:xvii-xxxiii). *The Library* records two filicides associated with the royal house of Athens. The first filicide mentioned, which is also the more famous of the two, is the death of the child Itys at the hands of his mother Procne, who is a daughter of Pandion, a legendary king of Athens. She kills her child and serves him to his father, Tereus; this act is one of vengeance because (in this version) he told Philomela (Procne's sister) that she was dead, and then seduced, married, and mutilated Philomela (2:3.14.8). The lesser-known filicide is the death of one of Erechtheus' daughters by his hand. This son of Pandion (and a thus brother to Procne) and succeeding king of Athens is eager to win a war against the Eleusinians and kills one of his daughters, as instructed by an oracle, in exchange for victory (2:3.15.4-5). The other filicides mentioned, while not connected to the legends of the house of Athens, are connected to other well-known tales. The Epitome to *The Library* tells us of an episode of filicide that resembles the death of Itys. Tantalus kills his son and feeds pieces of the corpse to the gods; Pelops, unlike Itys, is later resurrected (2:2.3). The description of the fate of Pelops does not explain his father's motivation for his actions, but a passage just shortly before it describes the infamous torments of Tantalus, that while in Hades, despite his best efforts, he cannot reach water or food (2:2.3). The text notes some of his crimes that may have justified such a punishment, but neither fits as well as the unmentioned crime against his son, whom he makes into food for the gods. In a tale connected to the Golden Fleece,

Athamas (father of Helle and Phrixus, who rode the Golden Ram) is driven mad by Hera and kills Learchus, a child by his second wife Ino, and then Ino kills herself with their child Melicertes (1:1.9.2). In one of the most famous myths collected in *The Library*, we see how Zeus narrowly escaped being killed by his filicidal and cannibalistic father Kronos who preferred eating his children to risking losing power to one of them (1:1.5-7). Because the purpose of this vast collection of tales is to catalog, not to provide commentary, the work unfortunately does not preserve the commonly held interpretations or receptions of these myths and legends. While clearly there was some interest in these sorts of stories, *The Library* does not reveal that this is the case.

While *The Library* is one of the largest extant compilations of mythological and legendary material, Parthenius' far shorter collection of thirty-six tales, *The Love Romances*, mentions three filicides not addressed in the larger work.[8] Two of these filicides result from cases of mistaken identity. In the first, Odysseus kills his son Euryalus. In "The Story of Evippe," which Parthenius identifies as being taken from Sophocles' *Euryalus* (which now exists only in a fragmented form), the wanderer has had extramarital relations with Evippe, and this leads to the birth of Euryalus. When grown, the son seeks his father in Ithaca; when Penelope, Odysseus' wife, discovers this, she convinces him to kill Euryalus, whom she has intentionally misidentified as an enemy (3). This case is very unlike most other filicide episodes examined to this point, and one could perhaps argue that it ought not to be counted as a filicide because Odysseus does not intend to kill his son, but a stranger. Parthenius, however, does not label this as a tragic accident, and uncharacteristically, he comments upon

8 This fact is not too surprising, given that Parthenius' work follows the model of the earlier Alexandrian poets, who delighted in working with esoteric material.

this death. He labels it as a murder and explains that Odysseus, "as a punishment for his incontinence and general lack of moderation, became the murderer or his own son," an act soon followed by his death at the hands of another of his children (3). The following filicide episode may be more properly termed an accident. In "The Story of Leucippus," Xanthius unintentionally kills his own daughter while trying to slay her illicit lover who, as it turns out, is his son Leucippus. The son then kills his father and is exiled for his parricide. Parthenius does not provide any commentary upon the action of Xanthius, and since the father dies immediately after murdering his daughter (5), there is no room in the narrative for punishment (save being killed), were it considered a crime, or for praise, were it considered an appropriate action. The final filicide episode of *The Love Romances* is found in "The Story of Eulimene," who is sacrificed because her father Cydon wishes to defeat his enemies. He has consulted the oracle and cast lots to determine which virgin of the country should be sacrificed, and it is determined that it must be his own daughter. After she is sacrificed, her pregnancy (and thus her lack of virginity) is discovered. As with "The Story of Leucippus," Parthenius provides no commentary on these events (35). Because he interjects comments infrequently in his work, the motivations behind his choice of subject matter remain obscure. As Stephen Gaselee notes in his introduction to his translation, the romances predominately address "unfortunate" love (254), and it may not seem surprising that "unfortunate" romantic relationships may lead to other tragic events, such as filicide.

Since these episodes are so briefly touched upon in *The Love Romances*, one may think that they are insignificant in the greater scheme of the work, but as Parthenius' preface to the work demonstrates, nothing could be farther from the truth. He composed it for the

Roman poet Cornelius Gallus, a contemporary and friend of Virgil's. This work presents a repository of tales that have romantic or sexual plots and subplots; all of the tales exist here in remarkably compact forms and thus are likely of equal significance. In the preface to the work, Parthenius explains that he has intentionally summarized the tales as much as possible because they are provided "as aids to memory" for Gallus and that he presents this work to his friend so that "you [Gallus] will thus have at hand a storehouse from which to draw material, as may seem best to you, for either epic or elegaic verse." If these romances were to be useful mnemonic devices for the Roman poet when composing, he had to have been familiar with the myths and legends in their expanded forms.

Ancient Greek tragedians, unlike the Greek epic poets, took great interest in tales of filicide, and many extant tragedies provide the fullest versions of the tales alluded to in epic poetry or outlined in *The Library* and *The Love Romances*. We also know that tragedies connected to tales of filicide have been lost. Fragments that have been attributed to Sophocles, considered by many to be the father of Greek tragedy, have been labeled as parts of plays entitled *Athamas*, *Euryalus*, *Thyestes*, *Tantalus*, and *Tereus* (Sophocles 11, 82, 106, 286, 290), all of which are names associated with a filicide episode. Furthermore, some legends provide the subject matter for several plays by different playwrights; Peter Burian has noted that while Euripides is credited with the first (and most influential) play about Medea, at least six others are known to have existed (184).

Why did the Greek tragic poets choose to dramatize these tales of filicide that the Greek epic poets, on the whole, chose to ignore? In the fourteen chapter of the *Poetics*, Aristotle explains that tragic poets need to evoke "horror and pity," which can best be done

by dramatizing "cases where the sufferings occur within relationships, such as brother and brother, son and father, mother and son, son and other - when the one kills (or is about to kill) the other, or commits some other such deed" (1453b). Tales involving filicide thus seem ideally suited for tragedy. Aristotle explains in the thirteenth chapter that the subjects for these tragedies are derived from the legends surrounding a small group of families (1453a), and because audiences are necessarily familiar with the staged material, changes in the plot line and emphasis (or de-emphasis) of aspects of the story are immediately obvious to the audience; this challenge to the audience's expectations then provokes a response from that audience to the innovations of the playwright (Burian 179). While innovation is essential to successful Greek tragedies, the playwrights could not take too many liberties with the plots because the raw materials were regarded not just as entertaining stories but historical ones (Burian 185). This confirms that these filicides were well known. These familiar tales were passed down through Roman tragic drama (including the plays of Seneca in the first century CE) and through other poetic forms, most notably Ovid's epic *Metamorphoses*, which will be discussed below. Of the extant Greek tragedies, those of Euripides - especially *Medea*, *The Bacchae*, and *Hippolytus* - reveal a particular interest in filicide. While his *Medea* addresses the murder of young children, Euripides also addresses the murder of adult male children by their parents.

In Euripides' *Medea*, the most well-known dramatic adaptation of a tale of filicide, the mentally unhinged title character kills her children in order to punish their father Jason for marrying the daughter of King Creon. As the play opens, Medea's nurse foreshadows the deadly fate of Medea and Jason's two sons: Medea "loathes the children," she says, and

"takes no joy in looking at them" (287). The nurse fears her violent temper, though she does not yet mention that the children might be harmed by their mother. She does, however, worry that her mistress may kill herself or Jason and his new family (287, 289). Shortly thereafter, the nurse begins to realize the peril that the children face as she curses them, "O accursèd children of a hateful mother, may you perish with your father and the whole house collapse in ruin!" (295). This house of which Medea speaks is the figurative house, or lineage, rather than the literal house; with the children and their father deceased, the line of Jason comes to an end. Parallelism makes this particular mode of vengeance especially attractive to Medea, for she has destroyed her own house, by killing her own brother, in order to be with Jason (299).

The children also face danger from agents other than their mother. When Creon exiles Medea and the children, they all face the penalty of death if they disobey and remain in Corinth (317). Creon's daughter agrees to speak to her father to prevent the exile of the children only when she sees the gift sent by Medea (which, unknown by the recipient, has been poisoned); before that, she has no interest in the children (387, 89), for they are not of her lineage. Jason, however, believes that the new marriage could have benefited his children and secured his line (333). So, when Medea resolves to kill her children, it is not just to punish their father, though she tells the chorus "It is the way to hurt my husband the most" (359). She also sees the killing as a form of protection from a worse fate. While trying to strengthen her own resolve to kill the children, she exclaims, "I must not, by lingering, deliver my children for murder to a less kindly hand. They must die at all events, and since they must, I who gave them birth shall kill them" (395). She sees the potential

threat the children face from a future stepmother (even after she has eliminated the immediate threat of Creon's daughter); the children Medea has with Jason are legitimate, and thus any new wife of his could view them as an obstacle to the success of any children she may have with him.

Medea's interactions with Aegeus, the king of Athens, further accentuate the importance of children and lineage in this play. He has come to consult Apollo's oracle because he is childless (341, 343), and she plots to use this to her advantage. She promises to provide him with medicine to resolve his fertility issues if he takes her into his country (349).

Medea is clearly unwell, but she is rational enough to understand that the killing is wrong, not just from a legal standpoint but from a religious one as well: "Ah me, I groan at what a deed I must do next! I shall kill my children: there is no one who can rescue them. When I have utterly confounded the whole house of Jason, I shall leave the land, in flight from the murder of my own dear sons, having committed a most unholy deed" (357). The chorus suggests that she is not in complete control of her desires and actions. She is referred to as a Fury (397), and as David Kovacs explains, the Furies are "usually thought of as under the control of Zeus" and thus cannot act of their own accord (397 n. 20). The chorus also draws a comparison between Medea and another filicidal woman, Ino: "One woman, only one, of all that have been, have I heard of who put her hand to her own children: Ino driven mad by the gods when Hera sent her forth from the house to wander in madness" (399). Despite the women's lack of emotional control, the chorus seems to place blame with these women: "O womankind and marriage fraught with pain, how many are the troubles you have already wrought for mortal men!" (399), which seems at odds with the Euripidean sympathy

for women's lot in life expressed in an early speech by Medea (303, 305, 307). The playwright has not described the children of Medea and Jason in detail, but from context, we know that they are school-aged boys (289). He does allow them to express their fear; they cry out for help and a way to escape their mother's rage (397, 399). The pity the audience is pressed to feel is accentuated by the exchange with the chorus (who debate intervening and preventing the tragedy) and one of the children, who tells the chorus, "Yes, in heaven's name, stop it! Now is the time!" (399). The audience, like the chorus, is transfixed by the gruesome act that it knows is coming but cannot prevent it.

Euripides continues to evoke pathos in *The Bacchae,* where he depicts another mentally unbalanced and filicidal mother. In this play, Pentheus, the King of Thebes, is killed by his mother Agave, who has been driven mad by her nephew, the god Dionysus. As is the case with other Euripidean tragedies, the audience is fully aware of what is to occur from the onset; in his opening speech, Dionysus explains that he has driven his aunts mad because they were impious and cruel to his mother and that he will deal with his cousin Pentheus because he spurns Dionysian worship (15). The god is more explicit about his goals near the midpoint of the play: the king's punishment will be to be killed by his own mother (95). When the actual killing takes place, Agave is raving mad, as evidenced by eyes that roll back and a mouth that foams (121). Dionysus leads Pentheus to his mother and her sisters, and according to a messenger, he tells the women to punish the king because he has spurned their religion (119). The king cries out to his mother: "It's me, mother, Pentheus, the son you bore in Echion's house! Have pity on me, mother! I have sinned, but do not kill your son!" (121). Despite these pleas and being told by Dionysus that Pentheus is human,

Agave believes that she and her sisters have killed and dismembered a mountain lion cub (127). Her madness continues to manifest itself after her son has been killed; she asks for Pentheus, so she can show him her hunting accomplishment (133). Finally, after Agave's father Cadmus is able to bring her to her senses, she recognizes her son's head, which she has mounted on her thyrsus, but she has no recollection of the death and dismemberment (141). While her madness may negate some of her responsibility for her actions, Agave accepts exile as a punishment (151).

Pentheus seems an unusual victim of filicide compared to others examined so far because he is so clearly marked as a flawed figure. Like his mother, he loses his grip on reality in the course of this play, a grip that he regains only with the fear of his imminent demise (121). He is so desperate to reveal impropriety in the worship of Dionysus that he agrees to disguise himself as a woman in order to catch the bacchants at their worst (101), which according to Dionysus is a mark of insanity: "If he is sane, he will never agree to put on a woman's clothing, but if driven from his senses he will" (95). In addition to cross-dressing, the king now experiences double-vision and other visual hallucinations (101). Dionysus ironically tells the now more pious and compliant Pentheus, "your previous mental state was not sound, but now you have the thoughts you ought to have" (105). His death highlights the importance of piety, for it serves as a punishment to both the impious victim and his unwitting and impious killer. Not only does Dionysus explicitly state that Pentheus must be punished for his resistance to the Dionysian rites, but the god also reminds the audience of the irreverence of his aunts. He explains, "My mother's sisters, the last who should have done so, said that Dionysus was no son of Zeus but that she had been bedded by

a mortal and then, by a clever invention of Cadmus, had ascribed her sexual misdeeds to Zeus. And that, they loudly proclaimed, is why Zeus killed her - for falsely claiming that he was her lover" (15). Agave and her remaining sisters, like Pentheus, have denied the godhood of Dionysus, and they have also maligned his mother and father, Semele and Zeus. It is no wonder, given the punishments assigned to the irreverent, that the messenger who provides details of Pentheus' gory demise concludes, "The best thing of all is to practice moderation and worship the gods" (123). Had Pentheus had more respect for his divine cousin, Dionysus' revenge on the sisters of Semele might have take a different form and spared the Theban king.

In *Hippolytus*, Euripides recounts the death of another adult son by a parent. The Athenian King Theseus exiles and then kills his adult son Hippolytus because his wife Phaedra has committed suicide and has left a tablet that wrongfully claims that she and Hippolytus had slept together. The king achieves his son's death through the use one of the three fatal curses given to him by Poseidon (his own father) (lines 856-87). While Theseus believes, for much of the play, that his own actions are just, it is clear that the audience is supposed to see them as unjust. Artemis comes to Theseus and accuses him of murder: "Why dost thou joy in thy shame, Who hast murdered thy son unrighteously" (1286-87). She also tells him that misuse of the curse has made him a "villain" and "wicked" in the eyes of his father (1313-24). Despite these harsh accusations, she later softens her condemnation when she remarks, "By plots of deity was he beguiled" (1406). Plots (here those of Aphrodite) do lead to the deaths of Phaedra and Hippolytus, because the hunter's attention to Artemis instead of to the goddess of love angers her (1-58), yet Theseus does not curse his

son while hallucinating due to insanity. Still, though he asserts, "the Gods had caused my wit to stumble" (1415), he considers himself a murderer at the end of the play until his dying son forgives him (1448-51). Hippolytus, unlike many victims, is a grown man, and is afforded more of an opportunity to defend himself verbally than other victims. Still, once he is convinced that he cannot change his father's mind about exiling him, he obediently leaves Athens (1090-101). Like most others facing a parent's wrath, he is blameless. While he does not worship Aphrodite, he is not without devotion; he is a chaste and pious follower of Artemis (73-87).

Dynastic tensions play a noteworthy role in this play, as they do in *Medea*: Hippolytus is an illegitimate child from Theseus' union with the Amazon Hippolyta, but the king also has younger, legitimate sons by Phaedra, his current wife. While Hippolytus seems content with his life and has no desire to rule Athens (1014-20), the father expects his son to be somewhat anxious about his standing in the family. When Theseus accuses his son of the affair, he imagines that his son will claim, "'She hated me: Bastard and true-born still are natural foes'" (962-63). In his response, the son anticipates and refutes an expected argument by Theseus that Hippolytus had hoped to win the kingship of Athens - which would have passed not to him but to the legitimate sons - by bedding Phaedra (and, presumably, marrying her after the passing of Theseus) (1009-20). The death of Hippolytus, while tragic, neatly eliminates the turmoil that could arise from a potential dynastic struggle.

As demonstrated best by these dramatic works, ancient Greek myths provided storytellers with ample opportunities to captivate their audiences with shocking plots and simultaneously to highlight important social issues including interfamilial strife and shifts in

moral codes dealing with religion and other topics. This potential becomes further realized, particularly during the literary golden age of Rome (the period of the late republic and early empire), in narratives influenced by and even adapted from these Greek filicide tales.

Filicide in Roman Literature

The Works of Ovid

The works of Ovid influenced many medieval authors to such an extent that Ludwig Traube referred to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as an "aetas Ovidiana" (Hardie 10); thus, Ovid's treatments of filicide are of great interest to this study. The story of Medea particularly held Ovid's interest. As Arthur Palmer explains in the commentary accompanying his critical edition of the *Heroides*, Romans were extremely fond of the legends of Medea, and in addition to his treatments of Medea in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Heroides*, Ovid was inspired by the Euripidean tragedy and wrote a play about her that is now lost (386).

The letters of Hypsipyle and of Medea, the sixth and twelfth letters of the *Heroides*, provide a fairly complete outline of the legend of Jason and Medea when they are read together. Hypsipyle's letter (the sixth) to her estranged husband foreshadows the plight of Medea that drives her into her filicidal rage. At first, Hypsipyle diplomatically chides him for not having sent word of his adventures during his quest for the Golden Fleece, but her calm demeanor yields to passion as the source of her anger is revealed: "Barbara narratur venisse venefica tecum / In mihi promissi parte recepta tori" 'It is said that a foreign witch, having been received in the part of the bed promised to me, has come with you' (6.19-20). She fears that Medea would be an evil stepmother and injure her children, since this woman

has dismembered her own brother (6.126-30). Hypsypile wishes ill for Medea: "Utque ego destituor coniunx materque duorum / A totidem natis orba sit illa viro" 'And just as I, wife and mother of two, am abandoned, let her be abandoned by her husband after having been deprived of the same number of children' (6.155-56). That Medea should be the instrument by which she is deprived of her children becomes apparent as the letter continues: "Erret inops, exspes, caede cruenta sua" 'Let her wander, without resources, without hope, bloody from her slaughter' (6.162). Medea's letter confirms that what Hypsipyle has wished for has come to pass: Jason has left Medea for Creusa, yet another woman. Now, she fears what kind of a stepmother Creusa may be to her children, who (like those Hypsipyle bore to Jason) are much like their father (12.188-89, 6.123-24). Medea's letter does not specifically indicate that she will kill her children because he has left her for another woman. She does declare, however, that she will punish her enemies as long as she has the means to do so at her disposal (12.181-82). Furthermore, the letter ends with a sense of coming doom: "Quo feret ira, sequar!" 'Where my wrath goes, I will follow' (12.209). An intrinsic evil nature does not drive the Medea described in the *Heroides* to kill her children; instead, a desire to spare the children from harm and the confusion and wrath of a betrayed woman are at the root of her actions. *The Heroides* has been described as a moralistic collection, with Penelope's letter to Odysseus at the forefront to show how women should behave with respect to love and with other women's letters as exemplars of how other women suffer from excess emotion (Dimmick 268). Clearly, letters six and twelve demonstrate unacceptably extreme anger, particularly on the part of Medea.

Within the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid makes use of many tales of filicide. Some, he refers to almost in passing (no doubt influenced by the Alexandrian poets and their tradition of working obscure references into their poetry). For instance, Ovid tacks a brief allusion to the story of Tantalus' killing of Pelops onto the story of Niobe (6.401-411). While the poet describes Pelops as killed by paternal hands (6.407), he omits the relevant background material and the reason why the gods fashioned a new shoulder for Pelops. Similarly, when in the fifteenth book, Virbius attempts to console the Nymph Egeria, he tells her that he had a former life as Hippolytus and was killed by his father Theseus; Virbius emphasizes his death but rushes through the earlier details of the narrative (15.479-546). Ovid explores other filicides, however, in more detail (sometimes *far* more detail). While these tales often provide aetiologies, as is fitting for a poem dedicated to the transformations of various beings, they also provide moral commentaries.

Within a story told by Leuconoe (one of the storytelling daughters of Minyas) about Apollo (here, referred to just as the Sun) and the nymph Clytie, whose love for him was unrequited (4.167-273), we learn of the death of the maiden Leucothoe by her father's hand. Her father buries her alive in the sand because Clytie tells him that Apollo has had his way with his daughter (4.234-40). Ovid does not explicitly reflect upon this story, but the father is described as "ferox immansuetusque" 'insolent and savage' (4.237), and while Apollo cannot save the girl, he transforms her body into a Frankincense sprout (4.252-55). This filicide tale functions in two ways, morally (the father, and thus his actions, are negatively characterized) and aetiologically (the girl lives on as a plant used in religious observance).

Similarly, Ovid's tales of three filicides connected to the house of Cadmus address moral - particularly religious - concerns. When telling of the death of Pentheus at his own mother's hand (a tale made famous by *The Bacchae*, discussed above), Ovid describes him as "contempto superum Pentheus" - that is, 'Pentheus, a denigrator of the deities' (3.514). The blind seer Tiresias warns Pentheus that his impiety would lead to his death, but he ignores the warning and chooses to challenge the claims and rituals of Bacchus. The warnings of others further incite Pentheus, and his madness ("rabies") grows (3.567). Ovid compares the king's emotions to a river that had been held back by a dam but then let to flow forcefully (3.568-71). As in the Euripidean tragedy, when Pentheus manages to view the rites (3.710-11), he is attacked by believers led by his own mother Agave. They think that he is a dangerous boar. After his aunts tear off his arms, his mother tears off his head. She and the other women are clearly not rational, but they are held somewhat blameworthy, as Ovid writes that Pentheus' limbs were torn off by impious hands (3.731). Interestingly, he does not explain in this story why the women have been driven mad; their denial of the divinity of Bacchus, which Euripides addresses, does not figure into this narrative. Instead, Pentheus is largely to blame for his demise, and Ovid writes that the women of Thebes learn from his grave error and adopt the Bacchic rites (3.732-33). Juno also has been spurned by members of the House of Cadmus, namely Agave's sister Ino and brother-in-law Athamas (4.464-69). Because Bacchus has driven his aunts mad (except for Ino, who raised him), Juno justifies driving Ino mad enough to kill her child (4.428-31). At Juno's behest, the Fury Tisiphone poisons the couple, and this poison obscures their sanity (4:481-511). In their madness, Athamas kills their son Learchus (4.516-19), whom he believes to be a lion cub, and Ino drowns herself

with their other child Melicertes (4.528-30). The latter two, however, are transformed into gods because of the divine intercession of Venus and Neptune (4.531-42). Melicertes, unlike his cousin Pentheus, is an innocent child, and Ino can be viewed as benevolent for rearing her nephew. Why Athamas and Learchus are not granted a similar resurrection is unclear, though perhaps Ino receives special treatment because of her extraordinary devotion to Bacchus.

Ovid's retelling of the death of Itys, another innocent child, in addition to providing an aetiology for particular species of birds, emphasizes the troubles that arise from excessive emotion, particularly when it leads to foul acts against family members. Early on in the narrative, the poet mentions that the marriage between Procne of Athens and Tereus of Thrace as well as the birth of their son were marked by bad omens (6.428-34); this foreshadows both the breach of the marriage and the death of the child, the fruit of the marriage. Lust overcame Tereus when he first saw his sister-in-law (a problem which Ovid attributes in part to his Thracian background) (6.455-60). In 6.482, Ovid refers to Tereus' desire for Philomela as "impius." He certainly does not condone the rape and mutilation of Philomela perpetrated by Tereus, a man whom he calls a barbarian (6.515). By the same token, he does not condone the retributive actions of Procne when she discovers the evils her husband has committed but instead characterizes her as a woman so overcome with emotion that she is "fasque nefasque / confusura ruit" 'about to mix up right and wrong' (6.585-86). While Procne's desire for justice is *fas*, the actions she chooses to pursue are *nefas*. The Thracian celebration of Bacchus, which provides cover for Procne's rescue of Philomela (6.587-600), helps to highlight the emotional state of the mother, for her madness, which stems from her sororal grief, resembles Bacchic frenzy (6.595-96). All sense has not left

Procne, however. She still recognizes the difference between *fas* and *nefas*, as is evident when she promises Philomela that she will punish her husband for his actions. She says, "in omne nefas ego me, germana, paraui" 'Sister, I prepared myself for any crime' (6.613). Itys, with his unfortunate resemblance to his father and poor timing, seals his fate; he serves as a substitute Tereus on whom Procne can wreak vengeance even though he shares none of his father's stereotypically Thracian hot-headed nature. Rather, he is vulnerable and likened to a nursing fawn (6.636-37). He becomes even more pathetic to the audience as his cries for his mother are included in the tale (6.640). The only thing that makes her hesitate is a moment of maternal emotion, which, like her sororal emotion before, is characterized as excessive. When, however, "ex nimia mentem pietate labare sensit" 'she realized that her determination was faltering because of too much piety,' she steeled herself (6. 629-30). This initially seems contrary to Ovid's emphasis on *pietas*, for how could one have too much of such an important virtue? In this sentence, the verb *sensit* is of critical importance. Here, Procne is the judge of her emotions; she is the one who determines that her filial piety is excessive. Now that Procne has resolved to finish what she has started, to avenge her sister, Ovid likens her to a tigress who has dragged her prey of a young fawn into the woods to devour (6.636-37). She has lost her humanity, both figuratively and later literally, when she is transformed into a bird (6.668-70).

Likewise, Ovid focuses upon the issue of piety when telling of Althaea's killing of her grown son Meleager and the aftermath (8.425-546). Because he kills his own uncles (Althaea's brothers) in a fit of rage induced by their taking away a gift that he has given to the beautiful maiden Atalanta, Althaea causes his death by burning a piece of wood magically

tied to his lifespan at the time of his birth. She does not come to the decision to do so easily. In a long speech, she considers her loyalty to her brothers and her love for her son. Her great emotional turmoil, which Ovid likens to that of a boat seized by the opposing forces of the wind and the tide, finally leads her to decide in favor of vengeance. In this decision, she is "pious in her impiety" ("inpietate pia est"), Ovid writes; she is pious because she avenges her brothers, but she is impious because she is intentionally severing the filial bond (8.477). Her moral quandary leads her to kill herself after ensuring her son's death (8.531-32). It is useful to compare the positions of Althaea and Meleager to those of Procne and Itys, respectively. Althaea, unlike Procne, is called *pia*, though both seek vengeance for wrongs against siblings. Why is this? Is the murder of Plexippus and Toxeus a greater crime than the rape and mutilation of Philomela? Is the number of victims important? No, it is not. The important difference here is in how the vengeance is directed. Meleager is an adult who has committed a crime of passion. Itys is a child who is innocent of any crime. While Itys may resemble Tereus, he should not be held culpable for his father's actions against Philomela.

The legend of Medea's killing of her innocent children holds great potential for comparison with the two previous filicide narratives, but despite his clear affection for the material, Ovid only provides a very abbreviated account of how Medea kills her children in his *Metamorphoses*:

> Sed postquam Colchis arsit noua nupta uenenis
> flagrantemque domum regis mare uidit utrumque,
> sanguine natorum perfunditur impius ensis
> ultaque se male mater Iasonis effugit arma. (7.394-97)

But after the new bride burned from Colchian poisons

And both of the seas saw the house of the king burning,

The impious sword was drenched with the blood of her sons,

And the mother, wrongfully avenged, fled the weapons of Jason.

Instead of showing the audience how the filicide itself unfolds, Ovid explores her emotional turmoil before she is even married to Jason. He explicitly refers to her amorous feelings in the beginning of book seven as "ualidos ignes" 'strong fires' and writes that she is not able to conquer her madness ("furorem") with reason ("ratione") (7.9-13). Even before she agrees to help Jason win the Golden Fleece, she has imagined both the best-case scenario (being happily married to him) and worst-case scenario (being jilted by him after helping him) (7.21-22, 38-41). She has even imagined circumstances under which she would wish him dead (7.43). It is this excessive emotion that leads her to her greatest crimes. Once again, piety is expressed as a key virtue, since Medea commits impious acts both for and against Jason. By helping him secure the Golden Fleece and leave Colchis, she has severed her bonds with her own family (7.38-39, 170), and in order to help him seek revenge on his uncle Pelias, she tricks the daughters of Pelias into killing their father (7.297-349). The greatest act of impiety, however, is when she kills her sons.

The moralism found in the filicide narratives recounted by Ovid exists not only in those particular passages of the *Metamorphoses* but in the entirety of the work as well. In the beginning, Ovid addresses the problem of man's godlessness, which he says did not arise until the Iron Age (1.125-29). Then, relatives and friends betrayed one another (1.144-48). As proof of the depths of human depravity, Ovid writes "uicta iacet pietas, et uirgo caede

madentes ultima caelestum terras Astraea reliquit" 'Piety lay conquered, and the virgin Astraea [the goddess of Justice], the last of the gods, deserted the murder-soaked lands of the Earth' (1.149-50). These crimes against one's friends and family are the catalysts that isolate humankind from their gods. These misdeeds continue to plague the Earth, as further demonstrated in this first book. Jupiter shares how Lycaeon, eager to disprove his deity, has plotted against him (1.216-39). Ovid even alludes to this moral problem within the narratives that he uses as framing elements. For example, the narratives he recounts in book four are shared through the mouths of the daughters of Minyas, whom Ovid describes as irreverent because they refuse to join the Bacchic celebrations and instead remain home and occupy themselves with chores and storytelling (4.1-4, 32-41). Impious actions that serve as negative behavioral examples fill the pages of the *Metamorphoses*, yet examples of positive, pious behavior can be found as well. The tale of Baucis and Philemon serves as one such case. This couple, despite their great poverty, entertain the disguised Jupiter and Mercury and are thus rewarded by the gods, who turn their home into a temple. Baucis and Philemon wish to tend to the temple together until the day on which they both die; these two shine as examples of both marital fidelity and piety (8.611-724).

Because the *Metamorphoses* covers such a wide range of mythological, legendary, and even historical material, it may tempt readers to view the work as some may view *The Library* of Apollodorus - as a compendium of mythology, albeit a much more artistic compendium than the Greek work. The Roman poem, however, is so much more than that. It is, at least on the surface, a pious work of epic proportions (and meter) intended to curry favor with Augustus. While Ovid was eventually exiled by Augustus, their relationship was

not always so strained. References, both oblique and direct, that praise the emperor can be found throughout the *Metamorphoses*. Much of book fifteen declares the greatness of Rome, of Julius Caesar, and above all, Augustus Caesar. Even when Ovid recounts the deification of Julius (15.745-870), he praises Augustus even more than he does the elder Caesar; he calls Augustus the greatest accomplishment of Julius (15.750-51). After the deified emperor sees the accomplishments of his son and declares his happiness that his son's accomplishments have surpassed his own (15. 850-51), the poet lists other sons who have surpassed their fathers (15.855-58). He caps off the list by placing the god Jupiter and his emperor on equal ground: "Iuppiter arces temperat aetherias et mundi regna triformis, terra sub Augusto est; pater est et rector uterque" 'Jupiter governs the heavenly citadels and the kingdoms of the three-fold universe. The earth is under the rule of Augustus; each is a father and a leader' (15.858-60). For the finale of this praise, Ovid beseeches the gods that Augustus will live a long life before he, like his father, ascends to the heavens, deified (15.861-70).[9] Given the importance of literary patronage in this period, it is wholly logical that Ovid should desire to find favor with such a powerful ruler and that he would promote Augustinian policy in his mammoth poem in order to do so. The emperor promoted moral and religious reform as part of his marriage reform laws (Purcell), and Ovid's emphasis on piety lines up with this emphasis on morality.

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9 Ovid's sense of humor, however, is legendary, which leads one to question the sincerity of his praises of the emperor. Ovid's *Tristia,* however, reveals that his praises of Augustus are meant to be taken as genuine. Yes, the direct supplications of Augustus within the books of the *Tristia* themselves may well be taken as the desperate words of a desperate man, for he disliked life in Tomis intensely and asked to be sent to live in a place closer to Rome (2.185-86). In that work, however, Ovid urges Augustus to refer back to his other poems, especially the *Metamorphoses*, composed only shortly before Ovid's relegation to Tomis, and to find there praise for and loyalty to Augustus (2.61-66). Ovid was no fool and was unlikely to intentionally commit another *error* by recommending to the Emperor anything that he believed would be construed as inappropriate or offensive, especially given the Emperor's reaction to the "carmen et error" that landed the poet in Tomis (2.207).

Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*

While Iphianassa (also known as Iphigeneia) survives in the most well known versions of her legend, she is a victim of filicide in the version of her legend preserved by Lucretius in *De Rerum Natura*. In this didactic poem of the first half of the first century BCE that uses narratives as examples, Lucretius does not describe how Agamemnon slays her, but clearly indicates that this occurs. As in other versions of the legend, she is brought to the altar "concideret" 'in order that she might fall lifeless' by the "mactatu [...] parentis" 'by the sacrificial blow of her father' (1.99). In this version, however, the Greek leaders (including her father) are said to have horribly defiled the altar with the blood of Iphianassa (1.84-85). Thus, it is clear that no goddess has provided an alternate sacrifice. Why would Lucretius write about this legend, and why would he choose to tell it in this way? Lucretius wrote *De Rerum Natura* to introduce others to Epicurean philosophy, and in the work, he anticipates that his audience may object to this philosophy on the grounds that it promotes criminal acts (1.80-82). He asserts that "religio" 'superstition,' more often than reasoning, has caused wicked and impious deeds (1:82-83). Lucretius thus uses the well-known example of a father's sacrifice of his daughter to appease an angry goddess as proof of his assertion. To ensure that his audience does not miss his point, Lucretius finishes his remarks on that subject by again characterizing the sacrifice as an evil act caused by superstition (1.101).

Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*

While most of the tales of filicide in Roman literature ultimately derive from Greek mythology and legends, an important tale of filicide derives from the native historical legends of Rome. Livy (Titus Livius), a contemporary of Virgil and Ovid, composed an

important Roman historical work, *Ab Urbe Condita* (*From the Foundation of the City*). The first five books of Livy's immense work recount the history of Rome from the Trojan foundation (typically dated as 753 BCE) to the rebuilding of Rome after the Gaulish invasion (typically dated as 390 BCE). Within book three, Livy presents the story of Verginia, a young woman killed by her own father Verginius in order to protect her honor.[10] Appius Claudius, one of the decemvirs who then ruled Rome, is struck with lust for the moral daughter of the honorable soldier Verginius. When she rejects his advances, he concocts an elaborate scheme. When her father is in the battlefield and thus not able to protect her, one of Appius Claudius' clients, Marcus Claudius, claims that she is his long-lost slave so that he can hand her over to the decemvir. Verginius is well respected in the community, and his supporters are able to delay her being handed over until her father can return and attempt to resolve the matter. Appius Claudius, however, has the ultimate legal authority in the case and rules that she is a slave. Rather than allow his daughter's dishonor, Verginius kills her. His supporters help him to escape, and eventually justice prevails to an extent as the decemvirs lose their power and as Appius Claudius commits suicide while in prison.

Livy does not include the death of Verginia in his monumental history solely for the sake of being a thorough historian. While he clearly views his work as that of a historian, and modern scholars have treated it as such (though with a certain disdain for his methodology and partiality), it is crucial not to draw too sharp a line between history and legend in the first part of *Ab Urbe Condita*; in fact, the author himself cautions against this in his preface. He acknowledges that the veracity of historical accounts from the distant past is

10 The first five books of *Ab Urbe Condita* were written together and meant to be read together (Walsh 5), and Verginia's story stands out by appearing in the third book, in the central position.

questionable, yet he declares that he has no interest in determining what is fact and what is fiction in these cases (preface 6). What does interest Livy are the moral lessons one can take from studying history. He explains to his readers the moral value they will gain from reading his work: "Hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre ac frugiferum, omnis te exempli documenta in inlustri posita monumento intueri; inde tibi tuaeque rei publicae quod imitere capias, inde foedum inceptu foedum exitu quod uites" 'There is this which is especially healthy and productive in the learning of historical events: all sorts of examples are placed for you to consider in this clear historical record; from this you should choose for yourself and your state what to imitate and what, horrible from its beginning and in its ending, you should spurn' (preface 10). This concern with morality fills *Ab Urbe Condita*, according to P.G. Walsh, who further suggests that "this is the *patavinitas*, the quality in Livy's writing at which Asinius Pollio jeered" (2).[11] Thus, if anyone is to understand *Ab Urbe Condita*, one ought to consider what moral lessons Livy hopes to convey through his chosen examples. One may wonder to what extent one can trust that the moral values are those of Livy and not those of an undisclosed patron, but he composed it for his own edification and enjoyment, not at the behest of any other individual. He explains that by focusing on the distant past, he is able to avoid the anxiety that plagues those who write about the present or recent past, anxiety: "curae quae scribentis animum, etsi non flectere a uero, sollicitum tamen efficere posset" 'which is able to unsettle a writer's mind, even if it is not able to bend the mind from the truth' (preface 5). Livy intentionally chose not to write about the present so that he could avoid the wrath of his powerful contemporaries as well as

11 Livy was a native of Patavium, now known as Padua, and as such was considered provincial by the Roman Gaius Asinius Pollio, patron of Virgil.

the possibility that external influences would lead him to change how he presented events. We can rest assured then that the people and actions described by Livy have not been depicted in a particular way because of the whims of a patron such as Augustus or Gaius Asinius Pollio; any shaping done is in accordance with Livy's own perception of history. While the work purports to be objective, for Livy does not interject his opinions in his own voice (Walsh 82-83), it is not objective by the standard used to judge historical works today.

Livy's history is one in which "types" of people "react identically in all circumstances" (Walsh 40, 88-93), one that is "dominated by idealised heroes and denigrated villains" (Walsh 109). Thus, in the example of the death of Verginia, the decemvir and would-be rapist Appius Claudius exemplifies tyranny and immorality while Verginius and his daughter exemplify moral fortitude. After explaining about the corruption associated with the decemvirs (3.33), Livy addresses the behavioral changes taking place within the villain, who had once been viewed as a hero; pride led to tyranny (3.35). Livy demonstrates the animosity between the decemvirs and the nobility by referring to the rulers (through the mouth of Marcus Horatius Barbatum, whom Livy shows to be a model for just behavior in 3.50) as "decem Tarquinios" or 'Ten Tarquins' and inveighing against tyranny (3.39). Were Livy's distaste for Appius Claudius not already apparent, this comparison to Tarquin would have made it obvious to his audience, as references to the notoriously evil king were common poetic insults.

The modern reader may be shocked that Verginius kills his daughter and may think that he, like Appius Claudius, must be a terrible man. Livy would have us think otherwise - the father commits a just act: "atque ibi ab lanio cultro arrepto, 'Hoc te uno quo possum' ait,

'modo, filia, in libertatem uindico.' Pectus deinde puellae transfigit, respectansque ad tribunal 'Te' inquit, 'Appi, tuumque caput sanguine hoc consecro.'" 'And there, after he seized a knife from a butcher, he says, "I champion your freedom, daughter, in this one way that I am able." Then, he pierces the chest of the girl, and looking upon the judgment seat he says, "with this blood, Appius, I devote to destruction you and your head'" (3.48). Just as Verginius has served as a protector in the military, he tries to protect his daughter. He participates in the Roman judicial system, a system that fails him. This sacrifice, then, is his last resort. Livy notes that after the expulsion of the villain, Verginius is elected a tribune (3.54). This point is made to ensure that we see him as a moral man.

Verginia is, of course, critical to this episode of filicide, yet Livy does not give her a voice. In fact, she is so frightened when she is wrongfully claimed as a slave that she cannot speak (3.44). How, then, can we know her moral character beyond the fact that she refuses Appius Claudius? In this case, it proves helpful to look at another of Livy's examples.

In the third book of *Ab Urbe Condita*, Livy draws an explicit parallel between the events leading to the death of Verginia and those leading to the suicide of Lucretia (the paragon of the moral Roman wife). As Livy recounts in 1.57-60, Sextus Tarquinius, son of the last Tarquinian king (Lucius Tarquinius Superbus), has been invited by the Roman noble Collatinus to his home in order to demonstrate the moral fortitude of his own wife Lucretia. He lusts after his hostess and decides to have his way with her. Sextus Tarquinius, like Appius Claudius, has lost control over his emotions. He finds himself aroused by her beauty and her proven chastity (1.57), and this "mala libido" 'evil desire' drives him to commit his grave crime while "burning with lust" 'amore ardens' (1.57-58). After a few days, when

Collatinus is away, he comes to visit the home and is accepted as a guest; that evening, he threatens Lucretia with physical violence and public disgrace until he is able to violate her. As soon as possible, she calls for her father and her husband and two of their best friends to avenge her. Mortified by her disgrace, she stabs herself to death (1.58). Brutus, one of the friends, takes the lead against the Tarquinian royals and gathers other nobles into their group to drive the royals into exile, and Sextus Tarquinius, the rapist, is killed. This marks the end of Roman monarchy and the beginning of rule by elected consuls (1.60).

The dying speech of Lucretia is noteworthy, as the first five books of Livy's work feature few speeches by women. As the men try to comfort her, she urges them to avenge her. With her final words, she then explains why she feels that she must kill herself, and then she stabs herself in the heart: "ego me etsi peccato absoluo, supplicio non libero; nec ulla deinde impudica Lucretiae exemplo uiuet" 'Though I acquit myself of the crime, I do not acquit myself of the punishment; therefore, not a single adulteress will live by the example of Lucretia' (1.58). If people all can be classified by moral type, and if the Verginia episode and the Lucretia episode are similar, then we must see Verginia and Lucretia as being of the same moral type: honorable, virtuous women.

Livy's emphasis, in his comparison in book three, falls upon the abuse of power: "Sequitur aliud in urbe nefas, ab libidine ortum, haud minus foedo euentu quam quod per stuprum caedemque Lucretiae urbe regnoque Tarquinios expulerat, ut non finis solum idem decemuiris qui regibus sed causa etiam eadem imperii amittendi esset" 'Another crime followed in the city, risen from lust, not less serious than the horrible event that forced the Tarquins from the city and the kingship through the disgrace and bloodshed of Lucretia, so

that not only was the end the same for the decemvirs as it was for the kings but also the reason for their being removed from power was the same' (3.44). Throughout *Ab Urbe Condita*, he rails against immoral behavior, especially the abuse of power. In fact, Verginius is said to have pointed out that he has been protecting the people from outside threats, but that it is pointless if the domestic threat is allowed to go unchecked (3.47). Here, clearly, the unrestrained power of the decemvirs, especially that of Appius Claudius, is the domestic threat. Like many classical writers, Livy sees the society surrounding him as decaying due to the mistakes of his fellow man (preface 9, 12). His concern with the decaying morality of Rome was shared by other famous writers of the Augustan age, such as Horace and Virgil. According to Walsh,

> There is no doubt that the *Ab Urbe Condita* was commenced in an atmosphere of renewed hope. After two decades of the horrors of fratricidal war, the years 29-27 [BCE] saw the introduction of peace both at home and abroad [...] he must have welcomed Augustus as the second founder who was needed to put a halt to the progressive degeneration, political and moral, to which Sallust and others had drawn attention. The notion of Octavian as a second Romulus was strongly current at Rome after the final defeat of Antony. (10)

The hope for a renewed Rome can be seen at the end of book five, when after the destruction of Rome by the Gauls, Camillus (shown in 5.27 to be a morally upright protector of children and hailed by his people in 5.49 as a Romulus) urges the Roman people to be pious and to reflect upon the prosperity enjoyed by the pious and the adversity endured by the impious (5.51). Having hope for the future does not mean, however, that Livy was not at all

skeptical. His skepticism can be seen in the end of book five as he describes the poorly done rebuilding of Rome (5.55); the care due to such a mighty state has not been given.

The Roman narrators have shaped these tales of filicide, whether native or borrowed, to highlight the perils of excess while retaining the focus of the audience. Ovid's murderous mothers overflow with emotional turmoil as his fathers do with rage. Lucretius shows how an excess of religious zeal and a deficit of reason can lead to an act as outrageous as killing one's daughter, all the while providing a familiar example to help ensure that his audience pays attention to and understands his detailed philosophical work. Livy demonstrates, while recounting an important historical (or at least pseudo-historical) event that changed/shaped the system of governance, how extraordinary injustice requires extreme actions - such as filicide - to overcome it. The exploration of excess, especially emotional excess, is not restricted to tales of the Greco-Roman tradition, as evidenced by a Persian version of the father-son combat myth explored below.

Persian Filicide Narrative

Scholars in the field of Indo-European studies have long noted similarities in the languages of widely disparate cultures that had no known direct contact (Mallory 9-23, Beekes 13-17).[12] Once it was established that many of the peoples of Europe and western Asia are descended from an ancient group settled in Eurasia, comparativists began to examine other affinities among the descendant groups, including with respect to mythology. In particular, these academics have compared myths preserved in Old Norse, Ancient Greek, and Sanskrit written texts, though the same approach can be applied to the tales of other

12 J. P. Mallory notes that musings on the closeness of the languages of Europe were recorded as early as the seventeenth century, and the field of Indo-European studies bloomed in the nineteenth (9-14). Robert S.P. Beekes claims that similarities were observed between Sanskrit and European languages in the early sixteenth century but does not offer the source of his information (13).

disparate cultures of the Indo-European group. It is on this basis that *The Tragedy of Sohráb and Rostám* is examined here. This famous Persian[13] filicide tale was not well known during the European Middle Ages, and it certainly was not studied in the medieval universities of Western Europe. Still, the narrative has value for this study because, with its roots in Indo-European mythology, it may share key features with other filicide narratives rooted in this mythology, features that may be overlooked when examining only tales that have been passed down through direct cultural connections.

The *Shahname*, the Persian epic concerning the Shahs, or Kings, of the pre-Arabic period preserves this tale of filicide.[14] The famous warrior Rostám sires a son, Sohráb, who is raised in another land and becomes as great as his father. The boy's desire to find and honor his renowned father leads him to join forces with the enemy of his father's lord, Shah Kavús. The father and the son meet on the battlefield, and Rostám kills his son.

Jerome Clinton argues in his introduction to his translation that "Sohráb must be killed even though he is Rostám's son, because he has sworn to overthrow Shah Kavús and set his father on the throne. This violates both the sanctity of the shah and the principle of divine selection" (xiv-xv). This analysis makes sense from a practical defensive standpoint. Sohráb may have the best of intentions toward his mysterious father, and his is the son of the shah's best warrior, yet is an external threat to the monarchy and social order. The father's job is to defend his shah against any threat to his rule; to do any less would amount to treason. Clinton continues:

And the reason that Rostám, Iran's foremost hero, must be the one who kills

13 Persian and Sanskrit are both offshoots of the linguistic group known as Indo-Iranian.

14 While Abol-Qasem Ferdowsi compiled the version of the *Shahname* that is now considered the definitive version in the late tenth century, the stories within it are centuries and sometimes even millenia older (*Tragedy* xv-xvi).

> his son is that he has been slack in his loyalty to the shah, albeit with good reason. He has repeatedly saved the shah from the consequences of his rash and foolish actions. Still, Kavús remains remarkably ungrateful and even threatens Rostám's life when he is slow to respond to the shah's summons. But in the end, both familial and personal dignity must be sacrificed to instant and unwavering obedience to even so unworthy a shah as Kavús. (xv)

From the comparative mythological perspective posited by Georges Dumézil,[15] this analysis makes sense, for the warrior class (his grouping of second function figures) is duty bound to serve the needs of their sovereigns (his grouping of first function figures). Strict adherence to this model of mythological analysis, however, leads one to ignore the reasoning behind Rostám's dereliction of duty.

The narrative itself indicates that Rostám's pride necessarily leads to his killing of Sohráb. Were it not for his pride in his ability to fulfill his duties, which overtakes his sensibilities in a confrontation between the warrior and his lord, Kavús' ingratitude would not necessarily have led the warrior to shirk his duties (411-13). Furthermore, because Rostám believes that no warrior could possibly be his match on the battlefield, he drinks for days instead of reporting directly to the shah (334-56). He boasts that once any potential enemy saw that he would need to fight Rostám, he would consider himself defeated (346-47, 356). Ironically, he realizes that his son, about whom he knows but whom he does not know, could be a warrior as mighty as the unknown Sohráb. He dismisses this thought quickly, however,

15 Noted scholar of Indo-European mythology Georges Dumézil proposed a theory that categorized mythological figures across cultures by their dominant function in the myths. Individuals of the first function were religious figures (such as priests), rulers, and/or judges. Individuals of the second function were warriors. Individuals of the third function were those associated with fertility, both agricultural and reproductive; this group included artists and laborers. This theory was once widely accepted but has been criticized in more recent decades (Beekes 40). For more information, see Mallory 130-35, 139-42.

because he believes that his son is too young to fight (337-41). Next, the narrator interjects commentary within the scene of the first battle of Sohráb and Rostám: "From fishes in the sea to wild horses on / The plain, all beasts can recognize their young. / But man who's blinded by his wretched pride, / Cannot distinguish son from foe" (687-88). Rostám is so supremely confident that he is the best warrior that all other warriors are insignificant to him. This man, so blinded by excessive pride, is thus reduced to a state even below that of animals. Then, Rostám refuses to identify himself truthfully to Sohráb when directly questioned because he believes it is a trick designed to put off fighting him (809-21). This is especially tragic because Sohráb has noticed similarities between himself and Rostám and hopes that he has finally found his father (792-800). Had Rostám simply answered his son's questions, the tragedy could have been averted. Sohráb, who mirrors his father in martial prowess, likewise mirrors him in terms of excessive pride, as seen in his desire to overthrow the shah in favor of Rostám. This tale thus tells us what is destined to happen when there is an excess of emotion on the part of a parent. In this case, Rostám is not that unlike some of the filicidal mothers of Greco-Roman traditions who suffer from excessive emotion, a quality often viewed as feminine. Notably, Rostám cries when he realizes what he has done (896-98), an action often viewed as more characteristic of a woman than of the mightiest warrior of a realm.

Conclusion

Already in this chapter on early filicide narratives, certain patterns have begun to emerge. One pattern, as evidenced in the Bible and Greek and Roman literature, is that a father, who is a political or martial leader, kills a child, usually a daughter, because he

believes that it is the right thing to do - whether for specifically religious or more general moral reasons, such as to protect her from a worse fate. If the child's reaction to the situation is included, the child is compliant. These killings are sacrificial in nature, and the men's actions are well received by those around them, even rewarded. A second pattern, as evidenced by Greek and Roman literature and the *Shahname*, is that a parent of either gender, clouded perhaps by excessive emotion, kills one or more children (usually male and sometimes named), often as a way of seeking vengeance. If the victims are boys, they are likely to resemble their fathers, and if the children's reactions are included, the children usually protest their fate. If the victims are girls, they are likely vulnerable teen daughters. If the parent is a woman, that woman may be in emotional turmoil because of another blow to the family dynamic. When the actions of deceitful husbands directly harm these mothers' family members (as in the Philomela stories, where a sister is attacked) or even indirectly threaten them (as in the Medea narratives, where the mother fears for her children's future safety), the wives punish their husbands by striking down those whom they love the most, their children. Similarly, a mother may punish the fruit of her own womb for an attack on her siblings, as in the case of Althaea's killing of Meleager. A filicidal woman may have reservations about her actions, but fury and sometimes devotion to siblings overcome them. A third pattern - which may be best considered as an extreme subtype of the second pattern, again evidenced by Greek and Roman literature, is that a parent of either gender unwittingly kills one or more children (usually male and sometimes named) because that parent is temporarily yet fully insane. The victimology associated with the third pattern is nearly identical to that of the second. Furthermore, the purposes of the extended filicide episodes

show a dual purpose. The first is substantive; the storytellers capture the attentions of their listeners and readers by describing subject matter that is fascinating and horrifying. The second is illustrative; these tales of child killing reveal to the audiences concerns of their tellers and the societies of which they are a part, including anxieties about lineage, the practice of religion, and social justice. All of these patterns will be addressed again in the next chapter, which examines the medieval filicide narratives that derive from the traditions discussed here.

Chapter Two: The Classical Traditions of Filicide Revisited

This chapter will consider the medieval continental and English adaptations of the classical myths and legends involving filicide that were discussed in the previous chapter. The purpose here is not to catalog but to analyze choices made by those telling these stories. The medieval writers were well versed in the relevant classical legends, so their choices of which elements to keep, which elements to transform, and which elements to discard help to reveal the purposes for which these works were adapted.

The purposes for using episodes of filicide from classical sources can be classified as material and moral/ethical. First, these writers used the classical legends materially, that is, as the matière about which they wrote. Their new takes on old stories no doubt pleased their audiences, who were familiar with the base myths and legends, and the writers adapted their tales to emphasize aspects that would further please the audiences. In addition to longer considerations of classical filicide material, medieval narratives contained sometimes passing references to classical filicide tales. When the medieval writers drew examples, particularly fairly obscure ones, from their mental storehouses, they demonstrated their familiarity with their classical predecessors. Some even explicitly acknowledged their debt to their elders by naming them or their works. All of this helped writers to increase their authority (for they have shown that they know the value of the classical models) and thus pave the way for the other purpose of their works: providing guidance for the audience.

While pagan literary works of the classical era proved popular throughout the Middle Ages, concerns about the subject matter rose within these new Christian audiences. Religious communities worked to justify reading and studying these older texts (Krueger 90).

One method of rehabilitating these works involved the addition of Christian commentary. An example of this can be seen in the twelfth-century *Philomena* (examined below), which may have directly inspired the further moralizations by the fourteenth-century poet behind the *Ovide Moralisé* (also examined below) despite obvious differences in their approaches to the pagan material (Krueger 102). The *Ovide Moralisé* also serves as an example of an allegorizing trend in literature that began in earnest in the thirteenth century and continued into the fourteenth. As explained by Marylène Possamaï-Pérez, man sought a divine meaning in everything, including ancient literature, and this concept helped medieval audiences justify their appreciation and even translations of ancient pagan texts as they worked to uncover the hidden meanings (123-24).

The medieval variants of the classical filicide narratives frequently appear within discussions of moral issues, and most often, the narratives serve an exemplary function. Notably, the filicides themselves are not at the center of most of these moral discussions. The deaths of the children are of importance, however, and are not mere plot points, for they help to demonstrate the magnitude of the related crimes. While it is impossible to be certain about the intricate interplay of these authors' motivations, we shall see below that these storytellers used the legends for multiple purposes within one narrative work. The medieval narrators considered here borrowed not just content from their classical predecessors but also sometimes style and thus were also influenced by the Horatian notion mentioned in the introduction to this study of pleasing and instructing through one's writing. As Umberto Eco has explained, medieval writers embraced this notion. "The accepted opinion as far as literature was concerned was that it should 'instruct and delight', that it should exhibit both

the nobility of intellect and the beauty of eloquence. This was a basic principle in the aesthetics of the Carolingian *literati*" (16), he wrote, and it continued to be an aesthetic value in the later Middle Ages.

Since this is not a mere catalog of references, brief mentions of and allusions to relevant figures and tales will receive less attention here than longer treatments unless they are noteworthy in the discussion of another relevant text. The popularity of some legends, especially those related to the Trojan war, prevents a truly comprehensive examination of all relevant texts, as these texts are far too numerous, so I have chosen some key texts to examine here. The primary texts under consideration in this chapter are Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Le Roman de Troie*, Chrétien de Troyes' *Philomena*, Guillaume de Lorris' and Jean de Meun's *Le Roman de la Rose*, "La Vie Sainte Barbe," Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*, the anonymous *Ovide Moralisé,* John Gower's *Confessio Amantis,* Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* and the "Physician's Tale" of his *Canterbury Tales*, and John Lydgate's *Troy Book.* As much as possible, I have addressed the relevant texts in chronological order to help demonstrate interpretive trends.

Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Le Roman de Troie*

Benoît de Sainte-Maure contributed greatly to the transmission of the Trojan War legends through his twelfth-century *Roman de Troie*, which was a principal source for continental and British translations and adaptations that followed and, perhaps most famously, a source for the adaptations of the legend of Medea and Jason.[1] In the prologue to the romance, he complains about the ignorance found in society and explains the goal of his

1 I have used the edition of Léopold Constans here but have referred also to the abridged edition and translation by Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Françoise Vielliard.

work, which is two-fold, both material and didactic. First, he intends to translate the story of Troy from Latin into French so that more people will become familiar with the material (lines 33-39); second, he intends to share the true legend of Troy, "la vertez," which he writes is scarcely known (42-44), and to which he will be faithful and not add material (139-44). His source, he explains, is the version of the legend by Dares, a Trojan eye-witness to the events; despite Dares' potential biases, which Benoît discounts, this Trojan version is obviously superior to the better-known *Iliad* because while Homer was a talented man, he did not witness the events (75-128, 45-54).

Benoît opens his narrative with the quest for the Golden Fleece, as does Dares; here, however, our author greatly amplifies the tale despite his claim in the prologue to be translating without such additions. The greatest change is the inclusion of the relationship between Jason and Medea, which is not in his acknowledged source. Dares fails to mention Medea at all; Dictys, to whom Benoît occasionally turns, mentions her in a slightly different context and does not mention Jason at all. While Benoît provides rich detail about Medea's physical beauty, the appearance of her bed, the oaths she and Jason spoke to one another, and other elements that audiences would find interesting, he shies away from telling the ending of the Medea and Jason legend; he only gives hints and writes that he has so much more of his story to tell that he cannot allow himself to be diverted. One of these hints appears within his description of the famous bedroom scene. Medea asks Jason to swear, in front of a statue of Jupiter, that he will be faithful and not abandon her, and he swears it (1624-36). Benoît then interjects:

Convenant ne lei ne li tint:

Por ço, espeir, l'en mesavint.

Mais jo n'ai or de ço que faire,

Del renconter ne del retraire:

Assez i a d'el a traitier,

Ne le vos quier plus porloignier. (1637-42)

He held to neither the legal agreement nor to law:

I believe that that misfortune struck him because of this.

But I have too much to do right now

To recount it or relate it.

There is so much to draw from this [narrative]

That I do not want to delay you with it any further.

He seems to be protesting too much. If he did not wish to include something, especially material that does not appear in his primary source, he could have omitted it, and the audience would have remained ignorant. By informing us, however, that there is more to the story that he does not currently wish to tell, he piques the audience's interest. He draws attention to the misfortune that strikes Jason, which is almost certainly the death of his children at Medea's hand, for it is the greatest misfortune to befall him in the legend. Benoît uses this technique again as he draws this portion of the narrative to a close. He explains Medea's great error in judgment - that she abandoned her family for a liar - and explains why Jason's actions were reprehensible (2030-40). Then, he provides another hint about what he leaves untold:

Trestuit li deu s'en corrocierent,

Qui mout asprement l'en vengierent.

N'en dirai plus, ne nel vueil faire,

Quar mout ai grant oevre a retraire. (2041-44)

The gods were completely outraged about this,

Those who avenged her for this very severely.

I will say no more, nor do I want to,

For I have such a long work to translate.

True, the *Roman de Troie* is quite long: including the prologue and epilogue, this poem contains 30,316 lines. Still, as noted above, he could easily have omitted material. He chose to draw attention to the vengeance sought by the gods (because of the false oath sworn in front of Jupiter), and he wanted us to realize that they avenged Medea "mout asprement," which may be a reference to how, in some classical renditions of the narrative, the gods help her escape Jason's wrath after she kills their children. Since Benoît considers the filicide portion of the legend important enough to allude to it twice, why does he not provide an elaborate rendering of it within the *Roman de Troie*? The literary context holds the key to this mystery. The romances of the twelfth century are replete with tales of passionate love, from the love of Aeneas and Dido in the *Roman d'Eneas* to the love of Tristan and Iseult. While the love of Helen and Paris is at the center of the Trojan legend, Benoît creates interest for his audience by including other tales of love, including that of Achilles and Polyxena and of Troilus and Briseida. As scholars have long noted, the lovers in these poems escape the potential burdens of pregnancy and childbirth. For Medea to become pregnant not only once,

but twice, would disrupt the romantic subplot, and for her to kill the children would be even more horrific and disruptive.

Benoît handles filicide in a similarly oblique way when writing of Agamemnon's sacrifice at Aulis later in the romance. He curiously omits whom the Greek leader was sacrificing and the transfer of the sacrifice. He writes, "Vers la deuesse s'umelie: / Del tot se met en se manaie; / A li s'acorde, a li s'apaie" 'He humbles himself to the goddess. He puts himself completely in her power. He reconciles and makes peace with her' (5970-72). The poet has previously described Agamemnon as "Cil qui tant ert sages e proz" 'He who was so clever and brave,' which is a stereotypical description of a well-respected knight (5707). Child sacrifice does not seem within the purview of one who is "sages et proz," for a clever man would have found another way to please the goddess or perhaps not have angered her in the first place. Instead, Benoît shows us a man who dutifully and chivalrously humbles himself for the sake of his men and his mission, so they can all go forward to Troy. It follows that just as he is loath to include child murder within a story of romance, Benoît is loath to include child sacrifice within a story of chivalry.

