

Knighthood and the Body in Late Medieval English  
Culture

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**Abstract**

This thesis examines the corporeal identity of the knight as depicted in late medieval English culture. Critical readings of Middle English romance, chronicles, medical texts, and natural philosophy identify a set of morphological and physiological motifs by which the knight was characterised in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. The thesis argues that the late medieval knight can be examined through the lens of embodiment theory, as expounded on in the works of sociologist Bryan Turner (1984), philosopher Gail Weiss (1999), and psychologist Elena Faccio (2014). Embodiment describes the phenomenon of ‘being’ rather than ‘having’ a body, drawing attention to the ways in which particular socio-cultural identities become essentialised within select physical types. Like bodies themselves, however, embodied identities are not fixed but are instead always in the making. The thesis evaluates the constituent parts of the knight’s embodiment, arguing that embodied knighthood is a chimeric construct, reliant on diffuse medieval ideas regarding the body, lifecycle, physical trauma, fashion, and human encounters with nonhuman things. The thesis uses four chapters, each discussing one of the ‘bodies’ which contributed to embodied knighthood.

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## Introduction

William Caxton's fifteenth-century Middle English *Ordre of Chyualry*, translated from Ramon Llull's thirteenth-century work, provided late medieval English audiences with a foundational 'begynnyng' for knighthood.<sup>1</sup> The *Ordre* describes a legendary period of great 'erroure and trouble in the world', during which the human race was divided into 'thousandes' by an unknown agent. From each grouping, the *Ordre* reads, there 'was chosen a man moost loyal, most stronge, and of most noble courage, & better enseyned and manerd than al the other'. Each of these men was named 'knyght', and instructed to utilise his innate strength, courage, and courtesy to return the world, and its people, to a condition of virtue. Whether these first knights were chosen by God, a terrestrial ruler, or by common consent, is left unstated in the text; Beverly Kennedy suggests that this ambiguity helps achieve the text's mythic tone.<sup>2</sup> It is clear, however, that each of these one-in-a-thousand men possessed certain essential qualities by which he could be recognised as *knyght*, even before such a designation formally existed.

The knight, alongside the monk and ploughman, can thus be identified as one of the cultural archetypes of the Middle Ages, appearing in the late medieval imagination with what Dorothy Yamamoto calls a 'reassuring solidity'.<sup>3</sup> In this thesis, I argue that such 'solidity' relies to a considerable extent upon ideas about the body and embodiment. In Caxton's *Ordre*, the original knights are not *made* or transformed *into* knights; each begins as a knight in and of the body before being dubbed 'knight' in name. Thus, in this origin story, the identifying prostheses of knighthood do not confer a new status, but beautify and bolster what is inherent and inborn. The knight must 'honoure *his body*', the text tells us, by 'beyng wel horsed, and to haue fayr harnoys' (119). This thesis examines the honoured body of knighthood, treating it as a distinct 'embodiment', or corporeal identity, in late medieval English culture and literature.

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<sup>1</sup> William Caxton, *The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry*, Early English Text Society (hereafter 'EETS') Original Series No.168, ed. by Alfred T. P. Byles (London: Oxford UP, 1926), pp. 14-15 (15). Subsequent page numbers given in text.

<sup>2</sup> Fifteenth-century commentators on the *Ordre* often supplied an authority by whom these first knights were chosen. Thus, Kennedy observes, one French source attributes the decision to regal authority, while a Scottish writer places the choice with 'the peple'. See Beverly Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 1. Yamamoto is here referring to the 'Three Orders', those who pray (*oratores*), fight (*bellatores*), and work (*laboratores*). Georges Duby sketched the development of this theory of social orders, noting its persistence throughout the Middle Ages. See *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (London: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Stephen Rigby discusses this and other tripartite theories of late medieval society in 'English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Deference, Ambition and Conflict', in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c. 1350-c. 1500*, ed. by Peter Brown (London: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 25-39 (25-6).

The prominence of the body in representations of knighthood has been identified before, though often by scholars whose primary focus lies elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> In his work on violence, for instance, Richard Kaeuper observes that the knights of medieval literature are typically codified as more beautiful and well-proportioned than other characters.<sup>5</sup> This is especially the case in the genre of romance, where, Kaeuper suggests, the effect is exaggerated by the physically diminutive and deformed figure of the dwarf, against whom the knight is naturally contrasted. These representational tropes exist, Kaeuper asserts, because of the belief that knighthood, and the physical qualities by which it became recognisable, derived from a ‘genetic inheritance’ bound up with ideas of nobility. Danielle Westerhof’s work also stresses this elision of knighthood and nobility.<sup>6</sup> Westerhof discusses how, at the turn of the fourteenth century, nobility came to be ‘rendered visible or concrete within and upon the body of the aristocratic man [...] unthinkingly cast as a knight’.<sup>7</sup> Much of Westerhof’s analysis focusses upon depictions of the body in death, such as in funerary monuments; however, like Kaeuper, Westerhof draws attention to a growing appreciation of knighthood as an ‘embodied essence’ in late medieval England.<sup>8</sup> Most recently, Steven Bruso has written on the developed male body and ‘knightly masculinity’ in Middle English literature.<sup>9</sup> Like Kaeuper, Bruso points to the regularity with which knightly bodies are praised for their ‘brawniness and largeness’, though his analysis stresses the way in which these recurring physical traits shaped elite standards of medieval manhood.<sup>10</sup>

Each of these scholars recognises the correlation between a particular type of body and knightly identity in late medieval English culture, though in each case the body arguably becomes a secondary consideration to either violence, social status, or gender. There remains, then, substantial work to be done on this topic. None of the above examples, for instance, fully considers the implications of this argument that the medieval knight *was a body* – a

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen acknowledges this during a wide-ranging treatment of *chevalier* identity, with at times a very broad conception of ‘body’. See *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 35-77. By far the greatest concentration of scholarship on knighthood and the body concerns representations of violence in Middle English romance (see further Chapter Three). More recent approaches examine representations of disability from the perspective of physical and sensory impairment. See, for instance, Kristina Hildebrand, ‘Sitting on the Sidelines: Disability in Malory’, *Arthuriana*, 27 (2017), 66-80; Tory Pearman, *Disability and Knighthood in Malory’s Morte Darthur* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1-16.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 190-191.

<sup>6</sup> Danielle Westerhof, *Death and the Noble Body in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Westerhof, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Westerhof, p. 43. For more representational tropes of knightly bodies in death, see Rachel Dressler, *Of Armor and Men in Medieval England*, new edition (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Steven Bruso, ‘Bodies Hardened for War: Knighthood in Fifteenth-Century England’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 47 (2017), 255-77 (265).

<sup>10</sup> Bruso, pp. 256, 262-63.

recognisable arrangement of flesh, phlegm, blood, and bile, as well as muscle, bone, and sinew. The medieval body was formed of complex material, endlessly subject to physiological changes emerging from within and without, prompted by age, exertion, diet, injury, and illness. To truly apprehend the knight as a form of embodiment in the Middle Ages, one must address the ways in which the knights of medieval literature become intertextually entangled with other late medieval discourses such as Galenic medicine and natural philosophy. By critically reading these texts alongside Middle English chronicles and romance, as well as archaeological and material cultural evidence, this interdisciplinary thesis aims to detail, to a hitherto unrealised extent, how a particular set of morphological and physiological motifs constituted, and at times complicated, representations of knightly bodies in late medieval English culture.

Among the questions which this investigation seeks to answer are: was there a codified embodiment for knightly identity in late medieval English culture? If so, by what morphological motifs was this body recognisable, and which parts of the body did representations of the knight most stress? How might this embodiment manifest at the level of physiological complexion, predisposing particular inclinations, attitudes, and passions? Which practices or actions best reveal this embodiment? How might bodily processes, natural and accidental, engage or revise embodied knighthood? Would old age, for instance, or injury and its treatment, prompt non-normative or deviant embodiments, or could they be *incorporated* in such a way that the embodiment of ‘knight’ remained recognisable to late medieval English audiences? Could the knight become ‘disembodied’? What role might the knight’s harness, which encloses and extends the human body, play in shaping this embodiment? How might one develop a definition of embodied knighthood in which equal parts human and metal participate?

In addressing these questions, I consider medieval knighthood through the lens of embodiment theory, as developed by sociologist Bryan Turner (1984), philosopher Gail Weiss (1999), and psychologist Elena Faccio (2013).<sup>11</sup> Embodiment concerns the phenomenon of *being* rather than *having* a body, drawing attention both to the lived experiences of bodies, and to the ways in which particular socio-cultural identities become essentialised within select physical types. Like bodies themselves, embodied identities are not fixed but instead occur through a process involving different ontologies or experiences of the body – producing ‘multiple’ bodies, as it were.<sup>12</sup> I will evaluate the constituent parts, or

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<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Bryan Turner, *The Body & Society*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Sage, 2008); Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (London: Routledge, 1999); Elena Faccio, *The Corporeal Identity: When the Self-Image Hurts* (London: Springer, 2013). These authors are discussed further below.

<sup>12</sup> See Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

bodies, of the knight's embodied identity, arguing that 'embodied knighthood' was a chimeric construct, reliant on diffuse medieval impressions of the lifecycle, physical trauma, fashion, and human-nonhuman interactions. My introduction develops the necessary historiographical and theoretical background for this investigation. First, I introduce the medieval body and some scientific models through which it was appraised and understood by contemporaries. I will also outline the ways in which the particular properties of medieval bodies contributed to the formation of socially and culturally distinct identities.

### **The Galenic Body, Physiognomy, and 'Embodiment' in the Late Middle Ages**

Galenic medicine and the science of the four humours predominantly informed late medieval English attitudes to the body.<sup>13</sup> This model posits the human body as the product of internal substances, or 'humours', the balance and circulation of which within the body engendered degrees of health and types of temperament.<sup>14</sup> John Trevisa (d. 1402)'s late fourteenth-century Middle English translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum* was partly responsible for popularising humoral science in the English vernacular.<sup>15</sup> Trevisa lists the four humours as 'blood, fleweme [phlegm], colera, and melencolia', with the latter two occasionally referred to as yellow and black bile respectively (I. 148). The body governed by the play of humours was a kind of hydraulic machine, which 'renneþ, lykeþ [leaketh], and droppiþ' [dripeth]. Within this system, physiological change responded to any action or environment which, intentionally or accidentally, manipulated the balance of the humours. Even prosaic day-to-day behaviours like 'suetynge, spettinge, and oþir suche' contributed to the workings of the body. More radical changes followed the adoption of select regimens, which dictated diet, levels of exercise, and patterns of bloodletting.<sup>16</sup> These measures based their effectiveness on managing the distinct combinations of temperature and consistency

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<sup>13</sup> For the influence of Galenism in the European Middle Ages, see Michael McVaugh, 'Galen in the Medieval Universities 1200-1400', in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Galen*, ed. by Petros Bouras-Vallianatos and Barbara Zipser (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 381-92.

<sup>14</sup> For an introduction to the medieval science of the humours, see Noga Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), pp. 78-110.

<sup>15</sup> *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum* ed. by Maurice Charles Seymour, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 1988). Subsequent vol & page given in text.

<sup>16</sup> For a survey of medieval regimens popular during the late Middle Ages, see Glending Olsen *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Cornell University Press, 2019), pp. 47-55. Luke Demaitre discusses the role of diet, digestion, and appetite in managing humoral health in *Medieval Medicine: The Art of Healing from Head to Toe* (Oxford: Praeger, 2013), pp. 242-48; For the efficacy of bloodletting in the context of humoral science, see Hans Haak, 'Blood, Clotting, and the Four Humours', in *Blood, Sweat and Tears: The Changing Concepts of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Manfred Horstmanshoff, Helen King, and Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 295-306 (298-301).

which each humour exhibited. Thus, Trevisa says, ‘melencolia’ was ‘coolde and dry’ while blood was ‘hote and moist’; an excess of one might be remedied by a food or behaviour which prompted generation of the other.

The humours are important to embodiment because, in addition to underpinning bodily health, each humour fostered a corresponding mood or temperament, thereby predisposing the activities and attitudes of medieval people. In this respect, humoral science constitutes the physiological underpinning of medieval relationships between bodies, behaviours, and identities. An illustrative example is the humour ‘colera’, or cholera. This hot and dry substance provided the heat necessary for good digestion and bowel movements, but it also informed a particular ‘type’ of body and temperament. An excess of cholera, Trevisa says, ‘makeþ the body to strecche in lenþe, breþe, and þickenesse, [it] brediþ boldenes and hardynes [...] wreþþe and [an] appetite of wreche [retribution/vengeance] (I. 159). ‘Colerik men’, it is explained, are temperamentally ‘wraþeful, hardy, vnmeke, vnstable, [and] impetuous’. Cholera thus ‘breeds’ bodies that are not unlike those typically associated with knights: big, broad, and hardy, possessing warlike appetites, natural pugnacity, and daring. Importantly, there is no distinction here between body and self; the ‘who’ of the choleric man is inseparable from the ‘what’ of his physiology, thereby constituting a medieval manifestation of embodied identity.

Other approaches demonstrate how status, self, and identity became corporealized during the later Middle Ages. Caroline Bynum has been influential in this respect. Bynum’s early work illustrated how personal identity and experience were tied to the body in medieval religious thought, with ‘the soul itself [...] depicted as embodied’.<sup>17</sup> The ‘resurrected body’, Bynum explains, ‘was structurally as well as materially identical with the body on earth [...] never losing its sex or size or the scars of its suffering’.<sup>18</sup> The personhood of the individual, then, becomes essentialised within the body, with identity being conveyed, almost in the manner of genetic code, in the corpse awaiting resurrection. Bynum’s more recent scholarship develops these ideas to highlight how the heroes and heroines of medieval literature exhibit a similar ‘essential self’.<sup>19</sup> The behaviours of literary protagonists, Bynum notes, revealed their ‘character or type’ to audiences, the expectations of whom, Bynum argues, were not for character development, but for identity to be ‘always what it was’:

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<sup>17</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. xviii. See also Bynum, ‘Material Continuity, Personal Survival and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in Its Medieval and Modern Contexts’, *History of Religions*, 30 (1990), 51-85.

<sup>18</sup> Bynum, *Resurrection*, pp. 136-7.

<sup>19</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), pp. 22-33 (23).

essential and, I add, often embodied.<sup>20</sup> Expanding on Bynum's work, this thesis investigates to what extent the essential identity or 'type' of the literary knight was reliant on the body's structure and material.

A related medieval method of inferring selfhood from the body concerned the science of *fisnomy*, or physiognomy.<sup>21</sup> Joseph Ziegler has charted how physiognomy, a 'demonstrative science' reliant on the 'semiotics of the body', became gradually accepted in the later Middle Ages.<sup>22</sup> Physiognomists devised analytical categories in relation to the common morphological features of bodies, which they 'read' in such a way as to generate insight into a person's essential self.<sup>23</sup> The signs they scrutinised encompassed the entire body, including skin and hair colour, proportion and girth, as well as types of mannerism, gesture, and gait.<sup>24</sup> One of the characteristic preoccupations of late medieval physiognomists concerned what Martin Porter calls the 'conceptual link' between physiognomy and 'issues of hereditary, embryology, and generation'.<sup>25</sup> Practitioners predicated the existence of a 'radical complexion', inherited at birth and fixed throughout a person's life. This complexion represented an embodied essence which, for physiognomists, was inseparable from the 'truth' of a person. To a profound extent, this posited that the individual, and everything which made them who and what they were, was not only visible within and upon the body, but *was* the body.

Hannele Klemetilä has developed a physiognomic profile for the medieval hangman.<sup>26</sup> Textual and visual depictions of the hangman rely on a series of morphological tropes, such as a swollen face, thick lips, and wide nose, which occur uniformly throughout

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<sup>20</sup> Corinne Saunders' recent work takes this approach, examining the body as locus for emotion and thought in medieval literature. See, for instance, 'Affective Reading: Chaucer, Women, and Romance', *The Chaucer Review*, 51 (2016), 11-30, and 'Mind, Body and Affect in Medieval English Arthurian Romance', in *Emotions in Medieval Arthurian Literature: Body, Mind, Voice*, ed. by Frank Brandsma, Carolyne Larrington, and Corinne Saunders (Cambridge: Brewer, 2018), pp. 31-46.

<sup>21</sup> While physiognomy predates the European Middle Ages, it underwent a rich intellectual transformation during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, remaining popular throughout the fifteenth century. See Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul: Physiognomy in European Culture 1470-1780* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 46-78. For the circulation of physiognomic texts in Medieval Europe, see Mark Ahonen, 'Medieval and Early Modern Physiognomy', in *Sourcebook for the History of the Philosophy of Mind: Philosophical Psychology from Plato to Kant*, ed. by Simo Knuuttila and Juha Sihvola (London: Springer, 2014), pp. 633-637.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Ziegler, 'Philosophers and Physicians on the Scientific Validity of Latin Physiognomy 1200-1500', *Early Science and Medicine*, 12 (2007), 285-312 (285).

<sup>23</sup> See Max Goldman, 'Ethnic Bodies: Physiognomy, Identity, and the Environment', in *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds*, ed. by Rebecca Kennedy and Molly Jones-Lewis (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 62-74 (63-65).

<sup>24</sup> Ziegler, 'Philosophers and Physicians', p. 285.

<sup>25</sup> Porter, p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Hannele Klemetilä, 'The Physiognomy and Mental Equipment of a Late-Medieval Hangman: A Chapter in Anthropological History', *Fifteenth Century Studies*, 31 (2006), 144-63.

fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europe.<sup>27</sup> The hangman, Klemetilä argues, served ‘to embody and transmit aspects of lowness, marginality, and incivility’ through this distinct physiognomy. This thesis, in turn, explores the relationship between the knight’s body and the social forces which made it physiognomically meaningful in late medieval England. Owing to theories popularised by humoural and physiognomic science, contemporaries were accustomed to thinking in terms of ‘embodiment’: of the ways in which individual and group identities, behaviours, and moral characteristics corresponded to particular arrangements of flesh, blood, bone, and bile.<sup>28</sup> These medieval approaches to embodiment, however, disagree on the degree to which embodied identities were fixed, as in the physiognomic radical complexion, or subject to transformative flux, as in humoural science.

This tension is important to this investigation, as it prompts a dilemma recognised by late medieval contemporaries. As Dorothy Yamamoto queries, ‘if bodies can change, or be changed, then in what sense can a body truly “speak” identity?’<sup>29</sup> The Galenic approach to body-self, as mentioned, appears radically individualistic, with personhood arising out of a unique mixture of native humours, modified by a personalised regimen of diet, exercise, and medical intervention. This humoural model does not naturally support ideas of ‘essential’ or ‘fixed’ embodiments. The humoural body was subject to a range of forces, many of which complicated distinctions drawn between the immediate sphere of human agency (microcosm), and the broader universe in which body-self existed (macrocosm). Encompassing the humours, which themselves corresponded to the universal four elements, a triad of “naturals” (humours, temperament, the members and faculties of the body), “non-naturals” (environment, diet, regimen, the passions) and “contra-naturals” (diseases and other forces inimical to the body) governed bodily change, which was constant.<sup>30</sup> The individual had only limited control over non-natural phenomena such as the air he or she breathed, the temperature of the environment, or even the turbulent passions of their own mind, all of which challenged the self-contained essentialism assumed by medieval physiognomists.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Klemetilä, pp. 146-48 (148).

<sup>28</sup> For the widespread popularity of physiognomic ideas in late medieval England, see Bronwen Wilson, ‘The “Confusion of Faces”: The Politics of Physiognomy, Concealed Hearts, and Public Visibility’, in *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, Forms of Knowledge*, ed. by Bronwen Wilson and Paul Yachnin (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 177-92; and Porter, pp. 68-74; Monica Green argues that Galenic ideas and terminology circulated broadly through medieval society, partly through theologians who employed medical theory in their sermons. See Monica Green, ‘Introduction’, in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Medieval Age*, ed. by Linda Kalof (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 1-22 (4-5).

<sup>29</sup> Yamamoto, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> See Julie Orlemanski, *Symptomatic Subjects: Bodies, Medicine, and Causation in the Literature of Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), pp. 26-34.

<sup>31</sup> For varieties of harmful airs and environments, see Brenda Gardenour Walter, ‘Corrupt Air, Poisonous Places, and the Toxic Breath of Witches in Late Medieval Medicine and Theology’, in *Toxic*

The humoral body, then, unlike the radical complexion of the physiognomic body, is always being acquired. The embodied knight might possess a characteristic combination of humours which predisposed a particular body-type, pattern of behaviours, and physiognomic profile. Age, illness, injury, as well as changes in environment or diet, however, could cause each of these categories to undergo meaningful revision. In such cases, where does the individual's identity as 'knight' reside? Does it remain *as* the body, or must it become instead an identity construed *as well as, outside of, or even in spite of*, the body?<sup>32</sup> It is this 'acquired complexion' that medieval physiognomists acknowledged but with which they were ultimately unable to contend.<sup>33</sup> If inner states can be acquired, it follows that they can also be lost; that late medieval English culture appreciated and agonised over this danger is in part indicated by the growing popularity of physiognomy itself.<sup>34</sup>

This tension between essentialist and composite understandings of embodied identity will arise repeatedly in this investigation. In one sense, this is a methodological dilemma common to any cultural historical study, in that it concerns, as Dror Wahrman says, 'how to go about evaluating the relative weight of disparate bits of cultural evidence?'<sup>35</sup> Some of the depictions of knighthood which I analyse suggest an awareness of humoral science and the principles of physical and physiological change on which this science relies; others conform to a physiognomic model whereby the essential identity of the knight is plainly and durably fixed in his person. Both perspectives are, moreover, often discernible in the same texts. This is also a tension responding to this investigation's interdisciplinarity. Different forms of evidence reveal affinity for either the essential literary selves discussed by Bynum, or understandings of the body more obviously shaped by the work of physicians, natural philosophers, and theologians. Throughout, the question which this thesis most often asks in order to orient itself is: how radically can the body change before embodied identity is lost?

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*Airs: Body, Place, Planet in Historical Perspective*, ed. by James Fleming and Ann Johnson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), pp. 1-22 (3-12). For the medieval passions as 'accidents' or 'movements' of an embodied soul that prompted alteration in the body, see Elena Carrera, 'Anger and The Mind-Body Connection in Medieval and Early Modern Medicine', in *Emotions and Health, 1200-1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 95-120.

<sup>32</sup> This dilemma regarding the durability of identity within the body is one of the central preoccupations of embodiment theory. See Justin Smith, 'Introduction', in *Embodiment: A History*, ed. by Justin Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 1-15 (2).

<sup>33</sup> Ziegler, 'Philosophers and Physicians', pp. 294-296.

<sup>34</sup> Julie Orlemanski discusses both the popularity of physiognomy in late medieval England, and the fantasies regarding its efficacy, which Orlemanski argues were accepted by English audiences. See 'Physiognomy and Otiose Practicality', *Exemplaria*, 23 (2011), 194-218.

<sup>35</sup> Dror Wahrman views this opposition between essentialist and constructivist perspectives of the body in terms of the dynamic between biology and culture, which, Wahrman notes, is further complicated by the assumption of cultural historians that biology *is* culture. See 'Change and the Corporeal in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Gender History: Or, Can Cultural History Be Rigorous?' *Gender & History*, 20 (2008), 584-602 (592).



I will shortly discuss the modern theories of embodiment which shape this study's approach, but first I will address questions of gender and medieval manhood. As indicated by Bruso's work, the association between the knight's body and masculine self is an important one.<sup>36</sup> A substantial scholarship has developed on the body, sex, and gender in medieval culture, suggesting that gendered and embodied identities were mutually-reinforcing phenomena.<sup>37</sup> Often the male body (noble or clerical) was presented as the 'normative' body of the Middle Ages, to the extent of obscuring differences between the lived, embodied experiences of men and women (to say nothing of different *types* of men). One sees this, for instance, in presentations of the medieval lifecycle.<sup>38</sup> It becomes difficult, in this respect, to 'look past' the elite male body (or one version of it) during historical or literary investigations of particular kinds of men. Derek Neal has recognised this, stressing that the more diverse medieval "social" performances of masculinity ultimately derive from understandings of the body.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, Jeff Hearn notes the difficulty of extricating discursive masculinity from a monolithic 'embodiment of the male sex', defined by 'independence, aggression, and similarly active attributes and qualities'.<sup>40</sup> These are the same qualities emphasised by Christopher Fletcher in respect to medieval manhood, which Fletcher sees as 'organised around strength, vigour, steadfastness'.<sup>41</sup> Maleness and knighthood thus come to share one ahistorical embodiment, which can make unpacking the broader bodily taxonomy of the knight a challenge. In analysing the knight's corporeal identity, this thesis invariably engages medieval iterations of 'the' male body. Rather than reaffirm this hegemonic model of manhood within the context of embodiment, however, I will instead stress the way in the knight can be read,

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<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, Kathleen Kelly, "'Malory's Body Chivalric'", *Arthuriana*, 6 (1996), 52-71; Christoph Houswitschka, 'Masculinity in Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*', in *Configuring Masculinity in Theory and Literary Practice*, ed. by Stefan Horlacher (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 75-94; Kenneth Hodges, 'Wounded Masculinity: Injury and Gender in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*', *Studies in Philology*, 106 (2009), 14-31.

<sup>37</sup> For an overview of gendered and queer readings of medieval bodies, see Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Jill Ross, 'Limits and Teleology: The Many Ends of the Body', in *The Ends of the Body: Identity and Community in Medieval Culture* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 3-13; For discussions of medieval ideas regarding sex and the body, see Michelle Sauer, *Gender in Medieval Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 24-29, and Monica Green, 'Caring for Gendered Bodies', in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Judith Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 345-61.

<sup>38</sup> This has been discussed in the context of medieval adolescence, during which life stage the construction of gendered differences between young men and women has been argued to intensify. See Kim Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1540* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 4-15.

<sup>39</sup> See Neal, 'Masculine Identity in Late Medieval English Society and Culture', in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. by Nancy Partner (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 171-88 (177).

<sup>40</sup> Jeff Hearn, 'Male Bodies, Masculine Bodies, Men's Bodies: The Need for a Concept of Gex', in *Routledge Handbook of the Body*, pp. 307-320 (310).

<sup>41</sup> See 'The Whig Interpretation of Masculinity? Honour and Sexuality in Late Medieval Manhood', in *What is Masculinity?: Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*, ed. by J. Arnold and S. Brady (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 57-75 (62).

in John Tosh's words, as a 'complex [of] other identities' through which 'Masculinity' can be decentred in the historical investigation.<sup>42</sup> So, while this thesis is a study of the elite male body, it is also an investigation into adolescent, aged, disfigured, and cyborg bodies. This multiplicity of bodies complicates, and so broadens, our perspective on the lived experiences of a particular type of man and male body in the later Middle Ages.

### **Embodiment in Contemporary Critical Thought**

Having sketched some approaches to embodiment in medieval thought, I will now introduce modern embodiment theory in more detail, and highlight some relevant embodiment terminology and common methodological frameworks. There is of course no definitive 'embodiment theory'; rather, when speaking of embodiment one refers to various concepts and approaches developed by contemporary critical treatments of the body. These treatments are united by their classification of the individual as an 'embodiment': a 'unity of organism, consciousness, emotions, and actions';<sup>43</sup> or 'a subject that finds itself variously inhabiting, or captaining, or being coextensive with, or even being imprisoned in, a body'.<sup>44</sup> In this formulation, the subject or self is not considered an extracorporeal thing (mind, soul, ego, etc.) divisible from the body. As Bryan Turner says, embodiment can be recognised in the distinction between the statements: 'I *have* a body' versus 'I *am my* body'.<sup>45</sup> Or, as Elena Faccio expresses it, when one says "my foot hurts", one does not mean "this foot is causing 'me' (as a thing other than the foot) pain", but "the part of 'me' that is a foot hurts".<sup>46</sup> Judith Butler has argued that even this terminology ('I', 'we', 'my') is inefficient because it assumes that 'a disembodied agency [has] preceded and directed an embodied exterior' – the very thing embodiment theorists attempt to refute.<sup>47</sup> In this, embodiment is distinctly pre-Cartesian in outlook and attitude, although it originates with the French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (d. 1961), whose work mounted a sustained criticism of mind-body dualism.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> John Tosh, 'The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?', in *What is Masculinity?*, pp. 17-34 (62).

<sup>43</sup> Bryan Turner, 'Embodied Practice: Martin Heidegger, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault', in *Routledge Handbook of the Body Studies*, ed. by Bryan S. Turner (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 62-74 (62).

<sup>44</sup> Smith, 'Introduction', p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Turner, *Body & Society*, p. 50.

<sup>46</sup> Faccio, p. 37. I have slightly reworded Faccio's formulation here for comprehension.

<sup>47</sup> Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40 (1988), 519-531 (521).

<sup>48</sup> For the development of embodiment theory, particularly in response to Cartesian dualism, see Nick Crossley, 'Phenomenology and the Body', in *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, pp. 130-143; Gail Weiss and Honi Fern Haber, 'Introduction', in *Perspectives on Embodiment: The Intersections of Nature and*

Contemporary embodiment theory is strikingly consistent with certain areas of medieval religious thought and philosophy. As Rafael Nájera argues, embodiment was considered the ‘natural state’ for human beings living in a Postlapsarian universe.<sup>49</sup> Medieval scholastic philosophers contended with the body as both essential to the experience and knowledge of God’s world, yet also as a carnal impediment to attaining the highest spiritual wisdom represented by God and an immaterial angelic host.<sup>50</sup> Medievalists have recently advocated a ‘corporeal turn’, whereby the materiality of the medieval body is recaptured from the ‘body-as-text’ approach popularised by poststructuralist philosophy.<sup>51</sup> This, too, is a goal of those working on embodiment. As Turner notes, this often means rejecting the ‘rhetorical’ and ‘socially constructed body’ in favour of ‘the lived practical reality of embodiment’.<sup>52</sup> Henriette-Rika Benveniste’s and Giorgos Plakotos’ work on embodiment and religious identity in late medieval Europe demonstrates the difficulties in reclaiming this ground, however.<sup>53</sup> While the study makes valuable observations regarding the embodying potential of practices such as circumcision, the consumption of kosher food, Jewish burial, and the refusal to make the sign of the cross, all too often the article falls into discussion of the religious body as a ‘discursive construction’ or ‘textual body’.<sup>54</sup>

My intention here is not to single out these scholars for criticism; on the contrary, their work highlights the greater methodological challenge with which all forays into embodiment must contend. As Arthur Frank has pointed out, in the decades since 1990, scholarly use of the terms ‘embodiment’ and ‘embodied’ has increased substantially; however, Frank argues, few studies have come close to conveying ‘the actual experiences of

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*Culture*, ed. by Weiss and Haber (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. xiii-xvii; Faccio, pp. 36-9. For a useful medievalist perspective on the develop of embodiment theory, see Patricia Baker and Han Nijdam, ‘Introduction: Conceptualizing Body, Space, and Borders’, in *Medicine and Space: Body, Surroundings, and Borders in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. by P. A. Baker, Han Nijdam, and Karine van’t Land (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 3-8.

<sup>49</sup> Rafael Nájera, ‘Scholastic Philosophers on the Role of the Body in Knowledge’, in *Embodiment: A History*, pp. 143-70 (144).

<sup>50</sup> This intellectual history is the subject of Nájera’s article, cited above. See also Bynum, *Resurrection*, pp. 329-34.

<sup>51</sup> Nina Taunton and Darryll Grantley, ‘Introduction’, in *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Nina Taunton and Darryll Grantley (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-10 (1-2). For a broader perspective and critical overview of the ‘material turn’, see Iris Clever and Willemijn Ruberg, ‘Beyond Cultural History? The Material Turn, Praxiography, and Body History’, *Humanities*, 3 (2014), 546-66.

<sup>52</sup> Bryan Turner, ‘The Turn of the Body’, in *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, pp. 1-19 (10).

<sup>53</sup> Henriette-Rika Benveniste and Giorgos Plakotos, ‘Converting Bodies, Embodying Conversion: The Production of Religious Identities in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe’, in *Contesting Inter-Religious Conversion in the Medieval World*, ed. by Yosi Yisraeli and Yaniv Fox (London: Taylor & Francis, 2019), pp. 245-67.

<sup>54</sup> Benveniste and Plakotos, pp. 245, 247.

embodiment'.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Csordas has also addressed this, criticising scholars for using the term “body” without an adequate awareness of “bodiliness”.<sup>56</sup> This failing arises because the object of these studies is invariably absent – it is often somewhere, sometime, or most damningly, *somebody* else. For Frank, unless the writer is describing their own first-person embodied experiences, attempts at capturing the phenomenon by proxy almost always fail. ‘In attempting to describe the body that is both telling the story and told in the story’, he argues, ‘we bump into something no longer properly thinkable’.<sup>57</sup>

This is a dilemma well-known to medievalists, however, for whom the societies, cultures, and bodies under investigation have long since vanished. This is why the reluctance of scholars like Benveniste and Plakotos to abandon the poststructuralist ‘body-as-text’ cannot be overly criticised. For medievalists, the body *is* text, because all too often that is all that remains of it. The failure of embodiment theorists to address the complex relationship between textual discourses and bodily practices is a major criticism of embodiment thinking.<sup>58</sup> Attempts at recovering the ‘bodiliness’ of the knight will, in this investigation, rely largely on text and intertextuality: the combination of different forms and genres of medieval writing about knighthood and the body. In addition, this interdisciplinary study employs skeletal archaeology and evidence drawn from the material culture of knighthood, such as surviving pieces of armour, in order to retain the materiality of the subject. I will discuss the sources of this study further below.

Some of the most common terminology in embodiment theory regards the ‘lived experience’ of bodies. Csordas discusses the ‘existential immediacy’ of embodiment, which he stresses by arguing that the body constitutes the essential basis for our ‘being-in-the-world’ (we do not experience reality *through* the body but *as* a body).<sup>59</sup> For Csordas and others, embodiment thus becomes an existential condition, with who we are, what we do, and how we do it being continually and irresistibly embodied. As Faccio says, the body is unique in a world of objects and things because it is ‘not an object that we can abandon’, at least without abandoning ourselves.<sup>60</sup> Thus, while scholars of embodiment recognise that the body is not precultural, and is mediated by social forces, their work complicates a series of axiomatic dualities regarding not only mind and body, but culture and biology, and even gender and

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<sup>55</sup> Arthur W. Frank, ‘The Varieties of my Body: Pain, Ethics, and *Illusio*’, in *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, pp. 389-95 (390).

<sup>56</sup> Thomas J. Csordas, ‘The Body as Representation and Being-in-the-World’, in *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, ed. by Thomas J. Csordas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1-24 (4).

<sup>57</sup> Frank, ‘Varieties of my Body’, p. 390.

<sup>58</sup> See Clever and Ruberg, pp. 555-57.

<sup>59</sup> Csordas, ‘Body as Representation’, pp. 7-10.

<sup>60</sup> Faccio, p. 36.

sex. One of the challenges of this thesis arises in stressing the essential bodiliness of the knight, whether depicted in romance or chronicle, whilst also addressing the scientific, religious, and literary traditions shaping these depictions. The thesis has a difficult task, in that it attempts to discover the ‘lived experience’ of a ‘body’ shared between different cultural and literary voices.

Related to this emphasis on lived experience is an awareness that embodiment describes a ‘process’ more so than a fixed state.<sup>61</sup> Turner introduces the importance of particular ‘practices’ which define and demonstrate embodied identities. ‘As embodied persons’, Turner explains, ‘these practices come to define who and what we are; they define [our] particular way of working on [the] world through technologies and techniques, and of being in that world’.<sup>62</sup> Turner gives the example of religious practices, such as prayer, fasting, and other forms of physically performative supplication that create pious embodiments. I suggest that the late medieval knight, too, was known for particular physical practices and techniques, such as performed during combat, as well as a reliance upon distinct technologies, like the harness, undoubtedly essential to his ‘being-in-the-world’. This thesis will formulate the lived experience of textual bodies by analysing depictions of the physical practices, techniques, and technologies by which literary knights were embodied and defined. Where Turner discusses how ‘corporealization’ relies on learning specific ways of walking, dancing, speaking, and eating, this thesis asks how particular ways of fighting, bleeding, and moving in harness, may inform the embodiment process for the knight in late medieval English culture.<sup>63</sup>

One of the most characteristic assertions of embodiment theory concerns the close correlation between the ‘what’ of a body and the ‘who’ of an individual. As Turner expresses it, ‘embodiment and enselfment are mutually dependent and reinforcing processes’. The product of these processes is what Frank refers to as a ‘body-self’ and what I have been discussing thus far as an ‘embodied identity’.<sup>64</sup> These terms denote both the process whereby the individual is corporealized as a material entity, subject to and shaped by biological forces, and the broader sense in which particular social identities become essentialised in what Frank calls ‘ideal typical bodies’. Whilst being among the more intriguing elements of embodiment theory, this is also where its failure to properly theorise the distinction between bodily practices and social discourses most breaks down. How are ideal typical body-selves being constructed if not through societal discourses on gender, class, health, and beauty, which

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<sup>61</sup> Turner, *Body & Society*, p. 245.

<sup>62</sup> Turner, ‘Embodied Practice’, pp. 63, 70.

