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Galiziella's Escape: Interconfessional Erotics and Love Between Knights in the Aspremont Tradition

Jason Jacobs

Though its relation to language is explicitly marked as amorous, philology seldom manages to be sexy. The discipline's painstaking pursuit of origins, originals, and concrete signs of textual transmission, while not without its thrills, is nevertheless a rather chaste business. It is perhaps then no surprise that an intellectual tradition so deeply invested in genealogy, legitimacy, and fidelity at an early moment in its history came to be allegorized as a marriage.¹ In Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, the maiden Philologia is famously made an honest woman through a sanctioned union with a highly-disciplined Mercury. But for those of us whose blood is quickened rather than chilled by that which is messy, minor, oblique, and renegade in literary history, Michelle R. Warren's recent re-imagining of a Philology who "sleeps around" on a cross-dressing Mercury seems far more alluring, promising, and stimulating.² Warren's lusty Philology prompts us to reconsider literary history's extra pleasures, with attention not only to the implicit and explicit investments that determine our objects of study, but also to the excessive, illegitimate, and perverse ways in which texts in a tradition can relate to one another.

Resisting the constraints of Philology's wedding vows, as it were, this essay examines the textual and narrative traces of a fugitive, unsanctioned, and improbable eroticism in order to do several things at once. First, I trace a theme of desire among knights—a desire inherent in the mutual regard of the practitioners of chivalry and heightened by the allure of religious difference—through a group of medieval narratives that includes the *Chanson d'Aspremont* and several of its various redactions, revisions, and adaptations. This analysis is then brought to bear on the literary history of the *female* knight, a figure with roots in the ancient tradition of the Amazons and a starring role in the romance-epic poems of the Italian Renaissance.³ I focus on one warrior woman in particular—the feisty and beautiful Saracen warrior princess Galiziella—who figures in late-medieval Tuscan adaptations of *Aspremont*. Though she has in the past been of interest mainly to scholars in search of medieval models for the *donne guerriere* of the Italian

¹ Bernard Cerquiglini has memorably characterized philology as "a bourgeois, paternalist, and hygienist system of thought about the family" that "cherishes filiation, tracks down adulterers, and is afraid of contamination": *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 49.

² Michelle R. Warren, "Post-Philology," in *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval through Modern*, eds. Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 37-38.

³ See Maria Bordinelli Predelli, "La donna guerriera nell'immaginario del tardo Medioevo," *Italian Culture* 12 (1994): 13-31. On the typology of warrior women in medieval history, see Megan McLaughlin, "The Woman Warrior: Gender, Warfare and Society in Medieval Europe," *Women's Studies* 17 (1990): 193-209. On Renaissance epic, see Margaret Tomalin, "Bradamante and Marfisa: An Analysis of the 'Guerriere' of the *Orlando Furioso*," *MLR* 71 (1976): 540-52; Maggie Günsberg, "'Donna Liberata'? The Portrayal of Women in the Italian Renaissance Epic," *The Italianist* 7 (1987): 7-35; John C. McLucas, "Amazon, Sorceress, and Queen: Women and War in the Aristocratic Literature of Sixteenth-Century Italy," *The Italianist* 8 (1988): 33-55; and Deanna Shemek, *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). In Italian intellectual culture more broadly, see Frédérique Verrier, *Le Miroir des Amazones: Amazones, viragos et guerrières dans la littérature italienne des XVe et XVIe siècles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003) and Eleonora Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the Orlando furioso* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

Renaissance blockbusters of Boiardo and Ariosto,⁴ I contend that Galiziella looks quite different, which is to say quite familiar, when viewed instead as part of an unruly and even queer development of the *Aspremont*'s tale of inter-knight eroticism. A consequence of this reading is the claim that the female bodies of Italian chivalric literature's warrior women partially obscure and thereby sustain a tradition of erotically-tinged mutual admiration between male knights.⁵

Our first trace of the long, expansive, and formally/linguistically varied *Aspremont* tradition is an Old French *chanson de geste* in rhymed decasyllables, probably composed in the Norman Kingdom of Sicily at the close of the twelfth century.⁶ This *Chanson d'Aspremont* narrates Charlemagne's descent into Italy to defend his vast empire against an invasion by the pagan emir Agolant, who has set up camp in the conquered Christian city of Reggio Calabria.⁷ Several Franco-Italian versions attest to the poem's appeal to northern Italian audiences, most adding a new prologue that narrates Agolant's preparations for his attack.⁸ Two Tuscan versions—a fourteenth-century anonymous *Cantari d'Aspramonte* in *ottava rima* (Magl. VII 682 in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze)⁹ and Florentine author Andrea da Barberino's early fifteenth-century prose *Aspramonte*¹⁰—substantially expand on the Franco-Italian prologues,

⁴ Pio Rajna, *Le Fonti dell'Orlando furioso* (Florence: Sansoni, 1876), 44-45.

⁵ See Christiane Marchello-Nizia on courtly love's latent homoeroticism, "Amour courtois, société masculine et figures de pouvoirs," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 36, no. 6 (1981): 969-82; and William Burgwinkle on the homoeroticism of Turnus's bond with Camille in the *Roman d'Enéas*, "Knighting the Classical Hero: Homo/Hetero Affectivity in *Eneas*," *Exemplaria* 5, no.1 (1993): 33-35.

⁶ The poem may have been performed for the armies of Richard I of England and Philip Augustus of France, who spent the winter of 1190-1191 together at Messina en route to the Third Crusade. Roelof Van Waard, *Études sur l'origine et la formation de la Chanson d'Aspremont* (Groningen: J.-B. Wolters, 1937), 231-48; Wolfgang van Emden, "La Chanson d'Aspremont' and the Third Crusade," *Reading Medieval Studies* 18 (1992): 57-58.

⁷ I will make use principally of Louis Brandin's edition of the thirteenth-century Wollaton Hall MS, Nottingham University Library (Mi LM6): *La Chanson d'Aspremont: Chanson de geste du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Louis Brandin, 2nd ed. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1923), with some reference to François Suard's recent edition of BNF Fr. 25529, *Aspremont: Chanson de geste du XIIIe siècle*, ed. François Suard (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008).

⁸ Marco Boni has edited the prologue of the thirteenth-century *Aspremont* in the Musée Condé de Chantilly (col n. 470, anc. 703) in "Il 'prologo' inedito dello *Aspremont* dei manoscritti di Chantilly," *Convivium* 30 (1962): 588-602. Two fourteenth-century Franco-Italian *Aspremonts* are conserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana di Venezia: André de Mandach transcribes the prologue to the VI version (Cod. Marc. fr. VI) in *La Chanson d'Aspremont*, Vol. 3 of *Naissance et développement de la chanson de geste en Europe* (Geneva: Droz, 1975). On the Franco-Italian tradition of *Aspremont* more generally, see also Günter Holtus, "L'état actuel des recherches sur le franco-italien: corpus de textes et descriptions linguistique," in *La Chanson de Geste: Écriture, Intertextualités, Traductions*, ed. François Suard (Nanterre: Centres des Sciences de la Littérature, Université de Paris X, 1994), 150; Marco Boni, "L'*Aspramonte* quattrocentesco in ottave," in *Studi in onore di Carlo Pellegrini* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1963), 43-59; and Lorenzo Renzi, "Il francese come lingua letteraria e il franco-lombardo. L'epica carolingia nel veneto," in *Storia della cultura veneta* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1976), 1:568-69.

⁹ Quotations from Fassò's edition, with *cantare* and *ottava* numbers in Roman and Arabic numerals, respectively. *Cantari d'Aspramonte inediti* [Magl. VII 682], ed. Andrea Fassò (Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1981). A second version in *ottave* exists in an early printed edition described by Boni in "L'*Aspramonte* quattrocentesco." On the dominance of *ottava rima* as the poetic form of vernacular epic in Italy, see Jane E. Everson, "Materia di Roma e ottava rima nel Trecento," in *Firenze alla vigilia del Rinascimento*, ed. Maria Bendinelli Predelli (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2006), and Jane Everson, *The Italian Romance Epic in the Age of Humanism: The Matter of Italy and the World of Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 113-26.