Since Benoît does not provide details regarding how Medea killed her children or how Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter to Diana, his use of the filicides does not seem to be an obviously material one, though his treatment does illustrate his concern with advancing his chosen plot lines. He also offers no moral interpretation of the killings, which would seem to exclude any moral purpose. One can argue, however, that his omissions are ethical in the sense that he leaves out information that markedly contrasts with that which is properly in the *Roman de Troie* (stories of love and chivalry). It is believed, based upon lines 13457-

70, that he wrote the romance for Eleanor of Aquitane, who was certainly a "Riche dame de riche rei" 'Powerful lady of a powerful king'.[2] If Benoît worried about offending the Queen with a misogynistic rant about how easily women recover from the effects of love and avoid blame for their mistakes (13438-56), it seems reasonable that he would have been concerned about depicting child murder, especially that perpetrated by another woman. By leaving out "la vertez" with respect to these children, Benoît pleases a potentially sensitive audience, one likely to be more interested in tales of love than in tales of murder. He also emphasizes how the figures within the narrative can be positive and/or negative examples of knighthood and lovers.

Philomena

The poem *Philomena*, believed by increasingly more scholars to be the work of the twelfth-century poet Chrétien de Troyes and preserved by the anonymous fourteenth-century author of the *Ovide Moralisé* (discussed separately, below), contains one of the most detailed filicide episodes in medieval narrative.[3] As in preceding versions of the legend, Progné kills her child Ithis because her husband Thereüs has raped and mutilated her sister Philomena. E. Jane Burns, Nancy A. Jones, and other feminist scholars have generally focused either on the effects of lust upon Thereüs (in relation to the effects of love on a *fin amant*) or on the ways in which women communicate (in relationship to Philomena's mute state and her tapestry), but the act of filicide and what that reveals about familial dynamics are generally overlooked

2 For how this dedication to Eleanor may have affected the transmission of the text, see the note on this passage by Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Françoise Vielliard (644-45).

3 I have used the edition by Emmanuèle Baumgartner here. For summations of the scholarship on the authorship controversy, see Nancy A. Jones (161, 182 n. 4) and Roberta L. Krueger (88-89).

despite the fact that our narrator here provides more information than his predecessors about both Ithis and Progné.

The narrator makes it clear from the beginning of the poem that the child faces an early death. While the Thracian people rejoiced in his birth and celebrated it annually (lines 37-41), he was destined to bring bad fortune to his parents (36). He grew into a handsome five-year-old (42-43), but he was not destined to grow into a handsome lord. We learn early on what his fate will be: "Ce fu deulz grans / Qu'il ne vesqui plus longuement." 'It was a great sorrow that he did not live longer' (44-45). His physical beauty, which the narrator mentions again shortly before his mother kills him (1293), is meant to increase the audience's sorrow. The death of an attractive person, especially a child, is generally viewed as a greater loss than that of an unattractive person, for the medieval mind bound beauty and goodness together and perceived one's outward beauty as a physical manifestation of one's goodness (Eco 15-16).[4]

The narrator does not use Ithis' proper name much in the narrative; instead, he generally uses a form of "li enfes" and occasionally uses a word to denote a familial relationship (e.g. "son neveu" in Pandïon's indirect speech found in 99). Ithis is named, however, when his fate is announced at the beginning of the poem (44), when Progné and Thereüs make their fateful dinner arrangements (1353), and several times within the grotesque cannibalism episode (1378, 1381, 1386, and 1394). While he does not speak in the entire narrative (which seems unusual for a five-year-old, particularly one whose mother turns on him), this repetition of his name emphasizes his personhood and thus, the pathos.[5]

4 Certainly, there were exceptions, but not among children.

5 Ithis' silence may be meant to replicate that of his aunt Philomena, whose mutilation keeps her silent. Burns has demonstrated that the two victims share much, including their beauty, innocence, and victimization (*Bodytalk* 141, 144; "Raping" 150, 153). Jones has also noted the parallels (176-77).

When Progné begins to think of how to seek vengeance, the narrator is clearly amazed at what she says, for he refers to it as "une merveille" 'a wonder' and remarks that she spoke "Si com dÿables li conseille" 'as the Devil advises her' (1297-98). Progné explains to Ithis what she intends to do to him and why:

"Ha! fet elle, chose samblable
Au traïtour, au vil dÿable,
Morir t'estuet de mort amere[6]
Pour la felonie ton pere.
Sa felonie comperras,
Pour son forfait a tort morras,
Qui ne l'as mie deservi,
Fors seulement c'onques ne vi
Ne Diex ne fist, mon escïant,
Chose a autre miex resamblant,
Et pour ce te vueil decoler." (1299-309)

"Ah!" she said, "thing resembling
The traitor, the vile devil,
You have to die a bitter death
For the crime of your father.
You will pay for his crime;
You will die for his transgression,

6 Burns provides an intriguing alternate reading: "'Morir t'estuet de mort amere / a mere' [You must die a bitter death / death from the mother's hand]" (*Bodytalk* 143; "Raping" 152).

> You who have not deserved it at all,
>
> Except that I never saw or
>
> God never made, to my knowledge,
>
> A thing that resembled another so well,
>
> And for this I wish to behead you."

Progné appears rational here, for she understands that her husband, not her child, is the one who has perpetrated the horrible crimes against Philomena. Her announcement of Ithis' impending death by decapitation, however, seems sociopathic. Even though Ithis cannot hear Progné because of the low volume with which she speaks, she speaks directly and without a glimmer of maternal emotion. She sheds no tears here, unlike when she laments the violence against her sister shortly before this episode (1285-91). In fact, lines 1307-08 seem to imply a belief that Ithis was not made by God (and thus must have been made by something unholy). Only when he embraces her affectionately do we see any hesitation on her part (1310-19). The narrator uses this moment to interject a moral commentary that the forces of Right, Nature, and Piety forbid a mother from killing or dismembering her child (1315-19). Progné slips quickly back, however, into her decidedly unmaternal state. Her mind returns to her husband's crimes, so she announces that she is going to decapitate the child and feed him to his father in order to avenge her sister (1323-27). Burns explains in exquisite detail the symmetry of Thereüs' rape of Philomena and his "rape" by the women with his own child's corpse (*Bodytalk* 133-37; "Raping" 143-47). The decapitation is accomplished, according to the narrator, "Par dÿablie et par fierté / Que dÿables li amoneste" 'through devilishness and through pride, which the Devil encourages' (1330-31). Again, the narrator utterly

disapproves of Progné's actions (which is not to say that he approves of Thereüs' either, especially with respect to Philomena).[7]

Besides his uncanny physical resemblance to the object of her fury, Ithis likely suffers at Progné's hand because of his role within the family. He is the couple's only child and a male, so he is the natural heir. Without an heir - particularly a male heir - the lineage fails.[8] Jones points out that this is the unfortunate situation Pandïon finds himself in (167-68). It is no wonder that she characterizes *Philomena* as "a cautionary tale of family disaster" (162) and notes how it "articulates in narrative form what R. Howard Bloch calls the 'poetics of disruption'" (170), the worst fears of twelfth-century nobles. Not only does Thereüs need Ithis to carry on his lineage, but he also loves his son. When pleading with Pandïon over Philomena, Thereüs claims that if he were to leave Athens empty-handed, Progné would not allow him to see Ithis or herself again and that this prospect fills him with grief (526-30). While one ought to doubt Thereüs's veracity in general, for the narrator interjects that he lies to, betrays, and deceives Pandïon (542-43), the affection for his son seems to be genuine. He agrees to attend Progné's special dinner on the condition that she ensures that "ses filz Ithis i iert" 'his son Ithis will be there,' and he inquires about the boy's whereabouts twice during the meal (1353, 1381-83, 1393-99). When Progné and Philomena reveal what they have done to Ithis, his thoughts quickly move from shame and sorrow to avenging Ithis (1423-27).

The use in *Philomena* of the filicide narrative made familiar by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is certainly material, for it is a fundamental part of the subject matter of the poem. One may wonder how an audience, particularly one that contained women, could find

7 The "ambivalent" depiction of women in *Philomena* has been the subject of some modern feminist perspectives on the text (Krueger 100-01).

8 Much has been made of the etymological, orthographic, and vocalic similarities of *filz (*son), *fil* (thread), and the name Philomena. For more on this topic, see Jones (162, 170-72, 175-77).

any entertainment value in such a brutal narrative. Kathryn Gravdal addresses this very issues in *Ravishing Maidens*, her monograph on rape in medieval French literature. While she admits that some may have been titillated by the taboo nature of tales of rape, she also proposes that listening to such tales provided women with an opportunity to practice their coping skills and achieve "anxiety mastery," that is to overcome, in a safe place, their anxieties about rape (18, 168 n. 18). This theory also helps to explain why audiences would be inclined to listen to and read tales of filicide. Just as rape proved a real and serious source of anxiety for women, the death of a child and loss of a lineage caused anxieties for men and women. A tale like *Philomena* thus provides an opportunity for both genders to confront and "master" deep-seated fears. In addition to this use, the text has a clear moral use, for the narrative interjects condemnations of Progné's actions and emphasizes how tragic Ithis' loss is. The narrative also demonstrates how Thereüs' violation of the marriage contract results in the nullification of the marriage union through the death of Ithis and how his violation of Philomena's body results in his own violation through his unwitting cannibalism.

Le Roman de la Rose

Jean de Meun's thirteenth-century continuation of the allegorical dream vision *Le Roman de la Rose* does not use the classical filicide legends as the primary subject matter; rather, allegorical figures use these classical tales as examples within their arguments.[9] The dream vision begun by Guillaume de Lorris explains how L'amant (the lover) sees, falls in love with, and quests after the Rose. This part of the narrative breaks off early on, after 4028

9 I have used the three-volume edition by Félix Lecoy.

lines, and Jean de Meun takes over with his own version of the lover's quest, a lengthy 17,722 additional lines, which results in the conquest of the Rose.[10]

Jean de Meun illustrates his broad education and thus increases his authority through his numerous references to classical and contemporary literary and philosophical works. An oblique reference to the legend of Tantalus serves this purpose; he is mentioned within a catalog of punishments, but his crimes are not detailed (19251-64). Two other filicide legends, however, are treated more expansively, and thus serve as both captivating subject matter and examples of negative behaviors. Douglas Kelly notes the infrequency with which parent-child relationships are evoked in the romance and adds that the few instances signal familial disaster (*Internal* 125).

Within a passage in which Reson (Reason) argues to L'amant that romantic love is a less worthwhile pursuit than general love for humanity (5404-696), L'amant asks Reson to evaluate non-romantic love in relation to justice (5449-56). To illustrate how the abuse of power, which has long been a problem, lessens the value of justice, Reson uses the example of the death of Virginia (Virgine) by her father's hand (5559-628). In this version of the tale, Reson tells L'amant and the general audience little about Virginia other than that she has no interest in Appius or in any gifts he could give her (5567-68). Instead, the focus is on Virginius' actions. Reson (who admittedly is using Livy's text as a guide) describes the father as an honorable man and renowned knight, and he retains this honor throughout the example. When the knight realizes that he cannot defend his daughter, through legal means, from Appius' lechery, he devises an amazing but tragic scheme to prevent her dishonor (5598-

10 The numbering found in the two principal critical editions (Lecoy and Ernest Langlois) does not line up; Charles Dahlberg's translation includes an appendix designed to help readers resolve this issue (427).

603). Jean de Meun demonstrates how paternal love can overcome the abuse of the judicial system when Virginius hands over his daughter to the judge in an unexpected manner:

car il par amor sans haïne
a se bele fille Virgine
tantost a la teste coupee
et puis au juige presentee
devant touz en plein consitoire; (5605-09)
For, through love and without hate,
He immediately cut off the head
Of his beautiful daughter Virginia
And then presented it to the judge
In front of everyone in the open assembly.

Since Virginius has, in fact, handed Virginia over to the court, he has in a sense obeyed Appius' decision, but as the girl is dead, the judge cannot fulfill his illicit desires. The fact that the assembled crowd of people, who are moved because they are full of pity, promptly defend Virginius against Appius' orders to seize and kill him in this narrative helps demonstrate the real justice behind Virginius' act (5610-16). That a father's killing of his own daughter would be preferable to Appius' schemes shows just how great a concern both medieval writers and their classical predecessors had with the abuse of power.

Jean de Meun's Virginia has no say regarding her death; instead, she is a pawn in a legal battle between men. Douglas Kelly argues that Virginia's death (which he refers to as an infanticide, despite her age) shows here a degraded society in which women can only die

or be defiled (*Internal* 82). While Virginia's objectification here seems apparent, one should note that Virginius, like his daughter, is denied a voice in this text. The only reported speech within the example is that of Appius' lackey Claudius who lies about the girl's parentage (5570-84). Appius denies the knight the opportunity to respond verbally to Claudius' lies and rules immediately, so Virginius must respond instead with his actions, which he does by decapitating his daughter. This, of course, silences her permanently. Her headless state can also symbolize the tyrannical rule of Appius; in a sense, the state is truly headless, for there is no just rule. The society is thus degraded to the point when honorable people cannot speak - only lying churls have that privilege, and to regain a voice, the oppressed must speak through extreme actions.

In a less political and more personal argument made to L'amant, the old woman (La Vieille) who guards Bel Accueil[11] (Fair Welcome) argues that women should not give their love to just one man but to several, and she cites precedents from classical literature of devoted women who have been betrayed by their lovers. Of the four examples of betrayed women (Dydo, Phillis, Oenoné, and Medee, 13143-234), the old woman saves the story of Medea (13199-234) for last, likely because it has the most horrific ending of the four examples and thus has the most power to convince. When Medea learned that Jason left her, she strangled her children (13225-29). She committed this action "de duel et de rage" 'out of sorrow and out of anger' (13229). The old woman says that Medea's actions were not those of a wise person (13230) and that she "lessa pitié de mere / et fist pis que marrastre amere" 'she abandoned the pity[12] of a mother and did something worse than a bitter stepmother

11 Lecoy uses the spellings "Bel Acueil" and "Bel Acueill"

12 Greimas's *Grand Dictionnaire Ancien Français* indicates that "pitié" can mean either "piété" 'piety' or "pitié" 'pity'. This link is an interesting one worth further discussion.

would' (13231-32). The *topos* of the evil stepmother holds special significance here, as it is one fear that Medea explicitly expresses in *The Heroides* (12.188). Jason represents the ultimate traitor to women in many literary works, and by using him as an example, the old woman argues that women should not attach themselves to the Jasons of the world lest they become the Medeas who, despite their sorrow, are culpable for their actions. Kelly points out the parallels between Jason's quest for the fleece and the lover's quest for the Rose (*Internal* 81) and posits that if the lover continues his pursuit of the Rose, the relationship will sour, as explained by the old woman with examples from her own life and classical, "aristocratic" examples (38, 84-85). He further notes that the examples provided by La Vieille "rehearse the commonplace decline and disaster of love after consummation. All serve the overall intention to teach by example, while adding a powerful rhetorical argument to Jean's hidden agenda: the allegory of foolish love" (82).

In the arguments by Reson and La Vieille, we see demonstrated the material and moral uses of the filicide episodes, as they provide subject matter and are meant as instruction not just for the lover but also for the audience. The specific and well-known examples also help retain the audience's focus in this long and dense work filled with abstractions. What is unusual here is that this moral instruction is not directed as one may expect, for the killing of another human being and promiscuity are generally frowned upon. The guidance L'amant receives is meant to help him in his affairs of the heart, not in his spiritual affairs, and so the examples are used in that sense; Reson exhorts him not to commit human sacrifice but to embrace *caritas*. The audience, who is expected to understand more

than L'amant, is meant to see that lovers cannot sustain a relationship without the guidance of Reson (Kelly, *Internal* 89).

"La Vie Sainte Barbe"

The legend of Saint Barbara enjoyed immense popularity during the European Middle Ages. It has been incorporated into the vast hagiographic collection known as the *Legenda Aurea*, though as Sherry L. Reames explains, Jacobus de Voragine almost certainly did not include it in his original mid-thirteenth-century version of that text.[13] The insertion of the tale within the *Legenda Aurea* ensured its wide dissemination throughout western Europe, for that text was copied, adapted, and translated hundreds of times from Jacobus' period through the sixteenth century; the number of printed versions published in the last three decades of the fifteenth century even exceeded the number of printed versions of the Bible (Reames 3-5). The late thirteenth-century or early fourteenth-century "La Vie Sainte Barbe" has been selected for study here, as it is one of the verifiably earliest versions of the legend in western Europe.[14] William Caxton's English fifteenth-century version of the *Legenda Aurea* tells much the same story, and so it seems that despite wide dissemination and translation, the legend's core narrative has remained largely unaltered.

The Old French "La Vie Sainte Barbe," a brief poem, explains how the Christian Barbe becomes a martyr for her faith after being assaulted and then murdered by her father.[15]

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13 He emphasized penance in his original *Legenda* and does not promise, in any of his tales, "the remission of all of one's sins at the Judgment" if one devoutly follows the saints, something that the Barbara narrator does. Since it represents a later addition, Theodor Graesse placed the Barbara story toward the end of his edition, in "a sort of appendix" (Reames 160). Similarly, William Granger Ryan's two-volume translation of the *Legenda Aurea* omits the legend.

14 Alexander Denomy claims that the poet who composed the Old French poem knew and used the *Legenda Aurea* (156), and Brigitte Cazelles seconds this opinion in the introduction to her translation of it (102). Reames's claims about the Latin Barbara being a later addition to the *Legenda Aurea*, however, would seem to raise some doubts about the relative dating.

15 I have used the edition contained in "An Old French Life of Saint Barbara" by Alexander Denomy.

Many suitors pursue the beautiful girl, and though her pagan father Dyoscorus encourages her to choose one, he respects her wishes and agrees to protect her when she asks to delay marrying (lines 1-56). He orders the construction of a fortified building, complete with baths, and while he leaves town for a short while, he leaves his daughter in charge. She has the construction workers alter the plans so that the trinity is represented by three windows facing east, and after she is baptized by none other than John the Baptist, she also destroys her father's idols (57-152). Her father returns and quickly becomes enraged by her actions. He unsheathes his sword to slay her, but God moves her to a nearby hillside (153-92). A shepherd reveals her presence to her father, who then has her imprisoned and tortured. God heals her wounds, and she is tortured further. God responds to her prayer for her sacrifices to be meaningful and for the forgiveness of those who invoke her name by promising to protect those who show devotion to her (339-66). She then enables her father's decapitation of her, which the narrator recounts quickly and without much detail:

> La sainte viergene estent le col
>
> Et ses fel peres y fiert un cop.
>
> Or a sa fille decolle
>
> D'une espee bien aceree; (367-70).
>
> The saintly virgin extends her neck
>
> And her evil father strikes a blow there.
>
> Now he has beheaded his daughter
>
> With a well-sharpened sword.

Afterward, a fire is said to pursue and consume her father, and miracles occur in her name (371-513).

The narrator consistently portrays Barbe as one who transcends the ordinary. He claims that his skills cannot do justice to her beauty and then produces a description akin to those of the beautiful women from Old French romances: she is a well-mannered and radiant blonde with perfect features (8-18). Her beautiful and chaste nature recalls the daughters of Jephthah, Agamemnon, and Virginius. Like them, she is a virginal adolescent. While Iphigenia and Virginia both expect to become brides in the near future (though Iphigenia has been deceived into believing this), Barbe considers herself married to God. She is self-assured and fearless, far more so than the other girls, and the narrator grants her a voice in several instances. First, she insists on putting off marriage, and her father grants her this (49-66). Second, after being left in charge of the household (noteworthy in itself), she insists on redesigning the baths ordered by her father and protects the laborers by taking responsibility for the change (109-16, 124-27, 167-80). Third, she insists on destroying her father's idols (147-52). This lack of passivity is essential for a saint from whom people are encouraged to seek aid. Even in the face of certain death, she shows strength, for she "estent le col" 'sticks out her neck' so her father can easily decapitate her (368). Barbe faces torture and the threat of death three times, each followed by an interaction with the divine: after Dyoscorus first threatens her, God carries her away high on a hill; after her second round of abuse, Jesus comes to her jail cell to heal her bloody body; after her breasts are cut off, a divine voice consoles her, and then she is willingly martyred (181-370). This makes perfect sense in a narrative where the trinity plays a key role and further aligns Barbe with Christ. Her saintly

nature becomes evident even before her martyrdom, for when she makes the sign of the cross upon the ground of the baths, the cross leaves a mark in that ground (129-36). After her first torture in prison, the narrator writes "Or est la gemme precieuse / Tant plus enviers Dieu amoureuse" 'Now the precious gem is even more loving toward God' (263-64). Her increasing devotion to God in the face of extreme opposition highlights how truly remarkable she is.

Dyoscorus' inconsistent depiction initially seems to make less sense than the consistent depiction of his daughter. The poet first shows him to be a loving father who wants the best for Barbe. Lines 61-66 indicate that Dyoscorus has ordered the construction not "pour vengance" ('for vengeance'); his desire to lock his daughter away stems not from a desire to punish but from a desire to protect the beautiful, virginal girl from abduction. We also see that he entrusts Barbe with the right to correct the workmen, which seems quite an unusual boon for a daughter. It is only after he learns about the addition of a third window that his disposition changes (there is no indication that he is aware of his daughter's disposal of his idols). Her loud proclamation of her love for the trinity seems to trigger a madness in him that leads him to assault and imprison her (181-88, 209-24). The community does not recognize his sudden homicidal urge as a problem; the town officials seem plagued by the same madness, though Barbe is the one labeled as mad ("'dervee'") by the magistrate (228). The narrator, however, recognizes the horror of the father's crime and interjects, after calling him evil, "Ciertes ce fu cose mout ville / Quant li peres ocist sa fille" 'Certainly, this was a greatly horrible thing when a father killed his daughter' (371-72). Perhaps Dyoscorus has had no inkling of Barbe's Christian faith, for the poem indicates that she had been completing

her daily devotions while alone (35-36), and he feels betrayed by his only child.[16] This alone, however, would not seem a powerful enough force to cause such a great psychological shift. We must remember here that this is a hagiographic tale and that in the black and white world of hagiography, there is no room for sympathetic villains. Unlike in the previously examined cases of Jephthah and Agamemnon, also driven to filicide because of religion, we are not to have any compassion for the father in this case. Dyoscorus' demonization, as emphasized by his incineration - as if in the fires of Hell - becomes essential, therefore, in contrast with Barbe's saintliness.

This filicide clearly plays an intrinsic material role within the legend; without being martyred, Barbe would not have become a saint worthy of a narrative poem. True, her father's role as her decapitator does not seem essential at first glance; one of the region's legal officials could have done the deed just as easily. Having Barbe defy her own father for her faith and having him kill her for it, however, show the enormity of her faith and his crime.

An interesting variant of the narrative framework of the Barbara legend found popularity in the hagiographic story of the "Jewish Boy" that spread throughout Europe during the Middle Ages and became part of the corpus of Marian legends (Rubin 7-39). In the version popularized by Gregory of Tours, found in *De Gloria Beatorum Martyrum*, the first part of his *Miraculorum libri duo*, the Virgin Mary saved a Jewish child doomed to incineration by his father, a glass-worker.[17] The boy, who attended a Christian school, participated in a mass one day at the basilica of the blessed Mary and received communion.

16 The narrative indicates no mother (presumably, she has died) or siblings.

17 I have used the edition found in the *Patrologia Latina*. Geoffrey Chaucer includes a variant of the story in "The Prioress's Tale" of his *Canterbury Tales*. In Chaucer's version, a Christian boy has his throat slit by a Jew (to whom he is not related) because he sang the praises of Mary while traveling to school each day through the ghetto. His songs - which he continues after death - lead to the discovery of his body and the killing of his murderer.

His father became inflamed with rage when told of this, threw his son into his fiery furnace, and added fuel to the fire. The grieving mother could not save her child, but her cries drew the attention of local Christians, who put out the fire. They removed the child, unscathed, from the fire, and when asked, he reported that the woman he had seen in the church (Mary) had saved him. This led to the conversion of the boy, his mother, and many other Jews in the neighborhood; the father, however, died in his own furnace (chapter 10).

The father, like Dyoscorus, at first seems to be a loving man; when his son returns home from the mass he attended, he tells his father what has occurred "inter amplexus et oscula" 'between hugs and kisses.' It is only then that the father becomes "Christo Domino ac suis legibus inimicus" 'an enemy to the Lord Christ and his laws' and proclaims to the boy that he "'parricida in te durus existam'" 'will spring forth against you as a harsh familial murderer' because of his affront to Mosaic law.[18] Like Dyoscorus, the shift from father to foe comes after a revelation of participation in Christian rites. The Christian crowd who hears the mother's cries proclaims that he ought to be burned for his crime, and the fire consumes him, as it did Barbe's father. Karen A. Winstead writes that such evil beings are rare in the *Libri Miraculorum* but are consistently punished quickly (3), and Raymond Van Dam finds the "rather nonchalant attitude toward the murder of this boy's father" somewhat astonishing given the tolerant attitudes towards Jews during the period in question (31 n. 17). Clearly, Gregory wants his audience to view this man as a horrible human being who perpetrates a particularly heinous crime, as did the narrator of the Barbara story. By attempting to kill his own child, the glass-maker not only tries to destroy his own lineage, but he also, in a sense,

18 *Parracida* can, in an extension of its base meaning of "father killer," mean "killer of a family member" (Lewis and Short). As Raymond Van Dam notes, however, modern scholars and Gregory himself have noted problems with his Latinity (18 n. 1), and this could be an instance of one of his linguistic errors. Van Dam translates this clause as "I will step forward against you as a merciless murderer" (30).

attempts to repeat the murder of Jesus, for the Eucharist (Jesus's body and blood) presumably is still within the child's body when he is thrust into the furnace. This reinforces the belief in the culpability of the Jews for the death of Jesus.

Gregory writes little of the child's physical being other than that he is young and found unharmed in the furnace. His spiritual being is another matter entirely. He attends school with Christian children, yet he seems unaware of the fundamentals of Christianity, for he does not know who Mary is. The child instinctively knows what is right, however, which may be a testament to the innocence attributed to children. He sees nothing wrong with accepting the Eucharist or with telling his father and anyone else of it. Like Barbe, he is innocent. His direct speech is used to proclaim the Marian miracle: "'Mulier quae in basilica illa ubi panem de mensa accepi, in cathedra residens, parvulum in sinu gestat infantem, haec me pallio suo, ne ignis voraret, operuit'" 'The woman who was sitting in a chair, carrying a little baby in her lap, in that church where I ate the bread from the table, she covered me with her mantle so the fire could not devour me.' Mary has rewarded his intrinsic goodness with a miraculous preservation from death, and this leads the child to convert to Christianity. Gregory thus demonstrates how a Christian (represented by the child, even prior to his conversion) may undergo struggles and torments at the hands of unbelievers but that martyrs like Mary will come to his aid, and the example of his struggles will lead others to Christ.

The simplistic nature of this and others of Gregory's miracle tales is characteristic of other miracle narratives of the period and corresponds to their didactic use (Winstead 2). The child, though not highly developed, certainly is not unimportant, as he represents those in Gregory's audience whom he wishes to convince of the importance of the new martyrdom.

Christian martyrs, up to this point, had either seen Jesus or had suffered and died for believing in him, and both of these criteria had become difficult - if not impossible - to meet during the late sixth century, when Gregory wrote this work (Van Dam 4, 11). He thus sought to reformulate the notion of martyrdom as a moral and spiritual suffering of which any devoted Christian could be capable and composed this work to promote this new martyrdom and to provide examples of the lives of the devout for these new martyrs (11-13). Because he prizes the exemplary nature of the tales, Gregory used a variety of sources and did not seem concerned with verifying the veracity of what he heard or read, which has frustrated many modern historians who hope to use his works as sources for their own (6-8). Van Dam proposes, based on the engaging nature in which Gregory conveys the legends, that he meant to use them in sermons and other didactic outlets (14-15). "La Vie Sainte Barbe" and other later hagiographic tales seem to serve a similar purpose. Both the "Jewish Boy" legend and the Barbara story captivate audiences with their horror and provide a religious lesson. They contribute to the cult of saints through the tales of martyrdom, and they vilify non-believers, particularly Jews.

Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*

Dante's *Divina Commedia*, an early fourteenth-century epic poem in which he recounts his own spiritual journey, consists of three equal parts: the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio*, and the *Paradiso*.[19] He uses figures from classical mythology and legends, medieval literary and historical legends, and contemporary political events to illustrate moral qualities, both positive and negative, as well as to provide a form of entertainment for his audience. While

19 I have used the three-volume dual-language edition by John D. Sinclair. The translations are my own, though I found his translations quite helpful when dealing with difficult passages.

he makes only brief allusions to some individuals and their actions, he explores other individuals and their actions in more depth.

Dante touches quickly upon certain filicide legends as he does other classical and medieval stories, within comparisons between stories familiar to his audience and sights that his narrator witnesses on his odyssey.[20] For instance, the *Inferno* contains a comparison of acts perpetrated by the mad, and Dante refers here to the deaths of the children Learchus and Melicertes. Atamante (Athamas), driven mad by Iunone (Juno), seizes his son Learco (Learchus) and smashes the child into a rock (30.10-11). Ino (unnamed here), though not explicitly described as mad, drowns herself with her son Melicertes (also unnamed here) (30.12). It is interesting that Ino's actions are passed over even more than those of her husband, since Juno's anger ought to have been directed more against her, as a sister of Semele (the cause of Juno's anger), than against Ino's husband. What Dante witnesses in Hell, he writes, is worse than the sort of wrath that would lead one to cause parents to kill their own children (30.22-27). In order to convey how truly horrible these sights were, we must view these acts of filicide as particularly tragic and heinous.

Dante uses allusions similarly in the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso.* In order to highlight the ravaged state of the penitent gluttons in Purgatory, Dante compares their gaunt appearances to that of the Jews under siege when the Jewess Mary resorted to cannibalism (23.28-30). Who, after all, would be more skeletal than someone whose desperation leads her to kill her child for food? Virgil, Dante's guide, refers to the story of Meleager in his unsuccessful attempt to address how the gluttonous penitents can become so ravaged in an

20 Dante presents his *Divina Commedia* in the first person. The protagonist Dante, however, is a figure of literary fiction, despite the author's attribution of many of his own biographical details to his protagonist.

existence where they have no need of food (25.22-30), but as the example is hardly apt, the comparison is abandoned, and the task of explanation falls to Statius. In the *Paradiso*, Cacciaguida warns Dante that he will be exiled unjustly, just as Hippolytus was (17.46-48). These passing references echo Dante's poetic model, the sixth book of Virgil's *Aeneid*. While Aeneas' encounter with Dido (6.450-76) may be one of the longest and most well-known passages from his underworld journey, the sixth book is rife with short passages that do little more than name classical figures, such as the women who accompanied Dido: Phaedra, Procris, Eriphyle, Evadne, Pasiphae, Laodamia, and Caeneus (6.445-49). Dante's use of this technique shows reverence to his predecessors and illustrates to the audience the importance of such classical texts; Dante's overall authority thus increases, which helps him convey his moral messages about the desperate plights of the sinful and about unjust suffering.

Dante also draws from filicide legends more extensively in his narrative. In response to a query about compensating for unfulfilled vows "con altri beni" 'with other good works' (*Paradiso,* 4.137), Beatrice, Dante's guide in *Paradiso*, uses tales of filicide, namely, the sacrifices of Jephthah's daughter and Iphigenia, to illustrate her points about those who make careless vows (5). She explains that when one makes a vow to God, the most important aspect of it is that one is giving up free will to God, and nothing serves as an appropriate substitute for the gift of one's free will. She then explains how and why some vows are able to be changed (only with priestly advice). Jephthah should have sought to change his vow; "più si convenìa dicer 'Mal feci', / che, servando, far peggio" ' it would have been better to say 'I did wrong' than, obeying, to do worse' (5.67-68), just as Agamemnon should have (5.68-72). She argues that man ought to use the brain God gave him: "uomini siate, e non

pecore matte" 'be men and not foolish sheep' (5.80). As Sinclair points out in his notes on this canto, Dante's message to his audience here is one of "moral realism in religion" (84). People should not heedlessly violate one of God's laws, like the commandment against murder, in order to honor him, for that is contradictory. Instead, men should use God's gift of common sense, coupled when necessary to official spiritual guidance, to achieve the greater good. The Biblical example has clear moral force, and the example of Agamemnon shows that Dante considered classical works to be of considerable value also.

While the examples Beatrice uses in the *Paradiso* are fairly abstract, since the individuals discussed are not face to face with Dante, this is not true in the *Inferno*. When visiting the eighth circle of Hell, within which reside various varieties of "fraudulent" individuals, Virgil directs Dante's attention to Iasòn (Jason) (18.73-99). Presumably, the Argonaut endures the same punishment as those around him - to be whipped while naked (18.25, 34-36). Jason himself does not speak, a noteworthy point because it was with his words that he was able to gain the Golden Fleece and seduce women (18.86, 91), and Virgil informs us that he is punished here for the sin of seducing and abandoning Hypsipyle, whom he left pregnant. Dante's brief mention of Medea in this passage almost seems like an afterthought: "e anche di Medea si fa vendetta" 'and also it is revenge for Medea' (18.96). Of course, he hardly needs to retell the story of Jason and Medea, which was almost as popular in the Middle Ages as it was in the ancient world. When Dante mentions that Jason's punishment is revenge for Medea, he omits her famous revenge. It is highly unlikely that the poet was unfamiliar with the filicide portion of the legend, so the omission, like that by Benôit, must be deliberate. It must not suit the poet's purpose at this time, which is to

highlight the wrongdoings of the fraudulent. To go into Medea's actions would shift focus onto her crime, which ought to be addressed in a different canto and perhaps even a different part of the *Divina Commedia*.

Where would Medea belong in Dante's conception of the immortal world? One could argue that one who kills his or her child could belong in la Caina, one of the worst parts of Hell, a part of the ninth circle that is reserved for those who act treacherously toward family members and is named after the first kin-slayer mentioned in the Bible. Dante does not recount any classical filicides when he addresses la Caina, however; in fact, the only figure associated with an act of filicide who is in this place is Mordred, the nephew and son of the legendary King Arthur.[21] Mordred is not named in the passage, however, and his treacherous attempt to seize Arthur's throne not detailed. Instead, Dante's readers are supposed to know the story from the brief reference "non quelli a cui fu rotto il petto e l'ombra / con esso un colpo per la man d'Artù" 'not him whose chest, and the spirit with it, was broken / by one blow from the hand of Arthur' (32.61-62). Arthur, who commits filicide when he kills Mordred, is not in la Caina, as his actions were not treacherous, but justifiable, for he was defending his kingdom from Mordred's threat.

Why does Dante not include those guilty of filicide in la Caina? If Procne, who certainly did deceive Tereus when she killed their son, is excluded from la Caina, it is not because Dante is ignorant of the legend, for he refers to it briefly in the *Purgatorio*. In a passage about the imagination, he makes a reference to Procne: "Dell'empiezza di lei che mutò forma / nell' uccel ch'a cantar più si diletta / nell' imagine mia apparve l'orma" 'A mark appears in my imagination of the impiety of she whose form was changed into a bird who

21 Filicide in the Arthurian tradition will be treated in far more depth in chapter four.

delights so much to sing' (17.19-21). The reference to Procne fits in well with the other examples in the seventeenth canto: the death of Haman (a court official, from the Old Testament book of Esther) and the death of Amata, (Lavinia's mother, from the *Aeneid)*. Dante views all of these as related to the idea of sinful anger. In this canto, he hears "'*Beati / pacifici*, che son sanz' ira mala!'" "Blessed are the peaceful, who are without evil wrath" (17.68-69). Virgil, his guide, explains that humans who intend to do the right thing can be so clouded by emotion that they instead do something very wrong (17.91-102). This seems to characterize Medea well, for she is justified in her desire to punish Jason for his philandering, just not in her execution of that desire. So, at least some of those who commit violent, emotion-driven acts of filicide, according to Dante, do not have the motivations that would land one in one of the worst parts of Hell.

While Dante's use of filicide narratives is not substantial enough to be considered material, he obviously does use them for didactic purposes. Through his many references, Dante pays homage to those sources besides the *Aeneid* (and through it, the *Odyssey*), and he provides his audience guidance on the nature of sin and redemption.

The *Ovide Moralisé*

The anonymous (possibly Franciscan) translator of the early fourteenth-century *Ovide Moralisé* (*OM*) retold Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in French verse, with some additions from other related texts,[22] and inserted exegetical passages between parts of the narrative.[23] Throughout the latter Middle Ages, the poem served as an important "intermediary" text in the sense that it provided access to the Ovidian material for those who were far more

22 Marc-René Jung outlines the additions made by the *OM* poet along with his sources (109-11, 113).
23 I have used the five-volume version edited by Cornelis de Boer, Martina G. de Boer, and Jeannette Th. M. Van 'T Sant here.

comfortable in their own vernaculars than in the classical Latin.[24] Pierre Bersuire claims that Joan of Burgundy, the wife of the future King Philippe V Le Long of France, proposed its composition (Jung 115). Within the first book of the *OM*, the narrator explains that he is translating Ovid's fables (as he calls them) because, according to the Bible, everything written - whether it is good or bad - is designed to instruct us (1.1-19). He explains that the fables "toutes samblent mençoignables" 'all seem full of lies' but have hidden truths (1.41-46). Marc-René Jung points out, however, that the truths sought after and presented in the *OM* are not truths that Ovid himself knowingly hid within the *Metamorphoses* (108). Instead, the French poet believes the truths to have been divinely infused into the pagan mythological work. Gaston Paris and Cornelis de Boer both ridiculed the inserted exegetical passages, which de Boer called the "insipides allégories" 'insipid allegories' (Krueger 90; Harf-Lancner, Mathey-Maille, and Szkilnik 13). Modern condemnation aside, it is not surprising for a Christian poet to alter Ovid's pagan text in this way. The Latin poem has long been a popular one, and thus it makes sense for a Christian to desire to redeem it.

In order to understand how the French poet views the filicide narrative, it is important to know that he believes that some of the pagan gods of Ovid's tales represent Christ. In the third book, he reminds us of how King Pentheus suffered and died because he ignored and insulted the prophet Tiresias and spurned the god Liber (3.1965-2527). One interpretation[25] the narrator offers of this tale is that it is parallel to the advent of Jesus (3.2741-914). The similarity between wine and blood plays a vital role in his analysis. Like Liber, the Christian savior values wine, which is an integral part of the Eucharist (3.2801-806). The narrator also

24 Sheila Delany notes some of the principal late-medieval works containing borrowed material from the *Ovide moralisé* (276-77).

25 In another important passage, the narrator compares Pentheus to a devoted man who spurns earthly temptations; he also likens the king's dismemberment to the violent murder of Jesus (3. 2586-642).

describes Jesus as he who "de robe porprine / Se vest tainte en gout sanguine" 'dresses himself in a purple robe dyed with a blood drop' (3.2793-94). Toward the end of the interpretation, the narrator reminds his audience of Peter's miraculous liberation from King Herod's prison (3.2878-96), which is parallel to the delivery of the sailor Acestes from the prison of Pentheus (3.2478-83). Kings Herod and Pentheus resist the new world orders brought by Jesus and Liber, respectively. The narrator's fierce condemnation of persecutory leaders (3.2897-914) suggests, though he does not make this explicit, that Pentheus' grotesque end is to be shared by all those who persecute Christians, King Herod included.[26] Thus, a gruesome filicide from the Greco-Roman tradition becomes a triumph over an enemy of Christ. Similarly, in the fourth book, the poet reminds us of how King Orcamus killed his daughter Leuchoté (Leucothoe) because the sun god had taken sexual advantage of her (4.1372-453). The analysis of this tale (4.1784-923) explains that the sun god represents the Christian God (4.1787-88), who keeps Leuchoté - the Church (4.1828) - close to him and loves her honorable qualities. Clytie - the jealous informer - represents Judaism, as the Jews had fallen out of God's favor because they did not choose to follow Jesus (4.1822-30). Thus, sexual love, against which our narrator rails in his analysis of the legend of Venus and Mars (4.1488-755), is transformed into a spiritual love in Leuchoté's tale. He seems less interested here in pursuing an analysis of King Orcamus' filicidal actions than in examining the relationship between the sun god and Leuchoté. While his handling of the gods is consistent in these tales (both Liber and the sun god are cleansed of their pagan associations), he is far less consistent with his treatment of the filicide victims, likely because they are, in these cases, tangential to his main concern.

26 Herod is struck down by God in Acts 12:23.

Mankind's temptation by and reaction to worldly delights pervade many of the exegetical passages within the *OM*, especially those passages concerned with legends of filicide. The poet recounts - with some additions - the origin of Pelops' ivory shoulder, which serves as a replacement for what was eaten after Tantalus slew and dismembered his son Pelops and served him to the gods (6.2057-116). He then offers an exposition on the figure of Pelops, who represents a man who abandons worldly desires and luxuries, conquers temptation, and purifies his flesh for Jesus (6.2117-82). According to the passage,

> A ceulz doit l'on prendre exemplaire
> Dou mont guerpir et de bien faire
> Et de vivre en humilité,
> Pour regner en eternité. (6.2179-82)
> One ought to take such men as an example,
> To reject the world, to do good,
> And to live in humility
> In order to reign in eternity.

There is no moral exposition here on Tantalus, though in the story preceding the interpretation, Tantalus is described as the most avaricious and parsimonious man on the Earth (6.2084-85) who fed Pelops to the gods in order to poison them (6.2089). The narrator does provide a judgment on Tantalus, however, in his consideration of Ovid's fourth book. There, Juno sees him in Hell, and the author reminds us of his misdeeds (4.3820-24). Tantalus represents the man who, in his endless pursuit of riches, has lost his relationship with God and thus must suffer eternally (4.4262-322). Similarly, Athamas and Yno (Ino),

also discussed in the fourth book, have lost their relationship with God through love of material things and through pride (4.4567-601). Virbius on the other hand, who once was Ypolyte (Hippolytus) until his father, inspired by Phedre's lies, fatally cursed him, represents martyrs (especially Saint Hippolytus) of the Church who, like Pelops, have spurned earthly temptations (just as Ypolyte spurned his young stepmother's advances) (15.6249-376). In these cases, the narrator does count those guilty of filicide among sinners.

The poet continues to consider these themes in his analysis of the *Philomene* of "Crestiens," which he chooses to use instead of translating the Ovidian tale himself because Crestiens has done it so well (6.2211-16). In his moral exposition, he first repeats the information regarding the avian transformations (6.3685-718), though he inserts comments on Progné's actions, which she did "Par felonie et par pechié" 'through treachery and sinfulness' (6.3702). Then he provides his full explanation: Pandïon represents the omnipotent God (6.3721-24), and Progné is the soul that God created in his image (6.3725-29). The soul is united with the body (Thereüs) in accordance with God's will (6.3728-29), and the fruit of that union (Itis) is the fruit of a holy life (6.3746-47). Progné's desire to see her sister disrupts the harmony of that holy life, for Philomena represents false and wicked love, the earthly delights that inspire weakness (6.3752-60). When Progné (the soul) sends Thereüs (the body) to retrieve Philomena (the earthly delights), her yielding to temptation splits the soul from the body and violates the divine plan.

We see something similar in his retelling of the legend of Medea and Jason. After describing how Medea aided Jason in his quest to obtain the Golden Fleece (7.273-689), the poet explains that Medea represents Jesus, who made great sacrifices to help man

(represented by Jason) in his struggles against the Devil (the trials in Colchis) (7.690-820). He maintains this idea of the relationship between man and the divine further into his analysis of the narrative. When he recounts Jason's infidelity, he includes Medea's outrage at being replaced by Creüsa and her bipartite revenge: the death of the new wife and the death of her own children whom she had with Jason (7.1365-1506). He also includes the point made in some other narratives, that Medea killed the children because they looked like their father (7.1492). Jung notes the neutrality found in the translated narrative; the narrator does not find Medea culpable when describing her deeds (112). This corresponds with the inserted moral analysis, where the narrator explains that Medea's judgment is like that of God against those unfaithful to him (7.1605-42). Creüsa, then, is like a demon sent to tempt mankind away from God; these demons ought to burn, just as she burns from the poisoned garment (7.1643-72). This is just one example of many where the narrator presents the translated material to coincide with his moralization (Jung 108-09; Possamaï-Pérez 125-26, 128-31).

The analyses of the Philomene episode of book six and the Medea episodes of book seven share a basic structure. Thereüs and Jason, both known for their lies and unfaithfulness to their wives, both represent the flesh of mankind. Each of their wives has a spiritual aspect; thus the marriage is seen as a spiritual Christian union (either between the soul and the body or between Christ and man). Within each tale we also see a seductive force. Both Philomene and Creüsa are noble women whose beauty and other fine qualities inspire lust in men and lead them astray; these women thus represent the worldly desires that man covets. When man is led astray, the products of the spiritual Christian unions - the children - are destroyed.

Filicide in these instances thus represents the loss of man's relationship with God, a topic of great concern for this writer, as it lies at the very core of Christianity.

The careful reader may wonder how the French poet can justify casting filicide into a favorable light. As Jeremy Dimmick explains, within the *OM*, "there is a marked tendency for the commentary to change the moral polarity, so to speak, of the actors" (280). He points out that, as we see with *Philomene*, women who are victims in the *Metamorphoses* become sinners worthy of condemnation in the fourteenth-century exegetical passages and that the opposite also occurs (280). This pattern of reversal, however, is inconsistent. While filicide can represent the destruction of man's relationship with God in the *OM*, it can also represent its redemption. The death of Meleager as orchestrated by his mother is viewed in the *OM* as parallel to the crucifixion of Christ (8.2677-2736). Meleager and Jesus both died from the use of a piece of wood (as a fiery brand and as a cross), and each died because of those by whom he was betrayed. In the end, the one thing that seems certain is that the translator, after using the tales materially and making them accessible to those who cannot read the original Latin, uses them morally and reinterprets each Ovidian tale in a way that emphasized the Christian spiritual battle, even though it sometimes takes some drastic manipulation.

John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*

In his lengthy *Confessio Amantis* (*CA*), which John Gower began composing in the late fourteenth century, a love-sick narrator (Amans) seeks comfort from Venus, who directs him to convince her priest Genius (the confessor) that he has been faithful to the precepts of love.[27] Genius then instructs Amans regarding the effects of sins upon love and illustrates his lessons with exempla from various periods and places. Structurally, Gower seems to be

27 I have used the TEAMS edition by Russell A. Peck here.

drawing upon the model of *Le Roman de la Rose*, which Chaucer had recently translated into English. The prologue of the *CA* makes clear that Gower (whom Chaucer calls "moral Gower" in *Troilus and Criseyde* 5.1856) is interested in morality, as he first describes how mankind has deteriorated, a classical *topos*, and then echoes this sentiment through the example of Nabugodonosor's (Nebuchadnezzar's) dream (prologue, lines 93-662). He also realizes "That who that al of wisdom writ / It dulleth ofte a mannes wit / To him that schal it aldai rede" ('that he who writes only of wisdom writes something that often dulls the senses of him who reads it all day'; prologue 13-15), so he aspires, like most medieval narrative writers, to write something that is both entertaining and instructive (prologue 16-21). Derek Pearsall notes that in order to provide instruction that is as clear as possible, Gower has simplified the complex tales found in his sources (Ovid's *Metamorphoses* being the chief source) so that they fit neatly into the Christian framework he sets forth in the *Confessio* (478).

Genius uses the narrative of Jepté's (Jephthah's) daughter to illustrate how the sin of sloth relates to love. On the whole, his version follows that found in the Bible, but there is more emphasis on the vow and more sorrow. Genius provides the words to Jepté's infamous vow:

> ... "Ha Lord, if Thou
> Wolt grante unto Thi man victoire,
> I schal in tokne of Thi memoire
> The ferste lif that I mai se,
> Of man or womman wher it be,

Anon as I come hom agein,

To Thee, which art God sovereign,

Slen in Thi name and sacrifie." (4.1512-19)

... "O Lord, if You

Would grant victory unto this man,

I shall, as a sign of your memory,

The first life that I may see,

Whether it be of man or woman,

As soon as I have come home again,

To you, who are the sovereign God,

Kill in your name and sacrifice."

The line "Of man or womman wher it be" indicates that Jepté was explicitly offering a human sacrifice; the "mistake" of the vow is therefore only that he did not exclude his daughter from the pool of potential victims. What may seem more shocking, however, is that the sin that Genius sees in this narrative does not belong to Jepté (as we have seen in Dante's work), despite his poorly worded vow, but to his daughter. She, who is unnamed in this text as is the case in most, seems to be a dutiful daughter. Genius describes her as "lusti" 'lively' (4.1525), and her eagerness to congratulate her father on his triumph in battle leads her to her fate. Even after learning that she will die horribly, she responds to this shocking news compassionately; she comforts her father and urges him to fulfill his vow to God (4.1550-55). She has her permitted period of lamentation, and then she returns to be sacrificed and dies filled with grief (4.1556-95). Her sorrowful death helps to explain Genius's unusual

interpretation of her as a sinner. Gower writes, "Lo, thus sche deiede a wofull maide" ('Lo, thus she died a woeful virgin'; 4.1593). The priest uses this narrative to exemplify sloth because had Jephthah's daughter not waited for love and had instead married early, she would not have died a childless virgin and thus would not have had such anguish. The fact that this example follows that of Rosiphelee strengthens this supposition. In that tale, Rosiphelee, a princess of Armenia who had no interest in love, meets a woman who tells her how she suffers because she put off love until it was too late, and this experience changes the princess's mind about love (4.1245-446). Why is it so important in the *CA* that people enter into Christian marriages at a young age? It helps to consider the emotional state of the narrator. As Venus reveals near the close of the narrative, Amans is old (8.2398-39). His love-sick state suggests that he, too, is guilty of sloth; had he settled down, he would not need the aid of Venus. The death of Jephthah's daughter demonstrates to Amans how seriously this issue is to be taken.

In book five, Genius warns Amans about avarice, another vice, and sins associated with avarice. Some of Genius's references here to filicide tales are brief, undeveloped asides. For instance, he refers to the punishment of Tantalus, but provides no information about the crime except an implication (by placement within this discussion) that it has to do with avarice (5.363-97). Likewise, within a digression about ancient religions, Genius mentions that the Greek god Saturn ate his own children (5.835-63).[28] These brief allusions help build the suspense for the more developed examples of filicide, particularly one that is, like these others, associated with cannibalism.

28 Pearsall has criticized the fifth book's passage on religion as "informational and overly didactic" with "no internal validity within the structure" (477).

Perjury, a sin associated with avarice, can interfere with love because women are deceived and left heartbroken by lying men (5.3231-46), and this is a point Genius makes to Amans through the legend of Medea and Jason, the longest of his filicide-related examples (5.3247-4222). The seduction and betrayal of Medea by Jason follow the traditional, albeit streamlined, storyline up to the point when she kills their children:

> Tho cam Medea to Jason
> With bothe his sones on hire hond,
> And seide, "O thou of every lond
> The moste untrewe creature,
> Lo, this schal be thi forfeture."
> With that sche bothe his sones slouh
> Before his yhe, and he outdrouh
> His swerd and wold have slayn hir tho, (5.4210-17)
> Medea came there to Jason
> With both his sons in her hand,
> And said, "O you, the most unfaithful
> Creature of every land,
> This will be your punishment."
> With that, she killed both his sons
> Before his eyes, and he drew
> His sword and would have killed her there.

Although Medea was the one who slew her children, Genius does not seem to blame her. As noted in the introduction to this example, women are the victims of perjurers like Jason. He, though "in gret destresse" (5.4222) because of his loss, is the sinner that Genius concerns himself with in this narrative because he is "the moste untrewe creature." Genius tells Amans that the example of Medea, Jason, and their children should show him the grief one can cause by swearing a false oath, especially one related to love, and should keep him from committing perjury (5.4223-29). Medea remains largely blameless despite her filicidal actions because Jason, not she, serves as the negative example for Amans.

Genius uses another extended example of filicide when he tells Amans about the death and consumption of Ithis to illustrate the consequences of those guilty of Ravine (a companion of Avarice). Someone guilty of ravine is a predator, like the goshawk mentioned in the rape passage of this tale (5.5644). Furthermore, the word "ravine" is etymologically related to the word for "ravenous" (through Latin "rapina"), so the cannibalism association is natural here. Genius provides some fairly ghastly details about how Progné killed Ithis:

> Thus sche, that was, as who seith, mad
> Of wo, which hath hir overlad,
> Withoute insihte of moderhede
> Forgat pité and loste drede,
> And in hir chambre prively
> This child withouten noise or cry
> Sche slou, and hieu him al to pieces. (5.5891-97)
> Thus she who, as people say, was mad

From grief, which had overcome her,

Without the understanding of motherhood

Forgot pity and lost fear,

And in her room, secretly,

Without noise or a cry, she killed the child,

And she chopped him completely into pieces.

Progné made a stew from Ithis' body and served it to Tereus so that he, who did such an unnatural thing to Philomene, would partake in this unnatural cannibalism; then, so that he would know what had happened, she and Philomene (who has Ithis' head between two dishes) came out to tell him (5.5898-913). Ithis serves as the perfect substitute prey; he is young, vulnerable, and was loved by Tereus "as his lif / He loveth" ('as much as he loved his life'; 5.5885-87). Genius indicates that Progné has violated the code of motherhood by killing and dismembering her child, but he reduces her culpability by offering mitigating circumstances; he informs Amans that she was said not to be in her right mind, and the lover seems to accept this judgment. Some rational thought is ascribed to Progné, however, despite her alleged mental instability. When describing Ithis, Genius remarks, "His moder wiste wel sche mihte / Do Tereus no more grief / Than sle this child, which was so lief" ('His mother knew well that she could not cause Tereus more sorrow than if she killed the child, who was so beloved'; 5.5888-90). In order to determine what would hurt her husband the most and to conceive her elaborate plan, she had to have lucid moments. Pearsall notes that Philomene's character has also been softened by Gower's suppression of her direct role in Ithis' death and dismemberment (479). This further aids Gower in placing the focus on Tereus' failings.

The exemplary nature of Gower's handling of this legend is indicated both within the example itself and by the framing narrative. When Progné finally confronts her husband, she accuses him of having no moral compass. She calls him a predator, confronts him with his prey (Philomene), and tells him that what he did will be well known to the world forever (5.5914-27). Furthermore, once transformed into a swallow, she warns women through her song of unfaithful husbands, and people know that the "lappewincke" ('lapwing'), the type of bird Tereus was transformed into, is unfaithful (5.6003-47). Were this invective against rapine not clear, Genius explicitly warns Amans that if he tries to take love by Rapine, he could suffer the same fate that Tereus did (5.6048-52). While Genius does not pardon Progné for killing Ithis, the greater moral judgment here is against Tereus, for his treatment of Philomene, not Progné.

Genius offers the death of Virginia (who is actually unnamed in the text) as the final filicide example found in the *CA*. The priest uses the tale to emphasize both the importance of chastity and the need for rulers to "eschuie / The lust of vice and vertu suie" in the seventh book of the *CA* ('eschew the vice of lust and follow virtue'; 7.5131-5306). Little is said of the girl, and she does not speak in this version of the story. What Genius does tell Amans is that Virginia is described as "a gentil maide" (7.5135), the fairest in town (7.5138-39) and faithful to her fiancé Ilicius (an honorable knight from a good family) (7.5148-53). When word of Virginia's loveliness inflamed Apius Claudius (7.5140-47), this lust led him to devise a scheme with his brother to obtain her (7.5163-78), and even when he realized that her father Livius Virginius (henceforth called Virginius) and others had seen through his scheme, his lust drove him to rule in favor of his brother in their trumped up legal proceedings (7.5210-

26). Despite the tragedy of Virginia's death, justice is ultimately served on the larger scale. At the end of the tale, everyone finds out about Apius Claudius' unjust actions; the king is deposed, and his retinue is punished (7.5277-306).

Besides being a noble military leader, Virginius was clearly shrewd, for he anticipated treachery on Apius Claudius' part and left the war zone for Rome early so he could plead his case in court (7.5197-209). His reaction to the legal decision, however, was not thought through so carefully, for he was enraged like a lion (7.5235-45). Gower includes details meant to increase the pathos of the situation; for instance, he writes of Virginius "with his swerd droppende of blod, / The which withinne his douhter stod" ('with his sword dripping with the blood that had been within his daughter'; 7.5263-64). Surprisingly, Virginius receives no blame, except from the unjust Apius and his retinue, for killing his daughter. Even after stabbing his daughter in the side to prevent her violation, he is "This worthi kniht" ('this worthy knight'; 7.5259). His worthiness, or honor, appears to be just as important to him as that of his daughter. After killing her, he cries out:

> "Lo, take hire ther, thou wrongfull king,
> For me is levere upon this thing
> To be the fader of a maide,
> Thogh sche be ded, than if men saide
> That in hir lif sche were schamed
> And I therof were evele named" (7.5247-52).
> "Take her, you wrongful king;
> In this matter, for me it is dearer

To be the father of a virgin,

Even though she is dead, than if men said

That she was shamed during her life

And that I was called evil because of it."

It is not just his daughter's virginity that is at stake; he does not wish to be called "evele" because he allowed the disgrace. Even this pride is overlooked by Genius, and the moral emphasis lies on Apius Claudius' actions, which is consistent with Gower's overall plan.

Derek Pearsall explains that Gower chose to write about love because the topic holds nearly universal appeal and would thus please his audience and because it "reveals man's moral nature under its greatest stress" and serves "as the bait for instruction in the art of living" (476). The filicide episodes, in their material function, serve - like love - as "bait" to maintain the attention of the audience. This enables Gower to convey his moral messages about the various sins through the voice of Genius and explains why the priest seems almost to have condoned filicide (which one would expect to be condemned harshly) by emphasizing unlikely elements in the examples. As in other narratives that employ allegory, the *Confessio Amantis* has a didactic purpose, though the lessons are often not what one would expect.

Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*

The Legend of Good Women (*LGW*), also known as *The Seintes Legende of Cupide*, ostensibly serves as Chaucer's apology for his negative depiction of Criseyde and for his translation of *Le Roman de la Rose*.[29] In the prologue to the *LGW*, which takes the form of a dream-vision, Queen Alceste tasks Chaucer with telling stories of women "trewe in lovyng al

29 I have used *The Riverside Chaucer* for all references to his works.

hire lyve" ('true in loving for their entire lives'; line 438, version F), and that is what he sets out to do, though the work is incomplete. Two of the legends are particularly relevant to this study: the fourth and the seventh.

In the fourth legend, Chaucer retells material he claims to have read in Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* and in Ovid's *Heroides* regarding Jason, Hypsipyle, Medea, and the children Jason fathered (1396, 1466). Lines 1368-95 inform readers that what follows will illustrate just how great a cad Jason was and will serve as a warning for men who would follow in his footsteps. After Chaucer's introduction to this book, he divides what follows into two roughly equal parts: the tale of Hypsipyle (here Ysiphele) and the tale of Medea. The transition between these two passages is noteworthy, for therein lies Chaucer's reference to filicide. Queen Hypsipyle, seduced and abandoned by Jason (1396-563), writes a letter to him. Chaucer, clearly drawing from Ovid, reveals the contents: she wishes that he would be unfaithful to the next woman he beds and that this other woman would kill her children (1564-75). In the second half of the book, Chaucer describes how history repeats itself with Jason and Medea (1580-1661). Chaucer mentions Medea's letter found in the *Heroides*, but claiming that it is too long for him to rewrite (an excuse previously used by Benoît), he omits the rest of the legend (1678-79).

Chaucer's exclusion of the details surrounding Medea's revenge is striking, particularly since he saw fit to foreshadow them with Hypsipyle's letter. Furthermore, Chaucer was not known for his literary reticence, so his claim that Medea's letter is too long to recount is singularly unconvincing. Ignorance cannot be Chaucer's true motivation either, for while Medea's letter in the *Heroides* does not explicitly mention her killing her children

(12), Chaucer definitely knows the details from other sources such as Giovanni Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* (*Regarding famous women*), which provided him with a clear stylistic model for the *LGW*.[30] Chaucer's own works provide concrete evidence of his knowledge. In *The Book of the Duchess*, the narrator refers to Medea as a woman condemned to Hell because she "slough hir children for Jasoun" ('slew her children because of Jason'; line 727). Furthermore, in the introduction to the "Man of Law's Tale" in *The Canterbury Tales*, the title character lists works by Chaucer, and when he describes the contents of *The Legend of Good Women*, he mentions "The crueltee of the, queene Medea, / Thy litel children hangynge by the hals, / For thy Jason, that was of love so fals!" ('The cruelty of you, Queen Medea, [with] your little children hanging by their necks, because of your Jason, who was such an unfaithful lover'; lines 72-74).