<sup>63</sup> Turner, *Body & Society*, p. 245.

<sup>64</sup> Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 27-52 (28).

shape attitudes to diet, dress, sex, and other physical behaviours? This arguably becomes another manifestation of the above-cited tension between essentialist and composite (or constructivist) perspectives on embodiment.

Faccio observes that if the individual *is a body*, then the features of that body take on an almost physiognomic significance. ‘What importance’, Faccio asks, ‘do various components such as the outlines of the face, comportment, outward appearance, height, voice, as well as style of dress [...] have in communicating our sense of self-awareness?’<sup>65</sup> These are questions which this thesis also addresses; however, any answers must reference the aesthetic standards of the particular socio-cultural context in which such a physiognomic reading takes place. Body *is* self, as Faccio suggests, but the coding of that body (and thus of that self) is surely a product of culture. Faccio also addresses the embodiment of social groups, asking: ‘how is it possible for people belonging to the same cultural background to share a body morphology [...] physiognomic traits [...] expressions [...] and gestures?’<sup>66</sup> I likewise explore the uniformity of body-type which occurs in depictions of knights in late medieval England. In providing answers, however, whilst this thesis does follow the material turn, it does so with the qualifier that the physiognomic typicality of a body-group is partly socially constructed.

The final concept I draw from contemporary approaches to embodiment concerns the stressors to which embodied identities can become subject. Frank recognises that individuals rarely conform to ideal typical bodies. Rather, the embodiment process involves ‘distinct mixtures of ideal types’, to which ‘actual body-selves’ conform to a lesser or greater degree.<sup>67</sup> This prompts consideration of what Stratos Nanoglou calls ‘a multiplicity of embodiments’.<sup>68</sup> ‘Talking about the body in the singular has no sense’, Faccio similarly argues; ‘there are multitudes of bodies’.<sup>69</sup> Not only are there multiple body-types and, consequently, body-selves, but a single body can be encountered as several simultaneous or sequential embodiments. Gail Weiss gives an example, explaining that ‘an attractive body, an aging body, a Jewish body’ might all exist as a ‘series of overlapping identities whereby one or more aspects of that body appear to be especially salient at any given point in time’.<sup>70</sup> Benveniste and Plakotos discuss this finding in relation to the embodying process of religious conversion. The medieval convert’s body, they show, could be recognised as ‘an enemy body,

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<sup>65</sup> Faccio, pp. 45-55 (45).

<sup>66</sup> Faccio, p. 53.

<sup>67</sup> Frank, *Wounded Storyteller*, p. 29.

<sup>68</sup> Stratos Nanoglou, ‘From Embodied Regulations to Hybrid Ontologies: Questioning Archaeological Bodies’, in *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, pp. 157-170 (163).

<sup>69</sup> Faccio, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Incorporeality* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-2.

an animal body, or site of objectification' depending on the 'competing discourses and practices' which shape it.<sup>71</sup> Here again, in turning toward the corporeal, one can only turn so far from the discourses in which bodies gain meaning.

This notion of multiple bodies also raises the issue of *disembodiment*. Judith Butler's work is instructive here, as Butler similarly discusses a 'process of materialisation that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface' – not unlike a kind of embodiment.<sup>72</sup> Butler discusses the materialisation of sex, noting in the case of maleness that the male body is 'one whose imaginary morphology is crafted through the exclusion of other possible bodies'.<sup>73</sup> For Butler, this morphological identification is performative, in that we discern the male body from the bodies of women, children, and animals, because these bodies 'perform the bodily functions that it [the male body] will not perform'. In identifying materiality as the site where the 'drama of sexual difference plays out', Butler introduces the possibility that one can deviate in one's performance and effectively 'be', or perform, one's gender incorrectly.<sup>74</sup> 'Performing one's gender wrong', Butler explains, 'initiates a set of punishments', while 'performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all'. Like gender, as Turner says, embodiment involves not only 'being' a body but 'doing' a body.<sup>75</sup> One might ask, then, whether the body can be *done wrong*, and whether, as in Butler's formulation, if an embodiment goes off script, it might disrupt the essentialism of embodied identity, engendering *disembodiment*.<sup>76</sup>

This topic requires more work. Frank concedes that 'how bodies create selves is scarcely understood at all'.<sup>77</sup> Richard Zaer similarly accepts that embodiment is a 'complex, ongoing affair', never 'once done, forever done'.<sup>78</sup> As part of his discussion, Zaer claims that 'it is always possible to become *dis-embodied*'. Zaer's subsequent focus on, for example, physical paralysis as an example of *disembodiment* is unsatisfactory, however. Rather, the paralysed body arguably constitutes another form of embodiment, with its own rules and restrictions on 'being' a body. The *I* or *who* of the paralysed body does not cease to exist or go somewhere else, *away from* or *out of* the body – there is no such place. Consequently, I

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<sup>71</sup> Benveniste and Plakotos, p. 246.

<sup>72</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Butler, *Bodies*, p. 49.

<sup>74</sup> Butler, 'Performative Acts', pp. 525-28 (528).

<sup>75</sup> Turner, *Body & Society*, p. 245.

<sup>76</sup> Jacqueline Murray has answered the affirmative in regards to medieval male embodiments. See 'The Law of Sin That is in My Members: The Problem of Male Embodiment', in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women, and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. by Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 9-22.

<sup>77</sup> Frank, *Wounded Storyteller*, p. 40.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Zaer, *The Problem of Embodiment: Some Contributions to a Phenomenology of the Body* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971), p. 49.

suggest that *dis*embodiment is one of the more troubling aspects of embodiment theory, best approached through Butler's work on gender performativity.

This thesis will highlight those places in which the knight is in danger of becoming *dis*embodied, questioning under what circumstances the knight might *do* his body, and embodied identity, 'wrong'. The thesis also embraces the idea of multiple embodiments, dedicating each chapter to one of the bodies which collectively form the knightly body-self in late medieval English culture. As indicated, the tension between radical body-selves and more composite 'constructed' embodiments will be identified and explored throughout. In the next part of this introduction, I will outline the status of knighthood in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, examining developments in the knight's presence as both a martial practitioner and literary character.

### **The Knight in Late Medieval English Society and Culture**

The late Middle Ages experienced what has been termed the decline of 'strenuous knighthood' in England.<sup>79</sup> Michael Prestwich gives the percentage of knights fighting in the Agincourt army (1415) at around 8%, while, by 1441, that comprising the Duke of York's forces had fallen even further, to 2.4%.<sup>80</sup> As Andrew Ayton has shown, this decline began around the middle of the fourteenth century, when English martial forces underwent structural changes in organisation and composition.<sup>81</sup> From this point onwards, fighting was increasingly carried out on foot by non-aristocratic professional soldiers, working closely with archers.<sup>82</sup> Ayton argues that this compromised warfare as an activity in which the nobility could distinguish itself from social inferiors, alongside whom knights would now be fighting side-by-side.<sup>83</sup> For Ayton, this changing military status of knighthood prompted a

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<sup>79</sup> For a detailed breakdown of the declining numbers of knights participating in late medieval English warfare, see *The Soldier in Late Medieval England*, eds. Adrian Bell, Anne Curry, Andy King, and David Simpkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 56-72.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Prestwich, 'Miles in *Armis Strenuus*: The Knight at War', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5 (1995), 201-20 (203).

<sup>81</sup> Andrew Ayton, 'English Armies in the Fourteenth Century', in *Arms, Armies and Fortifications in the Hundred Years War*, ed. by Anne Curry and Michael Hughes (Cambridge: Boydell, 1999), pp. 21-38. See also Ayton's 'Knights, Esquires and Military Service: The Evidence of the Armorial Cases before the Court of Chivalry', in *The Medieval Military Revolution: State, Society and Military Change in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Andrew Ayton and J. L. Price (London: Tauris, 1995), pp. 81-104.

<sup>82</sup> Ayton, 'English Armies', pp. 22-33, 31-35. Geraldine Heng addresses this and other factors contributing to the decline of knighthood, arguing that paid military service challenged the 'idealized, mystified notions of mutual obligation' under which knighthood had been traditionally performed'. See *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 136-40 (137).

<sup>83</sup> The use of artillery during this period likely also contributed to the changing status and decline of knighthood as a military order. This thesis does not address artillery, however, owing to both the lack of evidence regarding the appearance and effectiveness of gunpowder, and the likelihood that it was



disillusionment among the elite men who had traditionally served as knights.<sup>84</sup> In addition, as Anne Curry shows, knighthood entailed growing organisational and financial commitments, such as the management of land and estates, as well as the administration of local justice.<sup>85</sup> Two separate regulations issued in 1430 and 1439, sought to compel men with an income greater than £40, from either land or rent, to take knighthood or face a fine.<sup>86</sup> In most cases, those targeted chose the fine, reluctant to accept new domestic duties in addition to the traditional costs relating to the dubbing ceremony and material accoutrements of knighthood.<sup>87</sup> By 1340, for instance, the cost of plate armour had risen so much that it necessitated a *regard*, or bonus payment, of 6d per day, to enable knights and men-at-arms to properly arm themselves.<sup>88</sup> In consequence, by the end of the fifteenth century, English knighthood was no longer 'active' because, as Anthony Pollard argues, there were simply fewer and fewer knights financially willing or physically capable of performing the 'hands on' work of chivalry.<sup>89</sup>

There were, nevertheless, still knights in late medieval England. In 1436, records of land taxation list 173 'greater' knights, whose annual income exceeded £100, and 750 'lesser' knights, with annual incomes between £40 and £100.<sup>90</sup> These men, however, would not all have been militarily active, with many serving primarily in administrative or bureaucratic roles.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, a great number would be from the gentry, the growing presence of whom in the composition of English knighthood marked a pronounced change to earlier centuries.<sup>92</sup> Prior to this, knighthood was synonymous with the nobility in the mentality of

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used primarily in sieges, which rarely figure in my sources. For the development of artillery during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Robert Smith, 'Artillery and the Hundred Years War: Myth and Interpretation', in *Arms, Armies, and Fortifications*, pp. 151-160. For the potential representation of artillery in the romance context, see Dhira Mahoney, 'Malory's Great Guns', *Viator*, 20 (1989), 291-310.

<sup>84</sup> See also David Grummit, "Changing Perceptions of the Soldier in Late Medieval England," *The Fifteenth Century*, 10 (2011), 189–202.

<sup>85</sup> Anne Curry, 'English Armies in the Fifteenth Century', in *Arms, Armies and Fortifications*, pp. 39-68.

<sup>86</sup> H. L. Gray, 'Incomes from Land in England in 1436', *The English Historical Review*, 49 (1934), 607-39 (623).

<sup>87</sup> For the 'distrain' of knighthood, and attempts to avoid it, see D. Smith, *Arts of Possession: The Middle English Household Imaginary* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 24-38.

<sup>88</sup> See Ayton, 'English Armies in the Fourteenth Century', p. 24. On the growing costs associated with knighthood more generally, see Anthony Pollard, 'English Chivalry and the Decline of Strenuous Knighthood in the Later Fifteenth Century', in *Prowess, Piety, and Public Order in Medieval Society: Studies in Honor of Richard W. Kaeuper*, ed. by Craig Nakashian and Daniel Franke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 140-58.

<sup>89</sup> Pollard, p. 147.

<sup>90</sup> Gray, pp. 622-25.

<sup>91</sup> *Soldier in Late Medieval England*, pp. 60-1.

<sup>92</sup> For an overview of the growing overlap between knighthood and the gentry in late medieval England, see Maurice Keen, 'Chivalry', in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 35-49

medieval Europeans.<sup>93</sup> By the fifteenth century, ‘true’ nobility in England was reserved for parliamentary peers, all of whom bore knighthoods.<sup>94</sup> During this period, however, political instability and the growing socioeconomic influence of the gentry meant that knighthood, as Geraldine Heng says, ‘opened up’.<sup>95</sup> During the Wars of the Roses, both Henry VI and Edward IV offered knighthood as a means to garner support amongst the gentry, with mass dubbings taking place at the Battles of Towton (1461) and, later, Tewkesbury (1471), where fifty new knights were made, only four of whom were peers—the majority being gentry.<sup>96</sup>

The gentry (its members identified as *gentil* or gentleman), while notoriously difficult to define, generally describes a social group subordinate to yet emulatory of the nobility.<sup>97</sup> Thus, Philippa Maddern suggests that by the late fourteenth century, ‘gentleman’ designated a wide societal grouping, potentially including both knights and merchants, below the peerage yet above the free peasantry.<sup>98</sup> The gentry are important to this thesis because of their growing association with late medieval English knighthood. As Maurice Keen has illustrated, members of the gentry who acquired knighthoods, even if they did so as lawyers or accountants, demonstrated an interest in and identification with chivalric culture, even to the extent of fictionalising ancient knightly forebears.<sup>99</sup> In this way, knights who had never proved their bodies in war, acquired coats of arms, armour, and weaponry as part of a performative knighthood.<sup>100</sup> As Michael Johnston argues, reading habits comprised a substantial part of this knightly self-fashioning, with Middle English Romance in particular developing in such a way as to reflect the interests and aspirations of a growing gentry audience.<sup>101</sup> Raluca Radulescu has similarly argued that the romance ‘knight-errant’ could be read as depicting the gentry experience, being often upwardly mobile, ambitious, and finely

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<sup>93</sup> Constance Bouchard in “*Strong of Body, Brave and Noble*”: *Chivalry and Society in Medieval France* (London: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 11-28.

<sup>94</sup> For the development of the peerage in late medieval England, particularly in the context of other titles like knight and gentleman, see Peter Cross, ‘An Age of Deference’, in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. by Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 31-73 (35-41).

<sup>95</sup> Heng, p. 130.

<sup>96</sup> Raluca Radulescu, *The Gentry Context for Malory’s Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 9-11.

<sup>97</sup> For a good discussion of definitions, see Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove’s introduction to their edited collection, *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 1-19.

<sup>98</sup> Philippa Maddern, ‘Gentility’, in *Gentry Culture*, pp. 18-34 (19-22).

<sup>99</sup> Keen, ‘Chivalry’, pp. 45-6.

<sup>100</sup> Pollard, pp. 146-7.

<sup>101</sup> Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 21-35. See also Robert Rouse, ‘Historical Context: The Middle Ages and the Code of Chivalry’, in *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur’s Court in Medieval European Literature*, ed. by Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 13-24 (13-14), and Bart Besamusca, ‘Readership and Audience’, in *Handbook of Arthurian Romance*, pp. 117-132 (128-29).

attuned to social courtesy.<sup>102</sup> In addition, Radulescu cites evidence that gentry families also owned both chronicles and chivalric handbooks.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, Barbara Hanawalt suggests that literacy rates in fifteenth-century London, where many of the gentry were based, were high.<sup>104</sup> Linda Zaerr identifies the minstrel tradition as further disseminating romance narratives to gentry audiences.<sup>105</sup> In all cases, scholars agree that gentry audiences learnt to identify with literary knighthood as a method of higher-status acculturation.<sup>106</sup> By the end of the Middle Ages, then, a gentry class of what Richard Kaeuper terms ‘chivalric “sirs”’ – merchants, financiers, lawyers, book-keepers, and administrators – were reading romance, attending tournaments (typically as spectators), developing their own heraldic lineages, and essentially identifying as ‘knights’.<sup>107</sup>

Thus, while the presence of active or ‘strenuous’ knighthood diminished in the context of late medieval warfare, English culture developed a pronounced preoccupation with, as Heng says, ‘who, and what, a knight might be, or might become’.<sup>108</sup> Crucially, much of this reflection focussed upon the knight’s body. This is apparent in the legislative measures intended to enforce visible distinctions between social groups, often by limiting access what the body wore, ate, and which activities it engaged in.<sup>109</sup> Kaeuper identifies a sensitivity on the part of the aristocracy, for whom the historic connections between noble legal standing and knighthood were under threat.<sup>110</sup> When attempting to maintain its exclusive association with

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<sup>102</sup> Radulescu, ‘Literature’, pp. 104-9. See also Felicity Riddy ‘Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 235-52.

<sup>103</sup> Raluca Radulescu, ‘Literature’, pp. 100-115.

<sup>104</sup> Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 72-82. See also Helen Cooper ‘Good Advice on Leaving Home in Romance’, in *Youth in the Middle Ages*, ed. by P.J.P Goldberg and Felicity Riddy (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 101-122.

<sup>105</sup> See Linda Marie Zaerr, *Performance and the Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012), pp. 6-14.

<sup>106</sup> For romances popular among gentry audiences, see Carol Meale, “‘Gode men / Wiues maydnes and alle men’’: Romance and Its Audiences’, in *Reading in Medieval English Romance*, ed. by Carol Meale (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 209-225; Ad Putter, ‘Arthurian Romance in English Popular Tradition: *Sir Percyvell of Gales*, *Sir Cleges*, and *Sir Launfal*’, in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Helen Fulton (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 235-51.

<sup>107</sup> Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) pp. 127-28.

<sup>108</sup> Heng, p. 136. For the ongoing fascination with the literary knight in late medieval England, see Edward Donald Kennedy, ‘Romancing the Past: A Medieval English Perspective’, in *Writing Medieval History*, pp. 13-39.

<sup>109</sup> Rosemary Horrox gives an overview of the late medieval English interest in visible social distinction in the ‘introduction’ to her *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1-13 (4-5). For heraldry, see Keen, ‘Chivalry’, p. 42. For the way in which such measures impacted upon gentry culture, see Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, pp. 24-5, 35. For medieval sumptuary law, which aimed to limit access to particular styles of dress and materials, see Kim. M. Phillips, ‘Masculinities and Medieval Sumptuary Laws’, *Gender & History*, 19 (2001), 22-42.

<sup>110</sup> Richard W. Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, pp. 121-30.

knighthood, the nobility looked to the body, stressing genetics and visible physical hereditary.<sup>111</sup> Elsewhere, classical ideas which linked knighthood to virtuous behaviours, rather than blood, appealed to the gentry, placing a different kind of premium upon the body, and what one did with, or *as*, a body.<sup>112</sup> As Robert Rouse argues, romance drama often hinges upon the positive and negative potentials of the knight's body, reflecting an audience interest in bodily practice.<sup>113</sup> Jill Mann observes that the best-known Middle English romance, the *Morte Darthur*, prioritises the body as one its 'key concepts', both 'a field of action and a repository for truth'.<sup>114</sup> Such a repository would be keenly studied by noble and *gentil* audiences alike, each hoping to reveal or reinforce truths about the relationship between body, status, and self. A romance like the *Morte*, moreover, might cater to both viewpoints simultaneously. The *Morte's* Sir Gareth begins his adventure in obscurity, often disparaged for his ostensive lower status. In spite of this, Gareth, who possesses a big and beautiful body, eventually earns his knighthood. In this, as Jane Gilbert notes, Gareth appeals directly to gentry audiences, apparently problematising the correlation between genetics and knighthood.<sup>115</sup> Yet, Gareth is ultimately revealed as Arthur's nephew acting *incognito*, his celebrated body thereby reinforcing a more physiognomic and essentialist understanding of embodied knighthood.

In this way, as Geraldine Heng says, the knight's body in late medieval English culture became something not only to 'look at' but to 'look through' – engaged with through reading practices and roleplay which, I suggest, informed perceptions and practices of body and embodiment for a diverse English audience.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, as Allen Frantzen argues, in spite of the social changes reshaping knighthood, cultural representations remained fundamentally unchanged, casting the knight as a 'vigorous, aggressive model' in which the body was foremost a 'fighting machine'.<sup>117</sup> Thus, transformations in patterns of warfare and

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<sup>111</sup> For more on this facet of medieval scientific thought, see Peter Biller, 'Proto-Racial Thought in Medieval Science', in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. by Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 157–80.

<sup>112</sup> See Heng, p. 135. Felicity Riddy explores these themes. See 'Courtesy and Service in *The Tale of Sir Gareth*', in *Contested Language in Malory's Morte Darthur: The Politics of Romance in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Ruth Lexton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 109-37.

<sup>113</sup> Rouse, pp. 15-16.

<sup>114</sup> Jill Mann, 'Knightly Combat in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*', in *Life in Words: Essay on Chaucer, The Gawain-Poet, and Malory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 235-42 (237, 242).

<sup>115</sup> Jane Gilbert, 'A Theoretical Introduction', in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. by Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-38 (20-6). Karen Cherewatuk also discusses this romance in terms of its reflection of noble and gentry attitudes, specifically toward marriage. See 'Pledging Troth in Malory's "Tale of Sir Gareth"', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 101 (2002), 19-40.

<sup>116</sup> Heng, p. 136.

<sup>117</sup> Allen Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 114-16 (116).

membership to elite social groups did not make the embodiment of the knight redundant. Medieval sources demonstrate that the knight remained recognisable through a set of morphological motifs and physical behaviours, the meaning of which continued to engage contemporary debates on what a knightly body *was* and what it *did*.<sup>118</sup>

## **Interdisciplinarity and the Embodied Experience of Late Medieval English**

### **Knighthood**

In order to study, as Nanoglou, says, the experience of ‘living as a particular body in particular historical conditions’, this investigation employs an interdisciplinary approach.<sup>119</sup> The primary evidence of which this thesis makes use is textual evidence, particularly Middle English romance and chronicles. Here, I will explore the relationship between these two forms of medieval literature, particularly in terms of genre. Richard Kaeuper has regularly emphasised how the literature and lived experience of medieval knighthood developed as mutually reinforcing phenomena.<sup>120</sup> One example of this reciprocation between ‘real’ and representational is the medieval tournament. The tournament, as a cultural practice in which military tactics and techniques were developed alongside martial reputations, influenced the work of romance authors like Chrétien de Troyes (d. 1181).<sup>121</sup> In romance, as Kaeuper says, tournaments ‘were splashed with even more colour and adorned in more symbolism that, in turn, effected historical tournament practice’.<sup>122</sup> Thus, while Chrétien de Troyes drew upon the spectacle of contemporary tournaments to characterise his portrayal of Arthur’s court, by the following century English knights were ‘role playing’ as their Arthurian counterparts at tournaments arranged by Edward I (d. 1307).<sup>123</sup>

Lee Patterson argues that late medieval knighthood is best considered not as a ‘vocation’ but as a ‘mode of being’ or ‘ideological conditioning’.<sup>124</sup> As reflected by the knights of Edward I, literature played a role in scripting such modes of being, and conditioning both knights and their physical behaviours within the ideological frameworks of chivalry.<sup>125</sup> The

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<sup>118</sup> *Soldier in Late Medieval England*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>119</sup> Nanoglou, p. 163.

<sup>120</sup> See, e.g., his ‘William Marshal, Lancelot, and the Issue of Chivalric Identity’, *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 22 (2005), 1-19. For a discussion of this approach, see ‘Literature is Essential for Understanding Chivalry’, in *The Journal of Military History*, 5 (2007), 1-15.

<sup>121</sup> See Ruth Cline, ‘The Influence of Romance on Tournaments of the Middle Ages’, *Speculum*, 20 (1945), 2014-211.

<sup>122</sup> Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, p. 4.

<sup>123</sup> See Juliet Barker, *The Tournament in England, 1100-1400* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003) pp. 88-92 (89).

<sup>124</sup> Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 176.

<sup>125</sup> The colours and character of the Arthurian-inflected tournament featured in chronicle writing, too. See Cornelia Logemann, ‘Re-enactment: Tournaments, Chronicles and Visual History’, *Iran*, 57 (2019), 31-48.

household book of Edward IV (d. 1483), for instance, reveals that the knights and squires of Edward's court attended evening sessions during which they read and discussed chronicles – a custom which Andrew Taylor describes as a 'sustained exercise in roleplaying and self-censorship'.<sup>126</sup> Edward IV's knights learned how to speak, act, and fight – notably embodied practices – from textual sources like chronicles. Similarly, the Scottish Robert I (d. 1329) read both chronicles and romances to his knights whilst on military campaign, in part, it has been argued, to contextualise and codify their experiences of physical violence.<sup>127</sup> Because of this, one can approach textual sources like Middle English romance and chronicle as performative scripts, as it were, for knightly body-selves and embodied practices.

In doing so, however, one quickly encounters issues relating to genre, and the distinction between literary and historical texts. Middle English romance, particularly Arthurian romance, features several generic hallmarks, such as an aristocratic cast of kings, queens, knights and ladies; a setting at least partly shaped and inhabited by supernatural forces; a narrative focus on the maturation and developing status of the protagonist; and, related to this, the demonstration and celebration of physical prowess, and the corresponding cultivation of martial renown, known as *worship*.<sup>128</sup> In addition, there is often an awareness of the tension between public duty and personal desire, one that regularly involves the competing forces of romantic love, fraternal loyalty, and the knight's existential need for adventure.<sup>129</sup> One of the most prominent generic traits of Arthurian romance thus concerns the genre's commitment to a 'specific heroic type' – typically male, of knightly status, physically imposing, behaviourally pugnacious, and highly skilled in armigerous combat with

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<sup>126</sup> Andrew Taylor, 'Chivalric Conversation and the Denial of Male Fear', in *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. by Jaqueline Murray (London: Taylor & Francis, 1999), pp. 169-188 (73, 78).

<sup>127</sup> Alastair MacDonald, 'Courage, Fear and the Experience of the Later Medieval Scottish Soldier', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 92 (2013), 179-206 (185). For the role of literature in managing knightly expectations of and behaviours in war during the later Middle Ages, see Craig Taylor, 'Military Courage and Fear in the Late Medieval French Chivalric Imagination', *Journal of Medieval and Humanistic Studies*, 24 (2012), 129-147.

<sup>128</sup> The most comprehensive recent study on the development of romance motifs is Helen Cooper's *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also Ad Putter, 'A Historical Introduction', in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, pp. 1-15; Raluca Radulescu, 'Genre and Classification', in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, ed. by Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011), pp. 31-48. For the rhetorical principles and structure of romance, see Ann Dobyms, 'Exemplars of Chivalry: Rhetoric and Ethics in Middle English Romance', in *Romance and Rhetoric: Essays in Honour of Dhira B. Mahoney*, ed. by Georgiana Donavin and Anita Obermeier (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 17-32; and Christopher Cannon, *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 176-91.

<sup>129</sup> See Kevin Sean Whetter, *Understanding Genre and Medieval Romance* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 61-64. For a discussion of the range of 'heroic types' in medieval literature, including Middle English romance, see Laura Ashe, 'The Hero and his Realm in Medieval English Literature', in *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*, ed. by Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), pp. 1129-147.

edged weapons.<sup>130</sup> These characteristics hold for the Middle English romance texts which make up the major source body for this investigation.

Beyond these general elements, however, definitions of ‘romance’ begin to blur.<sup>131</sup> Zaerr shows that English authors like John Lydgate, whose work this thesis examines, used many romance elements to achieve ‘something other than romance’.<sup>132</sup> Ad Putter, too, has found that late medieval English authors often used ‘romance’ when referring to a range of texts ostensibly belonging to different genres, such as epics, legends, saint’s lives, and, particularly, chronicles.<sup>133</sup> As Monica Otter notes, this complicates attempts of modern scholars to distinguish between forms of medieval literature on the basis of fact (*historia*) or fiction (*fabula*).<sup>134</sup> The Arthurian court, Otter argues, was considered to be ‘historical’ by late medieval contemporaries, while romance, ostensibly a form of *fabula*, carried profound truths for medieval audiences.<sup>135</sup> In consequence, Otter and others have argued that these generic distinctions between historical fact and fiction prove unsuited to the medieval context.<sup>136</sup> These ‘vexed questions’, Ad Putter recommends, of how one might disentangle romance and chronicle are best avoided; ‘they are not’, he says, “‘our’ problem’, but rather reflective of a different understanding of genre altogether.<sup>137</sup>

The problems of genre have also been explored by those focussing on chronicles themselves, which, as a form of *historia*, have at times been set apart (and above) from other genres of medieval literature.<sup>138</sup> Sarah Foot has recognised this whilst discussing the complexities involved in categorising medieval chronicles.<sup>139</sup> Foot notes that, as a means of transmitting and preserving the historical record, chronicles ostensibly lack the narrative meaning of other forms of literature, being often without clearly marked beginnings and

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<sup>130</sup> Whetter, *Understanding Genre*, p. 61.

<sup>131</sup> For an overview of the problems regarding genre and romance, see Radulescu, ‘Genre and Classification’, pp. 31-40.

<sup>132</sup> Zaerr, p. 5.

<sup>133</sup> Putter, ‘Historical Introduction’, pp. 2-3.

<sup>134</sup> Monica Otter, ‘Functions of Fiction in Historical Writing’, in *Writing Medieval History*, pp. 109-130 (111).

<sup>135</sup> Otter, pp. 110-113

<sup>136</sup> In addition, see Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon, 2004), pp. 1-6.

<sup>137</sup> Putter, ‘Historical Introduction’, p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> There remains a tendency amongst military historians to afford special precedence to the chronicle as a source for medieval warfare, often at the expense of other genres. See, for instance, Kelly DeVries, ‘The Use of Chronicles in Recreating Medieval Military History’, *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 2 (2004), 1–16. Or Iain MacInnes, who argues that chronicles provide ‘a realistic alternative to the more flowery depictions of combat in contemporary romance’. See ‘Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes: Injury and Death in Anglo-Scottish Combat, c. 1296–c.1403’, in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture* ed. by Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (London: Brill, 2015) pp. 102-127 (104).

<sup>139</sup> Sarah Foot, ‘Finding the Meaning of Form: Narrative in Annals and Chronicles’, in *Writing Medieval History*, pp. 88-108.

endings.<sup>140</sup> This structural characteristic contributes to the impression of chronicles as superior forms of documentary evidence. Continuous exposition, however, is often punctuated by more distinct narrative episodes, carefully constructed and ‘made meaningful’ by ‘selection, omission, and careful interpretation’.<sup>141</sup> As others have noted, this process often involved intertextuality, with biblical, classical, and contemporary literary models informing the chronicle presentation of, for example, medieval warfare and acts of violence.<sup>142</sup> Ruth Morse has argued that literary *topoi* – common descriptive or representational formulas – borrowed from genres like romance, regularly appear in chronicle writing.<sup>143</sup> Types of location, action, attitude, and individual all, Morse suggests, attract *topoi* as forms of ‘set-piece historical invention’.<sup>144</sup> In light of this, Morse makes a similar argument to that of Ad Putter, observing that attempts to distinguish ‘historical’ from ‘poetic, fictional creations’ misunderstands the nature of medieval history writing.<sup>145</sup>

This thesis thus follows Gabrielle Spiegel in classing chronicles as forms of literature, combining elements of contemporary political polemic, literary borrowings, and anachronism in order to de-problematise historical change through prose narrative.<sup>146</sup> In this, chronicles share enough in common with romance for each to be intertextually read alongside the other.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, Spiegel’s definition would arguably prove at least partly applicable to Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, which engages with the political strife of the fifteenth century through the nostalgia and *topoi* of its own literary world.<sup>148</sup> There are important differences, of course, in how Middle English romance and history writing each depict the experiences of knighthood, such as physical trauma and the practicalities of wearing armour. In contextualising these differences, I supplement my reading with other forms of textual and material evidence, like surgery books, soldier petitions, and pieces of late medieval harnesses.

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<sup>140</sup> Foot, ‘Meaning of Form’, pp. 91-92.

<sup>141</sup> Foot, ‘Meaning of Form’, p. 102.

<sup>142</sup> See Richard Abels and Stephen Morillo, ‘A Lying Legacy? A Preliminary Discussion of Images of Antiquity and Altered Reality in Medieval Military History’, *Journal of Military History*, 3 (2005), 1-13.

<sup>143</sup> Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 108-124.

<sup>144</sup> Morse, p. 86.

<sup>145</sup> Morse, p. 124.

<sup>146</sup> Gabrielle M. Spiegel, ‘History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages’, *Speculum*, 65 (1990), 59-86 (80-81). For an overview of Spiegel’s approach and contributions to this debate, see Gabrielle M. Spiegel, ‘Theory into Practice: Reading Medieval Chronicles’, in *The Medieval Chronicle: Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle*, ed. by Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 1-12. For a similar but more recent perspective, see also Justin Lake, ‘Authorial Intent in Medieval Historiography’, *History Compass*, 12 (2014), 344-360.

<sup>147</sup> Perhaps the greatest argument for accepting the interconnectedness of romance and chronicle, is that made by Kaeuper, who maintains that medieval audiences themselves drew no distinctions between the two. See Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, pp. 31-33.

<sup>148</sup> See Patricia Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 194-205.



Through this interdisciplinary source body, this thesis builds on the above work by identifying and analysing the *topoi*, or literary commonplaces, which shaped depictions of the knight's body.

The thesis examines Middle English romances such as the *Prose Merlin* (c. 1420), *Octavian* (c. 1350), and *Bevis of Hampton* (c. 1300).<sup>149</sup> The major source for this thesis, however, is Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*.<sup>150</sup> Completed between 1469 and 1470, the *Morte* draws on French and English Arthurian antecedents, as well as Malory's own personal experiences as knight-prisoner during the York-Lancaster conflict (c. 1440-1471).<sup>151</sup> By reworking his sources, as well as introducing his own original episodes, Malory produced a text wedded to a historical past but struck through with contemporary concerns regarding kingship, governance, and, especially, knighthood.<sup>152</sup> As P.J.C. Field has said, Malory's sympathies as an author respond foremost to 'chivalrous actions' and the individuals, and bodies, which undertake them.<sup>153</sup> Indeed, it is possible to limit Malory's sympathies even further to unalloyed *action* itself. Whilst Malory at times indicates nostalgia for the abstract ideals of Arthurian kingship and chivalry, Andrew Lynch shows that 'goodness' in the *Morte* occurs foremost as the outcome of singular 'martial prowess' rather than moral conduct.<sup>154</sup> Thus, bodies are not superficial or incidental in the *Morte*. What knightly bodies *are*, what they *do*, and *how*, are of greater import for Malory than *why* and even *to what end*. This makes the *Morte*

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<sup>149</sup> Henry Lovelich's Middle English translation of the French Vulgate *Merlin* exists only in the fifteenth-century Corpus Christi Cambridge MS 80, fols 88v-200v. For its composition, see Robert Ackerman, 'Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*', *PMLA*, 67 (1952), 473-484, and Roger Dalrymple, "Evele knowen ye Merlyne, in certayne": Henry Lovelich's *Merlin*, in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translations and Innovation*, ed. by Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellowes, and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), pp. 155-167. *Octavian* is found in two fifteenth-century Middle English versions: the 'Southern' in BL MS Cotton Caligula A. ii, fols 22v-35r, and the 'Northern' in Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38, fols 90r-102v and Lincoln Cathedral Library MS Thornton 91, fols 98v-109r; see Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 79-84. *Bevis* appears in several Middle English versions. Two complete MS copies, Edinburgh National Library MS Advocates 19.2.1, fols 176r-201r and Manchester Chetham's Library MS 8009, fols 122r-190v, supply the EETS edition used in this thesis. For the English *Bevis* manuscript tradition, see Jennifer Fellowes, 'The Middle English and Renaissance *Bevis*: A Textual Survey', in *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition*, ed. by Jennifer Fellowes and Ivana Djordjević (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), pp. 80-113.

<sup>150</sup> The thesis cites from P.J.C. Field's edition, developed from Caxton's 1485 printed version and the 1480 Winchester MS, British Library Add. MS 59678. See *Sir Thomas Malory Le Morte Darthur: The Original Text edited from the Winchester Manuscript and Caxton's Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013). Page and line numbers will be given in parentheses as in-text citations. For a discussion of both manuscript and printed editions, see K.S. Whetter, *The Manuscript and Meaning of Malory's Morte Darthur: Rubrication, Commemoration, Memorialization* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2017), 1-22.

<sup>151</sup> See P.J.C. Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), pp. 1-4.

<sup>152</sup> For an overview of Malory's style and sources, see Ralph C. Norris, *Malory's Library: The Sources of the Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), pp. 1-13. For the way in which contemporary events informed Malory's life and writing, see Radulescu, *Gentry Context*, pp. 1-7.

<sup>153</sup> Field, *Life and Times*, p. 2.

<sup>154</sup> Andrew Lynch, *Malory's Book of Arms: The Narrative of Combat in Le Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 34-9.

a rich source for considering the embodied experiences and ‘being-in-the-world’ of knights in late medieval English culture.