¹⁰ Quotations from Cavalli's edition, with book and chapter numbers in upper- and lower-case Roman numerals. Andrea da Barberino, *L'Aspramonte*, ed. Luigi Cavalli (Napoli: F. Rossi, 1972). A second prose version exists in a fourteenth-century MS (British Museum Add. 10808) described by Marco Boni, "L'*Aspramonte* trecentesco in prosa del Ms. Add. 10808 del British Museum," *Studi mediolatini e volgari* 1 (1953): 7-50; and by Anna Valeria Borsari, "La leggenda d'Aspramonte in Italia e l'*Aspramonte* in prosa del ms. Add. 10808 del British Museum," in *Critica testuale ed esegesi del testo. Studi in onore di Marco Boni offerti dagli amici e collaboratori dell'Istituto di filologia*

narrating Agolant's invasion, the Christian ducal family's defense of its city, and the fall of Reggio. Galiziella first appears in these texts, where she bucks her father's authority, charges into the mêlée, and ends up "conquered" (amorously as much as militarily, and not against her will) by her adversary, the duke's strapping young son. It is via the couple's orphaned offspring that Galiziella and the *Aspremont* tradition push their way into the epic romance poems of Boiardo and Ariosto, where the converted Saracen woman is revealed to have been the mother of the paladin Ruggiero (future spouse of the female warrior Bradamante and therefore forebear of the Este dynasty) and his twin sister Marfisa (a warrior woman in her own right).

Throughout this essay, I avoid the normal language of revision, *ré-écriture*, or *imitatio*, which privileges later authors over their sources or inspirations. Rather than considering literary history (especially the relationship between medieval and Renaissance works) backward, genealogically, in a quest for sources,¹¹ I instead attempt to track the current of knight-on-knight eroticism as it travels within and especially across characters, political allegiances, religions, genders, narratives, and texts.¹² My hope is that this approach will not only bring to light aspects of the *Aspremont* tradition likely to pass under the radar of traditional philological scrutiny, but will also yield new resources for thinking more generally about questions of transmission, dissemination, and influence in literary history. A first step might involve something as simple as a more active and intransitive use of the term adaptation: while we are accustomed to thinking about, say, Andrea da Barberino adapting the *Aspremont* material to his audience's tastes, I want to find out what it would mean to say that the *Aspremont* tradition *adapts itself* to fifteenth-century Florentine tastes via Andrea da Barberino.

Implicit in this different sense of literary adaptation is a change in the attribution of agency, since we start to be able to ask question about how texts themselves endure from earlier into later periods; adjusting linguistically, formally, and thematically to new political, cultural, and geographic contexts; working their way into and out of other texts; and getting their stories told.¹³ Figures like Galiziella, I contend, help us to glimpse in this textual agency a scrappy,

romanza dell'Università di Bologna, Vol. 1, ed. Andrea Fassò et al. (Bologna: Pàtron, 1984). In the French tradition, late medieval continuations of the *chansons de geste* generally culminated in a *mise en prose* (see Suard, "Aspremont" and Maria Colombo Timelli, Barbara Ferrari, and Anne Schoysman, eds., *Mettre en prose au XIVe-XVIe siècles* [Turnhout: Brepols, 2010]).

¹¹ Scholars of the *chanson de geste* have more often taken the opposite approach, primarily to regret the decadence of the vernacular epic tradition. On some of the methodological concerns of studying "late" epic and its continuations, see Jane E. Everson, "Les Prolongements romanesques de la matière épique," *Olifant* 25, no.1-2 (2006): 41-68, and François Suard, "L'Épopée française tardive (XIVe-Xve s.)" in *Études de philologie romane et d'histoire littéraire offertes à Jules Horrent*, eds. Jean Marie d'Heur and Nicoletta Cherubini (Liège: Comité d'Honneur, 1980). In an essay on Boccaccio's *Teseida*, Carla Freccero proposes a study of "gender ideologies, not in a developmental sense, but in the sense of successive ideological formulations and reformulations that assist in the interpretation of [...]later works": "From Amazon to Courtly Lady: Generic Hybridization in Boccaccio's *Teseida*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 32, no. 2 (1995): 226. Stoppino's recent *Genealogies of Fiction* is exemplary in its treatment of canonical texts like *Orlando furioso* as the culmination of multiple strands of narrative production that are classical and vernacular, elite and popular.

¹² See Daniel Selden on "text networks" as "autopoietic bodies of related compositions whose origins largely escape us." "Text Networks," *Ancient Narrative* 8 (2010): 7.

¹³ Peggy McCracken reads together the twelfth-century Alexander romance and Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality to produce this imagining of textual agency: "To describe texts as self-reproducing is to shift focus away from the author, translator, or compiler as the agent of dissemination and to consider the text as having an agency of its own. That agency would be located in the text's invitation, through thematic representation, to its own reproduction through translation and rewriting." "The Floral and the Human," in *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Washington, D.C.: Oliphant Books, 2012), 84.

unauthor[iz]ed, unpredictable dynamism essential to medieval literary culture. As she absorbs, reconfigures, and redeploys the inter-knight eroticism of the *Chanson d'Aspremont*, refracting that eroticism through models of the amorous knight both ancient and contemporary, she becomes a kind of auto-allegorization of the medieval text, a synecdochic figuration of narrative self-propagation.

I.

The *Chanson d'Aspremont* is a queer text on several counts. Long shunned as a “Cendrillon littéraire”¹⁴ by epic scholars who found it insufficiently unified, generically compromised, or in any case not particularly good, the poem attests to the epic genre’s stubborn failure to stay true to its imagined “origins” as an austere, monological poetry of war.¹⁵ In the sloppy sweep of the poem’s eleven thousand lines, themes of youth and rebellion are loosely interwoven with marvelous elements, humor, and a startling anti-clericalism. At bottom, however, the *Chanson d'Aspremont* remains a recognizable product of crusade ideology. Like other poems of the *geste du roi*, it rallies listeners to the cause of defending Christianity and Christendom against marauding Saracen invaders, while also indulging in one of crusading culture’s most cherished fantasies: the erotic seduction of a religious other who joins the Christian faith through conversion.

Scholars have long recognized an erotic undercurrent to the narratives of Christian-Muslim conflict so common in the epic literature of the Middle Ages. In the Muslim princess narratives first described by F. M. Warren, for example, a Saracen woman falls hard for a Christian warrior, adopts his religion, and joins his culture through marriage. Recent studies of this topos have emphasized gender difference as a necessary precondition for the fantasy of the assimilable other, since the converting Saracen’s femininity signals both her sexual availability and her capacity for a radical change in identity.¹⁶ But I would suggest that the texts sometimes feature religious difference itself as a turn-on, and one that is indifferent to gender. In the opening scene of the twelfth-century *Prise d'Orange*, a Christian knight who has escaped captivity in the city of Orange gives this stimulating account of the Saracen queen Orable: “Bel a

¹⁴ André de Mandach, *La Chanson d'Aspremont*, Vol. 3 of *Naissance et développement de la chanson de geste en Europe, III* (Geneva: Droz, 1975), 1.

¹⁵ On the overemphasis on the *Chanson de Roland* in definitions of the *chanson de geste*, see Sarah Kay, *The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 25-26. François Suard has recently advanced a vision of the Old French epic as mixed and polyvalent from the beginning; see “Impure, en son début même, la chanson de geste,” in *L'Épique médiévale et le mélange des genres*, ed. Caroline Cazanave (Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2005), 46.

¹⁶ See Sharon Kinoshita, “The Politics of Courtly Love: *La Prise d'Orange* and the Conversion of the Saracen Queen,” *Romanic Review* 86, no. 2 (1995): 265-87; and the second chapter of Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 46-73; Lynn Tarte Ramey, “Role Models? Saracen Women in Medieval French Epic,” *Romance Notes* 41, no. 2 (2001): 131-41; Lynne Dahmen, “Orientalism and Reading La Sarrasine in the *Chansons de Geste*,” *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 48 (2000): 155-65; Hans-Erich Keller, “La belle Sarrasine dans *Fierabras* et ses dérivés,” in *Charlemagne in the North: Proceedings of the Twelfth International Conference of the Société Rencesvals, Edinburgh, 5-11 August 1991*, eds. Philip Bennett, Anne Elizabeth Cobby, and Graham A. Runnalls (Edinburgh: Société Rencesvals British Branch, 1993), 299-307; and Régine Colliot, “L'Étrange et les belles étrangères dans le *Siège de Barbastre*,” in *De l'étranger à l'étrange, ou la conjointure de la merveille. Sénéfiance 25* (Aix-en-Provence: CUERMA, Université de Provence, 1988), 89-107.