Chaucer tells a similarly stripped-down version of the "Legenda Philomene" in book seven of the *LGW*.[31] Here, we learn of the marriage of Progne and Tereus, his blameworthy actions against his sister-in-law, and the reunion of Progne and her sister Philomene. Instead of including the grisly revenge of the women against Tereus, Chaucer writes, "The remenaunt is no charge for to telle, / For this is al and som" ('There is no responsibility to tell the rest, for this is the sum of it'; 2383-84). Our narrator here is lying about the ending of this story; he knows it, and his contemporary audience surely knows it.

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30 The mid-fourteenth-century *De claris mulieribus* (also known as *De mulieribus claris*) provides a catalog of one hundred and six moralizing narratives about legendary and historical women, primarily from Greco-Roman antiquity. Most of the women about whom Chaucer writes are included in Boccaccio's work (a notable exception is Philomene), and the tales of Hypsipyle and Medea stand side-by-side in both texts. Boccaccio includes Medea's filicidal acts (chapter 17).

31 Larry Benson uses the spelling "Philomela" when marking off the sections of the text, but Chaucer himself uses "Philomene."

Why would Chaucer choose to expurgate these tales in *The Legend of Good Women*? Returning to the prologue provides a clue. Alceste directed Chaucer to write of women who were true lovers (438), but the women in question did not necessarily fall into that category. Philomene, for instance, is a rape victim, not a lover - true or otherwise. The *incipits* and *excipits* surrounding the legends provide another clue. The fourth legend is labeled as the "Legenda Ysiphile et Medee, martirum." These women, though they suffered as a result of their romantic entanglements, are hardly martyrs. They did not die for love or any other noble cause. These clues suggest that we ought not to trust Chaucer's literal words. We see this again in his claims of sensitivity to gore. In the introduction to the "Legenda Philomene," he informs readers that the details of the story cause him physical pain when he reads them: "And, as to me, so grisely was his [Tereus's] dede / That, whan that I his foule storye rede, / Myne eyen wexe foule and sore also" ('And, for my part, so grisly was his [Tereus's] deed that when I read his foul story, my eyes became painful and sore'; 2238-40). Chaucer does, however, depict the suicides of women such as Cleopatra (in the first legend, 696-98), Dido (in the third legend, 1249-51), and Lucretia (here Lucresse, in the fifth legend, 1854-55). Thus, Chaucer does not fundamentally object to the depiction of death in the *LGW*, despite his claim of sensitivity.

The introduction explicitly tells the audience that the tales here will be of virtuous women, and by excluding the filicide / revenge portions of the fourth and seventh legends, Chaucer is able, on the literal level, to keep these women's virtues intact. As demonstrated above, however, the literal level of the *LGW* is a facade. Chaucer's Man of Law is one who sees through this facade, for regarding the contents of the *Legend of Good Women,* he

remarks, "Of swiche cursed stories I sey fy!" ('I denounce stories of such damnable subject matter'; line 80). Instead of a "cursed" story, he tells the tale of Constance (here Cunstance), a woman who, unlike Medea and Philomene, patiently endures all sorts of abuse. If anything, the abbreviated nature of the *LGW* draws attention to the omitted details and illustrates that the women here were not, in fact, "Good Women." Sheila Delany suggests that Chaucer desires "to demonstrate the fallibility of any effort to portray human beings as entirely good" (289). This analysis seems quite reasonable but can be taken further. Lisa Kiser points out that Chaucer's expurgation demonstrates "exactly how the literary preferences of the God of Love force the poet to abuse classical works" (97) by transforming them into something that they are not. She also argues that the *LGW* serves as "a powerful attack on unfaithful translators and on the *in bone / in malo* literary critical habits that turned classical texts into imitations of Christian literary works" and that the contemporary emphasis on the exemplum hindered readers in their attempt to understand Chaucerian works, for his examples were not the clear-cut ones that they might expect (94, 97). She seems to mean that Chaucer had great problems with the sanitization of classical literary material that could occur during a writer's efforts to redeem a pagan text. This sort of purification could strip from this material the very things that writers like Chaucer found interesting, such as psychological complexity and other sorts of human intrigue that we find in abundance in *The Canterbury Tales*. While *The Legend of Good Women* presents itself as an apology, hidden within seems to be an attack on the way some writers approached *translatio studii*. These tales thus serve a sort of moral purpose, although it is an ironic one.

The filicide episodes themselves do not serve a material function here, due to the narrator's unwilling self-censorship.

Geoffrey Chaucer's "Physician's Tale"

In the "Physician's Tale" of *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer follows the overall plot found in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita,* Jean de Meun's continuation of *Le Roman de la Rose*, and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, though he considers the figure of Virginia in far more depth. Previous versions of this historical legend have noted merely that Virginia is an attractive, virtuous girl who is engaged to be married. Chaucer informs us that she is fourteen years old (line 30), and he omits any mention of a fiancé. He fills dozens of lines with details of her beauty and impeccable character (5-71, 107-17). What is more remarkable is that Chaucer's Virginia speaks! While Livy and the previous medieval poets describe the death of Virginia as occurring quickly and in public, Chaucer allows his Virginius to go home, where his daughter is, to explain the situation to her and to hear her response before killing her (203-57). Initially, she asks her father if there is any alternative to her death (231-36). We see some strength in Virginia as she asks for some time to process her fate, as Jephthah allowed his daughter (238-44); this is, however, followed by her fainting (245).[32] Her final lines illustrate her resolve: "'Blissed be God that I shall dye a mayde! / Yif me my deeth, er that I have a shame; / Dooth with youre child youre wyl, a Goddes name!'" ('Blessed be God that I shall die a virgin! Give me my death before I can be shamed. Do your will with your child, by God's name'; 248-50). Chaucer clearly depicts the emotions of both Virginia, through this speech, which Lawrence Besserman argues is influenced by the

32 Daniel T. Kline views her request here and the Biblical one on which it is modeled as acts of resistance (90-92, 136-37 n. 17).

popularity of the "Planctus Maria" (24-25), and her father, through his appearance and actions. He is clearly grieved when he delivers the bad news to her. His face is described as "deed as asshen colde" ('dead as cold ashes'; 209), and he has "fadres pitee strikynge thurgh his herte" ('a father's pity striking through his heart'; 211). When she asks him for an alternative, she throws her arms around his neck, something she was accustomed to doing (232-33). Clearly, they had enjoyed an affectionate relationship. When it comes time to kill her, she asks him to "smyte softe" ('strike gently'; 252), and accordingly, he beheads her while she remains unconscious (253-55).

The Physician uses this tale to illustrate his belief in the importance of moral behavior; he urges the audience to stop sinning, lest it lead to their downfall (285-86). Thus, Apius, the man who caused this tragic death, dies by his own hand in prison; Claudius, whose crimes are slightly less only in that he was not the instigator, goes into exile at the recommendation of Virginius. The knight, however, is not relegated to the ranks of the unjust. While Daniel T. Kline views the incident as "theologically rationalized murder" that serves as proof of Virginius' "failure as a parent" (87, 89), this is not how he is presented within the text. Clearly, the decision to kill her does not come easily to him, as his face "deed as asshen colde" indicates, but he takes the time to explain the situation to her instead of killing her outright. It seems that his decapitation of Virginia (a departure from the *Ab Urbe Condita* and a borrowing from *Le Roman de la Rose*) is justified because he seeks to protect her virtue.[33] As in previous versions of this historical legend, the people of the region protect

33 Kline argues that Virginius ignores several legal and illegal alternative courses of action that include filing his own legal grievance, bribing Apius, and handing over another girl to the court and claiming that she is Virginia (102). He seems to ignore that within the narrative context that Chaucer provides, Virginius could not realistically expect success with any of these measures. Apius is set upon having Virginia and would presumably recognize that another girl is not the object of his desires. He is also in charge of the legal system and in a position to use that to his own advantage, as is seen in the text.

Virginius from Apius, and they follow the knight's recommendation for Claudius' punishment instead of their plan to execute the churl. Robin L. Bott, who emphasizes the view of women as disposable property within the text, argues that Virginius kills his daughter only to protect his own honor and that his refusal to provide "a second opinion" on her fate "robs her of any agency" (194-95). She sees the overall message as a patriarchal one that subjugates the suffering of Virginia to the health of the state and the honor of men (189-208). One could make this argument about any Virginia variant. Gower's use of this legend, in particular, seems to emphasize the objectification of Virginia - who has no name in the *Confessio Amantis* - and the honor of Virginius, to which he directly calls attention. Chaucer, however, infuses within his Virginia a stronger character more akin to the previously examined Sainte Barbe (who also permitted her own decapitation by her father in order to serve a greater purpose) than to her own medieval and classical counterparts.

Another Chaucerian tale with overt moralization and a filicide theme is "The Clerk's Tale," which is closely based upon Giovanni Boccaccio's tale of Griselda in the tenth day of *Il Decameron*.[34] The overall plot is the same. Walter (Gualtieri in the *Decameron*), the young marquis of Saluces (Saluzzo), having been urged by his people to marry, chooses for himself a virtuous peasant girl named Griseldis (Griselda) (lines 1-245). Before marrying her, he determines that she will be obedient to him, but he chooses to test the limits of her obedience throughout the course of their marriage until he is finally satisfied (344-1050). Two of his tests require her to hand over their children with the understanding that he would

34 Griselda's story also appears within the Middle French *Le Mésnagier de Paris* in a section devoted to wifely obedience; the author - like Chaucer's clerk - claims Petrarch as his source (I.vi.8; *The Good Wife's Guide* 105-18). The French version is overtly religious and moralizing, as exemplified through a speech by Griselda in which she tells a group of her husband's followers not to blame him for his actions and urges the women among them to be likewise submissive to their own husbands.

have them put to death (442-700). Despite the hatred for him rising among his people because of his treatment of his wife, he continues with the tests (722-1050). When he finally reveals the truth to her and to all, there is much merrymaking (1051-1141). The Clerk ends the tale by explicitly addressing how Griseldis can serve as an example of positive behavior to which to aspire in the face of adversity (1142-62). He does not comment upon what kind of example Walter sets, but Dioneo, who narrates Boccaccio's version, shows his audience how to interpret that tale when he warns them that they will hear about "d'un marchese non cosa magnifica ma una matta bestialità" 'not the splendid affair of a marquis but his crazy brutishness' (10.10), and that characterization seems consistent.

Why did Chaucer choose to include a tale of filicide and one of near-filicide within his *Canterbury Tales*? Tales of several genres and periods find themselves in *The Canterbury Tales*, so it should not be a great surprise to find moralizing tales or child-murder addressed in this collection. What does seem a bit surprising is the choice of narrator for the Virginia story. Larry Benson, in his editorial notes on this tale, points out that scholars have long found the association of the tale with the figure of the Physician an odd one, since the tale makes no mention of medicine and since we know little of the Physician's moral character (902). Robin L. Bott, however, has proposed that the Physician's telling of this legend is apt as the threat of (and act of) rape, along with the political corruption symbolized by it, should be viewed in this context as a type of contagious disease that called for radical treatment, namely death. In the tale, she argues, Virginius must contain the disease before even he becomes afflicted (190, 193-95). As evidence, she cites passages such as lines 87-92, which refer to such action as a type of treason and a "sovereyn pestilence" 'supreme

disease.' This interpretation is possible, and it does speak to the moralizing nature of the tale. The placement of this tale within the context of a larger work may reveal even more about Chaucer's motivation. In one arrangement of these tales,[35] "The "Physician's Tale" appears after the "Franklin's Tale" and before the "Pardoner's Tale. Within the "Franklin's Tale," the noblewoman Dorigen contemplates suicide as an alternative to fulfilling a vow that would result in unchastity (lines 1355-1456). Within the "Pardoner's Tale" three debauched men attempt to find and kill Death but are distracted - and ultimately destroyed - by their own greed. Each of these tales is one with a moral lesson of the type Chaucer's pilgrims ask of the Pardoner (lines 323-26). Furthermore, the "Physician's Tale" and the "Franklin's Tale" both address the idea that death is preferable to dishonor. The primary purposes we see here, then, are moral and material.

John Lydgate's *Troy Book*

John Lydgate's early fifteenth-century *Troy Book* provides a translation and amplification of Guido delle Colonne's version of the Trojan legend.[36] Ruth Morse characterizes it as "the most important English translation of Guido" (195). Lydgate began the translation, as he explains in the prologue, at the behest of Henry V of England (then Prince Henry of Wales), who was interested in chivalric exploits and desired that the Trojan legends be available in English, as they were in Latin and French (lines 69-118). He claims to follow Guido's *Historia* because it, unlike the *Iliad* and like *Le Roman de Troie*, offers the correct version of events (prologue 256-85, 353-60), though we may wish to be careful about how we view his notions of truth and falsehood, for we have seen this argument before in *Le*

35 The fragmentary nature of the manuscripts containing these tales has led to multiple ways of arranging the tales.

36 I have used the multi-volume edition by Henry Bergen.

Roman de Troie, on which Guido's text is based, and as Morse notes, Lydgate has been highly influenced by his predecessor Chaucer (196).

Lydgate begins his first book by telling of Kings Eson (Aeson) and Pelleus (Peleus) of Thessaly and how dynastic concerns led to the quest for the Golden Fleece (1.1-530) and then delves more deeply into the Argonaut legend, with a special emphasis on the legend of Iason (Jason) and Medea (1.1513-3715). While he claims that Ovid mixed truth and lies (prologue 299-303), Ovid's questionable veracity does not stop him from borrowing material from the Roman poet. He draws his Medea narrative to a close by writing that she was abandoned by Jason and that Guido has no more to say on the subject (1.3692-97). Before ending, however, he informs the audience that more is written about Medea's "dedly sorwe" 'deadly sorrow' in the *Heroides* (1.3711-13) and provides his audience with this information from the *Metamorphoses*:

> Medea hir bothe sonys slowe,
> For þei wer like her fader of visage;
> And telleth eke, þat put hir moste in rage,
> How falsely he, I can hym not excuse,
> Loued another þat called was Ceruse; (1.3706-10)
> Medea killed both of her sons.
> Because they looked like their father;
> And he [Ovid] also tells what enraged her the most,
> How he [Jason] unfaithfully (I cannot excuse him),
> Loved another who was called Creusa.

There is a subtle moral commentary here. Curiously, he does not condemn Medea's actions; while he states that she was enraged and mentions her crime, he does not characterize her as cruel or add anything, such as an indication of blood, to highlight the potential pathos or to further vilify her. Instead, he shifts his examination of moral behavior to Jason and finds him guilty. One possible reason for this disparity lies in his source material. Guido's *Historia* is rife with exclamations about the perfidious state of women, and while Lydgate finds it necessary to include these in his translation, he also believes he should apologize for Guido's sexist rants. He writes, "I am riȝt sory in englische to translate / Reprefe of hem, or any euel to seye; / ... / My purpos is nat hem to done offence" ('I am truly sorry to translate into English a reproof of them [women] or to say any evil [about women]. ...My purpose is not to offend them.'; 1.2100-04). Obviously, it would be inconsistent for Lydgate to condemn Medea as solely responsible for her actions and at the same time to apologize for including harsh denunciations of womankind. Morse presents Lydgate as a man who desired to provide "moral *exempla*" in his works and "to write seriously" (198). To show his audience his thoughtful nature, he would need to ensure that his moralization is as clear and consistent as possible. His desire to be taken seriously may also explain why Alain Renoir refers to him as "a vigorous user of the topos of affected modesty" (130). It is interesting that Lydgate mentions that the slain children were boys (this is included in some versions of the legend but not all), particularly in light of the dynastic problems found at the beginning of book one that set this part of the narrative in motion. He neither names them, however, nor describes them other than to say that they look like their father. Perhaps he did not comment on this further because he did not know anything else, or perhaps he thought it would be unseemly to his

patron to address issues of succession so directly. The disagreements Henry V had with his father regarding contemporary French politics led Henry IV to oust his son and heir from his council during the period when the *Troy Book* was written (Gillespie). Dynastic turmoil may then have hit too close to home.

Another filicide legend that Lydgate addresses is Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter to Diana (2.6077-255). He follows the most common tradition (specifically, he writes, that conveyed by Ovid), in which Diana substitutes a hart for Effigenya (Iphigenia) because she was "ful of Innocence / Gilt[e]les" ('full of innocence, guiltless'; 6226-32). He tells little of Agamemnon's demeanor except that he went to Diana's temple in Aulis "Ful Deuoutly" ('completely devoutly'; 6210) with the intention "To-fore Dyane to maken hir to blede" ('to make her bleed before Diana'; 6222). Given Lydgate's passionate declarations about false deities in the *Troy Book*, it seems odd that he would not give the alternate version (in which Iphigeneia is actually killed) unless he was unaware of it, and it seems even more unusual that he would not have taken the occasion to remark upon the actions men do to placate the gods.

Lydgate alludes to Tantalus' killing of his son Pelops three times in passing references. First, he refers to Tantalus within a long list of classical figures who, unlike the muses, are intimately familiar with tragedy and thus qualified to help him mourn Hector: "Tantalus / þat for hunger haste so huge pyne" ('Tantalus who had such a great pain because of hunger'; 3.5464-65). Second, he refers to "hungri Tantalus" as one who, despite his sad lot, is unable to grieve as much as the Trojans did while mourning Troilus (4.3050-53). Third, he refers to him as "cruel Tantalus" within his lengthy condemnation of the Greek

gods and other false deities who lead men to destroy themselves (4.6964). In none of these references does Lydgate identify Tantalus' heinous crime against Pelops; he expects his audience to remember why Tantalus would be punished with an irrepressible hunger. In this regard, his work is like that of Dante, for he uses the allusions within comparisons in order to make his points clearer for his audience; this is didactic, but not material because of extreme brevity.

The fullness of the Medea narrative, as opposed to the earlier abbreviated scene found in Benoît's romance, points to its material and didactic use. John Lydgate gives us all of the details so that we can judge the behavior accordingly. Also, in his efforts to apologize for the misogyny found in Guido's text, he finds Medea less culpable than others have. In his Iphigenia narrative, we see a material use but strikingly not a moral one in a passage upon which he may have been sorely tempted to comment. Here, a different aspect of his serious nature shines through; we must remember that he sees himself as a translator of Guido's text, and that this duty sometimes restrains him (Renoir 64). Lydgate injects himself into the narrative when it matters most to him.

Conclusion

Within the texts examined above, we have seen moral and material uses of the filicide episodes, often both within one narrative work. We saw the moral purpose fulfilled most obviously in "La Vie Sainte Barbe" and L'*Ovide Moralisé*, which show Christians how they ought to live their lives, and also strongly in *Le Roman de la Rose* and in the *Confessio Amantis*, in which allegorical figures explicitly use these legends while teaching a naive

lover. We also saw material use, with *Philomena* providing the most obvious example of this, as it appears to have been written as a self-contained filicide narrative.

One trend that emerges within this chapter is a movement towards increased moralizing beginning in the thirteenth century, sparked in part, but not exclusively, by theological trends. In 1215, annual confession and communion was mandated for all Christians by the Fourth Lateran Council, and this move spurred the creation of innumerable Christian didactic texts, both Latin and vernacular, throughout Europe over the course of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries (Barratt). Furthermore, as the crusades had increased access to pagan Greek and Arabic literary, philosophical, and scientific works, religious scholars sought to reconcile what they discovered within these newly available texts with the Bible (Hollister 300-01). These factors seem to have resulted in an increase in self-consciousness among writers; they now had to justify, at least to themselves, their interest in and promulgation of secular matters.

Corresponding literary trends, specifically the rising popularity of prose and of the framed narrative, enabled this moralizing trend to continue. Norris J. Lacy explains that poetry lost some favor in this period because the manipulation of language needed to make ideas fit particular poetic forms came to be seen as a force that could distort those ideas. Prose, then, which had been used more for legal and religious matters than literary ones, gained favor as it came to be seen as “essential for the presentation of truth” ("Evolution" 167). The prose format accommodates digressions and interlacing plot lines more easily than does poetry (168), so moralizing passages were easily inserted within and between narrative passages. Of course, the *OM* demonstrates that such additions were also possible in poetic

works. Within the thirteenth century, framed narratives also gained in popularity as the more traditional forms of epic and romance - without intervening exegetical passages – waned. This narrative form certainly was not new to the world; Bonnie Irwin posits that framed narratives may have originated thousands of years ago in southern Asia and then migrated through the middle eastern regions and into Europe (28-29). She cites examples of such works in twelfth-century and thirteenth-century literature and places their zenith in the fourteenth century (29). Irwin, drawing on the work of Walter Ong, explains that framed narratives served as a sort of bridge between the oral reception of tales (associated most frequently with epic) and the visual reception of tales through reading (35), something that proved quite useful with the increasing literacy of the period. The imbedded narratives facilitated the infusion of works with theology and philosophy as well as the retention of the interest of audiences through the inclusion of familiar material from earlier narratives as concrete examples. Irwin classifies framed narratives as either a "student/teacher" type or an "entertaining" type, yet she explains that even the "entertaining" narratives "always includes serious messages for its audience, whether they be overt or veiled" (29-30).

This ubiquitous moralization affects the patterns that began to emerge in the first chapter. Where in classical literatures we saw fathers who were leaders who killed their children because it was the right thing to do, these deaths are not necessarily treated as essential or beneficial sacrifices in medieval literature. For instance, Dante shows us that Jephthah's actions were regrettable, not laudatory. Where in classical literatures, we saw parents who killed their children as a sort of vengeance or in a fit of madness, we find many of the corresponding medieval texts sanitized, either through omission or moral reframing.

We also see a focus on men's evil treatment of women, which is interesting given the stereotypical view of misogynistic medieval writers.

The children killed within these texts fall into two key patterns: adolescent women (predominantly virgins), killed by their fathers, and younger children who are presumably male.[37] Detailed depictions of victims and speech of the victims are both rare. This minimalism should not be perceived as a slight to these children. While the generically beautiful child Ithis, for example, remains silent, the use of his name in a climactic part of the *Philomena* narrative demonstrates how the narrator wishes us to perceive his murder and consumption: as a grave tragedy. Neither should it be perceived as stemming from a lack of knowledge or skill on the part of the medieval writers. As discussed above, they elsewhere demonstrate their familiarities with the classical material and their abilities to embellish what they find most suitable for their narratives.

Understanding the use of filicide episodes in these texts, then, hinges upon a contemplation of choice. When we are forced to examine why and how, for instance, the *OM* poet chooses to see Philomena as a seductive force instead of as a victim, we are forced to consider what it is that he wishes to accomplish with his work. This seems utterly in keeping with the contemporary interest in how mankind's choices affect his relationship with God and his place in the world.

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37 A third category of adult male victims - represented by Hippolytus, and a few others - does occur but is far less common in these texts.

Chapter Three: The Feudal Traditions of Filicide

This chapter will consider how filicide episodes function in feudal narratives of the Middle Ages. These narratives find their bases not in the classical myths and legends that have been borrowed and adapted over millennia but in the native legends of the previous few centuries; they have no obvious classical models despite occasional commonalities in plot. I have used the term feudal to describe these texts because each of them, regardless of period or place of composition, concerns itself with the relationship between feudal lords and persons subservient to them. These types of texts purport to be historical in nature, and notably, most of them attach themselves in some way to the legends of the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne.

The primary texts under consideration in this chapter are three versions of the Amicus and Amelius legend, namely that found in the eleventh-century Latin "Epistula II Ad Bernardum," the thirteenth-century Middle English *Amis and Amiloun*, and the twelfth-century chanson de geste *Ami et Amile*; the continental epics *Jourdain de Blaye* and *Daurel et Beton;* and the insular romance *Athelston.* The popularity of the Amicus and Amelius legend led to a vast number of adaptations, some narrative and some dramatic, composed in several languages during the Middle Ages, and to examine them all here would be prohibitive.[1] Thus, I have limited this discussion to a few texts that demonstrate key variants of the legend. I have opted to consider *Amis et Amile* after the Middle English romance, despite the earlier composition date of the chanson de geste, because it is an explicit prequel to the next narrative under consideration, *Jourdain de Blaye*.

1 MacEdward Leach listed thirty-four versions (seven "romantic" and twenty-seven "hagiographic") in the introduction to *Amis and Amiloun* (ix-xiv), and Samuel N. Rosenberg and Samuel Danon have noted in the introduction to their translation of the chanson de geste that Brian Woledge has added another to Leach's list (2).

Of the texts examined here, two are Old French chansons de geste, and one is, as Elizabeth Aubrey calls it, an Old Occitan "*canso de gesta*" (137). A common translation[2] of the terms chanson de geste and canso de gesta is "song of a deed," and the words *geste* and *gesta* (related to the English word *gesture*) refer in this context to a heroic deed. The heroic deeds of great men, especially one's ancestors, have been viewed as something to be celebrated by cultures throughout the world, and thus, the song of the deeds of a great ancestor becomes the song of that heroic lineage. It has been proposed that with the eleventh century came a fundamental shift in familial structures and corresponding marriage and inheritance laws, a shift that favored the eldest male child and disfavored younger male and all female children "to avoid the partitioning and dispersal of their estates" (Bloch 66-70; Paterson 220-21).[3] Families' lands had been continuously divided and distributed among family members and even to the church, and this degraded familial fortunes and power (Bloch 67). Holding onto one's land (and thus wealth and power) had become all the more critical. Thus the lineage, the new "'vertical' kinship structure," came to hold even more importance for those with land (Paterson 288). It comes as no surprise, then, that lineage, especially noble lineage derived from marriage and reproduction within the socially accepted guidelines, along with the fear of what R. Howard Bloch calls the "prospect of interruption" (105) - that is, the possibility of a break in the family line - are chief concerns in these texts. Indeed, some chansons de geste have been grouped into cycles based upon the lineages to which they are attached. Rodulfus Tortatius' Amicus and Amelius tale and the later

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2 *Geste* and *gesta* are ambiguous terms that lend themselves to a variety of translations, from *action* or *deed* to *chronicle* or *story* to *family*, *lineage,* or *race* (Greimas).

3 The extent to which communities implemented primogeniture did vary, and they were slower to adopt it in Occitania than in the northern regions of France (Paterson 225-26, 288-89).

romances, while generically different, have much in common with the epics discussed here; as we will see below, they address feudal relationships and contain epic-style battles.

The question of authorial intent becomes especially fraught when examining these texts, as they are almost all anonymous and, with the possible exception of *Athelston*, have clear ties to an oral narrative tradition. While this allows for the possibility that many poets shaped the narratives before they were recorded, it does not mean that the intentions of these individuals cannot be examined. The successes of oral poets rested on their abilities to please their audiences. Thus, they needed to recount tales that would captivate their audiences, ideally for long periods of time, and they needed to respect certain social conventions while entertaining. An audience would surely not be receptive if a poet's choices were inconsistent with the *mores* of the time. Especially in the idealized feudal societies found in the chanson de geste / canso de gesta, in which truth is revealed by painful ordeals and deadly duels, divine justice is ultimately served, and to suggest otherwise and to claim that the world is ultimately unjust would be an affront to religion. The *mores* depicted within the poems held great importance, for the poet needed not only to please but to educate; William Calin cites as evidence the introduction to the chanson de geste *Aymeri de Narbonne*, where "the telling of the story is justified in the manner traditional to medieval aesthetics - that he who is learned and wise, who knows the *sens*, is morally obliged to teach others" (55-56).

In the feudal narratives considered in this chapter, as in the texts considered in the second chapter, most of the episodes of filicide serve multiple functions within one narrative work, specifically a material function (to provide subject matter essential to the larger narrative) and an exemplary function (to provide ethical and/or moral guidance for the

audience). In each text except the oldest Amicus and Amelius text, the filicide episode, which is recounted in sometimes shocking detail, plays a key role in the larger narrative. Furthermore, all these episodes illustrate moral principles, especially those intrinsic to feudal societies. The worlds of these feudal narratives are idealized ones of heroes and villains, where loyalty to God's justice is critical, and in such worlds, the filicides help demonstrate the manifestation of that justice.

Rodulfus Tortarius's "Epistula II Ad Bernardum"

The oldest extant version of the Amicus and Amelius narrative lies within an eleventh-century letter by Rodulfus Tortarius, also known as Raoul Le Tourtier, who was a monk at Fleury-sur-Loire (Bar 3). In what is known as "Epistula II Ad Bernardum," he tells how Amicus and Amelius become fast friends while successfully serving King Gaiferus of Poitiers and are eventually buried together in Mortaria (lines 123-320).[4] Much of the tale describes a judicial combat that Amicus undertakes for Amelius against Ardratus (188-268), but Rodulfus includes a second great display of these men's friendship: Amelius kills his two sons and uses their blood to cure Amicus of leprosy (291-312).[5]

Rodulfus explains to Bernard after a brief greeting why he has written this letter: "His veri poteris cognoscere quae sit amoris / Gratia, quae vinclis conseritur validis" 'from these [words] you will be able to understand the nature of the grace of true love, which is bound by strong chains' (3-4), and while the letter provides few details regarding this filicide, it is clear through authorial interjections that the episode is recounted to demonstrate the virtue of friendship to Bernard. Amicus' leprosy is not attributed to any particular action; rather, it

4 I have used the edition by Marbury B. Ogle and Dorothy M. Schullian.
5 For some unknown reason, the narrator begins to tell the leprosy portion of this tale as if to Amicus himself, using second-person familiar pronouns.

seems to strike him randomly (291-92). Because his wife ejects him from their home, he is reduced to begging until he arrives at the home of his dear friend Amelius (293-97). Amelius, unprompted by any force other than fraternal love, provides doctors and seeks a cure for his friend, and when he discovers that leprosy can only be cured with the blood of children, he voluntarily kills his own sons - though as Francis Bar points out, the blood of any children would have sufficed in this version of the narrative (98 n. 1) - and bathes Amicus in the blood until he is fully healed (303-12). The sacrifice he makes transcends what one may reasonably expect from the dearest of friends. The letter provides the details of the sacrifice in a rather compact manner, so we see nothing of Amelius' state of mind other than a concern for his friend and his wife. He fears that knowledge of his actions could kill Beliardis (presumably from shock and grief), so he sends her away until he has completed his mission (309-10). Rodulfus notes that Amelius' actions are a sign of deep affection for Amicus: "Ostendit quanto te complectatur amore, / Dum pro te natos abdicat ipse duos" 'He shows with how much love he embraces you when he kills his own two sons for you' (307-08). While not explicitly mentioned as such, this devotion appears to be divinely sanctioned and rewarded, for the children are later found resurrected, playing in their room with red apples (317).[6] The lack of overt religious references is noteworthy here, particularly since Rodulfus is a monk, but there is consistency in this regard throughout the account. In fact, the letter as a whole contains more borrowings from and references to classical pagan works than Christian texts (Bar 29-58). Amicus and Ardradus swear upon sacred relics before their combat (182-87), but no divine force is credited for the outcome. Rather, Amicus' victory seems due to a gift from Beliardis, the sword of Roland (228-38). At the end of this tale,

6 The significance of the apple will be treated in depth in the examination of the chanson de geste.

Rodulfus repeats his overall message about friendship: "Tanta fides purae praestat amiciciae" 'Such great faith in pure friendship stands out' (318). The primary use of the child-killing within the letter is therefore explicitly exemplary; the abbreviated nature of the leprosy portion of the tale, particularly in comparison with the prolonged battle portion, signals its limited material use. This seems to correspond with what we know of the monk's body of work, which, while varied in genre and content, contains much that is didactic in nature (Bar 5-6). He explains to poet and friend Guarnerius Burdo in "Epistula I Ad Guarnerium Burdonem," "Nos nec gloriolas vulgi captamus inanes, / Ostendi tenso nec cupimus digito" 'we neither try to seize the worthless little praises of the crowd nor desire to be pointed out with an extended finger' (161-62). Rodulfus is not interested in earthly *fama* ("fame"). Instead, he sees writing as a path to heaven for those like him who know that the greatest good is God (144-46), and he tries to share this and similar messages through his correspondence with his friends.

Amis and Amiloun

The thirteenth-century Middle English *Amis and Amiloun* presents an altered and greatly expanded version of that set forth by Rodulfus Tortarius.[7] In this romance, Amis is the sacrificer and Amiloun the leper. Here, these two identical but unrelated boys enter the court of an unnamed duke and become loyal friends as they gain chivalric prowess (lines 25-156). When Amiloun contracts leprosy and is cast out by his wife (1540-84), he eventually finds solace at the home of Amis and Belisaunt, and his friend cures his leprosy with the blood of his own children (2149-412).

7 I have used the edition of the romance by Leach.

The narrator of this romance attributes Amiloun's leprosy to his illicit participation in a judicial combat. When a jealous steward suspects a sexual relationship between Amis and the duke's daughter Belisaunt and then catches them *in flagrante delicto*, he denounces the lovers (697-804). Amiloun saves the couple by secretly taking his friend's place in a duel despite an angel's warning that he would be punished with leprosy after the passing of three years (1189-368).[8] He considers heeding the angel's warning but does not want to fail Amis (1276-81). Finally, he decides to participate in the duel even though he will incur God's wrath (1284). This decision demonstrates how greatly he values the oath of friendship that he and Amis have sworn to one another (145-56).

After Amis and Belisaunt care for the leprous Amiloun for a year, an angel brings messages to both men that the leprosy can be cured through the blood of Amis' children shed on the morning of Christmas (2185-226). This poses a moral quandary for Amis. On the one hand, although the message is from an angel, "to slen his childre so ȝing, / It were a dedli sinne" 'to kill his children who are so young would be a mortal sin' (2246-47). Also, he deeply loves his children and does not want to kill them (2216-18). On the other hand, he loves Amiloun intensely, as shown when he assaults him earlier in the narrative because he believes that a strange leper (really Amiloun) has killed his dear friend (2059-100). Finally, he decides that his friend's own sacrifice in the judicial combat calls for reciprocity (2296-300), and he summons the state of mind needed to kill his children and:

> ... hent his kniif wiþ dreri mode
>
> & tok his children þo;

8 Susan Dannenbaum writes that the placement of the angelic warning before the duel greatly improves the narrative structure found in the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Amis e Amilun*, where the warning occurs after the duel (as it does in the contemporary chanson de geste) ("Insular" 619-20).

For he nold nouȝt spille her blode,

Ouer a bacine fair & gode

Her þrotes he schar atvo.

& when he hadde hem boþe slain,

He laid hem in her bed ogain,

-No wonder þei him were wo-

& hilde hem, þat no wiȝt schuld se,

As noman hadde at hem be; (2306-15)

... seized his knife with a sad manner

And he took his children then;

Because he did not want to spill any of their blood,

Over a fair and good basin

He cut their throats apart.

And when he had slain them both,

He laid them in their bed again

-It is no wonder that it was sorrowful to him-

And covered them, that no man should see,

As if no one had been at them.

The children sleep through their deaths. Nicole Clifton argues that this emphasizes their defenseless state and increases the pathetic nature of the scene (124). Putting the children back in bed would seem like a tender fatherly act, but as the narrator explains, he does this to hide what he has done. Similarly, he locks the door to the nursery and hides the keys to

conceal the truth from the rest of the household (2317-20). These acts suggest that Amis feels guilt despite the divine instruction to kill the children, and we see his attempt to gain absolution afterward by praying in his chapel (2353-64).

Amis and Belisaunt both feel "wo" 'sadness' at the prospect of their children's death (2216, 2389), but they nonetheless consider the children somewhat disposable. The narrator writes that the children are "Þe fairest þat miȝt bere liue" 'the fairest that might bear life' (1535), and their beauty is recalled as their father watches them sleep before killing them (2285-86). Still, he slays them, and although Amiloun reacts with sorrow when he learns that his friend has killed his children (2329-34), Amis reassures him that "'Ihesu, when it is his will, / May send me childer mo'" 'When it is his will, Jesus may send me more children' (2336-37). Belisaunt shares this sentiment when her husband tells her what he has done (2389-400). This belief that children are a gift sent by God helps show how we should view this filicide. If Amis considers himself a murderer, it would be foolish for him to believe that God would reward him with more children. Rather, Amis is like one of the sacrificing fathers seen in the previous chapters.

The narrator of *Amis and Amiloun* has used the filicide episode for both a material purpose and a moral one, though the latter seems to be of greater importance in this case than the former. Enough detail regarding the children's deaths is provided to captivate the audience and move the plot along (and thus fulfill the material purpose), though admittedly it does not have far to go, as the tale is almost complete. Divine intervention, however, makes the exemplary purpose particularly obvious to the audience. Those who follow God's will are rewarded (such as through the resurrection of the children), and those who do not are

punished (such as through leprosy). The placement of the critical filicide episode on Christmas reminds the audience of God's sacrifice of his own son and thus further emphasizes the sacrificial nature of the filicide. Susan Crane Dannenbaum has argued that the child sacrifice made in this text demonstrates a prioritization of chivalric values (namely sworn brotherhood) over "moral issues" and that this valuation of the secular over the sacred is typical of "exemplary romance" ("Guy" 364-65). While Amiloun's decision to fight in the guise of his friend clearly shows that he prizes Amis' earthly life over his own earthly life and perhaps even his own afterlife, the filicide situation is more complicated, since the secular and sacred are not neatly divided in the medieval world and especially in this episode. Elizabeth Ashman Rowe follows Dannenbaum's lead and remarks, "The happy ending of the romance, in which two wrongs appear to make a right, seems to show Christ and the angels looking down from heaven and saying, 'Look how much these two men love each other - surely they have expiated whatever sins they committed. 'But theirs is not a Christian love of God, any more than Tristan's and Isolde's is" (86 n. 20). This criticism would have one believe that the divine blessing of the filicide occurs only after the fact, as if it were a plan conceived by the friends themselves. This is not the case. Rather, God sends angels to both men to tell of the divinely sanctioned cure. The friends receive an opportunity to remedy their past wrongs regarding the judicial combat by following God's instructions instead of spurning them, as Amiloun has already done. Certainly, the preservation of the sworn brotherhood is a chief concern in the narrative, but that preservation does not necessitate the undervaluing of sacred concerns, and, as will be discussed more below, the sworn friendship is not devoid of sacred influence.

Amis et Amile

Like the previously examined versions of the Amicus and Amelius legend, the twelfth-century *Amis et Amile* depicts the lives of two men who were identical except in parentage and whose great love and loyalty for one another were noteworthy.[9] Ami and Amile make dramatic sacrifices for one another in this highly detailed chanson de geste. The two prove their value to the emperor Charlemagne, and his daughter Belissant soon falls in love with Amile (lines 205-420). Meanwhile, Hardré has begun to plot against the companions since their entrance into Charlemagne's court (237-50) and waits for an opportunity to denounce them to their lord. To save face in front of the emperor, however, he offers his niece Lubias to them, and Ami agrees to marry her (466-82). Amile refuses the affections of Belissant on numerous occasions (612-42), but she remains intent and under the cover of darkness, slips into his bed and allows him to think that she is a servant so he will have sex with her (662-91). Hardré hears them, and after he tells the emperor, he demands that Belissant be killed for her impure acts (692-733). To save her, Amile must duel with Hardré, but since he did sleep with her, he is sure to die in the proscribed judicial combat. Ami saves Amile's life by surreptitiously taking his place in the fight and overcoming the traitor (734-1682). When Charlemagne offers Belissant's hand in marriage to the triumphant Amile (really Ami, who has previously married Lubias), he agrees to marry Belissant despite a divine warning that he will be struck with leprosy for his bigamous oath (1683-799). Ami manages to have Belissant swear specifically to marry Amile, however, and after the companions re-assume their true identities, Amile and Belissant wed in a church in Blaye (1835-39, 1969-71). They make their home in Riviers, while Ami returns to Lubias, becomes

9 I have used the edition by Peter F. Dembowski but have also consulted that by Conrad Hofmann.

leprous, and finds himself homeless because of his disease (1886-2410). After his leprous friend eventually arrives at his home, Amile kills his sons Moran and Gascelin and cures Ami's leprosy by bathing his friend in the children's blood (3021-76).

Ami's leprosy has caused him intense suffering, both emotional and physical; he has lost not only his lands in Blaye, all but two of his men, his wife Lubias, and his child, but he has also lost all the tissue from his thighs (2587-88). By the time an angel comes to tell him how to be cured, he has only one good arm left and wants to die (2781-87). The angel renews his hope for recovery, but he hesitates to tell Amile, despite the demonstrated strength of their friendship. Finally, when Amile foreshadows what is to come by offering anything he has, including wife and children (2836-42), Ami tells him how the leprosy can be cured:

> "Sire, il me dist, je nel voz quier celer,
> Que voz deïsse et volsisse rouver
> Se voz douz fiuls que tant poéz amer,
> Ce est Morans et Gascelins li ber,
> Se voz por moi les voléz decoper,
> Le sanc resoivre dedens un bacin cler
> Et le mien cors de celui sanc laver,
> Adonc porroie ma santé recouvrer." (2909-16)
> "Sire, he said to me, I don't want to hide this from you,
> What I should tell you and should want to ask,
> If your two sons whom you can love so much,
> That is, Moran and the noble Gascelin,

If you would be willing to decapitate them for me,

To save the blood in an clean bowl,

And bathe my body with their blood,

Then I would be able to regain my health."

When Amile hears this news, a mix of emotions renders him speechless:

Li cuens l'entent, si conmence a plorer,

Ne sot que faire, ne pot un mot sonner.

Moult li est dur et au cuer trop amer

De ses douz fiuls que il ot engendréz,

Com les porra ocirre et afoler! (2917-21)

The count hears this and begins to cry.

He doesn't know what to do; he cannot speak a word.

It is very hard for him and bitter to his heart

Regarding his two sons whom he fathered.

How could he kill and destroy them?

At this point, the narrator interjects a remark about the horror of filicide:

C'est moult grant chose d'omme mort restorer

Et si est maus des douz anfans tuer,

Nus n'en porroit le pechié pardonner,

Fors Dex de glorie qui se laissa pener. (2929-32)

It's a very great thing to resurrect a dead man,

And it is evil to kill two children.

There is no one able to pardon that sin

Except the God of glory who allowed himself to suffer.

Despite his initial reservations and the narrator's moral interjection, Amile quickly realizes that the right thing to do is to kill his children; not only does he owe it to Ami, but the instruction to do so has come from God. He makes preparations while others from the household are at mass (2952-64). His determination, however, does not prevent him from fainting after looking at the children tenderly while they are asleep (2965-69). When he raises his sword, the elder awakens, is terrified by what he sees, and asks him what he is doing because "'[a]inz mais nus peres tel chose ne pensa'" 'no father has ever thought of doing such a thing' (2985-94).[10] Amile tells his son exactly what he intends and why, and the child seems pleased with this response and with the idea that he and his brother will soon be in heaven (3000-12). He also notes that since Amile fathered them, he has the right to use them as he wishes (3003-05).

This coincides with a belief uttered by the hero Guillaume d'Orange in the *Enfances Vivien* regarding the use of a child to save a parent. In that epic, his brother Garin d'Anseüne has been captured by Saracens and is being held in Spain. Garin's kidnappers have demanded that the family provide not money but the boy Vivien as ransom; according to the boy's mother, the Saracens plan to torture and kill her son because of perceived injustices done to them by her father Naimon (285-96). Guillaume promotes the exchange and explains that parents,

10 Francis Bar notes that in the Latin *Vita Amici et Amelii*, the father's grief wakes the children, who then laugh; Bar maintains that this laughter in the face of death must be in whatever version served as the source for the vita and the chanson de geste, especially since the motif repeats itself in *Jourdain de Blaye*, when Fromont prepares to kill Garnier (96 n. 2). The *topos* of children laughing in the face of danger emphasizes their absolute innocence.

"De ce qu'il ont norit en lor aé

Se doient il guarir et repasser;

Mal soit de l'arbre c'o vergier est planté

Qui son seignor ne fair onbre en esté." (lines 313-16)[11]

"With the one whom they have reared during their lives,

Ought to be able to save and heal themselves;

Bad is the tree that is planted in the garden

that does not provide shade for his lord in the summer."

In the metaphor, the child is the tree, and the lord who planted it is the parent. In exchange for being given life (through the planting), the tree ought to give shade to the planter. Thus, because parents sustain their children's lives, children ought to reciprocate, should this prove necessary. This does not mean, however, that parents dispatched their children without care or regret. Sarah Kay points out that Garin, the father whose life is saved when he is exchanged for his son Vivien in the *Enfances Vivien*, "sees himself as a filicide and promises to undergo penance" (93). Amile, likewise, contends with feelings of guilt. After another emotion-driven fainting spell,

Li cuens Amiles vint vers le lit esrant,

Hauce l'espee, li fiuls le col estent.

Or est merveilles se li cuers ne li ment.

La teste cope li peres son anfant,

Le sanc[12] reciut el cler bacin d'argent,

11 I am indebted to Sarah Kay's reference to this passage in *The* Chansons de geste *in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (93).

12 I prefer Hofmann's reading of "sanc" here to Dembowski's reading of "sans," for which he provides no explanatory note, either in his introductory comments on the language of the poem or in his notes and

A poi ne chiet a terre. (3018-23)

Count Amile went at once toward the bed,

He raised his sword, and his son extended his neck.

Now it is wondrous that his heart did not fail him.

The father cut off the head of his child

And collected the blood in the clean silver bowl.

He nearly fainted on the ground.

Amile replaces his elder child's head on his body, and then repeats his actions with his younger son (3024-30). Afterwards, he covers the children and then goes to bathe Ami in the blood. The cure works, and the friends briefly celebrate (3031-152). Amile then publicly admits how he has achieved his friend's cure and encourages the crowd to decapitate him and his dear, newly healed companion, for he holds them both culpable of a great crime (3153-67). When he attempts to provide evidence of his crime, however, the children are later found resurrected playing with an apple made of gold (3168-92).[13] The apple, in a Christian context, generally finds itself associated with original sin, for Eve took one of the fruits (presumed to be apples) forbidden by God, and after Adam and she had eaten, God cast them out of Eden, that is out of his presence (Gen. 2.16-3.24). Here, the resurrected children's apple, which is intact (that is, uneaten), points to their innocent, sinless nature and serves as a memento of the time that they spent in the presence of God before their bodily resurrection. Rodulfus Tortarius' version of this tale leaves the children with red apples (317), and the red

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glossary at the end.

13 Clifton mistakenly refers to this "pome" as a "golden ball" rather than an apple; she also notes that the Anglo-Norman version of the tale has the children "playing with a sunbeam" and that the Middle English has them playing without an object (128). The similarity in color of the sunbeam and the apple does not seem coincidental, especially since the sun and sunbeams can serve as markers of the divine.

of the fruit could be meant to parallel and highlight the red color of the blood they shed. Here, however, the single apple is gold in color. This apple thus also calls to mind the golden apples of the Hesperides mentioned in Hesiod's *Theogony* (lines 211-16) and associated with the judgment of Paris, which have more to do with immortality than with sin.[14] The Hesperides, children of Night and thus sisters to Death, guard these apples on an island in the far western reaches of the world where, like Eden and Heaven, ordinary men do not tread.

Despite the narrator's condemnation of killing children, filicide is, in this text, sanctioned. Only by following God's commands, no matter how puzzling they may seem, can the moral failing represented by the leprosy be overcome. In the twelfth century, leprosy was believed to be transmitted, at least in part, through sexual activity, and Béroul famously explores this notion in his *Roman de Tristan*, with which the composer of *Amis et Amile* seems familiar.[15] Not only does the leper Yvain ask Marc to give Yseut to him and the other lepers because they have strong, unfulfilled sexual desires (lines 1190-216), but also in the famous Mal Pas scene, Tristan, pretending to be a leper, explains that he was infected with the disease by a lover whose husband was leprous (3760-73). In the chanson de geste, Ami has sworn an oath to enter into a bigamous relationship, and while he does not engage in sexual activity with Charlemagne's daughter, the agreement constitutes enough of a moral failing to render him a leper. Amile and Belissant (to a greater extent because of her guile) are also culpable, as their lack of sexual restraint has put Ami in jeopardy, which is why the cure for the leprosy requires their sacrifice. While she was not a witting party to the killing, the death of her children certainly would have affected her, and as she declares after Moran

14 The Nordic goddess Idun, like the Hesperides, keeps golden apples associated with immortality, but the narrator of this chanson was unlikely to have been familiar with Scandinavian mythology.

15 Both texts contain *topoi* such as the discovery of an adulterous couple by a *losengier*, a judicial combat, and the placement of a sword between two people as a symbol of chastity.

and Gascelin's resurrection is known, she would have helped Amile had she known of his plan to kill their children to save his dear friend (3228-32). The weapon used in killing the children further connects the cure to the cause of the leprosy. A sword certainly has practical advantages when it comes to decapitating someone, but it is also symbolic. The literal sword of Ami in the duel with Hardré and the figural sword (the phallus) of Amile ultimately led to the leprosy.

If God has ordained this filicide, why does Amile have so much anxiety - especially anxiety that manifests itself physically and so inconveniently - regarding his decision? His loyalty is split. On the one hand, he has someone who is essentially a twin (and thus a second self) who fought for him so that he could live, marry Belissant, and have two sons, Moran and Gascelin; on the other hand, he has a duty to protect and maintain this nuclear family.[16] Furthermore, God's angels have encouraged him to do something utterly heinous and blatantly against the commandment not to kill (Exod. 20.13). The decision Amile faces is similar to that faced by Abraham, a notion to which the poet draws the audience's attention with an explicit reference in this narrative to the Biblical tale. Earlier in the poem, when Charlemagne's wife fears that Amile has betrayed his hostages (Buevon, Belissant, and herself), which would condemn them all to death, she begins her prayer to God by acknowledging that he had ordered Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and that his angel had transported Isaac to heaven to be with "'les Innocens,'" the innocent children martyred by Herod (1277-84). The parallel between the Biblical filicide (altered as it is) and that in this epic romance cannot be ignored, as it helps to demonstrate the justice in Amile's actions.

16 Kay argues that paternal "ambivalence" is commonplace in the Old French epics and that fathers feel torn between their wives and children, who represent their present and future, and their youthful (past) selves (91). While this does not seem to hold true here in the most literal sense, it may be worth considering that as Ami and Amile are doublets, Ami could reasonably represent Amile's youthful self.

Furthermore, once he has explained the situation to his elder son (the text does not indicate whether this is Moran or Gascelin), the child tries to help his father with the decapitation by extending his neck (3000-19). Sarah Kay has argued that the child, while willing to be sacrificed, does not desire it (95-96), but his action of extension seems to argue otherwise; were he merely willing, he could instead have lain still and not aided his father. Instead, he seems to realize that being in heaven - as Isaac is according to the empress's prayer - is the most favorable situation possible in this idealized medieval world.

This *chanson* clearly shows that the parent-child relationship is a highly emotional one. While Amile primarily demonstrates his affection for his children by fainting repeatedly when he prepares to kill them, we can imagine that the relationship is much like that between Ami and his only son Girart,[17] since Amile and Ami are doublets. The relationship between Ami and Girart exemplifies the loving father-son bond. After Ami becomes a leper, Lubias orders the people of Blaye to disregard him, but seven-year-old Girart steps up to feed and care for his father, despite threats of physical abuse, until his mother has him locked away (2230-315).[18] When Lubias sends Ami out of Blaye, he begs her twice to let him see their son (2429-31, 2435-37), saying, "'en ma vie nel quier plus esgarder'" 'I desire nothing more in my life than to look at him' (2437). Her refusal drives him to tears (2442). When, as an

17 It is curious, given the blatant mirroring found in this legend and the greatly expanded nature of this version, that Ami has one son and that Amile has two. Ami's having one child, Girart, helps to keep the feud between his lineage and that of Hardré as simple as possible. There seems no clear reason, however, for Amile to have both Moran and Gascelin as sons.

18 The fragmentary C manuscript of the Anglo-Norman *Amis e Amilun* contains a variant in which the leper Amilun has a son named Florentyn whose mother becomes enraged because he cares for his leprous father; she physically abuses the child, and he dies from those injuries three days afterward (Clifton 118-21). This variant does not appear in the L manuscript transcribed and edited by Hideka Fukui for the Anglo-Norman Text Society (*Amys e Amillyoun)*. In most respects other than in his death, the child seems akin to *Ami et Amile*'s Girart. Clifton suggests that the Florentyn variant may represent an attempt "to correct" the Anglo-Norman version using knowledge from the Middle English narrative (137-38). The child's death emphasizes the evil nature of his mother.

adult, Girart learns that his father has been restored to health and has returned to Blaye, he is so overcome with emotion that he faints and nearly falls from his horse (3403-04). He then thanks God, rushes as quickly as he can to where his father is, and embraces and kisses him (3407-22).

A striking feature of this epic is the emphasis of divine authority over not only secular authority but also the authority of the church. Charlemagne, despite being emperor, cannot control his own daughter; her sexual encounter with Amile would have gone totally unnoticed had it not been for Hardré. Ami does not even consider going to Charlemagne for aid after being struck ill. Instead, he does seek the aid of his godfather, the Pope Yzoréz, who welcomes him and cares for him, despite the leprosy, but he cannot cure him, and when Ysoréz dies, Ami must flee Rome or risk dying of starvation (2464-508). Only by obeying the instructions given by the angel can the leprosy be cured.

The filicide episode of *Amis et Amile* works here as both matière and as example. While Amile's sacrifice of his children is rather close to the end of the narrative and thus may seem less materially necessary to the flow of the plot, it mirrors Ami's sacrifice in the judicial combat (Amile's sacrifice saves Ami, just as Ami's sacrifice saves Amile), and this reciprocity is very important in a narrative so concerned with doublets.[19] The exemplary function of this text is obvious. True friendship ought to be valued, but as the friends' joint pilgrimage at the end of their lives shows,[20] friendship is not valued above God. To assert that would foolishly

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19 Calin argues that Amile sacrifices more than his friend because by killing his children, he also risks his own life, as killing the children would be a capital offense, whereas Ami has only sacrificed his physical health, contact with his family, and power over Blaye (90-91). In this comparison, however, he has neglected the risk Ami has already taken by fighting Hardré to the death.

20 Dembowski has astutely pointed out in his essay "*Ami et Amile*, une chanson de geste" that the companions' baptism in Rome almost certainly occurs because their parents also were pilgrims (10). This framing of their lives by pilgrimage further emphasizes the Christian nature of the poem.

place a limitation on the power of the divine in the medieval mind. Rather, as pointed out by Peggy McCracken, "the friendship is preordained: Ami and Amile are conceived at the same hour, born on the same day, and resemble each other perfectly" ("Engendering" 62). While members of the audience likely would not be confronted with the same challenges faced by Ami and Amile, the degree of sacrifice for one's fellow man and for God is one to which the narrator urges the audience to aspire (Calin 95-99). Each of the companions thus serves as an ideal Christian everyman.

Jourdain de Blaye

The late twelfth-century (or early thirteenth-century) Old French chanson de geste *Jourdain de Blaye* functions as a sequel to *Amis et Amile*, as the title character - the grandson of Ami - has many adventures while working towards regaining Blaye from Fromont, a nephew of the traitor Hardré.[21] In his introduction to *Amis et Amile,* Peter F. Dembowski refers to the ensemble narrative presented by these chansons as "la petite 'geste de Blaye'" (x). Within this chanson de geste, Renier and Eremborc, who are godparents to Jordain, switch their own baby Garnier and their infant lord and godson in order to protect him; then, they deliver Garnier to Fromont even though they know he will kill the baby (lines 486-693).

Fromont explains, in *Jourdain de Blaye,* that he seeks vengeance against the line of Ami because that hero, while pretending to be Amile, has killed Hardré in the famous judicial combat described in the earlier chanson (76-79, 220-26). The traitor of the latter chanson sees that as a great injustice to his family, for Hardré, to whom he applies the epithet "'le droiturier'" 'the rightful' (77), spoke the truth when he told Charlemagne about the illicit

21 As with *Ami et Amile*, I have used the edition by Peter F. Dembowski but have also consulted that by Conrad Hofmann.

behavior of Belissant and Amile within the prior narrative.[22] Thus, jealous Fromont plots to take Blaye from Jordain's father Girart, the faithful son of Ami, and with the help of some corrupt servants, decapitates him and his wife Hermenjart while they sleep (63-118). He then seizes Blaye by force, to the chagrin of the people of Blaye, with whom Girart was immensely popular (119-47). Upon the advice of his henchmen, Fromont then sets out to kill the baby Jordain, who is in Valtamise with his godparents (160-254). Renier and Eremborc do their best to protect the child, but after being imprisoned and savagely tortured for over a year, they realize that they need a new plan (333-482).

Eremborc suggests that they save Jordain by switching him with their own child (486-91). She notes that it will work because the children resemble each other, are the same age, and have not been seen by Fromont and his men (488-89). Renier is initially stunned by this suggestion but prays for guidance and finally agrees to the plan (493-539). He then negotiates with Fromont, who must promise not to harm (literally touch) the child before they can embrace and kiss him (548-60), and Eremborc ensures that the nursemaids, who know the difference between the children, do not reveal the truth to Fromont (575-94).

Though the people of Blaye ask Fromont to be merciful as Renier and Eremborc deliver the child to the villain (690-95), he is anything but:

> "Sire Fromont, frans chevaliers gentiz,
>
> Dou fil Girart car en aiéz merci,
>
> Mait le as laittres[23] por Deu qui ne menti,

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22 Despite the truth of Hardré's revelation, the narrative does not elicit pity for this figure, who is descended from Ganelon, prays to the Devil before his second day of fighting against Ami, and as Calin notes, is based upon the historical would-be assassin Hardradus (77).

23 Bernard Ribémont's note on this line explains that the crowd is calling on Fromont to have Jordain raised in a monastery (32).

Si proiera adéz, sire, por ti."

Li fel l'entent, onques ne respondi,

Ainz trait l'espee, par vigor le feri,

Le chief li tranche, a la terre chaït. (696-702)

"Lord Fromont, good, noble knight,

Have mercy now on the son of Girart,

Put him in a monastery, for God who does not lie,

So that he will soon pray for you, lord."

The villain listened to this. He never responded.

Rather, he drew his sword. He struck him with force.

He cut off the head, which fell to the ground.

More than a thousand spectators faint upon seeing the atrocity, which demonstrates how horrific the action is to the audience (703). Garnier finds peace, however, as God's holy angels takes the child's soul into heaven (704-08).

In the first portion of this narrative, Garnier and Jordain are infants and thus do little, but each serves an important role in the poem. Neither is described in much physical detail, though both are said to be attractive (21, 613). In keeping with their lack of agency, neither is called by name often. The poet refers to Jordain as "le fil Girart" 'the son of Girart,' and he remains unnamed until line 323. Similarly, the poet refers to Garnier as "le fiz Renier" 'the son of Renier' when he builds suspense and pathos by noting that this innocent laughing baby does not know anything about treachery or traitors (609-12). The infant is called by name only twice, both times by his mother in her final moments with him (647, 653). As she

laments his fate, she says to him, "'Biaus fiz Garnier, mar voz vi onques né / Mar voz portai neuf mois en mon costel, / Onques mais anfes ne fu tant desirréz'" 'Beautiful son Garnier, it is unfortunate for me that I ever saw you born, unfortunate for me that I carried you for nine months in my side; there was never a child who was more wanted' (653-55). Eremborc clearly loves her son, and she imagines that she will continue to be pained in the future when she sees other children his age learning to be knights (656-65). While Renier does not verbalize his love for his child as eloquently as his wife does, the difficulty he has in agreeing to the plan speaks volumes. When he prays for divine guidance, he proclaims,

> "Fu onques peres qui son anfant traïst
> Ne por paor de morir le randist!
> Et nonporquant il avenra ainsiz.
> Je le ferai tout a vostre plaisir
> Que prouz iestez et saige." (496-500)
> "Never was there a father who betrayed his son
> Or handed him over for fear of death!
> And nonetheless it will happen thus
> That I will do this completely according to your will,
> For you are noble and wise."

Clearly, he finds the plan highly objectionable and contrary to expected parental behavior, but he will agree to it because it is God's will, which supersedes his own feelings and desires to protect his young lord. Eremborc and Renier's demonstrated love for their child helps the

audience understand how to interpret their decision to save Jordain by allowing Garnier's murder.

While Eremborc and Renier have knowingly condemned their child to death by handing him over to Fromont, they are not judged as murderers in the narrative; instead, they are shown to be good people who have made an enormous sacrifice in the name of the greater good. The poet introduces Eremborc as a good, God-loving woman (281-82) and quickly demonstrates her intelligence. After Fromont imprisons Renier, she realizes that she may meet the same fate, so she gives explicit instructions to her people to protect Jordain until he is old enough to seek revenge (294-302). She demonstrates strength and moral fortitude in her verbal skirmishes against the traitor and later during her unjust incarceration and torture. When she first contends with Fromont over his request that she surrender Jordain, she questions his definition of "'droiture'" 'justice' and proclaims that those of her lineage do not commit treason (310-16); the narrator labels this "la fierté Eremborc" 'the daring of Eremborc' (317). She proves herself even better able to resist torture than her husband. When Renier seems to be losing heart and to be considering giving in to Fromont, she chastises him for his weakness (464-76). Renier, while not as resolute as his wife, is nonetheless an honorable man and proves this often, especially through martial service. The importance he places on his feudal bond and justice is demonstrated when he condemns Fromont for killing Girart: "'Itel seignor m'as tolu et emblé / Que plus amoie c'omme de mere né. / Dex m'en envoit droiture!'" 'You have taken away and stolen such a lord from me whom I loved more than any man born of a mother. God send me justice for it' (237-39). While Fromont is now, through usurpation, lord of Blaye, Renier's use of the familiar and insulting

"tu" when addressing him shows that he views Jordain, not Fromont, as his new lord, and it is to this new bond that he adheres when he agrees to Eremborc's plan (533-39).