This romance evidence will, as explained, be read alongside Middle English historical writing such as John Shirley’s (d. 1456) *Dethe of The Kynge of the Scotis*, Thomas Walsingham’s (d. 1422) *Chronica Maiora*, and the *Cronycle* of Jean Froissart (d. 1405), as it appears in the Middle English translation by Sir John Bouchier Lord Berners (c. 1467-1533).<sup>155</sup> Other texts drawn from religious, scientific, and philosophical traditions within Middle English literature will be examined in order to reconstruct late medieval English attitudes toward a range of topics, such as the archetypal figure of the knight in English culture; the moral and scientific interpretations of human physiology and the lifecycle; and the late medieval theory of metallurgy. Notable among these texts are William Caxton’s *Ordre of Chyualry*, cited earlier, which proved immensely popular in late medieval England, becoming the standard text on the physical and spiritual faculties of knighthood until the end of the Middle Ages.<sup>156</sup> As Kennedy has noted, Caxton was a shrewd publisher, often careful to anticipate his audience; his Middle English *Ordre*, appearing only a year before his edition of Malory’s *Morte Darthur* (1485), suggests an ongoing fascination with knighthood in late medieval England.<sup>157</sup>

Similarly, Vegetius’ *De re Militari* received numerous vernacular treatments in the fifteenth century, in both verse and prose translation.<sup>158</sup> One of the best-known of these was Christine de Pisan’s (d. 1430) *Book of Fayttes of Armes of Chyualrye*, which Caxton also translated and published in 1489.<sup>159</sup> *De re Militari* was thus well known in fifteenth-century England, covering several topics relating to warfare which translators like Caxton repurposed to suit contemporary audiences. In many cases, this meant foregrounding the figure of the knight. Indeed, Dominique Hoche has suggested that late medieval English readers of this text, among them Sir John Paston, consulted Vegetius not for guidance on practical military

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<sup>155</sup> On Walsingham and his chronicle, see James Clark’s introduction to *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham 1376-1422*, trans. by David Priest (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), pp. 1-21, and his ‘Thomas Walsingham Reconsidered: Books and Learning at Late-Medieval St Albans’, *Speculum*, 77 (2002), 832-160. For Lord Berners life and literary output, see Joyce Boro, ‘Lord Berners and his Books: A New Survey’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 67 (2004), 236-249; and Alexandria Gillespie, ‘Caxton and After’, in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. by A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 307-326.

<sup>156</sup> For the popularity and influence of the *Ordre*, see Frantzen, *Bloody Good*, pp. 84-9; Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, pp. 275-79.

<sup>157</sup> Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>158</sup> See Catherine Nall, *Reading and War in Fifteenth-Century England: From Lydgate to Malory* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012), pp. 11-47. For Vegetius’ influence in the Middle Ages, see Christopher Allmand, ‘The *De re Militari* of Vegetius in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance’, in *Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare*, ed. by Corinne Saunders, Françoise le Saux, and Neil Thomas (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 15-28.

<sup>159</sup> Christine de Pisan’s *Book of Fayttes of Armes and of Chyualrye*, EETS OS 189, ed. by A.T.P. Byles (London: Oxford UP, 1932).

strategy, but to learn ‘how to act/look/sound/behave like a knight.’<sup>160</sup> This makes *De re Militari*, alongside Caxton’s *Ordre*, a valuable source for discerning the practices through which knighthood could be embodied in late medieval English culture. *Knyghthode and Bataile*, the fifteenth-century verse paraphrase which I cite, was an especially popular Middle English iteration, with copies known to have been owned by both the gentry and aristocracy, including Henry VI, who received a copy around 1460.<sup>161</sup>

John Trevisa’s (d. 1402) Middle English translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus’s *De Proprietatibus Rerum* is another valuable source for this investigation. As an encyclopaedia in the tradition of Isidore or Seville (d. 636)’s *Etymologies*, Trevisa’s work offers insight into diverse topics such as human aging, the four humours, the complexion and qualities of metals, and, most relevantly, the body and its parts, such as they were apprehended in the late medieval English mentality.<sup>162</sup> Each of the chapters in this thesis employs Trevisa’s work in order to contextualise the particular facet of embodiment under discussion. Similar but more specialised sources, such as late medieval English surgery books, religious lyric poetry, and morality plays, provide different perspectives on the body and processes to which it was thought subject in late medieval England.

This thesis also makes use of evidence drawn from late medieval material culture and archaeology. Allen Frantzen has written on the ways in which interdisciplinary readings of objects *as* and *in* texts can benefit the field of medieval studies.<sup>163</sup> Frantzen’s description of the ‘ideological force of a magnificent material culture, even if completely represented’, is of relevance to this study, in which the harness is understood as a crucial adjunct to the embodiment of the knight, in both practice and representation. Embodiment, as stated above, often demands degrees of immediacy and materiality which, at times, prove elusive in purely textual studies. Thus, the first three chapters of this thesis employ archaeological evidence in order to better engage the embodied practices of young, aged, and wounded knights in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. By examining the skeletal data uncovered at

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<sup>160</sup> Dominique T. Hoche, *The Reception of Christine De Pisan’s Fais d’Armes in Fifteenth-Century England: Chivalric Self-Fashioning* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 2007), p. 83.

<sup>161</sup> Radulescu, *Gentry Context*, pp. 43-44; see also D.L. Wakelin, ‘The Occasion, Author and Readers of *Knyghthode and Bataile*’, *Medium Aevum*, 73 (2004) 260-272; Nall, pp. 34-35; Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, p. 163.

<sup>162</sup> For an overview of *De Proprietatibus Rerum*’s content and significance in late medieval England, see David C. Fowler, *The Life and Times of John Trevisa: Medieval Scholar* (London: University of Washington Press, 1995), pp. 206-212. For Trevisa’s literary style and approach to *compendia*, see Emily Steiner, ‘Compendious Genre: Higden, Trevisa, and the Medieval Encyclopaedia’, *Exemplaria*, 27 (2012), 73-92 (83-86).

<sup>163</sup> Allen Frantzen, ‘Prologue: Documents and Monuments: Different and Interdisciplinarity in the Study of Medieval Culture’, in *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, ed. by Allen Frantzen (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 1-33 (22).

medieval battlegrounds, the thesis will better disclose, for example, the kinds of antemortem trauma which altered how the body moved, fought, spoke, ate, and smiled, thus encoding the lived experiences of knights during this period. Similarly, the final chapter of this thesis analyses material evidence to explore the ways in which human bodies and nonhuman things cooperate in the creation of knightly embodiments.

#### **Four Knightly Bodies: Organisation of the Thesis**

Considering the multiplicity of bodies at play in the knight's embodiment in late medieval English culture, a detailed analysis has of necessity to be selective. While there are many physical ontologies, including the dead body, queer body, and the racialised body, which this thesis does not have space to discuss, there is a rationale for concentrating on four bodies: the young body, old body, wounded body, and 'cyborg' (armoured) body.

Turner observes that the body is subject to 'processes of birth, decay and death' which both complicate and contribute to embodied experiences as "“meaningful” events located in a world of cultural beliefs, symbols, and practices'.<sup>164</sup> The first two chapters of this thesis consider the beliefs, symbols, and practices related to the medieval lifecycle, the differing stages of which entailed distinct embodiments in the medieval English mentality. In answering which physiognomic motifs most characterised the ideal typical body-self of the knight, Chapter One examines the young body. Here, I analyse the strong associations between the life stages *adolescentia* and *juventus*, and the morphological profile of the knight, often big, beautiful, shapely and strong.<sup>165</sup> In addition to physical morphology, the chapter identifies the ways in which the embodied practices of the knight originate in the humours and passions of the young male body.

Chapter Two explores entropy, decay, and the old body, questioning how embodied knighthood might undergo natural bodily processes which prompt physical change. Old age, Turner notes, exposes the tensions between the lived experience of a particular body (say, that of an aged runner with reduced muscle mass and bone density) and its idealisation as a body-self ('Athlete'), resulting in 'existential discomfort'. In late medieval English thought, old age imposed a series of physiognomic transformations, with the humoral body cooling into a weakened, shrunken, wrinkled, and discoloured body-self. By investigating the degree to which characterisations of aged knights in Middle English literature conform to medical

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<sup>164</sup> Turner, *Body & Society*, pp 245-46 (246).

<sup>165</sup> For an overview of the correlations between beautiful and young bodies in the Middle Ages, see Montserrat Cabré, "Beautiful Bodies", in *Cultural History of the Human Body*, pp. 121–40.

understandings of old age, this research considers the possibility of the knight's *disembodiment* as symptom of age.

Chapter Three further investigates *disembodiment* by means of the wounded body and the degree to which physical trauma is (or is not) incorporated into the knight's embodiment. Wounds and fractures potentially work, much like old age, to reshape the knight's body, potentially also impairing embodied practice. Turner argues that 'embodiment is a life process that requires the learning of body techniques', such as eating, speaking, walking, kissing, dancing, and so forth. One such body technique for the medieval knight must concern his making wounds upon another body. This chapter analyses further whether the experience of physical trauma, pain, surgery, and blood loss might represent other body techniques necessary for the knight to *be* his body-self.

The concluding chapter of the thesis analyses the harness as a prosthetic modification of the knight's embodiment. As Weiss suggests, embodiment is not an exclusively human process. Rather, *being* a body often involves 'intercorporeality' or 'corporeal exchange' between humans and nonhuman things which, together, support 'the ongoing construction and reconstruction of our bodies'.<sup>166</sup> Similarly, Csordas notes that embodiment is in part defined by 'perceptual experience' and by one's 'presence and engagement in the world'.<sup>167</sup> In Chapter Four, I explore the extent to which the knight's presence in, engagement with, and perception of the world was mediated by layers of steel, limiting movement, respiration, and vision, thereby shaping a distinct embodied experience.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, I consider the way in which the harness reconstructed the body shape, size, and silhouette of the knight. When discussing premodern forms of embodiment, Faccio asks 'what did the Romans "see" when they looked at one another?'<sup>169</sup> What an individual first looks *to* and *at* when encountering another individual – their eyes, mouth, clothing, or posture – is historically and culturally determined. I analyse how the steel harness arrested the gaze of onlookers, modified its wearers physiognomic profile, and thus dictated how the knight's body-self was encountered and understood by other bodies.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Weiss, *Body Images*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>167</sup> Thomas J. Csordas, 'Embodiment and Cultural Phenomenology', in *Perspectives on Embodiment*, pp. 143-162 (145).

<sup>168</sup> Kenneth T. Macleish looks at the 'embodied state' of the twenty-first century soldier, discussing the relationship between the soldier's body and his/her body armour. See 'Armor and Anaesthesia: Exposure, Feeling, and the Soldier's Body', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 26 (2012), 49-68 (50).

<sup>169</sup> Faccio, pp. 48-50.

<sup>170</sup> The role of armour and clothing in refabricating identities has been examined in the context of Italian knighthood, see Carolyn Springer, *Armour and Masculinity in the Italian Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). And in the English Enlightenment, see Karen Harvey, 'Men of Parts: Masculine Embodiment and the Male Leg in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 54 (2015), 797-821.

Throughout, the thesis stresses the sometimes uneasy constellation of ideas and impressions regarding the different bodies (human and nonhuman) and physiological processes through which embodiments emerge. Each of the ‘multiple bodies’ of knighthood attracts its own tensions and challenges, sometimes threatening *dis*embodiment. In this, the investigation will demonstrate that any ostensible ‘essentialness’ of embodied identity is a fantasy, obscuring the more complex processes that govern relationships between bodies and selves as they interact and remake one another. Crucially, however, as Nanoglou points out, these fantasies of body and self often blur ideology and ontology, with late medieval English knights, like the modern embodiments Nanoglou discusses, ‘*really living* these fantasies, successfully or not’.<sup>171</sup> This thesis interrogates the fantasy of embodied knighthood in late medieval English culture, identifying the intertextual networks in which this embodiment was constructed, as well as the experiences, lived and represented, through which it came under pressure.

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<sup>171</sup> Nanoglou, p. 163. My emphasis.

## Chapter One: The Young Body

There is considerable conformity in literary depictions of knightly bodies, particularly in the romance genre.<sup>1</sup> The typical physiognomic profile for the knight is *byge*: that is, physically large, robust, and powerful; *faire*: attractive and well-proportioned; and *wight*: brave, vigorous, and warlike.<sup>2</sup> In this physiognomic formula, the knight conforms to one of the three major *topoi* governing characterisation in medieval literature, that of the ‘handsome youth’.<sup>3</sup> As Richard Kaeuper has suggested, the superlative bodies of knights in medieval literature may reflect the access which higher-status individuals had to better living conditions, diet, and physical regimens, which allowed for the cultivation of ‘better’ bodies.<sup>4</sup> In the terminology of embodiment theory, the knights of late medieval English culture could be recognised by a particular ‘style of flesh’.<sup>5</sup> This chapter argues that one factor influencing the embodiment of the knight concerns the cultural attitudes to and understandings of young male bodies. The chapter analyses the elision of and, at times, enmity between the corporeal identities of knight and youth in late medieval England. I argue that, of the multiple bodies contributing to the knight’s body-self, the young male body is most responsible for imparting the recognisable ‘material’ – both morphological and physiological – of the knight.

One of the earliest academics to address knighthood in relation to a particular medieval life stage was Georges Duby, who argued that chivalric culture developed in such a way to reflect the experiences and expectations of noble boys and youths in high medieval Europe.<sup>6</sup> Duby suggested that the knight, as a cultural and literary type, became imaginatively entangled with the medieval life stage of *juventus*, or youth. Without the dependency of infancy or the responsibilities of adulthood, the *juvenis*, or young man, was, like the questing knight, ‘always on the point of departure or on the way to another place’. While Duby did not discuss this relationship in terms of the body, he argued that forms of chivalric literature like romance reflected and, in turn, helped acculture ‘the tastes, prejudices, frustrations, and daily behaviour of the “youths”’. In this, Duby hits upon what embodiment theory terms ‘body techniques’ – particular practices through which one learns how to *be* a body – which, for young elites, were partly influenced by stories about knights.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jill Mann notes Malory’s knights are ‘barely differentiated from each other’, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> Westerhof breaks this profile down, pp. 46-50, and Lynch examines these physical traits in relation to the knight’s noble blood, pp. 65-66.

<sup>3</sup> See Henrik Specht, ‘The Beautiful, the Handsome, and the Ugly: Some Aspects of the Art of Character Portrayal in Medieval Literature’, *Studia Neophilologica*, 56 (1984), 129-46.

<sup>4</sup> Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, pp. 190-91.

<sup>5</sup> Faccio, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. by Cynthia Postan (London: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 112-122 (113, 120).

<sup>7</sup> Turner, *Body & Society*, p. 245.

J. Burrow reached a similar conclusion when examining depictions of aging in medieval literature and philosophy.<sup>8</sup> Burrow identified the presence of a ‘cult of youth’, originating in French courtly culture and most apparent in romance literature.<sup>9</sup> ‘Their stories’, Burrow explained, ‘are stories of love and adventure, considered as the natural preoccupations of warm-blooded youth’. The avatar for this ‘cult’ was the archetypal *lusty bachelor*, often cast as a knight, whose young body burned for both martial and romantic conquest.<sup>10</sup> The *lusty bachelor* constitutes a pronounced form of body-self, with both the character’s virtues and volatilities – the qualities that make the *lusty bachelor* who and what he is – deriving from the humoural complexion of the young body. Tellingly, the best-known iteration of this archetype, for Burrow, was one of the best-known knights of romance, Sir Lancelot.<sup>11</sup>

The archetypal ‘knight’ and ‘youth’ thus began to blur in medieval imaginations, first in France but later in England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In this period, the population decreased due to war and disease, creating new socio-economic opportunities and placing a novel emphasis on the young.<sup>12</sup> Karen Smyth has argued that the chivalric-inflected lionisation of youth suited this ‘culture in the flower of manhood [...] young, fresh, and courageous’.<sup>13</sup> The ‘the youth as knight’ in this way became representative of a particular late medieval English mentality, encompassing ideas about the body, social mobility, and societal regeneration, just as the ‘knight as *lusty bachelor*’ proved characteristic in the romance portrayals of knighthood. Duby felt that this *topoi* was so prominent that he advised contemporaries to ‘consider the themes of the literature of chivalry anew’, in the context of the medieval lifecycle and male youth.<sup>14</sup>

In practice, however, there have been obstacles to this approach. Marian Rothstein, for instance, has agreed with Duby that characters aged between thirteen and nineteen appear

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<sup>8</sup> J. Burrow, *Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Burrow, pp. 162-3.

<sup>10</sup> Burrow, pp. 171-2.

<sup>11</sup> One of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Pilgrims*, the ‘Squire’, is referred to as a ‘lusty bachelor’ in the *General Prologue* of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, and so represents another example of this archetype. For a discussion of the Squire in the context of late medieval English knighthood and masculinity, see Craig Taylor ‘The Squire’, in *Historians on Chaucer: The ‘General Prologue’ to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Stephen Rigby (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 63-76.

<sup>12</sup> On the crises of the fifteenth century and their impact on demographics, see Pamela Nightingale, ‘England and the European Depression of the Mid-Fifteenth Century’, *Journal of European Economic History*, 26 (1997), 631-656; also S. H. Rigby, ‘English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Deference, Ambition and Conflict’, in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350-c.1500*, ed. by Peter Brown (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 25-39 (29-34).

<sup>13</sup> Karen Smyth, ‘Imagining Age in the Fifteenth Century: Nation, Everyman, and the Self’, in *Medieval Life Cycles: Continuity and Change*, ed. by Isabelle Cochelin and Karen Smyth (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 319-49, p. 332.

<sup>14</sup> Duby, *Chivalrous Society*, p. 121.



in far greater number ‘than might be expected’ in the romance genre.<sup>15</sup> Rothstein points out, however, that within this genre, it is often difficult to reliably track time and, therefore, the age of any given character. What is more, Rothstein questions the extent to which literary characterisations conform to broader medieval assumptions about what was physically possible for adolescents. Rothstein cites the example of *Amadis de Gaule*, in which the character Galaor becomes a knight at age eighteen. Rothstein argues that, prior to the dubbing ceremony, Galaor ‘had neither practise, experience, nor observations to prepare him to become, as he does, an instantly excellent teen-knight’.<sup>16</sup> Rothstein thus acknowledges the primacy of the body in compelling the youth-knight association, but considers it the product of cultural fantasy. ‘Few fifteen-year-olds’, Rothstein notes, ‘had the strength to manoeuvre a lance or a pike while fully clad in armour’.

Phyllis Gaffney has also questioned the relationship between age, physical practice, and identity in medieval romance.<sup>17</sup> Gaffney finds that, in Old French epic and romance, fifteen is by far the most common age provided, with youths of fourteen, thirteen, and eighteen also appearing. Much like Rothstein, however, Gaffney argues that, if the intention of the author in such cases is to set audience expectations of ‘how the character ought to feel and behave, [then] these expectations are very often frustrated’.<sup>18</sup> The criticism in both Gaffney’s and Rothstein’s work is that characters identified as adolescent boys exhibit neither the temperament nor behaviours which their physical immaturity should imply. Instead, it is argued, boys are embodied as adult men. Indeed, Gaffney asserts that the heroism of such youths ‘is a function of the extent to which they transcend the incapacities of their stated age’.<sup>19</sup>

Much of this work, explicitly or not, engages with late medieval understandings of the young body. When Rothstein calls adolescent knights ‘the stuff of dreams’, the argument relies on a series of unstated assumptions regarding the physical capabilities, humours, and

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<sup>15</sup> Marian Rothstein, ‘Teen Knights: Interpreting Precocity in Early Modern Life-Stories’, in *The Premodern Teenager: Youth in Society 1150-1650*, ed. by Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2002), pp. 173-88 (173).

<sup>16</sup> Rothstein, pp. 180, 187-7.

<sup>17</sup> Phyllis Gaffney, ‘The Ages of Man in Old French Verse Epic and Romance’, *The Modern Language Review*, 85 (1990), 570-82.

<sup>18</sup> Gaffney, p. 576.

<sup>19</sup> Gaffney, pp. 577-78. Gaffney in this way unintentionally recalls the arguments of Philippe Ariès, who suggested that the life stage of childhood was socially and culturally absent in this period, with children being idealised as miniature adults. See his *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of the Family*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Pimlico, 1996), pp. 18-33. Ariès’ arguments have proven divisive and often criticised. For an overview, see Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity Press, New Edition 2018), pp. 11-15; Barbara Hanawalt, ‘Medievalists and the Study of Childhood’, *Speculum*, 77 (2002), 440-60.

temperament of adolescent bodies.<sup>20</sup> In sources like *Amadis de Gaule*, wherein youths seem to become knights without preparation, authorial intent may not be to fantasise, but to convey sincere assumptions regarding the body's radical complexion and the essential nature of embodied identity. It is arguable that scholars like Rothstein overlook that the very ease and spontaneity with which medieval youths *do* prowess and *be* knightly bodies, itself reveals something about the relationship between body and self during this period.<sup>21</sup> When investigating the relationship between youth and the embodied identity, practices, and predilections of the knight, then, one must first begin with medieval attitudes to the lifecycle itself. The life stages of medieval youth were strongly embodied, with recognisable physiognomic and humoral complexions. In the next part of this chapter, I will outline these life stages and consider the presence of young knights in late medieval English warfare.

### ***Adolescentia* and *Juventus* in Late Medieval English Culture**

By the fifteenth century, multiple methods existed of dividing the life course into discrete periods, or stages. As Burrow notes, aging within this system involved the passage 'from one distinct stage to another', with each stage being beholden to 'a prevailing humour' and associated set of behaviours.<sup>22</sup> Divisions into four life stages were especially popular owing to associations with macrocosmic forces such as the four seasons, elements, and humours, as were seven-fold divisions which reflected celestial and astrological arrangements.<sup>23</sup> In the case of the four-fold division, the life course could be arranged as: *adolescentia* (ages 0-25); *juventus* (ages 25-40); *senectus* (ages 40-60); and *senium* (age 60 until death).<sup>24</sup> Here, *adolescentia*, as the first of four life stages, connotated the temperate springtime of human life, during which the body, its humours, and the behaviours to which they gave rise became most volatile and pliable.<sup>25</sup>

One fifteenth-century *regimen sanitatis*, *The Booke of Goode Governance and Guyding of þe Body*, discusses spring as the sanguine season, being a 'hote and moiste' time during which

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<sup>20</sup> Rothstein, p. 187.

<sup>21</sup> Helen Cooper discusses this in relation to the depictions of young saints of hagiography. As with literary knights, the behavioural traits of the religious hero manifest abnormally early in childhood, indicating that the individual is destined to become a saint. See 'Good Advice', p. 103.

<sup>22</sup> Burrow, p. 177.

<sup>23</sup> Burrow discusses these distinct formulations in detail, with each responding respectively to medieval ideas of seasonal (5-54) versus astrological time (55-94).

<sup>24</sup> This represents one of the most basic and iconic divisions. Shulamith Shahar reproduces this and other popular schemes for structuring the lifecycle in *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: Winter Clothes us in Shadow and Pain* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 15-17.

<sup>25</sup> See Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe c.1300-1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 96-126. Shahar, *Growing Old* (47) discusses archetypal youth in the Middle Ages as comprising 'warmth, flowering, power, love, beauty and life [...] sunrise, fire, sun and spring'.

‘mannis bloode [begins] to encrease’.<sup>26</sup> It followed, too, that the dominant humour during *adolescentia* was hot and moist blood, with Trevisa claiming that ‘pure blood’ was found ‘noȝt but in ȝonglinges’ (I. 149). Blood, Trevisa explains, is not only ‘hooȝt and moist’ but ‘sotile and swete’, making ‘parfite ȝouȝe’ and ‘glad’ spirits (I. 153). Thus, individuals like adolescents with sanguine complexions possessed cheerful, hopeful, but at times careless or cocky temperaments. During an early episode of the *Morte*, Arthur’s rival, King Royns, possesses a mantle of beards, cut from defeated adult kings. When his messenger asks for Arthur’s beard as a sign of submission, the youth responds ‘thou mayste se my bearde ys full yonge yet to make off a purphile [trimming] (45. 27-28). As an alternative exchange of body parts, Arthur, with the pugnacity of a sanguine adolescent, threatens ‘he shall lese hys hede, by the fayth of my body!’ (45. 30-31).

In addition to physiological temperament, the morphological features of the adolescent body itself also underwent transformation. Trevisa describes *adolescentia* as the life stage in which the body became more supple, strong, and active. This gave rise to a particular embodiment, one ‘able to barnische [grow large] and encrease, and fonge myȝt and strengþ’, its ‘members ben neische and tendre [...] abil to strecche and growe by vertu of hete’ (I. 292). Heat, alongside moisture, again presents itself as the most iconic humoral trait for medieval adolescents, dictating fiery attitude, a predisposition toward certain activities, and, as Trevisa notes, an enlarged body. Elsewhere, Trevisa observes that an abundance of ‘heat’ and ‘temperat humour’ directly correspond to a body ‘more hihe, grete, longe, and brode’ (I. 143).

The following life stage, *juventus*, was commonly understood as an intensification of the qualities associated with *adolescentia*. Its season was summer, and its humour was the dryer and hotter choler, or yellow bile. The *Booke of Goode Governance* compares choler to a ‘fire which is exceedingly hote and drye’.<sup>27</sup> An individual in the life stage of *juventus* behaved in many respects like one in *adolescentia*, though bolder, fiercer, and potentially more troubled by the intense heat of their complexion. Trevisa explains that too much choler even ‘brenneþ’ the body, causing visions ‘of griseliche siȝtes in slepe [...] of fire [...] and of dredeful brennynge’ (I. 159). This innate heat of the choleric body, in turn, prompted a larger, broader, and stronger morphology (as noted above). Divisions between *adolescentia* and *juventus* were often roughly drawn and irregularly kept. For Trevisa, *juventus* is ‘þe middil amonges ages’, and does not suffer the full destructive potential of the choleric body (I. 292). From the twelfth century onwards, however, *juventus*, having previously represented the

<sup>26</sup> This text is taken from a Middle English translation of Johannes Hispaniensis in Bodelian MS. Rawlinson C. 83, fol. 6. It is cited here in *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*, ed. by M. A. Manzalaoui (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 3-9 (7).

<sup>27</sup> *Secretum Secretorum*, p. 7.

zenith of the lifecycle, was supplanted by a more mature adulthood, succeeding *juventus* but distinct from old age.<sup>28</sup> This new ‘middle age’, often called *virilis aetes*, *virilitas*, or *robor*, meant that by the late Middle Ages, *juventus*, though still beginning in the mid-twenties, had become associated with the fiery period of late youth, thereby overlapping considerably with *adolescentia*.<sup>29</sup> Historians Barbara Hanawalt, Ruth Mazo Karras, and Jessie Sherwood have each found, in different late medieval English contexts, that Middle English authors used *adolescentia* and *juventus* interchangeably.<sup>30</sup>

Each of the medieval life stages could be subdivided further, producing even nine-fold divisions of the lifecycle. In the case of *adolescentia*, the stage could be broken up into three parts: *infantia*, the period prior to speech, usually ending at age seven; *pueritia*, the period of childhood play and basic learning before the milestone age(s) of fourteen/fifteen; and, finally, *adolescentia* itself, the beginnings of young adulthood and passage into *juventus*.<sup>31</sup> For the nobility, this transition has been argued to have been celebrated with, or even triggered by, the acquisition of knighthood. This has led to the belief in a ‘chivalric lifecycle’, wherein *adolescentia* corresponds to the years spent as a squire, *juventus* to those in strenuous knighthood, and *virilitas* beginning with the knight’s marriage, which closed the period of choleric prowess and youthful adventure in favour of the more settled domesticity of the ‘knight-householder’.<sup>32</sup> Maurice Keen noted the potential for dubbing ceremonies to act as ‘coming of age’ rituals.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Ruth Mazo Karras and Katherine Lewis have both recognised that the acquisition of knighthood, and later marriage, could act as milestones in the adolescent’s passage into *juventus*, and subsequent maturation into *virilitas*.<sup>34</sup>

Yet one could remain a squire for the duration of the life course. Michael Prestwich cites the example of John de Thirwall senior, called “the oldest squire in the North”, who claimed to have fought as a squire for sixty-nine years.<sup>35</sup> Alternatively, one could be dubbed late in the martial career, possibly even at its close.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the at times awkward division of the medieval lifecycle in the context of knighthood does not adequately clarify how particular bodies and selves mapped onto specific life stages. As Smyth has remarked,

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<sup>28</sup> Cochelin, pp. 7-15.

<sup>29</sup> Cochelin, pp. 17, 36-7.

<sup>30</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up*, pp. 109-13; Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2002), pp. 13-14; Jessie Sherwood, ‘Rebellious Youth and Pliant Children: Jewish Converts in Adolescentia’, in *Medieval Life Cycles: Continuity and Change*, pp. 183-209 (183-5).

<sup>31</sup> See Shahaar’s examples, *Growing Old*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>32</sup> Burrows, p. 175.

<sup>33</sup> Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 64-82 (67).

<sup>34</sup> Karras, *From Boys to Men*, p. 64. Katherine Lewis, *Kingship and Masculinity in Late Medieval England* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 170. See also Neal, pp. 182-84.

<sup>35</sup> Prestwich, ‘Miles in Armis’, p. 218.

<sup>36</sup> Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, pp. 124-5.

the fifteenth-century lifecycle was not ‘a predictable or static formula’; rather, different uses in different contexts show ‘each age state being perceived as distinct and as wholly interdependent’.<sup>37</sup> *Adolescentia* and *juventus* are at once two successive, discrete stages dividing the individual’s youth, as well as two different names for the same period of young adulthood. Both *adolescentia* and *juventus*, however, implied recognisable morphological and humoral traits arguably conducive to the strenuous embodied experience of knighthood.

This is demonstrated by ages of majority and military service in late medieval England. Nicholas Orme, for instance, has shown that the beginnings of social and legal responsibility usually coincided with the period of *adolescentia*, around ages fourteen or fifteen.<sup>38</sup> Orme cites age fourteen as the milestone from which a child could be expected to swear oaths, and age fifteen as the typical threshold past which an individual could give evidence in ecclesiastical courts. Importantly, martial obligations often began around the same time. Hanawalt finds that the convention in late medieval London was for those aged sixteen and over to perform military service.<sup>39</sup> Prestwich, similarly, has argued that legal requirements compelled those between the ages of sixteen and sixty to bear arms, though many over sixty continued to fight.<sup>40</sup> In 1410, an English statute held that from the age of fifteen, the individual acquired responsibility for familiarising himself with the armour and weaponry befitting his social status.<sup>41</sup> The early fifteenth-century armorial dispute between Grey and Hastings took statements from over a hundred witnesses, many of whom began their military service at age sixteen.<sup>42</sup> Four witnesses claimed to have participated in their first campaign by age twelve.<sup>43</sup> Other cases in the Court of Chivalry, such as the late fourteenth-century dispute between Lovel and Morley, reveal a similar precedent, with many witnesses claiming active participation in war from ages fourteen or fifteen.<sup>44</sup> In charting patterns of military service amongst the English nobility, Adrian Bell, Anne Curry, Andy King, and David Simpkin sampled 247 English peers from 1369-1453. Of these, seventy-eight began their career in arms between ages sixteen and twenty, while twenty-two were younger than sixteen during their first combat.<sup>45</sup> Fourteen of the peers traced their first experiences of warfare to the age of twelve or younger.

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<sup>37</sup> Smyth, p. 346.

<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 322.

<sup>39</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing Up*, pp. 201-3.

<sup>40</sup> Prestwich, ‘Miles in Armis’, pp. 217-18.

<sup>41</sup> Orme, *Medieval Children*, p. 183.

<sup>42</sup> See Maurice Keen, ‘English Military Experience and the Court of Chivalry: The Case of Grey V. Hastings’, in *Nobles, Knights, and Men-at-Arms in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), pp. 167-86.

<sup>43</sup> Keen, ‘English Military Experience’, p. 180.

<sup>44</sup> Ayton, ‘Knights’, p. 92.

<sup>45</sup> *Soldier in Late Medieval England*, pp. 25-6.

Some specific examples are illustrative here. Both Edward Prince of Wales and Henry V participated in battles at age sixteen and seventeen respectively, and Henry was only thirteen during the Scotland campaign of 1400.<sup>46</sup> It may be questioned whether the presence of adolescent boys in martial settings was largely performative. By the time Henry VI was eight years old, for instance, he owned several swords of varying designs and a full harness.<sup>47</sup> The eight-year-old Henry, then in *pueritia*, would obviously not have participated in the violent bodily practices of knighthood; however, the intention was arguably that, by the time Henry was fourteen, his young body would be accustomed to being in harness. In this way, the child is still *being*, or learning *how to be*, the body of a knight. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that those in *adolescentia* did experience the physical trauma of knighthood. Henry, earl of Somerset, was fourteen during the 1415 French campaign, as part of which he was badly wounded at Harfleur, while Humphrey, Lord Fitz Walter, died at the same siege, aged sixteen.<sup>48</sup> Henry V, most famously, was fifteen during the battle of Shrewsbury (1403), where Thomas Walsingham describes him as an active martial participant.<sup>49</sup> Having been wounded, Henry, though only a boy [*licet puer esse*], masters the natural vigour of his age [*etatis exigenciam*], and employs it to do violence against his enemies.

Archaeological evidence also helps establish the active martial practices of late medieval English adolescents. Violence during the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485) would have required individuals in *adolescentia* and *juventus*, including those from noble and gentry backgrounds, to commit their bodies to war.<sup>50</sup> Excavations of the 1461 mass grave at Towton placed the average age of skeletal remains at thirty years, based on osteological and dental data.<sup>51</sup> This would put combatants in the medieval life stage *juventus*, or possibly late *adolescentia*. The age range for eleven of the bodies, however, was further narrowed and placed between sixteen and twenty-five, which comfortably fits within the bracket for medieval *adolescentia*.<sup>52</sup> Methods of determining the age of remains are more precise in younger individuals owing to consistency in the development of bones and teeth prior to age twenty-five. Two individuals from the mass grave at Towton, 26 and 37, were discovered to have teeth still in the process of developing. The ages of these individuals were estimated to have

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<sup>46</sup> For Henry V's adolescent military career, see Lewis, pp. 46-53, 67-9.

<sup>47</sup> Orme, *Medieval Children*, p. 182.

<sup>48</sup> *Soldier in Late Medieval England*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>49</sup> *The St Albans Chronicle: The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, 1394-1422, ed. and trans. by John Taylor, Wendy R. Childs, and Leslie Watkiss, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), II, p. 370. Subsequent vol & page given in text.

<sup>50</sup> See Horrox, pp. 9-11.

<sup>51</sup> Anthea Boylston, Malin Holst, and Jennifer Coughlan, 'Physical Anthropology', in *Blood Red Roses: The Archaeology of a Mass Grave at Towton AD 1461*, ed. by Veronica Fiorato, Anthea Boylston, and Christopher Knüsel, revised edition (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), pp 45-59. (51-52).

<sup>52</sup> Boylston et al, pp. 47-51.

been somewhere between sixteen and eighteen at the time of their death. Towton 37 even exhibited small, well-healed cranial fractures, potentially indicating participation in earlier combats.<sup>53</sup> Other individuals, such as Towton 47 and 49, can likewise be classified in the *adolescentia* age group, being between sixteen and twenty years of age when they died.<sup>54</sup> Archaeological evidence like this allows one to observe with confidence that, by contemporary standards, adolescents were fighting and dying at battles like Towton.

There exists no single rule or threshold that determines on which side of adolescence or adulthood an individual might be classed.<sup>55</sup> Progression through the medieval lifecycle, in this, was physiological rather than chronological, with age responding to signs discerned in the body and its behaviours. The arguments of Gaffney and Rothstein appear limited in this light, particularly given the above evidence. It can be amply demonstrated that adolescent boys could move and fight in harness, and, indeed, began learning the body techniques necessary to do so earlier in life. These expectations reveal much about medieval attitudes to the bodies and selves of noble youths. The body in *adolescentia* increased in *bote* blood, *myȝt*, and *strengþ*. It grew taller, broader, longer, yet remained *tendre*. The young body, in both its morphology and humoural complexion, thus represents a viable ‘ideal typical’ body for the knight. Social and archaeological records on medieval warfare support this, suggesting that the participation of adolescents in the embodied practices of knighthood was not only unexceptional but, in some cases, desirable. I will now look more closely at how understandings of *adolescentia* and *juventus* informed depictions of knighthood in Middle English literature. In particular, I will analyse to what extent the particular ‘style of flesh’ of the literary knight originated in the young body, and what this means for romance portrayals of knighthood.

### **Male Youth and Embodied Knighthood in Middle English Literature**

William Caxton’s 1484 *Ordre of Chyvalry* describes the ideal knight in terms of a specific and recognisable embodiment. The knight can be identified by his ‘noble apparence’ (37), being neither ‘ouer grete or ouer fatte’, nor with ‘ony other euyl disposycion in his body’ (64). In Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, these bodily motifs are shown to be instrumental in guiding the selection of prospective knights. On his wedding day, Arthur is approached by a youth named Torre, the son of a ‘cowherde’, who requests that Arthur make him a knight. Torre, in spite of his humble status, is ‘a fayre yonge man of eyghtene yere’ (78. 13), whom Arthur

<sup>53</sup> Shannon Novak, ‘Case Studies’, in *Blood Red Roses*, pp. 240–268 (260).

<sup>54</sup> Novak, ‘Case Studies’, pp. 265–66.

<sup>55</sup> Orme, *Medieval Children*, p. 327.

‘faste’ recognises as ‘passygnly well vysaged and well made of hys yerys’ (79. 8-9). Torre’s father complains that his son refuses to labour alongside his family, often being found instead ‘shotynge or castynge dartes’, or hoping ‘to se batayles and to beholde knyghtes’ (79. 2-4). Arthur requests that Torre be placed alongside his brothers, of which he has twelve, all ‘shapyn muche lyke the poore man’ (79. 12-13). ‘But Torre’, Malory says, ‘was nat lyke hymn other in shappe nother in countenaunce, for he was muche more than ony of them’ (79. 13-14). Upon seeing this, Arthur, without further explanation, merely asks ‘where ys the swerde he shall be made knyght withall?’ (79. 15-16).