le cors, eschevie est et gente, / Blanche la char comme la flor en l'ente. / Dex! mar i fu ses cors et sa jovente / Quant Dex ne croit, le pere omnipotente!" (204-7; She has a beautiful body, slender and noble, with skin as white as a fruit-tree blossom. God! Her body and youth are worth nothing, since she doesn't believe in God the all-powerful father).¹⁷ The surface logic of the knight's exclamation is that the queen's cultural and religious identity is a deal-breaker; but the verbal spasm of pleasure (*Dex!*) that joins the titillating description of her physical beauty to this evocation of her religious otherness betrays more than a hint of irony. Far from stifling a desire stoked by the description of fair skin and a svelte figure, this disclosure of the queen's difference rather intensifies her allure.¹⁸ Like her fabulous city's fortifications, the queen's religion is a tempting obstacle for the enterprising Christian hero to overcome, a tantalizing challenge rather than a hard ideological limit.¹⁹

Recognizing religious difference as constituting an axis of desire allows us to rethink familiar scenarios in which epic Christians admire an enemy knight so ardently that they are led to fantasize his conversion. Sharon Kinoshita has demonstrated that the apparently stark contrast between faithful Christians and infidel Muslims in the *Chanson de Roland* is often undercut by a shared language, political organization, and customs: "[E]ach a mirror image of the other, the two sides arguably differ in religion *and nothing more*."²⁰ Kinoshita focuses particularly on the *Roland's* emir of Balaguez, of whom the narrator sings: "De vasselage est il ben alosez; / Fust chrestiens, asez ouïst barnét" (898-99; He is much honored for his vassalage; he would be a fine baron, were he only Christian).²¹ Like the *Prise's* appraisal of Orable, this description points to religious difference as a kind of erogenous zone, especially when followed up with the *Roland* narrator's comment that the emir of Balaguez is not only doughty, but also awfully good-looking: "Cors ad mult gent e le vis fier e cler. / Puis quë il est sur sun cheval muntët, / Mult se fait fiers de ses armes porter" (859-97; He has a noble body and a proud, fair face. When he is mounted on his horse, he bears his arms proudly).

Indeed, we can generalize that enemy knights in the *chanson de geste* hold each other in (literally) high regard, an insight that is implicit if unintended in Kinoshita's notion that Christians and Saracens are mirror images of each other. Paul Bancourt describes numerous "Sarrasins qu'on remarque pour leur beauté" ([male] Saracens noted for their beauty)²² in the *chansons de geste* of the *geste du roi*. These Saracen warriors are praised not only for their nobility and their courtliness, but also for their athleticism, musculature, trim waists, great legs,

¹⁷ Citations by line number from *La Prise d'Orange: Chanson de geste (fin XIIe-début XIIIe siècle)*, ed. Claude Régner (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010). Translations throughout are my own.

¹⁸ The performative dimension of epic poetry moreover suggests that the audience would have been stimulated along with the characters. As one speaker entices another with verbal descriptions of physical beauty, the *jongleur* simultaneously offers that description for the enjoyment of listeners. In turn, epic characters model the audience's reaction, inviting auditors to swoon along to these evocations of the seductive enemy's charms. On epic characters as models for audience reaction, see Margaret Jewett Burland, *Strange Words: Retelling and Reception in the Medieval Roland Textual Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

¹⁹ Kinoshita's reading of the *Prise* stresses the overlap between Orable and Orange, seduction and conquest. Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries*, 46-50.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-26, emphasis in original. Similarly, Michelle R. Warren studies the circulation of objects in the *Roland* in order to uncover "Frankish desires at odds with the poem's more strident moral claims." See *Creole Medievalism: Colonial France and Joseph Bédier's Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 174.

²¹ Citations from the *Chanson de Roland* by line number from Cesare Segre's edition (Geneva: Droz, 2003). Kinoshita discusses this passage in *Medieval Boundaries*, 26-27, citing from a different edition.

²² Paul Bancourt, *Les Musulmans dans les chansons de geste du Cycle du roi* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1982), 1:58.

nice hair, and regular features.²³ Love is a battlefield, and perhaps vice-versa. In the medieval epic, the face-off across lines of political and religious allegiance seems to invite a contemplation of the other that is tinged with erotic interest.

These observations help in unpacking the *Chanson d'Aspremont's* initial court scene, which is subtly suffused with the desire of knights. As the poem begins, the emperor Charlemagne presides over a sumptuous holiday court, reveling in the cohesion and peacefulness of his realm. The young warriors who attend him, however, hunger for action.²⁴ Duke Naimés ventriloquizes the fidgety knights' concerns, warning the emperor: "Trop vos sont priés Sarrasin herbergiés. / Molt lor en poise que vos tant delaiés" (176-77; Saracens are camped all too close to us, and it weighs on [the knights] very much that you wait so long). And just as young knights' wishes for *adventure* tend to come promptly true in the courtly romances of Chrétien de Troyes, this desire for a Saracen encounter results in the appearance of the hoped-for adversary in the *Aspremont*. Appearance is the operative term: when Balant, an emissary sent by Agolant with a hostile message for Charlemagne, rides into court and dismounts before the emperor's dais, his superlatively good looks manage to dazzle rather than menace:

Blont ot le poil menuëment trechié;
Sor ses espales l'ot detriers soi colcié;
Desci as hances li erent arengié;
Gros iols et vairs, le vis riänt et lié,
Ne l'ot pucele plus blanc ne delié,
Mais que del caut del harle l'ot cangié.
Gros contre cuer et le vis bien tallié;
Par les costés fu drois et alignié,
Et droite jambe, sot bien torné le pié;
Molt li avint l'esperon qu'ot calcié. (203-13)

(He had finely-plaited blond hair, spilling over his shoulders and down his back, reaching all the way to his hips. He had large blue eyes, a laughing, happy face, whiter and more delicate than a girl's, except that the heat had tanned it. He was thick-chested, with a finely-carved face. His body was svelte and elegant, his leg straight and his foot well-turned, and the spurs he had donned really flattered him.

Balant combines in his impressive appearance all that a Christian looks for in a Saracen, as the above comparison of the *Prise* and the *Roland* allows us to register. Like the *Roland's* pagan emir, he sports an imposing warrior's physique, able to show off his arms to maximum advantage, while at the same time featuring the fair coloring, bright expression, and languid grace typical of the Saracen princess.²⁵

²³ Bancourt attributes an increase in descriptions of the Saracen woman's beauty to the influence of the romance genre, rather than drawing the obvious parallel between descriptions of male and female Saracen beauty. *Les Musulmans*, 2:575-79.

²⁴ Compare to the opening of the *Prise*, where Guillaume and his men chafe at springtime pleasures and hanker after a new conquest.

²⁵ Bancourt remarks that epic Saracens tend to resemble their Christian counterparts in coloring, shape of features, etc., their adherence to conventional standards of aristocratic beauty signaling a class identity that trumps religious

The sheer spectacle of the knight's beauty scrambles not only the standard codes of gender difference, but also the coordinates of the Christian-Muslim conflict he has come to provoke, his powerful-yet-pretty body inviting interest and intimacy where his words aim for repulsion and hostility.²⁶ At the end of one of his feisty harangues, the assembled Christians can only express their admiration: “Bien parole Balant / Et bien manache et de bouce et de gant” (326-27; Balant speaks well, and threatens well with his mouth and glove). No one is as affected by the foreign knight's charms as Duke Naimes, who responds to the knight's intention to depart with a stubborn insistence that he remain at court and accept the duke's lavish hospitality. Taking the stranger by the hand—“le vait au puig cobrer” (384; he covered his fist/wrist with his own)—Naimes insists that he stay for dinner. The duke then plies his guest with such a quantity of rich gifts that Balant suspects funny business. “Fols cresttiens,” he protests, “tu me viols encanter” (393; Christian fool, you want to enchant me!).²⁷

Whatever his intentions might be, Naimes does succeed in working his magic on Balant, bringing him over to the other side of the religious divide. The Saracen's conversion clearly entails an ideological payoff: an enemy of the faith is persuaded by the rightness of Christian doctrine. But it would be a mistake to overlook the extent to which this personal transformation is both precipitated by and experienced as an expression of Balant's intimate relationship with Duke Naimes. When night falls on Charlemagne's court, the duke makes sure that the captivating stranger beds down with him, and that he is denied no pleasure. While earlier Naimes had helped the court's young knights express their concern that the Saracens were “Trop [...] priés [...] herbergiés” (176), here it seems that the Saracen cannot be *herbergié* close enough: “Et li dus Namles l'a o soi herbergié. / N'a en la vile noviel fruit ne daintié / Dont il ne l'ait cele nuit efforcié. / En une canbre se sunt andoi colcié” (483-86; Duke Naimes lodged [Balant] with him. And there was no new fruit or delicacy in the whole city with which he did not ply him. They went to bed together in the same room).