Despite the fact that she is the one who initially proposes switching Jordain and Garnier and considers it the only way to protect Jordain, Eremborc's own judgment of her and Renier's actions is unfavorable; she states to Fromont that they are condemned for their actions unless God pities them, for they have committed a rare and horrible sin:

> "Ainz ferons, sire, de si tres grant pechié
> La penitance toute de chief en chief
> Dou fil Girart que voz avonz baillié.
> Perdu en sons se Dex n'en a pitié.
> Ne parrons mais a home desoz ciel." (727-31).
> "Rather, Lord, for such a very great sin, we will do
> Complete and total penance
> For Girart's son whom we entrusted to you.
> We are lost because of it, if God does not show pity.
> We no longer appear like any man under the sky."

The mere fact that she mentions the potential for God's mercy, however, suggests that it is not out of the question. Furthermore, Jordain does not condemn his foster parents; if anything, his discovery of their sacrifice of Garnier further cements their relationship. He is moved when he first learns of their boundless devotion from Renier: "'Asséz grant foi me portastez, biaus sire, / Quant voz por moi vostre anfant oceïstez'" 'You bore me very great loyalty, good sir, when you killed your child for me' (944-45). He recalls the generosity of their deed when

he is later separated from them and washes up on the shore of an unknown land (1278-89), and his desire to relocate his foster parents is unquenchable, for they are bound both feudally and emotionally. When he tells of Garnier's death to the archbishop who has been caring for his wife Oriabel, the man of God provides him with twenty men and supplies for the voyage to find Renier and Eremborc (2584-637). This implicit blessing of the godparents by the archbishop shows that the church views their actions as a contribution to the greater good. At the end of the narrative, Jordain rewards Renier and Eremborc for their enduring loyalty and love, as well as their great suffering, by giving them all of the lands of Blaye (4199-211). The reward of land is one of the greatest possible gifts in the chansons de geste and clearly demonstrates the worthiness of Eremborc and Renier's actions by elevating their stature.

The maintenance of one's lineage (and land) plays a prominent role in *Jourdain de Blaye*. Even the opening lines convey this to the audience: "Huimais orréz avant de lor lingnie / Et de la geste qui des barons issirent" 'Now you will hear first of their lineage and of the family from which the noble men issued forth' (8-9). Fromont's desire to harm Girart and his family stems from an interfamilial conflict from the previous generation, and when he succeeds in his initial goal, he is urged to wipe out the whole family line (to put a final end to the conflict): "'Qui bien weult l'aubre afoler et destruire, / Se par dedenz n'en cope la racinne, / Sachiéz de voir, les branches enracinnent'" 'Whoever truly wishes to kill and destroy the tree and doesn't cut the root from within, know truly, the branches [will] take root' (153-55). His failure to destroy the branch that is Jordain (though he has destroyed Renier's branch, Garnier) leads to his doom, for although Jordain has countless adventures, marries a beautiful and devoted wife, has an equally beautiful child, and reunites with his beloved

godparents, his work is not done until he has retaken Blaye - and thereby reestablished his patrimony - and punished the traitor. Fromont may well feel entitled to the land of Blaye, for it did once belong to a member of his family, the brother of Hardré and father of Lubias. Lubias clearly believes that she retains control over that land after her marriage, for she declares, as the Lady of Blaye, that Amile should be imprisoned for killing her uncle (*Ami et Amile* 2021-22); she also uses this control to justify ejecting Ami from Blaye when he becomes a leper. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, women living in various parts of France did possess the right to control land and were not forced to cede their lands after marriage (Paterson 223-24), so Lubias's claim to power is not an unreasonable one. After her husband's cure, however, Lubias places herself in his power (3433-34). He first seizes and then later returns the land to her, and then he dubs his son and gives him all of his land (3442-61). It seems then, at the end of *Ami et Amile*, that the land of Blaye properly belongs to Girart and that it should pass directly to his only child Jordain, the only grandchild of the Lady of Blaye, when he dies and not to a more distant relation. Bloch writes that if those who owned land died without heirs, the land "reverted to the lineage of its origin" (71). If Fromont had been successful in killing the infant Jordain, he may have been legally entitled to Blaye, since it would have reverted back to the family of Lubias's father.[24] With Jordain alive, however, the land seems unquestionably his.

Not only does the main plot deal intrinsically with protecting the line of Ami, the lineage of other key figures receives attention in the narrative. Eremborc, while imprisoned, compares her own lineage to Fromont's; in keeping with the standard bilateral opposition

24 The narrator of *Jourdain de Blaye* does not explain whether Fromont is the child of a brother or a sister of Hardré or how, precisely, he may be related to Lubias and her descendants.

found in the chansons de geste, hers is quite noble and includes the King of Aragon, while his includes the infamous traitor Ganelon (406-11). Fromont, when ordering Renier to send his son (really Jordain) to Blaye offers, "'Mes oirs sera'" 'He will be my heir' (790-92).[25] The traitor turns on Jordain, however, as the teen grows to resemble his biological father, and calls him the bastard child of Girart and Eremborc (831-45, 877-85). This is a grave insult (especially given the public venue in which Fromont hurls it), for the bastard child of a noble is still perceived as a "'Fiz a putain'" 'son of a whore' (831). Once Jordain knows his true lineage, he is proud of it (1422-33), and this noble lineage plays an important role in the fate of his daughter Gaudiscete. In Constantinople, the emperor cannot bear that his son has fallen in love with this girl of unknown origin,[26] so he arranges for her to be sent to a bordello (3347-69); he happily arranges for Alys to marry the girl, however, once he discovers that she is descended from a noble line (3526-37).

The filicide portion of this epic serves an important material function, for it allows the title character to escape his parents' fate and grow to avenge them. It also provides an important opportunity for character development (especially of Eremborc). At least as important as this material function, however, is the exemplary function. While the sacrifice of Garnier is certainly tragic, it is necessary to illustrate the depth of the ideal feudal bond. Eremborc and Renier make the ultimate sacrifice for their lord Jordain; they sacrifice their own line so that his has the opportunity to continue and thrive.

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25 This offer is especially puzzling in light of the existence of Huistasce, Fromont's son, whom Jordain decapitates in an interesting parallel (1007-10). Furthermore, Jordain cannot be integrated into this family of villains - despite his biological ties through Lubias - because his very nature is that of a hero.

26 The Queen of Cemaire had sent the girl to Constantinople because she perceived the girl's beauty as a threat to the continuance of her own line (3090-112).

Daurel et Beton

In the twelfth-century Old Occitan fragmentary epic *Daurel et Beton*, the joglar Daurel and his wife Biatris sacrifice their youngest son, Daurelet, in order to save Beton, the child of their slain benefactor Duke Bove d'Antona and his wife Ermenjart, the sister of Charlemagne.[27] The villain Gui d'Aspremont, who slew Bove because he coveted the duke's wife, wishes to secure his own position by killing Beton. This desire stems from part of the oath sworn by Bove to Gui at the beginning of the text:

> "Mas s'ieu prengui molher e [no mi] venh enfanto,
> S'ieu mori denan vos, companh, ieu la vos do;
> Mos castels e mas vilas, ma tera e maio
> Vos solvi, bels companh, e·us meti a bando." (18-21)
> "But if I take a wife and no child comes to me,
> If I die before you, friend, I give her to you;
> My castles and my towns, my lands and my houses
> I give to you, fair friend, and deliver completely to you."

This oath serves as Bove's will. The duke has made arrangements for the disposal of his estate in the event that he dies without an heir, but since he does have an infant son, the duke's lands, homes, and other goods should pass to that child. For Gui to gain possession of Bove's estate legally, there must be no other heir; Beton must no longer exist.

Biatris, like Eremborc in *Jourdain de Blaye*, proposes the switching of infants to save the noble child:

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27 I have used the edition by Arthur S. Kimmel, *A Critical Edition of the Old Provençal Epic of Daurel et Beton*, here.

"Vec vos aissi aquest efan que jatz?

Vostre [senher] e mos filh propiatz

En una nueh ambidoi foro natz.

Batejet lo lo duc qu'es traspasatz

En aicel pali; e vos l'evolopatz

E Betonetz el bresolet colgatz,

E nostre filh al traïdor portat

E de luy fasa totas sas volontatz.

Morra mos filh, mo senher er salvatz!" (1005-13)

"Do you see this child who lies [here]?

Your lord and my own son

Were both born the same night.

The Duke who has died baptized him

In this silken cloth. Wrap him,

And set little Beton in the cradle,

And take our son to the traitor,

With him let him [the traitor] fulfill all his desires.

My son will die; my lord will be saved!"

Neither Biatris not Daurel literally slays Daurelet, but they decide to give him to Gui knowing that he will not survive. As in *Jourdain de Blaye*, the sacrificing father asks for the traitor not to harm the child (1018-19), and here, the father is the one who literally hands the child to the villain (1022). The poet describes Gui's actions with brutal detail:

So dit lo tracher: "Gardat qu'eu volrai far."

Pren lo pels pes, dona ne a .i. pilar;

Amdos los ueilh li fes del cap volar

E las servelas trastotas escampar[28] (1030-33).

The traitor said this: "Watch what I would like to do."

He took him by the foot, strikes him against a pillar.

He made both of the eyes fly from the head,

And the brains scattered everywhere.

The narrator repeats the gory details of Gui's actions against Daurelet (though the child is not named in these passages) through various voices throughout the text. Bertran, another of Daurel's sons, rails against the traitor for the death of Daurelet: "'Fels tracher Gui, no·m podet escapar; / La mort de mo fraire ara·us vuelh demandar, / De l'efantet que feris al pilar'" 'Evil traitor Gui, you cannot escape me; I now want to ask you [for retribution for] the death of my brother, of the child whom you struck against the pillar' (1304-06). Beton, in his confrontation with Charlemagne at the end of the epic, likewise mentions the blow against the pillar (2168-71). When Daurel tells the teenager Beton of his true lineage, he recounts how Daurelet's eyes flew from his head from the force of Gui's assault (1660-64). Similarly, when the joglar tells the Emir of Babilonia and his men why he and Beton have fled their homeland, he says,

"Volia m'ardre, e mi e l'enfan Beto,

E ieu, can vi non auria guerizo,

28 These details are virtually identical to a description found in Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon* of Herod's slaughter of the Innocents: "Inlisa ceruix cautibus / spargit cerebrum lacteum / oculosque per uulnus uomit" 'the nape of the neck struck against the rocks sprays milky-white brain and ejects the eyes through the wound' (12.118-20).

E luoc de lui diei li .i. mieu filho;

Vezen de totz lo pres per lo talo,

Feri n'al mur et eservelet lo;

Ieu soi sos hom, fih lh'en cest gazardo." (1834-39)

"He [Gui] wanted to burn me, both me and the child Beton,

And I, when I saw that there would be no salvation,

In place of him [Beton] I gave to him [Gui] one of my own sons;

We saw it all. He took him by the heel,

Struck him against a wall, and made his brains come out.

I am his [Beton's] man, my son [is] this gift to him."

The narrator provides few details of Daurelet beyond the manner of his death, though this should not be read as a sign that he lacks importance. We do know that he is the youngest of three sons (91), which is an interesting point, because he is not Daurel's primary heir. Like Garnier in *Jourdain de Blaye*, Daurelet is an attractive child: "L'efas fom bels, car fon be aleutat" 'the child was attractive because he was breast-fed well' (1017). This physical beauty enables him to serve as a substitute for Beton, as beauty is a characteristic of noble children in literature. When Daurelet is born, his father asks Bove to be the child's godfather, which he does by baptizing him "Daurelet de Monclar" before going on his fatal hunting expedition (347-56). This naming of the child foreshadows his importance as a substitute for Beton, since it shows that he will be a key figure within the tale. After Guy kills Daurelet brutally, Ermenjart tries to comfort Daurel, and the narrator interjects: "Non vi tant gran dol per .i. filh de [j]oglar: / Apres lo duc va l'efan sostrerar, / Per luy es mort, ben deu ondrat

estar" 'I never saw such great sorrow for the son of a joglar: the child will follow the duke in burial; through him he is dead; so he well ought to be honored' (1065-69). Daurelet's burial with Bove illustrates the honor given the slain infant.

Though Biatris and Daurel have two older sons, which means that the joglar's lineage is secure, they clearly do not view Daurelet as a disposable extra child, for their grief is intense. Biatris suggests the sacrifice, but this decision soon leads her to kill herself by intentionally falling from a high tower after Daurel sets out with Beton (1080-89, 1175-77). Immediately before her death, she laments her situation:

> "Laissa! caitiva, que poirai aras far!
> Mort es mos filh, no·l veirai recobrar,
> Mon pauc senhor aras ne vei anar
> E mo marit que·m degra capdelar." (1083-86)
> "Alas! Now what can I, wretch [that I am], do!
> My son is dead; I will not see him recover.
> Now I do not see my little lord go about
> And my husband, who ought to guide me."

While she does have two remaining sons, her grief over the youngest, coupled with the loss of her substitute son Beton, is insurmountable. Daurel is likewise affected by this death. The narrator describes the care with which the joglar wrapped his dead son: "E Daurel vai son efan ajustar, / En .i. bel pali l'a fait evolopar; / Se fo iratz no vos o sai comtar" 'And Daurel goes to get his child. He has him wrapped in a beautiful silk cloth. I can't manage to tell you how afflicted he was' (1041-43). Further into the narrative, even though he raises Beton as

his own child, he still grieves for his "'pauc filh''little son' (1661) and desires vengeance against Gui for Daurelet's death:

> E·l pros Daurel a Beto a pregat:
>
> "Coms debonaire, non sias pi[at]atz,
>
> A mi donar; mo filh verrai vengatz
>
> qu'el m'ausis, ieu rendrei lh'en son grat." (2056-59)
>
> And the worthy Daurel asked Beton:
>
> "Noble count, don't be compassionate
>
> Give him to me; I will see my son avenged
>
> Whom he [Gui] killed; I will pay him back for this."

We know that we should consider Daurel an honorable man despite his initial poverty and his profession. The joglar is generally looked down upon in literature,[29] as is evidenced by the tests Beton endures at the court of the Emir, who first voices his suspicions that Beton is not Daurel's son when the child is still a toddler (1253-55). This belief, based on the theory that no son of a joglar could be as remarkable as Beton, while denied vigorously by Daurel, resurfaces and is tested throughout the next ten years, until the Emir finally threatens him with prison unless he tells the truth (1260-799). Daurel, while a joglar, "be·is sap deportier" 'knows how to carry himself well' (80). He also receives great honors throughout

29 On the whole, outsiders viewed the joglar as a necessary figure in the world of the canso de gesta and in society but one not worthy of respect. The joglar performed the canso de gesta and thus had the power of knowledge and the ability to entertain, but he was still viewed as a lesser human being. According to Jacques Le Goff, "The Franciscan Berthold of Regensburg in the thirteenth century put all the 'estates of the world' into the 'family of Christ' except the Jews, strolling jongleurs, and vagabonds who formed the 'family of the devil'" (316). Hence, when St. Francis of Assisi referred to himself as "God's jongleur," he meant it as a mark of humility because "he really wanted to live like Christ," as one who is cast out by society (Le Goff 317). Daurel is remarkable because he is a rare example of a heroic joglar; Karen A. Wilde addresses his characterization in depth in "Daurel and Volker: The fiddler in medieval epic."

the text. Bove enjoys his playing so much that he invites the joglar to accompany him to Charlemagne's court (88-89). When Daurel explains that he cannot come because he has a wife and two sons to raise, the duke arranges for the family's care and even gives him a white palfrey (90-102). Further into the narrative, Bove rewards him with the castle of Montclar and - perhaps more significant - the right to pass the castle to his heirs (208-15). Even Charlemagne is impressed by Daurel, so much so that the emperor gives him a warhorse (169-70). The joglar makes an immense sacrifice when he chooses to save Beton; not only does he sacrifice his own child Daurelet, but he also sacrifices his wife and family, as his wife commits suicide, and he goes into exile in order to keep Beton safe. This level of sacrifice and commitment, according to Karen A. Wilde, elevates Daurel above all other figures in the canso (152). While Ermenjart cannot reward him financially for saving her son by giving up his own (for Gui has seized what was Bove's), she offers these words: "'Compaire senher, Dieus vos capdel e·us gar! / So aves fait que a[n]c hom mai non poc far, / C'om des so filh per so senhor salvar'" 'Lord friend, let God guide you and watch over you! You have done what no man could ever do, that a man would give his son to save his lord' (1062-64). To her, the sacrifice of Daurelet goes above and beyond the call of duty, which seems to contradict a suggestion made by Teruo Sato that filicide episodes of this nature may not have received much scholarly attention because "la substitution qu'exécuta Reniers de Vantamise ne serait pas tout à fait extraordinaire" 'the substitution that Renier de Vantamise makes was probably not totally unusual' and that such acts are congruent with the expected level of sacrifice for one's lord in a feudal society (668).

As in the strikingly similar *Jourdain de Blaye*, in *Daurel et Beton*, the filicide episode serves multiple functions. Its material use within the overall plot helps to entertain the audience, for the death of Daurelet, like the death of Garnier, allows the narrative to continue; the young lord can reach maturity and seek vengeance. The filicide also works as moral exemplum. The tragedy here is even more profound than that in *Jourdain de Blaye*, as evidenced by the death of Biatris. The sacrifice made by the joglar and his wife represents the strength of their bond to the family of Bove and Beton. Daurel explains to Gui (who has questioned him about his role in hiding Beton), that it was a matter of *drechura*, which William D. Paden defines as "rights, what is right, righteousness" (396). According to the joglar: "'Dretura m'o fes far, / Que so senhor deu hom tostemps amar'" 'Righteousness made me do it, for a man always ought to love his lord' (1028-29). The term applies not just in the context of feudal obligations but also in terms of how the world ought to function. In Marcabru's "L'autrier jost'una sebissa," a shepherdess rejects the narrator citing this same principle:

> "Don, oc; mas segon dreitura
> Cerca fols sa follatura,
> Cortes cortez' aventura,
> E.il vilans ab la vilana;" (12.1-4)
> "Lord, yes; but according to what is right
> A fool searches for his folly,
> A courtly person, a courtly adventure,
> And the peasant man goes with the peasant woman."

According to the principle of *drechura*, God set forth a natural order to the world that one ought not to disrupt by mating outside of one's social status (as in the poem by Marcabru) or by enabling a usurper. Daurel and Biatris go a step further; not only do they not enable Gui, but they also work to reestablish what is *drech* through the sacrifice of Daurelet.

Athelston

The fourteenth-century Middle English romance *Athelston*, while neither a chanson de geste / canso de gesta nor textually related to any such poem, shares important features with the works previously considered in this chapter.[30] Like the others, *Athelston* has historical[31] rather than mythic roots, and it is deeply concerned with feudal dynamics; it also contains many of the *topoi* found in the previously discussed and other Old French and Old Occitan epics, including an oath of brotherhood, a jealous *losengier*, and a public demonstration of innocence.[32] Lineage also concerns this poet, for the title character here destroys his own bloodline when he assaults his pregnant wife, who has tried to intercede on behalf of the Earl of Stane and his family.

Gullibility drives Athelston to forsake his pledge of brotherhood to the Earl, and arrogance drives him to attack his own wife. The narrative begins by recounting how four

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30 I have used the edition by Allan McIntyre Trounce but have also consulted that of Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale.

31 Scholars have long sought to demonstrate to which specific events the narrative alludes. Laura A. Hibbard has argued that *Athelston* is an adaptation of the historical legend of Queen Emma and the Ploughshares, which is found in the *Annales de Wintonia* under the year 1043. Gordon Hall Gerould has examined relationships similar to that of the sworn brothers and has proposed that the narrative is highly influenced by the tumultuous relationship of Henry II and Thomas Becket. Trounce finds much of interest in his arguments but acknowledges some problems with the correspondences outlined by Gerould. Far more recently, Elizabeth Ashman Rowe has provided a very convincing argument that the text is a veiled representation of fourteenth-century English political events.

32 Trounce, in his introduction to his edition of *Athelston*, addresses the similarities between this poem and other medieval texts, especially poems composed in Old French, and argues that the poet has modeled this text on the chansons de geste and (less convincingly) that there is likely an Old French antecedent (4-25, 40).

friends pledge their loyalties to one another, and this foreshadows the importance of these bonds (lines 10-24). When Athelston (one of the friends) inherits the throne of England from a relative who had no direct heir (which sets an important precedent), he fulfills his oath to the others by making Wymound the Earl of Dover, Egelond the Earl of Stane, and Alryke the Archbishop of Canterbury; furthermore, he arranges for Egelond to marry his sister Edyff (32-57). Jealous of Egelond, Wymond breaks his oath of loyalty and convinces Athelston that the Earl of Stane and his family are traitors, which nearly leads to their deaths, since Athelston breaks his own oath, tricks them into coming to his court, and imprisons them with the plan of executing them; believing the family treacherous, he no doubt feels justified in his actions (73-252). The narrator points out the king's agitated frame of mind during the course of these events as he writes, "Þe kyng as wood ferde in þat stede" 'The king went as if mad in that place' (250). When the Queen learns of what her husband has done, she asks him for a delay in the execution of the Earl and his family, which he denies, and then he orders her to go away (256-72). His refusal drives her, crying, to her knees in prayer (273-78). This challenge to his authority - for she has not obeyed him by leaving as instructed and has interfered with his plans - infuriates the King (279-81). He kicks her and causes her to miscarry: "Wiþ hys foot (he wolde nouȝt wonde) / He slowȝ þe chyld ryȝt in here wombe: / Sche swownyd amonges hem alle" 'With his foot (he would not turn away from the situation) he slew the child right in her womb. She swooned among them all' (282-84).

Athelston's actions are clearly cruel both to modern and medieval audiences (as shown by his previously noted agitation), yet they were not necessarily illegal. While Nicholas Orme explains that English law had established rules regarding the willful

termination of pregnancies even prior to the twelfth century, these laws do not necessarily apply here. Early laws called for lifelong excommunication of those who willfully terminated a pregnancy, while twelfth-century law was less severe. The new penalty found in the *Leges Henrici Primi* differed according to the stage of said pregnancy because it was believed that the soul entered the fetus after forty days; for pregnancies of less than forty days, three years of penance were called for, and for more advanced pregnancies, seven years of penance (Orme, *Medieval* 95). Although this pregnancy seems advanced, we do not have a *willful* termination of the pregnancy, for the king's goal was not to cause a miscarriage but to correct his wife, and corporal punishment of a spouse was neither unheard of in literature nor illegal historically. The *topos* of a king's punishment of a disobedient wife is quite old and can be seen in ancient works such as the Biblical book of Esther (1.9-22). According to late medieval English law, husbands were bound to protect and correct their wives and other dependents in the household, and while husbands were encouraged to control their tempers, corporal punishment was sanctioned (Hanawalt, "Violence" 197-214).

Legality aside, the narrator does not condone the king's actions and emphasizes the royal tragedy by describing the miscarriage:

> Soone withinne a lytyl spase
> A knaue-chyld iborn þer wase,
> As bryȝt as blosme on bowȝ.
> He was boþe whyt and red;
> Off þat dynt was he ded-
> Hys owne fadyr hym slowȝ. (288-93)

Soon, within a brief period,

A male child was born,

As bright as a blossom on a bough.

He was both white and red;

From that blow he was dead -

His own father had killed him.

The fetus is not described as an unformed human or as a corpse, but as a beautiful male child. His gender would have allowed him to ascend to the throne, had he survived, as Athelston has no other heir. French and Hale assert in their edition of the romance that the poet uses "whyt and red" because they are "the colors of the aristocracy" (188), but Trounce disputes this claim and argues that the colors play a part in "a conventional expression for describing a goodly external appearance" (109). Clifton follows Trounce's lead and adds that both male and female children may be described in this way (66). White and red indeed find use in descriptions of beauty, and the point finds support in the similar descriptions of the teenage children of Egelond and Edyff:

In þe world was non here pere-

Also whyt so lylye-flour,

Red as rose off here colour,

As bryght as blosme on brere. (lines 69-72)

In the world, there was none their peer-

As white as a lily flower,

As red as a rose in color,

As bright as a blossom on a briar.

This use is not limited to insular literature, for Beton is also described as having a mouth like a rose and a face that is white like snow (*Daurel et Beton* 1251-52). One ought not, however, to discard additional possibilities so quickly. White and red, which often represent flesh and blood, are also associated with martyrdom, notably in Edward Grim's account of the death of Thomas Becket. Grim illustrates how the colors of that crime scene are religiously symbolic: "At tertius miles ita procumbenti grave vulnus inflixit, quo ictu et gladium collisit lapidi, et coronam, quae ampla fuit, ita a capite separavit, ut sanguis albens ex cerebro, cerebrum nihilominus rubens ex sanguine, lilii et rosae coloribus virginis et matris ecclesiae faciem confessoris et martyris vita et morte purpuraret" 'But the third soldier inflicted a serious wound upon the prostrate one [Thomas Becket], by which blow he both struck the sword against the stone [floor] and separated the crown, which was fully tonsured, from the head, with the result that blood, white from cerebral tissue, and brain, by no means less red from blood, stained the face of the church with the colors of the lily and rose, of the virgin and the mother, and with the life and death of the confessor and martyr' (437-38). One should consider then that Athelston's child could be viewed as a martyr (like the Holy Innocents killed by King Herod) because of his unjust death, just as his cousins could be viewed in a similar light for their miraculous endurance of an ordeal by fire (596-617).

Having killed his own heir, Athelston must find another, for in feudal narratives, which are highly concerned with lineage, it would not do for this matter to remain unresolved. Following the precedent that led to his own acquisition of the throne, the king

chooses his newborn nephew St. Edemound[33] (630-61). He gives the child, born immediately after Edyff endures an ordeal by fire, half his land and the position of heir (657-61), and in doing so, he passes over the older children in the family.[34] Edemound is, by his very nature as a live infant, a viable substitute for the newborn heir that the king should have had, and his sainthood demonstrates his own suffering through the ordeal, a suffering parallel with that of Athelston's miscarried heir. Clifton points out that in addition to serving as an heir, Edmound serves as "a daily reminder of Athelston's sin" (69-70), for his constant presence highlights the original heir's absence.

The narrator repeats, in the final lines of this stanza, that the king killed his child, and this repetition underscores the tragic and unusual nature of this event.[35] Were it not significant, it would hardly be worth mentioning once, let alone repeating in a brief narrative of only 812 lines. Furthermore, when at the end of the narrative, Athelston learns that Wymound has led him astray, he reflects upon his act of filicide while addressing the traitor:

> He sayde: "Traytour, nouȝt ȝit! lete!
>
> Be God and be seynt Jhon,
>
> For þy falsnesse and þy lesyng
>
> I slowȝ myn heyr, scholde haue ben kyng,
>
> When my lyf hadde ben gon." (760-64).
>
> He said, "Traitor, not just yet! Stop!
>
> By God and by Saint John,

33 Rowe claims that Athelston makes Edemound his heir as compensation to Egelond (82), but this is not indicated within the text.

34 Clifton explains that it helps to think of the children within the narrative as two sets of two, with one a set of "adolescent knights" and the other a set of infants, rather than as three siblings and a cousin or as a group of four (65-67).

35 Notably, the grief seems to derive from the break in lineage rather than affection.

Because of your falsehood and your lying,

I slew my heir, who should have been king

When my life would have been gone."

Though he clearly blames Wymound (though because of his oath of brotherhood, he initially hesitates to denounce him publicly), he also holds himself culpable, as indicated by the word "slowȝ," which is related to the word used for "slaughter" and "murder" ("Slagh"). Clifton has posited that *Athelston* teaches us that children "are expendable and replaceable" (86),[36] but while the king does fill the position of his heir with his nephew, it seems unlikely that he would feel guilt if the substitution of children settled matters so easily. His admission of moral (though not legal) guilt helps emphasize the narrator's message about wielding royal authority unjustly. When the queen attempts, on her own, to prevent Athelston's abuse of power, she does not succeed and loses her child in the process; the archbishop of Canterbury (from whom the queen seeks aid), however, does succeed in tempering the king's behavior through the power of interdict.

Athelston's narrator uses the king's killing of his unborn child near the half-way point of the romance because it provides a climax and focuses the audience's attention upon the actions of this unjust ruler; this final injustice cannot be tolerated by the other characters in the narrative, and thus it calls for the advancement of the plot. The poet further uses the midpoint of the text to convey moral lessons. As in the world of the chanson de geste, divine justice ultimately prevails, despite injustices - like filicide - along the way. Not only does this death reveal the problems that can derive from the misuse of authority, but it also reveals

36 She goes on to argue that most figures in the narrative are easily replaceable types, which weakens her point about children (86-87).

the problems associated with excesses of emotions. Like the murdering (as opposed to sacrificing) parents discussed in previous chapters, this king acts out of rage at a perceived injustice (in this case a challenge to his supreme authority).

Conclusion

Within each of the extended narratives discussed in this chapter, we have seen the material and the exemplary use of filicide episodes. The narrators generally do not shy away from the details of these killings; we see the shedding of blood and tissue, and in some texts, we are reminded of the details as they are repeated throughout the course of the narratives. This handling corresponds to the treatment of other violent episodes, such as combat scenes, within these feudal narratives. In these same narratives, we see decapitation and dismemberment along with brutal torture. The repetition of detail within the epic works stems from their oral traditions, since oral poets use repetition to help them hold the narratives in their mental storehouses. While repulsive to modern audiences, these episodes resonated with medieval audiences who lived in more violent times.

Rudolfus Tortatius uses his brief account of the Amicus and Amelius legend to illustrate the virtue of friendship, though the anonymous authors of the later versions of the tale make more extensive use of the legend's moralizing potential. These poets, like those who composed *Jourdain de Blaye*, *Daurel et Beton*, and *Athelston*, use these filicides to help illustrate the importance of maintaining the ideal social order. When a force poses a threat to the sanctioned power structure, such as when an ally faces death or when a leader faces usurpation, one ought to mitigate or eliminate that threat. In *Amis and Amiloun* and *Amis et Amile*, leprosy poses a threat to the predestined friendship, and divine forces guide a father to

do what is right, namely to kill his children, to eliminate that threat. In both *Jourdain de Blaye* and *Daurel et Beton*, a usurper threatens legitimate rule, so we see parents loyal to their lords secure the future of the ruling line by the substitution and sacrifice of their own children. Wymound's lies and the king's own emotions pose a threat to just rule in *Athelston*, and the destruction of the potential heir (who may represent the fractured kingdom) highlights just how great these threats are and signals a need for intervention, in this case that of the archbishop of Canterbury, to restore the appropriate social order. These narratives thus not only instruct the ruled populace in how they ought to behave but also serve as a stern warning to those in power not to abuse it. The *faiblesse* of Charlemagne is a *topos* in several epics, including *Daurel et Beton*, which demonstrates "the failure of Charlemagne as representative of God the transcendent Father" when he essentially sells his sister to Gui (Sinclair 906, 909-10). Trounce has noted similarities between the emperor and king Athelston (28), whose act of filicide is the ultimate expression of the abuse of power. Similarly, Rowe has argued that the king's unjust actions, which she has noted contrast markedly with those of the kings in earlier English romances, reflect real anxieties held by society because of contemporary abuses of power (79, 82). That children are among the "casualties of violence" from the marginalized ranks described by Kay (59) emphasizes the degree of *faiblesse* exhibited by those holding power in these works, for a leader who cannot or does not protect the weakest members of society arguably lacks the ability to wield power appropriately.

The victims in each of the extended narratives are attractive males,[37] though their ages vary, with the youngest not quite born and the oldest able to discuss and understand his fate. It is noteworthy that in those narratives where there is a substitution of children, the lesser-born children are interchangeable with their noble and heroic counterparts, which seems to speak to a nobility of spirit rather than blood. This nobility of spirit, in the case of Daurelet, is rewarded by burial with the deceased duke. Even in the Amicus and Amelius texts, where there is a resurrection rather than a substitution of children, we see a rewarded nobility of spirit.[38] When the parents discover that the children have been resurrected, they find their children playing with fruit that they must have received while in heaven (Roldulfus Tortarius 317; *Amis et Amile* 3189-92).

The sacrificing parents discussed in this chapter have much in common with the figures of Abraham, Agamemnon, Jephthah, and Verginius discussed in chapters one and two. All of these parents sacrifice a child (or, in the Amicus and Amelius texts, two children) because it is perceived to be in the interest of the greater good. These parents (except perhaps for Amelius, whose only noted motivation is love for his friend) either owe a debt to the divine forces that actively affect their lives (as in the adaptations of the legends concerning Abraham, Agamemnon, and Jephthah and in *Amis and Amiloun* and *Amis et Amile*) or owe allegiance to the idealized socio-political system that, in the world of the chanson de geste / canso de gesta, is a manifestation of the divine (as in the adaptations of the Verginia material and in the epics *Jourdain de Blaye* and *Daurel et Beton*). While Verginia's death helps to weaken the power of the tyrannical Appius and to reestablish just rule in

37 The gender of the children is not noted in Rodolfus Tortarius's letter or in *Amis and Amiloun*, but they are male in the chanson de geste. The appearance of the children is also not noted in the letter.

38 These children are, of course, also of royal blood, for they are the grandchildren of Charlemagne.

Rome, the preservation of the lives of Jordain and Beton through the sacrifices of Garnier and Daurelet, respectively, ensure that justice - which is always divine justice in these texts - will eventually prevail in these societies that suffer at the hands of traitors.

A key difference between the sacrificers in the classically based texts and those of the feudal texts lies in the gender of these individuals. Prior to this chapter, the sacrificers we have seen have been male, and Peggy McCracken has argued that this literary trend is consistent with and stems from the patriarchal social structures found in reality ("Engendering" 56-66). Barbara Newman claims that in medieval texts prior to the thirteenth century, mothers had little to no influence regarding the decision to sacrifice a child; she further claims that in those medieval texts of the fourteenth century and beyond in which mothers had a more active role in the decision making process, they regularly deferred to their husbands' wishes (76-77). The validity of this point is verifiable in some cases. It is only after her husband has killed their children that the figure of Beliardis / Belisaunt / Belissant gives consent (if she gives it at all), as both McCracken and Newman illustrate ("Engendering" 65-66; 98-100). The figures of Eremborc and Biatris,[39] however, do not easily fit Newman's model of the secularized "maternal martyr," who sacrifices her children because she is a devoted and obedient wife (77, 96). These mothers actively suggest to their husbands that they sacrifice their children to save their noble counterparts. Wilde has suggested that the Occitan narrator uses Biatris' words to voice Daurel's thoughts on sacrificing Daurelet (131), but no evidence supports such a transfer of agency or this marginalization of Biatris' personhood. In particular, Eremborc is not "[f]aced with a call for

39 Finn Sinclair notes that Biatris seems to contradict McCracken's theories, but she remains silent about Eremborc (911-12 n. 32).

child sacrifice arising from her husband's demands or commitments" (Newman 96); she calls for the sacrifice herself, works to convince the hesitant Renier that it is a good idea, and participates in the physical delivery of Garnier to Fromont (69-93). While she recognizes the need to restore social order, which can be viewed as an adherence to the male-dominated chivalric society, she seems to be the dominant partner in her marriage and to goad Renier into adhering to his socio-political commitments (464-82). One could argue that Eremborc, a woman to whom *fierté* - a decidedly masculine quality[40] - is attributed (317), has been masculinized in this text by the loss of her breasts (522-28). We are reminded, however, that she is still very much a woman and a mother when she spends her final moments with Garnier (653-55). McCracken has written, "in narratives that recount the mother's willingness to accept her child's death, the child does not actually die at the mother's hands" ("Engendering" 56). This is true, but it is just as true that the child does not die at the father's hands in *Jourdain de Blaye* and *Daurel et Beton*. Garnier dies at Fromont's hands, and Daurelet at Gui's, though in both cases, both parents knew what would occur when they willingly delivered their children over to murderous traitors. To suggest that Eremborc and Biatris have a passive role because they did not deliver the fatal blow to their children in these cases seems to subordinate these women illogically and unfairly. The detailed plans they conceive of substitution and sacrifice, to which their husbands agree, demonstrate their authority within their families as well as their sacrificial natures.

We also see a key difference in the primary example found in this chapter of a murdering (as opposed to sacrificing) parent, Athelston. The emotionally-driven Procne and

40 Glyn S. Burgess has examined many uses of the word *fierté* in twelfth-century texts and has concluded that the word carries with it a militaristic sense and is "predominantly a masculine quality" (114). He claims, "[w]hen found in a woman it is condemned," but he does not examine the case of Eremborc.

Medea figures discussed in chapter two are generally condemned as murderesses when their filicides are addressed,[41] and this seems consistent with the depiction of Florentyn's mother in the C variant of *Amis e Amilun*, but Athelston is offered an opportunity to reform. While in line 454, the archbishop of Canterbury has made him so angry that "[a] wodere man myȝte no man fynde" 'a man could not find a madder man,' the king soon backs down (because of the archbishop's power of interdict) and seeks absolution from him (547-54). The narrator thereafter calls him "þe goode king Athelston" 'the good king Athelston' (576, 774). Unlike so many in the tale, he is not forced to endure an ordeal by fire, and unlike the traitor Wymound, he is neither dragged nor hanged for his actions. Instead, he is allowed to maintain his crown, presumably until he dies, when his adopted heir takes the throne. This opportunity likely has more to do with the role of the church in this narrative than it does with the gender of the perpetrator, for *Athelston* demonstrates the power of the church to restore order to a society that has been broken by unjust secular rule.

41 A prominent exception is within the *Ovide Moralisé*.

Chapter 4: The Celtic Traditions of Filicide

This chapter will consider how filicide episodes function in medieval narratives that are based on Celtic mythological traditions. The people known as the Celts, who once resided in settlements scattered throughout Europe, were long gone by the beginning of the Middle Ages, but many of their myths and legends have survived, albeit in altered forms, in medieval literature. This becomes most apparent when one examines the native literary corpora of Ireland and Wales, but also on studying Middle English literature and the literatures of medieval continental Europe. The word "Celtic" is therefore used here not only to refer to the ancient people famously described by Julius Caesar and their beliefs but also to the medieval literary works - regardless of the languages in which they were composed - influenced by those far earlier beliefs. The Old Irish *Cath Maige Tuired* (*The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*), *Aided Óenfir Aife* (*The Death of Aife's Only Son*), and *Fingal Rónáin* (*The Kin-slaying of Rónán*), the Middle Irish *Scél na Fír Flatha* (*The Tale of the True Sovereignty*), and the Middle Welsh *Mabinogi* will be examined here alongside British and continental narratives concerning the legends of Melusine, Tristan, and King Arthur.[1] The popularity of these last three legends has led to their appearance in numerous insular and continental texts, and to examine them all would be prohibitive. Thus, texts representing key variants have been chosen for this study. These include the *Mélusine* of Jean d'Arras, the *Roman de Partenay* of Coudrette, *Le Roman de Tristan en Prose*, and *La Mort le Roi Artu*, all in Old French, and the Middle English *Romans of Partenay*, The *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, and the Arthurian narrative of Thomas Malory.

1 The spellings of titles and personal names vary widely even within texts but have been standardized in the examinations of each text, when possible, aside from within direct quotations and titles.

Nearly all of these works are anonymous and the product of a strong oral tradition of literature as well as a complicated manuscript tradition. In the case of the Old Irish texts, linguists have asserted that the medieval manuscripts have often preserved literature that is several hundred years older than the manuscripts themselves. For such texts, it may be helpful to think of them not as the intellectual property of one or even a few individuals but instead as that of a culture. Extant tale lists indicate that storytellers in Ireland were expected to know literally hundreds of tales, which they mentally organized by tale type. Given this vast amount of material, a certain amount of improvisation was likely essential to a storyteller, which could result in many variants of a narrative that could find their way into a single manuscript (*Early* 18-20; Rees and Rees 207-12). Yet even when the author of a particular text is known, as is true for some of the Melusine and Arthurian materials, we must consider how much the pre-existing versions may have limited that author's storytelling options. Over the course of centuries, certain legendary details become fixed, and an audience may have rejected, for instance, an Arthurian narrative in which Mordred does not die.

As seen in previous chapters, the texts considered here demonstrate that filicide episodes serve a dual purpose. The material function is most evident in narratives such as *Aided Óenfir Aife* and *Fingal Rónáin*, where filicide is the predominant theme of the work. In most of the other texts, the episodes serve at least a catalytic purpose. The exemplary function is likewise evident throughout, for these texts concern themselves with the well-being of the society described within and especially with the role of its ruler, for the weaknesses of a ruler manifest themselves in the state of his lands in Celtic narratives.

Cath Maige Tuired

The early Irish mythological and pseudo-historical epic *Cath Maige Tuired*, which is believed to contain material from the ninth century but is dated to the eleventh or twelfth century, is well-known to students of Old Irish history, law, and literature but is scarcely known to non-specialists. The narrative focuses upon the triumph of the Túatha Dé Danann (the people of the goddess Danu, who are the supernatural forerunners of the Irish), led by the seemingly omnipotent Lug,[2] over their Fomorian enemies, and a filicide episode within it poses an interesting moral puzzle.

Díen Cécht,[3] the physician of the Túatha Dé Danann, slays his son Míach by striking him repeatedly in the head with a sword (sections 33-35). He kills his son (not in combat) because they disagree about the treatment for their former king Núadu, who has lost his arm in battle and with it, the kingship, for a king must be physically perfect (11, 14).[4] Díen Cécht has fashioned a silver prosthetic arm for Núadu, but Míach offers an alternative: the magical regeneration of tissue (33). This initiative displeases the father, who assaults his son four times by striking his head - each time more deeply - with a sword (34). Míach is able to heal himself the first three times but cannot do so the fourth time (34). Afterward, his father buries him (35), though Míach makes an unexplained reappearance further into the text (123).[5]

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2 This Lug is believed to be related to the Celtic god(s) commemorated by the names of European cities such as London and Lyon. For more on this figure, see MacCana, *Celtic* 24-25, 58.

3 Through his son Cían, he becomes the grandfather of the god Lug (section 8).

4 This is consistent with early Irish law. Thomas Charles-Edwards and Fergus Kelly provide examples from legal and literary texts in the notes to *Bechbretha*, a legal treatise pertaining to bees (131).

5 This reappearance may be a simple textual error, but as this text contains episodes of resurrection, one cannot be certain. Furthermore, R. Mark Scowcroft's "Abstract Narrative in Ireland" urges scholars to be cautious when drawing conclusions about Old Irish narratives and to avoid characterizing narrative variants as mistakes, even if the elements of the narratives are improbable. He notes that these works have an "ordered strangeness" to them and an "often baffling character" (123, 136).

The text does not explain why Díen Cécht chooses to slay his son beyond stating "Ba holc lia Díen Cécht an freapaid-sin" 'That healing was evil to Díen Cécht' (34). The narrator does not indicate that he is enraged but simply that "Duleicc claidimh a mullach a meic go rotend a tuidn fri féoil a cinn" 'he threw a sword at the crown of his son's head until it cut the skin to the flesh of his head' (34). One may suspect that the father is angry because his son's medical skill surpasses his own, but this is not recorded in *Cath Maige Tuired*.[6] Here, Díen Cécht's emotions are not stated, though his burial of Míach indicates a sense of familial duty if not affection. No reprisals against Díen Cécht appear in this epic. He retains his position as his people's physician during Núadu's second reign when Lug appears (64), and he joins other chief members of the Túatha Dé Danann in planning the war against the Fomorians (75-76). This continuing acceptance and lack of punishment seems to indicate that the death is socially sanctioned. This is puzzling not only because it is Míach's offer of a cure - which many would regard as a boon - that leads to his death, but also because it seems to be an obvious case of *fingal*, kin-slaying.

This crime was not particularly rare in Irish history, but was very serious; the epithet *fingalach* (kin-slayer) was a shameful one (Charles-Edwards, *Early* 89, 127).[7] Historical punishments included being sent off to sea in "a boat with one paddle and a vessel of gruel," conditions which would almost certainly have lead to death (F. Kelly 220). This crime

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6 In a note to her edition of *Cath Maige Tuired*, Elizabeth Gray addresses an alternate version of these events presented in the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (*LG*) in which she claims jealousy is noted but filicide is not (9, 85). The version of the *LG* preserved in the *Book of Leinster*, however, mentions neither: "Lám argait co lánlúth cacha láma in cach meór ⊤ in cach alt dorat fair. Dían Cecht. in liaig. ⊤ Créidne cerd i congnam fris" 'A silver hand has given to him full vigor to each finger and each joint of each hand. Dían Cecht the physician [did this,] and Créidne the smith was assisting him' (section 9a). This version is consistent with what is recorded in the section of the *Annala Rioghacta Eireann* (the *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland*) that addresses the prehistorical period (I.16-17).

7 Joanne Findon claims that the numerous episodes of *fingal* recorded in the Irish Annals are never father-son conflicts (94).

demanded such a great punishment because it had the potential to spiral out of control, for a victim's family member who sought vengeance by slaying the killer would himself be guilty of the same crime. For non-familial killings, the legal system generally required those who killed to make financial restitution to the victim's family, but *fingal* disrupts the order in this system too because the perpetrator would need to compensate himself (F. Kelly 125-28). That nothing is written about *fingal* within *Cath Maige Tuired* suggests that despite initial appearances, this death should not be classified as such.

If this is not a typical kin-slaying, then what is it? Fergus Kelly explains that the laws list circumstances in which killing another was socially sanctioned and requires no compensation; these include combat, self-defense, and criminality - that is, one could kill a criminal (128-29). Díen Cécht and Míach are not engaged in combat, for there is no mention of Míach having a weapon, and this also rules out self-defense. One could, however, consider Míach in violation of the law. The epic's focus on the theme of just kingship sheds some light on this puzzle. Míach's cure poses a problem not because tissue regeneration is unnatural in itself, as Joanne Findon has suggested (172 n. 3), for the text later has Díen Cécht boast to Lug that he, too, is capable of healing the warriors of the Túatha Dé Danann in this fashion (sections 98-99). With the help of his physician-children, he accomplishes this and helps ensure the victory of his people (123). This particular regeneration, however, causes a problem with respect to the kingship. Míach's actions effectively remove Núadu's blemish and thus render him fit once again for rule. A second king, however, named Bres has already ascended the throne, and having two men eligible for the kingship naturally leads to conflict. Núadu does regain the throne, but only after Bres has left (under a cloud of

discontent, for he proves to be an unjust king) to seek foreign allies (53).[8] By killing Míach, Díen Cécht emphasizes the importance of preserving the status quo. Here we see a death that is neither a clear sacrifice nor a clear murder. The text does not present a grieving sacrificial parent of the sort found in the narratives concerning Jephthah or the legends of Amicus and Amelius or the recognition of a sacrifice, but it also does not present a parent like Procne or Athelston, whose lack of emotional restraint leads to murder. Instead, this text presents something almost in between: an accepted, almost emotionless killing, an imposition of capital punishment upon Míach. Díen Cécht executes his son because his actions have circumvented the society's rules about kingship; the death is designed to prevent further actions of this nature and thus helps support the accepted social order.

This episode of filicide serves a material function, for while it does not drive the plot, it entertains while adding important information pertaining to the kingship of Núadu and the knowledge-base of the Túatha Dé Danann. It also serves a second function, for it exemplifies the importance of the traditional notions of kingship, a dominant theme in the narrative.

Aided Óenfir Aife

When it comes to Old Irish heroes, Cú Chulainn stands out as the most famous, due in large part to William Butler Yeats's plays focusing on his life and death and to the statue of the hero that stands in Dublin, at the General Post Office, in commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising. Tales of this hero's life abound within the corpus of Old Irish literature, with

8 The re-ascendance to the kingship by Núadu suggests that he is fully healed by Míach's magic, which is not said to have been undone, but when Núadu dies in battle, he is later referred to as Núodai Aircetláum, Núadu Silver-Hand (133). Scowcroft notes that in the *Leabhar Gabhála*, Nuadu regains the throne because of the silver prosthetic (151 n. 110).

the major events of his life (conception, birth, childhood, education, marriage, and death) accounted for, including a lesser known tale, his killing of his only child.[9]

Aided Óenfir Aife or *The Death of Aife's Only Son*, dated to the late ninth or early tenth century,[10] explains that Cú Chulainn engenders Conlae upon the warrior Aife during his martial training with the mysterious Scáthach, Aife's sister.[11] The hero instructs Aife to send their son to him when he is old enough to wear a golden thumb-ring and further dictates, "'nacham berad óenfer dia chonair ד nacha sloinded do óenfiur ד ná fémded comlann óenfir'" 'let no man bear him from his way, and let him not name [himself] to anyone, and let him not refuse battle to anyone' (section 1). Seven years later, a mysterious child arrives in Ulster in a small bronze ship and demonstrates his martial prowess for the Ulstermen (2). Conchobar, the king of Ulster, fears, given how skilled the child is, that grown men will follow the boy into Ulster and destroy the Ulstermen (3). The child refuses to identify himself, challenges the warriors of Ulster, and even attacks the renowned warrior Conall Cernach when he goes to meet him, so afterwards, the others - except for Cú Chulainn - refuse to confront him (4-7). The great Ulster hero feels duty-bound to do so even though his wife Emer identifies the child as his own:

> " Ná téig sís!" ol sí. "Mac duit fil tís. Ná fer fingail immot óenmac, co sechnam, a maic saigthig soailti. Ní soáig ná soairle coméirge frit mac

9 Yeats adapted this tale for his play *On Baile's Strand*.

10 This is at the latter end of the Old Irish period.

11 *Tochmarc Emire* (*The Wooing of Emer*) offers a variant of these relationships. In this text, also from the Old Irish period, Cú Chulainn marries Scáthach's daughter, Úathach, but this relationship produces no children, and he leaves her with her mother when he is done with training (sections 70-72). Aife is not Scáthach's sister but her enemy; she agrees to have Cú Chulainn's child after he defeats her in combat (74-77). He later avoids marrying Derbforgail ingen Rúaid, a maiden offered to him after he rescues her (81-84) and succeeds in carrying off and marrying Emer, the woman he had been courting before beginning his training abroad (85-90).

> mórgnímach mór... n esiut. Artai o ríag cnis fochlóc ót biliu, ba cotat fri Scáithchi scél. Mad Conlae céssad clár clé, comad fortamail taidbecht. Tinta frim! Cluinte mo chlois! Fó mo chosc! Bad Cú Chulainn cloadar! Atgén sa cid ainm asind ón, maso Conlae óenmac Aife in mac fil tís" ol in ben. (8) "Do not go down [there]!" she said. "The boy below is your son. Do not commit a kin-slaying against your only son that would cause me to avoid [you], O eager, well-bred boy. Rising up against your great, mighty son is neither a fair fight nor sound counsel ...out of you. Turn away from the flesh-torture of the sapling of your great tree; be hard against the teachings of Scáthach. If Conlae endures the left side of the chariot, the brave [one] may be destroyed.[12] Return to me! Hear me! My instruction is good! Let it be that Cú Chulainn hears [it]! I know what name he gives, if that boy below is Conlae, the only son of Aife," said the woman.

He does not take her advice and rebukes her sharply: "'Coisc, a ben! Ní cosc mná admoiniur mórgnímaib asa coscur glé. Ní gníther do banchobrae. Bam gnímbúadach. Buidig ruisc ruirech. Dé fola form chnis crú cuirp Conlai. Caín súgfet gaí in cleitine cain. Cid é no beth and, a ben,' ol sé, 'na ngénainnse ar inchaib Ulad'" 'Hold back, woman! It is not the advice of a woman I request about great deeds of clear triumph. It [triumph] is not done with your womanly assistance. Let me be triumphant in deeds. Let the eyes of a great king be satisfied. Let the gore of the body of Conlae be a vapor of blood on my skin. The fair spears

12 Van Hamel notes in the glossary for his edition, under his definition of the term "clár clé," that turning the left side of one's chariot to another was an insult and a challenge (154). He also suggests that "Comad fortamail taidbecht" ought to be translated "it should be valorously dissolved, terminated" (214).

will suck the fair little spear.[13] Though it were he there, O woman,' he said, 'I would do it for the sake of the Ulstermen' (9). Cú Chulainn acknowledges that the child could be his, yet his focus lies upon his role as the chief warrior of Ulster and its king, not on his role as the father of Conlae.

At first, the child appears to be Cú Chulainn's superior in combat. Although he is far smaller than his father, he manages to best him several times, including during a dunking contest: "Lotar didiu isin muir do imbádud, cora mbáid in mac fo dó" 'Then they went into the sea for mutual drowning until the boy drowned him twice' (11). Cú Chulainn then employs a strategy to defeat the child: "Luid risin mac íarom asin uisciu, coro bréc cosin gaí bulga, ar níro múin Scáthach do duine ríam in gaisced sin acht do Choin Chulainn a óenur. Dacorustar don mac tríasind uisce, co mboí a inathar foa chossaib" 'Afterwards, he went to the boy from that water, until he tricked [him] with the *gaí bulga*,[14] for Scáthach did not ever teach that set of weapons to a man except to Cú Chulainn alone. He brought it to the boy through that water so that his entrails were around his feet' (11). He then carries the child, who is near death, to meet the Ulstermen on the shore, and he introduces the child as his son (12). Conlae claims that he would have led them to conquer lands as far as Rome, and then he embraces each of the Ulstermen before saying goodbye to his father and then dying (12-13). The tragedy was so great that it affected not just the people but also the cattle, which were separated from their calves for three days after the burial (13).

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13 A.G. Van Hamel offers the following translation for this difficult line: "beautifully the spears will suck the fair javelin" (214). The line may well be corrupt, for if the "fair little spear" symbolizes Conlae, it would make sense for the subject of the clause to be the singular form, to symbolize his father.

14 Cú Chulainn's weapon, the *gaí bulga,* is generally believed to be a type of spear or harpoon. The term is almost never translated since it refers to a unique weapon like King Arthur's sword Excalibur. Notably, both of these figures are believed to be mythologically related to the god Lug.

Surprisingly, given the copious volumes of scholarship on the tales of the Ulster Cycle, this tale has garnered little scholarly attention other than as a variant of the motif of combat between an unwitting father and son that is exemplified in the Indo-Iranian legend of Sohráb and Rostám (Cross, "A Note" 176).[15] These legends have much in common, but considering them two versions of the same motif can mask key narrative features and thus potential differences in interpretation. While Conlae bears the same head-strong nature as Sohráb, the depictions of the fathers differ. Rostám has no idea that he fights his son, likely because he is blinded by his pride as a warrior. Cú Chulainn, however, has been told who the strange child is, yet he persists in protecting the kingdom. He is prideful, but not blinded by pride. He does lash out verbally at his wife, but compared to his demeanor in other Ulster cycle narratives, he has his emotions under control here. According to accounts of his *macgnímrada* "boyhood deeds" found within the famous Old Irish epic *Táin Bó Cúaligne* (*The Cattle Raid of Cúailnge*, often referred to simply as the *Táin*), he could only be subdued on one occasion by being embarrassed by the display of bare-breasted women followed by being plunged into vats of cold water (lines 5197-207). In the aftermath of the killing in *Aided Óenfir Aife*, Cú Chulainn is almost stoic,[16] which contrasts markedly with Rostám's immense grief after learning that he has killed his son. The differing emotional states of the perpetrators of filicide indicate other potential differences, including differences in motivation.

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15 Cross notes three other Old Irish versions of the motif that have not been considered here because in each, the tragic outcome of filicide is averted. He proposes that this motif found its way into the Old Irish narrative from the Persian through a chain of Germanic variants, one of which may have been a Hildebrand narrative ("A Note" 180-82).

16 Jeffrey Gantz, in the introduction to his translation found in *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, identifies "emotional restraint" as a personal characteristic in Celtic tales (147), but Cú Chulainn generally serves as an exception.

Conlae clearly mirrors his father, as evidenced by his great feats of arms, and one may argue that this means he cannot survive because Ulster needs only one such headstrong warrior at a time.[17] The child is more, however, than a copy of his father. Conlae, though Cú Chulainn's son and thus great-nephew to the king of Ulster,[18] represents an exterior threat to the Ulstermen because he comes from the mysterious and mystical land to the north where women have remarkable powers. He comes from abroad in a small ship, and Conchobar notes that his coming could lead to the annihilation of the kingdom. This problem of foreign invasion, a *topos* in Old Irish literature,[19] is best demonstrated in the *Táin*, where Cú Chulainn single-handedly defends Ulster from the warriors of Connacht.

Regnal impotence likewise is a key element in the tales of the Ulster cycle. According to the exiled Ulster warrior Fergus, "'Is amlaid domel Conchobar a flaith. trían ind laí oc déscin na macraide. A trian n-aill oc imbirt fidchille. A trian n-aill oc ól chorma conid gaib cotlad de.'" 'Conchobar spends his sovereignty in this way: [he spends] a third of the day by watching the boys,[20] another third by playing *fidchille*,[21] [and] another third at drinking ale until he falls asleep from it' (*Táin* 4858-61). Instead of protecting his kingdom, the king amuses himself during his waking hours with games and alcohol. Conchobar shows himself to be similarly disposed in the legend of Deirdre, the *Longes Mac n-Uislenn* (*The*

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17 Scholars of Celtic mythology who see Cú Chulainn as the earthly embodiment of the god Lug may also point out that the existence of Conlae, a doublet of his father, would require two living embodiments of the same deity at the same time, which would be odd indeed.

18 Cú Chulainn is the child of Conchobar's sister Dechtine; some variants of his birth tale *Compert Con Culainn* identify her as the daughter of the king, not his sister. Three figures are suggested as potential fathers for the child: the mortal Súailtaim, the immortal Lug, and even King Conchobar.

19 Viking invasions began in earnest throughout Ireland at the end of the eighth century (Ó Cróinín 234), and invasion in the textual world likely reflects fears realized by such foreign threats.

20 These boys of the Ulstermen are engaged in games that will help prepare them for combat-training.

21 The nature of the game *fidchille* "wood sense" has generally eluded scholars, though it is known to be a board game at least as old as the seventh century (MacWhite 25-35).

Exile of the Sons of Uisliu).[22] The king selfishly has the beautiful girl Deirdre raised to be his bride despite a prophecy that she will pose a threat to his kingdom. Thomas Owen Clancy has argued that examining the role of kingship - particularly that of Conchobar, is a vital key to understanding the narratives concerning the Ulstermen (169-82), and that seems confirmed with respect to *Aided Óenfir Aife*. The king is unable to protect his lands alone or even through the efforts of the first two men whom he sends out. Thus Cú Chulainn, who has served as the kingdom's chief champion since he killed the infamously fierce watchdog of Culand the smith as a child (*Táin* 4973-5033) and who owes allegiance to his maternal uncle who has long harbored him, must protect the kingdom from the threat, even if that threat is his son.

Conlae's biological parents seal his tragic fate, for with filial piety, the child obeys the rules established by his father and conveyed by his mother in the initial part of the narrative: he does not stop for any man; he does not name himself to any man; he does not refuse to fight any man. The narrative does not indicate whether he wears the ring Cú Chulainn left for him that here, as in other similar tales, was likely meant as a piece of identification. Findon has noted other Irish tales with father-son conflicts that do not end in death precisely because they recognize one another (86-87). Here, however, the token of recognition becomes irrelevant because Cú Chulainn's response to Emer's warning indicates that no ring would have dissuaded him.

Joanne Findon's analysis of this narrative focuses on the loudly voiced objections of Emer to her husband Cú Chulainn's killing of his child, which she notes is socially mandated

22 The Deirdre story, also favored by Yeats, is a variant of the primary motif of the Tristan legend.

(84-105). When a society upholds the "heroic ethos," the cost is great, she explains, for that society cannot survive if it destroys its future (84-85). Conlae, had he survived, would have taken his father's place as the greatest Ulster warrior, an essential figure in a martial society. Findon argues that Emer stands in for Aife in the narrative as a mother and protector of Conlae against a set of *mores* upheld by the warriors of Ulster (85). Emer's key role in the tragedy, which is perceptively analyzed by Findon, highlights an ethical shift that is similar to that seen in other narratives of failing kingdoms, such as tales recounting the end of King Arthur's reign.