Though it is later discovered that Sir Torre is the bastard of King Pellinore, and thus of the nobility, it is foremost his embodiment – his *shappe*, *vysage*, and compulsion to engage his body in select practices – that compels Arthur to make him a knight. In this, Torre’s body declares the essential truth of his identity, the ideological force of which cannot be mistaken, even when disguised by an ostensibly lower status. When compared with his peasant brothers, there is simply so *muche more* of Torre, as if he is a member of a different and greater race entirely. Indeed, Torre’s body entails a kind of physiognomic radical complexion to which even Torre himself is ignorant, but which he unconsciously conforms to in his predisposition toward casting darts and looking for other knights. In addition, for Malory, this unmistakable body-self of the knight is partly understood with reference to age. Torre is not just well made, but is finely constructed *of hys yerys*, of which he has eighteen – a youth in *adolescentia*.

Torre’s description is an example of the *fayre unknowen* trope, which sees anonymous but obviously knightly youths discover the hereditary truths of their bodies and selves. Malory’s Gareth is another example, also appearing, like Torre, as ‘the goodlyest yonge man and the fayreste’ ever seen by Arthur’s court, being ‘large and longe and brode [and] well-vysaged’ (223. 23-26). Gareth’s body is recognisably shaped by the humoural heat and moisture of his young complexion. Indeed, these traits of beauty, proportion, and physical fitness were those consistently cited by other Middle English texts depicting the early life stages *adolescentia* and *juventus*.<sup>56</sup> Because of this, Michael Goodich calls physical beauty the ‘chief characteristic of the adolescent’ in the Middle Ages.<sup>57</sup> Goodich notes, however, that beauty was not prestigious in and of itself, but, as with Gareth and Torre, because it was often understood to attend, and so signify, ‘the agency of an agile and well-ordered body’.

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<sup>56</sup> See Gerhard Jaritz, “Young, Rich, and Beautiful: The Visualisation of Male Beauty in the Late Middle Ages”, in *The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Full Many Ways: Festschrift in Honor of Janos M. Bak*, ed. by Balazs Nagy and Marcell Sebok (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), pp. 61-77; Youngs, pp. 96-126.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Goodich, *From Birth to Old Age: The Human Life Cycle in Medieval Thought 1250-1350* (London: University Press of America, 1989), p. 105.



Though *fayre* and *well-vysaged*, the bodies of Gareth and Torre are not purely aesthetic, but are intended to convey a more profound bodily rhetoric suggestive of their embodied identities. One of the fullest examples of this correlation between youth, a particular body, and the selfhood of knight, comes in the Middle English Vegetius translation, *Knyghthode and Bataile*.

*Knyghthode and Bataile* repeatedly stresses the affinity between youth and *chivaler* status.<sup>58</sup> The book, for example, identifies ‘yonge folk’, ‘in puberte [and] of tendre age’, as those best placed to learn the body techniques indicative of knighthood (201-3). This is because the bodies of the young are, as noted above, lighter and more flexible, with the sanguine or choleric complexions of youth naturally predisposing them to bravery and pugnacity. Like Caxton, when describing the exemplary knight, *Knyghthode and Bataile* places particular emphasis on ‘the look’ and ‘the lymys’ of the medieval youth (300). The book then goes on to further clarify this *look*, recommending that, ‘for bataile’, one take ‘adolescentys yonge’

of grym visage and look pervigilaunt  
vpright-necked, brod-brested, boned stronge.  
Brawny, bigge armes, fyngeres elongaunt,  
kne deep, small wombe, and leggyis valiaunt,  
To renne & leppe: of these and such signys  
thelectioun to make (243-49).

From head to toe, encompassing proportion, posture, visage, and even the qualities of bones and fingers, *Knyghthode and Bataile* sketches the distinct morphology of a particular embodiment. This is not to suggest that mature adults in the Middle Ages might not appear this way, but this text directly associates the body being described with that of an adolescent. As with Torre, this is a body *well made of its yerys*. This passage thus provides a good indication of the physiognomic profile that Arthur looked for when evaluating Torre’s worthiness, praising his *visage*. Christine de Pisan reproduced this description of the ideal knight almost exactly in her *Book of Fayttes of Armes*, thereby further disseminating this image of embodied knighthood, and the defining role of youth within it (35). Indeed, this elision between the young male body and the corporeal identity of knight is not restricted to chivalric literature.

The mid-fifteenth-century lyric poem *The Day of Life* casts several life stages as late medieval cultural types, each associated with a particular hour of the day.<sup>59</sup> These pairings would likely have been familiar to medieval audiences, providing evidence for the popular

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<sup>58</sup> *Knyghthode and Bataile: A XVth Century Verse Paraphrase of Flavius Vegetius Renatus’ Treatise ‘De Re Militari’*, EETS OS 201, ed. by R. Dyboski and Z.M. Arend (London: Oxford UP, 1935) Subsequent line numbers given in text.

<sup>59</sup> National Library of Wales, Porkington MS. 10, fols. 62-4.

perception of life stages in the late medieval English imagination. In the earlier sections of the poem, for example, the poem's narrator is a pupil. During 'myde-morroo-daye' he learns to play, 'to fy3t and beyt' with his friends, while at 'vnder-day' he leaves them for 'skole', 'to lerne good as chyldern dothe'. 'At mydday', when the speaker leaves his childhood behind, he reveals: 'I was doobbyt a kny3te', and 'there was none so bold a wy3te, that in battayll durst me abyde'. As a knight, the narrator is full of the 'pryd', 'Iollyte', and 'fayre bovtte' which medieval audiences would have recognised as typical traits of male youth. He is also, significantly, a *ny3te* – a person possessed of the kind of physical vigour and brawn so well-conveyed in *Knyghthode and Bataile*.

Knighthood could thus be understood as a thing seen in, on, and *as* the body – a particular style of flesh, with its own *look* and *lym*. In texts like the *Morte*, it is not only other knights, like Arthur, who recognise the embodied promise of youths like Torre and Gareth, but the audience, too. Poems like *The Day of Life* popularised the idea that certain characteristics common to male youth sat comfortably in the body of the knight, thereby blurring the two body-selves. Thus, a literary knight like Lancelot seems at times ageless, not unlike a biblical patriarch, forever beautiful, bold, and big, because, without these qualities, his embodiment as 'knight' would be unclear and impractical. On the other hand, fifteenth-century images of the 'Wheel of Life' could use an armoured knight to represent the life stage of youth, confident that their audiences would understand the connection.<sup>60</sup> In consequence, two different body-selves come to share one style of flesh. This sharing of embodiments between two medieval types is important because, as has been shown above, the young male body of the Middle Ages was more than just *look* and *lym*.

At its core, the medieval body was its humours. Different combinations of humours predisposed not only variety in bodily form and shape, but particular behavioural inclinations and moral preoccupations. The young knight in *The Day of Life*, for example, declares four main attributes suggestive of his life stage. Two of these, *fayre bovtte* and the vigorous corporeal identity of *ny3te*, have already been discussed. The additional attributes, *pryd* and *iollyte*, are traits equally important in late medieval English attitudes toward the young male body. Contemporaries understood individuals in the life stages of *adolescentia* and *juventus* to be objects of a battle waged by specific vices and virtues, the outcome of which would determine the moral character of the youth.<sup>61</sup> *Adolescentia* in particular was understood as a

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<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Surrey: Princeton Press, 1986), p. 151.

<sup>61</sup> Barbara Hanawalt considers this in the context of the late medieval English gentry behaviours. See "'The Childe of Bristowe' & The Makings of Middle-Class Adolescence', in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 155-178.

pliable period in which both virtuous and villainous impulses arose within the young body, potentially fostering behaviours that would persist in later life.<sup>62</sup> Among the virtues thought native to this life stage were hope, magnanimity, fearlessness, and, as in *The Day of Life*, joviality.<sup>63</sup> Corresponding vices could move youthful temperaments towards insolence, stubbornness, and, again as the poem describes, pride. Even the fair *shappe* and *countenance* of *adolescentia*, so important in depictions of embodied knighthood, could be corrupted into vanity and affectation.

This is apparent elsewhere in Middle English literature. In Caxton's *History of Iason* (1477) for instance, Aeson, Jason's dying father, uses his last words to command his adolescent son, that 'thou be virtuous and that thou flee the vices'.<sup>64</sup> George Ashby gives similar advice in his *Active Policy of a Prince* (c. 1470), which he addressed to the sixteen-year-old Edward, Prince of Wales. Ashby praises Edward's 'bringyng vp', which has fostered a 'vertuous disposicioun' during the years of *adolescentia*.<sup>65</sup> Ashby goes on, however, to warn Edward that he must struggle to keep this course. 'There was never yet fal of high estate', Ashby warns, 'but it was for vices' (162-63). Henry Percy (d. 1403) earned renown for his service as an English knight in both Scottish and French campaigns, eventually gaining membership to the Order of the Garter in 1388.<sup>66</sup> Percy was reputedly a vigorous and bellicose knight, given the moniker 'hotspur', which suggests the choleric audacity and impudence of *juventus*. After becoming involved in the Wars of the Roses, however, Percy died at the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403.<sup>67</sup> Walsingham reflects that Hotspur enjoyed promising fortunes [*serena fortuna*] but was too often moved by unbridled rashness [*effrenata temeritas*] and flattery [*blandita*] (II. 358). Interestingly, Walsingham in part attributes Henry's death to stubborn youthful vice [*induratum iuuenilem maliciam*], although when he died Henry Percy was thirty-nine years old (II. 362).

Although Trevisa discusses *adolescentia* as sometimes lasting until 'þe ende of 28 3ere', noting too how 'fiscicians stretchen þis age to þe ende of 30 3ere or of 35 3ere', by most

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<sup>62</sup> Fiona Dunlop discusses this at length in the context late medieval young male elites. See *The Late Medieval Interlude: The Drama of Youth and Aristocratic Masculinity* (York: York Medieval Press, 2007), pp. 22-53.

<sup>63</sup> On youthful virtues and vices see Goodich, p. 106.

<sup>64</sup> William Caxton, *The History of Iason*, EETS OS 111, ed. by John Munro (London: Oxford UP, 1913), p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> George Ashby, 'The Active Policy of a Prince', in *George Ashby's Poems*, EETS OS 76, ed. by Mary Bateson (London: Oxford UP, 1899), lines 113-34. Subsequent line numbers given in text.

<sup>66</sup> For Hotspur's martial successes in his youth and subsequent admittance to the Order, see Hugh E. Collins, *The Order of the Garter 1348-1461: Chivalry and Politics in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 45-55, 100.

<sup>67</sup> Anthony Cheetham describes Henry Percy's practical and political grounds for revolt as being minimal, attributing the move instead to Percy's 'vain' and 'impetuous' character. See *The Wars of the Roses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 21-26 (21).

models Henry would have been in his middle age, *robor* or *virilitas*, at the time of his death (I. 292). This again supports the observation that chronology was less important than physiology when judging one's place within the medieval lifecycle. Though thirty-nine, Hotspur's body-self was that of an intemperate youth. The audacious Henry Percy thus fits the cautionary model of Ashby, his promising career corrupted by vice. Similar examples include Roger, the earl of March (d. 1399), described by Walsingham as a vigorous youth [*valde iuuenis*] (II. 116). Roger, like Hotspur, possessed a hot-headed assurance of his own manliness [*in virtute sua*] but lacked prudence. Riding alone and unarmed [*sine sociis suis sine armis*], Roger was ambushed and killed. Vices like hubris and impudence thus posed danger to youths themselves, as did more prosaic failings. Caxton's *Ordre* warns against 'gloutonye', which 'egendreth feblesse [...] slouthe & lachenes of body', debasing the noble physiognomy by which knighthood could be recognised (97).

Among those writing in late medieval England, John Lydgate was especially drawn to criticising young men for their fiery passions. Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* represents a catalogue of the vices to which princes and adolescent rulers might succumb. One of the text's common *topoi* involves depicting the youth as an unbroken horse, 'hasty [...] onbridled furious [with] insolence'.<sup>68</sup> By contrast, the 'Golden World' – the classical utopian setting which Lydgate favourably compares to his own day – has the youth 'bridled vnder discipline' (II. 1167-8). Equestrian imagery aligns the youth with an animal body of both tremendous power and promise, but also one over which the youth cannot assume complete control. Such imagery also possesses an obvious chivalric inflection, being of particular relevance for one like Henry 'Hotspur' Percy, whose youthful passions too often ran away with him. For Lydgate, and other late medieval English writers, being *bridled*, referred to the youth's ability to 'fostre [...] vertu' within the body, while the 'vices to despise' (III. 1761).

As indicated by Walsingham's Hotspur, the young knights of medieval literature often seemed to epitomise the vices typically associated with adolescence. Both romance and manuals of chivalry display an awareness of how the 'youthful vices', such as pride, vanity, and wrath, might beset the knight. One explanation for why knighthood became synonymous with this particular life stage is that, in each case, the body-self can be seen at its best – beautiful, bold, strong, and magnanimous – or its worst. The knight, much like the youth, had in effect to ride out, armoured in virtue, to struggle against vice and put his body to good purpose.<sup>69</sup> John Sullivan finds that Chrétien de Troyes criticises 'youthful males', and

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<sup>68</sup> John Lydgate, *Fall of Princes* ed. by Henry Bergen, 4 vols (Washington: Carnegie Institute, 1923), vol. I, p. 221, lines 785-88. Subsequent vol and lines given in text.

<sup>69</sup> Goodich makes a similar comparison, p. 109.

the vices to which they were prone, such as foolhardiness and vanity.<sup>70</sup> Robert Rouse, similarly, notes the potential for romance to function as a *bildungsroman*, wherein the ‘maturation’ of the aristocratic youth is articulated through acculturation to the code of chivalry and its commitment to virtuous behaviours.<sup>71</sup>

In the *Ordre*, the play of virtue and vice in the bodies of knights is considered at length, often in terms implicitly directed at young men. The text distinguishes between those who conform to the physical taxonomy of knighthood (*byge, faire, nyght*) and those who possess this body *in addition* to being virtuous. The book thus advises that those seeking to discern ideal knighthood not only go by ‘beaute of facion, or by a body fayr grete & wel aoured’, or ‘by fayr here [or] by regard [appearance]’ – as Arthur does in the case of Torre (57). It is not ‘for to holde the myrroure in the hand, and by the other Iolytees [that] a squyer shold be adoubed knyght’, the *Ordre* states, directly referencing the *Iolytees*, or frivolous pleasures of youth. On the contrary, knighthood ought to respond foremost to ‘hope, Charyte, Iustyce, strengthe [...] & of other noble vertues’ (55-56). The *fayr* and *grete* body thus ceases for a moment to be the guarantee of knighthood, becoming instead a body prone to a series of potentially *disembodying* physical habits.

Of all the vices to which young bodies were subject, lust was most characteristic. Hanawalt observes that, in late medieval England, contemporaries were ‘convinced that “lust-longing” dominated the adolescent experience’.<sup>72</sup> Caxton’s *Ordre* expresses this in typically knightly terms by noting that, amongst ‘the *armes* with whiche lecherye warreth [against] Chastyte’, foremost are ‘Yongthe’ and its attendant ‘beaulte’ (98). Rachel Moss argues that the associations between lechery and youth were so widespread in England that male sexual activity prior to marriage was accepted as a consequence of the natural heat of young bodies.<sup>73</sup> Katherine Lewis, similarly, cites cases of noble youths not only engaging in pre-marital sex but in some cases fathering illegitimate children.<sup>74</sup> Lewis gives the example of the ‘pre-accession’ Henry V, who, she suggests, appeared as the ‘embodiment’ of *adolescencia*: immodest, bold, and lascivious.

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<sup>70</sup> Joseph M. Sullivan, ‘Youth and Older Age in the Dire Adventure of Chrétien’s Yvain, the Old Swedish Hærra Ivan, Hartmann’s Iwein, and the Middle English Ywain and Gawain’, *Arthurian Literature XXIV*, ed. by Keith Busby, Bart Besamusca, and Frank Brandsma (Cambridge: Brewer, 2007), pp. 104-120 (106-9).

<sup>71</sup> Rouse, p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing Up*, pp. 120-24.

<sup>73</sup> Rachel E. Moss, ‘An Orchard, A Love Letter and Three Bastards: The Formation of Adult Male Identity in a Fifteenth-Century Family’, in *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World*, ed. by John Arnold and Jean Brody (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 226-44.

<sup>74</sup> Lewis, pp. 86-7.

Like Caxton, Lydgate draws an especially strong association between youth and lust. ‘The play of youthe’, he remarks: ‘folk calle it lecherie’ (I. 1198). Lydgate complains that, when challenged, the youths of his day argue ‘how [lechery] longeth to ther condiciouns, be right off nature’ (I. 1167-69). Lydgate’s sentiment here reflects contemporary assumptions that lechery, like the more positive traits of youth, was a natural product of the young body. Indeed, Lydgate even provides a scientific explanation for this. ‘Everich liffli creature’, he notes, ‘that stant in helthe and is coraious [is] off verrai kynde for to be lecherous’ (I. 1201-04). This understanding of *liffli* bodies – those vigorous, energetic, and keen – no doubt encompasses *coraious* knights as much as it does *bote* youths. In effect, then, the humoural complexion of the young body, whilst generating the favourable physiognomy of the knight, also inclines the body toward promiscuity and lasciviousness. The intertwining of these body-selves is thus complex and not without ambivalence. The knight, as an ideological proponent of chivalric virtue, is intrinsically wedded to vice at the level of his humoural complexion.

This could lead to unusual tensions. Lewis cites contemporary anxieties over Henry VI’s ability to rule in relation to his reputation as an atypically chaste adolescent. Henry, Lewis suggests, by appearing to forgo natural youthful vices like wantonness, could all too easily be argued as lacking the corresponding virtues, such as strength. ‘Temperamentally’, Lewis observes, Henry VI seemed ‘just not very masculine’ to his subjects.<sup>75</sup> In contrast, Launcelot of the *Morte* appears as the ideal typical embodiment of the knight, possessing supreme prowess, fighting spirit, and noble visage. Yet Launcelot’s knightly virtue is bound, at the depths of his humoural interior, to ruinous vice. Launcelot’s fierce pride, for instance, could become hubris. ‘I wolde with pryde have overcome you all’, he says after coming close to death in competition with his friends (820. 31-32). ‘And there in my pryde I was nere slayne, and that was in myne owne defaughte’ (820. 32-33). Launcelot’s most transgressive vice attends his sexual passion for Queen Guinevere, which ultimately proves disastrous. The humoural heat of Lancelot’s body lends itself to each dimension of his body-self. As a result, it is both Launcelot’s virtues and his vice that, combined, make him who he is: the best knight in the world and archetypal *lusty bachelor*.

Another example can be found in Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*. Here, Iason is presented as an ideal knightly body-self, with ‘statly apparaunce [...] ‘obesaunce and humble cheere’.<sup>76</sup> Iason is also, however, said to be a ‘dragoun’ and ‘devourere’ of ‘gentil wemen’ (1581-87). In this guise, Iason embodies the fiery heat native to his youthful humours. In consequence, Iason’s body conceals a complexion antithetically bound to his knighthood –

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<sup>75</sup> Lewis, p. 150.

<sup>76</sup> *The Riverside Chaucer*, Third Edition, ed. by Larry Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 614. Subsequent line numbers given in text.

the dragon which consumes, rather than honours, good women. ‘In his tyme’, Chaucer says, ‘there was nat swich a famous knyght’ as Iason, caught between virtuous ‘strengthe’ and the vice of ‘lustynesse’ (1403-05). Indeed, though flawed, Iason was nonetheless, like Launcelot, a chivalric exemplar of the later Middle Ages. His iconic acquisition of the golden fleece supplied the Burgundian chivalric order with its name and heraldry, and Caxton’s *History of Iason* consistently depicts the character as a forerunner to contemporary knightly practices. How, then, were audiences supposed to reconcile the virtues and vices naturally arising from the humoural complexions of knights and bachelors? How can the body-self of the knight *be* knightly when its flesh is part dragon?

The principle of balance is regularly cited by medieval texts discussing the intemperate humours of youth. George Ashby encourages Prince Edward to be ‘luste’ but also to be ‘sad’ (149-50); to be ‘chierful’ but, again, to be so ‘with sad constance’ (843-44). The Middle English *sad* suggests constancy, steadfastness, and soberness.<sup>77</sup> Katie Walter, who has written on both *sadness* and the process whereby one became *sad*, notes that, as elsewhere in medieval thought concerning the body, the concept involves ‘temperature’, ‘both literarily and figuratively’.<sup>78</sup> Becoming *sad* meant cooling and tempering one’s humoural physiology, thereby moderating the behaviours it prompted. As Barbara Hanawalt has shown, *sadness* was crucial to medieval ideas on aging and maturing from *juventus* into *virilitas*.<sup>79</sup> Thus, when Ashby tells Edward to be *luste* and *sad*, to be *chierful* and *sad*, he is effectively advising the young Prince to calm each heated impulse of his young body with something like cool-headed maturity. Ashby advises Edward that as an adolescent he, much like Iason, will have to navigate a path ‘betwyxt colde & fire’ (847).

This *saddening* process, I argue, should be considered a form of embodied practice. It involves Edward, and other young men, learning how to *be* a body caught between humoural extremes. Medieval youths had to develop the right body techniques necessary for maintaining a *sad* constancy, even while their humours boiled with lust. This stress on practice appears in Caxton’s *Ordre*, which warns against raising the squire to knighthood ‘in his enfancy’ (56). ‘Yf the squyer that be a kny3t be ouer yong’, Caxton explains, ‘he is not worthy [...] by cause he may not be so wyse that he hath lerned the thynges that apperteyne a squyer for to knowe tofore that he be a knyght’. Without such training, the knight may prove ‘faynt of herte’ and ‘vnmy3ty feble’ later in life, as well as crucially being more prone to ‘pryde & vyce’ (57).

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<sup>77</sup> MED entry *sad* adj. 1(a).

<sup>78</sup> Katie L. Walter, ‘Peril, Flight and the Sad Man: Medieval Theories of the Body in Battle’, in *War and Literature*, ed. by Laura Ashe and Ian Patterson (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014), pp. 21-40 (26-9).

<sup>79</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing Up*, p. 201.

Caxton's language is significant here. *Wyse*, for instance, does not only connote prudence but, as Hanawalt has shown, commonly appears associated with ideas of maturity, *sadness*, and the cooling and drying of the humours. The *berte*, too, is important, with Trevisa noting that among 'alle membres, þe herte is most nobil' (I. 23). The heart produced the best blood, 'clere and hoot', and, in consequence, provided the body with 'strenþe [...] wrapþe, hardynes, and woodnes' (I. 24). Strong hearts and pure blood were, as noted above, aligned with vigorous youth, while a *foynt berte*, Caxton shows, imposed both physical and moral weakness. This text on ideal knighthood, like those treating male youth, thus similarly identifies the humoural poles of cold and fire, or *nyse* and *wode*. For Caxton, the measure which saves the squire from either faint-hearted weaknesses or hot-headed ignorance comes with the *thynges* he has *larned*. Indeed, the epilogue of his text describes the squire who reads the *Ordre* as becoming 'sayd' as a result (121). Caxton thus introduces the role of education, arguing that the 'knyȝt ought to be [...] *nourysshed* in age competent' (57). Having been *nourysshed*, the *sayd* knight will prove 'always virtuous vnto thende'.

The Middle English *norishen* entails several processes such as invigorating and warming the body; encouraging either virtue or vice through the promotion of particular habits; and the raising, fostering, and educating of the youth.<sup>80</sup> *Norishen*, then, fully encompasses the embodied practices involved in learning how to be a particular body. In the *Morte*, the *nourysshyng* of Arthur is given to Sir Ector, a 'true man and a feithful', and his wife, who 'nourysshed [Arthur] with her owne pappe' (5. 12-30). In arguing for the importance of *norishment*, texts like the *Ordre* complicate understandings of embodied knighthood as the outcome of an essentialising and ideologically irresistible process – something which, as with Malory's Sir Torre, seems to happen spontaneously. To be *nourysshed* suggests instead that something needs to happen *to* and *within* the body before it can produce the desired body-self of the virtuous and vigorous knight. Exactly how one was to become *sad* in body and complexion, and thus judge virtue against vice, however, is not always clear. Caxton refers to the *thynges* that a squire should know *before* he *be a knyght* – the sorts of body techniques which, perhaps, Arthur learns while being *nourysshed* by 'true' Ector. The following section expands on these ideas, examining how late medieval English curricula for noble youths reflect ideas on both inborn and learned (or *norished*) embodiments.

### ***Norished* in Cold and Fire: Embodying Education in Late Medieval English Knighthood**

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<sup>80</sup> MED entry *norishen* v. 1(a), 2(b), 5(a).



In William of Worcester's *Boke of Noblesse* (1475), the author describes the ancient traditions which preceded the education of late medieval English noble youths. 'Alle tho that ben comen and descended of noble bloode', Worcester explains:

as of auncien knightis, esquires, and other auncient gentile men [...] while they ben of grene age ben drawn forthe, norished, and exercised in disciplines, doctrine, and usage of scole of armes [...] to make hem hardie, deliver, and wele brethed <sup>81</sup>

This 'nourishing' of an antique English nobility is largely practical, cultivating martial prowess, hardiness, agility, and stamina. Worcester's curriculum builds bodies that draw deeper breaths, move confidently in arms, and can endure physical violence. Christine de Pisan cites a similar classical tradition of educating juvenile knights, in which 'children, whan theyre come to xiiii yere of aage, they made hem to be taught in al suche thyng that longeth to knyghthed' (29). Lydgate, too, argued for the existence of ancient schools for knighthood, which he attributed to Arthurian customs. 'Ther was a scoole of marcial doctrine', he explains, 'for yonge knihtes to lerne [...] in tendre age to have ful disciptyne [sic] on hors or foote be notable exercise' (III. 2815-18). Again, the stress here is on *norishing* the body through specific martial practices. For Lydgate, however, development of the body 'doth help in many wise', such as ensuring that 'idilnesse in greene yeeris [is] gone', thereby instilling 'vertu' in adolescents (III. 2819-21).

Curricula which developed the bodies and virtues of young knights were well known in late medieval England. When listing the formal institutions used to *norish* or acculture youths into *sad* and *nyse* adulthoods, Hanawalt identifies 'squirehood' as one of the main models.<sup>82</sup> The elements of martial training regimens have been documented by a number of historians, including Nicholas Orme, Shulamith Shahar, and Ruth Mazo Karras.<sup>83</sup> A conscious series of choices were made by the nobility regarding which activities, undertaken at which times, would best form the body-selves of knights. Following a general education, martial training may have begun as early as age seven in the manner of play with wooden swords and pommel horses, with the formal duties associated with becoming squire occurring seven years later in *adolescencia*. At this age, the squire began developing the body

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<sup>81</sup> *The Boke of Noblesse: Addressed to King Edward the Fourth on his Invasion of France in 1475*, ed. by J. Nichols (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), p. 76. Subsequent page numbers given in text.

<sup>82</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing Up*, p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530* (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 133-40, 182-210; Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 210-215; Karras, *Boys to Men*, pp. 28-64; Youngs, pp. 76-8, 107-108; Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, p. 112-22.

techniques of knighthood. Practices undertaken aimed to increase the squire's familiarity with weaponry and armour; to work as part of a group of other boys, typically under the leadership of an older mentor; to cultivate the appropriate standards of social courtesy, often by serving food and drink at court; and to begin developing the temperament necessary to endure violence – a kind of *saddening*. One fifteenth-century example of this curriculum appears in the first chronicle of John Hardyng (d. 1463).<sup>84</sup>

Hardyng's chronicle, written around 1440, places continuing emphasis upon the careers of exemplary young men, such as Brutus, King Arthur, and Henry V. Hardyng visualises Brutus 'at age fifteene yere, nurtured fully right faire, wyse and gladde', having thus moderated the humoural extremes of his young body as Ashby hoped Prince Edward would. Indeed, in addition to being *wyse, gladde*, and possessing the typical traits of beauty and strength, Brutus is also said to be 'stedfast' and 'without mutabilite', suggesting a *sad* sobriety highly unusual for the adolescent body. In a note, Hardyng then supplies an account of Brutus' regimen: '*how lordes sonnes shuld bene lerned in tendre age*'.

The curriculum begins 'at foure yere age', when the child is sent 'to scole' in order to 'lerne the doctryne of lettrur' – this, perhaps, being the same *doctryne* Worcester mentioned. From age six, Hardyng's pupils then acquire 'language' and awareness of how to 'sitte at mete semely in alle nurture'. Years ten and twelve see boys 'daunse and synge and speke of gentelnesse', before age fourteen, at which point youths shall 'to felde isure [to] hunte the dere'. Throughout, the child is developing the body techniques – how to speak, eat, gesture, and dance – which enable him to *be* the body of a knight in courtly society. Unlike the regimen described by Christine de Pisan, however, Hardyng does not have *adolescentia* coincide with the beginning of martial training. Here, *adolescentia* is associated with hunting.

Hunting would have played a role in the noble youth's education, nurturing both horsemanship and physical fitness.<sup>85</sup> Hardyng's pupils, however, hunt deer foremost, he says, to 'catche an hardynesse'. When elaborating, Hardyng explains that the youths who 'hunte and sla and se thaym [deer] blede', are able to develop both 'hardyment' and 'corage'. In this, Hardyng's regimen mirrors other educational practices intended to familiarise young members of the aristocracy with bloodshed, such as exposing youths to contact with cadavers.<sup>86</sup> Importantly, Walter has found that milestones like this, during which the individual first experiences violence and trauma, contributed to the humoural process of *saddening*, altering the physiological complexions and temperaments of those effected. Walter argues that becoming *sad* would have been particularly important for the knight, 'if he was to

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<sup>84</sup> British Library MS Lansdowne 204, fol 12.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Almond, *Medieval Hunting* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), pp. 14-17.

<sup>86</sup> Shahar, *Childhood*, p. 214.

be able to bear the thought of his own death, and to risk his body'.<sup>87</sup> Hardyng's reference to *hardyment*, thus refers not only to physical endurance and psychological fortitude, but humoural steadfastness, too. *Hardynesse*, in this, refers back to the adolescent Brutus' atypical lack of *mutabilite*, implying a more sober and, I suggest, *sad* temperament. If one recalls the *Ordre's* emphasis on certain *thynges* without which the knight might be proven faint hearted or feeble, it is similarly arguable that something like this *hardynesse* is intended.<sup>88</sup> Hardyng's hunt pits his pupil against a flesh-and-blood body, in opposition to which the young man can hone his 'wytte' by strategizing, or 'ymagynynge', how to do violence 'at avauntage', thereby tempering his passions and hardening his heart.

The formulation of the educative process as a violent and inimical encounter between the youth and an 'other' figure is evidenced elsewhere in Middle English writing. Richard Hill's commonplace book (c. 1500), contains a verse poem written by or from the perspective of a school boy.<sup>89</sup> In the poem, the student describes the 'sharpe' physical abuse which his master inflicts with 'brychyn twygges', punning that 'hit makith me a faynt harte'. Instead, the student imagines that

my master were an hare,  
and all his bokes howndes were,  
And I myself a Joly hontere;  
To blow my horn I wold not spare  
For if he were dede I wold not care

This poem represents a useful comparison to Hardyng's education of noble youths. The dominant educational motif in the poem is, again, the hunt, with the student beginning the poem by combining two relevant images, the faint *berte* and the harried *harte*. His master, in such a formulation, is *bounding* the student, whose trauma he prolongs with sharp implements. By becoming a hunter, the pupil usurps control over his master's books, which, obeying the boy like well-trained dogs, are then set upon his tormentor. The poem thus becomes a fantasy focussed upon the reversal of powers. By mastering the books of his master, the schoolboy becomes the agent of his own education, a transformation which reaches completion in the destruction of the teacher figure entirely, who is consequently removed from the educative process.

In this way, like Hardyng's noble youth, the schoolboy of the poem actively 'catches' a bloody wisdom from his opponent's body, the dissolution of which appears to *norish* his

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<sup>87</sup> Walter, pp. 30-40 (38).

<sup>88</sup> Walter also describes saddening as constituting a 'hardening of the knight's body' (38), which is consistent with this educational ideal.

<sup>89</sup> Oxford MS Balliol 354, fol. 252. Cited in *The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse and Prose*, ed by Douglas Gray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 172-3.

own body into maturity. The emphasis here is notably different from the syllabi of Lydgate and others. Worcester has the noble boys of his book *drawn forth, norished, and exercised* as the objects of education. Similarly, the training described by Christine de Pisan is carried out by mentor figures – an adult ‘they’ who *made youths to be taught*. Merridee Bailey has noted the growing popularity of representing youths as the agents of their own education in late medieval English culture.<sup>90</sup> Daniel Kline, similarly, has read for this in Middle English literature, such as in the romance trope of child protagonists being orphaned from their families.<sup>91</sup> As with Hardyng’s pupil, Kline observes that romance youths often have to rely on their wits, becoming bloody, *sad*, and *wyse* as they struggle to learn the truth about themselves. In the Old French Vulgate, Lancelot, like the tortured schoolboy of the poem, beats his schoolmaster as a sign of his developing manhood and sensitivity to knightly virtue.<sup>92</sup> On a larger scale, Robert Zajkowski discusses a London processional pageant held for the young Henry VI.<sup>93</sup> Over the course of the pageant, Henry encountered fantastic representations of the virtues and vices which attempted either to aid or obstruct his passage into maturity. As a rite of passage, Henry had either to evade or confront monstrous vice while finding aid in the virtuous, thereby gradually guiding himself out of his own youth.<sup>94</sup>

The above sources, and the dynamic education which they describe, reveal medieval attitudes toward the young body. Hunting imagery, for instance, casts the youth in opposition to an animal body, against which the pupil struggles for violent supremacy. Through this encounter, the student gains a maturity which, in the case of Hardyng especially, can be read as a form of *saddening*, thus indicating physiological change within the youth. The animal bodies of *hartes* and book-hounds are not in this way entirely separable from the young body itself. This is particularly apparent in the student’s intermingling of his own faint *herte* with the hunted *harte*, and subsequently the personification of his books – and thus his wisdom – as a pack of well-trained dogs. Articulated here, I argue, is a form of self-mastery. The conquered and co-opted animal bodies act as externalised representations of the forces

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<sup>90</sup> Merridee L. Bailey discusses the child as self-socialising in *Socialising the Child in Late Medieval England C.1400-1600* (York: York Medieval Press, 2012), pp. 14-15.

<sup>91</sup> Daniel T. Kline ‘That child may doon to fadres reverence: Children and Childhood in Middle English Literature’ in *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary*, ed. Adrienne E. Gavin (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 21-37 (30-31).

<sup>92</sup> This incident also takes place in the context of a deer hunt, and is punctuated by decisions which Launcelot makes regarding his horse and hounds. Launcelot only physically engages his tutor after the latter strikes Launcelot’s dog. See *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. by Norris Lacy, IX vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), vol III, pp. 35-38.

<sup>93</sup> Robert Zajkowski, ‘Henry VI of England: The Ritual Education of an Adolescent Prince’, in *The Premodern Teenager*, pp. 111-129.

<sup>94</sup> See also W. M. Ormrod, ‘Coming to Kingship: Boy Kings and the Passage to Power in Fourteenth-Century England’, in *Rites of Passage: Cultures of Transition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Nicola F. McDonald and W. M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 31-49.

characterising the youth's own turbulent physiology. This is also the case with Henry VI's pageant, wherein the vices and virtues can be recognised as the embodied inner qualities at war within Henry. One can analyse this idea further in another example.

Lydgate describes the adolescence of the impetuous prince Mithridates, who becomes the target of an assassination plot while 'in tendre youthe' (II. 1368). The method of this conspiracy, interestingly, relies upon convincing Mithridates to 'ride vpon an hors wildere than a leoun' (II. 1369) As mentioned above, Lydgate frequently compares the youths of his text to wild horses. By threatening Mithridates' death by means of an incorrigible animal, the conceit of the episode hinges upon the volatile passions of youth, as embodied in the horse, being allowed to do their work and destroy the young prince. In the event, however, Lydgate reveals that Mithridates, 'yong of age, the hors he reuled in al his moste rage' (II. 1371-72). Remarkably, Mithridates survives the plot because, in his youth, his body is fiercer than the horse chosen to kill him. As above, the embodied interplay between the bodies of beasts and children travels through enmity into what, in this instance, becomes a more explicit synthesis between the youth and his animal passions. Mithridates escapes with the horse, now his companion, into the wilderness.

In this new environment, Mithridates, still 'yong of age', engages in a years-long blood sport, being, Lydgate says, 'vndir that colour', or complexion, which compels him 'to hunte & chase beestis most savaage' (II. 1375-9). Mithridates hunts a succession of carnivorous animals, finding 'o corage, of oon hert & o cheer [...] among hih hilles abood in wilderness' (II. 1401-04). Consequently, Mithridates also naturally 'fledde idilnesse' until 'bexercise [sic] his bodi was maad liht' (II. 1410-12). *Liht* here suggests both physical agility, eagerness, and gladness, such as George Ashby recommended to Prince Edward.<sup>95</sup> In addition, *liht* conveys the cutting away of superfluity and easing of burdens, which indicates transformations in temperament and complexion as well as in physical morphology. By the time that Mithridates returns from his hunt of 'fulli sevene yeer', he has manifestly captured a new body-self, with Lydgate observing how he 'shewed hymself of manhod and [...] ful lik a kniht' (II. 1429-32).