Naimes' aggressive hospitality soon opens up the possibility for intimacy and exchange between the enemy knights. Once they are bedded down in Naimes' chamber, conflicting religious allegiances entangle the two men in an all-night, intimate struggle—“Tolte nuit ont estrivé et tencié” (487; They argued and debated all night long)—with each probingly asking the other “Que creié?” (488; What do you believe?). By morning, Balant's heart is changed. This monumental shift in identity is not a public matter, but rather an intimate little secret that he and his friend will keep together from here forward. Once he has returned to Agolant to communicate Charlemagne's reply, Balant promises cryptically, “Tost en ferai cho qu'en ai enpensé” (540; I will then do the thing that I have thought of). Reunited with Naimes later in the poem, Balant assures him that their encounter at the Christian court has created between them a special bond

and cultural difference (*Les Musulmans*, 1: 57-58; 2: 575-79). De Weever and Cazanave object that the “whitening” of Saracens violently erases a racial difference that medieval Christians are sure to have perceived. However, many “Saracens” of the culturally and genetically hybrid Mediterranean world were indeed blond and blue-eyed. See Jacqueline de Weever, *Sheba's Daughters: Whitening and Demonizing the Saracen Woman in Medieval French Epic* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), and Caroline Cazanave, “Sarrasins terrifiants, Sarrasines attrayantes: double effet de la vision de l'autre dans les chansons de geste,” in *Éxotisme*, eds. Alain Buisine and Norbert Dodille (Paris: Didier-Érudition, 1988), 61-71.

²⁶ The admixture of femininity and masculinity in Balant's seductive allure cannot be reduced to the trope of the feminized enemy: the knight's femininity is not a mark of his domination and does not appear to compete with or undermine his masculinity.

²⁷ BNF MS 25529, edited by Suard, gives a variant that downplays the element of seduction: “Fauz Crestiens, tu me vialuz vergonder” (BNF 377; False Christian, you want to shame me).

that will never be broken. “Vos me fesist honor en vo regné,” he reminds the duke tenderly, “Gel ferai vos a trestolt mon aé; / U que jo soie, sui jo vostre privé” (2608-10; You honored me in your kingdom, as I will honor you for all of my life. Wherever I am, I am your friend).

2.

Although Balant’s seduction into the Christian religion is one of the *Aspremont’s* more frequently studied scenes, critical commentary remains primly limited to the episode’s intellectual and spiritual dimensions.²⁸ This is perhaps due to a scholarly reluctance to read homoeroticism into texts where same-sex acts are not openly acknowledged.²⁹ The two men’s tender vows of companionship certainly would seem to fit the bill of C. Stephen Jaeger’s “Ennobling love,” a passionate and honorable attachment between men that at the same time “had to manage sexuality, hold it in its place by severe discipline, or—the most ascetic position—banish it altogether, demonize it, lay heavy taboos on it.”³⁰ Focusing more narrowly on the *chansons de geste*, Marianne J. Ailes argues that the language of “close, even passionate male friendship” signals a masculine culture that is merely and innocently *homosocial*.³¹ However right these scholars may be to alert us to important historical differences in the experience and conceptualization of love, sex, and desire, such efforts to maintain a neat distinction between the homosocial and the homoerotic—or even between the social/political/spiritual and the sexual/carnal—can nevertheless serve as an alibi for the disavowal of non-heterosexual eroticism in texts from the past.³² It is after all the major insight of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men* that homosocial dynamics, hardly devoid of erotic potential, function precisely by re-routing eroticism, permitting men to enjoy the intensity of their relations while dodging stigma.³³ The homosocial and the homoerotic are not antithetical concepts but, as it were, bedfellows.

²⁸ See Bancourt, “Le visage de l’Autre: étude sur le sens de la ‘Chanson d’Aspremont,’” in *De l’étranger à l’étrange*, 25:47-48; Huguette Legros, “Entre Chrétiens et Sarrasins, des amitiés paradoxales: liberté de l’imaginaire ou rêve d’un monde réconcilié,” in *Aspects de l’épopée romane*, eds. Hans Van Dijk and Wilhelm Noomen (Groningen: Forsten, 1995), 270-71.

²⁹ Anna Klosowska, *Queer Love in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), argues that “it [is] not the volume, but our hearing range, that account[s] for near-silence on queer-related topics” (3) and suggests that scholars’ “conclusions are heavily influenced by [their own] personal attitudes toward sexuality” (9).

³⁰ Jaeger, C. Stephen, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 7.

³¹ Marianne J. Ailes, “The Medieval Male Couple and the Language of Homosociality,” in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (New York: Longman, 1999), 214.

³² We are of course not speaking of homosexuality as a category of identity, which scholars such as David M. Halperin have shown depends on the emergence of sexuality in modernity for its condition of possibility (“Sex Before Sexuality: Pederasty, Politics and Power in Classical Athens,” in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George J. Chauncey (New York: NAL Books, 1990), 41). On Jaeger’s *Ennobling Love* and the mysterious sexual tastes of Richard the Lionheart, see William Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050-1230* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 74.

³³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, “To draw the ‘homosocial’ back into the orbit of ‘desire,’ of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted.” *Between Men: English Literature and*

In Sedgwick's analysis, homosocial desire often triangulates two men around a single woman, the men's rivalry for the woman's affections actually constituting the more intense affective bond. The supplement of the woman's body neither absorbs nor cancels the erotic relation between men: on the contrary, it clarifies the erotic content of emotions that bring men together, from rivalry and envy to chumminess and solidarity. In the *Chanson d'Aspremont*, the introduction of a Saracen woman—Agolant's queen—provides just such a third term, expanding and making visible the circuit of desire first established in Naimés' and Balant's initial encounter.³⁴ The three come together in Agolant's camp at Reggio, where Naimés has been sent to deliver Charlemagne's response to the emir's threats. Though he arrives in disguise, Naimés is quickly recognized by his Saracen friend, who relishes the opportunity to reciprocate the lavish hospitality he has enjoyed at the Christian court. Having warmly welcomed the duke with a luxurious coat, fine food, and other costly gifts, Balant leads the way to his own tent, where he repeats his vows of devotion and reiterates his fervent desire to convert. Once this parallelism with Balant's earlier reception at Charles's court is firmly established, the narrative introduces the queen, who, Balant relays to Naimés, “vos a désiré” (2621; has desired you).

That the queen gets in on the action between Naimés and Balant rather than displacing it is evident, as in the earlier scene I have considered, in the dynamics of the gaze: male beauty is an important preoccupation in the *Aspremont*, and its impact on women is not so very different from its impact on men. We have noted the spectacular impression made by Balant's arrival at Charles's court, where the Christian knights marvel at both his brawny body and his fine, feminine features. Naimés arrives at the Saracen camp in disguise and therefore does not draw this sort of attention to himself. But when Balant dresses the duke for dinner in a rich cloak, the narrator allows a peek in on him as he is changing, noting that “Namles fu fors et bials et bien menbru” (2456; Naimés was strong and good-looking and well-membered). When the men visit the queen's tent, she takes—and through the narrator's enunciation, is able to share with the audience—a closer look:

Li dus ert bials et de cors bien mollé,
 Cler le viaire et bien afenestré.
 Cho li avint c'un poi ert camosé
 De son auberc que il avoit porté.
 Voit le la dame, si l'a lués enamé;
 De la bialté qu'en lui ot esgardé
 Ot si son cuer espris et alumé. (2627-33)

(The duke was handsome, with a well-formed body and a fair, open face. It so happens that he was a bit banged-up by the mail-shirt he had worn. The lady looked at him, and fell in love with him on the spot; her heart lit up and caught fire due to the beauty that she saw in him.)

Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 2. Jaeger writes that homosociality “sets sexuality to one side, eliminates its automatic inclusion, while holding it in readiness” (*Ennobling Love*, 15).

³⁴ The queen is already linked to Balant by a triangulated adulterous desire, since her current lover is the knight's son Gorhan (2223-24, 2323-24).