Cú Chulainn's killing of Conlae in *Aided Óenfir Aife* is an act of sacrifice. Some may argue that his forceful dismissal of his wife's counsel and his use of the *gaí bulga* demonstrate arrogance and even anger that is characteristic of murdering fathers like Athelston or Dyoscorus. He only confronts the child, however, after the other Ulster warriors have failed to stop him or have refused to deal with him, and he reserves the *gaí bulga* until it is clear that he will not be able to neutralize Conlae without it. Cú Chulainn, while potentially frustrated and angry - as he has met his physical match - does not kill Conlae because of any such emotions. Furthermore, we see parental affection as Cú Chulainn carries the wounded boy up to meet the other Ulstermen and filial affection as Conlae says goodbye to his father before dying. The separation of the cattle emphasizes the unmistakably tragic nature of the tale and the sorrow throughout Ulster. The men of Ulster had reason to grieve, for as Findon reminds us, they are the ones who put forth the idea that Cú Chulainn should marry (90). They hoped to keep him from consorting with their womenfolk and that he would provide himself with an heir: "ד dano ba sáeth ד ba homan leo mocherchrae do

bith do Choin Chulainn, corb accobur leo arin fáth sin tabart mná dó, fo déig co fárgbad comarbae. Ar rofetatar is úad fessin no bíad a aithgein" 'and then they had sorrow and fear of an early demise for Cú Chulainn, so for that reason they desired to give a woman to him in order that an heir would be left. For they knew that his rebirth would be from his very self' (*Tochmarc Emire* section 7). Despite widespread grief, Cú Chulainn receives no rebuke from Conchobar or the Ulstermen for his actions.[23] One could argue that this is because early Irish law deemed that deaths that occurred in combat were fully sanctioned, though the law was likely designed to apply to grown men of differing tribes who fought with one another, not to one man fighting a child of his own bloodline.

This tale of the death of Conlae serves a moral function as well as a material one, for it demonstrates Cú Chulainn's willingness to sacrifice his only child for the greater good of the Ulstermen and the weakness of the king who forced him into that position, and it captivates the audience and adds to the Ulster cycle of texts by furnishing a depiction of Cú Chulainn as a father.

Fingal Rónáin

Like *Aided Óenfir Aife*, *Fingal Rónáin* (*The Kin-slaying of Rónán*) is a late Old Irish text, in this case dating from the tenth century, depicting a father's killing of his son. This tale of filicide from Leinster recounts how the king Rónán mac Aeda kills his grown son Mael Fothartaig because he believes he has slept with his new, young wife.[24]

23 Findon has explored variants of the legend in her scholarship of this tales, and she has found some evidence in the poems in the *Metrical Dindshenchas*, a collection of place-name lore, that cast a negative light on the hero's actions (90-96). Enough variance in key details exists (e.g. lack of warning and lack of recognition), however, to render the transfer of interpretation problematic.

24 Some scholarly attempts have been made to find a historical analogue for Rónán while others have explored the similarities between the tale and other variants on the motif of Potiphar's Wife. See the introduction to Greene's edition of the text as well as Erich Poppe's article and Myles Dillon's introduction in *Cycle of the*

Rónán, the king of Leinster, and his wife Eithne have a son named Mael Fothartaig, well known for his athletic prowess and his attractiveness to women. After Eithne dies, Rónán seeks and gains the hand of the beautiful daughter of Echaid (the king of Dunseverick), despite his son's objection that the girl is too young for him. She desires to have Mael Fothartaig for a lover, yet he goes to great lengths and enlists the aid of his foster brothers Congal and Dond to avoid her advances.[25] The queen, insulted by repeated rejection, lies to the king and claims that the foster brothers have facilitated an affair. She offers a song as proof,[26] and Rónán accepts it as damning evidence. The king orders that his champion Aedán mac Fiachnai Lára kill his son and Congal with spears. Mael Fothartaig does not die immediately, and after his father literally adds insult to injury, he tells the king how the queen had been trying to seduce him. After the wounded have died, Rónán mourns his son. Dond decapitates the queen's family members, and she commits suicide when he confronts her with their heads. The mourning for Mael Fothartaig continues, and his sons - who are not mentioned earlier - seek revenge upon Aedán. Rónán praises his grandson Aed's killing of Aedán and dies soon afterward.

Rónán is in the wrong, according to the narrative. We see this from the beginning of the tale, for against his son's advice, he pursues a "'scintline ingine'" 'skittish girl' instead of a "'ben forusta'" 'steady woman' more appropriate for an aging king with a grown son (lines 12-13). As is seen in Conchobar's pursuit of Deirdre in the Ulster cycle, this is a bad idea.[27]

Kings (42).

25 He does, however, begin an affair with the servant girl sent to arrange a liaison with his stepmother.

26 She offers to complete a song that Mael Fothartaig begins (he sings two lines, and she follows with two lines). Her response contains a double entendre that her stepson does not detect.

27 Conchobar's pursuit of Deirdre, who has fallen for his nephew Noísiu, leads to the murder of her lover and his brothers, the suicide of Deirdre herself, and the defection of thousands of the king's men who considered his actions shameful.

Furthermore, Echaid reveals that he intended for his daughter to marry Mael Fothartaig, not Rónán, whom he deems too old (66-67). Thus, the king of Leinster has essentially stolen his son's bride-to-be. Although, as Erich Poppe demonstrates, Mael Fothartaig is extremely passive (and thus not king-material) (146-48), he shows himself to be a loyal son through his well-intentioned advice and by his rejection of his stepmother's sexual advances. Rónán has even boasted to his new queen that his son is "'mac as dech fil la Laigniu'" 'a son out of the best there are in Leinster' (line 19) and that "'nī fil i nHērinn mac as ferr[28] do rēir a athar'" 'there is not in Ireland a son who is more obedient to his father' (108-9) and initially dismisses her allegations against his son (117). However, he puts this paternal affection aside easily, for the evidence she supplies is hardly damning, and orders his son and Congal killed (135-37). Rónán has clearly committed *fingal*, which he eventually regrets, as demonstrated when he sits with his dead son's head for three days and nights and later praises his grandson for seeking vengeance (160-61, 249-57). *Fingal*, even when perpetrated by a king, remained a serious crime. A king who killed a family member could lose his honor price, the amount of financial compensation due to him if a wrong is committed against him, and even his kingdom (F. Kelly 8, 18, 127-28). Even worse, a king who kills his only son loses his obvious heir, so the kingdom could pass from the hands of his family to those of another.

Erich Poppe argues convincingly that *Fingal Rónáin* serves as an *exemplum* not just regarding *fingal* but also regarding the effects of "deception and self-deception" on an individual's life and the lives of those around him; he argues that the lesson is intended to benefit rulers as well as commoners (149-51). He explains the legal travesty depicted in the narrative. Mael Fothartaig has no idea that his father is judging him and thus makes no

28 A dot should appear above the f.

attempt to defend himself; this results in his father making a false judgment (141-43), an act that leads to loss of respect (his men hold him down upon the ground) and possibly to his unexplained death at the end of the tale (lines 245-70). Poppe rightfully attributes Rónán's mistake to his lubricity (143), which is not a favorable quality in a king.

The filicide found in *Fingal Rónáin* is clearly meant to have a material function, for the narrative would be of an entirely different nature were it not for this crucial element. It also has an obvious moral function, as it demonstrates how lack of truthfulness and how valuing one's own desires above one's family leads to no good. As in *Aided Óenfir Aife*, we also see a failing ruler and the effects he has on his lineage and the greater society.

Scél na Fír Flatha

The Middle Irish *Scél na Fír Flatha* (*The Tale of the True Sovereignty*),[29] which is part of a larger work entitled *Scél na Fír Flatha, Echtra Cormaic i Tir Tairngiri ocus Ceart Claidib Cormaic* (*The Tale of the True Sovereignty, the Adventure of Cormac in the Land of Promise, and the Decision regarding Cormac's Sword*), includes information about some supernatural truth-telling devices. The larger narrative explains that during the peaceful and prosperous reign in Tara (the reputed seat of the Irish high-king) of Cormac, grandson of Conn, the king gathers the nobles to discuss professional boundaries in society and to publish a work regarding several truth-telling devices, the first of which are three collars of the legendary judge Morann, the son of the king Carpre Cat-head. The work also provides a long narrative on the origin of Cormac's truth-telling cup that he obtains in the otherworld from the mysterious figure Manannan mac Lir and a shorter explanation of a sword that is said to

29 It is also often known, as it is in the edition and translation by Whitley Stokes used here, as the tale of "The Irish Ordeals."

have belonged to the legendary hero Cú Chulainn. Within a brief imbedded narrative concerning the birth of Morann and the origin of the collars, we learn how the boy, unlike his siblings, escapes his murderous father (sections 12-16).

The narrative portrays Carpre as an evil man and unjust king. He is of the "cheinel aitheach" 'race of peasants' and forcefully takes the kingship of Ireland. He would not have been eligible for the kingship due to his low birth and his deformity, for he has a "[s]rub chair" 'a cat's snout' (12). Once he is king, "rohorta sær Erenn lais acht tri meic ructha a mbroindib a maithreach" 'the nobles of Ireland, except for three boys borne away in the wombs of their mothers, were killed by him' (12). He kills not only his enemies, but he also his children. Like Carpre, "cach mac dobertha do dobídh anim fair, ד nomarbdais lais iarum" 'each boy who was born to him had a blemish upon him, and they were killed because of it' (12).[30] Morann, who is born after his mother suggests praying concerning the matter, is also born disfigured and escapes death only through the intervention of one from the síd (the other-worldly fairy-realm), who tells the boy's mother that he will become a king[31] if he is held in a particular way in the water. His deformity, which is a skin hood that entirely covers his neck and head, is transformed by the crashing waves and becomes a collar around his neck; the uncovering of his mouth also allows him to sing (12-13). The servant charged with killing the Morann decides it would be wrong to kill the child and leaves him instead with the royal cowherd. Eventually, a collar of silver and gold is made to cover the remnants of his

30 A separate and fragmentary version of this legend preserved in the *Book of Leinster* under the title "Cía tréide cétna labratar iarna genemain?" ("How did three first speak immediately after their births?") provides a few details not found in *Scél na Fír Flatha*. King Carpre has two older sons, "ד ro bádidís leis fo chetoir. ar ba doig ropdís torathair. Fo bíthin no bitis a cathbairr fo chennaib" 'and they were drowned immediately by him, since it was probable that they were monsters, because their membranes were over their heads' (14619-21).

31 The boy grows up to be a famed judge but not a king; this proclamation seems strange since his deformity would prevent him from being a legitimate ruler.

skin hood; this collar, when placed around one's neck, will spare the innocent but demonstrate one's guilt by choking the offender (14).

Physical deformity was an important issue in Old Irish literature, for having a blemish normally disqualified someone from being a king, as we have already seen in *Cath Maige Tuired.* It was not, however, a justification for killing someone, and in fact, various Old Irish heroes are believed - sometimes based on their epithets - to have been deformed. One tale even reports that the women who love these heroes take on their deformities, so that those who love Cú Chulainn blinded themselves in one eye because when roused to anger, he could retract one eye far into his head (*Serglige* section 5). Thus, neither Carpre nor any of his sons - including Morann - was inherently monstrous. In fact, the supernatural circumstances surrounding Morann suggest that his existence will prove beneficial to society; he was born only after his mother prayed to have a child that Carpre would not decide to slay, and his drowning is prevented by a warning and a promise of his future greatness from the otherworld. To ensure that there would be no misunderstandings regarding Carpre's character, however, the narrator of *Scél na Fír Flatha* refers to him as a "drochfear" 'a bad man' (section 12). His deformity does not make him inherently evil but does mark him as one unfit to rule. The injustice of his rule may explain why he is so keen on killing each heir born to him. Carpre ascended the throne not by right of birth, but by force, and perhaps he is uninterested in preserving a royal lineage since he knows that the kingship can easily be taken by another.

Scél na Fír Flatha, like the Irish texts previously under consideration, serves both to entertain and to enlighten. The embedded nature of the tale speaks to the Irish love for

aetiological tales found within other narratives, and the subject matter adds to the body of knowledge about one of the most famous legendary judges of Ireland and the king he later serves, Feradach Findfechtnach (one of the three children who survive Carpre's slaughter of Irish nobles). Morann's drowned siblings, though unnamed and undeveloped, highlight the survival of their important (though deformed, as they are) younger brother. As has also been the case so far, the narrative uses the filicide motif to illustrate a point about just kingship. Here, Carpre's flagrant commission of *fingal*, in addition to his physical and other moral shortcomings, demonstrates what an unjust ruler he is, which is expected because of his non-noble blood.

The Mabinogi

Tales of individual children, other than those revolving around Cú Chulainn and the hero Fionn mac Cumhaill, are uncommon in the extant body of Old and Middle Irish literature, but young children figure prominently in the four branches of the late eleventh / early twelfth-century Middle Welsh *Mabinogi*.[32] *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet* (*PPD*) and *Branwen Uerch Lyr* (*BUL*), the first two branches, are particularly relevant to this discussion of filicide because the former contains an episode of presumed filicide, and the latter contains the kin-slaying of a young child.[33] *Llyfr Iorwerth* (*The Book of Iorworth*), the best-known medieval Welsh legal work, contains no specific information on filicide or the kin-slayings, but its

32 T. M. Charles-Edwards summarizes and critiques several key arguments on the dating of the four branches ("Date").

33 W.J. Gruffydd has argued that an earlier version of *BUL* was a filicide narrative (*Folklore* 14-17; *Rhiannon* 62-63), though Proinsias MacCana has convincingly dismissed that argument on lack of evidence (*Branwen* 162, 166-73, 191-94). J.K. Bollard has addressed the first two branches with respect to the motif of the calumniated wife (179-83), as Juliette Wood has done even more recently. Wood focuses on the effects of the foreignness of the women within the communities they enter at the time of marriage. She is in error, however, when she writes "the accusation of infanticide [...] is very unclear in *Pwyll*" and "Rhiannon is merely accused of barrenness" (65). Rhiannon tells her own child of the crime she is believed to have committed when he returns to the court (*PPD* 592-95).

treatment of *galanas* (a term that applies to both a homicide and the compensation for the crime) reveals a system of financial compensation akin to that found in early Irish law (sections 104-10). One can presume that kin-slaying would lead to the same sorts of entanglements in medieval Welsh societies that *fingal* could in early Irish societies.

Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet demonstrates the punishment a lady receives when she is believed to have committed filicide. In *PPD*, which focuses on the rule of Lord Pwyll of Dyfed, he gains his mysterious, foreign bride Rhiannon, the daughter of Hefeydd the Old, and after some concerns among the aristocrats over Pwyll being "dietiued" 'heirless,' they have a son who promptly disappears from his mother's side in the middle of the night (lines 192-468). The nurses fear punishment for not protecting their lord's heir, so they frame Rhiannon, by placing the blood of some puppies on her face and hands and the bones on her chest, and claim that she has killed her baby (468-90). Pwyll does not believe them but is obligated to render judgment upon his wife; her daily penance for seven years is to sit outside the court, where she tells of her crime to those ignorant of it, and to carry visitors to the court on her back (491-508, 592-95). The penance is finally lifted when, years later, the child (eventually named Pryderi) is rediscovered and reunited with his family (608-23). Clearly, the death of a child - particularly a much-needed royal heir - is not to be taken lightly in the *Mabinogi*.

Gwern, a child born in *Branwen Uerch Lyr*, is also of great importance, for his parents' marriage was heralded as the beginning of an alliance between the British and the Irish (the focus of much of *BUL*), and his death at the hands of his maternal uncle Efnyssyen restarts a war between the two peoples. The discord that results in Gwern's death stems from

how his parents are wed. Matholwch, the King of Ireland, sails with his retinue to seek the hand of Branwen from her brother Bendegeiduran, the King of the Island of the Mighty (Britain). A deal is struck, and the wedding festivities are held, but when Efnyssyen, a brother of Branwen's infamous for his malevolence, discovers that she has been married without his counsel or consent, he flies into a rage: "'Ay yuelly y gwnaethant wy am uorwyn kystal a honno, ac yn chwaer y minheu, y rodi heb uyghanyat i? Ny ellynt wy tremic uwy arnaf i'" 'Is it thus they did with a maiden as good as this, and my sister even, to give her away without my permission? They were not able to put a greater insult upon me' (lines 70-73). He retaliates by mutilating Matholwch's horses. Bendegeiduran appeases his new brother-in-law with gifts, though he will not harm his half-brother Efnyssyen because of their familial relationship. The peace does not last long. A fierce war erupts between the British and Irish that is eventually settled by investing Gwern with the kingship of Ireland. Efnyssyen feels insulted again because, at the gathering of the British and Irish where Gwern's future is decided, the child approaches his three other maternal uncles (two of whom have explicitly called the child to them) but not him. He complains, and when Gwern then approaches him, he throws the child into a fire: "'Y Duw y dygaf uyg kyffes,' heb ynteu yn y uedwl, 'ys anhebic a gyflauan gan y tylwyth y wneuthur, a wnaf i yr awr honn.' A chyuodi y uynyd, a chymryt y mab erwyd y traet, a heb ohir, na chael o dyn yn y ty gauael arnaw, yny want y mab yn wysc y benn yn y gynneu" "'To God I make my confession,' he said in his mind, 'in the eyes of the family it is unimaginable to commit the outrage that I will now do.' He rose up, took the boy by the feet, and without delay or anyone in the house getting a grip

on him, he thrust the boy headlong into the fire" (361-66). This action renews the war, which results in massive devastation on both sides.

Although Gwern's death is not a filicide in the strict sense, this kin-slaying is still very important to this study. He is the maternal nephew of Efnyssyen, and this link is of great consequence. The relationship between a man and his maternal nephew is one that has held great importance in many cultures and is "the closest tie between male relations in much of medieval literature" (Bollard 171; Ó Cathasaigh).[34] In Old Irish, the term *gormac* is used to mean the son of one's sister, and this figure is, in a sense, adopted by the uncle as one who will care for the uncle in the future (Ó Cathasaigh 137). The *gormac* thus has a strong filial relationship, perhaps stronger than that between father and son, and the death of a *gormac* at the hands of his uncle would be especially remarkable, for the uncle would have eliminated the one who would later care for him.

The meaning of the word *mabinogi* has not been conclusively determined, although many speculate that it is related to the root word *mab*, meaning boy or son. An early prominent theory posited by W.J. Gruffydd argues that the term refers to the life and death of the above-mentioned Pryderi, who connects all four of the branches, though subsequent scholars have noted the tenuous nature of some of these connections (Gantz 266; Gruffydd, *Folklore* 23-24; *Rhiannon* 5, 8-19; MacCana, *Branwen* 174).[35] More recently, J.K. Bollard has pointed out the emphasis on the themes of "Friendships, Marriages and Feuds" within the four branches (168). This aligns well with Helen Fulton's theory that "the Four Branches

34 Key literary examples cited by Ó Cathasaigh include Conchobar and Cú Chulainn and Conchobar and Noísiu, as well as King Mark and Tristan.

35 Pryderi is born in the first branch, survives a war in the second, triumphs over a mysterious enemy in the third, and dies in the fourth. While he is a major figure in the first and third, he is a minor figure in the second and fourth.

perform, among other things, an educative function for the nobility of Wales, contributing a native version of the *speculum principium* ('mirror of princes') tradition which was widespread in both prescriptive and exemplary forms among medieval European cultures" (230).[36] Each branch provides an example of a young male heir, and as Fulton points out in a discussion of succession, Pryderi and Gwern, in the first and second branches respectively, are only children and thus the only potential direct heirs to their realms (235, 241), which means that their deaths would devastate their societies by leaving them heirless and thus potentially defenseless, as illustrated in *BUL* when Gwern's death sparks a chain of events that leads to the conquest of Britain (236). If we accept the posited exemplary function of the *Mabinogi*, for which the case seems strong, we could possibly view *BUL* as a warning to follow all protocol when forging unions between feuding groups, for the consultation of all of Branwen's brothers may have prevented bloodshed. A promotion of prudent unions would be perfectly in keeping with the theme of moderation evidenced in other parts of the *Mabinogi*.

Melusine Narratives

All medieval variants of the Melusine legend conform to the following pattern: a noble man (Raymond) falls in love with a mysterious woman he encounters in the woods; she (Melusine) agrees to marry him and promises him success as long as he abides by her particular rule (that he not seek her out on a Saturday); he agrees, and they experience great prosperity (including the birth of ten sons); he breaks one of her rules (by spying upon her and verbalizing what he sees - that she is a supernatural being); she leaves, and his fortunes diminish. This pattern is found in many narratives derived from Celtic myths and legends

36 Fulton notes that Catherine McKenna has already proposed this function for *PPD* (237 n. 22).

about sovereignty figures.[37] The otherworldly women of these works (who are often associated with bodies of water) ensure the success of their lords until some sort of *geis*, or taboo, is broken, at which point they begin to suffer misfortune. In the Melusine narratives, the death of a child ironically helps prevent the complete collapse of the familial domain.

These tales teem with details regarding her family history and construction efforts, her husband Raymond's chivalrous adventures, the sons they have, and the exploits of those sons and their descendants. As Jane H. M. Taylor points out, the sons of Melusine and Raymond greatly concerned the medieval authors and thus ought to receive more scholarly attention than they have. This is certainly true in the case of Horrible, one of the most mysterious of the sons,[38] who is the victim of filicide. Because the general framework of these texts is similar, a general discussion of filicide in the legend will follow the examination of the treatments of relevant passages of the three individual texts.

Jean d' Arras's *Mélusine*

In 1392, Jean d'Arras began to compose his *Mélusine,* as he explains in his own words, "au plaisir de Dieu mon Createur et au command de mon dessuz dit trespuissant et noble seigneur" 'at the pleasure of God my Creator and at the command of my incredibly powerful and noble lord mentioned below,' John, son of the king of France, duke of Berry and Auvergne, and count of Poitou (110, 112, 116). While he emphasizes that he is using

37 The Welsh "Llyn y Van Vach" ("Lake of the Little Peak") (*Physicians* xxi-xxx) and the Irish *Echtra mac Echach Muigmedoin* (*The Adventure of the sons of Eochaid Muigmedón,* found in "The Death of Crimthan, Son of Fidach, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedon") are two of the most obvious variants on this sovereignty theme. They treat the origins of the famous Physicians of Myddvai and the foundation of the Irish Uí Néill dynasty, respectively. The theme appears in a more subtle form in many other medieval works with a Celtic mythological foundation, including *Le Chevalier au Lion* and its Middle Welsh counterpart, *Chwedyl Iarlles y Ffynnawn* (*Tale of the Earl of the Fountain*).

38 Likewise, little is related regarding Eudes other than his deformity and marriage.

"vrayes coroniquez" 'true chronicles' for this history, he understands that his audience may have trouble believing some of the supernatural elements of the story (which have been recounted locally for many years), and he aims to help them suspend their disbelief by explaining that men cannot fathom all that God creates (110, 112, 114, 116, 118). He presents *Mélusine* to his audience not as fiction but as the history - without embellishment on his part - of how "la noble et puissant forteresse de Lisignen en Poictou fu fondee par une faee" 'the noble and powerful fortress of Lusignen in Poitou was founded by a fairy' and of "la noble lignie qui en est yssue" 'the noble lineage who sprang from her' (118). In this sense, *Mélusine* has much in common with a chanson de geste. Given the importance of lineage in this narrative, it is noteworthy that Melusine instructs Raymond to kill Horrible, the eighth of ten children.

When Jean d'Arras initially introduces each of the first eight children, he describes the deformity of each and names the child except in the case of Horrible; his naming is deferred until far later in the narrative. The unnamed son "apporta trois yeux sur terre, de quoy ly uns fu ou front" 'bore three eyes on earth of which one was on the forehead' (294). In addition to this child's physical abnormality, he has a monstrous personality: "fu si crueulx et si mauvais qu'il occist, ains qu'il eust quatre ans, deux de ses nourrices" 'he was so cruel and evil that he killed two of his nurses before he was four years old' (294). The passage also informs the audience that further into the narrative, he will be killed and buried at "Moustier Nuef" (209). Raymond, the first to name the child in this tale, provides more information about Horrible's malevolence: "'Ne veéz la Orrible qui n'a pas .vii. ans acompliz, qui a ja occiz deux de mes escuirs et, avant qu'il eust trois ans, avoit il fait mourir deux de ses nourrices par force de

mordre leurs mamelles?'" 'Don't you see there Horrible, who, before he was seven years old, had already killed two of my squires and who, before he was three years old, had already caused two of his wet nurses to die by dint of biting their nipples?' (688). Horrible has killed at least four people by the age of seven, but those specific acts are not what spur his mother to order his death. It is not what he *has done* but what he *will do* that concerns Melusine. As she explains to Raymond and his men,

> "Beaulx seigneurs, gardéz, si chier que vous avéz vostre honneur et vostre chevance que, si tost que je seray partie, que vous faciéz tant que Horrible, nostre filz qui a trois yeulx dont l'un est ou front, soit mort priveement. Car sachiéz, en verité, que il feroit tant de maulx que ce ne seroit pas si grant dommage de la mort de telz .xx^{m}. que de la perte que on auroit par lui, car certainnement il destruiroit out quanque j'ay ediffié ne jamais guerre ne fauldroit ou Paÿs de Poictou ne de Guyenne. Et gardéz que vous le faictes ainsi ou vous feistes oncques si grant folie." (700)
>
> "Good lords, take heed, as dear as you hold your honor and your property, that as soon as I have left, you privately arrange for Horrible, our son who has three eyes, one of which is on his forehead, to die. For know, in truth, that he would do so much evil that the sorrow over the deaths of twenty thousand people would not be as great as the loss that we would have at his hands, for

> certainly he would destroy everything that I have built, and war would never stop in the country of Poitou or Guyenne. And take heed that you do it thus, or you will never have made such a great mistake."

While it is not explicitly stated that Horrible would take another human life, it is clearly implied that his actions would result in the deaths of many, including Raymond's own men. This matter is so critical that Mélusine reminds her husband of it again before parting from him (704), and though too distraught over the loss of his wife to manage the details himself, Raymond directs his men to follow her bidding (706).

The author suggests that killing Horrible requires caution and skill. Raymond's men

> prient Horrible par belle maniere et par belles paroles et le menerent en une cave,car, s'il se feust donnéz de garde de ce que on lui vouloit faire, ilz ne l'eussent pas eu sans peril ne sans peine. Ilz l'enfermerent et l'estoufferent de fumee de foing moillié et puis le mirent en une biere. Et fu porté ensevelir a Poictiers, en l'abbaye de Moustier Nuef, et fu fait son obseque moult richement si comme il appertenoit. (706, 708)
>
> took Horrible by means of a pleasing manner and speech and led him into a cellar, for if he had anticipated what they wanted to do to him, they would not have taken him without danger or difficulty. They shut him up and smothered him with smoke from wet hay, and then they put him in a coffin. He was

> carried off to be buried in Poitiers, in the abbey of Moustier Nuef, and his funeral was conducted magnificently as was appropriate.

The luring of Horrible into the cellar is reminiscent of how one may lead a dog or other animal into an enclosure; his bestial ferocity requires that the barons be cautious or become his victims. Despite his threatening nature, however, he is treated with dignity in death. The abbey of Moustier Nuef[39] in Poitiers is mentioned earlier in the narrative as the place where Raymond goes to mass shortly before acquiring the hide used to mark his territories (182), so it is an abbey important to the family. Moreover, the funeral is sumptuous, as appropriate for one of the Lusignen lineage and with the added benefit of masking any appearance of wrongdoing. While Melusine and Raymond view Horrible as a threat while alive, he remains a part of their noble family in death.

Jean d'Arras does not portray Melusine and Raymond as enraged murderers. While admittedly, Melusine has a strong vengeance streak evidenced by her punishment of her own father (132, 134), the figure shown to the audience for the bulk of the narrative is a virtuous and magnanimous woman. She displays generosity not only to her husband but also to his family; after the marriage, she gives fabulous gifts to the wedding guests, including a priceless golden broach to the Countess of Poitou and a jeweled crown to her daughter Blanche (206, 208). Melusine establishes early on in her relationship with Raymond that she is a devout Christian and not at all diabolical (164), and she promises that she will not be dishonoring him during her secret Saturdays (166). As for Raymond, he likewise demonstrates his noble character through his actions. After regaining his Breton patrimony

39 The abbey's name is also spelled Moustier Neuf and is modernized as Montierneuf.

from the traitor Josselin de Pont de Léon, he bequeaths it to his fraternal cousin Hervé and gives Josselin's familial lands to Hervé's brother Alain (260, 262). The generosity is noted by the Breton king's barons as the mark of a good man (262). The admirable qualities of the parents reappear in the subsequent Melusine narrative, *Le Roman de Parthenay.*

Coudrette's *Le Roman de Parthenay*

Coudrette produced *Le Roman de Parthenay* at the beginning of the fifteenth century, shortly after the Arrasian version was completed.[40] This poetic narrative presents the same base narrative, in a condensed form; the key differences (namely an appended episode regarding Melusine's sister Palatine and some shifts in emphasis) stem from Coudrette's catering to his patrons, Guillaume and Jean, lords of Parthenay. The desire to streamline the narrative led Coudrette to change the details of some episodes, and one interesting result is a softened treatment of Horrible.

When Coudrette introduces Horrible to his audience, he describes the child's deformity and general temperament but provides no tangible evidence of the latter (lines 1463-70). This eighth child, as in the earlier narrative, has three eyes, one of which is on his forehead, and he shocks and disturbs people when they see him (1465-68). His personality matches his appearance: "... tant fut de mauvais affaire, / Qu'il ne pensoit fors qu'a mal faire" 'he had such a bad disposition that his only thought was to do evil' (1469-70). Unlike Jean d'Arras, Coudrette does not provide examples of Horrible's wrongdoings or any hint of his fate, so the audience has no way of knowing at this point how serious a problem he may pose for the family unless it is already familiar with the legend. Melusine, after receiving word

40 The edition used throughout is that of Matthew W. Morris, unless noted, though I have employed the more common spelling Coudrette rather than his Couldrette.

that her sons Antoine and Renault have gained land and wives in Luxembourg and Bohemia, respectively, reflects upon the good fortune of the majority of her sons and prays that the rest will fare likewise (2933-68). She does not hint that anything is amiss with any of the sons; it is implied that they are still young, for they "par cest hostel vont courant" 'go running through this house' (2964). Even after Geoffrey burns the monks of the abbey of Maillezays, an infuriated Raymond proclaims that despite his wife's gossip-worthy serpentine nature, he shouldn't complain because he had ten fine children by her (3791-93). It is only when Melusine prepares to depart Lusignen after her husband's verbal betrayal that the audience realizes how horrible their son Horrible really is. She instructs Raymond and his men:

> "Entens, Raymond; ton filz Horrible
>
> Fay mourir ou en exil mettre;
>
> De ce te fault il entremettre.
>
> Il aporta troys yeulx sur terre;
>
> Si vit, jamais ne fauldra guerre
>
> En tout le pays poictevin,
>
> E n'y crostra ne blé ne vin,
>
> Car tout le paÿs gasteroit
>
> Tant que rien croistre n'y pourroit,
>
> Et touz les lieux que j'ay fait faire,
>
> Destruyre feroit et desfaire

Et ses freres en verité

Mettroit il touz a pouverté

Voyre, et touz ceulx de la lignye.

Fay le tost mourir, je t'em prie." (3980-94)

"Listen, Raymond; have your son Horrible

Killed or send him into exile.

It's essential that you intervene regarding this.

He bore three eyes on earth.

If he lives, war will never cease

In the entire Poitevin country,

And neither wheat nor wine will grow,

Because he will ravage the entire country

Such that that nothing will be able to grow,

And all of the places that I had constructed,

He will have destroyed and unmade,

And truly, his brothers

He will drive into poverty,

Truly, and all those of the lineage.

Have him killed soon, I beg of you."

Melusine refers to Horrible here as Raymond's child, not their child, but this may not be significant, as this sort of diction appears in parental discussions of their children's misbehavior even today. Although in the final line she urges Raymond to have Horrible killed, she initially gives him the option of exiling him. This suggests that either Coudrette found the filicide shocking and sought to make it less so for his audience (unlike Jean d'Arras, who claims not to change the truth that he recounts) or perhaps that Coudrette's Horrible is perceived as less of a threat to other men than his Arrasian counterpart. That Coudrette would wish to please his audience is a given, but he certainly does not shy away from depictions of violence, intrafamilial or otherwise. Furthermore, the remainder of the passage supports the latter conjecture. The destruction of Melusine's work and war throughout Poitou are found in the earlier narrative, but here we see less emphasis on the loss of human life and more emphasis on the loss of agriculture, specifically wheat and wine.[41] Wheat, of course, is a staple crop, and the lack of it would almost certainly result in mass starvation. Lack of wine also seems a particularly serious threat to our poet, as demonstrated by his reiteration that Poitevin men are strong warriors because they are nourished on wine (1563-65, 2417-18) and by the catalog of wines served at the wedding banquet of Melusine and Raymond (1161-75). Horrible, while a clear threat to the Lusignen prosperity, does not seem to harbor homicidal intent, so the suggestion to exile him rather than kill him may seem more just.

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41 The potential devastation of the land and the dwindling fortunes of the Lusignen family relate to the relationship found in Celtic mythology between a king, his queen/sovereignty figure, and his land. When a king is no longer fit to rule (often because of a miscarriage of justice), his sovereignty figure (e.g. Melusine) abandons the land, and the fertility of the land suffers. For more on sovereignty figures, see Proinsias MacCana's *Celtic Mythology* 92-93, 119-21.

For the killing, we find in Coudrette's narrative what we find in that of Jean d'Arras: Raymond's barons remind him of Melusine's orders, and he agrees to have Horrible put to death (4268-77); they suffocate him in a cellar by setting fire to damp hay and then bury him properly and hold a funeral (4292-306). The only other mention of Horrible is a brief one at the end noting that all of the brothers except Horrible and Fromont, who were killed, held themselves well and conquered many lands (5805-08).

Melusine and Raymond generally seem to be fine, devoted parents, as in the narrative by Jean d'Arras. Coudrette particularly emphasizes Melusine's ability to nourish her children: "La dame ses enfans nourist, / Tant que furent huyt parcreü" 'The lady fed her children such that the eight were strong' (1432-33). After she leaves Lusignen, she secretly returns to feed her two youngest children (4365-72). Thierry, the future lord of Parthenay, grows remarkably during this period, which Coudrette ascribes to the power of breast milk, especially that of one's own mother (4383-91). One would hardly expect a murderess to be portrayed as such a good and caring provider, and Melusine, as demonstrated by her amazing fertility, is the consummate mother.

The Romans of Partenay

The description of Horrible in the late fifteenth / early sixteenth-century English version of Coudrette's narrative, *The Romans of Partenay,* is a straight translation (lines 1268-74), but there are slight differences in Melusine's instructions regarding his fate. The English adaptation is more brutal. It begins, as do the mother's other speeches regarding the eighth child, with an instruction to kill Horrible: "Raymounde, understande, horrible thy sone gete / Do hym for to dy, neuer be he found" 'Raymond, understand; arrange for your son

Horrible to be killed and never be found' (3655-56). This last part about hiding the body could be a misunderstanding of Coudrette's passage regarding exile, but this may not be the case given the lady's final words. While the middle of her speech here is much the same as in the fifteenth-century French, the end differs. Instead of Melusine's urging of Raymond to kill Horrible soon, here she says "'...lete hym dy w*ith* pine'" 'have him die with pain' (3668). This is a new detail, not found in either of the preceding versions. Horrible's death proceeds as in Coudrette's poem: the barons remind Raymond of Melusine's instructions, and Raymond gives them carte blanche to kill Horrible (3929-37). Horrible is then suffocated in a cave with smoke from burning hay (3949-57); afterward, the barons bury him and hold a funeral (3958-64). Following Coudrette's narrative, the translator also briefly notes toward the end of the narrative that all of the brothers save Horrible and Fromont made great conquests (5344-47).[42]

Horrible's character is not well developed in any of the Melusine tales, and it is not obviously critical to the main events of these narratives. Indeed, had Horrible never been born, Raymond and Melusine would have had only nine children, but the lineage would have been established in much the same way. Why, then, include Horrible at all? What sets Horrible apart? It cannot be the mere fact that he is disfigured, for so are his older brothers who, except for the tragically cremated Fromont, achieve greatness.[43] In fact, his ocular abnormality does not set him apart from his brothers, for three others (Urien, Guy, and the single-eyed Renault) also have deformities of the eyes. Eleanor Roach claims in her edition of Coudrette's narrative that Horrible's three eyes constitute the most horrific deformity borne

42 The English translation also includes Melusine's hope for the futures of her sons who remain at home (2695-716).

43 Much has been made of what the marks mean; see D. Kelly ("The Domestication"), Spiegel, and Taylor.

by the children but does not explain why having three eyes is worse than having only one or having two that are mismatched (57). Peggy McCracken argues that physical appearance demands less attention in *Le roman de Mélusine* than "moral monstrosity" (*Curse* 82), and the evidence tends to support this.

A consideration of Horrible's temperament seems in order. Gabrielle Spiegel writes that Horrible is the only one of the children who is "a wholly 'authentic' person" because his monstrous appearance matches his fully monstrous personality (109) and that he "is the antitype to Melusine, the visible contradiction to the *roman's* fantasies of the generativity, prosperity, and benevolence that she can bestow" (109). This nature necessitates his death, she argues, for "he alone can redeem the transgressions of category that his mother and siblings embody" (114). They do not fit neatly into categories based on humanity or monstrosity, for while their ability to function well in society demonstrates their human nature, their mutations demonstrate their otherworldly nature. Horrible, in contrast, does not function properly in normal human society because he is pure monster. Spiegel's interpretation seems valid, given the placement of Horrible's death within the narrative right after Melusine leaves and the emphasis in all versions of the narrative of his destructive rather than productive nature.

Another enticing thought arises from Spiegel's general recognition of "the doubling - on all levels of the text" (103). She argues that Horrible's death is a doublet of Melusine's vengeance on her father Elinas (115), but while both Elinas and Horrible are enclosed, the similarities end here, for even if one accepts that the confinement of Elinas results in his death, there is no indication that Elinas was suffocated. Horrible may be echoed in other

figures within the texts, but Elinas does not appear to be one of them. It makes more sense to examine his brothers, since we see doubling in that the adventures of Urien and Guy are parallel with those of Antoine and Renault.

Horrible has nine brothers, two of whom - Geoffrey and Fromont - demand consideration here. Douglas Kelly places the sons into three categories.[44] The two youngest sons are neither physically nor socially abnormal. The eldest five sons are abnormal physically, but not socially; each marries and lives a fairy-tale life. The middle three sons, however - Geoffrey, Fromont, and Horrible - "are especially unusual morally and socially" and never marry ("The Domestication" 34); they also do not have children,[45] which is unusual in such a prolific family and in narratives focused on lineage (Taylor 180). Kelly notes that both Fromont and Horrible, who are notably mortal despite their supernatural mother, are victims of domestic violence that he labels as murder[46] and suggests that there may be a further, albeit obscure, link between the two ("The Domestication" 39, 43). They also both die as the result of fire (presumably both of smoke inhalation). Roach and Myriam White-Le Goff note that Fromont and Horrible are the only children for whom scholars have not posited a historical counterpart and write that their characters are polar opposites in terms of temperament (56-57; 120). Jean d'Arras also provides information that may link Horrible to Geoffrey. His Horrible, whose monstrous deformity involves his eyes, kills his wet nurses by biting their breasts while nursing. It would make more sense if Geoffrey, with his dental

44 Douglas Kelly suggests that the unmarked appearances of Remonnet and Thierry indicate that Melusine gradually becomes more human and less supernatural through the narratives, but he is forced to admit that Geoffrey, Fromont, and Horrible pose a challenge to his logic ("The Domestication" 44).

45 Spiegel identifies Geoffrey's failure to sire any children as "the beginning of the family's decline" (115).

46 Spiegel likewise uses the word "murder" in reference to Horrible's death (102), though in the same article, she refers to him as a "sacrificial victim" (114). McCracken uses the phrase "murder sanctioned by Mélusine herself" (*Curse* 82).

abnormality, had been the murderous masticator. Both Geoffrey and Horrible also have foul temperaments. Perhaps in an earlier version of the legend, Geoffrey and Horrible were the same figure and stood in opposition to Fromont; this could also explain why Horrible is the only child whose first name is an adjective. Stephen G. Nichols groups Melusine, Geoffrey and Horrible together "in a demonic trinity," a connection also made by Raymond when he denounces the actions of Geoffrey and links them to the monstrous nature of the children illustrated by Horrible (146-49). He believes that the three illustrate "the unnatural morbidity of this family given to parricide, fratricide, and infanticide" (149).

There are hints throughout the Melusine narratives that there may be some textual problems related to the children.[47] In *The Romans of Partenay* edited by Walter W. Skeat, Fromont and Thierry (Tierry) are named as Melusine's last two children (2546-50), although Fromont (Ffromont) has already been named as the seventh child (1261-67) who precedes Horrible. Skeat offers no explanation, but this error almost certainly derives from Coudrette's text. Matthew Morris's critical edition names the ninth child as Froymond and provides no note (line 2791), and Eleanor Roach's critical edition notes that all manuscripts consulted contain a variant of Fromont's name, which she emends to read "Raymons" (line 2797). Since the material immediately following the naming of the ninth and tenth children treats their older brother Fromont, the mistaken naming of Raymond can almost certainly be attributed to a transcription error such as eye-skip. It does, however, raise the possibility that other such errors may have occurred and not yet been detected and that therein lies the enigma of Horrible.

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47 Some obvious errors have been corrected by editors; for instance, in Vincensini's edition of Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine*, he corrects the mother's instructions to kill Horrible so that they match the following events; the original text used reads "Eudes" instead of "Horrible" (700 n. 1).

White-Le Goff argues that though Melusine's order to kill Horrible is for the greater good, this act separates her from the nourishing mother figure she was previously and renders her an "ogresse inquiétante" (165). This seems odd considering that in Coudrette's narrative, Melusine's stealth feedings of her youngest occur after the death and burial of Horrible.

If Melusine and Raymond are not murderers, those who would kill their child while fueled by an emotion like rage, are they then sacrificers? One obvious difference between these narratives and previously examined sacrifices is that Horrible is not innocent like the sacrificed babies discussed in the last chapter, Garnier and Daurelet. Another obvious difference between Horrible's parents and many sacrificing parents is the emotional detachment of Melusine and Raymond. No grief for their child is depicted, though Fromont's death and Melusine's separation from Raymond illustrate that both parents are capable of grief. Emotional outpouring is, however, not the sole domain of sacrificers since Medea and Procne, both murderers, demonstrate attachment to their children. An assessment of motivation provides some clarity here. Melusine does not urge Raymond to kill Horrible out of anger. As she calmly explains, not killing Horrible will result in the devastation of everything she has built and would likely result in mass casualties. Raymond follows his wife's advice as he does for most of their marriage, because it is sound and rational, not emotional. Both parents realize that their child's death is for the greater good. Despite our inability to perceive that Melusine and Raymond feel a sense of loss, this death is a sacrifice made to prevent the utter destruction of Lusignen by the potential threat Horrible. As Jean d'Arras wrote about our not being able to understand all of the supernatural elements of his narrative, we may not be able to understand all that we care to about Horrible's death. Still,

the tales of his death serve as fascinating matière that helps flesh out the narratives and help mark the beginning of the dwindling prosperity of a ruler who breaks his *geis*.

Tristan Narratives

Based upon evidence such as the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (*The Welsh Triads*) regarding the figure Drystan, the Tristan legend appears to be of Brythonic (that is Welsh or Cornish) origin (McCann 3-6, 22-34). The legend became more widely known upon its adaptation into Old French romance, and the thirteenth-century *Le Roman de Tristan en Pros*e, also known as the *Prose Tristan*, enjoyed wide circulation during the Middle Ages (1.8).[48] The romance gives credit to two men as translators of the material within it from Latin into French, the knight Luce del Gat (who is otherwise unknown and whose name is believed to be a pseudonym) and Hélie de Boron (to whom one other romance, *Palamedes*, is ascribed and whom scholars believe to have pretended to be related to the famed Arthurian writer Robert de Boron) (1.11-12). The immense narrative begins with the lineage of Joseph of Arimathea - to which the family of Tristan has been attached, continues with his childhood and his amorous and chivalric exploits, and ends with a prolonged scene of his death. Renée L. Curtis notes in the introduction to her abridged translation of the romance that the *Prose Tristan* is the earliest extant Tristan narrative in which his stepmother tries to kill him (xx). This innovation constitutes a brief yet key episode within the larger story, for it sets the stage for other attempts on Tristan's life by his maternal uncle Mark.

When Tristan's father King Melyadus marries the beautiful daughter of King Hoel of Brittany, the narrator describes her largely in negative terms: "ele estoit mout malicieuse et

48 I have used the three volume edition edited by Renée L. Curtis but have also occasionally consulted her abridged translation, *The Romance of Tristan* and, for the death of Tristan, the ninth volume to the multi-volume edition published by Droz.

envoisiee et jolive plus que mestier ne li fust. Et comença a amer par amors des le premier an qu'ele vint a mari" 'she was very malicious and hedonistic and more fickle than was appropriate. And she began an affair from the first year that she was married' (1.244). She desires that her year-old baby be the heir to the throne of Leonois instead of the seven-year-old Tristan, whom she decides to poison. A servant caring for the baby finds some water that the queen has poisoned and left for her stepson to consume (1.244-46). Unaware of its nature, she gives that water to the baby, who is crying from thirst, "Et tot maintenant / qu'il en ot beü, il se pasme et s'estent entre les mens de cele qui le tient, et erranment li parti l'ame dou cors" 'And right at the moment when he drank it, he fainted and stretched himself out in the hands of the one who held him, and his soul promptly left his body' (1.246). This unexpected death throws the court into turmoil and causes the queen to grieve heavily, though her anger turns into rage against Tristan (1.247-50). The king and his trusted man Gorvenal suspect treason but do not know the intended victim (Melyadus or Tristan) or perpetrator until she strikes again (1.248-49). The queen's plot unravels as she stops her husband from drinking another poisoned beverage that she has prepared (1.252-53). She receives a death sentence for her actions, but Tristan, who is now only eight years old, asks the king to pardon her, which he reluctantly does (1.254-56).

The narrator uses this episode of filicide, which is a motif found in many folktales, both as matière and example. First, we have a tale concerning Tristan's childhood that has not yet been told, and audiences no doubt found this intriguing. Practically, the episode also drives the plot, for after Melyadus dies, Gorvenal suggests that he and Tristan flee - first to Gaul and then to Cornwall - to avoid the queen's wrath (1.261, 280). Without the queen's

murderous intent, Tristan may have been able to remain home. Second, we have a tale concerning Tristan's noble nature in contrast to his stepmother's villainous nature.[49] Even the boy's father is amazed at the maturity his son demonstrates when he asks him not to execute his stepmother (1.256). Tales of heroes, in addition to showing how the protagonists avoid near-death experiences like the poisoned water, also demonstrate that even while young, they possess the qualities that make them unique, and that is certainly true here.

This narrative appears in a similar, albeit slightly condensed, form within Thomas Malory's Arthurian narrative, which will be discussed in more depth below. *The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* describes how a daughter of Howell of Brittany kills her son in her attempts to pave the way for her own children to achieve the throne of Lyones. She poisons a beverage and leaves it in a room near the children, but her own son inadvertently drinks the poison and dies. Undeterred, she tries again, and King Melyodas almost consumes the poison. When her plots are discovered and she is about to be burned for her acts, Tristram forgives her and convinces his father to spare her (8.2). As in the *Prose Tristan*, this episode allows the plot to proceed along the traditional lines, so that Tristram can reasonably be handed into the care of Governayle (8.3), away from the court, and eventually enter the court of his maternal uncle, King Marke (8.5). Malory provides little information about the poisoned child but effectively uses this episode to emphasize the noble nature of the survivor, Tristram, as do the narrators of the thirteenth-century French romance. Tristram shows himself to be devout in Malory's work, for he uses God's forgiveness of her as part of his argument to his father, and the narrative reports that he helps to mend the relationship

49 The killing of one's child has been used elsewhere in the romance to demonstrate evil character; Sador (an ancestor of Tristan) discovers that a giant he encounters has raped and then eaten his own daughter (1.101).

between the king and his new queen (8.2). This view is consistent with Malory's later portray of Tristram as a hero, in opposition to the villain Marke. As in the French romance, the purpose of the episode is dual.

King Mark's desire to kill his nephew is one of the most famous parts of the legend, yet in the prose romance, this desire originates *before* Mark met Yseut. The king had cultivated deep, unrequited feelings for a married woman of Cornwall; when Mark discovers that the lady and Tristan had fallen for one another and arranged a liaison, he ambushes his nephew and tries to kill him while the two are on horseback (1.356-65). Mark's hatred grows into an obsession, and when he sends Tristan to Ireland so that he can make Yseut his queen, he does so hoping that the Irish will kill him (1.396-399). When this plot fails and instead leads to Tristan and Yseut's affair, Mark continually tries to capture them and kill him. After Tristan saves Yseut from a kidnapper, the narrator provides the audience with a glimpse inside Mark's mind: "Mes qui que soit liez de sa poesce, au roi Marc n'en est point de bel, car por la bonté qu'il voit en li et por la bone grace qu'il a, le redote il mout et a grant paor qu'il ne li toille Cornoaille au derrien; et por ce vodroit il trover achoison vers li qu'il le poïst destruire ou giter hors de sa terre" 'But whoever was joyful about his [Tristan's] power, Mark was not happy about it at all, because for all the goodness he saw in him [his nephew] and all the good grace that he had, he [Mark] was fearful of him and had a deep fear that he would at last seize Cornwall from him, and for that reason, he wanted to find an opportunity to destroy him or to send him out of the country' (2.512). Even in Mark's mind, we see the dichotomy that Tristan, for all of his carrying on with his uncle's wife, should be viewed positively and that Mark should be viewed as treacherous and evil. The romance shows how Mark finally

succeeds in killing his nephew with a poisoned lance[50] that enters "par mi la quisse" 'through the thigh' while Tristan is playing a lay for Yseut; while death did not overtake Tristan immediately, he knew for certain that it would (section 76).[51] The placement of the wound is noteworthy, given the time the poison requires to kill. The word "quisse" or "cuisse" can euphemistically refer to one's genitals, and a wound through the genitals would certainly prevent Tristan from siring his own heirs who might seek revenge upon Mark. The inability of Tristan to father any children heightens the tragedy, for he and Mark find themselves heirless.[52] Malory recounts the scene similarly in the *Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere*, but leaves out the placement of the poisoned lance. Instead, he focuses on all those who grieve for the knight and notes that vengeance is taken not only upon King Marke but also upon those allied with him (19.11). The reduced emphasis on Tristram's bloodline and increased emphasis on chivalric grief and revenge helps to promote the notion of the brotherhood of those seated at the Round Table.

Arthur-Mordred Narratives

Some of the most widespread and enduring legends of the Middle Ages are those of King Arthur and his realm, and the final and deadly battle between King Arthur and the usurper Mordred has long held importance in the body of legends, for it marks the destruction of the Arthurian world. It is only in the mid to late medieval Arthurian texts, however, that the tragedy becomes not only political but personal with the loss of the kingdom and the heir who so desires to rule it. As with the abundant Melusine narratives, an

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50 In a note to this passage, Laurence Harf-Lancner explains that Morgan le Fay gave this lance to King Mark expressly for the murder of Tristan, who had killed her lover (311 n. 76.5).
51 For this portion of the tale, I have referred to the Harf-Lancner volume.
52 Mark has at least one other nephew (Audret), but their relationship seems more distanced.

examination of all relevant texts would be prohibitive. Therefore, I have chosen to examine key texts, and as there is substantial variance among them, there will be some analysis of each before a more general discussion at the end of this section.

The earliest Arthurian texts do not portray Mordred as Arthur's child. In the *Annales Cambriae*, it is recorded that Arthur and Mordred (Medraut) died in the battle of Camlann in 537 CE, but no relationship between the two is posited (45, 85). Similarly, the *Welsh Triads* concerning Medravt reveal an antagonistic relationship between him and Arthur, but not a familial one (51, 54, 59). The best-known Arthurian chronicles of the twelfth century include a battle between Arthur and Mordred but similarly do not describe them as father and son. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* identifies Mordred (Modredus) as a nephew to Arthur (Arturus), for he is a son of Loth (who is married to Arthur's sister) and brother to Gawain (9.152.205-07).[53] Later, the narrative explains how the king entrusts his kingdom and wife to Mordred so he can answer a challenge from Rome to his authority, how Mordred betrays Arthur by appropriating his crown and bed, and how the men are mortally wounded in their final battle (10.164.13-16, 176.480-84, 11.177.1-178.81).[54] This work also includes more information on Mordred's grown children, who revolt against Arthur's successor Constantinus and are shortly thereafter killed by him (11.179.85-180.101). Wace, in his Old French adaptation of Geoffrey's Latin work, retains the avuncular relationship as well as the details regarding their fight for the crown and the deaths of Mordred's sons at the hand of Constantinus (lines 11173-89, 13015-293, 13299-326). He embellishes the tale presented by Geoffrey with more details of Mordred and Guinevere's (Ganumare) illicit

53 This establishes Mordred as a sister's son to Arthur. Victoria Guerin has argued that Geoffrey of Monmouth was familiar with the incest story but chose not to use it (18).

54 The text does not indicate with precision who kills whom.

relationship (11178-86, 13205-22). Notably, Wace remarks, in a passage speculating upon the survival of Arthur, "Damage fud qu'il n'ot enfanz" 'It was a shame that he did not have children' (13294). He realizes the tragedy of Arthur dying without a son to be his heir. Layamon's Middle English *Brut*, which relies upon Wace's text, preserves the familial relationships established in the earlier texts as well as the treason, war, and death depicted therein (lines 11074-82, 12710-39, 13972-4288). Layamon amplifies the portion of the narrative that treats the deaths of Mordred's sons and even reveals that one is named Meleou (14301-349).

Narratives of the late twelfth century and beyond add a new facet to this relationship. Like the chronicles, the Middle Welsh narrative tradition identifies the king and Mordred as uncle and nephew. In *Breudwyt Ronabwy*,[55] Idawc the son of Mynyo claims to have been a messenger between Arthur and Mordred (Medrawt) at the battle of Camlan (Katgamlan) (4); he notes that Arthur wished him to remind Medrawt that "'uot yn datmaeth ac yn ewythyr idaw'" 'he was a foster-father and uncle to him' (5). Fostering played an important social role in early Celtic cultures, and the relationship is frequently evoked in the literary corpora and is particularly significant when a man fosters his sister's son. This theme reappears in the fourteenth-century *Alliterative Morte Arthure*.[56] This narrative, based on that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, explains how Sir Mordred betrays Arthur by seizing his lands and wife when he goes to the continent to answer a challenge from Rome. It identifies Mordred as Arthur's nephew through the king's sister (line 645) and indicates that he has also been his foster-son, for Arthur calls Mordred "'my nevew full ner, my nurree of old'" 'my very close nephew, my

55 This text was composed in the late twelfth century or early thirteenth century.
56 The edition used here is that found in *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthur.*

former fosterling' (689). No more is written of this fostership, and Mordred does not seem to be favored any more than the other nephews despite the reputed closeness. Arthur notes that since he has no children, his maternal nephew[57] Sir Cador, or one of his children, is his heir (1943-45), and he later names the son of Cador, Constantine, as his successor (4316). In his last speech of the narrative, Arthur urges that Mordred's children be killed in order to wipe out the potential threat of the "wicked weed" (4320-22).[58] This exhortation hearkens back to the idea seen in the feudal texts of the previous chapter that villains beget villains.

La Mort le Roi Artu

The thirteenth-century *La Mort le Roi Artu*, the final part of the Vulgate or Lancelot-Grail cycle, focuses on the latter days of the Arthurian realm.[59] The narrative begins after the end of the Grail quest and first addresses how Lancelot unintentionally wins the affections of the maiden of Escalot, much to the disgust of Guenièvre. He leaves the court but returns to defend the queen when she is accused of the treasonous murder of the brother of Mador de la Porte. The lovers then reconcile, and the nephews of Artu strive to prove their adultery to the king. Their actions set off a series of battles against Lancelot, followed by a skirmish against some Romans, during which time Mordred - chosen to watch over the kingdom - seizes power and tries to take the queen. Artu returns, albeit with reduced martial power due to his recent wars, and gradually crushes Mordred's forces while remarkably reducing his own in the process. The final battle leaves both men dead and the realm devastated, and the few

57 Arthur has no lack of maternal nephews in the Arthurian legends.

58 The mother of these children is not specified, though it is reported to Arthur that Mordred has married and impregnated Queen Waynor (3550-53, 3575-76).

59 The edition used here is that edited by Jean Frappier. The recently published ten-volume translation of the Vulgate and Post-Vulgate cycle (of which Norris J. Lacy is the general editor), *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation* will undoubtedly prove valuable in future studies of this work.

survivors of Artu's court seek a contemplative life until their deaths. *La Mort le Roi Artu* is the first extant narrative to identify Arthur and Mordred as father and son and to detail the filicide episode.

Mordred's incestuous birth likely became appended to the legend within this narrative, according to Elizabeth Archibald, because the theme was a popular one in contemporary medieval literature and correlated with ecclesiastical and legal concerns of the period ("Arthur and Mordred" 4-6). His origin does not render him inherently evil, but as Archibald explains, it does represent a hurdle that would be difficult even for a literary hero to overcome (4). The illicit nature of Mordred's birth comes to light in *La Mort le Roi Artu* only after his betrayal of Artu in the second half of the narrative. Within the letter that Mordred forges in order to gain the king's realms and wife, he writes that Mordred is not the nephew of Artu but does not clarify what their familial relationship is (135.6-7). When the queen is about to be married against her will to Mordred, she confides in her cousin Labor that not only is he a traitor but also that he is "'filz le roi Artu'" 'the son of King Arthur' (141.33). The truth of the queen's statement is confirmed when the king receives word from her messenger about her predicament. His devastation initially renders him speechless, though he soon cries out, "'Ha! Mordret, or me fez tu connoistre que tu ies li serpenz que ge vi jadis eissir de mon ventre, qui ma terre ardoit et se prenoit a moi. Mes onques peres ne fist autretant de fill comme ge ferai de toi, car ge t'ocirrai a mes deus meins, ce sache touz li siecles, ne ja Dex ne vueille que tu muires d'autrui meins que des moies'" 'Oh! Mordred, now you make me recognize that you are the serpent whom I previously saw come from my belly, who burned my land and challenged me. But never has a father done such with his son as I

will do with you, for I will kill you with my two hands; the entire world knows this, and God does not want you to die by other hands than by mine' (164.5-12). This relationship has not been common knowledge, as revealed by the surprise of the king's men at his outcry (164.12-16). The serpent reference makes clear to the audience the diabolical nature of Mordred in *La Mort le Roi Artu*, while no mention of the circumstances of his conception mars the depiction of Artu in his righteous anger.

This holy vengeance finds its way onto the battlefield. While Artu has already declared his intention to kill his son, Mordred's killing of Sagremor (190.42-45) reinforces this desire and leads him to swear to God that either he or Mordred will die right there (190.46-49). The narrative then describes the fatal combat between Artu and Mordred, in which they set upon each other with lances; the king strikes his son so hard that his lance goes straight through him, and Mordred strikes Artu so hard that he removes a piece of his head (190.49-69). When relating the outcome, the narrator again identifies them as father and son, which increases the pathos of this already enormously tragic event: "Einsi ocist li peres le fill, et li filz navra le pere a mort" 'Thus the father killed the son, and the son mortally wounded the father' (191.1-2). Afterward, though fatally wounded, a distraught Artu stops to pray in the Black Chapel that God would have mercy upon those killed in battle, but there is no indication that he expresses any remorse over the death of Mordred (191.34-42). In the Arthurian world, there need be no remorse for killing a murderous traitor.

That God allows Artu's killing of Mordred is evident, for even when the archbishop to whom the king confesses before entering into battle urges him not to fight his son, the protest is not rooted in the belief that this killing is wrong. In fact, the holy man suggests that the

king call in Lancelot. His concern lies in the likelihood that Artu will die and that the kingdom will suffer (177.10-18). The narrative raises a bit of doubt, however, when Mordred receives his death-blow from Artu "et l'estoire dit que aprés l'estordre del glaive passa par mi la plaie uns rais de soleill si apertement que Girflet le vit, dont cil del païs distrent que ce avoit esté sygnes de corrouz de Nostre Seigneur" 'and the story says that after the withdrawal of the lance a ray of sun passed through the wound so clearly that Girflet saw it, regarding which the people of the region said that this was a sign of the anger of Our Lord' (190.56-60). Certainly, natural phenomena such as eclipses were sometimes viewed as a manifestation of divine wrath. This narrator, however, does not explain why the people believe that God is angered, and this leaves the audience with a puzzle. A possible explanation that seems in keeping with the overall depiction of the battle as one of good vs. evil lies in Celtic mythology. King Arthur, like some other heroic figures found in Celtic narratives, may be seen as similar to the figure of Lug (mentioned in the discussion of *Cath Maige Tuired*, above). Like the warrior-king Lug, he uses a spear here to slay his mortal enemy. Lug is also associated with solar deities of the Celts,[60] so it is possible that this is the origin of the ray that Girflet sees passing through Mordred's body. That this passage should be mythologically influenced should not be a surprise, for it is not in isolation. The tale of Gawain's noontime superhuman strength has a similar character (153.1-155.29). It is possible that some vestiges of mythological beliefs remain even if they are no longer commonly understood and are overshadowed by Christianity's dominance.