Each of the medieval life stages was divided into seven-year periods, suggesting that Mithridates has lived out his entire *adolescencia* alone with his horse in the wilderness. Mithridates masters the most bestial passions of the adolescent body – embodied as wild stallions and ferocious beasts – independently developing his virtuous courage, strength, and cheer while also learning to eschew the vices of sloth and gluttony. 'Al delicat fare he did also despise', Lydgate says, so that there was no 'gredi excesse' in Mithridates *liht* body (II. 1424-

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<sup>95</sup> MED entry *liht* adj. 5(a), 7(a).

25). It is significant, I argue, that, as in Hardyng and the schoolboy's poem, the youth 'embodies' himself without instruction. Upon his return, Lydgate reveals that Mithridates has already mastered how to 'renne on horsebak' and 'in armys excersise', allowing him to seamlessly situate himself within a community of knights (II. 1422-23). In Hardyng's curriculum, too, the young man returning from his hunt sets out 'to werray and to wage', 'to juste and ryde', and to find 'castels to assayle'. Both youths intuitively perform these embodied practices, those associated with knighthood, without prior instruction. The sentiment expressed is thus that one cannot be taught *how to be* one's body, with Lydgate going to great lengths to illustrate how 'natural' Mithridates' development into a knight is. These sources thus recall the physiognomic radical complexion, illustrating the essentialness of body-selves like Mithridates', which develop in recognisable patterns even in total isolation.

It is also apparent, however, that a transformation has been undergone in each case. Mithridates is not the same youth, under the same *colour*, during and following his seven-year hunt. It is also arguable that Mithridates' decision to abandon the hunt upon his entrance into *juventus*, and knighthood, was not inevitable. For several years, Mithridates appears most himself while among *hib hilles* in the company of wild beasts. This is not without tensions. Hanawalt has shown that failure to evidence the development of a *sad* and *nyse* complexion could disqualify the youth's entrance into mature adulthood.<sup>96</sup> Lewis makes a similar argument, observing that while lusty behaviours were accepted as the natural condition of youth, wantonness was also understood as an impediment to one's progression in the lifecycle. 'Becoming a man', Lewis explains, was 'dependent on the individual providing evidence in his conduct that he had left behind the rowdy and dissipated habits of youth'.<sup>97</sup> This attitude, Lewis points out, influenced Henry V, who framed his coronation ceremony as a mature reformation of youthful vices.<sup>98</sup>

Ashby discussed the danger that adult bodies might retain youthful complexions, thereby corrupting mature selves. He argues, for instance, that until adolescent boys have become *sad*, they possess humours more akin to children than grown men. 'He that heth childis condicion ys not acceptable to gouernaunce', Ashby thus advises.<sup>99</sup> Conversely, 'he which guidith hym *wisely* with goode *sadnesse* [...] is the verray man of stedfastnesse (34-5). *Stedfastnesse*, as with Hardyng's Brutus, here indicates not only a behavioural virtue, but a physiological state wherein one's *condicion* is less apt to be moved by humoural mutability. In

<sup>96</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing Up*, see pp. 85-88.

<sup>97</sup> Lewis, p. 9.

<sup>98</sup> Lewis, pp. 84-90.

<sup>99</sup> Ashby, 'Dicta et Opiniones Diversorum Philosophorum', in *George Ashby's Poems*, lines 32-3. Subsequent line numbers given in text.

the above textual evidence, young hunters *catche* this *saddened* complexion, showing themselves as men and knights. What is more, they do so alone, often by rejecting human companionship. One wonders, however, whether youths like Mithridates were in danger of becoming lost, as it were, in these woods, unable to find their way back to sober maturity.

Education in the late Middle Ages could not be wholly undertaken alone, even or especially for the nobility. One of the most widespread approaches toward educating and *norishing* children in late medieval England relied upon the interactions between masters and apprentices.<sup>100</sup> This was not a custom purely among mercantile classes. Zajkowski has discussed the importance of master-apprentice relationships as they occurred among the nobility and gentry.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, Orme has identified the central roles which fostering, and the guidance martial tutors, played in the socialisation of noble boys and youths.<sup>102</sup> We see evidence of this custom in Arthur's fostering with Sir Ector in the *Morte*. Similarly, Caxton's *Ordre* reflects how pronounced the master-apprentice dynamic had become in the chivalric culture of late medieval England. Discussing those best placed to train knights, the *Ordre* advises

for in lyke wyse as a mā wyl lerne to sewe for to be a taillour, or a Carpenter hym behoueth that he haue a mayster that can sewe or hewe, Al in lyke wyse it behoueth that a noble man that loueth the ordre of chyualrye, and wyl be a knyght, haue fyrst a mayster that is a knyght (21-2)

Thus, the adolescent Henry VI was tutored by the Earl of Warwick, who devised methods to 'nurture of the Kynges *persone*' – that is, his body and temperament.<sup>103</sup> Beauchamp, for instance, was to 'lerne the Kyng to love worship', or martial renown, 'and generally norysse hym and drawe to vertues and to eschewyng of vices'. Under discussion here is not just the cultivation of body techniques, but the development of a particular physiological *condicion* that will seek out opportunities to do martial prowess, demonstrate virtuous courage and strength, while suppressing unmanly vice. Beauchamp, then, had to *norish* his protegee in such a way as to prompt the very embodiment that youths like Mithridates seem to have developed spontaneously. This is not, however, simply a distinction between Middle English literary representations of education and those common in social practice.

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<sup>100</sup> See, for example, John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 66-74. See also, Hanawalt, 'The Childe of Bristowe', pp. 157-64, and *Growing Up*, pp. 129-46; Goodich, pp. 169-112.

<sup>101</sup> See Zajkowski, p. 115.

<sup>102</sup> Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 44-49.

<sup>103</sup> *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England*, vol. III, ed. by Sir Harry Nichols (London: 1834), p. 229.

The importance of older mentor figures has been identified in the context of Middle English romance. Louis Boyle, for example, draws attention to Merlin's pivotal role as advisor to the young King Arthur in the *Morte*. Boyle suggests that Arthur's willingness to follow Merlin's instruction would have been recognised as a positive indicator of his development by contemporaries, representing 'typically exemplary behaviour for the hero of Middle English romance'.<sup>104</sup> In the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, similarly, Sullivan has argued that Chrétien often disparages young protagonists who undertake action without the advice of older, and thus *sadder* and *nyser* figures.<sup>105</sup> Jean Jost, too, has written on the role of aged mentors as guides for the questing knights of the Malory's grail narrative. Jost identifies the 'cooperation of young and old' as a particularly developed motif in the *Morte*, observing that, for Malory, 'youthful strength and energy must be closely interlaced with experience and wisdom'.<sup>106</sup>

Mithridates, of course, had no such aged experience on which to draw in the wilderness, and the schoolboy of the poem's maturation requires the bloody destruction of his aged master. There is thus a disagreement amongst certain of these ideas regarding how the youth matures into adulthood and, relatedly, how the body-self of the knight develops – whether innately or in collaboration with other actors and social forces. In this latter respect gender, too, is a factor. It has been argued, most comprehensively by Ruth Mazo Karras, that manhood in late medieval chivalric culture was developed with reference to, and in opposition of, other men.<sup>107</sup> Derek Neal, likewise, argues for an understanding of 'competitive masculinity' in many medieval sources.<sup>108</sup> Lewis, similarly, suggests that 'manliness' in the individual could be discerned in terms of 'where they stood on a spectrum of established masculine qualities occupied by other men, both above and below them'.<sup>109</sup> Mithridates has no such context in which to develop his manhood. It is arguable, perhaps, that he ascends within a non-human masculine hierarchy, at the expense of the lions, tigers, and bears he hunts and butchers. This, though, is an ambivalent cohort in which to model one's body-self as a *sad* and *nyse* human male.

Even more problematic is the lack of women Mithridates encounters during his wild youth. It was recognised above that lust was the primary vice to which *adolescentia* and *juventus*

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<sup>104</sup> Louis Boyle, 'Ruled by Merlin: Mirrors for Princes, Counselling Patterns and Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur'', *Arthuriana*, 23 (2013), 52-66 (56).

<sup>105</sup> Sullivan, p. 109.

<sup>106</sup> Jean Jost, 'Age-Old Words of Wisdom: The Power of the Aged in Grail Literature', in *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), pp. 263-298 (296).

<sup>107</sup> Karras, *Boys to Men*, pp. 22-47.

<sup>108</sup> Neal, p. 179.

<sup>109</sup> Lewis, p. 7.



were thought prone in the later Middle Ages. The indulgence in and display of debauchery has been convincingly argued by historians to have been a central performative element of adolescent masculinity.<sup>110</sup> Neal has suggested that, for both clerical and secular men, sexual practices were paramount. The medieval male body, Neal explains, is either ‘a body that does things’, such as in the amorous and bellicose knight, ‘or refuses to do them’, as with the pacific celibate priest.<sup>111</sup> Perhaps most significantly, Christopher Fletcher has stressed that demonstrably resisting, or ‘defending against’, sexual urges was among the most powerful signs of mature manhood in the later Middle Ages.<sup>112</sup> Again, this is a trial which Mithridates avoids in his adolescent isolation. Without older mentor figures, a community of other men and women against and for whom to compete, there exists the possibility that the embodied identity of young men like Mithridates becomes in some manner incomplete.

There are thus markedly different perspectives on embodiment, education, and maturation at work here. These different attitudes are not necessarily in contradiction, but they do reveal divergent emphases upon the relationship between the body, self, and the processes and practices of embodiment. On the one hand, the body and body-self are presented as essential and perhaps irresistible biological inheritances. For young men like Malory’s Sir Torre or Lydgate’s Mithridates, the truth of embodied knighthood is greater than the atypical environment or circumstances in which these youths are placed. The radical complexion of each youth manifests physiognomically so that, when each returns from exile, he is immediately recognised by his fellow knights. On the other hand, practices of fostering, the increasingly popular dynamic between masters and apprentices, and the widespread perception of historic martial schools for knighthood, reflect something different. Here, the embodiment of the knight, and status of the young body within that embodiment, appears more composite and even collaborative – relying on other bodies and forces for one to *be* the body that is intended. Both perspectives agree that certain physical and physiological changes had to occur in the body of the young person, and that those changes bore upon one’s *hardyment* as a knight. To unpick some of these tensions and offer clarity on the disagreement in attitudes to education and embodiment, I will look at a final case study.

### **The Middle English Prose Merlin: A Case Study**

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<sup>110</sup> See, for example, Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 168-73.

<sup>111</sup> Neal, p. 175.

<sup>112</sup> Fletcher, pp. 57-60.

The Middle English *Merlin* was translated out of French around the middle of the fifteenth century, and concerns the earliest days of King Arthur's reign.<sup>113</sup> During this period, an adolescent Arthur and his friends are guided by Merlin until the young cohort reach maturity. In this way, the *Prose Merlin* acts as a kind of *bildungsroman* for both Arthur and the young squires who grow up to become the well-known knights of his Table. One of the sections of the text in which this theme is clearest concerns the adventures of what the text refers to as the *yonge bachelers* or *yonge squyres*. These are Gawain, his brothers Agrauain, Gaheriet, and Gaheris, and, eventually, Segramore of Constantinople. The *squyres* of the *Prose Merlin* are described as matching the morphological motifs often outlined by textual depictions of embodied knighthood. Segramore, for instance, is

the feirest creature of man that was formed. And this childe dide wex moche and semly and right wise and hardy [...] he was so well waxen that he was able to be a knyght [...] and [he] was but xv yere of age, and was oon of the feirest men of the worlde, and of large stature, and beste shapen of alle members, and ther-to hardy and wise (I. 186).

Segramore's body is *feire, large, beste shapen* and *well waxen in alle members*. The Middle English *waxen* suggests physical growth, with Segramore's body having *waxen moche*, or 'grown large', and so matured into something recognisably masculine and martial.<sup>114</sup> As with Sir Torre, then, Segramore's embodiment already conforms to the ideal typical image provided by texts like Caxton's *Ordre*. Yet, Segramore himself is explicitly still a *childe*, although crucially one who has undergone some form of *saddening*, having becoming both *hardy* and *nyse*. Segramore is thus so *well waxen* that knighthood is the inevitable consequence of the body into which he has grown.

A similar description is given when the *Prose Merlin* introduces Gawain. The first time we see Gawain, he is, significantly, returning home 'fro huntynge' and

clothed comly in a robe that was warme as a robe for the wynter, and ledde in honde a leeshe of grehoundes, and ledde also two brace folowing hym. And it be-com hym full wele all thyng that he dide: and he also was of the feirest makynge that eny man myght be as of his stature (I. 181)

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<sup>113</sup> *Merlin, or The Early History of King Arthur: A Prose Romance*, Early English Text Society Original Series 36, 112, ed. Henry B. Wheatley, 2. Vols (London: Trübner 1899). Vol and page given in text.

<sup>114</sup> MED entry *waxen* v. 2(a).

Gawain, physically, is very much like Segramore, with the *fairest makeynge* of his body favourably aligning with his *stature*. Unlike Segramore, we are given no exact age for Gawain; however, if we take Hardyng's curriculum as a guide, we can perhaps place Gawain, depicted as he is after a hunt, at around Segramore's age, in *adolescentia*. There are, however, some notable differences between Gawain and Segramore. Firstly, unlike Segramore, Gawain is not yet explicitly *wise* and *hardy*. Depending on how pronounced the association between hunting and *saddening* was in this period, it might be that the *Merlin* is conveying Gawain's maturity in action. Gawain, for instance, like the schoolboy of the poem, appears perfectly in control of the number of hounds he has about him. As with Hardyng's pupil, then, Gawain may have caught his *hardyment* while out hunting.

A second and more ambiguous distinction, however, concerns the role of Gawain's mother, who, we are told, 'whan the lady saugh Gawein, that was so feire a yonge squyer and moche of his age, [she] thought it tyme for hym to be a knyght' (I. 182). In a manner consistent with Lydgate's depiction of Mithridates, a young man thus returns from a hunt with a body that naturally signals a knightly self. Unlike Mithridates, however, while Gawain may be *moche* of his age, he does not yet *show hymself* to be a knight. Here, on the contrary, it is Gawain's mother who 'sees' this, instructing her son

Yow and youre bretheren spende youre tyme in foly, that fro hens-  
forth ye *oughten to be knyghtes* and *bere armes*, and ye sholde be at the  
court of kynge Arthur, for he is your oncle [...] and ye do nought ells  
euery day but hunte after the hare thourgh the feldes, and so *lese ye*  
*youre tyme* (I. 182-3)

Gawain's mother thus radically alters the significance of the hunt as an affirmatory stage of the noble youth's maturation. In hunting, Gawain and his brothers are *losing* their time, thereby reflecting the uncertainty, and a corresponding anxiety, regarding when and by which embodied practices the medieval adolescent is to mature into a knightly young man. Gawain should be *in armes* and *at court*, but is instead to be found wandering *thourgh feldes*, chasing *hare*. There is, arguably, an element of Mithridates' dilemma here, in that, as posited, the years of wanton youth spent hunting only gain positive significance if the adolescent is able to find his way back to sober society. Shortly after the encounter with his mother, Agrauiain, Gawain's brother, criticises him in much the same terms, complaining that the *squyres* have begun 'lose the tyme of oure ages' (I. 184). Again, there is an anxiety that Gawain and his brothers have wasted their young bodies on the wrong practices. 'We sholde be knyghtes', Agrauiain says, 'better it were for vs to do some prowesse'.

This representation of Gawain as a 'lost youth' unable, as yet, to lead himself out of *adolescentia* thus marks an interesting comparison to the other portrayals of young knights

analysed above. The *bachelers* of the *Prose Merlin* can appear, like Sir Torre or Mithridates, as if already embodying the knightly selves for which they search; however, the text repeatedly reminds its audience that the *yonge squyres* may not yet be *sad* or *wise* enough to succeed. When Gawain and his brothers eventually set out to find Arthur, for instance, they do so in May,

in the tyme when these brides syngith with clier voys and all thyng  
reioyseth, and than these wodes and medowes beth florished grene,  
and these medowes full of newe tendir erbys and entermedled with  
dyuerse colours that swote be of odours, and these amerouse yonge  
lusty peple reioyse be-cause of the lusty seson (II. 191)

The archetypal springtime environment emphasises the *adolescentia* of the squires in a manner that late medieval audiences would immediately recognise. What is more, the *Merlin's* use of this *lusty seson* raises concerns regarding the *lusty* bodies of the squires themselves. As ‘the children rode to-geder’, the text states, they, much like the new growth of spring, were ‘yonge and tender to suffer grete trauayle’. In this, the *tender* status of the *children* arguably refers as much to physiology, the pliable humoural complexion of *adolescentia*, as it does physical endurance and strength.

This immaturity is most apparent when the *yonge squyres* demonstrate the body techniques most suggestive of knighthood. When the *children* prepare for their first combat, for instance, they ‘hastely ronne [...] to armes, and lepen to horse, and hem renged and distreyned, as the knyghtes hem taughten’ (II. 193). There are adult knights travelling with the squires, and it might be these knights who quickly offer advice in some aspect of horsemanship. Alternatively, this might be a reference to a lesson previously *taughten* to the children. Whatever the case, this detail is significant for conveying an eagerness but also awkwardness in the bodies and martial aptitudes of the *yonge bachelers*. *Regnen*, for instance, with its obvious equestrian signification of taking up the reins, implies ideas of governance, ‘to rule’ or ‘take control of’.<sup>115</sup> As in Lydgate, the *children's* attempt to control their horses could be read as the struggle to master their youthful passions ahead of battle. Indeed, *distreinen* acknowledges some degree of resistance: ‘to hold in check’, ‘to restrain’, even ‘to distress’.<sup>116</sup> The *squyres* thus lustily run to mount their horses, just as chivalric handbooks like *Knyghthode and Bataile* hoped they would. The difficulty they experience in bringing the animals under control, however, prompts awareness of the internal struggle which the *bachelers* still face regarding the heated passions of their young bodies.

Yet, when the *squyres* reach their opponents, the depiction is consistent with other romance combats. This is especially the case for Gawain, who

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<sup>115</sup> MED entry, *regnen* v. 1(a).

<sup>116</sup> MED entry *distreinen* v. 1(a).

slowgh many [...] so that he was all bloody, bothe he and his horse. And he heilde an axe in his honde, and he was so crewell and fiers that whom he a-rought a full stroke neded hym no salue [...] for a-gein his strokys ne myght not endure Iren ne style, ne no mannys body, were he neuer so myghty ne stronge. And so the childeren smyten vp and down (II. 193)

In such moments, the embodied knighthoods of *squyres* like Gawain come to fore, proving essential and indisputable. The *yonge bachelers* of the *Prose Merlin* already fight as well as adult knights, each easily conquering multiple opponents without assistance. Indeed, the adult knights travelling with the children seem to disappear entirely in such moments, offering no further instruction. The *adolescentia* of these characters, it might appear, is *disembodied*, or at least is distorted beyond recognisability in order to serve the conventions of the genre. This sense of a transcendent ‘embodied adulthood’, however, is misleading. *Adolescentia* and particularly *juventus* were, as stated above, life stages often understood with reference to hot humoural complexions, sanguine and choleric, which prompted warlike instincts. Gawain’s blood-soaked body, literally *sanguine*, potentially acts not as a disguise for his youth, but the stylized attempt to display it most clearly.

A more conflicted example of the way in which the humoural *condicion* of the young body informs the behaviours of the *squyres* occurs later in the same battle. Gaheries, believing that his brother, Gaheriet, has been killed, pursues the enemy responsible across the battlefield. The *Merlin* takes this opportunity to appraise the *squyre’s* character, observing that Gaheries ‘was of marveilouse prowess’ and ‘was even like of bounté to Gawein his brother, whan he com to his right age and was knyght’ (II. 194). It is likely that this *right age* is a reference to *juventus*, the life stage most often associated with knighthood. Thus, while Gaheries is praised for his physical maturity – his *marveilouse prowess* – he is also, in some manner, held to be incomplete, having not yet reached the age at which his knighthood can be fully assumed and embodied. The nature of this immaturity is then made clear.

Having become so enraged as to be compared to ‘a wilde boor’, Gaheries follows his enemy ‘as faste as his horse myght hym bere’, until he is ‘the length of a bowe draught from his felowes’. He goes even further, until ‘he hadde lefte his felowes be-hynde the space of an arblaste.’ In this way, the *Merlin* emphasises both the growing anger of Gaheries and the increasing distance and vulnerability at which he puts himself as his youthful passions, like his horse, run away with him. Soon, other enemies ‘com redy to fight, and gladde were they of the pray that thei hadde so ledde’. Like the boar, then, the youth is baited and lured by wiser opponents who, ‘by hundredes and thowsandes’ surround him and ‘smote vpon hym with their speres’ (II. 195).

The abundance of hunting imagery here, with bows, boars, and the strategy of exploiting Gaheries' youthful ire, is significant in relation to the presentation of hunting by authors like Hardyng and Lydgate. Here, Gaheries is not the hunter but the prey, with the very passions which he fails to temper being those by which he is bestialised. Ashby's *Policy* observes that keeping 'sad constance' often involved 'keepyng your selfe from Angie, Wrath, & Ire' (848). Similarly, William of Worcester identifies 'fole hardiesse' as one of the vices most consistent with the 'proprete and nature of greene age' (63). Contemporary audiences would have made these connections, attributing Gaheries' failure to his wrath, foolhardiness, and thus the turbulent humoural *condicion* of his young body.

Throughout the *Merlin*, the *yonge squyres* each embody differing degrees of martial competence, with individual triumphs and failures often being tied, as with Gaheries, to ideas regarding maturity, immaturity and the humoural mutability of the young body. At such times, a tension emerges between the young body and its passions, and the embodied identity of knight to which the *squyres* aspire. In the above example, Gaheret, as youngest, was perhaps physically immature enough to become seriously hurt, while Gaheries was immoderate enough in his passions to act recklessly in response. Agraun is *sad* enough to recognise this, patronising his unhorsed sibling by ordering: 'now lepe vp lightly, for grete foly haue ye do to go so fer oute of oure company, for full nygh hadde ye more lost than wonne' (II. 196). Agraun, in this, accurately states Gaheries' inability to soberly judge the dangerous odds he faced when seeking vengeance for his younger brother. Indeed, it is also revealed that Gaheret has not been killed after all, lending the episode a peculiar didactic quality, as if having been arranged deliberately to test Gaheries. Ultimately, it is Gawain, literally and figuratively, whom the other children follow in search of knighthood. When Gawain arrives to rescue Gaheries, he does not appear like a baited boar as his brother did, but as a 'wode lyon' – a different breed entirely.

Yet Gawain, despite being the eldest of the group, is still in *adolescencia*. Although repeatedly shown to be beyond reproach in the body techniques of warfare, Gawain nevertheless undergoes challenges in his ability to navigate the youthful extremes of cold and fire. As suggested by his encounter with his mother, Gawain is most often tested for his discretion, sobriety, and *sadness*. By far the most active figure in testing Gawain's virtue is Merlin, who appears several times, in various disguises. Each encounter with Merlin not only advances the narrative, but significantly revolves around Gawain's ability to master his youthful passion and display a *sad* and *wyse* countenance. These meetings also speak to earlier observations regarding both the role of mentor figures in adolescent development, and the priority that the noble youth discern his own passage into maturity. It is worthwhile to consider two of these encounters, the first and last, in detail.

The first time Merlin appears, he does so in the form of a white-haired ‘olde man’, ‘courbed’ and ‘leene for age’, driving beasts through Camelot (II. 261). In this, the guise is a strongly embodied picture of old age, appearing as an inversion of the large and finely-proportionate bodies of the *yonge squyres*. Merlin’s test for Gawain involves ignoring or disparaging the youth while the latter is attempting to discover the location of another group of *bachelers*, those following Segramore, whom Gawain has been led to believe are in danger. Each time Gawain speaks, Merlin ‘leide to the deaf ere and smote his staff on the grounde as he hadde ben oute of his mynde’, or else loudly bemoans Gawain’s reputation. When Gawain finally manages to attract the old man’s attention, he

lefte vp his heed that was lothly and rivelid and loked on high to  
[Gawain] with oon eye open and a-nother clos, and grenynge with his  
teth as a man that loked a-gein the sonne, and ansuered, “What wilt  
thow?” (II. 262)

In this, the *Merlin* portrays both aspects of Merlin: the leering, grotesque old man by whom Gawain has been publicly disparaged, and the cunning tutor whom audiences recognise is intentionally testing his pupil’s patience. Merlin continues to trouble Gawain, hurrying his speech, implying that he is less important than Merlin’s beasts, and generally testing the squire’s composure and sobriety. The culmination of this ordeal is Merlin’s refusal to believe that Gawain is, as the youth claims, a “trewe squyer”. After elaborating on the danger that Segramore faces, Merlin declares to have wasted his time, saying “ffor I knewe well that ye haue not the herte ne the hardynesse to go thider” (II. 263).

The qualities of Gawain that Merlin calls into question, his *herte* and *hardynesse*, are those repeatedly cited above as positive embodied virtues in descriptions of knighthood, youth, and manhood. The *herte* was responsible for generating the purest, hottest blood in the body, and thus for endowing both youth and knighthood with their physical morphologies and temperaments. *Hardynesse*, as I have argued, ought to be read alongside not only physical and mental fortitude, but physiological steadfastness. *Hardynesse* or *hardymet* is ‘caught’ on the hunt, the youth having tempered his humoural *condicion* in the violence done to animal bodies. *Hardymet*, in this, sits alongside *sadness* as that which signifies wisdom and maturity. These are thus pointed criticisms which Merlin levels at Gawain, with damaging implications.

Indeed, Gawain becomes visibly ‘a-shamed’ and is thus caught in a dilemma. From Gawain’s perspective, he has been publicly humiliated by an aged *carl* – a lowborn herdsman. Yet Gawain still does not know the location of the children who, if the old man is to be believed, are shortly to be overwhelmed and killed. As Ashby described for the young Prince Edward, we might understand the range of responses open to Gawain to be those on a path *betwyxt colde & fire*. Gawain chooses the former, preparing his horse and bringing it to the old

man, he says simply “lepe vpon this horse, and lede vs ther these childeren fighten”. In doing so, Gawain not only endures the repeated insults of the lowborn old man, but extends tremendous courtesy to him, all so the matter of greater importance – the safety of the children – can be resolved. The audience gains the impression that Gawain has passed a threshold, possibly even having undergone a kind of *saddening*, suppressing his outrage in favour of wisdom.

The most significant encounter between Gawain and Merlin is the final one, in which Merlin adopts the appearance of a knight. Upon finding the *yonge squyres*, Merlin requests ‘eny squyer that were so hardy [and] be soche a condicion that he sholde haue no drede of no man but of his owne corse’ (II. 296). Again, *hardynesse* and a constant *condicion* are identified as desirable developmental motifs in the *squyres*’ maturation. When Gawain identifies himself as a suitable candidate, Merlin again attempts to discourage him, saying

ye haue not that prowess ne the hardynesse that ye dar me sue, and yet is it oon of the most honourable a-uenture in this worlde, and that ye sholde moste be preised yef ye myght it a-cheve, but ye haue nother the herte ne the hardynesse that ye durste thider come (II. 296-97)

As before, Merlin calls into question Gawain’s *herte* and *hardynesse*, as well as specifically insulting the youth’s ability to perform *prowess*, the physical work of knighthood. For the second time, Gawain becomes ‘shamefaste’; however, as in the earlier encounter, he ignores Merlin’s taunts. Merlin then leads the *yonge bachelers* back to ‘the myddill of the medowe’ – the environment so strongly associated with Gawain’s *lusty* and *tender* youth (II. 298). Here, Gawain

saugh a lady of grete bewte [...] and she was all discheuelee in her heer, and [her captor] Taurus hir heilde be the tresses and drough hir after his horse [...] and whan she cried and cleped oure lady seint marie, Taurus smote hir with his honde armed right sore that she fill down to the erthe euen as she hadde be deed (II. 298-99)

The context of this assault is a battle between an enemy army and Gawain’s father, King Lot, with the latter having been routed. Thus, when the knight asks Gawain “knowest thou not that lady yonder?”, the audience, like Gawain, recognises his mother from earlier in the romance (II. 299). “Yef euer ye hir loved”, the Merlin-knight says, “thinke hir to rescowen and to a-vengen.” Gawain, at this realisation, becomes ‘so full of angwissh that ner he yede oute of his witte’. The *squyre* spurs his horse with such ire that he ‘smote’ the animal, and strikes Taurus ‘so rudely through shelde and hauberk that the spere heede shewde thourgh



his chyne an arme lengthe'. With Taurus having been killed, Gaheret, Gaheries, and Agraubin then begin mutilating and dismembering his dead body: 'for it was not I-nough to hem that Gawein hadde don, but made of hym smale peces' (II. 299-300).

This episode is among the most violent and, in many respects, ambiguous in the *Merlin*. Gawain is taken back to the site of his youth – or, at least, the environment in which his *tenderness* was most plain. There, he is graphically confronted with the trauma of his mother's abuse, at which sight he is nearly driven mad, or *wode*, with anger and pain. Gawain, the text reads, 'wende never to have sein the hour to haue come ther-to' (II. 299). The onslaught of these passions proves so severe amongst the other *squyres* that they are driven to butcher the corpse of their now powerless antagonist, as though it is important for each of them to do some violence to Taurus' body. One *squyre* 'smote of his heed and a-nother thriste hym thourgh [...] and the thirde smote of bothe his armes' (II. 300). When discussing the medieval associations between religious conversion and aging narratives, Jessie Sherwood identifies the presentation of particular experiences as 'mile markers' in the youth's passage into maturity and a new religious identity.<sup>117</sup> I argue, similarly, that the rescue of their mother represents an important 'mile marker' for Gawain and his brothers.

Gawain's mother, it should be recognised, represents the first lady whom the *yonge squyres* are shown *rescoven* during their chivalric careers. In this way, Gawain's mother becomes both a maternal figure to be brutally avenged and also an anonymous, almost generic, 'romance lady' to be saved. Indeed, rescuing the damsel seems to have been the purpose of this entire episode, which Merlin has deemed *the most honourable a-venture* in the world. This effect is emphasised by the text's description of Gawain's mother as simply a *lady of grete bewte*, as if either she or Gawain – or possibly both – have each been so changed by recent events that they fail to properly recognise one another. Ruth Mazo Karras has argued that the objectification and eventual acquisition of the damsel represents one of the foremost performative acts of knighthood.<sup>118</sup> Female spectators, in this way, are crucial to the chivalric prowess done at tournament or during adventure, at which times, Karras says, 'the women's gaze [...] measured the worth of the young knight'. Gawain's mother, fittingly, is the first woman shown to have *seen* Gawain's knighthood: both at home when it first manifested in his body, and now in his prowess performed in the bloodied meadow of his childhood.

The relevance of the rescue, then, is not only to provide a formative damsel adventure for the *squyres*, but to take their mother, debase her, and thereby shatter both her maternal role in the text and thus the *squyres'* related status as *children*. The experience of

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<sup>117</sup> Sherwood, p. 198.

<sup>118</sup> Karras, 'Young Knights Under the Feminine Gaze: Youth in Society 1150-1650', in *The Pre-Modern Teenager*, pp. 189-205 (202).

Gawain and his brothers in this meadow – the violence which they see and then participate in – must be regarded as a form of *saddening*, hardening hearts and cooling complexions. Indeed, the senseless parting of Taurus' body into *smale peces* appears like the stripping of a carcass following a hunt, by which acts medieval noble youths like those described by John Hardyng caught their *hardinesse*. The *childeren* are thus returned to the site in which they appeared most *yonge* and *tender* so that they can perform the body techniques required to leave these traits behind.

The effects of this transformation become apparent when Gawain and his brothers finally meet Arthur at the end of their quest. As the *squyres* approach, Gawain leads them because it is Gawain, we are told, 'that thei helde for maister and lorde [...] for he was *beste taught* [and] the *wisiste* that myght be' (II. 370-71). Gawain's experiences have thus rendered his body *sad* and, in consequence, his complexion more *nyse*. His interactions with Merlin have, moreover, in the manner of a master-apprentice relationship, taught him patience and gentility. This makes Gawain 'the most curteise that ever was'. The *Merlin* thus charts the process of maturation through which a group *childeren* develop into more sober youths and young adults. Many of the tropes and tensions of this process concern the body, both the problematic compulsions and distractions of a youthful complexion, and the *saddening* experience of physical violence and emotional trauma. Interestingly, the *Prose Merlin* combines both perspectives on the education of noble youths, displaying both body-self essentialism and the importance of acquired complexion and intercorporeal collaboration. Gawain's body is recognisably that of a knight when he first leaves home, yet his youthful humours need to be tried and tempered before his status as knight becomes official.

In this chapter I have shown that the young body marks the closest ideal typical body for the knight, owing to shared physiognomic motifs such as beauty, proportion, size, and brawn. I have also illustrated, however, that the young body entailed a distinct humoural complexion, the dispositions of which, both positive and negative, played a role in shaping the embodied experience of the knight. The virtues and vices of youth contributed to the moral poles of romance knighthood and the challenges the questing knight faced. The young body, whilst endowing embodied knighthood with virtuous strength and courage, also threatened wrath, foolhardiness, and lust. Late medieval English curricula thus idealised a particular pattern of physiological change which sought to moderate the humoural heat of youth with cool-headed maturity. This change is signified by terms such as *sad*, *hardy*, *stedfast*, and *nyse*. A common way of expressing this process involved juxtaposing the young body with that of an animal, a wild horse or boar, which the youth had to subdue or slay. In romances like the *Prose Merlin*, *sadness* and *hardynesse* are gained instead during the violent and traumatic experiences of medieval war. Ultimately, the role of age in shaping the body-self of

the knight is complex. This complexity, I suggest, mirrors a more general tension in how contemporaries understood the relationship between body and self. In some cases, body-self develops spontaneously and inevitably, as if the product of genetic inheritance. Elsewhere, it occurs as part of a process requiring particular practices or partnerships. Anxieties no doubt attended this tension as, if the body-self was something *done*, then it could be *done wrong* – lost or wasted, as feared by Agrauain. In the next chapter, I will explore this further by examining how the physical changes imposed by old age also placed knightly body-selves under pressure.

## Chapter Two: The Old Body

The previous chapter argued that the knight of late medieval English literature and culture was often embodied through a series of traits commonly associated with male youth. These traits, I demonstrated, derived from medieval medical understandings of the young body. While the previous chapter identified several examples in Middle English literature of *yonge squyres*, these insights render the depictions of aged bodies in this genre more uncertain. If the romance knight, in his iconic bodily practices, physiognomic profile, and physiological complexion, signified embodied youth in the late medieval English imagination, then the ‘old knight’ is in danger of becoming an oxymoron.

Georges Minois has reflected on the uneasy representation of aged martial figures in medieval literature.<sup>1</sup> Minois found that by the later Middle Ages, earlier depictions of ‘valiant old men’, such as found in *chansons de geste*, were supplanted by more negative presentations of old age. In particular, Minois identifies the ways in which the aged were increasingly presented as antithetical inversions of youthful heroic figures, often shown to be physically feeble and unsightly where the young were vigorous and fair. Shulamith Shahar has observed similarly that not only were youthful qualities like physical beauty considered part of the ‘knightly ideal’ in late Middle Ages, but that this broader opposition between young and old appeared ‘prototypical and universal’.<sup>2</sup> Middle English literature at times suggests not only a general animosity between young and old, but a more specific alienation or othering suffered by the aged in knightly settings.<sup>3</sup>

For instance, Lydgate describes the meeting between King Arthur’s knights, ‘flouryng in lusti age’, and the belligerent messengers from imperial Rome (III. 2872). When characterising the latter, Lydgate describes a group of ‘olde mene [...] sad of ther port, demvre & temporat’, thereby creating an obvious and inimical contrast to the vibrant promise of Arthur’s young cohort (III. 2930-31). When the messengers offend Arthur’s Table by demanding he pay tribute to the ancient power of Rome, Arthur is able calm his outraged friends by observing that “men also gretli falle in age” (III. 2951). In voicing this, Arthur disregards not only the power of an insult when delivered by the aged, but the potential honour that might be found in rising to that insult. Arthur and his knights tolerate

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Minois, *History of Old Age: From Antiquity to the Renaissance*, trans. by Sarah Hanbury Tenison (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 238-39.

<sup>2</sup> Shulamith Shahar, ‘The Old Body in Medieval Culture’, in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 160-86 (170-1, 166).