The queen's reaction to the duke's beauty goes beyond the sly eroticism of the men's initial meeting, becoming both avowedly amorous and frankly sexual. In the *Aspremont* manuscript recently edited by Suard—which generally speaking is less erotically charged than the Wollaton Hall MS edited by Brandin—the queen greets Naimes with a bold gesture: “Par la main destre l’a maintenant coubré, / A l’autre main au nou de son baudré” (BNF 2158-59; She now takes him by the right hand, resting the other on his belt buckle).

The lusty queen's infatuation with Naimes and the knowing way in which she intertwines the erotic and the political seem on the one hand to indicate a burlesque parody of the Saracen princess topos. For instance, when the queen whispers under her breath, “Nos eüssciés moi et lui ajosté / En un bel lit molt bien egordiné, / Bien en valroit li deduis un regné” (2636-38; Were we, he and I, brought together in a well-draped bed, the pleasure would be worth a kingdom), we cannot but wonder which kingdom she means—perhaps her husband's? Or the Christian kingdom that her husband has come to conquer? In either case, like Orable before her, she would risk giving away the farm for love of an enemy knockout. But the evident overlaps between her experience with the duke and Balant's add a further layer of signification—and a further thematic function—to the expression of her desire. For starters, the kingdom she would willingly risk (whichever it is), will by the *Aspremont's* conclusion be threatened due to Balant's destabilizing change in loyalties—an effect of his having enjoyed the very thing that the queen is now fantasizing, a night in bed with Naimes.

What is more, just as Balant emerges from his night in the duke's chamber with a pledge to keep the secret and the promise of his desired Christian conversion—this dimension of secrecy marks an important difference from Jaeger's model of ennobling love, which is public rather than private (6)—the Saracen queen looks forward to the secret thrill she will enjoy when, in the future, she privately thinks of Naimes. Her anticipated *amor de lonh* moreover spatializes and eroticizes religious difference in ways that are familiar to us from the two knights' story. “Quant vos serés la u vos fustes né,” she whispers to the duke, “Vanterai m'ent coiemment a celé / Que j'ai un dru en la crestienté / Et, se mes cors estoit del vostre amé, / Tolte ma vie m'en tenroie en cierté” (2669-73; When you are back in your homeland, I will secretly boast that I have a lover in Christendom, and if I were loved by you, I would be happy all my life).

At the camp scene's conclusion, an exchange of gifts—a conventional enough way to signify bonds of love and desire in medieval narrative—further concretizes the triangulated erotic dynamic between Naimes, Balant, and the queen.³⁵ As Naimes courteously bids farewell to the queen, the smitten lady bestows upon him a golden ring as a sign of her friendship, revealing that its magical power will protect him against a variety of threats. Leaving the camp, the duke in turn proffers a religiously symbolic gift to his old friend Balant: a cross that will protect the Saracen from death. Though the cross clearly indicates Balant's coming conversion and though its magical powers amount to little more than salvation's promise of everlasting life, it is also unmistakably the *contre-don* to the queen's enchanted ring. The exchange of gifts thus mimics the exchange of looks as a relay of desire between three poles: just as the queen's visual scrutiny of Naimes' well-membered body returns the gaze fixed so intently on Balant as he arrives at Charlemagne's court, the virtually reciprocal bestowal of gifts allows Christian and Saracen friends to invest in each other's safety in anticipation of a hoped-for future. Furthermore, the gifts exchanged demonstrate the centrality of religious experience to this dynamic of desire, since what makes the gifts identical is the fact that each object is invested with a power foreign

³⁵ Gifts also signify political bonds and hierarchy. See Andrew Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy: Gifts, Violence, Performance, and the Sacred* (Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 2007).

to its recipient (the pagan magic of the queen's ring, the salvation-in-Christ signified by the cross). That these objects are offered *across* lines of religious difference marks that difference as a zone of mutual attraction and investment and differentiates it from gender difference, which does not seem to function in this way.

As we have seen, the eroticism generated between Naimés and Balant can be distributed, reconfigured, and shared. It is not a limited resource—the two knights' erotic energy can spread to the queen, who in turn can generate a desire that feeds back into the relationship between the two men. As we turn to *Aspremont's* Italian versions, we see this eroticism repeat and reinvest the adapted narrative, but also inflect and motivate an entirely new narrative scenario. As noted above, "Italian" versions of *Aspremont* expand on the Old French narrative by filling in the back-story, recounting Agolant's invasion of the Italian peninsula along with the fierce but futile defense staged by the duke of Reggio's family. Galiziella—the Tuscan texts' major original contribution to the *Aspremont* tradition—appears in these prequel episodes; it is my contention that Galiziella is not merely an *addition* to the thematic outlined above, but an outgrowth of it. In other words, the erotically-inflected mutual regard between knights is *the stuff that Galiziella is made of*.

3.

Galiziella is described in the *Aspremont* texts as the cross-dressing, illegitimate issue of a Saracen emir's extramarital fling with an Amazon queen, and thus the product of the medieval epic imaginary's kinky love affair with the menacing feminine of classical antiquity.³⁶ This is not to say, however, that the ambivalently-gendered princess is abjected or demonized: as Eleonora Stoppino has recently argued, "Through her status *as a warrior*, Galiziella seems to be able to achieve a new form of legitimacy for herself, entailing a unique kind of feminization".³⁷ This unique feminization derives from the fact that Galiziella can only be matched with a man who can best her on the battlefield; in other words, she is at her most feminine only when confronted with a man who is more of a man than she is.³⁸ Stoppino furthermore observes that Galiziella must "generate heirs with the strongest warrior she can find" in order to satisfy the exigencies of dynastic narrative, the strongest warrior being by definition he who is stronger than she.³⁹ In Stoppino's analysis, however, this crowding of the masculine pole of the gender binary—for is Galiziella's "unique feminization" not, in some sense, a variant masculinity?—does not ultimately trouble the gender system overall. Galiziella "poses no threat to the 'real' man," because "she is [...] the instrument that reveals who the real men are".⁴⁰ It would seem that real men are the only men who can prevail in a battle against less real men (women?), and the dynastic patriarch is he who not only triumphs in battlefield scuffles, but also manages to get another knight pregnant.

³⁶ Boccaccio's "istoria antica" (I.2)—the *Teseida delle nozze d'Emilia*—is a predecessor in this regard, as are other minor vernacular texts discussed by Stoppino (*Genealogies of Fiction*, 58-87)

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 36, emphasis added.

³⁸ Clearly inspired by ancient tales of Atalanta, the trope will reappear in several Renaissance narratives featuring female knights, including the *Orlando furioso* XLIV.70.

³⁹ Stoppino, *Genealogies of Fiction*, 41.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

Stoppino's claim that Galiziella's "unique feminization" poses no threat to dominant masculinity is perhaps a symptom of the extent to which Galiziella has tended to find herself drawn into critical narratives of gender normativity, genealogical legitimacy, and lineal inheritance. At stake here is an interpretive problem: does the normative always eclipse the non-normative, or bring the non-normative into its service? Or might a character like Galiziella open up new and strange possibilities, forging unexpected and troubling relationships among characters, narratives, and texts? Critical appraisals of Galiziella—though somewhat few and far between—have tended to follow the former approach, as in Juliann Vitullo's insistence that Galiziella's gender-transgressive warrior prowess must be "contained by the naturalized social dichotomy of masculinity/femininity," her warrior status necessarily yielding to the inevitability of marriage and motherhood.⁴¹ In what follows, I try to see what the latter approach might yield, offering a reading of Galiziella in the Tuscan *Aspramonte* texts that asserts neither her novelty nor her normativity, but rather reads her as a continuation and adaptation of that which is already productively queer in the Old French *Aspremont* tradition, including the theme of erotic bonds between knights. I furthermore suggest that Galiziella in a sense embodies narrative and textual proliferation: if she puts down her arms to become a wife and mother, as she does, it is indeed because the medieval literary tradition impregnates her with narrative possibilities.

First of all, Galiziella's "marriage by duel," in which gender and desire criss-cross in such queerly unpredictable ways, can hardly be relied upon to produce gender normativity.⁴² In both the anonymous *Cantari d'Aspramonte* and Andrea da Barberino's *Aspramonte* in prose, the confrontation between Galiziella and the Christian hero Ricciari is motivated in the first place by the desire for a good fight between well-matched adversaries. In the *Cantari*, Galiziella is quite literally attracted to Ricciari by the "gran suono / come correa di quei torniamento / di Ricciari ch'era sì gagliardo e buono / che mmai non fu uomo di tanto valimento" (VI.5; the noise that circulated about this tournament, concerning Ricciari who was so gallant and good that never was there another man of such value). Swooping in to demand her father's permission to usurp other knights' position in the joust (including Balante, about whom more later), Galiziella characterizes herself as a butch *mal-mariée*, hitched against her will to a husband who "può di me meno. / Provato l'ò a lancia in tua presenza: / sai ch'i' steso l'abbatte' i-sul terreno" (VI.12; is worth less than I. I challenged him with a lance once in your presence, and you know that I knocked him to the ground). Ricciari's superlative valor suggests that he alone will be able to best Galiziella, coming out on top in a phallic economy in which the sureness of Galiziella's lance is somehow not an obstacle to her femininity, but rather its condition.