60 The works of some early Celticists have been criticized for seeking out gods and goddesses in the literary corpora with too much enthusiasm.

The plot necessitates that both Artu and Mordred die because Merlin has prophesied and engraved in stone that the battle on the plain of Salisbury would be "LA BATAILLE MORTEL PAR QUOI LI ROIAUMES DE LOGRES REMEINDRA ORFELINS" 'the deadly battle through which the kingdom of England will be left an orphan' (178.19-21). Were either to survive, he would rule the land. Instead, Artu's direct line of descent must be entirely wiped out; thus we see in the narrative that after the king's death, Lancelot and his men travel to Britain to fight with the sons of Mordred, who have seized Winchester (196-98). Melehan is the elder of the two sons, and Bohort (Boorz) kills him for mortally wounding his brother Lionel (Lyonel) (197.28-49). Lancelot kills in battle the younger, unnamed son (who wears his father's armor) (198.5-18). The end of Artu's family line parallels the end of his kingdom, of which he is warned in a dream about the wheel of Fortune (176.56-79). The narrator emphasizes the finality of everything by writing, at the end of the work, that there is nothing more that is truthful to tell about the Arthurian matière (204.8-13).

This filicide serves not only a material purpose in the narrative, but also an exemplary one. As revealed in Artu's prophetic dream, the reign of his secular, prideful court is coming to a close. Fortune shows him shows him the world and explains, before he comes crashing down to earth, "'de toute la circuitude que tu voiz as tu esté li plus puissanz rois qui i fust. Mes tel sont li orgueil terrien qu'il n'i a nul si haut assiz qu'il ne le coviegne cheoir de la poesté del monde'" 'You have been the most powerful king that there ever was of this globe that you see, but such is the nature of secular pride, that there is no one lofty enough that it would not be appropriate for him to fall from worldly power' (176.71-75). It is notable that

Fortune cites *orgueil* here, for pride - the sin that brought Lucifer's downfall and the epic sin *par excellence* - was condemned even in prior literary works of chivalry. The death of Artu's son and grandsons ensures that his lineage, along with its terrestrial dominance, cannot continue. This condemnation of the secular correlates to the moralizing shift in French literature seen in the thirteenth century. Norris J. Lacy, however, discounts this notion of the text's emphasis on morality. He distinguishes between God and Fortune as agent in *La Mort le Roi Artu* and cites as evidence a conversation between Arthur and Sagremor on the occasion of Mordred's killing of Yvain ("The Sense" 119-21). In this episode, Arthur cries out to God asking how he could allow the action that he has just seen, the killing of one of the best noblemen in the world (Yvain) by the worst traitor in the world (Mordred) (190.1-4). Sagremor responds to his king that this is one of Fortune's games and that she is obtaining payment, through Yvain's death, for the prosperity he has enjoyed (190.4-8). The division Lacy makes between God and Fortune seems to be a false division, however, for Sagremor does not contradict Arthur regarding divine agency. While he has explicitly mentioned Fortune as a determining force, he acknowledges the transcendent power of the divine in the same speech when he exclaims, "'or doint Dex que nos n'aions pis'" 'now may God not give us worse' (190.8-9). Lacy argues that the end comes because Arthur's world "has simply outlived its time" ("The Sense" 117-21) and cites as evidence that Arthur is a far stronger king against foreign enemies than he is within Camelot (122). Lacy concludes that as in Malory's narrative, Agravain's dislike of Lancelot and his subsequent actions are the source of the destructive forces that crush the realm (118-119). This feud does play an essential

role, but that role is one that is destined by a greater force. Ultimately, God is the one who determines the fortunes of the Arthurian world.

Stanzaic Morte Arthur

The fourteenth-century *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*,[61] based upon *La Mort le Roi Artu*, retains this father-son relationship and further demonizes Mordred. The narrative begins shortly after the Grail quest, with Queen Gaynor urging Arthur to hold a tournament (lines 1-38). This leads into the tale of how the maiden of Ascolot meets Lancelot and how her love for him drives a wedge between him and Gaynor (39-833). Afterward, Gaynor accidentally kills a Scottish knight and faces death until Lancelot reappears to be her champion (834-1671). She and Lancelot reconcile, which infuriates Arthur's nephews; they work to prove the couple's adultery, and Gaynor is almost burned at the stake (1672-1965). The death of Gaheriet and Gaheries during Lancelot's rescue of Gaynor sets off a war between Arthur's men and Lancelot and his family, and this situation allows Mordred to seize Arthur's throne (1966-2953), setting the stage for the final conflict.

Mordred, who serves as steward during the war with Lancelot and ingratiates himself with the people, takes the throne and wants to marry Gaynor, who refuses and locks herself in the tower of London (2954-3049). He fears his father and seeks assistance in retaining the crown against the returning forces of the true king (3038, 3041-49). Arthur returns to claim his land, and after some fighting, the sides almost negotiate a truce, despite grave suspicions on both sides (3050-339). An unseen adder strikes one of Mordred's men as the two sides are meeting to negotiate, and when the wounded knight pulls his sword to dispatch the killer

61 The edition used here is that found in *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure.*

serpent, the sight of the drawn sword leads Arthur's men to believe they have been duped and need to defend themselves (3340-49). Both sides leap back into battle, during which father and son face off and deal fatal wounds to one another (3350-399). The final lines of the poem describe the return of Excalibur, the death and burial of Arthur, and the final days of Lancelot and Gaynor (3400-969).

The narrator describes the battle between Arthur and Mordred with few details. Immediately before facing off against his son, Arthur makes a declaration that explains why he wants to slay him: "'Shall we not bring this thef to ground?'" 'Shall we not bring this thief down to the ground?' (3389). Arthur strikes Mordred through the chest and out the back with a spear (3392-93), and with that, the poet simply states that Mordred dies and never speaks again. He then adds that the dying Mordred gives his father a mortal head wound that causes him to faint (3390-99). The sparing use of detail here initially seems surprising, given the weight of this material in other narratives, but the brevity is consistent with other important death scenes, such as that of Sir Gawain (3066-73).

Like *La Mort le Roi Artu*, the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* clearly depicts Mordred as a villain. Before he betrays his king, he is already known as a troublemaker (1675), and the poem reinforces this portrayal within the tale of his treachery. The narrator introduces the filial relationship when describing how Mordred takes the crown and intends to take the queen (2954-85). He suggests that the father-son relationship was common knowledge among the men of the court and the reason behind their choice of Mordred as steward of the realm: "The kinges soster son he was / And eek his own son, as I rede / (Therefore men him for steward chese)" 'he was the king's maternal nephew / and his own son too, as I read /

(Therefore, the king's men chose him to be the steward of the realm)' (2955-57). This, however, contradicts the previously given reason of Mordred's dependability (2516-23), which our storyteller may want the audience to forget. Mordred becomes steward, and from that moment, the poem unambiguously paints him as a sinful and despicable man. Although he is made king after he calls for a parliament, he uses forged letters to influence the people's choice (2970-81). Whenever the relationship between king and traitor arises, the incest angle is explored in relation to Mordred's desire for Gaynor, not in terms of any sin committed by the king (Cooper 152). The encounter with the Archbishop of Canterbury makes this especially clear. The holy man tells Mordred that he cannot marry his father's wife, and the traitor responds by threatening him with being drawn and hanged (lines 3002-15). The archbishop excommunicates him (3018-19), which indicates how far he has strayed from the moral path. When the narrator later tells of the war between the two forces, the narrator continues to show Mordred as a villain and Arthur as a hero. Mordred, when asked after Arthur's dream to delay the battle out of Christian love (3244-47), initially refuses and in his response, "swore by Judas that Jesus sold" 'swore by Judas who sold Jesus' (3250). The poet's alignment of Mordred with Judas unambiguously marks him as evil, just as the serpent reference does in *La Mort le Roi Artu*.

The poet describes Arthur throughout the narrative, however, in glowing terms, such as "noble" and mighty (5, 1560, 2051, 3050). He demonstrates his prowess on the battlefield at Dover, about which the narrator writes that "was there none that him withstood" 'there were none who withstood him' (3050-89). He fights similarly in Kent, "with herte good; / A nobler knight was never none" 'with a good heart; there was never a nobler knight' (3090-

121). Before the final battle, various knights come to Arthur, for they have heard of the conflict and know that he "had all the right" ' was in the right' (3152-56). Even in his prophetic dream (3168-221), he is not urged not to kill Mordred; he is simply urged to delay until Lancelot can come to his aid (3216-221). The mortally wounded king is transferred first to Avalon and then richly buried in Glastonbury (3518-55), and this further demonstrates the good nature of the king that Bedivere calls "the beste king / That ever was in Britain born" 'The best king that was ever born in Britain' (3552-53).

The Works of Sir Thomas Malory

Thomas Malory made himself famous with his monumental Arthurian opus. This fifteenth-century text covers virtually every episode of importance in King Arthur's life and many key episodes in the lives of his knights. It begins with the circumstances of Arthur's conception, proceeds with the young King Arthur's defense of his realm, and dwells upon the establishment of the Round Table and the adventures of the Arthurian knights. The narrative ends, after the monarch's death and burial, with an epilogue upon the lives and deaths of Bedevere, Lancelot, and Guenevere. The authorship of Malory has been derided by those who claim that he only compiled and condensed the works of his predecessors, but Eugene Vinaver, who summarizes the scholarly arguments about Malory's sources in his editorial notes, proposes that even where Malory may not have added original episodes to the Arthurian narrative, he may have shaped their presentation, and thus is worthy of examination (3.1615-26).

Malory makes clear Arthur's filicidal intentions early in *The Tale of King Arthur*. The young king impregnates the Queen of Orkney, who, unknown to Arthur, is his half-sister

(I.19), and he is informed by Merlin that this action displeases God and that the child will kill him and his knights (1.20). Merlin later explains that King Pellinore will some day tell him the name of the child he fathered incestuously who "shall be the destruccion of all thys realme" (1.24).[62] Arthur desires to save his realm but initially acts like the legendary King Herod in his attempt to do so.[63] He summons all of the noble children born on the first of May (which, according to Merlin, was the child's birthday)[64] and has them cast out to sea; a shipwreck kills all except Mordred, who is rescued and fostered by the man who finds him for fourteen years (1.27). Little more is said about the boy until it appears that Mordred is an established knight of the Round Table (6.6).[65]

The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthur Saunz Guerdon details the circumstances that allow Mordred to gain power and that lead to the episode of filicide. In preparation for his war against Lancelot, Arthur places his lands and wife under the watchful eye of his son Mordred (20.19), who soon after asserts that Arthur has been killed and claims his crown (21.1). When Mordred announces to Gwenyver his intention to marry her, we are told that she "was hys unclys wyff and hys fadirs wyff" (21.1). Marrying someone to whom one was related by marriage but not blood, depending on the proximity of the relationship, could still be taboo, according to the laws that governed marriage during the Middle Ages.[66] The ninth-century *Roman Penitential* excludes from possibility any marriage with "a wife's daughter, a

62 Cory Rushton points out that Malory includes no such scene in his work (141).
63 Notably, Merlin is blamed far more than Arthur for the deaths of the children.
64 Vinaver's note to this passage informs us that in other texts, Arthur summons all of the children born in May; this clears up a confusing statement by Malory regarding the varying ages of the children (3.1302 n. 55.27-28.).
65 Malory refers to Mordred's incestuous birth as the cause of King Lot's dislike of Arthur in 2.10 and names Morgause as Lot's wife in 2.11
66 Elizabeth Archibald provides an overview and analysis of these laws and their enforcement within the first chapter of *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (9-52).

stepmother, an uncle's widow, or a wife's sister" (Archibald, *Incest* 33-34). The laws codifying what did and did not constitute incest underwent substantial revision in the next few hundred years, with the last great medieval revision coming in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Even with the Fourth Lateran Council's lessening of restrictions regarding non-blood relations, the prohibition against marrying one's stepmother or aunt remained (34-41). The rules of consanguinity thus render Mordred's desire doubly abominable due to the dually incestuous nature of the relationship between him and Gwenyver (for she is both his aunt and his stepmother), and only a few lines further into this section, the Bishop of Canterbury tells the traitor that the marriage is impossible because of the incestuous relationship and threatens Mordred with excommunication (21.1).

While Gwenyver stows herself away in the Tower of London, Mordred charms the populace and gathers forces to repel Arthur when he returns (21.1-2). Arthur fends off the treacherous forces in their first two bouts (21.2). A date is set on which Mordred and Arthur shall meet on the plain of Salisbury, and on the eve of the battle, Arthur has two prophetic dreams. He is thrown from Fortune's wheel into a watery, serpent-filled abyss in the first dream, and in the second, the king sees Gawain, who claims to have been sent by God to warn him that he will die if he fights Mordred the next day. Upon waking, Arthur attempts to follow Gawain's advice and arrange a truce. Neither side trusts the other, and when a knight raises his sword to kill an adder that has just bitten him, the sight of the brandished weapon leads to a renewal of warfare (21.3-4). With both sides ravaged, Sir Lucan tries to dissuade Arthur from killing Mordred because of the prophecy and points out that the traitor's forces

have been wiped out, but the king will not turn away (21.4). Arthur rushes at Mordred with a spear and

> smote Sir Mordred undir the shylde, with a foyne of hys speare, thorowoute the body more than a fadom. And whan Sir Mordred felte that he had hys dethys wounde he threste hymselff with the myght that he had upp to the burre of kyng rthurs speare, and ryght so he smote hys fadir, kynge Arthure, with hys swerde holdynge in both hys hondys, uppon the syde of the hede, that the swerde perced the helmet and the tay of the brayne. And therewith Mordred daysshed downe starke dede to the erthe. (21.4)
>
> struck Sir Mordred under the shield with a thrust of his spear, more than a fathom into the body. And when Sir Mordred realized that he was mortally wounded, he thrust himself with his remaining strength up to the hand-guard of King Arthur's spear, and just then he struck his father, King Arthur, with his sword held in both his hands, upon the side of the head so that the sword pierced the helmet and the outer membrane of the brain. And with that Mordred collapsed, completely dead, on the ground.

Modern scholarly consensus seems to blame the fall of the court on interpersonal conflicts, particularly the conflict between the sons of Loth and Lancelot, instead of on moral degradation and punishment for such (Cooper 162; Malory 3.1621-23, 1626). This view is supported by a close reading of the text, for Arthur blames Aggravayne and Mordred's dislike of Lancelot for the troubles at the court (20.9). This strife transfers, after the final battle, to the rest of the populace. Sir Lucan sees that looters are stripping the corpses of anything of

value and even killing the grievously wounded in order to steal from them as well (21.4). Man's inhumanity to man demonstrates that the golden age of Camelot has been exchanged for something far less precious.

Had Malory's Arthur persisted in trying to kill Mordred after the botched first attempt, audiences may be more inclined to see the king as a villain akin to King Marke, whose attempts to have Sir Tristram die were manifold. Instead, Malory ignores the father and son theme until the end of his narrative and then presents Mordred not as an innocent newborn but as a foul traitor. Malory shows us Mordred's villainy even before he usurps his father. Palomydes' account of the slaying of Sir Lamorak, for instance, shows the brutality of the man, for "'sir Mordrede gaff hym his dethis wounde behynde hym at his bakke, and all to-hewe hym'" 'Sir Mordred dealt him the fatal wound from behind, in the back, and cut him into pieces,' acts that Sir Tristram and Sir Gareth immediately denounce as unchivalrous (10.58). Malory decries the acceptance of Mordred as ruler by the people and interjects: "Lo ye all Englysshemen, se ye nat what a myschyff here was? For he that was the moste kynge and nobleyst knyght of the world, and moste loved the felyshyp of noble knyghtes, and by hym they all were upholdyn, and yet myght nat thes Englyshemen holde them contente with hym" 'All you Englishmen, do you not see the wickedness that was here? For he was the greatest king and the noblest knight of the world, and he greatly loved and supported the companionship of noble knights, and these Englishmen were not content with him' (21.2). The narrator clearly means to emphasize the goodness of Arthur. In the prophetic dream about the battle at Salisbury, the ghost of Gawain warns his uncle not to do battle the next day with Mordred but instead to wait for Lancelot to arrive and kill the traitor (21.3). He

explains, "'God hath sente me to you of Hys speciall grace to gyff you warnyng'" "Because of his special quality of grace, God sent me to give you a warning' (21.3). This shows that in the world of the narrative, Mordred's killing is justifiable, and Arthur is well loved by God. Even Mordred seems to realize the quality of his role, for he remarks "'I know well my fadir woll be avenged uppon me'" 'I know for certain that my father will have vengeance against my person' (21.4).

Some have attributed the fall of Camelot to Arthur's sin and have noted that Mordred's existence provides tangible evidence of Arthur's all too obvious fallibility. For instance, Philippe Walter has written, "Le désastre caniculaire auquel Mordret condamne le monde arthurien était lui-même la conséquence d'un acte démesuré; il résulte de l'inceste qu'Arthur commit avec sa soeur pour engendrer le fils maudit" 'the canicular disaster to which Mordred condemns the Arthurian world was itself an act of immoderation; it results from the incestuous act committed by Arthur with his sister that produced the damned son (82).[67] In a note to line 2955 of the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, Larry Benson writes, "Though little is made of it in this poem, Arthur's fall is partly a consequence of his own sin" (127). While Arthur may be a weak domestic ruler, Eugene Vinaver writes in his edition, "Arthur's defeat on the battlefield is never treated in M[alory] as a punishment for his incest" (3.1647 n. 1228.2-4.).

Within the narratives, Arthur's actions do not constitute murder, for as we have seen, they are hardly condemned; Arthur's death is mourned, unlike that of his son. While like the battle between Cú Chulainn and Conlae, the Arthur-Mordred conflict can be viewed as a loose variant on the father-son combat motif, father and son fully recognize one another. The

67 Walter explores the fall of Arthur from a mythological standpoint and discusses the connection between snakes (representations of Mordred), fire, and the end of the world.

Arthurian situation is far different than any sacrifice, and this is not only because Mordred is a grown man and not a young child. The emotional bond between father and son is unusual to begin with (because Mordred is born of incest and in some cases raised outside of the court), and Mordred's treachery only puts another strain on the relationship. What we have in these narratives is an imposition of the King's justice on the traitor Mordred. According to the fourteenth-century English Statute of Treason, Mordred is guilty of high treason not only for warring against his king but also for his plot to force himself upon the queen (Altschul). Capital punishment was sometimes imposed for acts of treason throughout medieval Europe, though other penalties such as castration and blinding were also used (van Eickels 588-89). Arthur's desire to wipe out Mordred's line makes sense from a practical as well as a moral outlook. We have seen how vengeance figures within feudal narratives; one whose ancestors were wronged (or perceived to have been wronged) felt honor-bound to seek retribution. Thus, if one hoped to protect oneself against future threats of this nature, destroying a lineage became necessary, as reflected in the advice given to Fromont in *Jourdain de Blaye* to wipe out Girart's entire line. Thus, Arthur protects his kin and allies from retribution by wiping out Mordred's entire line - which just so happens to be his own.

Malory first complicates and then attempts to streamline the question of Arthurian succession. In *The Tale of King Arthur*, the king fathers not only Mordred, but also (earlier) impregnates Lyonors, the daughter of the earl Sanam. Their child Borre is destined to become a knight of the Round Table (1.17).[68] Curiously, Malory mentions him only twice, when he is conceived and when he, along with dozens of other knights, attempts to heal the enchanted wounds of Sir Urry (19.11). Cory Rushton views Malory's neglect of Borre as a

68 Vinaver notes that he is called Lohot / Loholt in another source (3.1295 n. 38.27-34 and 3.1613 n. 1150.25).

deliberate choice rather than an unconscious omission, a choice that disappoints him because the illegitimate nature of both sons could have been explored in an interesting way (142-43). Instead, with the current structure, "Arthur is incapable of fathering a son who can measure up to him in either chivalric or moral terms" (151). Similar to Malory's omission regarding the fate of Borre is the omission of the pursuit and destruction of Mordred's children found in *La Mort le Roi Artu* (Bruce 423). As Rushton writes, "Malory undercuts all possibilities of inheritance or linear descent" (151).

In the earliest extant Arthurian works, the king's death is generally handled in a matter-of-fact manner. In what more noble way could a warrior-king perish than in the middle of the battlefield? This episode receives more attention, however, with the growing popularity of the Arthurian material and transforms into a filial conflict by the thirteenth century. In the subsequent Arthurian filicide narratives, the storytellers use these death episodes for a material and moral use. The final battle holds the attention of the audiences, for the pathos built into Arthur and Mordred's mutual destruction increases its tragic nature and makes it even more gripping for the audience members who all know that the prophesied end must come. Further, the conflict with Mordred provides more detail for eager listeners and readers regarding the king's domestic life. *La Mort le Roi Artu* addresses the appropriate treatment of traitors and their families through the killing of Mordred and his sons. The *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* continues in this vein by showcasing the conflict as one of good versus evil; it also treats concerns about appropriate marital unions with its consideration of the incest issue. Thomas Malory explores these ethical issues and shows how interpersonal conflict leads to chaos, not just among the knights of the Round Table but also in society as a

whole, as evidenced by the dystopian aftermath witnessed by Sir Lucan. In all of these texts, we see how the destruction of Arthur's own lineage necessarily coincides with the destruction of Camelot, for a kingdom cannot survive without someone to rule it.

Conclusion

The emphasis on the failings of Rónán and Carpre Cat-head help to demonstrate that when they kill their children (or have them killed), they are guilty of murder, as are Efnyssyen, Tristan's stepmother and the previously discussed figures of Medea, Procne, Dyoscorus, and Athelston. Rónán, like Athelston, is not characterized as inherently evil but as one who is easily led astray by a selfish and malevolent figure in the court. He receives the opportunity to repent, though he, like Athelston, must forfeit his kingdom (in *Athelston*, this is accomplished by making the newborn Edemound his heir and giving him half of his land). The distinction seen between the murderers in these texts is also seen in the victimology, for Mael Fothartaig differs from the young and mostly unnamed victims in the other tales not only in age but also in the development of his character.[69] Carpre's deceased children and Tristan's unfortunate stepbrother die in order to demonstrate the threat level escaped by the surviving Morann and Tristran. Likewise, Gwern's death may highlight a survival - that of Pryderi, who is initially presumed dead in the first branch of the *Mabinogi*, *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyued*. All of these deaths advance the plot and show the fiendish nature of their killers. Mael Fothartaig's death is the climax of *Fingal Rónáin*, and as such does not function in the same way as the others in this category. It is certainly tragic, but it has a more obvious exemplary function than do the other murders.

69 His situation is closest to that of the adult Tristan who was, however, guilty of the conduct of which he was accused.

Sacrificing parents here bear similarity to others previously examined. Cú Chulainn certainly has his flaws; before marriage, he is unfaithful to his intended wife Emer (as demonstrated by Conlae's existence), and his dismissal of her advice in *Aided Óenfir Aife* reminds the audience of his characteristic inability to control his emotions. His goodness, however, is demonstrated in his loyalty to his uncle and king as well as to his society. Since childhood, he has been their protector, and once again, he keeps the Ulstermen safe when others cannot. Melusine and Raymond, similarly, are flawed but good. She has demonstrated her vengeful streak by imprisoning her father Elias in a mountain because he violated her mother Presine's *geis*, which drove her to take herself and her three daughters into exile (Jean d'Arras 130, 132, 134, 136). Still, however, Melusine plays mother to her children and a vast and powerful domain and demonstrates her generosity to her new in-laws at her wedding. Raymond too has a temper, as shown by his fight with his wife, but overall he is a noble knight and lord who follows his wife's instructions after she leaves him. These figures are reminiscent of Jephthah, who has made mistakes (like his poorly worded promise to God) but generally tries his best to do what is right in his deity's eyes.

These narratives of sacrifice differ from others examined with respect to the perception of the victims. The children sacrificed in the adaptations of classical works and in the feudal narratives were, if described in detail, beautiful and virtuous; those aware of their surroundings obediently submitted to their parents' filicidal designs. Here, however, the hideous and malevolent Horrible must be tricked into an indefensible situation by his killers. Conlae likewise does not submit to being killed and only succumbs to a weapon that no one can survive. Neither child is being punished for a crime that he has already committed,

however, but instead each is being prevented from destroying Lusignen and Ulster, respectively. While Jean d'Arras's Horrible has committed heinous acts, that narrative does not mention any punishment; instead, the child remains as free as any one of his brothers until Melusine departs. Perhaps it has only been her watchful eye and magical nature that has kept him from destroying all that she has built. Conlae's arrival drives fear into the Ulstermen who see him as an enemy combatant and the first of many potential invaders, though ironically, the boy in fact dutifully follows the rules left for him at birth by his father, the great protector of Ulster. This makes the child akin to the oldest son of Amile, in *Ami et Amiles*, who dutifully cooperates with his father's plan, and to other victims of sacrifice such as Verginia. Cú Chulainn's presentation of his son to his fellow warriors at the end of the text confirms that this is a sacrifice, for the father is essentially making an offering of his dying child to his countrymen.

In the texts considered in this chapter, there arises a third type of killing that is neither murder nor sacrifice but a sanctioned killing by an honorable person. Díen Cécht and Arthur, both portrayed in the relevant narratives as good men (through Arthur has plenty of human flaws) kill their adult children in encounters that are violent but not condemned by others. Instead, the fathers impose capital punishment for treasonous acts. Although Arthur is urged not to fight Mordred, that is due to the prophesied outcome for Arthur; no honorable figure denies that the traitor deserves death for his crime.

In these Celtic narratives, fathers have a far greater role in the filicides than do the mothers, who are generally absent. Even in the Melusine legends, in which the mother initially orders the death of Horrible, the father facilitates the act. Most of the instances

examined in this chapter benefit or uphold the social order, but they are also pathetic because these worlds are noticeably crumbling due to lackluster leadership. Cú Chulainn's sacrifice of Conlae ensures that the Ulstermen of the next generation will not have a champion equal to their current one and that their fortunes will diminish. Raymond's reign falters because he spies upon and speaks against his wife, the source of his prosperity. Arthur dies while executing the threat to his kingdom. Ultimately, many of the deaths - sacrifice or not - are meaningless.

Chapter 5: The Germanic Traditions of Filicide

This chapter will consider how filicide episodes function in medieval narratives that have been preserved in Old High German and Middle High German literature as well as in Old Norse-Icelandic literature and that are based on Germanic heroic and mythological traditions. These narratives include the *Heimskringla*, a saga chronicling the Nordic kings, and the fragmentary "Hildebrandslied," though the bulk of the chapter will be devoted to key narrative variants of the Volsung-Nibelung tradition, which continues to prove immensely popular.[1] These variants include the *Völsunga saga*, the *Eddas*, and the *Nibelungenlied*. The thirteenth-century Old Norse-Icelandic *Þiðreks saga af Bern* will also prove valuable in this chapter. This lengthy and highly episodic work begins with the hero Thidrek (Dietrich von Bern, based upon the historical figure Theodorich the Great)'s ancestry, continues with his adventures and those of his closest associates, and ends soon after his triumphant ascension to the throne. The interwoven nature of the text allows it to intersect with both the Hildebrand and Volsung-Nibelung heroic traditions, and thus passages from the saga will be examined separately, within the framework of each of these epic matters. The content, that is the themes at the cores of the texts examined here, serves as the prime organizational factor for the chapter.[2] Other medieval works including the *Gesta Danorum* (*The History of the Danes*) and the "Jüngeres Hildebrandslied" ("The Younger Lay of Hildebrand") share some material with the above-mentioned works and will aid in contextualization.

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1 The spellings of Old Norse-Icelandic, Old High German, Middle High German, and Old English personal and place names have been regularized except within quotations and the titles of primary and secondary works; within quotations and titles, the spellings used in the corresponding editions have been preserved, with the exception of the substitution of ö for the hooked o.

2 Chronology proves an unsatisfactory organizational tool, since many of the texts examined here have been preserved in a thirteenth-century form. Linguistic distinctions likewise prove unhelpful, as the Hildebrand and Volsung-Nibelung works have been preserved in more than one language.

Judging authorial intent here is, as with the Celtic material of the previous chapter, a difficult if not impossible task because of the strong and long-lasting oral tradition of the Germanic peoples. This is particularly true when it comes to myths and heroic tales preserved in Old Norse-Icelandic, for the ability to write came to the Scandinavian regions, along with Christianity, centuries after it did to the rest of northern Europe. Aside from runes and some inscriptions on coins, native Scandinavian records did not appear until the eleventh century and were not common until the thirteenth century (Sawyer and Sawyer 1). This spread of literacy then led to a "renaissance" of pre-Christian Germanic materials (Jochens 1-5). Thus the heroic tales and myths of the oral Germanic literary corpora were passed down by countless storytellers who shaped the material before anyone committed it to writing.

Despite the many individuals who passed this material on orally, a notion exists that this material has been transmitted in a pristine form. According to Michael Curschmann, the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas demonstrate as universal the belief that the "immediate poetization of an event guarantees the truth of the account for all time" (145). These poems, in turn, serve as the foundation for the large prose tradition (148). He sees within the prologue to *Þiðreks saga af Bern* what he considers "very much a thirteenth-century message" to the audience regarding some of the more remarkable events of the saga: the heroic tradition of old, including "the history of heroes and giants is simply an earlier part of our own history" that we humans ought not to disregard simply because we may not be able to fathom it (140-41).[3] Even if one accepts that the prologue and the saga are contemporary, the exhortation

3 Edward R. Haymes and Susann T. Samples have noted that the first and last parts of the saga have been preserved only in manuscripts that post-date the oldest manuscript for the saga (72). Thus, while it is certainly plausible that the prologue is original to *Þiðreks saga*, we must consider that any assessments of the veracity of sagas found in the prologue may be more recent than the saga itself.

not to dismiss fantastic matters in the saga argues that audiences were skeptical, that they did not accept the "truth" of the sagas at face value. This same skepticism raises its head in the prologue to Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla.* The best known of the medieval Scandinavian writers,[4] Snorri points out that the stories he tells may not be true but remarks that once they were considered true: "En þótt vér vitim eigi sannendi á því, þá vitum vér dœmi til, at gamlir frœðimenn hafi slíkt fyrir satt haft" 'And though we know not the truth to this, we know proof, too, that old historians have considered such as the truth.' He also points out that poets shaped their works for their individual audiences: "Tökum vér þat allt fyrir satt, er í þeim kvæðum finnsk um ferðir þeira eða orrostur. En þat er háttr skálda at lofa þann mest, er þá eru þeir fyrir" 'We took as true all that which is found in their [the skalds'] verses about their [the kings'] journeys and battles. But it is the custom of skalds to praise the one for whom the verses were composed the most.' Although most storytellers, and thus their influences, remain unknown, this does not negate the truth in Snorri's words, for perhaps he writes here from experience about the shaping of one's tales. This highly educated man was a prolific writer, famed lawyer, and a diplomat before his murder (Monsen vii-xiii), and it is not unlikely that his opinion colored his presentation of the Eddic material as well as the sagas of the kings.

The filicide texts under consideration stand out in part because, as Theodore M. Andersson and William Ian Miller note, the presence of children is exceptional in the Old Norse-Icelandic saga literature (185 n. 10).[5] This does not mean, however, that children were

4 A curious biographical fact about Snorri is that his mother claimed descent from Gudrun the daughter of Gjuki, of *Völsunga Saga* (Jochens 7).

5 Andersson and Miller note that children do sometimes appear, as in *Njál's saga*; they have also directed their audience to Gert Kreutzer's *Kindheit and Jugend in der altnordischen Literature* (185 n. 10). Kreutzer's work, which considers material from native sagas as well as those adapted from non-native tales (such as

not valued historically or in literature. While infanticide in the form of the exposure of infants occurred in pre-Christian Iceland and Norway and continued into the first part of the Christian era, the laws demonstrate that the act was increasingly condemned (Jochens 85-93). The thirteenth-century Old Icelandic *Gunnlaugssaga Ormstungu* (*The Saga of Gunnlaug Serpent-tongue*) provides literary evidence of this condemnation with an account of an averted filicide. The wealthy farmer and chieftain Thorstein, away from home on an errand, has a disturbing dream that he possesses an amazingly beautiful swan that is courted by two eagles who fight to the death over her; she is then courted by a hawk. When his Norwegian companion Bergfinn informs him of the dream's prophetic nature and that he will have a daughter so beautiful that two of her suitors will fight and die over her, Thorstein rebukes the man (sections 1-2). He returns to his pregnant wife and orders her to keep their child if it is male but to expose it if it is female. At this point, the narrator interjects to explain that in pre-Christian Iceland, the exposure of infants occurred but was certainly not promoted: "Ok þat var þá siðvanði nökkurr, er land var allt alheiðit, at þeir menn, er félitlir váru, en stóð ómegð mjök til handa, létu út bera börn sín, ok þótti þó illa gert ávallt" 'And it was the custom to some extent, back when the entire land was utterly pagan, that men who were poor and had too many dependents had their children exposed, but it was always considered a bad deed' (3).[6] When Thorstein learns, a few years later, that the beautiful girl Helga he believes to be his niece is truly his daughter, he gladly accepts this news (and with it, the knowledge that his wife disobeyed him). He refers to his previous state of mind as "vanhyggju mína" 'my

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those concerning Charlemagne) is an important general work on children in the sagas and addresses topics that include childbirth, child rearing, baptism, and fostership practices. The most noteworthy children in the sagas, as in other heroic literatures, are those who grow into mighty protagonists such as Egill Skalla-Grímsson of Snorri's *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*.

6 Thorstein has other dependents (at least three sons, according to section one), but he is wealthy enough to afford the cost of another.

thoughtlessness' (3), which indicates that he - like his wife, sister, and servant who saved Helga - realizes what a bad deed it would have been to expose her. Magnus Hakonarson, a thirteenth-century king of Norway, even declared that exposure constituted murder (Jochens 91). Furthermore, the active murder (e.g. killing by stabbing or decapitation) of children does not seem to have been permitted by either Icelanders or Norwegians. The murder of children, especially high-born children, in a tale, should thus command attention. John Lindow has noted that societies faced with a "dynastic crisis" because of a lack of fit heirs are more vulnerable to hostile takeovers (143), and this certainly was a concern, even within a highly armed society. We can well imagine that securing one's lineage concerned leaders, and this concern naturally found its way into the literature as it did in the continental feudal narratives considered in chapter three.

To ground this examination of filicides, it will prove helpful to consider how early Germanic societies, which have been characterized by some as blood-soaked, viewed unnatural deaths. Judith Jesch has written that Iceland, in the thirteenth century, was "mindlessly violent" (191). While there is a core truth here, these societies were not entirely lawless. In early Germanic societies and continuing into the later medieval period in Iceland, when a member of one's family was killed, that family had the legal right to financial compensation (*wergeld* or "the payment for a man") or other forms of justice. Some of the richest evidence of the systems of justice comes from Icelandic literary sources.[7] Icelandic sagas suggest that families preferred to be compensated with the blood of the killer or at least a declaration that the killer should be an outlaw (Andersson and Miller 45-46). Miller is quick to point out, however, that some would choose not to pursue blood vengeance,

7 Skepticism is, of course, warranted when one uses literary sources as evidence for historical truth.

particularly if the deceased had regularly caused social difficulties (211). One can imagine that this would only further exacerbate societal tensions.

Icelandic society had strict laws dictating who could seek vengeance and under what circumstances this could be done, though the sagas suggest that legality and reality did not always correspond completely (Andersson and Miller 43-44). Miller explains that people went to great lengths to justify the pursuit of blood vengeance and that their justifications may have even changed over time (215). The sagas, according to Andersson and Miller, suggest that vengeance killings were not rare. Furthermore, there were temporal guidelines for these vengeance killings, and avengers and their families could be shamed by not following the guidelines. Allowing for much time to pass before taking vengeance stained one's reputation with the taint of timidity, but killing in haste did not improve one's reputation. One was meant to plan such a killing carefully, to act methodically, and to savor it thoroughly (Andersson and Miller 44, 48). If vengeance were perpetrated in an unlawful manner, the family of that vengeance target could then have legal recourse (45).

Andersson and Miller write, "no law permitted the killing of persons not directly responsible for the injury" (43). They also conclude, based upon evidence gleaned from the Icelandic laws and the sagas, that no woman, female child, or male child under the age of twelve "was a legitimate vengeance target" (47); Miller adds old men to this group. The age of twelve seems to have been the legal age of majority for males, as Miller explains, because at twelve, males could pursue legal action and seek vengeance themselves (207).

A commonly held belief about this system is that while boys could grow into seekers of vengeance, this option did not present itself to Icelandic women. The argument proceeds

that because they had limited legal standing, women did not seek vengeance themselves in Icelandic culture; instead, they convinced the men in their lives to seek the necessary vengeance (Andersson and Miller 20-21). A woman's position as part of her biological family did not change with her marriage; two families would be bound, and the closest men in either family could be expected to aid her if necessary (Miller 169-70). The reliance upon a man to carry out a woman's will is not a mark of weakness; rather, "the conventional woman of the sagas is strong-willed and uncompromising. She is the self-appointed guardian of the honor of her men and as such she generally sees honor as unnuanced heroism" (212). Miller explains that inciters, regardless of gender (for they could also be old men and even servants) were dependent upon those they incited, legally and otherwise (212). To call these individuals weak, however, is to misunderstand the relationship - perhaps by thinking of dependence only in modern terms.

Judith Jesch has argued that inciters, while common in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, did not truly exist. She has attributed the role of women as inciters to the need of male warriors to deflect blame from themselves for the martial strife, and she notes that we see this deflection in the literatures of other similar cultures (130). She argues, however, that no evidence exists for women acting as inciters historically and that the literary inciter is a "literary cliché" and "a scapegoat" created by male authors (190-91). She discusses a poetic account of "Danae" (translated by Jesch as "Danish women") inciting their husbands to battle. In this work, the *Bella Parisiacae urbis*, the monk Abbo of St. Germain writes of a ninth-century viking siege upon Paris that he witnessed. Jesch uses details from the poem as proof that life for the *Danae* proved difficult and writes that it "is thought to be a fairly

accurate eyewitness account, allowing perhaps for some literary exaggeration" (105). Her dismissal of the historical inciter seems to indicate that she picks and chooses whatever facts best suit her purposes, even within a particular source.

Carol Clover, in contrast to Jesch, provides a convincing argument for the historical inciter and for the occasional female avenger. She presents as evidence that the role of the inciter exists in modern cultures that rely on bloodfeuds and that the role strongly parallels that found in the Icelandic materials ("Hildigunnr's" 169-75). Although the rules of Albanian bloodfeud, for instance, dictated that women did not participate as avengers or victims, the rules were sometimes broken, and these women "seem to have been particularly given to slitting the throats of the infant children of their husband's or brother's slayers" (171-72). This is especially intriguing, given Gudrun's actions in the *Völsunga saga*, which will be discussed below. In “Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe,” Clover posits a gender difference based less on one's anatomy and more on one's character, and she uses as evidence not just literary sources but also legal and archeological ones, such as the presence of "weapons, hunting equipment, [and] carpentry tools" - all traditionally masculine grave goods - in the graves of women (1-5). A portion of the Icelandic law treatise *Grágás* details circumstances when the unmarried daughter of a dead man who had no surviving male relations can act as a son would in the determination of *wergeld* (5). Clover also points to instances in the sagas when women take on the role of a man, including when Auðr in *Laxdœla saga* pursues the vengeance denied to her by her brothers, and argues that "[t]his is a world in which 'masculinity' always has a plus value, even (or perhaps especially) when it is enacted by a woman" (7).

While no word akin to the Old Irish term *fingal* existed in Old Norse-Icelandic, the crime of kin-slaying likewise led to social upheaval and was viewed as equally serious (Lindow 134-35). The simplest kin-slaying scenario, from a legal perspective, occurred when two family members killed one another, since the perpetrator of each death has been killed (139). In other circumstances, familial survivors "are caught between irreconcilable duties: to extract vengeance on the one hand and to honor the bonds of kinship on the other hand" (139). John Lindow notes that while Germanic literature is rife with kin-slayings, more appear to be fratricides than parricides or filicides (140-44). This does not mean that these were esteemed actions; in the Eddic poem *Völospá*, a hallmark of the end of the world known as Ragnarok is fratricide: "Brœðr muno beriaz / oc at bönom verðaz // muno systrungar / sifiom spilla" 'brothers will fight and kill each other' (stanza 45). Regardless of who slays whom, however, the tales of these killings make the difficulties arising from these situations clear.

Lindow illustrates the legal complexities of kin-slaying with his analysis of the Baldr myth. Several poems of the *Poetic Edda*, also known as the *Older Edda* (notably *Völospá,* stanzas 31-35 and 62, and *Baldrs Draumar*) allude to the Baldr myth, which is recounted in detail by Snorri Sturluson in sections 49-50 of the *Gylfaginning*, which is the first portion (aside from the prologue) of his poetic guidebook, the *Prose Edda* (also known as the *Younger Edda)*. The god Baldr had been rendered invulnerable to virtually all harmful things, thanks to the intervention of his mother, and the gods amused themselves by testing his immunity. The infamous trickster Loki convinced Hodr, Baldr's blind half-brother, to launch mistletoe at Baldr, and this turned out to be the only substance that could harm him.

Hodr thus unintentionally slew Baldr. Odin, as the father of Baldr, should have been able to exact vengeance for the death of his son even though Hodr did not intend to kill him.[8] Odin could not do so in this case, however, as he is also the father of Hodr. Were he to kill Hodr while seeking vengeance, he would be placed in a situation that required him to exact vengeance on himself. Snorri provides two separate tales of vengeance for Baldr's death. That provided in the *Gylfaginning*[9] places the blame for Baldr's death not on Hodr but on Loki, the man who led him to shoot his brother. The gods caught him, bound him with his own son Nari's entrails, and placed a poisonous snake in such a way that the poison dripped on Loki's face (section 50). Loki's punishment will become especially relevant when discussing the role of inciters in the Volsung-Nibelung tradition.

The goal of this chapter is not to present any sort of historical continuum of narrative treatments of filicide but rather to treat the episodes in their own right. Peter and Birgit Sawyer urge caution when interpreting Scandinavian materials not to view them as time capsules that retain the essence of Germanic legends in some sort of "uncontaminated" form (xi-xvi), and this is a chief critical concern of this chapter.

Here, as in all previous chapters, the filicide texts serve a dual purpose, material and exemplary. Snorri addresses this issue in the prologue to *Heimskringla* when he writes about "fornum kvæðum eða söguljóðum er menn hafa haft til skemmtanar sér" 'old verses and historical poems that men have had for their entertainment.' Snorri emphasizes that the verses composed by the Icelandic chronicler and poet Ari need interpretation when he writes, "ef þau eru rétt kveðin ok skynsamliga upp tekin" 'if they are recited correctly and received

8 John Lindow cites a passage from the legal text *Grágás* that has been interpreted by William Ian Miller to mean that accidents resulting in injury were not legally actionable, but he goes on to explain that this point did not easily settle such disputes, especially within families (144-45).

9 The *Skáldskaparmál* tells of Vali's actions against Hodr as does *Baldrs Draumar*.

intelligently.' Thus, the material used by himself and his contemporary storytellers enjoyed use as diversion but had deeper meaning that needed to be contemplated. The prologue to *Þiðreks saga af Bern* expresses the dual purpose particularly well:[10]

> En sögur af göfgum mönnum er nú fyrir því nytsamligar at kunna, at þær sýna mönnum drengilig verk ok fræknligar framkvæmdir, en vánd verk þýðast af leti, ok greina þau svá gott frá illu, hverr er þat vill rétt skilja, þat er samþykki marga manna, svá at einn maðr má gleðja þá marga stund. En flestir skemmtanarleikar eru settir með erfiði, en sumir með miklum fékostnaði, sumir verða eigi algervir nema með mannfjölda. Sumir leikar eru fára manna skemmtan ok standa skamma stund. Sumir leikar eru með mannhættu, en sagnaskemmtan eðr kvæða er með engum fékostnaði eðr mannhættu. Má einn þar skemmta mörgum mönnum, sem til vilja hlýða. Þessa skemmtan má ok hafa við þá[11] menn, ef vill; hún er jafnbúin nótt sem dag ok hvárt sem er ljóst eða myrkt.
>
> Moreover, the tales concerning worshipful men are now, for this reason, useful to know; they show to men brave work and immoderate successes, and the wicked work associated with sloth, and thus how to discern good from bad. And to anyone who wishes to understand correctly, they show that which is the agreement of many men, that one man can entertain for a great length of time. But most amusing pastimes are arranged with difficulty and some with

10 Given the aforementioned question about the dating of the prologue, we must consider that the assessment, found in the prologue, of the work as useful for entertainment and education could be a later addition. That Snorri also sees that sagas can provide diversion as well as wisdom, however, seems to give credence to the idea of the dual purpose.

11 I prefer Bertelsen's reading of "fæ" here, and this is reflected in the translation.

> great expenditures, and some cannot be perfect without a large crowd of men. Some amusements are the entertainment of only a few men and last a short time. Some amusements are dangerous, but telling stories or poems is not expensive or dangerous. One can provide entertainment to many men if they wish to hear and can have this entertainment with a few men, if one wishes. It is equally fit at night as it is in the day, and whether it is light or dark.

The composer of this prologue clearly places a high value on the ability of a story-teller to provide ethical guidance and to provide diversion no matter what the venue. While the passage does not explicitly mention filicide tales, there is no reason to believe that he would exclude them given that he makes no distinctions in the types of tales that can prove valuable and that *Þiðreks saga af Bern* contains such a wide variety of tales. The filicide episodes examined within this chapter provide intriguing subject matter as well as lessons about the notions of sacrifice, vengeance, and murder and about the informal code of conduct for warriors.

Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*

Snorri Sturluson provides, in his thirteenth-century *Heimskringla* (*Circle of the World*), an immense saga; it chronicles the lives of the Nordic kings from their mythological roots to the late twelfth century and ends during the reign of Magnus Erlingson. *Ynglinga Saga* (*The Saga of the Ynglings*) is the first portion of the *Heimskringla* and clearly demonstrates its link to mythology in its description of the early world and the conflicts of the Æsir and Vanir, though it moves into the more concrete heroic period and ends with King

Rognvald, the son of Olaf. The saga derives its name from one of the Vanir, Yngvi Frey, the reputed ancestor of the subsequent kings (*Ynglinga Saga* chapter 10).

The twenty-fifth chapter of *Ynglinga Saga* tells of King Aun (also known as King Ani), who sacrificed his sons to Odin in exchange for a longer life. The chapter initially characterizes Aun, the son of King Jorund, in a favorable light: "Hann var vitr maðr ok blótmaðr mikill" 'He was a wise man and a great sacrifice maker.' Snorri then explains that Aun lacked martial prowess: "Engi var hann hermaðr, sat hann at löndum" 'He was no warrior, and he remained in his homeland.' At the age of sixty and shortly after his return to the kingship at Uppsala (following his defeat by the Danish king Halfdan and subsequent twenty-year[12] exile), Aun sacrificed his first son: "Þá gerði hann blót mikit ok blét til langlífis sér ok gaf Óðni son sinn, ok var honum blótinn. Aun konungr fékk þau andsvör af Óðni, at hann skyldi enn lifa sex tigu vetra" 'Then he offered a great sacrifice, and he sacrificed for his longevity; he gave Odin his son, and he was sacrificed to him. King Aun received an answer from Odin that he should still live for another sixty winters.' Once again, Aun suffered a military defeat (this time from Ali the Valiant, son of Fridleif) and fled to West Gautland for twenty years, and he returned to his throne only after Ali's death. He sacrificed a second son to Odin, and "Þá sagði Óðinn honum at hann skyldi æ lifa, meðan hann gæfi Óðni son sinn it tíunda hvert ár, ok þat með, at hann skyldi heiti gefa nökkuru heraði í landi sínu eptir tölu sona sinna, þeirra er hann blótaði til Óðins" 'Then Odin said to him that he should always live while he gave a son to Odin every tenth year and that in addition, he should name any districts in his land after the number of those sons of his whom he had sacrificed to Odin.'

12 Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson notes that some manuscripts read twenty-five years, though he prefers the reading of twenty. An interval of twenty years makes much sense in a narrative dominated by multiples of ten.

Despite his unnaturally long life, Aun's body weakened; he lost the ability to walk, and after the death of his eighth son, he could not leave his bed. He was reduced to an infantile state after the sacrifice of the ninth son, and his people refused to let him sacrifice the tenth, Egil, whose reign Snorri describes in the following chapter. At this point, Aun died and was buried, and it is explained that the term *Ánasótt* derives from the legend and is applied to those who die painlessly of old age.

Certainly, this is an onomastic tale, typical of both this saga and this sort of mythological work. *Ynglinga saga* provides the origins not just of royal lines but also of customs, names, and terms. Not only does Snorri explain, in chapter ten, why the kings are known as the Ynglings, but he also explains in chapter seven that the name Audun derives from Odin and that the names Thorir and Steinthor derive from Thor. His etymology of *Ánasótt* in chapter twenty-five is much like his earlier etymology of *húsfreyja*: "Freyja helt þá upp blótum, því at hon ein lifði þá eptir goðanna, ok varð hon þá in frægsta, svá at með hennar nafni skyldi kalla allar konur tígnar, svá sem nú heita frúvur. Svá hét ok hver freyja yfir sinni eigu, en sú húsfreyja, er bú á" 'Then Freya kept up the sacrifices since she alone lived after the gods, and then she became more famous, so that all women of high rank should be called by her name, just as they are now called *frúvur* (ladies). And so each is called a *freyja* (lady) over her possessions, but each who has a dwelling is called a *húsfreyja* (mistress of the house)' (10). Snorri desires both to captivate and educate his audience, and a closer examination of the series of filicides further demonstrates the exemplary function of the narrative.

As his choice of language indicates, Snorri present Aun as a sacrificer, not a murderer, of his children. He continually uses variants of the word *blót*, which means "sacrifice," to describe Aun's actions instead of *dráp*, which means "slaughter" or "killing" and which he uses to describe the death of Ali at the hands of Starkad the Old in the same chapter. Valuing longevity over one's offspring may strike a modern audience as horrific, but nothing in the text indicates any improprieties in the initial sacrifices. We have already seen, especially in the first chapter of this dissertation, that men like Jephthah and Abraham have committed to performing sacrifices to please their gods and have benefited from their devotion.

Human sacrifice certainly was not unheard of in the early Germanic world. Hilda R. Ellis Davidson has pointed out several instances of adult females being sacrificed or sacrificing themselves (generally to accompany an adult male in death) in Old Norse-Icelandic literature as well as in the historical account of the Rus by Ahmad Ibn Fadlan (150-52). Sacrifices of human males did occur in Uppsala, according to Adam of Bremen's eleventh-century *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (4.27). One may be inclined to view his text with skepticism, for as Peter and Birgit Sawyer note, he sought to justify "his archbishop's claim to metropolitan authority over the church in Scandinavia (223). Archaeologists, however, have uncovered remains of sacrificed men and women, including some from the ninth and tenth century in nearby Denmark (Jesch 25). One must also remember that the world of *Ynglinga saga* is a pre-Christian world; Snorri will tell of the Christianization further into the *Heimskringla*, in the saga of Saint Olaf.

That the first nine children of Aun have neither names nor developed personalities serves as further evidence that sacrifice should not be condemned in this saga. They are

faceless and inanimate. As far as the audience is concerned, these could be animals instead of children. The narrative likewise remains silent regarding their mothers and any emotional reactions to these sacrifices by the children themselves, their mothers, or Aun's subjects. This keeps pathos to a minimum.

If Aun's people accept the first nine sacrifices, why do they rise up to prevent the tenth? The text does not explicitly reveal their motivation, but one can presume, based on their acceptance of the prior nine sacrifices, that it lies not in the act of sacrifice itself but in the state of the sacrificer. The sacrificer, their ruler, "drakk hann horn sem lébarn " 'drank from his horn like a newborn' at this point in his life. It follows that the people could value sacrifice yet place even more value upon having a potent king who could rule and defend them. Is it ethically wrong to strive for the retention of power? Perhaps, if that desire stems from personal interest, as it seems to for Aun. His actions call to mind those of Kronos, the father of Zeus, who also hoped to retain his throne. As mentioned in the first chapter, according to Apollodorus' *Library*, a repository of Greek myths, Kronos sought to prevent a prophecy from being fulfilled that he would lose power to his son, and so he devoured each of his children in turn until his wife arranged for Zeus to be saved (1:1.5-7). His actions, to an ancient Greek audience, were to be seen as extreme. From the beginning of his rule, Aun had trouble maintaining power, and his ability declined as his health did. He, like Kronos, went to extremes to avoid a change in the natural order of things. We see in this tale a work that is both onomastic and exemplary regarding the characteristics of a proper king. The didactic quality also characterizes other literature of the period, including Snorri's *Edda*,

meant to edify young poets, and the anonymous *Konungs Skuggsjá* (*King's Mirror*), meant to edify young princes.

How much of the ethical message is original to Snorri's version of the Aun legend? This is impossible to determine with any certainty. We find an allusion to the tale of King Aun within chapter four of "Hversu Noregr byggðist," which is found in the fourteenth-century *Flateyjarbók*, a famous Icelandic manuscript containing historical and pseudo-historical materials (Kolbrún). This chapter purports to provide the lineage from Odin to King Harald Fairhair, a Norwegian king from the ninth and tenth centuries. As in the *Heimskringla*, King Aun, also known as Ana, is placed chronologically between King Jorund and King Egil, and he is associated with old age. Here, he is called "ins gamla" 'the old' and is described as one "er níu vetr drakk horn fyrir elli sakir, áðr hann dó" 'who nine winters drank for the sake of old age before he died.' Given the reverence with which some held Snorri's works, however, "Hversu Noregr byggðist" may derive from *Ynglinga saga*. Even if the critique of a weak king was not an invention of Snorri but a preserved message from earlier storytellers, Snorri's decision to maintain this feature of the mythic tale demonstrates the value he ascribed to it.

Hildebrand Narratives

"Das Hildebrandslied," also known as the "Song of Hildebrand" or "The Older Lay of Hildebrand," narrates a battle between a father and son, Hildebrand and Hadubrand.[13] The fragmentary poem survives in a ninth-century format that is, according to James K. Walter, a

13 All direct quotations of the original text derive from the edition by Wilhelm Braune and Karl Helm. All translations of this text are those of James K. Walter.

mixture of Old High German and Old Saxon; the action finds its basis in the tales surrounding the fifth-century historical King Theodorich (1).

The poet quickly sets the scene after establishing the oral transmission of the tale: two warriors, who happen to be father and son, meet upon the battlefield (lines 1-6). Hildebrand, the older of the two, begins their conversation and asks, "hwer sin fater wari // fireo in folche" 'who the other's father might be // in that troop of fighters' (9-10). Hadubrand names himself and recounts what he has been told by his elders, that he is the son of Hildebrand, a man who left his family, followed Theodorich into exile, and is presumed dead (14-29). The father identifies himself as a family member and offers his son a gift of jewelry, but, refusing the gift from a man he believes to be an old Hun, his son reiterates, "'tot ist Hiltibrant, / Heribrantes suno'" 'Hildebrand Herebrand's son is no more' (44). Hildebrand realizes that they have reached an impasse, and after some remarks about exile, he voices the key problem of their encounter: "'so man mirat burc ęnigeru / banun ni gefasta, // nu scal mih suasat chind / suertu hauwan, // breton mit sinu billiu, / eddo ih imo to banin werdan'" 'While no one could slay me / at any stronghold, // now by the sword / my own son must kill me, // strike me down with his blade, / or I be his slayer' (52-54). As Walter points out, "Herein lies the tragedy of the situation for Hildebrand: he cannot be proven right by winning this fight, for a victory means the death of his own son and the end of his family name. A loss, of course, means his own death" (5 n. 2). They begin their battle, but the poem breaks off without indicating a victor (lines 63-68). Scholars believe, based upon both allusions to the tale in other heroic works and upon their understanding of the tragic nature of "Das Hildebrandslied," that the father must have killed the son (Walter 8).

Two texts often consulted to determine this ending are the early thirteenth-century Latin *Gesta Danorum* (*The History of the Danes*) and the Old Norse-Icelandic *Ásmundar saga kappabana* (*The Saga of Asmund, the killer of champions*). Saxo Grammaticus refers, in book seven, section 204 of his *Gesta Danorum*, to a filicide by the dying warrior Hildiger; after his brother Haldan has dealt him a mortal wound, he does not name the son but says that his shield depicted his only son, whom he once killed (1.223-24). Hilda Ellis Davidson and Peter Fischer have discussed the similarity of Saxo Grammaticus' tale to the "Hildebrandslied" and to the Old Norse-Icelandic *Ásmundar saga kappabana,* where two brothers fight, and the killed brother Hildebrand has a relevant deathbed speech (2.116 n. 77). They contend that the changes made in the depicted combat (from father-son to brother-brother) led to the inclusion in *Ásmundar saga kappabana* of "a rather unconvincing statement that Hildebrand has killed his son in a fit of berserk rage before the duel" (2.118 n. 94). The attribution of the killing to "a fit of berserk rage" may indicate that the narrator of *Ásmundar saga kappabana* felt the need to rationalize what he viewed as a horrific crime.

If we assume that the "Hildebrandslied" does end with Hildebrand killing Hadubrand, what purpose(s) should we attribute to this depiction of filicide? Certainly, the poem would have proved interesting to those who heard it, especially if they were warriors acquainted with certain codes of expected behavior. The tragic nature of the event is also telling. Hildebrand verbalizes the difficult and grievous situation he is in. "Alas, O Great God, a grievous fate's falling," he cries out before he notes that he has survived sixty years of fighting during his exile but is now doomed to commit filicide or be the victim of patricide

(lines 49-54). He seems to be questioning the justice of a system that presents him with such a dilemma.

The single-combat between Hildebrand and Hadubrand in the "Hildebrandslied" has a great deal in common with that between Cú Chulainn and Conlae, explored in the previous chapter.[14] Hadubrand seems to be older than his Irish analogue, but they both exhibit enough martial prowess to keep up with their famed fathers, men who are justifiably prideful. Though for differing reasons, the parental relationship is denied in both texts. Here, though Hadubrand names himself, he refuses to acknowledge Hildebrand as his father; Conlae refuses to name himself, and Cú Chulainn does not acknowledge their filial relationship until his son is dying. All fight rather than risk dishonor. All are driven to fight by a code of conduct (Conlae's is a personal rather than a societal code) to the point of death. Both tales seem to critique the role warriors play as the defenders of collectivist societies, where what benefits the society as a whole carries more importance that what would benefit the individual.

In one key Hildebrand text of the thirteenth century, we see the story transformed, with a confrontation between father and son but with the filicide portion removed; *Þiðreks saga af Bern* provides a very full account of the tale. In the saga, the Hildebrand episode occurs towards the end, when the exiled King Thidrek, dishonored after the Niflung-related devastation at his ally Attila's court (which will be discussed in the context of the Volsung-Nibelung tradition below), desires to go home and regain his kingdom of Amlungland (section 395). He and his faithful companion and foster-father Hildebrand return to Bern and

14 Parallels between the "Hildebrandslied" and the tale of Sohráb and Rostám in the *Shaname* are less obvious, though this may be expected due to the fragmentary nature of the former.

learn that Alibrand, the son of Hildebrand, is ruling over Bern and doing his best to hold out against the evil Sifka[15] (395-404).

Hildebrand learns where his son, who has grown to be a skilled and powerful warrior, will be and how to determine who he is (404-06). His ally Konrad warns the old warrior to identify himself to Alibrand and remarks, "'En ef eigi gerir þú svá, þá er þat þinn bani'" 'But if you do not act accordingly, then that will be your cause of death' (406). In this saga, however, the author does not foreshadow a tragic end; rather, Hildebrand laughs about the possibility of meeting his son in battle (406). They begin to fight when they first meet, without saying a word to one another (407). Alibrand begins to question his father while they are resting, but neither wishes to identify himself first; only when Hildebrand is in a position to kill his son does he reveal who he is: "'Villtu halda þínu lífi, þá seg mér skjótt, ef þú ert Alibrandr, minn son, þá er ek Hildibrandr, þinn faðir'" 'If you wish to keep your life, then tell me quickly; if you are Alibrand, my son, then I am Hildebrand, your father' (408). They cease fighting once they have identified one another, and though Alibrand has been wounded, the entire family happily reunites (408-09).

What are we to make of this transformation? Thidrek, in his saga, needs to regain his lost honor and patrimony. As Otto Gschwantler has pointed out, Thidrek's depression so overwhelms him at this point that he cannot make basic decisions regarding whether or not to fight enemies they encounter by chance; instead, he relies on his greatest warrior, adviser, and friend to decide for him (151-52). The king has already lost much of his retinue (sections 332-35, 388-89, 395) and needs companions to help him, and Hildebrand, while

15 Sifka, eager to ruin Thidrek's uncle King Erminrek (who has raped Sifka's wife), advises him to exile his nephew Thidrek (sections 276-87).

invaluable, cannot restore the kingdom to his lord single-handed. It thus helps the plot to proceed if both father and son survive, as we see in section 410, where Alibrand summons the people of Bern to join forces with Thidrek. Alibrand, in fact, deals the fatal blow to the king's rival Sifka (413). Had the young warrior died, Thidrek likely would not have had the martial force necessary to overcome his foe. While Hildebrand does die within the saga, this occurs only *after* he has achieved an important goal: the restoration of his king to the throne (415). This seems a fitting end for a warrior so highly praised throughout the saga.