<sup>3</sup> The juxtaposition between youth and old age appears outside of the European Middle Ages. For a discussion of the old-young dynamic in medieval Islamic culture, particularly as it relates to Western intellectual traditions, see Hassan Shuraydi, *The Raven and the Falcon: Youth Versus Old Age in Medieval Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 1-23.

the messengers as frustrating but ultimately harmless interlopers, saving their ire for the confrontation against enemies nearer to their own age. A similar manifestation of the aged's displacement within a knightly context occurs in the thirteenth-century *Chronicle of Melrose*. Here, king Henry III (d. 1272) is forced into the Battle of Evesham by his captive, Simon de Montfort. As he entered the fighting, the 58-year-old is said to have 'exclaimed to the men who were striking at him, "Do not hit me, for I am too old to fight"'.<sup>4</sup>

One of the more ambiguous but revealing tropes regarding the uncomfortable relationship between knighthood and old age in medieval literature concerns the Arthurian setting of Avalon. Avalon, as Shahar has argued, reflects both the dream of and practical need for an environment in which even the air knights breathed 'preserved the dwellers from growing old'.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, for Shahar, the enchantment of Avalon worked upon and through the knight's body. Time did not stop moving in Avalon; rather, bodies stop being affected by time for the duration spent there.<sup>6</sup> When one quit Avalon, age fatally reasserted itself, causing the individual to die of old age instantly. This detail suggests that, as with youth, the preoccupations regarding this life stage relate to what old age meant for the knight's body. The French *Tree of Battles* (c.1387) holds it a prerequisite that the knight 'finds all his pleasure and all his delight in being in arms'.<sup>7</sup> Arthurian Avalon provides the utopian setting in which this pleasure is never in doubt, with the inhabitants remaining young enough, in body and temperament, that they can bear both their arms and embodied knighthoods until such a time that they are ready to give them up.

Outside this fairy environment, however, old age remained a potentially *disembodying* force for a body-self in which beauty, strength, and athleticism appear as paramount signifiers. As Turner suggests, old age, like disease and sickness, exposes the tensions between idealised body-selves and the lived experiences of flesh-and-blood bodies subject to decay and death.<sup>8</sup> Turner discusses this with reference to contemporary sports figures who develop celebrity and embodied identity on the basis of a 'physical capital' which, invariably,

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<sup>4</sup> *The Church Historians of England*, Vol. IV, Part 1, trans. by Rev. Joseph Stevenson (London: Seeley & Co, 1856), p. 223.

<sup>5</sup> Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> John Darrah discusses Avalon's development as an ageless setting with reference to several interwoven themes, such as Avalon's etymological association with the Welsh *aval*, meaning apple – the classical symbol of immortality. Avalon, Darrah notes, was 'the fortunate isle, where the climate was always temperate and age took no toll'. See his *Paganism in Arthurian Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997). pp. 216-29 (216).

<sup>7</sup> Honoré Bonet, *The Tree of Battles*, trans. by G. W. Coopland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), p. 120. Subsequent page numbers given in text.

<sup>8</sup> Turner, *Body & Society*, pp. 55, 245. For a more focussed discussion on the way in which different ages or life stages impart distinct embodiments, see Jenny Hockey and Allison James, 'Health and the Embodiment of the Life Course', in *Routledge Handbook of the Body*, pp. 275-86.

diminishes as they age.<sup>9</sup> He questions what becomes of the aging athlete when his or her body proves incapable of the embodied practices in which the body-self had been developed. I argue, in turn, that this is an apt framework in which to begin considering how old age alters the embodied identity of the knight in late medieval English culture. Albrecht Classen has remarked that, much like contemporary sports figures, the ‘ambiguity [...] discontent, and frustration’ often detectable in depictions of aged martial figures in medieval literature, responds foremost to ‘the failure of their bodies’.<sup>10</sup> This chapter will investigate the relationship between old age, the body, and body-self of the knight in the literature and culture of late medieval England. The chapter will be broken up into several sections. First, it is necessary to introduce some definitions for and explanations of old age and the aged body within the broader context of the medieval lifecycle.

### **Bi-partite Old Age and the Humoural Rationale for Aging in Late Medieval England**

Perceptions of old age in late medieval England separated the period into two interrelated but distinguishable life stages, not unlike the relationship between *adolescentia* and *juventus* outlined in the previous chapter. Several names were used to refer to the two life stages constituting old age, but by far the most common were *senectus*, signifying the initial period of old age, and *senium*, used to describe the later, more advanced and severe stage.<sup>11</sup> Late medieval writers on old age admit a far greater degree of uncertainty regarding the beginning of this life stage than is the case for the corresponding period of youth. Joel Rosenthal cites the experiences of men like Geoffrey Chaucer (d. 1400), Thomas Hoccleve (d. 1426), and William Caxton (d. 1491) who felt, as Caxton said of his own experience of aging, that age “febleth all the body” by age fifty.<sup>12</sup>

The physician Gabriele Zerbi (d. 1505) believed that the initial period, *senectus*, could begin as early as ‘the thirtieth or thirty-fifth or fortieth year’, though often with negligible outward signs.<sup>13</sup> The more indisputable indications of the advanced stage, *senium*, could be seen and felt as early as age fifty or as late as seventy. These ambiguities as to when the body truly became ‘old’ responded to a variety of factors, among them the innate differences in

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<sup>9</sup> Turner, ‘Embodied Practice’, p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> Albrecht Classen, ‘Old Age in the Middle Ages and Renaissance’, in *Old Age in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), pp. 1-85 (35).

<sup>11</sup> For a range of different bi-partite methods of formulating the old age, see Shahar, *Growing Old*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>12</sup> Joel Rosenthal, *Old Age in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 96.

<sup>13</sup> Gabriele Zerbi, *Gerontocomia: On the Care of the Aged, and Maximianus, Elegies on Old Age and Love*, trans. by L. Lind (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Publications, 1988), pp. 29-30. Subsequent page numbers given in text.

what Zerbi called the ‘extremes’ of individual humoral complexion. Some individuals, depending on the interplay between their own dominant humour, the humoral waxing and waning entailed by aging itself, and the regimen of their lifestyle, would age faster and more debilitatingly than others. Irrespective of *when* one began to feel old, however, writers like Zerbi could predict with considerable confidence and precision *what* and *how* the aged would feel, and *why*, in the context of Galenic medicine.<sup>14</sup>

As in the case of youth, seasonality is an instructive model in understanding the ways in which the old body was conceptualised by humoral science. Though old age is commonly understood, not inaccurately, as the ‘winter’ of the medieval lifecycle, both autumn and winter played a role in shaping medical understandings of *senectus* and *senium* respectively. The fifteenth-century English *Regimen Sanitatis* of Johannes Hispanienis illustrates this when discussing the seasons and their place, both metaphorically and practically, in humoral physiology.<sup>15</sup> Here, ‘Autumpnus’ is the season in which both the earth and the bodies of those entering the autumn of their lives grow ‘colde and drie’. The dominant humour at work in the bodies of those in *senectus* was thus the cold and dry ‘colera nigra’, or ‘melancoly’, understood as the most defining quality of old age in the Middle Ages. The melancholic complexions of those in *senectus* were responsible for many of the most identifying traits of old age, both positive and negative.<sup>16</sup> Those in *senectus*, for example, were thought predisposed toward pessimistic, irritable, and miserly behaviour because of their cold and dry temperament. On the other hand, the same physiology might prompt more valuable characteristics, such as an inclination toward clemency and wisdom, both of which could embody the aged as sound counsellors.<sup>17</sup>

*Senium*, as the terminal period of radical mental and physical decline, was far-less nuanced in terms of the potential merits which the aged body might possess. John Trevisa, for instance, presents *senium* as the wintertime of the lifecycle: ‘þe ende of age and of lif’, when ‘mony yueles comen and sekenes’ (I. 292-93). In the *Regimen Sanitatis*, ‘wintir’ signals the ascendancy of things ‘colde and moiste’, or phlegmatic, with phlegm being the dominant

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<sup>14</sup> For the significance and popularity of Zerbi’s contribution to late medieval understandings of old age, see Margaret Wade Labarge, ‘Gerontocomia, On the Care of the Aged: A Fifteenth-Century Italian Guide by Gabriele Zerbi (1445-1505)’, in *Crown, Government and People in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Rowena Archer (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1995), pp. 209-221.

<sup>15</sup> Bodelian MS. Rawlinson C. 83, fol. 6, cited here in *Secretum Secretorum*, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Luke Demaitre, ‘The Care and Extension of Old Age in Medieval Medicine’, in *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Michael M. Sheehan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 3-22 (8-9). See also Burrow, who reviews both sets of qualities, pp. 29-53.

<sup>17</sup> See Stephen H. Rigby, *Wisdom and Chivalry: Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale and Medieval Political Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 116-126; Daniel Schäfer, *Old Age and Disease in Early Modern Medicine*, trans. Patrick Baker (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), pp. 16-18.

humour of those in *senium*.<sup>18</sup> The maintenance of good health during this season required that one ‘drink goode rede wyne’ while abstaining from the ‘letting of bloode’ – both of which are common features in the regimens aimed at the aged during the later Middle Ages.<sup>19</sup> Galenic medicine understood those in advanced old age to have almost no hot blood remaining in their bodies; it was this, alongside an abundance of the phlegmatic and melancholic humours, that caused the complexions of the aged to grow dangerously cold and dry.<sup>20</sup> This extreme lack of blood and corresponding need to retain fluids has caused confusion as to the apparent *moiste* complexion associated with *senium*. Zerbi addresses this, explaining that those in advanced old age were ‘cold and essentially dry but accidentally humid’ owing to the unnatural build-up of phlegm (30). The superfluous phlegm of aged bodies, Zerbi explains, adhered to and softened ‘the outer members’ of the old person, thereby smothering natural warmth and causing the heavy cough, faint voice, and respiratory problems commonly found in bodies experiencing *senium* (33). The encouragement to drink wine while avoiding unnecessary purgation was intended to help generate new blood, dissolve accidental phlegm, and foster heat in the otherwise frigid body of the aged (131-33).

These, as well as other physiological and physiognomic qualities of bodies undergoing advanced old age, will be discussed in more detail later. At this point, it necessary to reiterate that aging in late medieval England was understood as a cumulative and debilitating process whereby the body became increasingly cold and dry. In this, the aged body was often understood with reference to the hotter and younger body which preceded it. Indeed, as Chris Gilleard explains, it was the body’s innate humoral heat, which was at its most volatile during the life stage of youth, that ultimately destroyed the individual, having sustained itself by burning, and eventually exhausting, humoral moisture.<sup>21</sup> In this, Galenic medicine saw human longevity to be, as Zerbi says, ‘like the flame of a lamp which is extinguished because it consumed the material which feeds the flame’ (36). The period of old age, though lacking a precise chronological threshold, could thus be said, as Zerbi argued, to begin the moment that ‘the decay of the natural humidity [is] caused by the innate heat’ (35). This interior decay imposed a series of outwardly discernible debilitations, particularly in regards strength,

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<sup>18</sup> *Secretum Secretorum*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> For representative example of one such regimen for the aged, that of Avicenna (d. 1037), see the useful overview by Trevor H. Howell, ‘Avicenna and his Regimen of Old Age’, *Age and Ageing*, 16 (1987), 58-59. For the broader discussion of the aged as an audience for regimens in the Middle Ages, see Melitta Weiss Adamson, ‘Wellness Guides for Seniors in the Middle Ages’, *Fifteenth Century Studies*, 32 (2007), 1-16.

<sup>20</sup> Schäfer, pp. 28-9.

<sup>21</sup> Chris Gilleard, ‘Aging and the Galenic Tradition: A Brief Overview’, *Aging and Society*, 35 (2015), 489-511. See also Schäfer, pp. 24-8; Demaitre, ‘The Care and Extension of the Old Age’ pp. 8-15.



endurance, and even size. Because of this, understandings of old age in the Middle Ages generally construe the aging process as one of growing weakness, sickness, and disability.

It remains important to stress, however, that the initial stage of old age, cold and dry *senectus*, could hold positive implications for late medieval English writers. This is particularly the case when the properties of *senectus* are considered, as they often were, alongside those of the previous life stage. The zenith of the medieval lifecycle, in contrast to which the condition of old age was commonly understood, could at different times be known as *robor* or *virilitas* – terms which convey the potency and purpose of the medieval ‘middle age’, during which the individual was typically held to have reached the height of their powers.<sup>22</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, the life stage *juventus*, youth or young adulthood, was also at times conceptualised as the peak of the life course, and thus the point from which the descent of old age could be most clearly recognised.<sup>23</sup> This is the sense in which Trevisa treats *juventus*, calling it ‘þe middil amonges ages’ (I. 292). Owing to the pronounced associations between embodied knighthood and the young body, this use of *juventus* to represent the body against which old age was set in opposition is worth considering further.

Early on in his *Gerontocomia*, Zerbi identifies the way in which ‘certain qualities’ of *senectus* appeared in disagreement with ‘the period immediately preceding’, which Zerbi calls ‘the age of consistency, beauty, and flowering’, defined by its ‘hot and dry’ complexion (30). These, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, are the qualities of *sanguine* or *choleric* complexions, by which individuals were made impulsive, pugnacious, and promiscuous. Zerbi states that while the essential humoural condition of the old body was cold and moist decrepitude, there existed ‘something like a middle equidistant between these two periods’. During this intermediary stage, though increasing cold, the aging body retained the dry humoural complexion of *juventus*, having not yet been overcome by the phlegmatic excess of *senium*. As a result, those entering the initial period of old age, *senectus*, exhibited ‘constancy, strong understanding, and wisdom’, without the extreme enfeeblement that occurred later. ‘When men become old’, Zerbi thus argues, ‘in the first part of old age they understand more perfectly and fully’. Furthermore, ‘because of the lack of heat’, they experienced ‘the loss of youthful playfulness and sexuality’, thus becoming more sober and restrained. These physiological changes and the attributes they encouraged were positive developments for late

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<sup>22</sup> This was the dominant attitude to middle age during this period. See Deborah Youngs, ‘Adulthood in Medieval Europe: The Prime of Life of Midlife Crisis?’, in *Medieval Lifecycles*, pp. 239-64.

<sup>23</sup> The medieval awareness that these two life stages existed in a dialectic was not purely representational. E. Spindler examines the litigation between young apprentices and older masters as a developmental dynamic facilitating the youth’s transition into adulthood and the aged master’s growing societal irrelevance. See ‘Youth and Old Age in Late Medieval London’, *The London Journal*, 36 (2011), 1-22.

medieval English contemporaries, for whom wisdom and sobriety ranked chiefly among the virtues of mature manhood.<sup>24</sup>

One particularly rich Middle English text which reflects both the differing merits of life stages and the body-selves to which they gave rise, is the 1522 play *Mundus et Infans*.<sup>25</sup> Here, a character first introduced as ‘Infans’ progressively experiences the physiognomic and humoural profiles of each subsequent life stage. These transformations typically follow encounters with other personifications, such as ‘Mundus’, the world, or ‘Folly’, explicitly drawing upon contemporary understandings and demarcations of the lifecycle. When Infans turns seven, for instance, Mundus addresses him with the name and identity of ‘Wanton’, thus signalling his entrance into *pueritia*. When Wanton finds that his ‘fourteen year be come and gone’, he meets Mundus again to become ‘Lust and Liking’, who shortly proclaims: “I am as fresh as flowers in May/ I am seemly shapen in the same/ And proudly apparelled in garments gay” (117. 131-34). Lust and Liking thus embodies the well-visaged juvenility of *adolescentia* identified above, such as the Middle English *Prose Merlin*. Significantly, however, the protagonist of *Mundus et Infans* does not attain a knightly body-self until becoming ‘Manhood’ at age nineteen.

As Manhood, the protagonist is made a knight, again by Mundus, who compels him to “haunt always to chivalry” (120. 120). Manhood is understood to be “seemly in sight” and in possession of both the “strength and might” necessary for carrying out the embodied practices of knighthood (121. 209-10). In this, Manhood’s corporeal identity is consistent with the depictions of other young men, such as Sir Torre and Iason, seen in the previous chapter. Indeed, Manhood quickly shows himself to possess the choleric temperament and associated behaviours of *juventus*, revealing

For I have boldly blood full piteously dispilled,  
There many have left fingers and feet, both head and face.  
I have done harm on heads, and knights have I killed,  
And many a lady for my love hath said ‘Alas!’ (123. 254-57)

The character Manhood in *Mundus et Infans* represents another example of the ways in which embodied knighthood elides with the figure of the *lusty bachelor*, sharing the physiognomy and physiology of the young male body. What is more, Manhood’s humoural complexion, violent and virile, again appears as both a boon and potential hurdle in the young man’s

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<sup>24</sup> Sandy Feinstein has identified representations of this virtuous old age, thought possible for those in *senectus*, in Middle English romance. See Sandy Feinstein, ‘Longevity and the Loathly Ladies in Three Medieval Romances’, *Arthuriana*, 21 (2011), 24-48. For a list of the other virtues of the aged body, see Goodich, pp. 146-7.

<sup>25</sup> Cited here in *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays: Mankind, Everyman, and Mundus et Infans*, ed. by G. A. Lester (London: A. & C. Black, 1997), pp. 111-157. Subsequent page and line numbers given in text.

development. Manhood is “stiff, strong, stalworth, and stout”, but his fiery passions lead him toward the perennial corrupter of lusty bachelors, the vices (124. 271). Manhood becomes the champion of “Pride”, “Lechery”, and “Wrath”, each of whom, he boasts, “send me their livery” (126. 333).

When nearing the end of this life stage, Manhood is approached by ‘Conscience’, a personification who appears so foreign that the knight remarks “Conscience? What the devil man is he?” Conscience introduces itself as a teacher and begins reforming Manhood via a moral education in which the knight is slowly persuaded against each worldly vice in turn. This is notable as the first occasion during which an agent other than Mundus, the world itself, is shown to be responsible for propelling the protagonist through the stages of life. Because of this, Conscience can be read as signalling an inward turn in which Manhood withdraws from the secular stage of flesh and vice before reaching the next life stage, ‘Age’. While the character of Manhood meets another personification, Folly, before adopting his final embodiment, it is Conscience that first steers the knight away from the world, Mundus, and thus encourages the melancholic sobriety associated with *senectus*. *Mundus et Infans*, in this, celebrates the redemptive power of old age, explicitly here as an antidote to the volatile passions embodied by the knight-youth. As such, the poem demonstrates that late medieval English attitudes to old age, and thus to the old body, were often nuanced, with *senectus*, at least, fostering positive changes in body and self.

It is thus difficult to state with certainty whether the old body might entail a *disembodiment* for the knight of late medieval English culture. While the bloodless condition of *senium* would undoubtedly compromise both the physical prowess and attendant body-self of the knight, the wise and merciful *senectus* might continue in some manner to perform his knighthood. Later in this chapter, I will read for representations of such aged knights in Middle English literature. It should here be recognised, however, that in *Mundus et Infans*, while the depiction of ‘Age’ is positive, Manhood must abandon his knighthood upon progressing into this more mature embodiment. In this way, there is arguably an implication that knighthood and old age could be regarded as irreconcilable corporeal identities in late medieval England. In the next section of this chapter, I will examine this tension further by analysing the careers of older martial figures in context of late medieval English warfare.

### **Old Age and Knighthood in Late Medieval English Martial Culture**

In Bouchier's Middle English *Cronycle*, Sir John Chandos, 'a right valiant knight', is 'full of displeasure' at having failed to capture the abbey St Savin.<sup>26</sup> Sir John is a veteran general, being present at both Crécy and Poitiers; he is also blind in one eye, having 'lost the sight therof a fyve yere before as he hunted after an hart in the laundes of Burdeaux' (II. 322). In late December, 1369, Sir John 'stode in a kechyn, warmyng him by the fyre' while 'his servantes jangeled with hym, to thentent to bring him out of his melancholy' (II. 319). Early the next morning, while Chandos was fighting on the bridge of Lussac, he 'slode and fell downe' on the moist ground following a 'great dewe' (II. 321). A French squire, 'Jakes of saynt Martyn', struck Chandos with a glaive 'under his eye, bytwene the nose and the forehead' – an attack which Chandos failed to see coming due to his partial sight (II. 322). The 'rude' stroke 'entred into his brayne', so that 'after the stroke [Sir John] never spake worde' but died later that day.

Sir John Chandos was fifty-five-years-old when he died and, as such, was a man in the life stage of *senectus*, though this is not an aspect of his character which Bouchier's chronicle stresses. There are signs, however. Chandos, like many in *senectus*, is said to possess wisdom, being both 'sage' and 'full of experyens' (II. 138). Earlier in the *Cronycle*, the companions of 'therle of Penbroke' advise the earl, who was 'yet but yong', not to accompany Chandos into Anjou because, they suggest, 'whatsoever ye do he shall have the brute and voyce therof, presumably as a result of the older man's seniority and reputation (II. 298). Most suggestive is Chandos' *melancholy*, which can be read variously as a universal response to losses suffered during campaign, a dramatic premonition of his own imminent death, and, perhaps, as a symptom of his age, which may also be that which sees him alone stand close to the fire in order to keep warm.<sup>27</sup> Of particular interest here are Chandos' servants, who attempt to lighten Sir John's mood with lively chatter, the Middle English *jangle* suggesting 'idle speech' or 'gossip'.<sup>28</sup>

Zerbi, who wrote at length on the care of aged complexions, argued that lively conversation would 'increase the blood and spirit' in the old body, generating warmth and thereby favourably altering the temperament (267). The ability of those caring for the aged to remedy the melancholic humour of *senectus* with mirthful speech was thus a vital part of Zerbi's regimen. Joy, he suggested, 'banishes the pain of the body and the mind'; 'lends

<sup>26</sup> *The Chronicle of Froissart: Translated out of French by Sir John Bouchier Lord Berners*, ed. by William Paton Kerr, 6 vols (London: David Nutt: 1901) vol. II, pp. 319, 137-8 Subsequent citations (vol and page) given in text.

<sup>27</sup> Medieval calendars at times depict aged men warming themselves by the fire during the winter months of January and February. See, for example, the late fifteenth-century 'Isabella Breviary', BL MS Add. Ms. 18851 fol. 1v.

<sup>28</sup> MED entry *jangle* n. 1(a).

assistance to sluggish and gloomy old people of a cold nature'; and helps ensure that 'heat is spread out to the extremities' – all viable treatments for Chandos' melancholy (264).<sup>29</sup> For Zerbi, the individual best suited to achieve this would naturally be one 'skillful in introducing jokes, a careful connoisseur of tales and delightful bits of gossip' – one familiar, that is, with *jangle* (268). One can speculate that Chandos, as Seneschal of Poitiers, would have had servants capable of meeting these requirements, as well as fulfilling Zerbi's hope that the carer 'be witty, urbane, *articus*, that is, well educated' (269).

Whether Sir John Chandos' melancholy is intended to develop, however slightly, a picture of an aged knight's temperament on the evening before his death, his example reflects other considerations regarding the viability of military service for those in old age. Chandos dies, after all, as the result of an old injury and his failure to keep his footing on slippery ground. Though by no means the exclusive foibles of aged bodies, such physical accidents recall earlier observations regarding the old body – and more importantly its failure – in producing existential anxieties about old knights in late medieval English culture. In spite of this, however, the record of Sir John Chandos fighting and dying at fifty-five is not an outlier in late medieval England. Throughout the wars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, members of the English nobility and gentry, of ages both similar to and at times greater than that of Chandos, are recorded to have died while carrying out the physical duties of knighthood.

Sir John Talbot (c. 1387), for instance, was sixty-six when he died at the battle of Castillon in 1453, at which time his military career spanned fifty years.<sup>30</sup> Richard Neville (c. 1400), the earl of Salisbury, fought in Scotland from the 1420s through the 1440s before joining the Yorkists during the Wars of the Roses.<sup>31</sup> In this conflict, Neville fought at three major battles in 1455, 1459, and 1460, when he died, at age sixty, during the Battle of Wakefield. Another Yorkist, Sir Walter Devereux (c. 1432), also died in battle, this time at Bosworth (1485) while in his fifties.<sup>32</sup> Careers like these support the arguments of historians like Georges Minois, Michael Prestwich, and Andrew Boardman, that English Commissions of Array, which commonly stipulated military service for those aged sixteen to sixty, reliably indicate the range of age groups involved in late medieval warfare.<sup>33</sup>

In further expanding the picture of how regularly members of the nobility maintained military careers during their old age, one can look to the aristocracy. Adrian Bell et al's sample of 247 English peers from 1369-1453 details rates of military service among the late

<sup>29</sup> The use of cheerfulness as an antidote to melancholy is discussed by Glending Olsen, pp. 55-63.

<sup>30</sup> *Soldier in Late Medieval England*, pp. 28, 32-3. Minois also discusses Talbot, p. 212.

<sup>31</sup> *Soldier in Late Medieval England*, pp. 34-5

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Boardman, *The Soldier in the Wars of the Roses* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), p. 190.

<sup>33</sup> See Minois, p. 241; Prestwich, 'Miles in Armis', pp. 217-18; Boardman, pp. 75-79.

medieval English aristocracy. Peers, like knights, were ‘a highly militarised group [...] from early youth through to old age’, for whom martial activity played a primary role in the formation of group identity.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, most peers held knighthoods, and kept far more detailed records on military service than those describing the experiences of the lower nobility and gentry. The similarities between peers and other forms of nobility associated with knighthood, in addition to this greater availability of evidence, recommends Bell et al’s study as a valuable indicator of the conventions which may have governed military service amongst other armigerous groups in late medieval England.

Bell et al found that 32% of the 212 peers in their sample whose ages were known continued to participate in battles during in their fifties, while 11% did the same during their sixties.<sup>35</sup> Of the 11% of sixty-year-olds, seven peers died during combat, with the oldest being William Bonville, who was executed following the Second Battle of St Albans (1461) at age sixty-eight. Over half of all military active peers continued to serve until the final five years of their lives, suggesting that the convention was for individuals to fight for as long as they were physically able. It is notable, if unsurprising, how few of the peers fought beyond their late sixties into the period during which passage into *senium* became more and more certain. Only five peers (2.4%) were found to have fought over the age of seventy-one, though even this small number is remarkable. Guy, Lord Brian, one of this group, was around sixty in 1369, and continued to fight in 1370, 1371, and possibly again in 1378, before ending his service in 1380, by which time he would have been around seventy-nine years old. It is important to recognise that, with respect to both the nobility and gentry, martial service would not have been constant; however, the careers of the noblemen cited by Bell et al were punctuated by frequent and major military events to which the aged actively committed their bodies.<sup>36</sup>

In supporting their study, Bell et al drew on muster rolls, personal letters, and records relating to the Court of Chivalry, particularly those concerning armorial disputes.<sup>37</sup> These judicial proceedings, which heard competing claims to specific heraldic motifs, offer valuable insight into the ages up to which individuals continued to perform roles consistent with their knighthoods in late medieval England. The majority of witnesses in such cases were knights or men-at-arms, called upon to give evidence describing the first time they saw a disputant

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<sup>34</sup> *Soldier in Late Medieval England*, pp. 23, 52, 94.

<sup>35</sup> *Soldier in Late Medieval England*, pp. 27-32.

<sup>36</sup> For further discussion on how regularly the late medieval English peerage continued to act in military roles, see Andy King, ‘What Werre Amounteth?: The Military Experience of Knights of the Shire, 1369–1389’, *The Journal of the Historical Association*, 95 (2010), 418-436.

<sup>37</sup> For the development and structure of the Court of Chivalry, see Richard Barber ‘Heralds and the Court of Chivalry: From Collective Memory to Formal Institutions’, in *Courts of Chivalry and Admiralty in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. by Anthony Musson and Nigel Ramsay (Cambridge: Boydell Press, 2018), pp. 15-27.

using a contested coat of arms. In such testimonies, the earliest sightings were most prized as they suggested a disputant's greater pedigree in having borne a particular device and thus clearer right to continue doing so. It was thus common for deponents to recall the number of years for which they had fought, thereby prioritising the more senior practitioners of knighthood in this period.

The most famous of these cases is the late fourteenth-century dispute between Sirs Richard Scrope and Robert Grosvenor (1386), which Joel Rosenthal has discussed in terms of what the dispute suggests about old age within this community.<sup>38</sup> Rosenthal finds that, of the two disputants, Scrope gathered the majority of deponents (207), sixty of whom (29%) were in their sixties, while fifty-three (26%) were in their fifties.<sup>39</sup> These were the largest two age categories of deponents in Scrope's group, suggesting that demographically, Scrope, who was himself fifty years old, was able to call on a more seasoned set of witnesses. William de la Halle, age sixty, was typical of Scrope's deponents in claiming to have been fighting for forty-five years. Grosvenor had fewer supporters over all (149) and fewer witnesses over fifty able to speak on his behalf. Still, of those called, forty-four (30%), the largest single age group amongst Grosvenor's deponents, were in their forties. More than anything, this indicates that each party understood the benefit of, as Rosenthal says, 'lining up as many elderly friends as possible', and in potentially having such men emphasise, or even misrepresent, the years of their life. Sir John de Sully of the Order of the Garter, for instance, gave his age as 105 during a deposition in favour of Scrope – taken at Sully's home due to his inability to travel. Though disabled by his old age at the time of the dispute, Sully claimed to have fought eighteen years earlier at the Battle of Nájera (1367), where he would have been eighty-seven.<sup>40</sup>

There are similarly extreme old ages – 'inexact, if not mythic', as Rosenthal describes them – given in other cases heard by the Court of Chivalry.<sup>41</sup> Andrew Ayton discusses another late fourteenth-century armorial dispute, this time between Lovel and Morley, in which the average age for the supporters of both disputants was over fifty, with the mean age of Lovel's deponents being greater than sixty-five.<sup>42</sup> Again, Ayton notes that these individuals presented their careers as physically active, with none of the witnesses claiming fewer than forty years 'in arms'. Sir William de Wollaston, for instance, gave his age as ninety-six, his martial service having begun seventy years prior to his deposition. Maurice Keen, likewise,

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<sup>38</sup> Joel T. Rosenthal, *Old Age in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 44-55. See also Nicholas Harris Nicolas, *The Controversy Between Scrope and Grosvenor in the Court of Chivalry*, 2 vols (London, 1832).

<sup>39</sup> Rosenthal, *Old Age*, pp. 46-9.

<sup>40</sup> Prestwich, 'Miles in Arms', p. 218.

<sup>41</sup> Rosenthal, *Old Age*, p. 45.

<sup>42</sup> Ayton, 'Knights', pp. 86-88.

has examined a fifteenth-century dispute between Grey and Hastings in which the ages and careers of the witnesses are similar: aged men from military backgrounds whose great experience directly corresponded to both their authority in the court and, as a result, the legitimacy of their disputant's claim.<sup>43</sup>

How valuable is evidence like this in providing insight into the relationship between military service, the body, and old age in communities of knights during this period? In considering this, it is important to recognise that, while certain of the ages given can appear exaggerated, they nevertheless conform to broader conventions around age in the period. Rosenthal notes, for instance, that deponents generally rounded their ages up or down, as is the case in other contexts.<sup>44</sup> What is more, younger deponents were found to be as imprecise in recalling their ages as were older witnesses, again suggesting a broader pattern around the recollection and presentation of personal age. Ayton has even suggested that, if anything, the majority of ages given in these disputes were modest rather than exaggerated.<sup>45</sup> If one accepts that ages given in the Court of Chivalry were mostly reliable, then, the greatest question one has regards how physically active these aged knights were during the military service which, for many, was still ongoing. Sir Andrew Luttrell (d. 1390) proves instructive here. Luttrell gave his age as seventy in the Scrope-Grosvenor case (1386), and described his career in arms as lasting around fifty years.<sup>46</sup> Luttrell's first recorded service was in Scotland (c. 1337), while he was in his teens, and he had served prior to the Scrope-Grosvenor hearing (c. 1384), around the time when Luttrell would have been sixty-eight. Luttrell, however, then continued to serve in the years following his deposition, first in 1387, and then in 1388, just years before his death at seventy-four.

While one cannot assume that every knight in his sixties or seventies was as regularly engaged in military campaign as Andrew Luttrell, that some aged knights sought out opportunities to fight should not be disregarded without consideration. Both William Marshal (d. 1219) and John Hawkwood (d. 1394) were recorded as having participated in either war or tournament while in their seventies.<sup>47</sup> The archaeological record, too, suggests that the stated ages of the knights and men-at-arms who contributed to the Court of Chivalry

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<sup>43</sup> Maurice Keen, 'English Military Experience', pp. 167-186.

<sup>44</sup> Rosenthal, *Old Age*, pp. 48-52.

<sup>45</sup> Ayton, 'Knights', p. 100.

<sup>46</sup> *Soldier in Late Medieval England*, p. 88.

<sup>47</sup> On Marshal, David Crouch observes 'in old age, he could not let a campaign pass without pushing himself forward [...] his old age must have been a time of gnawing regret for him: a world-class sportsman grown old and stiff'. See *William Marshal*, third edition (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 41-2. John Hawkwood's precise age is more difficulty ascertained owing to ambiguity regarding his date of birth; however, he was deemed an "old fox" by one contemporary. See William Caferro, *John Hawkwood: An English Mercenary in Fourteenth-Century Italy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 35-37 (37).



were not greatly exaggerated. The skeletal remains from the Battle of Towton (1461) were categorised as belonging to one of three age groups, the third of which, ‘mature adult’, covers the age range thirty-six to fifty.<sup>48</sup> There were eleven individuals classified as belonging to each of the three age groups, suggesting that the representation of ages, at least in terms of fatalities, was equal. Of the eleven in mature adult range, eight individuals were thought to be in their mid-thirties to mid-forties, with the three remaining classed as over forty-six years old. Two of these three, Towton 16 and Towton 34/38, revealed well-healed ante-mortem trauma suggesting long careers in combat.<sup>49</sup>

Archaeological data is not without its own set of problems. Methods for determining age, as mentioned in the previous chapter, are more accurate when identifying younger remains. Because of this, aged individuals like those identified at Towton are often even older than estimates, which tend to be conservative. Even without this qualifier, however, it is apparent that older knights and men-at-arms died at Towton, and many more may have fought and survived. King John II, when founding the French chivalric Order of the Star (1352), stipulated that the Order would include retirement facilities in which old knights would be cared for by a staff of valets.<sup>50</sup> Edward III, similarly, established the college of St George in the same year, which was to hold religious services and maintain the spiritual welfare of Edward’s Garter knights.<sup>51</sup> Also resident at the college, however, were twenty-six *militēs veterani*, ‘veteran knights’, selected on the basis of age and military service.<sup>52</sup> As Minois observes, measures like this offer indication of the ‘relatively high number of knights who reached an advanced age’.

This evidence strongly suggests that men in their forties, fifties, sixties, and even in some cases their seventies, were engaged in the embodied practices of knighthood, at times suffering and inflicting physical trauma. There is thus little indication that the advanced age of septuagenarians like Sir John Talbot or Andrew Luttrell *enfeebled* their bodies, *disembodying* their corporeal identities as vigorous knights. Even in such cases where it appears less certain that the aged deponents of armorial disputes continued to actively perform the body techniques of knighthood, they retained an authoritative presence amongst their peers. Owing to the nature of such disputes, and the premium which the Court’s methods placed

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<sup>48</sup> Boylston et al, ‘Physical Anthropology’, in *Blood Red Roses*, pp. 51-3.

<sup>49</sup> For osteological reports of the three 46+ individuals, see Novak, ‘case studies’, pp. 241, 246, 249.

<sup>50</sup> Minois, p. 245.

<sup>51</sup> Collins, pp. 28-30 (30).

<sup>52</sup> The retirement of aged elite males in the Middle Ages requires more research. Johnathan Lyon notes the challenges in this, however, as the evidence used by social historians becomes slight once noblemen withdrew from their active careers. See ‘The Withdrawal of Aged Noblemen into Monastic Communities: Interpreting Sources from Twelfth-Century Germany’, in *Old Age in the Middle Ages*, pp. 143-69.

upon posterity, these trials presented an opportunity in which aged men could arbitrate within their communities. In doing so, irrespective of whether the aged would have been competing in tournament or participating in battle, they were still shaping, in as much as the aged fighters at Towton, the discourse around old age and knighthood in the late Middle Ages. They were also arguably conforming to perceptions of the aged body by demonstrating sagacity and good counsel in their role as reliable witnesses at court.

In consequence, one is left with what is, perhaps, a surprising lack of apprehension regarding the figure of the aged knight in late medieval English culture, at least in the evidence thus far considered. Missing in the above examples, however, is an indication of the broader attitudes toward men like John de Sully, allegedly still fighting in his eighties. It is unclear whether such individuals were considered exceptional within their age category, level of physical prowess, or indeed the humours of their bodies. Save for a few exceptions, I have avoided categorising any of the individual cases discussed above as being in either in *senectus* or *senium*. This is because, as was argued earlier, it was not chronology that dictated one's life stage during this period but physiological change. While Galenic medical wisdom held that wearing armour and doing prowess would typically prove impossible for an eighty-year-old body, there is always the possibility that, due to an individual's humoural complexion, their diet and regimen, such a body might prove resistant to age – not unlike a resident of Avalon. In such circumstances, Avalon might not be a place but a humoural complexion: an abundant quantity of pure blood and hot cholera to boil phlegm and dilute melancholy. In the next section of this chapter, I will further consider this idea of prolongevity and its relation to the depiction of aged knights and old bodies in Middle English literature.