Indeed, gender is not the only, and perhaps not the most significant, axis of difference and desire in Galiziella's joust with Ricciari. In the *Cantari*, King Agolante tries to dissuade his daughter from riding out to the *mêlée* by warning that she may find herself seduced into a new religion: "Tutti Cristiani son gente lusinghiera," he warns, "di predicare ciascuno è un dottore. / Lusingata sarai alla premiera, / ond'io me n'arò il danno e 'l disinore" (VI.10; All Christians are seductive folk; each is a master at preaching. You'll be enticed right away, and I'll suffer the damage and the dishonor). The Saracen king, it seems, *connaît la chanson*, which is to say that he has heard enough *chansons de geste* to know that when Saracens and Christians meet, the

⁴¹ Ibid., 65-67. Deanna Shemek critiques a critical tendency in which, "in remarkably authoritarian fashion, closure emerges as the ultimate key to meaning." *Ladies Errant*, 79.

⁴² Stoppino analyzes a comparable scene from the *Historia di Bradiamonte sorella di Rinaldo*, in which "the question of feminine beauty and military strength appear[s] as the fulcrum of [...] desire." *Genealogies of Fiction*, 26.

former are apt to yield to the latter sexually, ideologically, and politically. If femininity makes Galiziella more vulnerable to this particular threat, the king does not say so. Instead, the representation of religious conversion as a kind of seduction, as seductive preaching, recalls and clarifies Balant's wary response to Naines' hospitality in the *Chanson d'Aspremont*: "tu me viols encanter" (393; you want to enchant me!).

In fact, Galiziella is in so many ways proximate to Balant—Balante in the *Aspramonte* texts—that it is worth considering her as a proxy, offshoot, continuation, or *dédoublement* of his character.⁴³ The Tuscan Balante has all the allure of the Old French version, if not more. In the *Cantari* he wows the Christian court with his pretty face and battle-hardened body: "largo avea il petto e grosse le spalle. / Il viso avea dilicato e bello / come quel d'una dama over pulzella; / la 'nforatura (avea) grande e snello, / il piè[de] ben fatto" (X.15-16; he had a wide chest and broad shoulders. He had a delicate and beautiful face, like that of a lady or a girl; solid, slim hips, and a well-made foot). Andrea's Balante is darker in appearance, featuring a "pelo morello, e così di carnagione alquanto bruno" (II.2; dark skin, with a quite brown complexion);⁴⁴ but the Christians are no less drawn to the swarthy newcomer, or eager to praise his good looks: "lodavano l'apparenza di Balante [...] per la sua bella apparenza fu detta la sua venuta prima al re Carlo" (II.2; they praised Balante's appearance [...] his arrival was announced immediately to King Charles, because of his beautiful appearance).⁴⁵ The *Cantari* omit Balante's night with duke Namò, though the Saracen nonetheless repays this elided hospitality when Namò visits Agolante's camp, inviting his "compagno" (XVIII.24; companion) into his tent, where "era sua usanza / di carezze non mostrare troppa mena" (XVIII.25; it was his habit not to show much care for *carezze*). The subtle polysemy of *carezze* perhaps comes the closest to declaring the two knights' relationship as openly erotic, indicating that Balante is here liberal with both "precious things" (as in expensive gifts) and "caresses."⁴⁶ For his part, Andrea sends the knights to bed together despite Balante's suspicion of Namò's "lusinghe" (II.viii; flatteries or seductive words). They climb into bed together—"insieme dormirono, e come furono nel letto cominciarono a ragionare della fede di Cristo e della fede di Maometto" (II.8, 10; they slept together, and as soon as they were in the bed began to speak of faith in Christ and faith in Mohammed)—and Balante falls in love: "m'avete, duca, fatto innamorare della cristiana fede" (II.11; you made me, duke, fall in love with the Christian faith).⁴⁷

⁴³ Though she must have been introduced in the missing *cantare* III, Galiziella first appears in the extant *Cantari* in an *ottava* that begins with Balante's words: the knight is in the process of accepting Agolante's invitation to take on Riccieri when Galiziella inserts herself between them and demands this right for herself (VI.5).

⁴⁴ Whereas in the *Cantari* he is "più bianco e bel che ffior di prato" (X.15; whiter and more beautiful than a wildflower).

⁴⁵ In fact the Christians are at first drawn in by the beauty of Balante's horse, an easily identified metonym for the knight himself: "El cavallo di Balante era magro per lo camminare e molto grande, e per la sua bellezza molti gentili uomini gli faceano cerco, e guatando molto lodavano l'aparenza del cavallo (II.ii; Balante's horse was large though scrawny from the long voyage, and because of its beauty many gentlemen circled around him and stared, praising the horse's appearance).

⁴⁶ In the queen's chamber, the triangulation of Balante's and Namò's desire is even more explicitly rendered: "si poson così tutti e tre a sedere, / l'un l'atro riguardando alla segreta / con vista amorosa e bel piacere" (XIX.22; all three sat down together, each one looking secretly at the other with a loving look and much pleasure). Note that this three-way dynamic is reduced to a binary—and masculinized—in the grammar of "l'un l'atro."

⁴⁷ On male-male *innamoramento* (in this case of *valore*) in the *Orlando furioso*, see Marc Schachter, "'Egli s'innamorò del suo valore': Leone, Bradamante and Ruggiero in the 1532 Orlando Furioso," *MLN* 115, no. 1 (2000): 64-79.

Though these scenes appear *after* Galiziella's story in the chronology of the narrative, they precede her in the chronology of literary history and, I argue, condition her reception through a dynamic and multivalent relay of signification. Just as Agolante resists his daughter's request to challenge Ricciari based on his seeming prior knowledge of the Christians' ability to seduce Saracens in the *chanson de geste*, the *Aspramonte* narratives' focus on Galiziella's appearance relies on and builds on a pre-existing theme of erotic encounter between enemy knights. Thus when Ricciari defeats Galiziella in the joust, dislodging her helmet and revealing her face and hair, the *Aspramonte* texts are carrying forward not only the topos in which a knight's armor is pulled away to reveal a feminine beauty indicative of a female knight (perhaps first seen in Western letters in Virgil's Camilla), but also one in which rugged armor and feminine beauty combine in the alluring appearance of a *male knight*. The startling view of Galiziella's "bionda trezza / e quel vermiglio e delicato viso" (VI.37; blond tresses and delicate reddened face) in the *Cantari*, or of her hair that "si sciolsono e sparsonsi sopra l'arme" (I.31; was loosened and spread over her armor) in Andrea's version, recalls nothing so much as the Christians' first sight of Balant, who in the twelfth-century *Chanson* stuns with his "Blont [...] poil menuëment trechié; / Sor ses espauls l'ot destrier soi colcié; / Desci as hances li erent arengié" (203-5; finely-plaited blond hair, spilling over his shoulders and down his back, reaching all the way to his hips), and who in the *Cantari* features a "capo biondo più che secca sala" and luscious locks "fin al fianco era il capel dilungato, / tutti ricciuti di scender giù a valle" (X.15; a head blonder than dried straw [...] his hair reaching his flanks, tightly curled and spilling down in waves).