Edward R. Haymes has proposed that a Norwegian man of the cloth may have composed the saga in its written form for the court of King Hakon Hakonarson,[16] and he has noted commonalities between the chivalric *riddarasögur* (for example *Tristrams saga*) commissioned by King Hakon and *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, including "the image of kingship based on the support of the nobility" (*Saga* xix-xxi). Because of comparisons like this, Theodore Andersson has felt compelled to lay out the differences between *Þiðreks saga af Bern* and the Old Norse *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* (352-46). He argues that the saga serves as a condemnation of chivalric *vanitas* (371-72). He further claims that even Thidrek's restoration to the throne is "overshadowed by the gradual falling away of his retinue, as the remaining heroes succumb one after the other. Stripped of his glory, Thidrek himself disappears on a mysterious black horse" (369). Ulrike Sprenger has convincingly argued against Andersson's position in "Zum Superbiaproblem in der *Þiðreks saga*." She demonstrates that the saga does not, on the whole, depict the king as prideful man worthy of condemnation. In particular, she points to his comportment after Attila and Erka's sons and

16 Scholars debate whether the saga is a translation from a German written source or a compilation of German oral sources (Andersson; *Saga* xix-xxx; Bornholdt 86-91).

his own brother have died in battle (sections 335-39).[17] He is reluctant to return to the court of the Huns, and even when he finally agrees to re-enter that region, he deposits himself in a kitchen instead of the royal halls. Sprenger writers, "Daß er sich später im Hunnenland in eine Küche begibt, ist jedenfalls charakteristisch für diesen Þiðreker" 'That he later relegates himself to a kitchen is in any case characteristic of this Thidrek' (Sprenger 132). Pride, whether labeled as "*Superbia*" or "*vanitas*" (as by Sprenger and Andersson, respectively), characterizes the hero only in the end of the saga,[18] not throughout the narrative. Even if we accept Andersson's view of the text as a negative exemplum, which does not seem accurate, that does not negate the value of comparing this text to the *riddarasögur.*[19]

Combat between two warriors who love one another but do not recognize one another, followed by the identification of the two parties and their happy reconciliation, is a *topos* found in the Old French Arthurian romances on which the *riddarasögur* are modeled. The Old Norse-Icelandic translators of the *riddarasögur* retained this *topos*, as is evidenced by sections 14-15 of *Ívens saga*, the medieval Scandinavian adaptation of *Yvain*. Iven (Yvain) unwittingly enters into combat with his companion Valven (Gauvain / Gawain), and they fight fiercely until nightfall, at which time each acknowledges the prowess of the other. Valven identifies himself first, which leads Iven to identify himself and results in their joyful reunion. This scene bears a remarkable similarity to the Hildebrand-Alibrand reunion of

17 Sprenger uses Bertelsen's edition and corresponding volume and section numbers, but I have opted to retain those of the Jónsson edition here for consistency.

18 After Thidrek has regained his kingdom and has become ruler of Attila's former realm, he reunites with his friend Heimir and begins to demand tribute, including from a monastery. When the monks do not surrender their money, Heimir kills them, and Thidrek sets the monastery ablaze (sections 429-35).

19 In fact, Suzanne Kramarz-Bein has shown that such comparisons are worthy of more extensive study in her *Die* Þiðreks saga *im Kontext der altnorwegischen Literatur*.

Þiðreks saga af Bern. King Arturus, like Thidrek, needs his retinue alive if he is to hold any sway in the world.[20]

Another variant of the tale appears in "The Younger Lay of Hildebrand," also known as the "Jüngeres Hildebrandslied," which like its predecessor the older lay begins *in media res*. The set-up and outcome of the later narrative poem, however, are far different.[21] Master Hildebrand desires to return home after a thirty-two year absence (stanza 1). His companion Duke Abelon warns him that he will be attacked by his own son Alebrand on his journey home, but this possibility does not worry the old warrior, who trusts that his own martial skills are superior to those of his son (2-3). Dietrich von Bern protests against the possibility of strife and urges civility because he is friends with Hildebrand's son (stanza 4). When father and son finally meet, they engage first in a verbal skirmish and then a physical one without identifying themselves (5-13). Finally, Alebrand identifies himself by naming his mother and then his father, and Hildebrand reveals his identify (14-15). Unlike in the older poem, the son does not doubt his father here upon mutual identification; instead, the two joyfully embrace and return to the family home, where there is a further reunion with Ute, Hildebrand's wife (16-20).

Walter's notes on this poem highlight how changes to the initial parts of the earlier poem render this one less powerful. As he points out, it is unclear why father and son should not know one another since the son is said to be friends with the father's closest companion (300 n. 3). Removed from the historical context of exile, this poem does not carry with it the sense of loss or any other sort of tragedy that the earlier one does. Here, the audience does

20 This, of course, does not in itself obviate the possibility of negative political commentary by the narrators of these tales of kings and their men.

21 The edition used here is that provided by Walter alongside his own translation.

not believe that filicide or patricide could occur; Hildebrand finds the idea preposterous, and neither party's wounds seem potentially life-threatening. This lay seems to have retained the father-son combat and adopted certain elements of the legend that found their way into *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, such as the happy familial reunion, but has omitted the context necessary for them to make sense. While this tale has proved entertaining enough to audiences to be preserved, any ethical messages seem to be obscured by unclear events in the text.

Volsung-Nibelung Narratives

The Volsung-Nibelung narratives have entertained countless people for centuries and remain some of the best known tales of the Middle Ages. Within this body of stories related to the descendants of the renowned warrior Volsung, three filicide variants emerge. The most widely circulated, and thus better known, filicide variant (the second) involves the death of a child in the court of the Huns. Because of key similarities in certain textual representations of this epic, some general analysis will be necessary after those variants are discussed individually. The first variant, represented only by the thirteenth-century *Völsunga saga*, involves the deaths of several children at the instigation of their mother Signy, the daughter of Volsung. The third and final variant, the only filicide in the tradition perpetrated by a man, involves King Jormunrek's killing of his grown son Randver.

Poetic Edda

The *Poetic Edda* is believed to contain some of the oldest material related to these stories. This work is a composite text, formed from anonymous works that vary in origins, and most have survived in a thirteenth-century manuscript, the Codex Regius. Linguistic and

palaeographical evidence has led scholars to date the individual works between the ninth and thirteenth centuries (Clark 175 n. 3). About half of these Eddic poems treat some aspect of the Volsung-Nibelung material (Hallberg). A few of these contain brief mentions of the more well-known filicide variant, but only the *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál*,[22] both of which are often translated as *The Lay of Atli,* provide detailed narratives.

Atlakviða, considered the oldest of the Eddic Poems, begins with an invitation from Atli (better known as Attila the Hun) to his brothers-in-law, Gunnar and Hogni, to visit the court of the Huns (stanza 5). Gudrun, their sister, has sent her own message with her husband's messenger, and it is a warning that Atli has treacherous intent (8). The men decide to travel despite the warning (5-14). Shortly after their arrival at the court, the men are seized, and in turn, each is killed; the poem reveals that Atli has ambushed the men because he desires the gold of the Niflungs (15-32). Afterward, Gudrun brings her husband his drinking goblet and some food, and once he is drunk, she reveals what he has consumed (33-37). She tells Atli,

"Sona hefir þinna,	sverða deilir,
hiorto hrædreyrug	við hunang of tuggin;
melta knáttu, móðugr	manna valbr*á*ðir,
eta at ölkrásom	oc í öndugi at senda.
Kallaraðu síðan	til knía þinna
Erp né Eitil,	ölreifa tvá;

22 The edition by Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, which is used here, calls these poems the *Atlaqviða in grœnlenzca* and the *Atlamál in grœnlenzcao* respectively.

séraðu síðan í seti miðio

gullz miðlendr geira scepta,

manar meita né mara keyra." (36-37)

"Of your sons, sword distributer,

You have chewed around the gory hearts with honey;

Excited one, you were able to digest the flesh of slain men,

To eat it as ale-treats and send it to the high-seat.

Afterwards, you will call to your knees

Neither Erp nor Eitil, the two cheerful from ale;

Afterwards, you will not see in the middle of the seats

A distributer of gold, the fitting of spears with shafts,

The cutting of beards, or the riding of horses."

All but Gudrun grieve intensely; she gives gifts to the servants, kills Atli, and then incinerates the hall (38-43).

The narrator has named the sons but not portrayed them as children. Instead, the descriptions of Erp and Eitil are of their now impossible future selves, the men their father would hope them to become (37). In this way, Gudrun helps Atli visualize the heirs he has lost, the men who will not be able to hold the throne of Hunland when he is gone. Clearly, she aims to cause him pain, as her revelation that he has casually eaten the children's hearts demonstrates. This *topos* of the eaten heart or *le coeur mangé* finds itself used for a similar

purpose in Old French and other medieval continental literature, where an adulteress unwittingly consumes her murdered lover's heart.[23]

Remarkably, although Gudrun acts like a Procne figure by serving her sons to their father, the narrator seems not to condemn her outright. She is called "gaglbiarta" 'goosebright' towards the end of the poem (39) and "biort" 'bright' in the last line of the poem (43), terms that seem to have a positive sense, so we are to hold this particular quality of brightness in mind when thinking of her. Jesch likewise believes that the last line demonstrates the admiration of the narrator for Gudrun (147). The lady's gift-giving after the filicide in the thirty-ninth stanza shows her generosity, another positive attribute. While she is also called "afkár" 'terrible' (stanza 35), and is "er hon æva grét / brœðr sína berharða / oc buri svása, // unga, ófróða, / þá er hon við Atla gat" 'she who never cries, for her bearishly fierce brothers or her beloved children, young, unknowing, that she had borne with Atli' (38), she is not portrayed as emotionless. In fact, her children are said to be "svása" 'dear' or 'beloved' (38). Her vengeance demonstrates just how much she loves her brothers, and it seems no coincidence that stanza 38 mentions her brothers and sons in the same line; all four have importance for her. David Clark argues, however, that while Gudrun is described as "biort," "the final emphasis is on the deaths she has caused" (184). He also claims that her killing of Atli shows that she is not fighting fairly or respectfully, for he was inebriated and unarmed (184). Clark agrees that the narrator does not view Gudrun as entirely without merit, but he argues that "the poet seems to depict Guðrun as a kind of impressive monster in her inhuman self-control" (185). The lines that Clark uses as evidence, "hon hefir þriggia / þíoðkonunga // banorð borið / biort, áðr sylti" 'she caused to be borne a death-message about

23 For more on this motif, see "Consuming Passions: Variations on the Eaten Heart Theme" by Madeleine Jeay.

three kings of nations // the bright one, before she died' *do* leave the audience with a reminder that she has avenged her family and caused death to three kings, yet the epithet "biort" comes *after* the mention of these deaths. The final half-line thus seems to characterize her not as a "monster" then as Clark argues but as powerful and positive until her death. Regardless of interpretation, this gruesomely captivating poem shows how far Gudrun is willing to go for vengeance for her family.

Atlamál, believed to be one of the youngest poems found in the Codex Regius, presents a plot similar to that of *Atlakviða* but in a form that is more extensive and more focused on facets of domestic life, especially how husband and wife converse. Atli sends messengers to his brothers-in-law to invite them to visit his court; his wife Gudrun sends a warning which, altered by a messenger, is unseen by her brothers (stanzas 1-7). In this poem, Gunnar and Hogni have wives who try but fail to dissuade the men from traveling, for these women partially understand Gudrun's warning and have prophetic dreams (9-35). The men travel and are ambushed (38-44). Here, Gudrun takes an active role in her brothers' defense (46-53). Atli claims that he acts for many reasons but most of all because of the death of his sister (56), though one of Gudrun's brothers points out that Atli has committed offenses against them in his greed (57). Atli, who despises his wife, arranges for her brothers to die and then mocks her (58-68). This Gudrun is (or pretends to be) sentimental about her familial loss (72). She claims to be inconsolable and defeated and prepares a funereal feast (71-76). She lures her children to her, and

glúpnoðo grimmir oc gréto þeygi,
fóro í faðm móður, frétto, hvat þá scyldi.

"Spyrit lítt eptir! spilla ætla ec báðom,

lyst váromc þess lengi at lyfia yer elli."

"Blót, sem vilt, bornom, bannar þat mangi,

scömm mun ró reiði, ef þú reynir gorva."

Brá þá barnæsco brœðra in kappsvinna,

sciptit scapliga, scar hon á háls báða. (77-79)

Fierce, they became downcast, and yet they did not cry;

They went into their mother's embracing arms and asked what would

Happen. "Ask little more! I intend to destroy both of you;

For a long time, I have desired to cure you of old age."

"Sacrifice your children as you wish; no one can prohibit that,

Your wrath will not rest if you try to do this."

The passionate one struck the childhood of the brothers;

She arranged things appropriately; she cut the throat of both of them.

After she kills her children, she turns their skulls into goblets;[24] she feeds their blood and hearts to Atli, and she then informs him of what she has done (77-84). After a marital dispute, she and a nephew each strike a fatal blow to Atli, and she and her husband exchange words about the unhappy nature of their marriage before he dies (88-104).

While these children speak, the narrator says little more about them. They do seem to have the bearing of their mother; they do not cry in the face of certain death (78). Clark

24 In a note to her translation of stanza 82, Carolyne Larrington posits that the skull motif was borrowed from the Eddic poem *Völundarqviða* (*Poetic Edda* 292). The motif does appear in various Velent / Volund texts, as will be discussed below. Ancient historical accounts from Greece, Rome, and China indicate that drinking from the skull of an enemy "was a widely shared cultural attribute of the Northern Barbarian peoples of the Eurasian Iron Age" (Koch and Carey 30-31 n).

translates "glúpnoðo" as afraid and claims that this scene thus provides "an awful pathos," presumably because he believes them to be too afraid to cry (188). This interpretation goes too far. Geir Zoëga translates "glúpna" as "to become downcast" in his *Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*. Dejection and fear are not the same thing, and given the seriousness with which the boys reply to the news that she will kill them, dejection seems the more appropriate notion here, and the claim about pathos seems unfounded. The deaths do not provoke a rush of sentiment from either their mother or father; the children instead seem important as heirs, but even the need for heirs is not elaborated upon here. Gudrun points out that the death of Atli's sons is among the worst news possible (84), and he implies that she has harmed herself by destroying her lineage (85). This is true in a sense, as she now has almost no male relatives to avenge her, should the need arise.

Despite her shocking filicidal actions, Gudrun seems condemned primarily by Atli. He describes her as "váliga" 'harmful' (56), but the narrator describes her as wise three times (3, 68, and 104).[25] Furthermore, the final stanza of the poem notes that a father should be "sæll" 'happy' if he has children like those of Gjuki, Gudrun's father (105). This implies that the narrator casts some favor upon Gudrun's actions.

The poem seems far more focused on the relationship of the three main couples (Atli and Gudrun, Gunnar and Glaumvor, and Hogni and Kostbera) than on the children; much of the poem consists of discussions between husband and wife. This would provide entertainment, especially to an audience that contained women (for women have key roles) and especially to a later medieval audience. Given the focus of the poem, it comes as no

25 Clark argues that in one of these cases, the narrator refers to her as wise only because she tries to kill herself and is thus condemning her (189).

great surprise that here the children's deaths seem little more than an example of a cruel thing that one spouse could do to another.

The "distanced perspective" of the poems may help to explain seemingly contradictory characterizations in these poems; it could well be that the poems preserve faint traces of past attitudes towards vengeance that the social and legal conventions of the narrators' times have, at least partially, moved away from (Clark 174-76).

Völsunga saga

The *Völsunga saga*, composed in Old Norse-Icelandic, provides the fullest and most filicide-rich version of this heroic story. The prose epic conveys the deeds of several generations of the powerful and vengeance-driven family of the great warrior King Volsung, a descendant of Odin. What is particularly remarkable is that most filicides here are instigated by women. The first episodes of filicide occur as Signy, the daughter of Volsung, seeks vengeance against her husband, King Siggeir. The next episode of filicide takes place as Gudrun, a woman who has married into the Volsung family, seeks vengeance against her second husband, King Atli. The final episode of filicide stems from King Jormunrek's jealousy of his son Randver.

Signy desires vengeance against Siggeir (to whom she was given in an arranged marriage) because he arranged the ambush that killed her father Volsung and nine of her ten brothers, and she hopes that her two sons will carry out her plans against her husband. She sends them, one at a time, to her twin brother Sigmund, the only survivor of Siggeir's treachery. Sigmund is presumed dead by Siggeir and lives alone in the woods, where he tests the boys. The first unnamed child, who is ten years old, refuses to bake a loaf of bread for

Sigmund because there is something living in the meal bag that he does not wish to touch. Sigmund views this as proof that the child lacks heart and courage. When this fear is reported to Signy, she instructs her brother to slay him: "'Tak þú hann þá ok drep hann. Eigi þarf hann þá lengr at lifa'" 'Seize him then, and kill him. It is not necessary that he live any longer' (section 6). The next winter, she sends her younger son, and the events transpire in the same fashion with the same end result, the death of the child (6). We learn a little later that she has already performed her own test of each, the sewing of a tunic to each child's skin, and that they did not fare well: "Þeir þolðu illa ok kriktu um" 'they endured it badly and cried about it' (7). Signy's actions and words demonstrate her lack of maternal affection. She sends each child to be tested, and when the child fails the test, he is discarded because he is only needed for the task of vengeance. This corresponds to the depiction of these children in the text; while the elder son speaks, it is only in the context of his trial by Sigmund. When Signy engages in magical trickery to conceive a child with Sigmund, she finally has the champion she needs. She sends their child Sinfjotli to his father after he passes her tunic-test, and he similarly passes the bread-test without difficulty even though he is not quite ten years old (7). This testing and discarding of children parallels the testing of swords found farther into the narrative, where two substandard and unnamed swords are forged before a perfect, named sword is forged.[26] Sigurd, the son of Sigmund, discards two swords made by the smith Regin before he asks him to reforge the fragments of his father's sword; the hero keeps this final sword, Gram, and uses it to have vengeance on his father's killers and to slay Fafnir (15-18).

26 This motif also appears in *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, where the smith Velent forges two swords before forging Mimung (section 67).

The narrator retains Signy's attitude toward motherhood with the deaths of her fourth and fifth children, who were fathered by Siggeir. When Sigmund and Sinfjotli are about to follow Signy's instructions and take revenge upon Siggeir, one of Signy's two youngest children (who are playing together) discovers the intruders and reports them to Siggeir (8). In response, Signy brings both of the children to her brother and orders them killed: "'Ok ræð ek ykkr at þit drepið þau'" 'And I advise you that you kill them' (8). He refuses, but their half-brother Sinfjotli (who believes he is their full brother because he is unaware that Sigmund is his biological father) complies readily. R.G. Finch regards this second filicide episode as a textual mistake and cites other doublets of the saga as evidence of the poor skills of the compiler (ix). This theory fails to take into account the tradition of repetition and variation found in so much oral literature. Furthermore, it ignores how this episode contributes to the characterization of Sinfjotli. Yes, he has already proven his strength and determination in his training with Sigmund (sections 7-8), but here, this avenging child willingly kills two unarmed, innocent children - an act that even Sigmund finds abhorrent - because his mother desires it (8). No fraternal affection causes him to hesitate. This demonstrates that he is the hardened tool of vengeance Signy needs, for if he does not refrain from killing his young brothers for his mother, he is unlikely to refrain from killing the man he believes to be his father for her.

Sinfjotli's fratricidal actions are later recalled by King Grannmar, with whom Sinfjotli engages in a verbal skirmish: "'Þú drapt brœðr þína ok gerðir þik at illu kunnan'" 'You killed your brothers and made a bad reputation for yourself' (section 9). This would seem to indicate that kin-slaying could have a great impact on one's social standing. John Lindow

reminds us of a parallel incident of *flyting*[27] in *Beowulf* involving Unferth (143). The hero insults Unferth: "'ðū þīnum brōðrum / tō banan wurde // hēafodmǣgum; / þæs þū in helle scealt // werhðo drēogan /þēah þīn wit duge'" 'you were the slayer of your brothers, your close kinsmen; for that you have to suffer damnation in hell, though your intelligence may be mighty' (lines 587-89). The nature of the passage requires us to take the information with a grain of salt, however, since heinous insults sometimes characterized these insult contests. After succeeding in battle, Sinfjotli "Gerisk hann manna frægstr" 'Made himself a famous man' (section 10), and his eventual poisoning at the hand of his stepmother (as revenge for his justifiable killing of her brother) led to her exile and death (10). Committing a kin-slaying, at least for a grandson of Volsung, does not seem to preclude later fame.

Signy's resolve holds until she dies. After her champions have set Siggeir's hall on fire, she reveals all that she has done to achieve vengeance for the Volsungs:

> "Ek lét drepa börn okkur er mér þóttu of sein til föðurhernda, ok ek fór í skóg til þín í völvulfki, ok er Sinfjötli okkarr sonr. Hefir hann af því mikit kapp at hann er bæði sonarsonr ok dóttursonr Völsungs konungs. Hefi ek þar til unnit all hluti at Siggeir konungr skyldi bana fá. Hefi ek ok svá mikit til unnit at fram kœmisk hefndin, at mér er með engum kosti líft. Skal ek nú deyja með Siggeiri konungi lostig er ek átta hann nauðig." (section 8)
>
> "I had our children killed who seemed to me too slow to seek revenge for our

27 *Flyting* is a type of insult contest engaged in by men that has been compared to the modern practice known as *playing the dozens*. The goal of the exchange is to increase one's own status and demonstrate that one is worthy of respect by denigrating the other person's character; the game continues until one person is left speechless. *Flyting* is found in Old English and other Germanic literatures.

> father, and I went out into the forest to you in the guise of a witch, and Sinfjotli is our son. He has such great spirit for this reason, that he is both the son's son and the daughter's son of King Volsung. I have accomplished all these to this end, that King Siggeir should suffer to die. And I have accomplished so much for this vengeance to be brought about that for me, there is no choice to be allowed to live. I shall now die willingly with King Siggeir, though unwillingly I married him."

Signy claims responsibility for the deaths and sentences herself to death, and neither her brother nor her son protests this decision. She sees herself not as a mother who still has a child remaining, but as an avenger who has finished the only business she had.

Are we to view her as a cold-hearted murderer or as one who is committing a lawful act of vengeance? Signy's use of her brother and son as avengers seems to follow the law, for she is not taking matters into her own hands but is acting as a classic inciter. As we have already seen, however, Icelandic law dictated that one should not take vengeance upon one who did not commit the wrong and that one should not take vengeance upon children. King Siggeir would have been a legitimate target for vengeance, but his children would not have been. Thus, what she calls for is unjust and constitutes legally unjustifiable murder. This would seem to warrant legal punishment, as Loki was punished for his role in Hodr's shooting of Baldr. Sinfjotli's actions further complicate matters, for by killing his half-brothers, he has put himself in a position where he could take vengeance upon himself, if he

is no longer a child himself. Signy's culpability in this complex scenario may be why she sentences herself to death.

These filicides keep the audience enthralled but also have exemplary purposes. They aid in the characterization of both Signy and her remaining child, Sinfjotli. Nothing - not even a mother's love - weakens the resolve of Signy when it comes to exacting vengeance. In this regard, she is very different from the Medea and Procne figures we have seen who have struggled with their emotions. That Signy has no apparent grief or rage may be due to the terse, spartan nature of sagas. It has been noted that while the narrators of the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas may not probe the emotional depths of the grief felt by their characters or even note that these men and women are upset, that doesn't mean that the characters are utterly emotionless. Both Carol Clover and Jenny Jochens have noted, however, that women in the sagas whose lives were marked by tragedy generally occupied themselves with the repetition of past acts or with mundane chores ("Hildigunnr's"152; 112-13). Signy does no such thing. Furthermore, the narrator of *Völsunga saga* does allow for the occasional outpourings of emotion, such as Gudrun's grief at the loss of her husband Sigurd (section 32). The dead children here also differ from those slain by Medea and Procne, for although Signy wants vengeance upon the father of her children, she does not view the children as surrogates for their father. One can argue that these children must die because, if left alive, they could later avenge Siggeir, which could pose a threat to Signy, Sigmund, and the son who carries on their family line, Sinfjotli. It seems unlikely that Signy would view them as potential avengers, however, for she has already tested their two deceased older brothers and judged them incapable. If her eldest sons by Siggeir are deficient (hence the need for Sinfjotli's

conception) and disposable, it follows that her youngest children by the same father would likewise not be true Volsungs, capable of vengeance. Instead, they are obstacles, impediments to her success, and this coincides with the minimalist descriptions of them. Even Sinfjotli does not seem to be "her" child, as she has handed him over to Sigmund for a key stage of his childhood. Like the Melusine figures examined in chapter four, Signy arranges for but does not soil her hands in the filicides. Another similarity between these women lies in their desire to achieve what they perceive as the greater good; it is in how they achieve this that they differ completely. Melusine is far more maternal and seeks to save her family's heritage from a potentially destructive force. Signy, however, only thinks of creation (childbearing) as a means towards the destruction of Siggeir, his line, and eventually herself. The preservation of the Volsung line at the end of her part of the narrative is incidental.

The next episode of filicide in *Völsunga saga* occurs in the second half of the narrative and is perpetrated by Gudrun on her children by her second husband, King Atli. After her husband kills her brothers, Gudrun pretends to be at peace with what has transpired but uses her sons to seek revenge upon him (section 40). The narrative does not name the boys but does provide a brief sketch of them. Atli's messenger tells Gunnar and Hogni that the boys are young and in need of regents to rule for them because their elderly father grows increasingly infirm (35), and later, the boys are described as being at play. Still, they are old enough to speak coherently. When their mother comes to them, in a scene that mirrors the situation in *Atlamál*,[28] they sense that something terrible is to come; the narrator writes, "Sveinernir glúpnuðu" 'the boys became downcast.' We see what may be a hint at maternal

28 The language in each of the scenes is also very close, which suggests that one borrowed from the other or that they both borrowed from a common source.

affection when, in response to a question about their fate, Gudrun replies, "'Spyrið eigi at'" 'Do not ask that.' Perhaps she does not wish to vocalize her plans because her guilt is gnawing at her. Whatever her reason for uttering this, however, she follows it with a blunt and unsentimental statement that she will kill them both. The children acknowledge that as their mother, she has the right to decide their fate, but that there are consequences: "'Ráða muntu börnum þínum sem þu vill, þat mun engui banna þér, en þér er skömm í at gera þetta'" 'You will arrange for your children as you wish; that no one will forbid you, but you will have shame in doing this.' Afterward, she slit their throats (40).

In some key ways, this scene mirrors one examined in chapter three, the filicide episode found in the twelfth-century *Amis et Amiles.* The filicidal parent is interrupted and interrogated by at least one of the children about to be slain, and in response, a child acknowledges that parents have the authority to do what they will with their children. Even the modes of killing are similar; Amile decapitates his sons, and Gudrun slits her sons' throats.

The differences between these scenes, however, are striking and reveal how one ought to view the children, the parents, the parent-child relationship, and the filicide itself. In both texts, the children's voices serve as the voices of justice, divine or secular; they question an act and then provide a pronouncement upon it. Amile, plagued by doubt over his course of action, details what he intends to do; Gudrun, on the other hand, provides no motivation; she feels no need to justify herself to her children. After Amile decapitates each child, he rearranges the child's body carefully; he is respectful of his children's remains. The saga does not relate Gudrun's actions immediately afterward, but she does, at some point, take the

children's remains to the kitchen where they become part of their father's meal - an act that conveys immense disrespect to both sons and their father. The sentimentality infused throughout the French scene highlights the close familial bond and thus the sacrificial nature of Amile's actions. While Old Norse-Icelandic literature is notoriously unemotional, this particular scene, with the uncharacteristic inclusion of a child's voice, highlights Gudrun's business-like demeanor. Her actions are not sacrificial, for she is not giving up anything; she does not seem to value these children emotionally, and she still has one daughter by Sigurd, Svanhild.

In a scene that hearkens to the legend of Tereus' consumption of Itys, King Atli desires to see his sons while he is consuming a specially prepared feast. Unlike Tereus, however, he only needs to ask for them once before Gudrun delivers the relevant news: "'Þú hefir misst þinna sona, ok eru þeira hausar hér at borðkerum hafðir, ok sjálfr drakktu þeira blóð við vín blandit. Síðan tók ek hjörtu þeira ok steikta ek á teini, en þú ázt'" 'You have lost your sons, and their skulls are here as feasting cups, and you yourself drank their blood mixed with wine. Afterward, I took their hearts and I roasted them on a spit, and you ate them.' Atli specifically refers to the deaths as murders as he condemns her behavior and declares that she ought to be stoned and then burned. He also points out the particularly heinous nature of these filicides when he states, "'Verra hefir þú gert en menn viti dœmi til'" 'You have waged more evil than the tales of men know of.' She does not die as Atli desires but marries another king and has more sons, whom she eventually urges to seek vengeance for a wrong against their half-sister Svanhild (discussed below) (section 43). Hamdir, one of these sons, condemns his mother's filicidal actions in a conversation about vengeance. He

says, "'illar váru þínar brœðra hendir er þú drapt sonu þína'" 'it was bad vengeance for your brothers when you killed your sons.' Hamdir, like Atli, clearly sees this as a murder, as shown by the choice of the word "drapt."

Gudrun seeks vengeance against Atli because his greed for the dragon Fafnir's treasure leads him to conspire against her brothers Gunnar and Hogni and kill them. The method of vengeance - the slitting of her children's throats - is reminiscent of the technique favored by the Albanian women studied by Clover ("Hildigunnr's"171-72); like those women, Gudrun slits the throats of the children engendered by the one who killed her brothers. Her desire for vengeance for the deaths of her brothers may seem remarkable because Gunnar and Hogni engineered the killing of her husband Sigurd by their young brother Guttorm. Why would she seek vengeance against those who sought to kill her husband? In addition to remembering the importance of kinship, it is helpful to remember why the brothers entered into that conspiracy. Gunnar had come to Hogni for help because his wife Brynhild had threatened to leave him if he did not kill Sigurd and his young son Sigmund (since she learns, in section 30, that Sigurd has betrayed her). Brynhild, the daughter of Budli, is to blame in Gudrun's eyes, but she commits suicide after Sigurd's death. Gudrun must then turn to the family of Brynhild for a target for vengeance, and Atli is Brynhild's brother.

The narrative indicates Gudrun's predisposition to violence. Shortly after marrying Sigurd, he offers her part of Fafnir's heart to eat, "ok síðan var hon miklu grimmari en áðr ok vitrari" 'and afterward, she was much fiercer than before and wiser' (28). The heart had already imparted the same wisdom to Sigurd, though the narrative says nothing about his

fierceness being increased by it (19-20). We also see that vengeance has long been important to her, even before tragedy struck. One day before their marriages, Gudrun and Brynhild were relaxing while discussing well-known men. Gudrun criticized the sons of Hamund, whom Brynhild admired, because "'Miklir váru þeir ok ágætir, en þó nam Sigarr systur þeira, en hefir aðra inni brennda, ok eru þeir seinir at hefna'" 'They were great and celebrated, yet when Sigar took their sister and had burned another in her house, they were slow to vengeance' (26). This slowness to avenge was the same reason Signy gave, after the fact, for the deaths of her first two sons (8) and in this passage is clearly meant to foreshadow Gudrun's actions.

Völsunga saga provides several passages that foretell the doom of the children of Atli and Gudrun. The deaths of the children are prophesied by Atli's sister Brynhild and dreamed of by Atli himself, though he needs his wife's help to interpret his dreams. Shortly before she commits suicide,[29] Brynhild gives her prophecy to her husband Gunnar (who is also Gudrun's brother); in addition to describing the fate of Svanhild, she tells her husband what his fate will be: "'Atli mun þik svíkja ok í ormgarð setja, ok síðan mun Atli drepinn ok synir hans. Guðrún mun þá drepa'" 'Atli will betray you and place you in a serpent's lair, and afterwards Atli and his sons will die. Gudrun will kill them.' (32). Despite this warning and others along the way, Gunnar proceeds to Atli's court and into his trap. Dreams are more than warnings in the sagas; they foretell the destiny - sometimes divinely orchestrated - of the dreamer (Lönnroth 455-56). As Lars Lönnroth explains, "saga narrators do not primarily see

29 Brynhild kills herself because she feels great shame, anger, and grief over the deceit perpetrated by Gunnar and Sigurd that led to her marriage to the former; while she instigates the death of Sigurd and his young son, she chooses to join them in death (29-33).

dreams as a key to the inner soul but as a key to the future" (456). The fate foretold in the dream cannot be deferred or denied.

Atli has three dreams that are shown to signify the deaths of his sons and his eating of their bodies. First, he dreams of two reeds that he cares for being eradicated, bloodied, and offered to him as food; next, he dreams that two of his hawks died and that he ate their hearts mixed with honey; finally, he dreams that he unwillingly ate the corpses of two puppies (section 25). Many dreams in heroic sagas feature a "threatening beast" that attacks the hero and thus represents his human enemy (Lönnroth 456-57). Atli's dreams depict not an attack but the aftermath; the reeds, hawks, and puppies - his children - have already been destroyed. This represents the children's necessarily passive position; they are not destined to grow into warriors and cannot defend themselves against a violent threat. Gudrun explains to him, "'Eigu eru draumar góðir, en eptir munu ganga. Synir þínir munu vera feigir, ok margir hlutir þungir munu osss at hendi koma'" 'Those are not good dreams, but they are sure to occur. Your sons are certainly doomed to die, and there will be many difficult things for us to come' (section 35). His subsequent actions do not seem to be affected by this warning; he takes no stated precautions to preserve the lives of his heirs. He knows, as does Gudrun, that the course of his children's lives has already been mapped. The repetition, with variation, of such a fateful dream highlights the coming horror, which is important not only as a climactic moment in the plot but also in terms of the tragic nature of the texts.

The narrator makes known one ethical message of the saga through the wisdom of Brynhild. In a verbal exchange with Sigurd prior to their mutual oaths to marry one

another,[30] she shares many pieces of advice. She tells him the following regarding the treatment of relatives who offend: "'Ver vel við frændr þína ok hefn lítt mótgerða við þá ok ber við þol, ok tekr þú þar við langæligt lof'" 'Stay well with your kinsmen, and infrequently avenge offenses by them, and bear them with tolerance, and you will receive praise from that for a long time' (22). Had this message been taken to heart by the major players in the saga, much of the tragedy found within it could have been averted.

This position coincides with a legal interpretation of Gudrun's role in the saga. She certainly has cause to be angry with her brothers, and her family offers her financial compensation for the loss of her first husband (34). When her second husband confronts his brothers-in-law and proclaims to them his desire to kill them, he seems to be acting in accordance with the laws of vengeance: "'Fyrir löngu hafða ek þat mér í hug,' segir Atli, 'at ná yðru lífi, en ráða gullinu ok launa yðr þat níðingsverk er þér svikuð yðarn inn bezta mág, ok skal ek hans hefna'" 'For a long time I have had the intention,' said Atli, 'to obtain your life and govern the gold and reward you for your shameful deeds when you betrayed your best in-law, and I shall avenge him' (38).[31] Despite this seemingly legitimate action and Gudrun's own desire for vengeance for the death of her husband, she fights on the side of her brothers rather than against them. Here we see one of the complications that arises from killing within a kin group. One can make the argument that Gudrun's desire for vengeance against Atli has legitimacy since he kills her brothers. How she accomplishes her vengeance poses a problem, however. Instead of submitting to the expected role of an inciter, Gudrun takes

30 The passage is highly reminiscent of the *Sigrdrífomál* of the *Poetic Edda*, where advice is presented by Sigrdrífa.

31 Later, he provides other motivations, including their killing of his kinsmen and betrayal of him; he holds the death of Brynhild, however, as the most serious injury done to him (section 38).

matters into her own hands, though to be fair, she has a shortage of possible avengers at this point in the narrative. With her, we see the exceptional type of woman described by Clover who acts in a masculine way in the absence of male relations ("Regardless"). Gudrun's vengeance targets however, as we have seen in the related texts, are illegitimate, for they are innocent children.

The final episode of filicide in *Völsunga saga* occurs in the saga's last passages. After killing her children by Atli, Gudrun tries to kill herself but is swept off to the land of King Jonakr, to whom she is wed and bears three sons (section 41). Her new husband advises her to agree to a marriage between her daughter Svanhild (from her first marriage to Sigurd) and old King Jormunrek. That king's malevolent counselor Bikki urges the king's son Randver, who was sent as an emissary to Jonakr and Gudrun, to consider Svanhild for himself, since they are closer to the same age. On the trip to Jormunrek's court, Randver and the girl develop romantic feelings for one another, which Bikki reports to his lord (42).[32] Infuriated, the king orders his son's execution. Randver sends a final message to his father, a plucked hawk, which is meant to show that the king has no honor and to warn him that by killing his own son, he destroys his lineage and incapacitates his kingdom. Just as a featherless bird cannot fly, an heirless monarchy cannot survive. Jormunrek then regrets his hasty decision, but this comes too late, and his son is hanged (42). This death leads then to the murder of Svanhild and the vengeance called upon by Gudrun for her death (42-44).

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32 This incident exemplifies a motif common to many bridal-quest narratives and thus bears a strong similarity to one in the Tristan legend, where the handsome young nephew of the king travels abroad to arrange a marriage between the king and a famously beautiful young woman. The young people fall in love and are reported upon by servants of the king. For more on the bridal-quest theme, see Claudia Bornholdt's *Engaging Moments: the Origins of Medieval Bridal Quest Narrative*.

While the details of this act of filicide differ greatly from the others in the saga in terms of the specifics, the overall tragedy is similar. This killing is not in retaliation for another, but for the presumed crime of adultery. This tale conforms to the pattern of the Hippolytus legend, considered in the previous chapter with respect to *Fingal Rónáin*, though here, the son is somewhat culpable (and thus an appropriate target for one seeking justice); unlike his counterparts, he has feelings for his father's intended bride. In each, the murdering father expresses regret, though the narrator of the saga does not explore this in detail. In each of the filicides of *Völsunga saga*, the parent acts because s/he is driven by personal interest, and none of the dead children is a well-developed figure. At the end of this saga, three noble lines, those of Volsung, Budli, and Jormunrek, have suffered numerous casualties.

Prose Edda

Snorri Sturluson designed his tripartite *Edda* (also known as the *Prose Edda* or *Younger Edda*)[33] to educate poets in the rules of the poetic craft, around the year 1220 (Monsen xiv). As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, the *Skáldskaparmál* (the second part of the *Edda*) contains a telling of how Atli came to consume the flesh and blood of his deceased children whom Gudrun, their mother, killed.[34] There is also, in this same section, a brief mention of an incident also told in *Völsunga saga,* the death of Randver, the son of King Jormunrek. In other parts of the *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri makes passing references to key figures from the Volsung-Nibelung tradition, but he does not elaborate on their roles. This decision seems consistent with the didactic purpose of this text. Snorri desires his *Edda* to be not a source of ethical exemplars but a source of poetic exemplars.

33 The three parts are, in Old Norse, called the *Gylfaginning*, the *Skáldskaparmál*, and the *Háttatal.*
34 The story is told in the context of a discourse on gold, in general, and on the treasure of Fafnir, specifically.

The filicides in the *Skáldskaparmál* are thus told only briefly, for Snorri wants the young poets in his audience to know the material but be free to use them for their own literary purposes.

Þiðreks saga af Bern

In the portion of *Þiðreks saga af Bern* that deals with the Niflung material, Grimhild (akin to Gudrun) brings about the death of her son Aldrian, whose father is Attila. Attila's first wife Erka has had a deathbed prophecy about the fate of her husband and any children he will engender, and she urges him, "'tak eigi konu af Niflungalandi ok eigi af kyni Aldrians'" 'take no wife from Niflungaland and no wife from the family of Aldrian' (section 340), yet he ignores her advice and pursues the beautiful widow Grimhild.

Grimhild (the figure akin to Gudrun) desires revenge for the death of her husband "Sigurðr svein" (literally 'the boy Sigurd' but generally translated as 'young Sigurd'); she particularly blames her half-brother Hogni who struck the death blow (he did this to help Brynhild regain some of her honor after Grimhild revealed that her own husband had taken Brynhild's virginity), but Grimhild also holds her other adult brothers culpable as they were part of the conspiracy (343-47, 376). She tries to persuade several men, including Thidrek and Attila, to aid her, but most refuse, citing friendship with her brothers or their allies (376-78).

The queen then sows the seeds of conflict. She encourages her young son Aldrian to demonstrate his courage by striking her half-brother Hogni while he is filling his plate at a feast:

> Ok nú gengr drottning skyndiliga í garðinn, þar er veizlan var, ok sezt í sitt hásæti, ok nú renn til hennar Aldrian, son hennar, ok kyssir hana. Ok nú mælti drottning: "Minn sæti[35] son, muntu vera líkr þínum frændum, ok hefir þú hug til, þá skaltu ganga til Högna, ok þá er hann lýtr fram yfir borðit ok tekr mat af diskinum, reið upp þinn hnefa ok ljóst á hans kinn sem allra harðast máttu. Þá muntu vera góðr dregnr, ef þetta þorir þú." Sveinninn rann þegar yfir til Högna, ok þá er Högni lýtr fram yfir borðit, þá lýstr sveinninn sínum hnefa á hans kinn. En þat högg varð meira en ván væri at af svá ungum manni. (379)
>
> And now the queen went speedily to the court, there where the feast was, and sat herself in the high seat, and now her son Aldrian ran to her and kissed her. And now the queen said, "my sweet son, if you would like to be like your kinsmen, and if you have a mind to do this, then you should go to Hogni, and when he bends over the table and takes food from the platters, swing up with your closed fist and strike his chin as hard as you are able. Then, you will be a good warrior, if you dare to do this." The boy ran at once over to Hogni, and then when he leaned over the table, the boy struck his closed fist against Hogni's chin. And that blow was greater than the expectation was from such a young man.

Hogni immediately seizes the boy and, because he realizes that the boy's instructions came from his mother Grimhild, he decapitates the child and throws the head at her chest. Furthermore, he decapitates the boy's foster-father Folkher, and this causes Attila to call his

35 I prefer Bertelsen's reading of "sœti" here, and this is reflected in the translation.

men to arms against the Niflungs (379). Grimhild has no opportunity to express remorse for her actions either directly, like the murderous King Athelston examined in chapter three, or more subtly, as some may choose to interpret the suicide and attempted suicide of Signy and Gudrun, respectively. Instead, after seeing vengeance done,[36] Grimhild dies at the hand of Thidrek, as approved of by her husband (392). Although Grimhild seems a more caring mother than her counterparts examined up to this point, both men condemn her using the word *djöfull* "devil" because of the massive losses on both sides of the battle between the men of Níflungaland and those of Hunland (392). The losses sustained by the side of the Huns have decimated Thidrek's forces, which are essential to a king who wishes to regain his patrimony.

Grimhild's role lines up fairly well with that of a traditional inciter, and because she does not kill Aldrian herself, she cannot feasibly treat her son's body as her counterpart Gudrun does in the *Eddas* and *Völsunga saga*. The motif of the defiling of the children's bodies does appear in this saga, however, in a different context. The famous smith Velent, betrayed and then maimed by King Nidung of Thiod (part of Jutland), desires revenge (70-72). In one act of vengeance, the smith kills the king's two youngest sons and uses gold and silver to form items from every bone in the children's bodies for their father's banquet table:

> Nú tekr Velent sveinana ok skefr allt holdit af beinunum, ok síðan tekr hann þeira hausa ok býr gulli ok silfri ok gerir af tvau mikil borðker, ok af herðarblödum gerir hann öleysla ok af mjaðmarbeinum þeira ok býr gulli ok silfri. Af sumum beinum þeira gerir hann knífahefti, en af sumum bláspípur,

36 Hogni is mortally wounded but still somehow manages to father a son named Aldrian before dying (393).

af sumum lykla, en af sumum kertistikur, er standa skulu á konungs borði. (73)[37]

Now Velent took the boys and scraped all the flesh from their bones, and afterwards, he took their skulls and applied gold and silver and made from the two skulls two large cups for the banquet table, and from their shoulder blades and their hip bones, he made ale-ladles, and applied gold and silver. From some of their bones he made knife-handles, and from some he made pipes, and from some he made keys, and from some he made candlesticks which should stand on the king's banquet table.

Not only is it an ultimate insult to a king to destroy his heirs in a gruesome fashion, but the tokens of child murder publicly display the crime to all gathered for the feast. It is also significant that Velent is a forger of metals, a creator. In that generative sense and in his weakened physical condition (due to a hamstringing ordered by Nidung), he is much like a woman. This coincides with his inability to seek vengeance in a socially approved way.

Das Nibelungenlied

The late twelfth or early thirteenth-century[38] *Das Nibelungenlied*,[39] which tells about Siegfried (a Sigurd figure) and his wife Kriemhild (a Gudrun / Grimhild figure), provides a differing course of events from the similar filicides preserved in Old Norse-Icelandic texts.

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37 The child murder and use of their parts by Velent/Volund also occurs in the *Völundarqviða* of the *Poetic Edda.*

38 A.T. Hatto explains the enormous difficulties of dating the *Nibelungenlied* but proposes that the "last poet's version" should be dated between 1191 and 1204 ("Date" 365).

39 *Das Nibelungenlied* has come down to us through many manuscripts, though three (A, B, and C) have played a more important role in the transmission of the material than the others. Version B has become the standard upon which most editions and translations are founded. Version C, however, "represents an extensive revision of the poem designed to soften the vilification of Kriemhild and to cast greater blame on Hagan" (Haymes and Samples 107).

Here, Kriemhild neither seeks revenge against Etzel (an Atli / Attila figure) nor instructs her son to bait Hagan (here not named as a blood relative but as a warrior of her brother's court). She does, however, plot against against her brothers and especially Hagan (the Burgundians) for their conspiracy to kill her first husband Siegfried. The narrator suggests that an infernal force revived this urge, for the queen has already reconciled with her brothers (stanzas 1394-97). At first, her plans do not seem fruitful. Etzel's ally Dietrich[40] warns her brothers that their invitation to the court of the Huns is a part of a plot against them (1724-26). When Kriemhild seeks men to carry out vengeance for her, she is rejected by Dietrich and his best warrior Hildebrand (1899-1902). Finally, her brother-in-law Bloedelin reluctantly agrees to help her, provided that she arrange for him to marry a particular woman (1903-11). The closest the Nibelung poets come to the portrayal of Kriemhild as a filicidal mother who would use her child as a tool of vengeance occurs right after she concludes these negotiations. She has the young prince Ortlieb, her son with Etzel, brought to the banquet of the Burgundians and Huns:

> Dô der strît niht anders / kunde sîn erhaben
>
> (Kriemhilde leít daz alter / in ir hérzen was begraben),
>
> do hiez si tragen ze tische / den Étzélen sun.
>
> wie kundẹ ein wîp durch râche / immer vréislîcher[41] tuon? (1912)
>
> Since the struggle could not be elevated otherwise
>
> (Kriemhild was afflicted by that old [trauma] that was buried in her heart),
>
> She called to have the son of Etzel carried to the table.

40 Here we have another literary representation of Theodorich the Great.
41 An acute accent should appear above the second i.

How could a woman act in a harsher way in the course of vengeance? When his brother Dancwart comes to the banquet and reveals Bloedelin's assault on the Burgundians, Hagan decides to avenge the insult done to them (1951-60). He decapitates Ortlieb (1961), but in this narrative, unlike *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, the child has not struck him or otherwise provoked him other than by existing. This existence is critical, however, for Etzel's desire for his son to be fostered by his maternal uncles (1914-17) shows that the child could have helped reforge the connections between the Huns and Burgundians. Hagan's dismissal of Etzel's imagined future of Ortlieb's aiding his uncles (1918) demonstrates the warrior's unwillingness to settle the conflict and foreshadows what is to come. The boy's death provides the necessary catalyst for a battle between the gathered forces; "dô huop sich under degenen / ein mort vil grimmec unde grôz" 'Thus a very fierce and great slaughter arose among the warriors' (1961,4). Kriemhild sees her revenge and, in stanza 2376, is killed by Hildebrand.

Although the narrator seems to imply that Kriemhild intentionally involves Ortlieb in her plans for vengeance, no evidence other than the aside in stanza 1912 suggests that she orchestrates her son's decapitation. Helmut Brackert points out that Kriemhild's actions here derive from an older version of the legend but no longer make sense in *Das Nibelungenlied* (293 n. 1912). A.T. Hatto likewise refers to this passage as "a strange *non sequitur*" because he views Dancwart's appearance in the hall and announcement of Hunnish treachery as the precipitous events, not Ortlieb's death; he writes, "it would not matter whether Kriemhild's son were there or not" ("Introduction" 302-03). This of course contrasts with the events in *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, where the child has an active role.

Despite the lack of a true filicidal episode here, literary critics have condemned Kriemhild as a poor mother. She has an older, unnamed son fathered by Siegfried, and she sends this child with her father-in-law Sigmund to the land of the Nibelungs after Siegfried's death (stanza 1090). Hatto uses this passage as evidence that she is a "failure as a mother" who has "sacrificed her child and Siegfried's" ("Introduction" 315). How the older child can be seen as a sacrificial victim is entirely unclear; by sending him to his fatherland with his paternal grandfather, Kriemhild seems to be securing his patrimony, for he can be raised to be Sigmund's heir. The elderly king has assured her that she would not be subject to any legal penalties stemming from her husband's death (stanza 1086), and it follows that the child likewise would be exempt, especially given his young age. This child seems to look forward to a fate much more favorable than that of three-year-old Sigmund, son of Sigurd, who in *Völsunga saga* is killed at the order of Brynhild and cremated with his father (section 33).

Conclusion

When one looks at the filicide texts examined here, a common thread emerges in terms of victims: all but Randver and the son of Hildebrand are young, and all but the latter are sons of kings. Most are hardly discussed and not even named. For at least the Old Norse-Icelandic texts, this may be partially attributed to the sparseness of the common style of the sagas, and for some other texts, their short forms may play a role, but there is likely more to it. Even in the Hildebrand texts and in the last part of *Völsunga saga*, where the sons are adults, the sons are not portrayed in much detail. In the "Hildebrandslied," the only Hildebrand text in which the son presumably dies, we see the son only as a warrior, though one may argue that he is a fine and astute warrior. Of Randver, we know only that he serves

as his father's emissary and later catches the attention of the beautiful Svanhild. Since Hadubrand and Randver are adults, this lack of development cannot be wholly attributed to a view that children are not important. It is more likely that the narrators desire to direct the attention of their audiences to the ethical lessons to be learned from the perpetrators of filicide.

King Aun initially is portrayed as a sacrificer of the model of Jephthah and Abraham, but we see in the *Heimskringla* that he takes his sacrificing too far. His behavior may be a commentary on the foolishness of clinging to the pagan past, which was a concern for authors in the newly Christianized Scandinavia. It may also well be a commentary by Snorri and/or previous storytellers regarding the maintenance of power, for medieval Scandinavia was full of great political turmoil.

Hildebrand's presumed actions in the "Hildebrandslied" seem to follow the code he is expected to follow as a warrior. We are beginning to see here, however, that strict adherence to this code results in personal tragedy, as in the *Shahname* and in *Aided Óenfir Aife*. That we are to view Hildebrand as a good man with good intentions seems confirmed by his sorrowful call out to God and to the development of his character in later related texts and his lionization in *Þiðreks saga af Bern*.

Jormunrek may have been legally in the right to act against his son Randver if something improper had occurred between his son and Svanhild, but he realizes - too late - that his actions were misguided. His lack of wisdom is evident from the beginning, when he desires to marry a very young woman and when he trusts the malicious Bikki.

The assessment of the filicidal mothers seems far more complex. Although not portrayed as being as emotionally charged as Medea, these women may be viewed as excessive in their zeal for vengeance. Inciting was legal and expected for these women, but the *specific* actions that they suggested were not legal. The generally accepted rules dictate that Signy may not kill her children herself, but as an inciter, she is still responsible for their deaths, as she herself declares before committing suicide. The situation for Grimhild is similar. Their sons were not legitimate targets for vengeance; they are exempt because they lack culpability and are under age. The audiences of the Eddic poems may have admired Gudrun in some ways, but she is not a justified avenger in *Völsunga saga*. As in the other instances of children whose mothers determined their deaths, her sons are not legitimate targets for vengeance. Although Clover has noted that in practice, modern Albanian women have been known to act, as Gudrun does, as avengers, the saga narrator's condemnation of her role becomes clear through the pre-mortem words of her sons.

All of these narratives provide diversion for their audiences, but they also serve as exemplary texts. The filicidal fathers, whether sacrificers, warriors, or kings, may be legally justified in their actions, but the narrators seem to be holding them at least slightly culpable for their strict adherence to codes of conduct (religious or martial) and pride that lead to folly. The filicidal mothers, whether inciters or killers, are not legally justified in their actions. With the potential exception of the Gudrun of the *Poetic Edda*, the filicidal women in this tradition are condemned as culpable for their misdirected acts of vengeance. That almost all of the women die shows the condemnation of their narrators for these filicidal actions.[42]

42 These mothers' abilities to control the circumstances of their deaths (by remaining in a burning building, inserting oneself into battle, and so forth) suggest, however, that the narrators may have found some admirably heroic qualities in these vengeful women.

Gudrun, a noteworthy exception to this death pattern, tries to kill herself but is instead left alone, with nothing to live for.

Conclusion

From the medieval filicide narratives examined in this dissertation, certain trends have emerged with respect to both victims and perpetrators. When the narrators have identified the genders and ages of the slain children, we have seen that most have been male and young, yet categorizing *all* of these filicide victims, including post-pubescent females and males, reveals more about the significance of these sons and daughters. Similarly, a gendered examination of filicidal parents reveals key patterns in their motivations. We also see trends with respect to the use of the material and moral uses of these filicide episodes within the larger narratives and similarities between texts that cross linguistic and other cultural boundaries.

Daughters become filicide victims only in the narratives that draw upon classical traditions. These females are never babies; instead, they are adolescents at or near the age at which they would normally be married. Physical descriptions, when provided, recount the great beauty of these daughters, who are depicted as highly desirable mates. As such, they could be used by their fathers to gain powerful allies. While adolescent females have been exchanged for political and economic benefit across cultures for ages, and their presumed virginities were requisite for such exchanges, the adaptations of the classical narratives often emphasize the physical purity of these girls. The girls always die at the hands of their fathers, and most are shown to be victims of a sacrifice, though rage-fueled murders can also occur, as seen in the deaths of Barbe in "La Vie Saint Barbe" and Leuchoté in l'*Ovide Moralisé.* The fathers' actions thus reinforce their own impotence; they cannot use their daughters to improve their socio-political standing. The restriction of these daughters to the

retellings of the classical tales may be due to the overt moralization found in these tales, which is far less common in the feudal, Celtic, and Germanic narratives. Not coincidentally, the classical tales, unlike the others, were used in the educational system, and thus the use of the potentially corrupting pagan material needed to be justified in that context.

Slain sons, with a few exceptions,[1] fall into three categories: very young children, warrior-children, and adolescent or post-adolescent males suspected of adulterous relations with their fathers' mates. The first category is also the largest. It is not restricted to any one culture's literature but instead is found throughout the medieval adaptations of classical tales, the feudal narratives, and both the Celtic and Germanic filicide tales; this is unsurprising given the cross-cultural importance placed upon male children as heirs. These boys range in age, but none seems older than Signy's ten-year-old sons. When the narrators provide physical descriptions, they depict these boys almost universally as attractive; Morann's brothers and Horrible, deformed children from Celtic tales who resemble one of their parents, serve as noteworthy exceptions. Even Pelops, a victim of cannibalism in l'*Ovide Moralisé*, has had his missing shoulder restored in a way that does not negatively affect his form. Some of these filicide victims actively engage with their parents immediately prior to their deaths and may even speak with them, as exemplified by the eldest son in *Ami et Amile* and Gudrun's sons in *Völsunga saga*, while others remain unnamed and utterly passive, such as Carpre's sons in *Scél na Fír Flatha* and Aun's sons in the *Heimskringla*. One could argue for a further categorization of these young children as either victims of sacrifices or murders; to do so, however, would obscure the role that some, regardless of the modes of their death, play with respect to other children in the narratives. Some of these boys fall victim to a

1 Exceptions to this categorization are the classical figures Penthëus and Meleager and the Old Irish Míach.

threat that another child, a heroic child, is able to avert. Garnier and Daurelet, for example, are sacrificed to save their noble contemporaries Jordain and Beton, just as the murders of Athelston's son and four of Signy's sons highlight the survivals of St. Edemound (Athelston's nephew and adopted son) and Sinfjotli (Signy's son and nephew). Notably, all of the slain sons from the feudal narratives belong to this large pool of victims. This can be ascribed to the importance placed upon lineage in these narratives. The young boys, especially those presumed to be sons whose fathers have been murdered, represent the end of a family line, and this enhances the tragic nature of their deaths. Post-pubescent male children, however, do not represent the termination of the family in the same way, for they would have had a chance to reproduce and ensure the continuation of their families.

The sons of the second category, the slain warrior-children, appear in both the Celtic and Germanic filicide tales but not in the adaptations of classical tales or in the feudal narratives, which is a surprising point given the analog found in the *Shaname*, the killing of Sohráb by Rostám. In this category of filicides, the father-son relationship remains unconfirmed by at least one of the parties engaged in the fighting until it is too late.[2] Cú Chulainn's son Conlae[3] and Hildebrand's son Hadubrand die because the fathers and sons are locked into the warrior's code of conduct. Hadubrand believes his father to be an exterior threat from the land of the Huns, and similarly, Cú Chulainn must protect the Ulstermen from the exterior threat represented by Conlae. In each case, not only does a father lose a son, but a society loses a promising young warrior, one from the mold of his uncommonly gifted father. The relative scarcity of this sort of tale and the softened adaptations of the Hildebrand

2 For this reason, the Mordred figures have been excluded from this category despite their deaths in single combat with the Arthur figures.

3 Conlae, by virtue of his youth, also falls into the first category, but this second category is a better fit for the young warrior who is so like his father.

legend (which omit the son's death) suggest that this theme of father-son combat became less popular in the later Middle Ages. One could attribute this trend to changes, from collectivist to individualistic, in the heroic ethos. Further into the Middle Ages, literary protagonists grow increasingly introspective and more inclined to pursue their own goals, even if that means leaving their societies for a short period, as exemplified by a variety of Arthurian knights. The unthinking adherence to a heroic ideal even becomes comic material in works such as Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Conte du Graal*, where the boy Perceval tries to follow the advice his mother gives him about chivalry but manages to cause mayhem instead, such as when he discovers a woman alone in the woods and kisses her in a persistent and inept manner, though she is unwilling and begs him to leave (lines 491-562, 629-75). In a society where audiences become accustomed to tales of people seeking what benefits them, tales of father-son combat are likely to seem confusing and thus to grow less popular.

The third and final category of male victims, those who die because of suspected adultery, appears in adaptations of classical works but more prominently in Celtic and Germanic filicide tales.[4] The narrators portray these sons, at least initially, in a positive light; Hippolytus and Mael Fothartaig, both gifted huntsmen, attract the unwanted desires of their young stepmothers. Both resist temptation and spurn these women's advances, but the women inspire jealousy in their husbands that leads them to their filicidal plots. Randver, in the third portion of *Völsunga saga*, has been entrusted with securing a new bride for his father Jormunrek, but he receives and follows the bad advice to pursue his future stepmother Svanhild. His success in that endeavor and the wagging tongue of his evil advisor seal his

4 If one were to expand this category to include all those killed due to a father's jealousy, one could potentially include Míach. Some have interpreted Díen Cécht's killing of his son as an act of jealousy over his son's healing abilities.

fate. Mordred, likewise, is placed in a position of authority and pursues his aunt/stepmother, albeit unsuccessfully, and this treachery compounded with his usurpation of Arthur's throne, leads to their mutually fatal conflict. None of these sons would present a threat to lineage or even a change in succession, for even if they were to impregnate their stepmothers, those children - presumed to be their younger half-siblings, would generally not rule before their true fathers. The cross-cultural popularity of these tales speaks to a different but related issue, that of appropriate marriage. As Mael Fothartaig advises his father, he ought to pursue a mate that is suited to him, not a beautiful woman so much younger than himself.

An examination of these four categories of victims may lead one to question why female infants and other very young girls do not figure among the slain in these filicide tales. Except in certain versions of the Iphigenia legend, the fathers of the adolescent female victims are not said to have any other sons or daughters. The mothers are virtually or completely absent, which makes the girls the only hope for continuing their families. The adolescent girls, having reached puberty, are mothers *in potentia*, and thus their deaths mean that their family lines cannot be continued. This state allies them with the very young boys found in the first category of male filicide victims. Female infants would not play the same role, for their necessity to the preservation of a family would be less obvious; the mere existence of a female infant suggests that her mother - unless recently deceased - remains fertile and could ostensibly still produce a highly desired male heir.