### **Prolongevity and Perceptions of the Old Knight in Middle English Literature**

The late fifteenth-century romance *Lancelot du Laik* introduces the knight Sir 'Harvy the Reveyll'.<sup>53</sup> Sir Harvy is described as the knight who 'in this world [...] had most feill', or knowledge and experience, which 'longith to the were' (3204-06). The context of this introduction is a largescale combat in which Arthur's other knights are fighting – and in some places losing – but which Harvy has not yet entered. Recognising this, Sir Kay begins to insult Harvy for his inaction, with the implication that this has something to do with his old age. In responding, Harvy proclaims "Y wytness God that I never in my days comytit tratory; and if I now begyne into myne eld, in evill tyme fyrst com I to this feld" (3223-26). Having

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<sup>53</sup> *Lancelot of the Laik and Sir Tristrem*, ed. by Alan Lupack (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), lines 2853-5. Subsequent line numbers given in text.

said this, Harvy spurs his horse and, ‘evyne before Sir Kay’, strikes such blows against his opponent that ‘horss and he lay boith apone the gren’ (3236-38). Gawain, having been one of the knights rescued by Harvy, is said to witness ‘the counter that [Harvy] maad and leuch for al the sarues that [Harvy’s opponent] had’ (3239-40). Sir Harvy’s brief role in the romance reaches its conclusion with the author adding

That day Sir Harvy prevyt in the feld  
Of armys more than longith to his eld;  
For he was more than fyfty yher of ag,  
Set he was ferss and yong in his curag (3241-44)

This episode is relatively unusual in its portrayal of a knight in his *elde*, or old age. The aged Sir Harvy, for example, continues to perform the vigorous body techniques of knighthood, riding and fighting against the enemy. As Burrow and Jost have pointed out, the representation of aged knights in romance typically sees them in the role of hermits, the narrative agency of whom develops not through physical prowess but sage advice to the young.<sup>54</sup> Harvy appears to deviate from this model, although the expectation that his old age might in some way complicate his participation in battle is reflected by the taunts of Sir Kay. Harvy’s presence within Arthur’s knightly cohort, and his overall role in this narrative episode, are thus not without ambiguity. During the brief period of action for which Harvy appears, his age, and the ways in which other knights respond to it, are stressed repeatedly.

Harvy’s *feill* is notable in this respect as, like Chandos, it can be assumed that Harvy’s age, at over fifty years old, is that which has provided his great experience in warfare. The initial insult from Sir Kay, the notorious detractor of Arthur’s knights, is similarly able to be read in response to Harvy’s age. Sir Kay’s criticism hinges upon the danger that Harvy’s hesitation before joining battle could suggest the cold temperament or physical incapability stereotypical within medieval understandings of old age. Harvy himself, when preparing to disprove Kay’s accusations, seems to recognise that his *elde* is in part responsible for the other knight’s criticism. This is reflected in Harvy’s speech, during which he does not dispute his old age, nor the way in which it might distort his embodiment as a knight; rather, Harvy prioritizes his past experience *in evill tyme*, when he had *fyrst com to feld*, as being greater than the negative implications of his current life stage. In doing so, Harvy reminds both Kay and the audience that while he has now, as he concedes, entered *into myne eld*, his transition into old age has not entirely effaced the fierce triumphs of his youth. Indeed, the virtues of Harvy’s youth are preserved in tangible form – in his *corag* – which, unlike Harvy himself, is said to have remained *yong*.

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<sup>54</sup> See Burrow, p. 177; Jost, pp. 295-96.

This creates an ambivalence, wherein Harvy's success at proving Sir Kay wrong results less in the valorisation of his old body than in the ability of his youthful temperament to endure in spite of it. This ambiguity is seen most clearly in Sir Gawain's *leuch*, or laughter, with which the knight greets the *sarues* (injuries or misfortunes) of Harvy's opponent.<sup>55</sup> The implication, and source of Gawain's humour, is that Harvy's opponent has not only suffered defeat but, in addition, humiliation at having been bested by one in *elde*. The overall effect is to characterise Harvy as a kind of carnivalesque figure, subverting expectations regarding the typical body-self of the knight. Indeed, one popular character of late medieval English tournament culture was that of the exaggeratedly garbed 'old warrior'.<sup>56</sup> In 1511, Charles Brandon performed this role, disguising himself with 'a long & fforgrowyn berd rechyng to his sadyll bowe', which he threw off to reveal a 'bryght harneys' just prior to competing.<sup>57</sup> Antony Woodville adopted the same costume in 1447, during a tournament celebrating the marriage of Prince Richard, son of Edward IV; and Henry VIII also took on the role in 1515, with the king's beard being woven from 'damaske sylver'.<sup>58</sup> In all cases, the guise of the old man was cast off immediately before the physical action of the tournament, thereby demonstrating the suitability of the old body as a theatrical foil for the more able body of the knight-competitor. In *Lancelot du Laik*, the consequence of this juxtaposition between old and young bodies is that when Gawain, and arguably the audience, laugh at the knight being unhorsed by an old man, we also implicitly ridicule the aged knight himself, who becomes a kind of mock-heroic figure. By the end of Harvy's appearance in the romance, these tensions are largely unresolved. The narrative summarises Harvy as a knight bearing *armys more than longith to his eld*. Here, as with Harvy's *yong corag*, the commendation has the effect of acknowledging Harvy's old age whilst also disassociating it from his bodily prowess. It is as though the very reason we are hearing about 'old' Sir Harvy is because, in some vital respect, he is still *yong*.

These ambiguities in Sir Harvy's characterisations might be attributed to the idea of 'transcendence', the literary trope whereby a character presented explicitly in one life stage conforms with the archetypal traits associated with another.<sup>59</sup> The most common articulation of this trope is 'upward' transcendence in which infants or youths exhibit a wisdom more

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<sup>55</sup> MED entry *sorve* n. 4(a).

<sup>56</sup> See Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (London: Ashgate, 2002), p. 118.

<sup>57</sup> *The Great Chronicle of London*, ed. by ed. A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley (London, 1938), p. 372.

<sup>58</sup> *The Great Tournament Roll of Westminster*, ed. by Sydney Anglo, vol 1. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 33-4; Edward Hall, *The Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (London, 1809), p. 568.

<sup>59</sup> See Burrow, pp. 95-113.

common in those of cooler humoural complexions.<sup>60</sup> Shulamith Shahar, however, has identified cases of ‘downward’ transcendence, too, discussing this as one explanation for the atypical ‘powerful and dignified’ bodies of aged protagonists in heroic literature.<sup>61</sup> The presence of downward transcendence in this episode could be suggested by Harvy’s moniker as the ‘*Reveyl*’. This title, with its connotations of joviality and ribaldry, might reflect the uncommon characterisation of Harvy as an aged knight transcendentally *yong* at heart and in *corag*.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, the carnivalesque associations of revelry again support the argument that Harvy’s role is intentionally to disrupt or otherwise disorder the usual presentation of embodied knighthood as it relies on ideas about age, specifically youth.

Most examples of downward transcendence, however, concern chivalric luminaries like Charlemagne of *chansons de geste*. Characters like this often reach mythic ages of 200 or even 300 years old, all while remaining mostly physically unchanged in the manner of biblical patriarchs.<sup>63</sup> During such ancient longevities, however, characters cease to be ‘old’ but instead become simply ageless. Harvy’s example, on the other hand, is valuable because his longevity is altogether more natural and, indeed, more plausible in the context of the medieval lifecycle and the science of the four humours. The age at which Harvy is said to be fighting, around 50-60 years old, is the same age range cited above in relation to the military service rendered by English nobility during this period. Sir Harvy’s *yong corag*, while potentially an example of downward transcendence, could also be interpreted as a scientifically explicable trait of his natural physiology; an abundance of choler, for instance, or the outcome of a regimen aimed at prolongevity.

Galenic medical theory held that prolonging the physiological complexion of youth, and thereby extending the overall lifespan, fell within the sphere of human agency.<sup>64</sup> As Chris Gilleard notes, methods relating to prolongevity corresponded generally to ‘the careful husbanding of heat and moisture’ – the innate qualities of the life stage *adolescentia*.<sup>65</sup> If old age, in Galenic medical understandings, followed dryness and cold, then practical efforts to postpone the onset of old age stressed the opposite qualities of hot and moist *sanguine*

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<sup>60</sup> On the origins and development of the *puer senex* trope, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans by Willard R. Trask (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 98-101.

<sup>61</sup> Shahar, *The Old Body*, p. 161. See also Phyllis Gaffney, pp. 576-78.

<sup>62</sup> MED entry *revel* n. 1, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Shahar, *Growing Old*, pp. 66-7.

<sup>64</sup> Faye Getz discusses several methods for prolongevity, ranging from the natural ‘lifestyle’ medicine of the regimen, to the more occult possibilities of Roger Bacon’s philosopher’s stone. See ‘To Prolong Life and Promote Health: Baconian Alchemy and Pharmacy in the English Learned Tradition’, in *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture*, ed. by Sheila Campbell, Bert Hall, and David Klausner (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992), pp. 141-151.

<sup>65</sup> Gilleard, p. 495.

humours.<sup>66</sup> One sees examples of this in Middle English versions of the *Secretum Secretorum*, a compilation of knowledge allegedly composed for Alexander the Great, which offered guidance on a range of topics such as physiognomy, bodily regimens, statecraft, astronomy, and prolongevity.<sup>67</sup>

One late medieval English version, the *Secrete of Secretes* (c. 1445), advises that the reader ‘vnderstande wele that the bodies of men, that ben receptacles of mete and drynke, ben *thynned* and *resolved*’ over time.<sup>68</sup> The foremost way in which bodies were *resolved*, which in this context refers to the body diminishing, dissolving, and losing its substance, concerned ‘the hete naturell that drieth vp the moisture of the bodies’. This oil-lamp metaphor, as stated above, is one way of conceptualising the aging process. Here, the body is considered more in the manner of a furnace, with the stomach containing a fire larger or smaller depending on one’s natural complexion and dominant humour. ‘A stronge an hote stomak’ was like a fire that ‘brenne grete wode’, while a ‘stomak [that] is cold and feble’ could burn only ‘reedis [...] and sotell wode’. A long life involved tending one’s inner fire with the right fuel, whether ‘grosse’ or ‘sotell’ foods and drink, depending on the temperature of one’s complexion. In addition, there were particular humoral complexions which, regardless of regimen, would prove naturally resistant to the physiological transformations of old age. Zerbi discusses this, claiming that ‘those of a very humid and warm complexion are the longest lived’ (61). Individuals with sanguine and choleric complexions, then, had the best chance of keeping their *calor innatus* burning for longer, thereby retaining their youthful complexions.

Importantly, such complexions, as detailed in the previous chapter, could be recognised by a range of traits strongly suggestive of embodied knighthood. Trevisa illustrates this when describing ‘hote men and colerik’, whom, he says, ‘ben here and lengere þan flewmatik men’ (I. 143), as well as being more ‘wraþeful, hardy, [and] vnmeke’ (I. 159). In this way, choler informs an embodiment that conforms, in physiognomy and temperament, to that of the typical literary knight. Indeed, alongside choleric qualities like *boldenes* and *hardynes*, one might easily locate Sir Harvy’s *corag*, which appears decisive in accounting for his prolongevity as a knight in *elde*. Similar physiological explanations may also have influenced attitudes toward the ongoing presence of aged knights in late medieval English war cited above. The military service of men in their sixties and seventies, such as Sir John Talbot and Sir Andrew Luttrell, could be both medically explicable and physiologically plausible in the context of Galenic humoralism.

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<sup>66</sup> Gilleard, pp. 498-9; see also Schäfer, pp. 24-5, 35-8.

<sup>67</sup> For an introduction to this genre, see William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 15-37.

<sup>68</sup> Text taken from Bodelian MS. Ashmole 396, fol. 15v, cited here in *Secretum Secretorum*, pp. 50-51.

Though the portrayal of Sir Harvy is explicable, it remains exceptional and, moreover, ambivalent owing to the burlesque quality of an old knight goaded into unhorsing a youthful opponent. In order to contextualise the example of Sir Harvy, it is necessary to examine some more typical, although still rare, depictions of aged knights in Middle English literature. One of the most representative of these comes from Caxton's *Ordre*. The opening of the *Ordre* depicts a knight who, in youth, could be found 'aduenturyng his body [...] in many batailles', but who, 'by cours of nature [came] nyghe vnto his ende' (3-4). During this advanced life stage, the *Ordre* says, 'nature faylled in hym by age' until the knight 'had no power ne vertu to vse armes as he was woned to do' (4). Having been thus physically *resolved*, the knight 'fledde the world by cause that the feblenessse of his body in whiche he was by old age fallen', becoming a hermit. It is this same knight-hermit, 'moche old' but possessing the text of the *Ordre* itself, who uses his experience, which no longer has any physical utility, to instruct squires (7).

Here, old age directly constitutes a kind of *disembodiment* for the knight, sapping the strength and *vertu* from his body. This *feblenessse* is so debilitating and, in consequence, disfiguring, that it requires a new embodied identity – that of the hermit, with 'a grete berde, longe heer, and a feble gowne worne and broken'. Where Sir Harvy remains physically active, but does so in a manner almost farcical, the knight of the *Ordre* accepts the loss of his body, becoming a *nyse* and dignified hermit in *senectus*. Another variation of the old knight appears in the fourteenth-century Middle English romance *Sir Beues of Hampton*.<sup>69</sup> The romance opens with Sir Beues' father, Sir Gye, both 'a stalworthe knyght and [...] hardye' (10), as well as perennial *lusty bachelor*, being 'euer [...] wiþ outen wiue' (17). Like Sir Harvy, Sir Gye is shown eventually to have 'fallen in to elde', at which point, as in the *Ordre*, the knight 'feble a wexeþ and vnbelde [fearful]' (46-7). In this melancholic condition, Gye finally agrees to marriage with a 'faire and briȝt' wife, who is soon given to complain

Me lord is olde & may nouȝt werche,  
 Al dai him is leuer at cherche,  
 Ðan in me bour.  
 Hadde ich itaken a ȝong kniȝt,  
 Ðat ner nouȝt brused in werre & fiȝt,  
 [...]
 [he] wolde me louen dai and niȝt  
 Cleppen and kissen wiþ al is miȝt (58-65)

<sup>69</sup> *The Romance of Sir Beues of Hampton*, EETS OS 65, ed. by Eugen Kölbing (London: Oxford UP, 1894). Line numbers given in text.

An association is drawn here between physical *mizt* – martial prowess – and amorous behaviour, each of which diminish with the onset of old age. As Trevisa said, the choleric man possessed an equal ‘appetite [for] wreche’ (vengeance and destruction) and ‘þe werkes of Venus’, with both predispositions attending his *hote* complexion (I. 159). For sir Gye, these embodied faculties dwindle as his aged body cools into feebleness and fearfulness. The aged knight thus again becomes a tragic figure of ridicule, with a model *hardye* and *stalworthe* knight being made cuckold by his old age. Gye is eventually murdered by his wife’s young lover, his once strong body having become bruised and unsightly.

In the cases of Sir Harvy, Caxton’s knight-hermit, and Sir Gye, one recognises three narratives in which old age threatens pronounced change for the knight’s corporeal identity. In each case, the acceptance or avoidance of old age, along with the sudden and disabling impact of longevity, feature prominently. Sir Harvey, for instance, may be an example of downward transcendence or an illustration of humoural prolongevity. Whatever the case, his knighthood and *corag* resist, as it were, his *elde*, but not without marking him as an ‘other’ figure within the broader community of knights. The knight of the *Ordre*, in contrast, embraces his *senectus* but, in doing so, loses the body-self of knight, becoming instead a bearded, white-haired, hermit in torn rags rather than shining armour. Sir Gye, an archetypal *lusty bachelor*, in contrary manner appears unwilling to accept the maturity and domesticity which comes with marriage and the loss of his youth. By the time Sir Gye consents, he is already in his *elde*, in which life stage he is not only *disembodied* of his knighthood, but his manhood, too, having become equally incapable of the *werche* required of both knights and lovers.<sup>70</sup>

In all cases it is the body, and only specific parts of the body, which appears as the foremost vehicle for either realising or deferring the onset of old age. It is interesting, for instance, that none of these aged knights are shown to become mentally feeble, blind, or deaf, all of which were recognisable signifiers of old age in late medieval England.<sup>71</sup> Rather, for the knight-hermit, it is the wasting of his physical strength that drives him from the world, just as it is Sir Gye’s melancholic complexion which ultimately unmans and humiliates him. Sir Harvy, on the other hand, resists his *elde* precisely because of his *yong corag*, which enables his prowess and prolongevity. For each knight, old age is not presented in general

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<sup>70</sup> In this, Sir Gye’s status as father to the titular hero of the romance, Sir Beues, is also compromised. Philip Grace has shown that humoural heat, by conferring vigour and virility, contributed to ideals fatherhood and household governance in the Middle Ages. See ‘Aspects of Fatherhood in Thirteenth-Century Encyclopaedias’, *Journal of Family History*, 31 (2006), 211-236.

<sup>71</sup> Irina Metzler discusses the overlap between old age and physical/mental impairment. See *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages: Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 92-110.



terms but as something which engages, and more often than not erodes, the iconic physiognomic and physiological bases for knighthood – strong bodies and *bote* humours. Again, this suggests a focussed cultural juxtaposition between the old body and the body-self of the knight. Thus far, this chapter has not comprehensively detailed the ways in which the distinct embodiment of old age might constitute a corresponding *dis*embodiment for the knight, although there are signs in these examples. This is because the most prominent and, indeed, problematic image of the old body in late medieval England was not that of *senectus* but the more advanced life stage of *senium*. In the next section of this chapter, I will develop the complex attitude toward the old body outlined here, and consider *senium* as an antithetical embodiment to the corporeal identity of the knight.

### The Body in *Senium* and *Disembodied* Knighthood

When discussing advanced old age, Trevisa presents *senium* as a distinct embodiment, determining the way in which the person looks, speaks, eats, moves, and so on. This is the life stage in which

myȝt and strengþ passith and faileþ, fleish and fairness is consumpt  
and spendiþ, the skyn rivelip, þe sinewis schrinken, þe body bendiþ  
and crokeþ, fourme and schap is ilost, [and] fairness of þe body  
brouȝt to nouȝt (I. 293)

No other life stage in *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, save perhaps *adolescentia*, receives this much emphasis on the way in which age engages and alters the body. Uniquely in the case of *senium*, Trevisa conveys a sense of what it meant to *be* the body labouring through a particular life stage. Indeed, the morphological detail provided in this passage is particularly interesting, with *senium* not only sapping *fairness* and *strengþ*, but wrinkling the skin, contracting the sinews, and so distorting the physical integrity of the body that its *fourme* and *schap* – its recognisable selfhood – are disfigured. Descriptions like this enforce Shahar’s observation that while *senectus* could entail positive physiological developments, there existed no such ‘positive valuation’ for the body in *senium*.<sup>72</sup> What Trevisa describes here represents a total revision of the body-self.

Both literary and medical discourses on age presented similar depictions of *senium*, often using much the same language and imagery as Trevisa. Zerbi, for instance, described advanced old age as ‘the manifest decline of the entire body’ (30). In supporting this

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<sup>72</sup> Shahar, *The Old Body*, p. 160. For context on how particular conditions degraded the body’s identificatory coherence in the Middle Ages, see Miri Rubin, ‘The Person in the Form: Medieval Challenges to Bodily Order’, in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, pp. 100-22.

statement, Zerbi discussed some of the more pronounced morphological changes of *senium* in the context of Galenic humouralism. The *riveling*, or ‘wrinkling’ mentioned by Trevisa, for example, occurred as a result of the ‘excessive lack of innate heat and humidity’, characteristic of aged physiologies, which caused the members of the body to become ‘wrinkled and contracted’ (32). Zerbi also listed a series of similar physiognomic signifiers which announced the onset of *senium*, such as an identifying ‘change in color’ (blackened skin), as well as ‘dryness of skin, stiffness of tendons, [and] itching of the body’ (54). The overall effect, Zerbi noted, was that ‘he who was once of fuller and of more handsome colouring becomes emaciated, deformed, discoloured, and it is clear that old age is at hand’.

Notably similar presentations of *senium* appear in a range of other Middle English written sources. A fifteenth-century English lyric poem, *God Send us Patience in Our Old Age*, displays an obvious familiarity with the condition of advanced old age as it is outlined in medical texts like Zerbi’s.<sup>73</sup> The poem alters the perspective from which we encounter old age, conveying the medical description above in the manner of a first-person lived experience. The poem remarks

Oure body wol yche, oure bonys wol ake,  
 Owre owne flesshe wol be oure foo,  
 Oure hede, oure handys þan wol schake  
 Owre legges wol trymble whan we goo,  
 Oure bonys wol drye as doþ a stake,  
 And in oure body we schulle be woo,  
 Oure nose, oure chekes, wol wex al blake,  
 And oure glad chere wol vade vs fro

Late medieval English medical texts and forms of literature in this way contributed to a shared discourse on old age in which *senium* was understood to entail a devastating disfigurement of one’s physiognomic profile. This process was partly accounted for and articulated by the Galenic medical concept of *marasmus*, which described a consumptive wasting triggered by extreme humoural dryness, from either excessive heat or cold. *Marasmus* was regularly cited in connection with old age, which, as remarked, responded to humoural conditions of extreme cold and dryness.<sup>74</sup> As a result, Galenic medicine could offer a scientific explanation for the physiological processes taking place within bodies like those depicted in the poem, as they blackened and withered in the *marasmus* of old age.

<sup>73</sup> Harley MS. 1706 fols. 213r-v. A Modern edition can be found in *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 234.

<sup>74</sup> For the understanding of *marasmus* in Galenic thought and its presence in medieval understandings of old age, see Luke Demaitre, ‘The Medical Notion of ‘Withering’ From Galen to the Fourteenth Century: The Treatise on Marasmus by Bernard of Gordon’, *Traditio*, 47 (1992), 259-86.

These depictions of *senium* threaten an especially *disembodying* transformation for the knight, whose body is so often humourally *bote*, and so *byge, hibe, longe, fayre, and stronge*. In part, this antagonism concerns a more general conflict concerning embodied knighthood and the humoral body of Galenic medicine. Miri Rubin cites the ‘sense of openness and liquidity’ which the Galenic body conveys, and which constitutes its ‘vulnerability and pliability’.<sup>75</sup> This is at odds with the typical body of the romance knight which, as Christoph Houswitschka explains, is defined by its fixedness and efficacy in enduring threats ‘from outside the body’.<sup>76</sup> The embodiment of *senium*, however, not only dismantles the physical strength and coordination needed to contend with external forces but, in addition, makes, as the poem says, *owre owne flesshe oure foo*. In this, the ideological rationale of embodied knighthood becomes confused, with the usually interdependent ‘what’ of the knight’s body dismantling the ‘who’ of his selfhood.

The *disembodying* potential of *senium* is further apparent in the ways in which old age compromises the corporealization of both social and gender identities. With respect to social status, for instance, Shahar notes that medieval culture idealised the noble body as ‘magnificent, beautiful and strong’, while the body of the peasant was contrastingly ‘ugly and wretched’.<sup>77</sup> In this, as shown earlier, social hierarchy was innate, embodied, and indisputable. As Trevisa observed, however, *senium* obscured such recognisable physical *fourme* and *schap*. Thus, ‘when it came to the old man’s body’, Shahar goes on, ‘no such distinctions were made.’ As a result, in so far as nobility and knighthood could be inferred as particular physiognomic profiles in the Middle Ages, the ‘old noble’ becomes a paradox. The old body so distorts the physiognomic signifiers of elite identity that the body-self under scrutiny can be apprehended only as ‘old’.<sup>78</sup>

Likewise, in the case of gender, it was recognised earlier that one of the physiological deficiencies attributed to old age was a lack of *bote* blood. Trevisa references this idea when explaining that ‘phisiciens telleþ þat blood waineþ be age’, and that ‘þerefor in olde men is [a] shaking and quaking for defaute of blod’ (I. 149). The blood that did remain, Trevisa argued, ‘waxiþ colde’, causing fearfulness and lethargy (I. 292). This presents an additional problem for the old knight, as the quantity and quality of blood in the body connotated fighting spirit and manhood. The fifteenth-century *Knyghthode and Bataile*, for instance, held that those who ‘hath more blood’ were best suited ‘to fight & blede an hardinesse’ (178-9). This is because,

<sup>75</sup> Rubin, ‘Person in the Form’, p. 101.

<sup>76</sup> Houswitschka, p. 84.

<sup>77</sup> Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 37.

<sup>78</sup> The way in which old age complicated ideals of beauty in the Middle Ages has been fruitfully examined in the case of women, but less so for medieval men. See Claudio Da Soller, ‘Beauty, Evolution, and Medieval Literature’, *Philosophy and Literature*, 34 (2010), 95-111.

as Trevisa explains, the traits of *masculis* developed in accordance with ‘plente of spirit and of blood’ (I. 306). A man with ‘a grete habundance of blood’ would prove ‘more bolde and hardy’ than one with less blood or blood that was *colde*. This idea is so pronounced that physical signifiers of manhood, such as facial hair, were thought to appear more regularly in bodies with great quantities of *bote* blood (I. 307). By depleting and cooling the blood, the complexion of *senium* reverses this process, unmanning vigorous knights such as Sir Gye of the *Beues* romance, who could not *werche* with his wife in *bour*.

As a result, advanced old age entailed a compromising set of changes in terms of the morphological, physiognomic, and physiological motifs informing the corporeal identities of elite men like the knight. The French poet Charles d’Orléans (d. 1465), who fought at Agincourt in 1415 and survived into his own old age, wrote several poems on aging while imprisoned in England.<sup>79</sup> One in particular encompasses the ways in which old age could be understood, as above, to specifically degrade and demean the body-self of the knight.<sup>80</sup> In *Ballade 82*, written around 1435 while Charles was in his 40s, he describes himself ‘in armour rusty with Beyond-Caring, On a horse maimed by feebleness’. ‘Like one cashiered from Youth’s payroll’, he continues, ‘I don’t know where I can serve.’ Though Charles recognises that age has brought him ‘Tempered Wisdom’, he adds that it has also imposed ‘Weariness, Anxiety, Discomfort and Distress’.

Charles’ ballad conveys the loss of physical agency and corresponding clarity of identity occasioned by old age. Moreover, by casting the poetic subject as a knight facing the onset of old age, Charles demonstrates that late medieval contemporaries recognised old age as mounting a unique assault upon the distinct embodiment of knighthood. For Charles, the presence of age within the embodied experience of the knight is akin to disability, being the equivalent of a lame horse or rusted harness. The poem’s refrain, *I don’t know where I can serve*, neatly summarises the dilemma of the aged knight, for whom old age triggers existential crisis. Charles was a member of the French nobility and had served as a knight in that role; however, even had this not been the case, he could arguably have employed this same imagery to communicate his wearying passage through the lifecycle in a manner that contemporaries would have understood. Indeed, Charles’ ballad is as much a meditation on his lost youth, which is again aligned with knighthood, as it is on old age. The juxtaposition of life stages like *adolescentia* and *juventus* with those of *senectus* and *senium* comprised one of the

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<sup>79</sup> For the period Charles spent as a hostage in England, and his writing during this time, see A. Spearing, ‘Prison, Writing, Absence: Representing the Subject in the English Poems of Charles d’Orléans’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 53 (1992), 83-99.

<sup>80</sup> This thesis uses Ad Putter’s translation, in ‘Personifications of Old Age in Medieval Poetry: Charles d’Orléans and William Langland’, *The Review of English Studies*, 63 (2012), 388-409.

most popular ways of both understanding, and accounting for, the severity of advanced old age in late medieval English culture.

Karen Smyth explains that English perceptions of old age often placed it alongside youth not only to create a contrast between the two life stages, but to establish causality.<sup>81</sup> In humoural science, just as one might adopt a select regimen in order postpone the onset of old age, certain physical practices were thought to result in premature aging. Shahar notes the strong association between particular vices, such as those considered common during *adolescentia* and *juventus*, and a reduction in longevity.<sup>82</sup> This idea is reflected in the work of Zerbi, who conceptualised the physical trails of old age as a ‘penalty for the time of a vigorous youth’ (32). Among the youthful behaviours cited by Zerbi as reducing longevity are ‘immoderate exercise’, ‘frequent coition’, and ‘excessive venery’, which ‘precipitate a man more swiftly into old age’ (40-2). These are, significantly, those embodied practices understood to be characteristic within the sanguine and choleric complexions of the medieval youth. The full extent of this causality between the young body and old age is expressed when Zerbi remarks that ‘the defect of powers in old age is more often brought about by the vices of youth [...] than by old age, for a libidinous and intemperate youth brings an infected body to old age’ (66). For Zerbi, then, the debilitations of *senium* are misattributed, being foremost the product of the young body – *hote* humours and the vices they encourage.

Lydgate often stresses this relationship between intemperate youth and aged physical decrepitude. In his *Fall of Princes*, Lydgate traces the origin of old age to the original sin committed during mankind’s own youth. Adam and Eve, he says, went forth from Eden ‘quakyng for age [and] lak off myght’ (I. 479). This inheritance continues ‘fro man to man’, with Lydgate observing how ‘sin brouht in shame man to be feeble and feynt in his passage, and to be [...] halt and lame’ (I. 100-4). This continued to be the case for Lydgate’s contemporaries, whom he saw as prematurely aged by their vices. When discussing lechery, for instance, Lydgate warned his audience that, like old age, ‘it taketh fro men ther cleernesse off syng’ and ‘causeth gret siknessis and corrupcioun’ (I. 1625-26). Vice, Lydgate states, ‘maketh men seeme old’ while working to ‘shorteth ther dais’ (I. 1628-30).

This method of accounting for the old body is crucial, particularly given the findings of the previous chapter. An unchecked desire for women and immoderate indulgence in physical exercise are, after all, characteristic motifs within the careers of knights like Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram. As a result, the *hote* humours of knights embodied as *lusty bachelors* can convincingly be presented in the context of medical and religious thought to demand an

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<sup>81</sup> Smyth, pp. 340-41.

<sup>82</sup> Shahar, *The Old Body*, pp. 162-63.

equally dishevelled old age. As established, this punitive capacity of old age is best conveyed by the *disembodying* condition of *senium*, which, irrespective of its causes, entails the destruction of the knight's body and consequent collapse of his chivalric selfhood. Unlike *senectus*, which might cautiously be used to describe certain aged knights in Middle English literature, textual depictions of knights struggling through *senium* can, in consequence, prove comparatively rare. In concluding this chapter, however, I will argue for both the existence and narrative significance of one such depiction of advanced old age in Thomas Malory's romance, *Morte Darthur*.

### **Old Age as Knightly Prowess: The Symbolism of the Old Body in Malory's *Final Boke***

After Arthur's death and the collapse of his fraternity of knights, Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* follows one of the few surviving knights, Sir Launcelot. This concluding chapter of the *Morte* acts as a denouement during which Launcelot, having discovered Arthur's fate, enters into a hermitage in imitation of Gwenyvere, now an abbess. In this, Launcelot and Gwenyvere each take vows of religious service in recognition of the passing of Arthur, his kingdom, and the part they have each played in its fall. As an ascetic, Launcelot is able to mourn Gawain, Arthur, and eventually Gwenyvere herself, through fast and prayer. Although greatly bereaved, when Launcelot dies he does so peacefully, in the care of his religious brethren, some of whom, like him, are former knights.

As Barbara Newman observes, Launcelot thus ends his life not as a knight but as a repentant 'holy sinner'.<sup>83</sup> His final days are overwritten with a series of 'hagiographic signs', such as Launcelot's uncanny anticipation of his hour of death, and the visible tranquillity and sweet-smelling sanctity of his corpse once it is discovered. This transformation from knight into saint has proven a popular interpretation with scholars of the *Morte*. Karen Cherewatuk, for instance, has argued that, in presenting Launcelot's passage from a model of physical prowess to religious penitence, Malory consciously draws upon hagiographic literature, such as depicts the lives of St Andrew and St Martin.<sup>84</sup> Among the hagiographic tropes used by Malory in this way, Cherewatuk identifies the 'eremitic pattern of *contemptus mundi*, including flight from the world, abstinence, and penitential practices'.<sup>85</sup> Mickey Sweeney has similarly

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<sup>83</sup> Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular Against the Sacred* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), p. 106.

<sup>84</sup> Karen Cherewatuk, 'The Saint's Life of Sir Lancelot: Hagiography and the Conclusion of Malory's *Morte Darthur*', *Arthuriana*, vol. 5 (1995), 62-77.

<sup>85</sup> Cherewatuk, 'The Saint's Life', p. 66. Cherewatuk has since revisited this episode, highlighting the importance of 'Malory's language of sin, confession, and salvation' in his depiction of Launcelot's

recognised the place of hagiography in reshaping Launcelot's role in the *Morte* as it draws to conclusion.<sup>86</sup> Sweeney argues that Launcelot's individual death may be read more emblematically, signalling the end of the physically passionate world of Arthurian chivalry and the beginning of a new 'ascetic world', characterised not by knights and prowess but 'saints and sacrifice'.<sup>87</sup>

This interpretive model is not without disagreements, however.<sup>88</sup> Sweeney's article, for instance, addresses the longstanding debate concerning how comprehensive and genuine Launcelot's spiritual reformation truly is. Sweeney asserts that Launcelot's asceticism is in reality yet another way of serving Gwenyvere – and with her, his secular chivalry – by demonstrating his enduring fidelity through self-destructive abstinence.<sup>89</sup> Cherewatuk, conversely, has argued that Launcelot's redemption is both sincere and potentially personal for Malory himself, who, in the context of English civil war, created a literary world in which 'the hope of eternity remains even to those who bough about its collapse'.<sup>90</sup> Barbara Newman summarises this debate and the uncertainties in Launcelot's character to which it responds by observing, 'when Malory is forced to choose between sacred and secular values, he chooses both'.<sup>91</sup>

It is not the aim of this chapter to attempt to resolve this debate, nor especially to challenge it. It is clear that episodes from saint's lives demonstrably informed Malory's presentation of Launcelot's death and its significance in the narrative. In particular, the motifs characterising Launcelot's corpse are in the main those stressing its beatification and union with God. Here, however, I will argue that, much like the image of melancholic John Chandos in Bernier's *Cronycle*, there are as yet unrecognised physiological and physiognomic markers in Malory's depiction of Launcelot that are consistent with Galenic understandings of the old body. These characteristics, many of which have been discussed at length above, can be read alongside this hagiographic interpretation, thereby providing a complimentary reading. As Malory's *Morte* is the best-known chivalric romance of this period, and Launcelot the most revered knight within it, this departing episode of the narrative represents a valuable

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final days. See 'Malory's Launcelot and the Language of Sin and Confession', *Arthuriana*, 16 (2006), 68-72 (72).

<sup>86</sup> Mickey Sweeney, 'Divine Love or Loving Divinely? The Ending of Malory's *Morte Darthur*', *Arthuriana*, vol. 16 (2006), 73-77 (75).

<sup>87</sup> Kate Dosanjh adopts a similar approach, reading Launcelot's death as his triumphant acceptance by God into heaven – that which was withheld earlier during the *Sankgreal*. See 'Rest in Peace: Launcelot's Spiritual Journey in *Le Morte Darthur*', *Arthuriana*, 16 (2006), 63-7.

<sup>88</sup> Jeffrey L. Morgan highlights the ambiguities characterising this episode in his 'Malory's Double Ending: The Duplicitous Death and Departing,' in *Sir Thomas Malory: Views and Re-views*, ed. by D. Thomas Hanks, (New York: AMS, 1992), pp. 96-106.

<sup>89</sup> Sweeney, pp. 75-7.

<sup>90</sup> Cherewatuk, 'The Saint's Life', p. 70.

<sup>91</sup> Newman, p. 109.

case study for considering the import of longevity and age upon the body and identity of the knight in late medieval English culture.

Shortly after learning the specific details of Arthur's death and Gwenyvere's subsequent monastic vows, Launcelot performs a series of physical gesture which signal his eventual transformation from knight into ascetic. This begins when Launcelot 'threwe hys armes abrode, and sayd, "Alas! Who may truste thys world?"' (934. 19-20). This is an intriguing statement, in which Launcelot expresses his grief at the loss of his friends and his consternation at the events through which that loss has taken place. In casting aside his *armes* – his weapons, harness, knightly insignia – Launcelot connects this sentiment to his knighthood, which, in so far as it is represented by these objects, is thus literally put aside. One identifies parallels here with Caxton's knight-hermit. In Launcelot's case, his motivation is both more impassioned and practical. Launcelot has learned that he no longer has a lord or lady to serve, and so, lacking clear chivalric purpose, his knighthood appears suddenly in question. Launcelot's crisis, in this, is also reminiscent of that expressed by Charles d'Orléans in relation to old age. Launcelot's outrage at a false world can be read as his formulation, and equal realisation, of Charles' 'I don't know where I can serve'. Later, Launcelot and several other knights abandon their horses, leaving them to roam 'where they wolde' (935. 16). With these gestures, Launcelot distances himself from the identifying horse and *barneys* of knighthood which, for Launcelot, appear tarnished and lame, much as they did for Charles.