This is not to say that the *Aspramonte* texts make nothing of Galiziella's gender. On the contrary, the *Cantari*'s Ricciari quickly realizes that his beautiful adversary is a woman, and recoils in shame: "Doloroso e vil codardo si chiama, / che combattuto avea con una dama" (VI.37; he called himself a miserable, vile coward for having fought with a lady). But the affect surrounding Ricciari's discovery produces another, uncannily queer turn of the screw. Just at the moment when he has out-manned his female opponent, a discourse of mutual conquest emerges in the text and allows Galiziella, in a sense, to remain on top. "Quando la bionda trezza e 'l volto vide," the narrator notes, Ricciari "di vergogna sé stesso si conquide" (VI.36; When he saw her blond hair and her face, he was conquered by his own? shame).⁴⁸ In the next ottava the observation repeats, as Ricciari recoils—"come fuggendo" (VI.38; as if fleeing)—from the knight to whom he is unquestionably attracted: "Tosto dalla pulzella fu diviso / perché di vergogna avea tal gravezza / ch'al tutto gli paria esser conquiso" (VI.37; He quickly pulled away from the girl because he was so weighed down with shame that he felt utterly defeated). Galiziella must assert, against the evidence of Ricciari's actions and feelings, that it is she who has been beaten: "tu m'ài conquisa per tua vigoria" (VI.38; you have conquered me with your vigor). In Andrea's text, Galiziella fights on, her armored body covered simultaneously with her hair—" [i] capelli si sciolsono e sparsonsi sopra l'arme" (I.xxxi; her hair loosened and spread out over her armor)—and her shield: "con lo scudo si copriva da' colpi" (I.xxxi; with her shield she protected [covered] herself from his blows). Ricciari does not so much win as call off the skirmish, both because he is bowled over by the revelation of her beauty and because the ambiguously-gendered Galiziella still packs a wallop: Ricciari, "che aveva ricevuto sì grande il colpo, si maravigliò" (I.xxxi; who, having received such a harsh blow, marveled).

⁴⁸ Shemek discusses a remarkably similar confrontation between *Orlando furioso*'s female knight Bradamante and Sacripante, who also suffers "vergogna" once he realizes that he has fought a woman. *Ladies Errant*, 94-95.

The prior example of the *Chanson d'Aspremont* thus teaches us to be wary of the ways in which gendered characteristics accrue to knights in medieval narratives. Desire circulates among knights regardless of gender: the mutual admiration of participants in a common culture of chivalry is enough to kindle this desire, and religious or political differences are just as apt to stoke the flame as sexual difference. Blond tresses spilling out of battered armor may shock and intoxicate a Christian knight—but don't they always, whether the ivory-skinned, girlish face belongs to a Saracen woman or a Saracen man? The Tuscan *Aspramonte* narratives neither shut down nor demystify this complex dynamic, though they do introduce a significant innovation. Christian and Saracen knights not only come together on the battlefield in love, they also reproduce themselves, as one knight succeeds in getting the other pregnant.

4.

In the Tuscan *Aspramonte* texts, Galiziella's defeat in battle is inseparable from her sexual, spiritual, and political capitulation to the Christian enemy—just as her father had feared. In turn, the scenes of her conversion and marriage return us, however subtly, to the Saracen princess topos. Like the *Prise d'Orange's* Orable, whose nude conversion gives the Christian knights the chance to ogle the body they begin the poem only hearing about—"Orable firent de ses dras desnüer, / Il la baptisent en l'enor Damedé" (1866-67; They undressed Orable and baptized her in God's honor)—Galiziella is publicly adopted into the Christian community and given a new name.⁴⁹ But she differs from the *chanson de geste's* converting Saracen women in at least one crucial regard: unlike her sterile sisters, Galiziella soon finds herself with child. The purported change from warrior woman to wife and mother, as we have seen, has been interpreted as a necessary recalibration of the gender hierarchy, or as a move toward genealogical legitimacy. I suggest that Galiziella's pregnancy—dare I call it a queer pregnancy, improbable and indeterminate?—represents instead two very different impulses. First, this pregnancy allows us to glimpse the open-ended, polyvocal nature of medieval textuality. As narrators pause to acknowledge the multiple possibilities inherent in narrative, Galiziella is made to thematize inconclusiveness even as her story concludes. In the process (and symbolizing this process), Galiziella's pregnancy produces more of the stuff she is made of: desiring knights; Saracen and Christian knights; male, female, and complexly-gendered knights; knights who love other knights.

In the *Cantari*, this pregnancy is evoked only briefly, as a narrative possibility that is immediately snuffed out. Recaptured by her father after the fall of Reggio, Galiziella asserts her right to have married Riccieri—Agolante had agreed to bless her marriage to any man who could beat her in battle, after all—and seeks mercy for herself and her unborn child: "i' son gravida, come veder puoi" (VIII.48; I am pregnant, as you can see). Agolante is unmoved, and "Arsa fu quella dama" (VIII.50; the lady was burned) on a pyre built in the main piazza for this purpose.⁵⁰ Andrea da Barberino, however, treats this version of Galiziella's story as merely one among

⁴⁹ Andrea indicates that her new name does not stick: "la fece l'altra mattina battezzare, e posele nome Gostanza; ma ella fu sempre chiamata Galiziella" (I.xxxii; [Riccieri] had her baptized the next morning, and gave her the name Constance, though she was always called Galiziella).

⁵⁰ Reggio's ducal family first appears in the extant corpus in the Chantilly manuscript's prologue. When the defiant duke Rambaud insults Agolant's religion, the Saracen king has him beheaded and "fist ardoir cella que fu sa druz" (250; had his beloved burned). The duchess's burning clearly anticipates Galiziella's. See Boni, "Il 'prologo' inedito."

others, openly acknowledging that other possible outcomes exist and that in any case the story depends on the telling, and the teller. In his prose *Aspramonte*, Galiziella's pregnancy is tightly integrated with her conversion and marriage: once Riccieri has had her baptized, "la sposò all'usanza de' cristiani, e fecesi gran festa nella città. E la terza notte ingravidò in due fanciulli: l'uno fu maschio, e l'altra femmina, secondo che certi hanno detto (I.xxxii; he married her in the Christian tradition, and there was much celebration in the city. The third night, she became pregnant with twins: one male, the other female, according to what some have said). Andrea defers to a source—though he does not say which—when he admits that "l'autore non fa menzione di figliuoli, ma ben fa menzione ch'ella aveva il corpo grande quando perderono la città" (I.xxxii; the author makes no mention of children, but he certainly mentions that her body was big when the city was lost).

As in the *Cantari*, a disgusted Agolante "comandò che ella fosse arsa, e gittata la polvere al vento" (I.xliii; ordered that she be burned and her ashes thrown into the wind). But Andrea's text equivocates on the question of whether Galiziella truly meets this fate. Dilating on the possibility of different, contradictory narratives, Andrea acknowledges that Galiziella and her children may well have survived:

E ancora si dice che in quello fuoco fu gittata Galiziella; alcuno dice che Almonte vi fece gittare un'altra femina, e segretamente mandò Galiziella in Africa in su una nave e fella menare in prigione. Alcuno altro ha detto di lei che ella ebbe uno figliuolo maschio e una femmina. (I.xliv)

(It is still said that Galiziella was thrown into that fire; some say that Almonte had another woman thrown in the fire and secretly sent Galiziella to Africa in a boat and had her imprisoned. Yet others say that she gave birth to a male child and a female one.)

This indeterminacy, far from disappointing a reader eager to know what *really* happened, whets the appetite for new possible narratives. Andrea's first option, shared with the *Cantari*, dispatches Galiziella quickly but not without pathos. The second option, evoking the romanesque topos (indebted to the early Greek novel) of the condemned woman at sea, invites readers to imagine Galiziella's adventures and misadventures en route to her African prison. But it is perhaps the final possibility that most inspires the imagination, since Galiziella's fraternal twins—one male, one female—reproduce her and her lover Riccieri, seemingly with no loss. These two infants are conversion made flesh; the literal product of Christian-Saracen love; the repetition of male and female, Christian and Saracen lovers. While the same (twins), they are also different (in gender), thus propagating the same ambiguities and narrative possibilities inherent in Galiziella's and Riccieri's encounter.

With this in mind, we may conclude by reading Galiziella and her twins *into*, and not *back from*, the Renaissance poems in which they appear. In Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*, a Saracen elder urges King Agramante to seek out a knight whose valor will be vital to the Saracens' success. This Saracen knight, Ruggiero, will go on to desert the pagan army, convert to Christianity, and wed the female warrior Bradamante, thus becoming the ancestor of the Este clan. According to Marco Dorigatti, Boiardo considered Ruggiero to be his most significant

literary *invenzione*,⁵¹ since he permits the elaboration of an imaginary genealogy stretching back from the poet's Ferrarese patrons to a mythic origin in ancient Troy, and thus allows the *Innamorato* (and later the *Orlando furioso*) to achieve the scope and dignity of Virgilian epic.⁵² Ruggiero's more immediate fictional history, however, makes him seem less an *invenzione* than a survivor from a kinetic medieval literary tradition adapting itself to a new audience and to new aesthetic and ideological priorities.⁵³ "Sua matre del tuo patre fu sorella," the old Saracen informs Agramante, son of Almonte and grandson of Agolante, "E fu nomata la Galaciella" (I.i.70; His mother was your father's sister, and she was named Galaciella).⁵⁴ And indeed Ruggiero is recognizably the product of the *Aspramonte's* doomed couple:⁵⁵ like his father, he is attracted to tough knights with flowing blond locks, while also taking after his mother in her willingness to sacrifice family, country, religion, and political allegiances for the love of a good knight.