Returning to Nicole Clifton's statement about the paucity of "children with important roles" in the literature of the Middle Ages (64), we must consider what it means for a role to be important and recognize the subjectivity of that term. If importance is contingent upon

agency, then most of the examined victims of filicide, regardless of gender, would not have terribly important roles, as the majority are fairly young and incapable of much action. Within the two least powerful categories of victims (adolescent females and young boys), however, emerge two noteworthy children who aid in their own deaths: Barbe in "La Vie Sainte Barbe" and the eldest child of Amile in *Ami et Amile*. In each case, the child extends his or her neck so that the father can decapitate his child with ease.[5] Though Amile's actions are best described as sacrificial and Dyoscorus' as murderous, the motivations of the children in these texts have something in common: they are based in faith. Amile's son believes that his father and his God have his best interests at heart, so he aids his father's actions. Barbe may not agree with her earthly father, but she has faith in her divine father (and spouse, in her mind) and follows his instruction. This adherence to God's plan, even in the face of certain death, aligns both children with Christ and makes them important models to which medieval Christians could aspire.

If importance is contingent not on the figure's agency or passivity but on the role of the figure within the overall plot of the narrative, almost every one of these victims' roles becomes important. Virginia's death, for example, provides the impetus needed for the overthrow of a tyrant and sweeping political reform throughout the medieval narratives that recount the episode. Daurelet's death similarly provides the opportunity for Beton to grow into a man strong enough to overthrow the traitor who killed his father and brave enough to rebuke Charlemagne for his role as an accessory to Gui's illegitimate rise to power. Cú

5 As both texts were composed in Old French and are hagiographic in nature, it is highly likely that one of the episodes influenced the other, either directly or through one or more intermediary texts; though the preserved version of the Barbara legend is younger, this does not guarantee that the motif did not occur in an earlier, unpreserved French Barbara poem. It is also possible that both narrators have borrowed from the same source.

Chulainn's killing of Conlae and Hildebrand's of Hadubrand reveal how a father's adherence to a particular code of conduct can result in personal and societal tragedy with the death of a son and mighty warrior. The deaths of Medea's sons and Gudrun's sons, none of whom are described in much detail - which could lead to their characterization as insignificant, demonstrate the tragedy that can ensue when vengeful feelings overcome one's parental feelings and sense of reason. The annihilation of Attila's court depends upon Gudrun's murderous actions, and thus her children's deaths are entirely significant.

Filicidal parents may be either male or female, and gender does not strictly correlate with the justifiability of their actions. The only sorts of killings in which mothers do not play a role are those homicides justified by societal laws, including the rules that govern armed combat, most of which denied women a role,[6] and those fueled by paternal jealousy of adult male children whose birth mothers are deceased.

Across the various examined literatures, fathers make sacrifices, as exemplified by Virginius, the various Amelius figures, Cú Chulainn, Aun, and others. Peggy McCracken has discussed the obvious Old Testament precedents, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac and Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter (*Curse* 42), and to this we should add God's sacrifice of Jesus from the New Testament. As she notes, the Biblical and medieval fathers perform these sacrifices for the greater good (*Curse* 42), whether that good is a divine or terrestrial order.

The narratives examined in all chapters of this study also demonstrate that fathers may be fueled by emotion or driven mad in some way and murder (or arrange the murder of) their children, as exemplified by figures such as Dyoscorus, Orcamus, Athamas, Athelston,

6 Female warriors such as the Amazons, the Valkyries, and the Irish warriors Scáthach and Aife are exceptional in classical and medieval literature and as such are often described as dwelling in far-off and even supernatural realms.

Rónán, and Jormunrek. Dyoscorus and Orcamus both disapprove of their daughters' behaviors and condemn them to death for it. Athamas is driven insane literally and believes that he is killing an animal when he slays Learcus. Similarly, Athelston kills his unborn son because his wife infuriates him to the point of temporary madness, and Rónán and Jormunrek have their sons killed because they are jealous. A noteworthy feature of the killings by Athelston, Rónán, and Jormunrek is that each father expresses regret over his actions after the fact, something we do not see in the corresponding category of mothers (discussed below).

Women, like men, can become so consumed by personal desires that they kill their children, as exemplified most famously by the Medea, Procne, Signy, and Gudrun, all of whom kill or arrange the deaths of their young children, and by Altee, who kills her adult son Meleager. These cases confirm the veracity of McCracken's claim that "revenge explains most examples of maternal murder in medieval literature" (*Curse* 41). The slayers of the young all seek vengeance against their husbands for a personal betrayal (e.g. Jason's abandonment of Medea for another woman) or for a familial betrayal (e.g. Tereus' rape and mutilation of Procne's sister), and Altee kills Meleager, similarly, for a familial betrayal, namely the deaths of her brothers. These women do not express regret for their actions. A few unwitting filicides at first seem exceptional to this vengeance trend: the killings of Penthëus, Melicerta, and Tristan's stepbrother. In the first two cases, the mothers are driven mad by a divine force. Penthëus' mother believes that she is killing a wild animal, not her son, and Yno similarly has been made insane. In the prose *Le Roman de Tristan*, the daughter of King Hoel of Brittany - a jealous women - plots to murder her stepson; her

determination to kill Tristan blinds her to the tragically realized possibility that the poison could be consumed not by her stepson but by her own biological child. These women can be viewed as not wholly rational, a trait shared by at least some of the vengeance-driven mothers.

Contrary to what has been posited in other studies of this issue, mothers *can* make sacrifices, even if it is rare. This is particularly true of mothers in the feudal narratives, specifically Eremborc and Biatris, but also of the Melusine figures.[7] McCracken notes that cases exist in which mothers concur with fathers' sacrifices of their children, but she argues that these women's passivity keeps them from being true sacrificers. At issue is whether or not these women actually bloody their hands in their children's deaths (*Curse* 42). The literal bloodiness of one's hands, however, does not seem to correlate with the praise or blame one receives after perpetrating a child-killing. We may be quick to condemn a Procne or Gudrun figure for decapitating or slicing the throat of a child, but we are no less quick to judge Signy as a murderer of four of her five children, even though she did not deal the fatal blows herself. Furthermore, while some fathers are the ones who slay their children for the greater good (e.g. the various Amelius figures), we must note instances in which fathers facilitate the sacrifices but do not bloody their own hands. By McCracken's reasoning, Renier of *Jourdain de Blaye*, Daurel of *Daurel et Beton*, and Raymond of the Melusine narratives are sacrificers who seek to eliminate threats to just rule, but we must note that they do not bloody their own hands with the deaths of Garnier, Daurelet, and Horrible. Furthermore, in each of these narratives, the mothers do not merely consent to these filicides; they actually propose these

7 The Melusine narratives have a strong feudal core and thus have much in common with the non-mythological feudal texts.

killings. If one is to deny the sacrificial role of these mothers, one ought to deny the same role to the corresponding fathers.

The reputed absence of women's sacrificial capacity has been explained as aligning with patriarchal conceptions of lineage (McCracken, *Curse* 42). Certainly, there is a core truth here; the sacrificial deaths of young boys serve to protect key lineages and the power associated with them in these filicide narratives. Fathers who sacrifice may not consult with the mothers until after the fact or, as we have seen most clearly in the Jephthah narratives, the mother may not be mentioned at all. McCracken explains that this treatment of women is consistent with the notion that fathers are the true parents and thus the only important authority figures over their children (*Curse* 45-47). That fathers have an inherent right to dispose of their children as they see fit arises, as we have seen, in *Ami et Amile*.[8]

The importance of motherhood, however, seems to increase in some of the later narratives of sacrifice. *Ami et Amile*'s Belyssant proves passive in nature, but Eremborc, a woman proud of her heroic lineage, demonstrates both her strength and her affectionate maternal nature in the sequel *Jourdain de Blaye*, and her adopted son Jordain is quick to avenge Fromont's insult to her honor. Ermenjart and Biatris both work to protect little Beton in *Daurel et Beton*. The suicide of Biatris emphasizes the tragedy of a mother who loses a baby (or rather two - for she has lost her own Daurelet and her adopted son Beton), and the prominent role of the wet-nurse Aisilineta casts further light upon the importance of motherhood by calling attention to the value of breastfeeding. The Melusine texts similarly emphasize the maternal role in a variety of ways. Melusine creates the kingdom of Lusignan

8 A corresponding passage appears in *Völsunga saga,* but the parental authority in question is maternal, not paternal.

and is thus mother to the realm. While her sixth, ninth, and tenth sons eventually rule in place of their father, the children's deformities mark them undeniably as part of her bloodline. True, the youngest two do not share their brothers' unique appearances, but the narrators emphasize the link to their mother through her secret visits to hold and breastfeed them after she has left her husband.

This shift in the perception of a woman's ability to sacrifice may coincide with the increasing influence of Marian theology during the High Middle Ages. Patristic and early medieval theologians had already devoted time to considerations of the nature of Mary (Shahar, *Fourth* 24), and Gregory of Tours' version of the legend of the Jewish boy shows that she played a key role in miracle tales even in the early Middle Ages. In the later Middle Ages, however, medieval Christians increasingly turned to Jesus' mother as a vital intercessor, and this role, firmly established by the twelfth century, is demonstrated in many works of hagiography (Hollister 170, 198-99; Pelikan 165). The twelfth-century Cistercian Saint Bernard of Clairvaux has been credited with being the theologian who most increased the interest in the Marian cult, which Ernst Robert Curtius likened to past cults of fertility (Pelikan 160). Mary's fertility is necessarily of interest, for she has value explicitly because she gave birth to Jesus, so it should come as no surprise that among the numerous Marian relics possessed by medieval churches were containers holding what was purported to be her breast milk (Hollister 199-200). Bernard testifies to the identification of Mary as a sacrificer in his "In Purificatione B. Mariae" 'On the Purity of Blessed Mary': "Offer filium tuum, Virgo sacrata, et benedictum frustum ventris tui Domino repraesenta. Offer ad nostram omnium reconciliationem hostiam sanctam Deo placentem" 'Offer your son, holy Virgin, and return

the holy fruit of your womb to the Lord. Offer the holy victim, pleasing to God, for the reconciliation of all of us' (3.2). The call to return Jesus to the Lord is a clear reference to Jesus' death on the cross. The repetition of the verb "offer" demonstrates the agency attributed to this mother; Bernard does not call upon her to agree to a sacrifice but to make it. In this regard, Cleo McNelly Kearns likens Mary to Abraham (107). Shulamith Shahar writes that Mariology brought with it "the image of woman as a believer, faithful, sacrificing, and redeeming" (*Fourth* 25). It is thus probable that the idea of Marian sacrifice then began to pave the way for literary sacrifices by mothers.

Almost all of these episodes where a parent kills a child have been used for a material purpose. This use is especially obvious in the self-contained filicide narratives *Aided Óenfir Aife* and *Fingal Rónáin* but is also undeniable in works like *Philomena*, the accounts of Arthur and Mordred's last battle, and the texts of the Volsung-Nibelung tradition, where the death of children coincide with the destruction of families and kingdoms. Even in the framed narratives discussed in chapter two, in which the filicides are not part of the frame, they serve a material function, for in illustrating the moral concerns of the narrators, these episodes are presented with enough concrete detail for the audience to understand their relevance. While the subject matter of these tales has a repellent quality (for few would truly be pleased to hear or read of a child's spilled blood), the shocking nature of the events also makes for a gripping story. Those narratives in which the filicide episodes (or allusions to them) have little to no material function - most of which borrow from the substance of classical tales - are those that are explicitly exemplary, such as Rodulfus Tortarius' version of the Amicus and Amelius legend embedded in his letter to a friend; those where well-known and expected filicide

episodes have been expurgated out of a concern for *ethos*, such as *Le Roman de Troie*; and those where allusions to filicides aid in emphasizing moral messages and also increase the author's authority, such as *La Divina Commedia*.

All of the examined filicide tales have a moral/ethical function, even if it is not made explicit. Moralizing narrators made the exemplary use of classical filicide tales obvious in works like *Le Roman de la Rose* and especially in l'*Ovide Moralisé*, where every Ovidian tale becomes a Christian lesson. As in that monumental work, the moral lessons are not always those the audience may expect. While Jephthah's daughter, Iphigenia, and Virginia's deaths may have been presented in classical narratives as honorable acts of sacrifice, some medieval narrators implicitly and explicitly condemned the fathers' actions, as seen in the oblique handling of Agamemnon's sacrifice in *Le Roman de Troie* and in the characterizations of Jephthah and Agamemnon in *La Divina Commedia* as foolhardy. Overall, the moral purpose is most obvious in those works from the classical tradition, since the Christian writers adapted the pagan works quite consciously for their Christian audiences. In the feudal narratives, filicide episodes help to demonstrate the value of the feudal bond and the need to preserve noble lineages, a theme also present in the Melusine texts. The deaths of figures like Conlae and the children of Aun highlight concerns with just rule, and the deals in the Volsung-Nibelung narratives highlight concerns about appropriate vengeance.

While we have seen a softening of certain filicide tales, that is, the adaptation of story lines to remove a death scene, no gender-based or chronological patterns emerge to help explain this change across the board.[9] In the twelfth century, Benoît de Sainte-Maure glosses

9 The adaptations of filicides in the Germanic tradition may have to do with historical trends, but the difficulties of chronology with these oral-based tales makes this difficult to discern.

over the actions of Medea and Agamemnon, but John Lydgate restores some of the missing information in the fifteenth century. Geoffrey Chaucer omits details in some texts that he provides in others. In each of these cases, the changes made have more to do with the moral messages found in the individual texts than with gender politics or particular points on time lines.

This study shows that while certain types of filicides seem particular to specific bodies of medieval literature, other types appear throughout the bodies of narratives under study and reveal similarities among these texts that have escaped much critical notice. Virginal young women are not sacrificed by their fathers in feudal narratives or in those texts stemming from the Celtic and Germanic mythological and heroic traditions but are well-known victims in the medieval versions of classical tales. Similarly, fathers do not kill sons that they suspect of bedding their wives in the feudal narratives, but they do in the other medieval narratives under study. Mothers seek vengeance against their husbands, however, in the classically influenced tales and in the Germanic ones, and a comparison of *Philomena* and *Völsunga saga* reveals similarities in the motivation for vengeance (justice for one's siblings) and in the use of cannibalism as part of the revenge scheme. We can also see similarities among the fathers who sacrifice their children (regardless of the children's gender) when faced with impossible socio-political situations, as seen, for example, in the deaths of Virginia and Conlae. Similarities even arise in the aftermath of these filicides, such as in the rich burials of both Daurelet and Horrible.

Future studies that engage with literatures not examined within this dissertation would prove valuable, as they would provide even more data that could help reveal patterns not

found here and could aid in explaining outliers, that is the few exceptions to the trends witnessed here. For this purpose, studies of southern and eastern European literatures of the Middle Ages would be especially useful because of the proximity of these geographical regions. Further studies across world literatures would also be useful to see, if there are patterns, how far these patterns extend and to what degree they may be affected by trade routes and other such direct lines of communication.

Appendix of Summaries

SUMMARIES - CHAPTER TWO

THE CANTERBURY TALES

This most famous of Geoffrey Chaucer's works presents a variety of short tales that differ in length, genre, and style and are recounted through a variety of voices (male and female, ecclesiastic and secular) within a framing narrative of a group pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas Becket, the former Archbishop of Canterbury. The arrangement of these tales varies from edition to edition because the work has come to us in several fragments. The text is somewhat modeled after Boccaccio's *Decameron*, another framed narrative; in fact, Chaucer borrows some of Boccaccio's content for tales such as "The Clerk's Tale." Among the most famous tales are the Arthurian narrative told by the Wife of Bath, the fabliau told by the Miller, and the beast-fable of Chauntecleer told by the Nun's Priest. "The Physician's Tale" explains how and why a knight kills his virginal daughter. The narrative closely follows Livy's story of the death of Verginia, though Chaucer has also borrowed from Jean de Meun and made innovations of his own. Apius, a judge and governor, sees the beautiful and virtuous fourteen-year-old Virginia, desires her, and conspires to seize her from her family; he even presides over a travesty of a trial to determine her custody. To prevent her dishonor, her father (the knight Virginius) decapitates her and presents her head to Apius. The public defends Virginius and sends Apius to prison, where he commits suicide.

THE CONFESSIO AMANTIS

John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* is a framed narrative that takes the form of a prologue and eight books. The prologue explains Gower's desire to write something entertaining and instructive. He addresses the moral decline found throughout civilization and how this decline is related to the sinful state of man and lack of love. In the first book, he sets forth the framing element: Amans (the lover and narrator) complains, while in the midst of nature, of being far from love. Venus arrives and challenges him to prove that he has been true to her by confessing what he has done to her priest, Genius, who in turn explains that he will speak to the lover about all of the major sins and how they relate to love. Within the frame, Genius uses narratives, mostly from classical literature, to illustrate his points about sin. In each book, he addresses one of the seven deadly sins and its variants. He begins with pride in the first book and continues with envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, and gluttony in books two through six. The seventh book, on Wisdom and its relation to kingship, diverts from the pattern set forth by Genius, but he continues with it because of its inherent value. The priest returns to his coverage of the sins in the eighth book with his treatment of incest; this book contains the longest example, the story of Apollonius of Tyre. After his long dialogue with Genius, Amans still feels frustrated and asks Genius to intercede for him with Venus so that he may be granted love or allowed to die. She finally takes pity on him and has Cupid remove the arrow that plagues the lover; then, she heals him and urges him to retire from pursuing love and to embrace a life of peace and morality. Genius absolves him of any sin, and they depart. In his conclusion, Gower includes a prayer for England's welfare.

LA DIVINA COMMEDIA

Dante Alighieri provides his conception of man's spiritual path in his tripartite epic *La Divina Commedia*. He begins the *Inferno* by describing how, in the middle of his narrator Dante's life, he finds himself lost in the woods. He becomes frightened by a leopard, a lion, and a wolf, so he begs for help from the first person he encounters, who happens to be the poet Virgil. The ancient poet declares that the safest path for Dante is to follow him until he can go no further; then Dante will go with another guide. Virgil then leads him in his descent through the nine circles of Hell. In these infernal realms, the poets see sinners enduring punishments directly connected to their misdeeds. In the *Purgatorio*, Virgil justifies his and Dante's presence to Cato, and then they join a group of penitents in ascending the mountain of purgatory. At each of the seven levels of the mountain, sins are purged from the penitents. Virgil accompanies him for a distance but eventually hands him into the care of Beatrice. Finally in the *Paradiso*, Beatrice guides him through the heavenly spheres. This part of the work is more philosophical than the previous parts. The poem ends after Saint Bernard prays that Mary will allow Dante a vision of the divine light, which she does. It so overwhelms Dante that he cannot recall it well enough to do it justice in words, but he does praise it greatly.

THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

This unfinished framed narrative by Chaucer purports to be a presentation of stories about good and noble women who suffered because of love; in this regard, some consider it

the anti-*Troilus and Criseyde*. After some words about the useful nature of old books and about the glories of the spring and of the daisy, the poet enters the dream vision that serves as the frame for the rest of the work. In that vision, the god of Love (Cupid) rails against the poet for his past literary treatment of women (particularly his translation of the *Le Roman de la Rose* and his *Troilus and Criseyde*). The beautiful Queen Alceste urges mercy, reminds him of the poet's works that honored women and love, and proposes that he should immediately write more positive stories about women. This seems agreeable to all. The works presented within the frame are brief tales about Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, Lucrecia, Ariadne, Philomena, Phyllis, and Hypermestra. Book four treats Jason's seduction, insemination, and abandonment of Hypsipyle and Medea, and book seven treats Tereus' rape and mutilation of Philomena and Progne's rescue of her sister.

L'OVIDE MORALISÉ

This anonymous fourteenth-century poem retells Ovid's magnum opus, his *Metamorphoses,* with additional moralizing passages that claim to reveal the true Christian meanings of Ovid's pagan tales. These long interpretations sometimes differ strikingly from Ovid's original stories. *L'Ovide Moralisé* follows the structure of the *Metamorphoses* and thus has been divided into fifteen books; the added interpretive passages follow the corresponding narratives, translated from Latin into Old French, throughout. Before launching into the translation of Ovid's text, the narrator explains that he has undertaken the work because, though everything that is written is meant to instruct us, we may not be able to discern the knowledge hidden under such a tissue of lies. A brief epilogue attached to the

fifteenth book includes a reference that scholars believe is the narrator's identification as a Franciscan; this passage contains the narrator's hopes for the book and praises of the trinity and of the Virgin Mary. The work is best known for the twelfth-century narrative of *Philomena* found embedded within it.

PHILOMENA

This twelfth-century romance, recorded within the enormous fourteenth-century *Ovide Moralisé*, contains a shocking legend of rape, mutilation, and child murder. The Thracian warrior Tereüs marries Progné in an ill-omened ceremony, and she bears him a son, Ithis. She misses her younger sister, so her husband agrees to fetch the girl. When he first sees the beautiful and multi-talented Philomena, lust consumes him. He asks her father Pandion for permission to take the girl to her sister. When they reach Thrace, rather than taking Philomena to his wife, Thereüs rapes the girl. She reproaches him, so he cuts out her tongue to silence her and then stashes her in the home of two peasant women. He returns home and reports her death to his wife. Philomena, with the help of her guardians, weaves her story into a tapestry, which she convinces them to send to Progné. When she sees the tapestry, she realizes the crime and works to rescue her sister. Progné wishes further revenge, and while contemplating her options, she sees her son, whose resemblance to his father is his undoing. She kills the boy, and the sisters prepare a private, elaborate banquet for Thereüs . When he repeatedly requests that Ithis be brought to him, his wife reveals that he has consumed him through the course of the meal. Philomena then emerges from the kitchen wielding the bloody, severed head. Thereüs is at first stunned and then becomes focused on

revenge. He pursues the women, and all transform into birds (Thereüs, a crested hoopoe coupe; Progné, a swallow; and Philomena, a nightingale).

LE ROMAN DE LA ROSE

Guillaume de Lorris began the allegorical *Le Roman de La Rose*, and Jean de Meun completed the work. The thirteenth-century romance takes the form of a dream vision in which L'amant (the lover) discovers and pursues the Rose. In the first part, after addressing the instructive value of dreams, the narrator explains a dream from his youth in which he goes walking in the springtime and comes upon a garden surrounded by a wall that is covered with images of personified human characteristics. Within, he meets the Dex d'Amors (also known as Amors, the God of Love) and other personified forces, discovers the pool of Narcissus, and becomes enchanted by the Rose. Amors strikes him with five arrows and then advises him on love. Bel Accueil (Fair Welcome) agrees to help him, but Dangiers (Danger) chases him away. After the lover meets and spurns Reson (Reason), Venus and Bel Accueil help the lover kiss the rose. Male Bouche (Evil Mouth) sees this and reports it to Jalousie (Jealousy), who builds a fortified stronghold around the Rose and imprisons Bel Accueil. In the second part of the narrative (which is filled with asides), Reson reappears and advises the sorrowful lover to renounce love. Amors assembles various personified forces to discuss how to help the lover, and Faus Semblant (False Seeming) and Atenance Contrainte (Constraining Abstinence) kill Male Bouche, a guardian of the way to Bel Accueil. The lover's allies help him meet up with Bel Accueil and La Vielle (the old woman) guarding him, who provides her wisdom regarding love. The lover's efforts to gain the Rose are again

thwarted. His allies gather to help him with his assault. Nature, devastated, confesses to her priest Genyus (Genius), who later goes to rally the troops. Venus sets the fortification on fire with a blazing arrow, and the confusion provides an opportunity for the lover to enter and seize the Rose. After he achieves his quest, he wakes immediately from the dream.

LE ROMAN DE TROIE

Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Le Roman de Troie* provides a lengthy account of the events leading to the Trojan war, the war itself, and the aftermath. Benoît begins with a prologue that explains his purpose and the sources he claims to use, followed by a summary of the enormous work. The narrative proper begins with the animosity in Jason's family that leads to his quest for the Golden Fleece. A confrontation between the Trojan king Laomedon and the Argonauts Jason and Hercules sparks antagonism between the Trojans and Greeks that escalates and eventually, after the Trojan prince Paris takes Helen, leads to a full-scale war. Battles figure prominently in the text. The midpoint of the narrative is devoted to the death and funeral for Hector, whom the narrator admires above all other heroes of the romance. It ends (aside from a brief epilogue) with the destruction of Troy and the patricide of Ulysses by Telegonus. The romance is the longest of the twelfth-century romances of antiquity and is well known for the detailed descriptions of key figures and places and well as for recounting the amorous adventures of famous couples including Jason and Medea, Troilus and Briseida, and Achilles and Polyxena. Benoît's narrative served as a source for later medieval writers eager to explore the Trojan legends.

THE TROY BOOK

The monk John Lydgate's early fifteenth-century *Troy Book* tells the story of the fall of Troy in five books. He follows the outline first established by Benoît de Sainte-Maure: he explains his sources and then begins the first book of his narrative with his rendition of the Argonautic material. He goes into depth upon the labors of Hercules and Jason and Medea's relationship. The second book explains how despite prophecies of disaster, Paris is sent to Greece and returns with Helen, whom he marries, and how the Greeks travel to Troy to retrieve her. This book contains a eulogy for Geoffrey Chaucer. Lydgate describes battles in the third book, as well as the tale of Troilus and Cressida and the death and burial of Hector. The fourth book contains more battles and has much material related to Achilles and some related to Amazons. In this book, the Greeks use the false horse to gain entry to Troy. Lydgate covers the aftermath of the war in the fitfh book, which contains the deaths of Agamemnon and Ulysses and an epilogue on Henry V and contemporary politics. There is also a relatively brief envoy that follows the fifth book. A key feature of the narrative are Lydgate's interjections regarding the misogyny of Guido delle Colonne, the author of his primary source material, *Historia Destructionis Troiae*.

"LA VIE SAINTE BARBE"

This tale, written at the end of the thirteenth century or the beginning of the fourteenth, provides an account of the maiden Barbara's martyrdom and justifies her sainthood. The pagan Dyoscorus becomes enraged by his beautiful Christian daughter Barbara's pious acts, and he desires to kill her. God intervenes, but she finds herself tortured

and imprisoned. She maintains her faith and is martyred when her father slices off her head. Her father faces divine punishment, and people are cured in her name. She is compared to other female saints. Later, a warring knight who devoutly follows the cult of Saint Barbara is decapitated by his enemies. His severed head cries out to a priest, who then reattaches it. The knight shares the story of Barbara and his devotion to her with the priest and then dies; the war he has been fighting comes to a close after his funereal mass is held.

SUMMARIES - CHAPTER THREE

AMI ET AMILES

Ami et Amiles depicts the lives of two identical but unrelated men who forge an exemplary friendship. Born on the same day by divine decree and identical to all in appearance and behavior, Ami and Amile share a godfather, Pope Ysorez. The boys grow up in different regions, yet each hears of his doppelgänger, so upon achieving knighthood, each sets out in search of the other. When after seven years they finally find one another, they instantly bond and become inseparable. They enter the service of Charlemagne and immediately make themselves valuable to the emperor, much to the displeasure of his man Hardré, who plots to kill them. Ami marries Lubias, a beautiful but bad-tempered niece of Hardré, and they have a son, Girart. Meanwhile, Charlemagne's daughter Belissant has fallen for Amile and will not take no for an answer; when she tricks Amile into having sex with her, Hardré capitalizes on the opportunity and denounces them to the emperor. Amile and Hardré are scheduled to fight in a judicial duel to reveal the truth. Because Amile is guilty, Ami suggests that the two switch places until the matter is settled. When Ami, pretending to be Amile, decapitates Hardré, Charlemagne offers Belissant as a reward. Since he does not wish

to be a bigamist, Ami unsuccessfully tries to stall any marriage arrangements, and despite a warning from an angel that he will become a reviled leper, he swears that he will marry her. The next day, they travel to Blaye, where he and Amile switch places again; then, Amile and Belissant wed and depart for their own home in Riviers, as Lubias has threatened to imprison Amile for killing her uncle. Ami contracts leprosy, as foretold by the angel, and becomes a wandering beggar after Lubias casts him out of Blaye. Miraculously, he arrives in Riviers, and the friends are reunited. An angel appears to Ami with a way to cure his leprosy: he must be bathed in the blood of Amile's sons. Though saddened by what he learns and what he does, Amile kills the children and restores Ami to health with their blood. The two prepare to go to church and then announce to those gathered what has occurred, but when they return, they find that the children have been resurrected, and all celebrate. The men then go to Blaye, where Lubias is punished, and the family lands are turned over to the newly knighted Girart. Finally, Ami and Amille travel to Jerusalem and die together on their way home.

AMIS AND AMILOUN

The romance *Amis and Amiloun* tells of the deep-abiding friendship of Amis and Amiloun, identical men born to two barons of Lombardy on the same evening. As adolescents, they meet at the feast of a duke, who asks to have them enter his service. They become close friends and make a friendship pact. They are knighted after a few years and receive key management positions in the household. When Amiloun is called home home for a family emergency, he has made two identical golden cups for himself and Amis; they reaffirm their oath of friendship, and Amiloun warns his friend about a jealous steward in the

court. The duke's daughter Belisaunt sees and becomes lovesick over Amis. She threatens to accuse him of attempted rape unless he consents to be her lover, which he reluctantly does. The steward reports them to her father, who chases Amis with a sword. A judicial duel is called for, and since Amis knows that he is guilty, he departs to seek help from his dear friend. Amiloun has a prophetic dream and sets out to find his friend. The men switch places, and despite a divine warning that he will become a leper, Amiloun fights and wins the duel. The men switch back, and Amis marries Belisaunt. As decreed, Amiloun contracts leprosy and becomes homeless with only his nephew Owaines (also known as Amoraunt) for a servant and companion. They live as wandering beggars. When they arrive at Amis's rich court, Amiloun asks Owaines to keep his identity a secret. Amis learns that he and the leper have matching cups and assumes that the leper has stolen the cup from his friend, whom he presumes dead. After Amis begins to assault Amiloun, Owaines reveals his master's identity. Amis then embraces his dear friend, welcomes him to the court, and cares for him for a year. Both men see angels in their sleep who tell them how to cure the leprosy. As directed, Amis kills his sleeping children on Christmas morning to cure his friend with their blood. He and Belisaunt discover the next day that Amiloun is healed and that the children are alive. The companions return to Amiloun's home and punish his wife; Owaines is made lord of the land. Amis and Amiloun then return to the former's home, and they die and are buried together at an abbey in Lombardy that they have constructed.

ATHELSTON

In this fourteenth-century romance, four friends pledge brotherhood to one another, and when one - Athelston - becomes the King of England, he rewards his friends with secular and ecclesiastical posts. Another friend, Wymound - the Earl of Dover, becomes jealous of a third, the Earl of Stane, and plots against him. He convinces Athelston that the Earl of Stane and his family (who are also Athelston's kin, as the earl's wife is his own sister) are traitors, and this nearly leads to their deaths, since Athelston tricks them into coming to his court and has them imprisoned. When the Queen tries to intercede directly, her husband assaults her and causes a miscarriage. This does not deter her, however, and she sends a messenger with a plea to the fourth friend - the Archbishop of Canterbury - to intercede. The holy man forces Athelston's hand through the power of interdict and then reveals the real treachery through the imposition of judicial ordeals. In the end, the King regrets his actions and selects his newborn nephew as his heir and successor; the traitor is hanged.

DAUREL ET BETON

This twelfth-century Occitan epic poem begins as Duke Bove and Count Gui forge a friendship and alliance; Gui agrees to help manage Bove's affairs, and Bove agrees that Gui will inherit all that he has, including a future wife, if Gui has none himself. Ten years later, the two and the *joglar* Daurel travel from Poitiers to Paris to see Charlemagne, who gives his sister Ermenjart's hand in marriage to Bove. Gui is jealous and secretly vows that Bove will die. Meanwhile, Daurel delights Bove and the rest and receives handsome rewards. Years pass, and Gui unsuccessfully attempts to seduce Ermenjart. She reports the incident to her

husband, yet he cannot fathom such a betrayal by Gui. She bears Bove an heir, Beton, and Biatris, the wife of Daurel, bears their third child, whom Bove baptizes Daurelet of Monclar. Gui murders Bove on a boar hunting trip. Ermenjart makes public her suspicions of foul play and beseeches her brother for justice. He has been bribed by Gui and instead forces her to marry him, so she sends Beton into hiding. Ermenjart first tells Gui that Beton has died, but she finally tells the truth when he assaults her. Gui offers a reward for Beton; Daurel intervenes and hides the child in his castle. When Gui discovers the truth, he tells Daurel to surrender the child or have the castle burned down. Biatris suggests that they sacrifice Daurelet to save Beton, which they do. Gui smashes Daurelet's head against a pillar and leaves, believing his work to be done. Daurelet, presumed to be Beton, is buried with Bove, an honor which marks his sacrifice to preserve the lineage. Daurel tells Ermenjart of Beton's survival, asks that she protect his home in his absence, and takes the boy into exile so that he may grow to avenge his father. Biatris kills herself from grief. Daurel charms the court of Babylonia with his song of Gui's treachery. Beton grows up in the Emir's court and proves his nobility time and time again, such as when he singlehandedly defeats the forces of the Emir's enemy, King Gormon. The Emir convinces Daurel to tell the truth of Beton's origins, and upon hearing the story, provides them with martial assistance. Beton's forces emerge victorious, and Gui is killed by being dragged behind a horse. Beton rewards those who have helped him and marries Erimena, the Emir's daughter. He then seeks redress from Charlemagne, who praises his courage. At this point, the manuscript breaks off. A noteworthy feature of this text is its rare portrayal of a *joglar* as a hero.

"EPISTULA II AD BERNARDUM"

The letter, written to Bernardus by Rodulfus Tortarius, opens by praising the greatness of loyal friendships. He first provides examples from classical literature of true friends and of others bound by ties of loyalty and then provides the tale of the friendship of Amicus and Amelius as a more detailed example, though he admits that it may be only partially truthful. These men become soldiers for the King Gaiferus of Poitiers and become fast friends and dear to the king and his family. When the king's man Ardradus discovers an affair between the king's daughter Beliardis and Amelius, the queen demands his death, while the king decides instead on a judicial combat. The men switch places, so Amicus fights furiously, and Amelius remains, chastely, with Amicus' wife. Beliardis wants to help her lover, so she sends her father's sword, which had belonged to Roland, to her champion. He triumphs and receives her as his prize; he marries her in Amelius' name. Then men switch back. When Amicus later becomes a leper and is forced from his home by his wife, he comes to Amelius, who obtains the best medical care for his friend and even sacrifices his children so their blood can provide a cure. The children are found resurrected, and Amicus lives a long and healthy life. The letter concludes with a reinforcement of the importance of friendship and its relation to justice.

JOURDAIN DE BLAYE

This continuation of *Ami et Amile* begins with the successful plot of Fromont, a traitor descended from Hardré, to kill Girart, the son of Ami, and his wife Hermenjart and take the land of Blaye. He then seeks to obtain their infant son Jordain from his godfather Renier by

trickery, attempted bribery, and force, but he is unsuccessful in all endeavors. He imprisons and tortures Renier and later his wife Eremborc for over a year. She devises a plan to save Jordain by switching him with their own infant Garnier. They give their baby to Fromont, who kills him immediately, and they go home to Valtamise to raise Jordain as their own child. When Jordain, whom Fromont believes to be Garnier, grows up, the traitor invites him to Blaye for knightly training, but the child so resembles his father that Fromont grows suspicious. Renier tells Jordain the truth, and the teen immediately sets out for revenge. He slices the nose from Fromont's face and kills Huistasce, Fromont's son. Lohier, the son of King Charles, and his men enter the fray, and Jordain kills the prince. Renier, Eremborc, Jordain, and many of their men flee by water, are overtaken by Saracens, and are separated. Jordain escapes to Marcasile, where he makes himself indispensable to the king and his daughter Oriabel, whom he marries. He later sets out on the seas to find his godparents, but he is separated from Oriabel, who has just given birth to their daughter Gaudiscete. He places the child in safe keeping and searches for his wife. Once he has found her, they look for Renier and Eremborc. After this reunion, they go pick up Gaudiscete, but they discover that she has been sent to Constantinople. They find her there, and she marries Alys, the son of the emperor. Finally, the reunited family sets out to finish the revenge against Fromont and retake Blaye. Once Jordain has regained Blaye and the traitor Fromont has been flayed alive, messengers arrive to say that Oriabel and Alys's fathers have died. Alys then becomes emperor of Constantinople; Jordain becomes king of Marcasile, and he rewards Renier with Blaye.

SUMMARIES - CHAPTER FOUR

AIDED OÉNFIR AÍFE

The Old Irish tale *Aided Óenfir Aife* (*The Death of Aife's Only Son*) explains how Ulster hero Cú Chulainn kills his son Conlae. After he impregnates the warrior Aife, the hero provides a ring and a set of instructions for the child and returns to his own land. Seven years later, a bronze ship carrying a mysterious child arrives in Ulster. The child shows that he is a trained warrior, and King Conchobar of Ulster sends his men to get rid of him, lest his kinsmen come and conquer the kingdom. Conchobar's men refuse to fight a child. Finally, Cú Chulainn, his nephew and chief warrior, confronts the child despite his wife Emer's warnings that the boy is his own. The child's skills initially seem to surpass those of Cú Chulainn, who finally wins by using the *gaí bolga* in a type of attack only taught to him. He carries the dying child to meet his compatriots on the shore and introduces him as his son. The entire community - including the livestock - is afflicted by the tragedy. This tale proves especially valuable for those interested in the life of Cú Chulainn, the best known literary hero of early Ireland.

CATH MAIGE TUIRED

Cath Maige Tuired presents a key foundational tale of ancient Ireland. The Túatha Dé Dannan (the people of the Goddess Danu), led by King Núadu, win Ireland from the Fir Bolg (Bag Men), but Núadu loses an arm in the fight and thus the kingship. Bres, who is of mixed race (his father is from the nearby Fomorian people), becomes king and allows the Fomorians to conquer the Túatha Dé Dannan. The physician Díen Cécht kills his own son

because they disagree on the best treatment for Núadu. The Túatha Dé Dannan drive Bres away to the Fomorians and restore their former king to power. The multi-talented warrior Lug, who - like Bres - is of mixed race, arrives and offers to help them defeat their Fomorian enemies. He temporarily takes the kingship and leads them to victory, albeit a bloody one in which Núadu dies and Lug kills his own grandfather. He then restores order among the Túatha Dé Dannan. The text ends with a prophecy about the end of the world. Scholars especially value this narrative for its details about Lug, believed to be related to the god evidenced in continental and insular Celtic archaeological and linguistic remains.

FINGAIL RÓNÁIN

This Old Irish *Fingail Rónán* (*The Kinslaying of Rónán*) explains why the King of Leinster arranges the murder of his adult son. The widower King Rónán marries the young, beautiful, and malevolent daughter of the king of Dunseverick despite objections about the match. She prefers her stepson, the athletic and handsome Mael Fothartaig, who wants nothing to do with her and asks his friends for help avoiding her. Insulted, she seeks revenge and lies to Rónán about their relationship. He accepts her questionable proof and orders him killed. Though mortally wounded, Mael Fothartaig finally manages to convince his father of the truth, and then the father realizes what a terrible thing he has done and grieves for his dead son. Mael Fothartaig's sons and foster brother Dond seek revenge. The queen commits suicide, and the tale ends with Rónán's own death. Scholars value this text as an analog to the Greek Hippolytus legend.

THE MABINOGI

Some scholars refer to the Middle Welsh *Mabinogi* as "the four branches" because there are four key parts known best by shortened forms of their titles: *Pwyll*, *Branwen*, *Manawydan*, and *Math*. *Pwyll* tells how Lord Pwyll wins a supernatural wife and befriends a powerful and supernatural lord. It also tells of the mysterious disappearance of his infant son, how his wife is framed and punished for infanticide, and how the family is eventually reunited. *Branwen* tells of an ill-fated alliance between those of the Isle of the Mighty (Britain) and the Irish that results in the almost complete depopulation of Ireland and the decimation of the British forces. Bendigeidfran, the son of Lyr and leader of the British, agrees to a marriage contract between his sister Branwen and the Irish king Matholwch. Efnyssyen, a half-sibling of Branwen and Bendigeidfran, disrupts the alliance at every possible turn, and Branwen patiently suffers at her husband's hand because of Efnyssyen's actions. Finally, he starts a full-scale war by murdering his young nephew Gwern, and he ensures British victory with his own death. Branwen's grief over the war kills her, and Bendigeidfran is fatally wounded, but he provides guidance for the remainder of the British force even after he has them decapitate him. *Manawydan* tells how the title character, his step-son Pryderi, and their wives suffer at the hands of an enemy of Pwyll (Pryderi's late father) and then triumph over the enemy. *Math* tells how the noble magician Gwydion raises his nephew, the child Lleu Llaw Gyffes, and helps him establish himself as a man, despite the best efforts of his sister Aranrhod, Lleu's mother. It also explains how Gwydion saves Lleu from his murderous and adulterous wife and helps him gain revenge.

MALORY'S ARTHURIAN WORKS

Sir Thomas Malory's enormous fifteenth-century Arthurian narrative tells about Arthur's ancestors, conception, life, and death. It can be divided into eight unequal parts. The first two explain how Merlin arranges for Igrayne to bear Uther's child Arthur, how Arthur is recognized as heir to the throne, and how he establishes himself as a mighty ruler; it also includes the incestuous conception of Mordred and Arthur's attempt to have him killed. The next three treat the chivalric adventures of his knights, including Sir Launcelot du Lake, Sir Gareth of Orkeney, and Sir Tristram of Lyones. The Tristram tale is the longest of the eight parts of the larger narrative. The sixth part tells about the Arthurian Grail quest. The seventh and eight parts focus on the relationship between Launcelot and Queen Guinevere, the destruction of the realm, and the death of Arthur and the rest. This last part, *The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthur Saunz Guerdon*, depicts the mutual slaying of Arthur and Mordred.

MÉLUSINE

Jean d'Arras begins *Mélusine* by explaining his purpose and sources and then follows this with a narrative about Melusine's parents and her own early years. He explains how King Elias of Albanie becomes involved with, married to, and abandoned by the fairy maiden Presine. When their daughters punish Elias for breaking his vow to Presine, the fairy punishes them in turn. This leads to the core narrative. Remond, a wandering nobleman whose own family has connections to the fairy world, meets Melusine and agrees to marry her and to abide by certain conditions. She helps him cover up the unfortunate accident that

has led to his wandering and then establishes a wondrous kingdom for them. She also helps him regain his patrimony in Brittany that was lost because of treachery against his father. In the course of their relationship, Remond and Melusine have ten sons, eight of whom have a physical deformity but are otherwise remarkably attractive; several of these sons venture off and earn brides and land in places such as Cyprus, Armenia, and central Europe, through their chivalric adventures (most of which are against Saracen forces) recounted within the narrative. Remond's curiosity and anxiety drive him to break his vow to Melusine, and he sees her in half-serpentine form. Still, all bodes well for the couple until their sixth child, Geoffrey of the big tooth, burns down a monastery and kills his brother Fromont in the process. This enrages Remond so much that he takes out his anger verbally upon his wife and denounces her for her otherworldly nature. She then informs him that she can no longer stay with him, instructs him on how the remaining minor children ought to be dealt with after her departure, transforms fully into a serpent, and leaves. Afterwards, his power begins to diminish. Geoffrey has further adventures, discovers what happened to his grandfather Elias, kills the uncle who drove his father to break his vow, and shares the family narrative with his brothers and father. Remond becomes a hermit. The remainder of the narrative covers the final days of the family and includes, at the end, the misadventures of a king of Armenia at the castle of Melior, one of Melusine's sisters, and a brief epilogue in which Jean d'Arras connects the legend of Melusine to the family of his patron, Jean de Berry.

LA MORT LE ROI ARTU

The thirteenth-century *La Mort le Roi Artu* focuses on the final days of the Arthurian realm, after the Grail quest. A tournament at Winchester designed to revitalize the court instead helps hasten its destruction. The Maid of Escalot falls in love with Lancelot, and this causes tension between himself and Gauvain as well as between himself and the queen. Artu learns of Lancelot and Guenièvre's affair, and his nephews strive to acquire proof. Lancelot rescues the queen twice, when she faces execution first for unintentionally killing a knight and second for adultery with Lancelot. During the second rescue, he mistakenly kills Gaheriet, and this leads to a feud between Gauvain and Lancelot. Lancelot, his family, and their forces fight against those of Artu for months until the Pope intercedes. The king takes his queen back but then renews the war on the continent. This war and a subsequent battle provide an opportunity for Mordret to usurp the throne left in his care and try to take the queen as his own. Artu receives a message from the queen about Mordret's actions, reveals that he is the traitor's father, and returns to fight him. Many - including a dying Gauvain - urge the king to delay the battle, since his forces are so depleted, but he refuses, even after having prophetic dreams about Gauvain and Dame Fortune. The battle results in massive carnage on both sides, and Mordret and Artu deal fatal blows to one another. Before dying, Artu prays and arranges for Girflet to return Excalibur to the lake. A boat full of women led by the king's sister Morgain arrives to pick up the king, and they later deliver his body to the Black chapel. Girflet and the queen enter the religious life, as do Lancelot and his kin after they have killed Mordred's sons. The deaths of the queen and Lancelot are noted; he is

entombed at Joieuse Garde, and there is much lamentation over his death. The narrative indicates that there is nothing more to be added to the tale.

LE ROMAN DE PARTHENAY AND *THE ROMANS OF PARTENAY*

The Middle-English *Romans of Partenay* provides a relatively faithful translation of Coudrette's *Le Roman de Parthenay.* Both narratives closely follow the base tale found in Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine* (above), but there are notable differences. After some words about how he came to compose the poem, Coudrette begins his poem not with the story of Presine and her husband (which is included later, when Geoffrey discovers his grandfather's tomb, along with information about the other sisters Palatine and Melior) but jumps ahead to discuss Remond. Near the end of the text, he adds an episode about an English knight of the lineage of Tristan who unsuccessfully seeks Palatine's treasure, which is said to be enough to gain power over the Holy Land, at Mount Conigo in Aragon. Other key differences between the Arrasian version and the latter two lie in details connecting them to the appropriate patrons; Couldrette emphasizes that Lusignan is passed from Geoffrey to the youngest child Thierry, a purported ancestor of his patrons Guillaume and Jean de Parthenay. Coudrette finishes the poem with a long prayer. His English translator begins by explaining that he may make mistakes because he is not a native speaker of French, and he calls upon the Christian God (after disparaging other gods) to help him. After providing his translation, he thanks God for helping him and writes a few words about the translation process.

LE ROMAN DE TRISTAN EN PROSE

The early thirteenth-century *Roman de Tristan en Prose* tells of the ancestry, adolescence, chivalric pursuits, and death of the Arthurian hero, whom the narrator considers second only to Lancelot. He connects Tristan's family to that of Joseph of Arimathea and explains how the hero's ancestors became kings of Cornwall and Leonois. Then, he begins the narrative of the hero himself. Tristan's mother Elyabel gives birth in a forest as she desperately searches for her kidnapped husband Meliadus; she names the child and promptly dies. Merlin saves the child and delivers him into the care of Gorvenal of Gaul, who protects Tristan during his youth at the courts of Meliadus (after he is rescued), Faramon of Gaul, and Marc of Cornwall (Tristan's maternal uncle). Tristan's beauty and fine character become apparent to all as he grows older, and he develops romantic rivalries with both Palamedes the Saracen and his uncle Marc. A poisoned wound he receives while fighting the Irish champion Le Morholt is later healed by Yselt, daughter of King Anguin of Ireland. Marc sends Tristan to negotiate a marriage with Yselt, but on the return trip, she and Tristan accidentally consume a love potion meant for her and Marc. Tristan's chivalric prowess becomes known to Arthur's court, and the Arthurian knight Galehot mentions in a letter to his queen (Genevre) that Tristan and Yselt are second only to herself and Lancelot. The narrator makes great use of the parallels between the two sets of lovers throughout the narrative, and letters also play an important role in the remainder of the text. Much of the rest of the narrative involves how Tristan and Yselt work to evade detection by Marc and his lackey Audret. Tristan saves Yselt after a rash boon allows Palomedes to take her away. For a time, after escaping Marc's punishment, they live together in the forest, but Marc reclaims her.

When Tristan becomes gravely ill, he is sent to Brittany to be healed by Duke Hoel's daughter Yselt. Tristan marries this second Yselt but cannot bring himself to consummate the marriage and eventually, with her brother Kahedin, returns home. Tristan becomes jealous of the relationship Kahedin has with Yselt; the men fight, and the lovers are again separated. His despair leads to a temporary madness, and she becomes bedridden from love-sickness. Both consider suicide. Tristan is brought back to Tintagel and healed but denied access to the queen, so he goes into exile in Logres. Tristan earns Le Morholt's seat at the Round Table. Mark comes in disguise to kill Tristan but is discovered and forced to promise to forgive his nephew. Tristan returns to Tintagel, and the lovers return to their ruses. For a time, they live at Joieuse Garde. Eventually, after retrieving his bride again, Marc strikes Tristan with a poisoned lance. He dies a lingering death; Yselt agrees to die with him, so he stops her heart by embracing her too firmly and dies at the same time. There is great grief for them both throughout the land. Marc even regrets this and has them buried together; those at the Round Table mourn also. There is an epilogue that discusses the composition of the book and the patronage of King Henry III.

SCÉL NA FIR FLATHA

The Middle Irish *Scél na Fír Flatha* (*The Tale of the True Sovereignty* or *The Irish Ordeals*) is part of a larger work entitled *Scél na Fír Flatha, Echtra Cormaic i Tir Tairngiri ocus Ceart Claidib Cormaic* (*The Irish Ordeals, Cormac's Adventures in the Land of Promise, and the Decision as to Cormac's Sword*). Associated with the literary hero King Cormac Mac Airt, the larger narrative tells of an assembly held by the king in Tara and the

sorts of regulations put in place at that time. *Scél na Fír Flatha* explains the function and origins of several truth-telling devices, the first three of which are the collars of the legendary judge Morann, a son of the evil king Carpre Cat-head. The text provides the origins of the first collar and explains how Morann, deformed like his siblings, barely escapes being a victim of his father's filicidal tendencies. The longest and most famous part of the narrative explains the origin of the final device, King Cormac's lie-detecting cup that he receives (along with a musical, sleep-inducing branch) from the god Manannan mac Lir during a journey to the otherworld. The text continues with information about the rules set forth in the assembly and the construction of the *Saltair Cormaic*, a legendary record book. Also included is a judgment regarding a sword said to have belonged to Cú Chulainn. The sword, branch, and cup are declared to be the three greatest treasures in Ireland. Scholars value the text for the narrative about a famous literary king and also for the text's connection to early Irish judicial literature.

THE STANZAIC MORTE ARTHUR

The *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* largely follows the plot of *La Mort le Roi Artu*, on which it is based. Queen Gaynor urges Arthur to increase the renown of his court (after the tragic grail quest) by holding a tournament in Winchester. Lancelot goes incognito, distinguishes himself, and is wounded so badly that he remains away from the court. Gawain mistakenly tells Gaynor that Lancelot has become the lover of the beautiful Maid of Ascolot, and when he is healed enough to return home, she wishes for him to leave, which he does. Gaynor accidentally kills a Scottish knight by handing him a poisoned apple intended for Gawain.

While waiting for a champion to defend her, she discovers the truth about Lancelot and the Maid of Ascolot. He returns and successfully defends her. Agravain, frustrated by Gaynor and Lancelot's affair, denounces them to the king and sets a trap. Lancelot kills Agravain while fleeing the trap; he returns, however, to save Gaynor from being burnt to death but unintentionally kills Gaheriet and Gaheries in the process. Gawain vows vengeance against Lancelot and pushes Arthur into a war against him. The Pope intervenes and sends a letter that instructs Arthur to reconcile with Gaynor and with Lancelot. Lancelot prepares for exile. Mordred is made Arthur's steward, and Arthur resumes his war against Lancelot on the continent. Lancelot bests Gawain in battle but will not kill him; he tells him instead to recover so they can resume their fight. They fight again, but then word comes from England of Mordred's usurpation of the throne. The traitor also desires to marry the queen; the archbishop of Canterbury explains that this incest is forbidden, but Mordred threatens him and makes him flee. Arthur returns to fight Mordred. Meanwhile, Gawain dies, and Arthur has prophetic dreams (of the wheel of fortune and Gawain) that warn him not to fight Mordred, at least until Lancelot can come. The two sides consider a truce, but an adder's attack makes them think someone has violated their negotiations. Arthur and Mordred wound one another after most of the other warriors have died. Sir Bedivere returns Excalibur, and Arthur is taken to Avalon and then back to be entombed. Lancelot returns, sees the devastation, and learns that Gaynor is now a nun. When he visits her, she urges him to marry, but he becomes a hermit instead. The remaining members of his family also become hermits, and the former lovers die.

SUMMARIES - CHAPTER FIVE

EDDA (POETIC)

The *Poetic Edda* or *Older Edda* consists of over thirty short texts, most of which are poems; the variance in the number of texts included among the Eddic works stems from the fact that most of them are preserved in the Codex Regius manuscript, yet other short texts bear enough similarity to these works that they are usually considered together. Scholars have grouped the texts into category based upon subject matter. Some of the best known poems address figures and events from Scandinavian mythology, including Odin, Loki, and the destruction of the world known as Ragnarok. Most of the other texts have an emphasis on heroes, especially Sigurd and others of the Volsung-Nibelung narrative tradition. The collection has been especially valued because it preserves these tales in some of the oldest forms.

EDDA (PROSE)

Snorri Sturlusons' *Prose Edda* is a guidebook, in a sense, to Old Norse-Icelandic poetry; it consists of a prologue and three main parts known as the *Gylfaginning*, the *Skáldskaparmál*, and the *Háttatal*. The prologue takes great pains to place the native pagan gods in a Biblical context; it explains the divisions of the world and credits the Æsir, whom Snorri connects to the Trojan empire, with the spread of the Germanic languages. The *Gylfaginning* takes the form of a contest of wits between King Gylfi, who has been tricked by one the Æsir, and three mysterious figures of the Æsir whose names translate as High, Equally High, and Third. Gylfi desires to know how he was tricked, so he disguises himself

as a man called Gangleri and tries to reveal gaps in their knowledge about the gods. Gylfi wins, but the Æsir mysteriously disappear; the king then passes on his new knowledge to his people while the Æsir convene to discuss how to make the stories they have just told true. The *Skáldskaparmál* begins with a tale about a man named Ægir, who dines at a banquet with the Æsir and learns how poetic knowledge ultimately came about from the spit of the Æsir and the Vanir. Within the *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri provides a repository of kennings for use by poets, and narratives are interjected among them. The *Háttatal* provides detailed instruction, in dialogue form, on the many forms of versification, and he illustrates these rules with his own verses about King Hakon and Earl Skuli.

HEIMSKRINGLA

Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (*Circle of the World*) explains about the Nordic kings up to the late twelfth century and is organized into a prologue and sixteen sagas. *Ynglinga Saga* (*The Saga of the Ynglings*), the first of these sixteen sagas, begins with mythological material and continues up to the reign of Rognvald Olafsson. Lest anyone believe that he is not a Christian, Snorri explains that the early "divine" kings were really men revered for their strength and whom others took to be gods. The seventh saga, which is one of the most famous, treats the King and Saint Olaf Haraldsson, whom most historians credit with the large-scale conversion of the Scandinavian realms to Christianity in the eleventh century. The last saga recounts the rise of Magnus Erlingson, who was declared King of Norway in 1161 CE at the age of five, and the stewardship, during his youth, of his kingdom by his father Erling; the saga concludes before his reign comes to an end as the result of civil war.

"DAS HILDEBRANDSLIED"

The fragmentary and anonymous "Hildebrandslied" ("The Song of Hildebrand" or "The Older Lay of Hildebrand") tells of an encounter between Hildebrand, an aged warrior and companion of Theodorich, and his son Hadubrand. The two, who are unknown to one another, meet on the battlefield and engage in verbal sparring. When Hildebrand learns that the younger man is his son, he identifies himself and offers him gifts, which are refused because Hadubrand believes that he is an impostor. Fighting commences, but the final portion of the poem that would tell the outcome has been lost. Scholars believe, based upon a variety of pieces of evidence, that the father kills the son.

DAS NIBELUNGENLIED

Das Nibelungenlied tells how the beautiful and noble Kriemhild comes to be the wife of the powerful knight Sigfried and how they and those around them die violent deaths. Sigfried agrees to aid Gunther in winning Brunhild for a wife (and later to aid him in bedding her) in exchange for his sister Kriemhild's hand in marriage. Later, a fight over their relative importance leads Kriemhild to insult Brunhild publicly and Brunhild to complain to her husband. Gunther and his subject Hagan conspire to kill Sigfried. Then, the widow is married off to Etzel, King of the Huns. She seeks revenge for Sigfried's death, but she has a difficult time finding allies. She finally tricks her brothers and Hagan into coming to a feast, at which she instigates fighting between her Gunther's men and those allied with Etzel. In the end she, her child Ortlieb, Hagan, her brothers, and many knights all lie dead.

VÖLSUNGA SAGA

The first part of the saga begins by connecting the family of the mighty warrior King Volsung to Odin, Volsung's great-grandfather. It then sets the stage for the feud between the Volsung family and King Siggeir, who marries Volsung's only daughter, Signy. When Sigmund, Signy's twin brother, refuses to sell a sword clearly intended for him, Siggeir takes offense, and he arranges an ambush that kills Volsung and his nine eldest sons. Signy manages to save Sigmund and uses him to help her achieve revenge. Her first two children prove too weak to be useful to her, so she has her brother kill them; she then tricks him into fathering a child. This child, Sinfjotli, and Sigmund finally help her carry out her revenge. In the course of events, she has two more of her children killed, and she condemns herself to death. Sigmund goes on to regain the Volsung lands and marry twice before Odin wills that he die in battle. His first wife kills Sinfjotli in an act of vengeance for her brother. His second wife gives birth after he dies to their son Sigurd. The second part of the saga largely concerns Sigurd's acquisition of Fafnir's treasure, his marriage, and his murder. When Sigurd kills Fafnir for his fosterer Regin, he gains supernatural powers in the process, learns of Regin's plot against him, and in evading it gains the treasure for himself. He meets and woos the valkyre Brynhild, but magic makes him forget her and marry Gudrun instead. Sigurd then helps his new brother-in-law Gunnar woo Brynhild. When the young wives fight over whose husband is more important, Gudrun humiliates her sister-in-law, who then conspires with Gudrun's brothers to have Sigurd and his son killed. The devastated widow Gudrun is married off to Atli, king of the Huns and brother of Brynhild. He desires Fafnir's treasure

and plots an ambush of Gudrun's brothers. As revenge for their deaths, Gudrun kills the sons she bore to Atli and feeds him their flesh and blood before she kills him. In the last part of the saga, Gudrun's attempts to drown herself but is carried to the land of King Jonakr, whom she marries and to whom she bears three sons. She agrees to give her daughter Svanhild in marriage to King Jormunrek, who then kills the girl and his son Randver when he discovers that they have affection for one another. Gudrun incites her youngest sons Hamdir, Sorli, and Erp to avenge Svanhild, which they set out to do. A misunderstanding leads Hamdir and Sorli to kill Erp, so they must face Jormunrek alone. When they fail to kill him, Odin advises that they be stoned to death.

ÞIÐREKS SAGA AF BERN

The anonymous *Þiðreks saga af Bern* (*Saga of Thidrek of Bern*) begins, after a prologue, by explaining how Samson, the paternal grandfather of the hero Thidrek (who is based upon Theodorich the Great), came into power. The saga continues with the youth of Thidrek, who was fostered by the great warrior Hildibrand, and who becomes king of Bern after his father dies. The narrative provides back-stories for many in the king's entourage and recounts their many exploits together. A vengeful aid, Sifka, drives a wedge between Thidrek and his powerful uncle Erminrek, king over Rome and several other realms, who declares war upon his nephew. Outnumbered and hoping to save as many lives as possible, Thidrek goes into exile in the kingdom of Attila the Hun, until that king's second wife Grimhild causes massive destruction at the court. Then disgraced, Thidrek leaves the land of the Huns and with the help of Hildibrand and that champion's son, retakes the kingdom of Bern. He

also gains control over Rome and the land of the Huns. Two conclusions have been appended to the saga. In the first, the king disappears when, in pursuit of a hart, he mounts a mysterious - and likely sinister - black horse. In the second, attributed to a work entitled *Þiðrekskroniku* (*The Chronicle of Thidrek*), Thidrek secretly seeks vengeance against Vidga Velentsson for the death of his brother and the sons of Attila (possibly upon a horse kept for such secret journeys) but dies from wounds he receives in their battle. Some of the saga's most well-known episodes treat the lame smith Velent, the Volsung-Nibelung tradition, the hostages Valtari and Hildigunn known from the medieval Latin epic *Waltarius*, and the Hildibrand legend.

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