Two brief points will help highlight the ways in which Galiziella's role in the Renaissance epics represents an active survival and adaptation of medieval narrative into later texts. First, Ruggiero, son of a female knight whose fair complexion and knock-out looks are modeled on the example of the *Aspremont's* male knight, similarly impresses with his combination of prowess and beauty. When Ruggiero is first mentioned in the *Innamorato's* Book II, the narrator entices readers with a promise that they will hear of the paladin's "infinita prodezza e bellezza" (II.i.4; infinite strength and beauty).⁵⁶ When an old Saracen recounts the story of Galiziella's escape from Reggio and her fatal delivery of twins—"parturi duo figli a gran dolore" (II.i.72; she gave birth to two children in great pain)—he establishes that the female child is beautiful by comparison to her brother Ruggiero: "ha simiglianza / Al suo germano, e fior d'ogni altra bella, / Perché esso di beltate il sole avanza" (II.i.73; she resembles her brother and is beautiful beyond all others, for he surpasses the sun in beauty). Female beauty is thus understood by analogy to male beauty—because there is no difference between male and female

⁵¹ Marco Dorigatti, "Rugiero and the Dynastic Theme from Boiardo to Ariosto," in *Italy in Crisis, 1494*, eds. Diego Zancani, and Jane E. Everson (Oxford: Legenda/European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 92.

⁵² Many critics attribute this "Virgilianism" to Ariosto rather than to Boiardo: out of a vast bibliography, see Daniel Javitch, "The Grafting of Virgilian Epic in Orlando Furioso," in *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, ed. Valeria Finucci (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 56-76; Dennis Looney, *Compromising the Classics: Romance Epic Narrative in the Italian Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996); Peter V. Marinelli, *Ariosto and Boiardo: The Origins of Orlando furioso* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987); and David Quint, "The Figure of Atlante: Ariosto and Boiardo's Poem," *MLN* 94.1 (1979): 77-91.

⁵³ Though the two threads cannot be entirely untangled. In Andrea's *Aspramonte*, the Saracens arrive on Italian shores under the sign of Virgil, with Almonte praying: "O valoroso Enea figliuolo d'Anchisse, se gli iddei furono prosperevoli a farti acquistare questa parte d'Italia, siano prosperevoli a me che io l'acquisti" (I.xiii; O valiant Aeneas, son of Anchises, if the gods favored you in allowing you to acquire this part of Italy, may they be favorable also to me, that I may acquire it).

⁵⁴ Ariosto will later have the old wizard Atlante inform Ruggiero and Marfisa that "vi fu Galaciella genitrice" (XXXVI.60; Galiziella was your mother), narrating her escape with "in corpo il pondo / di voi" (the weight of you in her body), by sea on a "debol legno" (weak raft).

⁵⁵ The female twin, Marfisa, is only firmly established as Ruggiero's sister in the *Furioso*, though she is part of the *Innamorato's* vast cast of characters. Ita Mac Carthy separates Marfisa out from the broader tradition of warrior women, since she is never defeated and never marries. "Marfisa and Gender Performance in the *Orlando Furioso*," *Italian Studies* 60.2 (2005): 178-95.

⁵⁶ Citations of the *Orlando innamorato* from Brusciagli's edition, with book number in upper-case Roman numerals, Canto number in lower-case roman numerals, and *ottava* number in Arabic numerals. Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Orlando innamorato*, ed. Riccardo Brusciagli (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).

beauty? Or perhaps because in the chivalric context it is noteworthy and fortunate when women are as attractive as men.

Secondly, Galiziella's story reproduces itself even as Boiardo attempts to cast Ruggiero's lineage into the ancient past, establishing a genealogical connection to the heroes of the Trojan war. In the *Innamorato's* unfinished Book III, Ruggiero explains his origins to his future bride, Bradamante. His ancestor, Hector's son Astyanax, barely survived by fleeing the doomed city in the care of one of his father's knights, escaping across the sea to Sicily (possibly the place of composition for the *Chanson d'Aspremont*). Once installed as lord of Messina, Astyanax wed the queen of Syracuse, whom he "vinse in battaglia per amore" (III.v.23; won in battle through love). When the Greeks finally tracked Astyanax to Sicily and killed him in battle, the queen—alone and, like Galiziella at the moment of Reggio's capture (I.xxxiv), "gravida [...] de sei mesi" (III.v.25; six months pregnant)—escaped in a "barchetta piccolina" (III.v.26; a tiny little boat) to Reggio, where she gave birth to a son "Che rilucente e bionde avia le chiome" (III.v.27; who had blond, shiny hair). This son's descendants ruled Reggio until King Agolante's invasion.

All of this of course sounds very familiar. Galiziella's story—or rather one of the versions of her story acknowledged by Andrea da Barberino—inserts itself into Boiardo's attempt at Virgilian dynastic genealogy, ensuring that this much-revised and reproduced strand of medieval narrative carries along its principal features: pagan princesses, pretty blond knights, Reggio Calabria, *Aspremont*. Conventional ways of understanding the making of Renaissance chivalric poems insist that we congratulate Boiardo and after him Ariosto for knowing how to burnish and embellish the rough medieval literary material available to them, from the songs of *cantastorie* singing in the *piazza* to the rich reserves of French manuscripts in the aristocratic libraries of northern Italy.⁵⁷ I have rather tried to consider this process as if the task of authors—whether Andrea da Barberino, Boiardo, or even Ariosto—was essentially to open up new textual spaces into which medieval narratives could enter, to create new contexts to which medieval narratives could adapt.

* * *

In a long philological article on the anonymous prose *Aspramonte* of British Museum MS Add. 10808—a text not analyzed here—Anna Valeria Borsari discusses the wide diffusion of *Aspremont* narratives in the late Middle Ages, from the Franco-Italian *rifacimenti* (re-makings) to Tuscan *rielaborazioni* (re-elaborations) such as the *Cantari d'Aspramonte* and Andrea da Barberino's *Aspramonte* in prose. While the relationship between Old French and Franco-Italian manuscripts is judged reasonably clear, Borsari regrets that philologists have failed to establish a "diretta interdipendenza" (147; direct interdependence) between the *Cantari* and Andrea's version, or for that matter an "evidente rapporto diretto" (147; obvious direct relationship) between any of the Tuscan *Aspremont* texts. Philologists of course want the facts: the lines connecting Tuscan *Aspremont* texts to each other and to other texts of the past and future must necessarily be traceable according to particular protocols of analysis. A later text either reproduces the specific features of an earlier text, thus demonstrating origin and influence, or introduces features of its own (the notorious "innovations"), thus departing from the model. A text is faithful to the original, or betrays it.

⁵⁷ No less erudite a scholar than E. Jane Everson considers it a "paradox which is intellectually very challenging" that they even bothered at all. *Italian Romance Epic*, 3.

Nothing I have said here is of any use in establishing direct—faithful—lines of influence among the Old French *Aspremont* poems, their Franco-Italian *rifacimenti*, and their Tuscan *rielaborazioni*. Instead, I have asked what difference it might make to read across a series of texts in a tradition with an eye toward that which escapes from one text to another, or put another way, that which is productively *unfaithful* to the original text, but goes on to repeat it in some novel and valuable way just the same. Galiziella—my figure for medieval vernacular literary culture more generally—gets around, and so why shouldn't we? Why restrict ourselves to the accounts of transmission, influence, and adaptation that philological science can construct to its own satisfaction, when they clearly leave so much to be desired? The seductive figure of a Philology who sleeps around espouses certain principles and methods of the historical discipline but permits herself other pleasures as well.⁵⁸ Here I have tried to tempt philology into an open relationship with a queer reading of literary history, one that appreciates the cross-gender and intertextual allure of medieval literature's pretty knights. My aim has also been to attract some attention to a few underappreciated texts suggesting some new ways to think about how narratives adapt to and for new forms, audiences, contexts, and desires (including our own).

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⁵⁸ For Warren, this includes the postmodern and the postcolonial. "Post-Philology," 20-21.

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