Following this, Launcelot accepts the habit of a religious brother, thereby reifying this identificatory transition from knight to ascetic. As with the knight of the *Ordre*, this transformation develops as a shift in embodiments, underpinned by a revolution in body techniques. Launcelot replaces physical prowess with religious prayer, thereby *disembodying* his knighthood in favour of a new body-self. Like the knight of the *Ordre*, I argue that Launcelot's new embodiment as a religious hermit is also progressively reliant upon late medieval English attitudes to old age. To support this argument, one can examine the series of changes which begin to occur in Launcelot's body. One example can be found in Launcelot's *berte*, which becomes the bodily locus for the grief which he experiences during this final episode.<sup>92</sup>

For instance, after receiving Sir Gawain's letter, which first informs Launcelot of both Gawain's imminent death and the growing inevitability of Arthur's defeat against Mordred, Launcelot remarks "wyte you well hys dolefful words shall never go from my harte" (930. 20-1). Soon after, when arriving at Dover and realising that he is too late to help

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<sup>92</sup> The importance of the *berte* in this episode has been identified by Andrew Lynch, although with differing emphases. See *Malory's Book of Arms*, pp. 145-47.



Arthur, Launcelot says again “thys is the hevvest tydyngis that ever cam to my harte!” (931. 14-15). Launcelot’s heart continues to bear the burden of his growing sadness, until it ‘almost braste for sorowe’ (934. 18). Finally, after interring Gwennyvere in Arthur’s tomb, Launcelot ‘swouned, and laye longe styll’ (936. 25-6). When another hermit questions Launcelot’s extreme manner of mourning, Launcelot explains: “whan I sawe his corps and hir corps to lye togyders, trully myn herte wold not serve to susteyne my careful body” (936. 33-5).

This very physical symptom of Launcelot’s heartache is indicative of the fact that, in the broader context of Galenic medicine, such passionate assaults upon the heart were not construed as purely figurative.<sup>93</sup> Trevisa notes that, while the heart’s primary purpose was ‘to kepe and save hete’ (237), it also constituted the bodily seat of all ‘meouynge and al felinge’ (239). The heart, in this way, contributed to the individual’s mood and bore their responses to emotive stimuli, being not only the ‘welle of meouynge’, but of ‘likyng and of vnlikyng and generalliche of eueryche meouynge’ (240). This *meuynge* concerns not only the heart’s production of blood and heat, and thus generation of physical motion, but the way in which the heart undergoes the provocation of particular passions. ‘To be *meued*’, whether by anger or, as is the case for Launcelot, *sorowe*, describes the humoral play of passions within the body.<sup>94</sup> Launcelot’s *careful body* and sorrowful *herte* thus refer to a physiology so greatly *meued* that the individual actually loses consciousness, as if *meued* out of his wits, or, indeed, out of the body itself. It is this radical physiological crisis that allows one to begin interpreting Launcelot’s conversion from knight into hermit as entailing a corresponding transition into old age.

In the previous chapter I discussed the concept of *saddening*, which concerns the ‘cooling’ or ‘tempering’ that took place as the young body matured, its humours and passions becoming more moderate. Here, Launcelot’s *careful* body reflects such a condition in extremity, denoting a humoral complexion grown frigid with sadness and sorrow.<sup>95</sup> Significantly, this *careful* body also marks strong associations with late medieval English depictions and understandings of old age. One recalls, for instance, the poem *God Send us Patience*, in which *oure body*, the poet says, *schulle be woo*, with all *glad chere* fading. Daniel Schäfer has found, similarly, that the aged were often presented as ‘sorrowful and resigned in tragedy’.<sup>96</sup> As elsewhere, this is both a physiological and emotional *sadness*. Zerbi understood

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<sup>93</sup> Heather Webb begins her monograph on the medieval heart with a similar observation, noting that the modern distinction between the heart as a ‘pump-like muscle’ and the more metaphorical heart ‘literally open to sensation’ was not shared by medieval culture. See *The Medieval Heart* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 1-2.

<sup>94</sup> MED entry *Meuen* v. 5(b).

<sup>95</sup> MED entry *careful* adj. 1(a).

<sup>96</sup> Schäfer, pp. 16-17.

old age as the life stage of ‘excessive sadness’ due to the dominant humoural presence of cold and dry melancholy (41). He calls this abundance of the melancholic humour an ‘evil beyond doubt’, arguing that it ‘corrupts the person’s nature’. While Zerbi does not elaborate on the details of this corruption, it is a useful interpretive model for the total collapse which effects Launcelot’s body as his *herte* becomes overburdened with *sorowe*. Other late medieval writers can similarly help account for what is happening to Launcelot’s body, and why it may mirror old age.

Trevisa remarked that the ‘malencolif humour’ could, in extreme cases, ‘constreyneþ and closiþ the herte’, thereby prohibiting the generation of heat and blood within the rest of the body (I. 161). For Trevisa, those suffering from an excess of melancholy would thus become, like Launcelot, ‘faynt and ferdful in herte’ (I. 242). Similarly, the physician Guy de Chauliac cites a lack of clear, hot blood – the product of the heart – as a common cause for the accident of ‘swownynge’, such as befalls Launcelot.<sup>97</sup> It is important to recognise here that, with the exception of Zerbi, old age is not being discussed specifically. Yet, as established earlier, the signs and symptoms of melancholy are invariably bound up with the physiological condition of old age. Trevisa, for instance, argues that one of the most recognisable indicators of excessive melancholy is that ‘þe colour of þe skyn chaungiþ into þe blake or into bloo colour’. Though Trevisa does not make the connection explicit, it is likely that this is the same discolouration of skin that Zerbi and various other late medieval writers noted as a physiognomic indicator of advanced old age. In Caxton’s *Ordre*, for example, the aged knight-hermit is described as ‘moche discoloured and lene’, ostensibly because of his religious penance but, in addition, because of his *moche age* (7).

None of this need imply that Launcelot should be read here as bearing the blackened skin of *senium*. Rather, I argue that there are a developing series of bodily motifs in the depiction of Launcelot that cohere with late medieval understandings of the old body, humoural science, and human longevity. The Galenic heart is crucial in maintaining the body’s humoural heat, thereby extending youth and postponing old age. By the logic of humoural medicine, the cooling and choking *sorowe* of Launcelot’s *herte* can be understood as a form of physiological aging. Indeed, the saddened heart was commonly cited in literary reflections upon old age, such as the fourteenth-century *Pricke of Conscience*, which attributes to the old man a ‘herte [...] hard and eke hevvy’.<sup>98</sup> Schäfer finds elsewhere in late medieval

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<sup>97</sup> *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, EETS OS 265, ed. Margaret S. Ogden, 2 vols. (London: Oxford UP, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 200, 205.

<sup>98</sup> *Prike of Conscience*, ed. by James H. Morey (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2012), line 388.

English culture that ‘sadness, dread, and desperation’ were common in the complexions of the aged.<sup>99</sup>

There are additional signs in Launcelot’s *careful* body and behaviours that he is experiencing something which Galenic medicine might justifiably understand as old age. Toward the end of his life, Launcelot is said to have ‘slombred’ only in a ‘broken sleep’, having developed an insomnia not unlike that seen in depictions of the aged in the later medieval England (937. 11-12).<sup>100</sup> Likewise, Launcelot begins to speak with a ‘drery steven’ – a subdued and sorrowful voice which Zerbi noted as symptomatic of old age during this period (937. 19). The most prominent indicators of an embodied old age, however, concern Launcelot’s physiognomy and morphology, which undergo radical transformations following Gwennyvere’s death.

From this point onwards, Malory explains, ‘Syr Launcelot neuer after ete but lytel mete, nor dranke, tyl he was dede, for than he seekened more and more’ (937. 6-7). The outcome of Launcelot’s refusal to nourish his body is that the body itself soon ‘dryed and dwyned away’, until ‘he was waxen by a kybbet [cubit] shorter than he was, that peple coude not knowe him’ (937. 7-10). Malory is careful to stress that this is a purposeful act, noting that ‘the bysshop’ under whom Launcelot has been serving as a hermit, ‘nor none of his felowes myght not make hym to ete’ (937. 8-9). Though the bishop attempts to convince Launcelot that he is suffering “but hevynesse of [...] blood”, Launcelot begins asking that the Bishop prepare for his death (937. 22). In doing so, Launcelot makes a final reference to his saddened physiology, stating “wyt you wel my careful body wyll into th’erthe” – the *erthe* being the environment, cold and dry, which shares the greatest affinity with Launcelot’s melancholic complexion (937. 24-5). Launcelot dies shortly after this, with Malory describing how he ‘laye as he had smyled, and [with] the swettest savour aboute hym’ (938. 18-19).

This deliberate ‘starvation fast’, as Barbara Newman calls it, along with Launcelot’s beatific repose in death, are among the most recognisable hagiographic elements in Malory’s presentation of Launcelot’s departure from the world.<sup>101</sup> They are also remarkably consistent with depictions of the old body, particularly in the advanced stage of *senium*. This is especially notable in the language which Malory uses to describe Launcelot’s *drying* up and *dwindling* away, and the spectacle of his having been so physically reduced, or *resolved*, as to become physically unrecognisable. These physiognomic motifs are profoundly suggestive of a new embodiment, with the body that Launcelot now is having become so disfigured as to efface the identity of ‘Launcelot’ completely. This new body-self, I stress, is one which recalls

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<sup>99</sup> Schäfer, pp. 34-38.

<sup>100</sup> Shahr, *Growing Old*, p. 38.

<sup>101</sup> Newman, p. 106.

several of the morphological markers of old age noted earlier in this chapter, such as *schrinken sinewis* and a body that *bendip* and *crokep* until *fourme* and *schap* are lost. Similarly, one might recall the picture of the aged body in *God Send us Patience*, in which the bones *drye as dop a stake*. The early Medieval Latin poet Maximianus described a condition identical to that of Launcelot when saying of the aged man that ‘his shape are [sic] not the same as they once were’.<sup>102</sup> ‘We shrink together’, Maximianus observes, ‘grow wonderfully smaller [so that] you’d think our very bones have been diminished’. This presents a valuable context in which to account for Launcelot’s lost *kybbet*, without which his *shape* and selfhood are, as Maximianus says, *not the same as they once were*.

This is a viable method of interpreting Launcelot’s transformation during the *Morte*’s final moments. Indeed, Burrow argued that the retired ‘knight-turned-hermit’ is one of the few places in which older character traits are permissible in the genre of chivalric writing.<sup>103</sup> We saw this earlier with the knight-hermit of Caxton’s *Ordre*. Though he does not discuss Malory’s Launcelot, Burrow suggested that the passage from knight to hermit could be read as an established device intended to signify a character’s entrance into the ‘last phase’ of the lifecycle, in which physical knighthood is no longer viable or, as with Launcelot, visible.<sup>104</sup> The result is seemingly both to allow *and* prohibit the ‘knight’ from becoming old, as in order to *grow old*, the knight must *grow into* something else – a new embodiment. Malory reveals that seven years pass while Launcelot is in the hermitage, with seven being the archetypal number of years afforded to each life stage in the medieval imagination.<sup>105</sup> Upon the seventh and final year, the critical point of transition occurs wherein the individual passes into the next stage.

Launcelot undergoes a similar passage into a new embodied life stage, following which even the graceful ease of his death strikes surprising associations with medieval understandings of old age. It was widely believed, for instance, that owing to the cold and moist complexion of *senium*, the death of the old person would be painless and without suffering.<sup>106</sup> ‘Such a death’, Zerbi argued, occurred ‘completely without any perceptible violent passion’, as if, as was the case for Launcelot, during ‘a gentle sleep’ (305). Thus, I identify Launcelot at the close of Malory’s *Morte* as experiencing a *disembodying* old age which compliments his rejection of knighthood in favour of religious asceticism. Having outlined the evidence for such an interpretation, I will now expand on the explanation for

<sup>102</sup> *Maximianus’s Elegies*, in Lind, p. 324, lines 212, 215-16.

<sup>103</sup> Burrow, pp. 162-3.

<sup>104</sup> Burrow, p. 177.

<sup>105</sup> The significance of the seven-year cycle in the medieval lifecycle is discussed at length by Elizabeth Sears, pp. 38-53.

<sup>106</sup> Shahr, *The Old Body*, p. 163. Schäfer, p. 55.

this transformation. I will do this both in terms of late medieval English ideas on longevity and the aged body, and the longevity of the *Morte* itself, its world and characters. In particular, I want to return to the importance of Launcelot's *sorowe* and the relationship between his passions, body, and knighthood.

Andrew Lynch finds that the emotional displays of characters in the *Morte* become more extreme and explicit as the story reaches its conclusion.<sup>107</sup> In the case of Launcelot, the knight's dominant and most intense passions arguably concern his love and longing for Queen Gwenyvere, which intensifies as the narrative progresses. It is following Gwenyvere's death, for example, that Launcelot's sadness first becomes physically disabling. Raluca Radulescu has discussed the Launcelot-Gwenyvere affair, as well as the broader role of emotion in the *Morte*, with reference to the phrase "out of measure".<sup>108</sup> Radulescu argues that passions which Malory describes in this way are understood to manifest more openly and, increasingly as the narrative develops, more destructively. Tellingly, Radulescu finds that this expression is regularly used in order to describe the depth of feeling which Launcelot bears for the queen, which so exceeds Launcelot's ability to master it.<sup>109</sup> For my purposes, *out of measure* also arguably hits upon a guiding motif of humoral medicine. This is the ideal of balance – the management and *measurement* of diet, behaviour, and the humours – which medieval regimens identified as the key to good health.

One fifteenth-century English *Regimen Sanitatis* reflects this when summarising the causes of early old age. The text argues against immoderate excess in all forms, such as 'to laboure our much', 'walke our much', 'to be lette oft blood,' 'to have þe company of women oft', and, relevantly, to 'ofte [...] be in drede and haue grete sorrow'.<sup>110</sup> Zerbi likewise discusses the way in which 'excesses', both emotional and behavioural, can weaken the body's innate heat and thus exaggerate the signs of old age (41). In particular, Zerbi singles out the immoderate experience of particular passions, such as sadness, described as 'a certain pain on account of the loss of some good', as being likely to physiologically age the sufferer. Zerbi's definition of sadness is of obvious relevance for Launcelot, whose own grief at the end of the *Morte* responds to a series of such losses. In discussing the range of unchecked emotions which can hasten old age, however, Zerbi draws even closer to Launcelot's condition when describing 'hereos', or *eros*. This, Zerbi explains, is

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<sup>107</sup> Lynch discusses the growing extremity of affective gesture in the *Morte*, pp. 155-56.

<sup>108</sup> Raluca L. Radulescu, 'Out of Measure': Violence and Knighthood in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, in *Re-viewing Le Morte Darthur: Texts and Contexts, Characters and Themes* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), pp. 119-131.

<sup>109</sup> Radulescu, 'Out of Measure', pp. 129-30.

<sup>110</sup> Bodelian MS. Rawlinson C. 83, fols 7v-8v, cited in *Secretum Secretorum*, pp. 8-9.

the suffering [...] that is a deep love, *hilichi* in Arabic, or excessive love, which arises when one thinks continually of a beloved object through which there grows an immoderate desire [...] for whose sake all other activities are rendered secondary to the attainment of that object (42)

It is difficult to imagine a more accurate contemporary diagnosis for Launcelot's love, borne so far *out of measure*, for Gwenyvere.<sup>111</sup> For this, Launcelot jeopardises all other relationships, as well as his personal honour and the broader political stability of his kingdom.<sup>112</sup>

Launcelot's love is apocalyptic and, for Zerbi, this is precisely how such extreme passions behave on a physiological level. The body of one caught in *eros* undergoes a 'vehement and laborious motion of the vital spirit' which triggers *marasmus* and, with it, old age. The foremost casualty of this physiological agitation, Zerbi notes, was again the 'heart' – the locus of the body's natural heat and that which so struggled beneath Launcelot's *sorowe*.

Launcelot's *eros* thus consistently complicates the knight's ability to moderate or *measure* his passion in such a way that its role in his body and self – to say nothing of his community and kingdom – becomes less destructive. The microcosmic turbulence of Launcelot's physiology wearies and ages him just as it wearies and ages his wider world, driving each body, personal and political, to self-inflicted annihilation. As Corine Saunders explains, the loves and losses of Malory's narrative are in this way 'written on the bodies, minds, and hearts of his characters', informing the complex patterns of agency which precipitate 'the fall of the Arthurian world'.<sup>113</sup> In this, there is broader and more obviously metaphorical form of embodiment at work, uniting the longevity of the individual with the lifespan of his world.<sup>114</sup> By the end of the *Morte*, Launcelot's failure to master his personal body and passions has produced a world *resolved* by a kind of political *marasmus*, fragmented in a society-wide manifestation of Zerbi's 'vehement motion'.<sup>115</sup> It is in this context that Malory's decision to embody Launcelot as an aged knight-hermit becomes most intelligible and meaningful.

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<sup>111</sup> For the condition of *eros* elsewhere in medieval culture, see Mary Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and its Commentaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

<sup>112</sup> Because of this, Launcelot can be convincingly read as a medieval 'trickster type' and 'one-time outlaw'. See Jack Baker, 'Lancelot the One-Time Outlaw: Fallenness and Forgiveness in the *Morte Darthur*', in *Telling Tales and Crafting Books: Essays in Honor of Thomas H. Ogden*, eds. Alexander Kaufman, Shaun Hughes, and Dorsey Armstrong (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2016), pp. 345-68 (346-54).

<sup>113</sup> Saunders, 'Mind, Body, and Affect', p. 46.

<sup>114</sup> For the unravelling of Arthur's kingdom and the inability of Malory's characters to arrest this process, see C. David Benson, 'The Ending of the *Morte Darthur*', in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), pp. 221-238; Joseph D. Parry 'Following Malory out of Arthur's World', *Modern Philology*, 95 (1997), 147-169.

<sup>115</sup> Richard Kaeuper has identified the social anxiety and corresponding forms of social control regarding the violent body of the knight in the Middle Ages. See *Chivalry and Violence*, pp. 11-29.

Shahar has observed that one of most universal anxieties attending old age, especially the advanced stage of *senium*, concerned ‘the old person’s alienation from his/her body’.<sup>116</sup> This has been demonstrated at length throughout this chapter, in the work of writers like John Trevisa, Charles d’Orléans, and arguably in the *Morte* itself, wherein a gulf of sorts emerges between the ‘who’ of Launcelot the knight and the ‘what’ of his aged body. This symptom of old age becomes crucial in the final episode of the *Morte* because, as shown, the narrative follows Launcelot as he makes increasingly emphatic renunciations of his embodied identity as ‘knight’. It is this sentiment being articulated, for example, when Launcelot discards his harness and abandons his horse. Thus, when one considers the relationship between Launcelot’s body, his unchecked passions, and the ruinous *marasmus* of his world, old age begins to appear emancipatory – a way for Launcelot to escape the vigorous but ambivalent body-self of knight.

This idea is not without precedent in late medieval England. Shahar notes, for instance, that religious writers in the late Middle Ages argued that the old body could be understood as liberation from one or more secular vices. Failing eyesight, for instance, might free the aged from lust, gluttony, and avarice.<sup>117</sup> Michael Goodich, similarly, has shown that some authors went even further, developing equivalent virtues for the physiognomic signs of old age, such as the body’s shrinking coming to signify humility.<sup>118</sup> This instils a dualism within the old body, wherein, as Schäfer says, physical decrepitude and disfigurement could be repurposed to represent ‘special capabilities and freedoms’.<sup>119</sup> Though these ideas developed in the clerical context, their suitability in accounting for the old body as a tool for Launcelot’s spiritual reformation is readily apparent. The emancipatory qualities of the old body prompt reflection on certain of Launcelot’s final decisions, particularly the fasting which intensifies his physical decline.

Chris Gilleard makes two important observations regarding *marasmus*, the wasting of the body which often came with old age.<sup>120</sup> First, Gilleard finds that the condition always corresponds to extreme physiological change, such as the kind which Zerbi argued corrupted the heart following extreme melancholy or *eros*. Second, Gilleard notes that *marasmus* often accompanied starvation – itself a perennial danger for the aged, whose ability to digest or even to desire food waned considerably in later life.<sup>121</sup> In this, diet represents a further facet uniting hagiographic and aged readings of Launcelot’s final moments. Indeed, Zerbi argued

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<sup>116</sup> Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 46.

<sup>117</sup> Shahar, *Growing Old*, pp. 54-59.

<sup>118</sup> Goodich, p. 147.

<sup>119</sup> Schäfer, p. 18.

<sup>120</sup> Gilleard, pp. 498-9. See also Schäfer, p. 31.

<sup>121</sup> See also Demaitre, ‘The Medical Notion of Withering’, pp. 277-79.

that fasting, as another example of immoderate behaviour, would not only exacerbate the *marasmus* of old age but ‘hasten old age’ in those not yet in the lift stage (41). Observations like this allow for an interpretation of Launcelot’s old age as the outcome of a series of physical practices which he undertakes deliberately, as if following a self-destructive regimen. These choices, such as to forgo food and drink, exaggerate rather than ameliorate the *marasmus* corresponding to Launcelot’s *careful* humoural complexion, thereby prompting the characteristically shrunken form of *senium* and the associated loss of Launcelot’s physiognomic recognisability as a knight.<sup>122</sup>

Read in this way, old age acts as the force by which Launcelot is able to achieve a favourable kind of *disembodiment*, one which in part redeems the problematic properties of his embodied knighthood. In his shrunken, enfeebled, and melancholic body, Launcelot’s physical prowess, destructive pride, and immoderate passion for Gwenyvere are physiologically *dissolved* and, hence, one might argue, narratively *absolved*. Indeed, the choleric traits of desire and *wreche* are those most imbricated in the death of Arthur’s kingdom, and thus those most representative of the sins for which Launcelot first undertakes his ascetic penance. It is deeply fitting that the penitential labour chosen by Launcelot involves the deliberate disfiguration of his own culpable body-self.<sup>123</sup> As a result, whether or not one credits Launcelot with having truly forgone the secular world in favour of the spiritual, old age and the old body become crucial to the positive resolution of Lancelot’s story. As Andrew Lynch observes, Launcelot’s final acts achieve what a career’s worth of opponents could not: victory over his own body.<sup>124</sup> Malory in this way employs the old body as equal parts punishment, redemption, and reward; the means by which Launcelot can escape the lonely Avalon of his own making.<sup>125</sup>

This chapter has demonstrated that the old body appears irregularly reconciled with the corporeal identity of knight in late medieval English culture. In some cases, the way in

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<sup>122</sup> This is the manner in which Susan Bordo understands medieval fasting, as a form of ‘self-denial’ intended to allow the individual to transcend embodiment. See ‘Beyond the Anorexic Paradigm: Re-Thinking “Eating” Disorders’, in *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, pp. 244-255 (244).

<sup>123</sup> I have avoided describing Launcelot’s actions here as a form of suicide. There is arguably scope for such a conversation, however. Rebecca McNamara discusses the relationship between self-killing, physiological sorrow, sickness, and extreme heartache in ‘The Sorrow of Soreness: Infirmary and Suicide in Medieval England’, *Parergon*, 31 (2014), 11-34 (25-7).

<sup>124</sup> Lynch makes this observation with respect to Launcelot’s *herte*, and so as part of a different argument to mine. His phrasing, however, is too relevant to this interpretation to be ignored. See, p. 146.

<sup>125</sup> Late medieval culture understood particular ideal forms of death, justified by medical as well as religious discourses. Launcelot arguably meets one such ideal here. For the ‘good death’ in late medieval medical thought, see Karine van’t Land ‘Long Life, Natural Death: The Learned Ideal of Dying in Late Medieval Commentaries on Avicenna’s Canon’, in *Early Science and Medicine*, 19 (2014), 558-583.



which old age contributed to the lived experience of the knight is extreme and explicit, at other times, this experience is elided or ignored. I have suggested that, in part, this complexity responds to the existence of two old ages in late medieval English culture, one more severely debilitating than the other. In some Middle English texts, old age triggers the total dissolution of embodied knighthood, enfeebling and emasculating the knight. Elsewhere, one identifies more positive portrayals in which, whilst the old body remains incompatible with the body-self of knight, age imparts wisdom, clemency, and conscience. This is apparent in the case of Sir Launcelot, whose aged *disembodiment* represents a liberation from the knight's more problematic embodied traits, those responsible for the destruction of his community. For Malory, the experience of old age might in this way be read as a final great labour – almost a form of physical prowess – that appears distinctly chivalrous even as it effaces the embodiment of the *chevalier*. Launcelot's final act is to best his own body, escape his body-self, and so die with a smile on his face.

Such an understanding may have appealed to men like Andrew Luttrell or John Talbot, who fought in old age, and in some cases died while doing so. Indeed, knighthood meant meritorious suffering for many late medieval commentators; perhaps the old body could be understood as one of many pains borne by the knight.<sup>126</sup> It is likely that any such positive appraisal of old age ceased once the individual reached *senium*, and the physical limitations of old age reached extremity. The knight's prowess is a body technique paradoxically dedicated to the bloody ways in which superlatively able bodies can wound, disfigure, and ultimately disable the like bodies of opponents. Advanced old age undoubtedly complicates participation in such a practice by disabling and disfiguring the body in a separate contest altogether – one in which the knight's *owne fleshe* becomes his foe. Other infirmities which threatened *disembodiment* were a constant danger in a culture predicated on violent encounters. In the next chapter, I will consider the experience of physical trauma in the formation of knightly body-selves.

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<sup>126</sup> For meritorious suffering, see Richard W. Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 96-104.

## Chapter Three: The Wounded Body

The previous chapter highlighted how particular bodily conditions or processes, such as old age, might *disembody* the body-self of ‘knight’ in Middle English literature. In this chapter, I will explore whether other bodily phenomena, specifically physical trauma, work similarly to disrupt the portrayal of embodied knighthood in late medieval England. Wounds, after all, might enfeeble the body as old age did, while scars, particularly facial disfigurement, might similarly complicate a youthful aspect. This chapter has five parts. First, I will offer some context for the patterns and placement of wounds amongst armigerous groups during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. I will then consider how such physical trauma informed the embodied experiences of knights described in Middle English chronicles.

### ‘The Peril of His Body’: Physical Trauma in Archaeology and Historical Writing

Monica Green has suggested that the medieval body may have been considerably more scarred than previously imagined, owing in part to the prevalence of war and war games amongst elite males.<sup>1</sup> The most common wounding implements used in late medieval warfare were varieties of *mêlée* weapon: swords, daggers, axes, and maces, which caused either slashing or blunt-force trauma.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, wounds from this kind of weaponry could be mitigated by armour, the quality of which directly corresponded to chances of surviving an attack.<sup>3</sup> The fifteenth-century chivalric handbook *Knyghthode and Bataile* reflects this when describing the sorts of sword manoeuvres needed to bypass armour and ‘mak woundis’ on an opponent’s body (373). The text advises that ‘to foyne [thrust] is better then to smyte [slash]’, because the latter ‘may nat through steel & bonys bite’ (376-78). It has been suggested that armigerous groups like knights had a good chance of surviving slashing and blunt force trauma, providing that the injury did not damage internal organs and the individual could find treatment.<sup>4</sup> The lived experiences of such individuals – characterised by significant but

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<sup>1</sup> Green, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Whilst the techniques and technology shaping late medieval English warfare changed, edged weaponry remained a powerful determinant both of the style of late medieval war and the sort of wounds suffered during it. See Helen Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare: Theory and Practice of War In Europe, 300-1500* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), pp. 103-110.

<sup>3</sup> See Ralph Moffat, ‘The Importance of Being Harnest: Armour, Heraldry and Recognition in *Mêlée*’, in *Battle and Bloodshed: The Medieval World and War*, ed. by Lorna Bleach and Keira Borrill (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), pp. 5-24 (10-12).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Woosnam-Savage and Kelly DeVries, ‘Battle Trauma in Medieval Warfare: Wounds, Weapons and Armor’, in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, ed. by Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (London: Brill, 2015), pp. 27-56 (46-7).

survivable injury – would contribute to the wider social presence of visibly marked bodies which Green posits.

When questioning how the knight's body suffered trauma, and where it bore scars, one can look to archaeological evidence.<sup>5</sup> For example, excavation of the mass grave from the 1461 Battle of Towton reveals a high level of antemortem trauma among combatants, with damage being concentrated at the head and limbs.<sup>6</sup> The majority of healed fractures, for instance, were found on the limbs, potentially as the result of injuries sustained while fighting or training to fight earlier in life.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, of the wounds suffered during the battle itself, the highest frequency of postcranial slashing and blunt-force wounds were found upon the arms and hands, most commonly on the right forearm.<sup>8</sup> As Thom Richardson explains, the limbs would have been among the more lightly armoured areas of the body, and so would have been more vulnerable.<sup>9</sup> *Knyghthode and Bataile* corroborates this, advising when 'thentrailys ar couert in steel & bonys' (379), the knight should attempt to 'hew of [his opponent's] honde, his legge, his thegh, his armys' (374-5). Not a single perimortem rib wound was found in the Towton excavation, suggesting that the torso was well-armoured enough to limit wounds to soft tissue damage, or discourage attacks on this part of the body altogether.<sup>10</sup>

The circumstances at Towton, however, were exceptional, both on account of the battle's size and the attitudes of combatants, supposedly influenced by orders of 'no quarter' having been issued by either side.<sup>11</sup> Skeletal analysis reflects this, with 96% of Towton remains showing perimortem cranial trauma, potentially indicating death while restrained, such as during an execution, or from behind while in flight. Fatal trauma of this kind is not representative of the typical 'lived' experience of wounding amongst armoured knights which I am here attempting to establish. More applicable to my study, the Towton excavations also found that 32% of remains exhibited well-healed trauma on the face and head resulting from

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Sutherland in particular has attempted to show how archaeological investigation can inform historical interpretations medieval warfare. See Timothy Sutherland, 'Killing Time: Challenging the Common Perceptions of Three Medieval Conflicts—Ferrybridge, Dintingdale and Towton—"The Largest Battle on British Soil"', *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*, 5 (2010) 1-25; and 'Archaeological Evidence of Medieval Conflict – Case Studies from Towton, Yorkshire, England (1461) and Agincourt, Pas de Calais, France (1415)', *Battlefield Archaeology*, 1 (2009), 109-116.

<sup>6</sup> The most representative archaeological survey of Towton remains *Blood Red Roses* (2000), now in a revised edition. In addition, Timothy Sutherland has made subsequent discoveries and excavations of other grave sites from the battle. For a good overview of the finds related to Towton, both human remains and material culture, see Timothy Sutherland, 'The Bloody Battle of Towton, England', *The Archaeology of Medieval Europe: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries*, Vol. II, ed. by Martin Carver and Jan Klapste (Langelandsgade: Aarhus University Press, 2012), pp. 272-276.

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Coughlan and Malin Holst, 'Health Status', in *Blood Red Roses*, pp. 60-76 (71-2).

<sup>8</sup> These could be defensive or 'offensive' wounds suffered when attacking with a weapon held in the right hand. See Novak, 'Battle-Related Trauma', pp. 92-4.

<sup>9</sup> Thom Richardson, 'Armour', in *Blood Red Roses*, pp. 137-47 (147).

<sup>10</sup> Novak, 'Battle-Related Trauma', pp. 93-100.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Boardman, *The Battle of Towton* (Stroud: Sutton Limited, 1996), pp. 105-7.

wounds suffered earlier in life. Like the high frequency of damage to the forearms, antemortem facial trauma like this possibly reflects the kind of violence more commonly experienced and survived.<sup>12</sup> While the high percentage of perimortem cranial trauma seen at Towton is rightly interpreted in the context of a mass rout, the head and limbs, as demonstrated by scholarship on medieval European martial techniques, were also routinely prioritised as targets in both small and largescale combats.<sup>13</sup>

The healed facial and cranial injuries found on the Towton remains ranged from superficial cuts to deeply penetrating wounds which likely resulted in disfigurement. Of these, the most famous is Towton 16, which exhibited several shallow blade wounds upon the cranium, as well as two well-healed but severe cuts along the mandible, one of which sheared away teeth and parts of the jaw, also fracturing the chin.<sup>14</sup> These injuries showed no sign of infection, suggesting their having been successfully treated earlier in the individual's life. Towton 16 thus lived, potentially for years, with the visible trauma from earlier combats. This is apparent in the facial reconstruction of Towton 16, which reproduces the individual's *in vivo* countenance, including facial deformity and soft-tissue scarring.<sup>15</sup> Caroline Wilkinson and Richard Neave note that the large mandibular wound on Towton 16 may have severed the facial nerves, resulting in loss of feeling and drooping in the left side of the face. The tongue may also have been damaged, impairing speech and causing difficulty when eating.

In life, then, Towton 16's embodiment – the way he spoke, smiled, and ate – was radically informed by the wounds of his body. Indeed, Wilkinson and Neave note that the end result may have been even more extreme than the reconstruction shows, owing to extensive necrosis of facial tissues and muscle wastage. Data like this prompts reflection on how a soldier *wore* this kind of extensive physical trauma – how one lived with or *as* a wounded body. Other skeletal remains, such as Towton 22, 25, 34/38, 40, and 41 similarly revealed numerous antemortem injuries to the cranium, such as cuts, fractures, and blunt-force depressions in the skull.<sup>16</sup> Many of these injuries would have resulted in some degree of superficial scarring or disfigurement. The excavations of other medieval battle sites, which are admittedly few, reveal similar patterns of wounding. Archaeological evidence relating to the battles of Visby (1361) and Aljubarrota (1385), for example, likewise discovered

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<sup>12</sup> See Christopher Knüsel and Anthea Boylston, 'How Has the Towton Project Contributed to Our Knowledge of Medieval Warfare?' in *Blood Red Roses*, pp. 169-88 (172-4).

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance Sydney Angelo's *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), which remains the standard academic monograph on this topic.

<sup>14</sup> Novak, 'Case Studies', p. 246.

<sup>15</sup> Caroline Wilkinson and Richard Neave, 'The Reconstruction of a Face Showing a Healed Wound', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 30 (2003), 1343-48.

<sup>16</sup> Novak surveys each in 'Case Studies', pp. 251, 253, 259, 261, 262.

disproportionate trauma situated at the head, arms, and legs.<sup>17</sup> Many of these injuries, again, are thought to have derived from earlier combats, impacting upon the lived experiences of soldiers. One soldier at Aljubarrota, for example, fought on the healed stump of a leg lost earlier, during another battle. Consequently, while the chances of surviving certain types of trauma were high, particular parts of the body remained vulnerable to lifechanging injury. Archaeological evidence like this indicates that more exposed areas of the body, such as the limbs and head, were common sites of antemortem wounding for armigerous groups.

It might, however, justifiably be questioned whether individuals like Towton 16, or the others who similarly exhibit historic trauma to the head and limbs, *were* knights or men-at-arms. John Waller has argued that the Towton remains do not reflect individuals from noble backgrounds, as these, he asserts, would have had access to forms of head protection, and ‘would not, therefore, have sustained the serious head wounds observed’.<sup>18</sup> Woosnam-Savage and DeVries similarly call the high prevalence of cranial trauma the most ‘puzzling aspect’ of the archaeological data describing medieval warfare.<sup>19</sup> In this, however, Waller arguably fails to take into account the various circumstances in which helmets might be lost.<sup>20</sup> Skeletal analysis of Richard III, for instance, has generated findings very similar to those at Towton.<sup>21</sup> Richard, like many at Towton, suffered perimortem wounds to the skull, none of which were consistent with the use of any type of helmet in this period.<sup>22</sup> This, of course, does not suggest that Richard lacked access to such equipment; rather, the archaeological interpretation of the remains argues that, as suggested by contemporary accounts, Richard was fully armoured but lost his helmet during combat.<sup>23</sup>

Subsequent excavation of other Towton gravesites further complicates claims that these patterns of physical trauma suggest the presence of non-elites. Tim Sutherland has discovered additional single and group burials at Towton Hall between 1996 and 2006, believing these to be individuals who died during the battle but were later moved.<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup> Woosnam-Savage and DeVries, pp. 41-3.

<sup>18</sup> John Waller, ‘Combat Techniques’, in *Blood Red Roses*, pp. 148-54 (153).

<sup>19</sup> Woosnam-Savage and DeVries, pp. 54-55.

<sup>20</sup> Knüsel and Boylston even suggest that the frequency of cranial and facial trauma found at Towton may suggest that ‘helmets that obstructed peripheral vision were removed [prior to close combat] as a matter of course’, p. 174.

<sup>21</sup> Jo Appleby, Guy N. Ruttly, Sarah V. Hainsworth, et al, ‘Perimortem Trauma in King Richard III: A Skeletal Analysis’, *Lancet*, 385 (2015), 253-59.

<sup>22</sup> For comparative skeletal analyses of Towton with other contemporary European battlefield sites, see Malin R Holst and Tim Sutherland, ‘Towton Revisited—Analysis of the Human Remains from the Battle of Towton 1461’, *Forschungen zur Archäologie im Land Brandenburg*, 15 (2014), 97-129.

<sup>23</sup> Appleby et al, pp. 257-8.

<sup>24</sup> Tim Sutherland, ‘Unknown Soldiers: The Discovery of War Graves from the Battle of Towton AD 1461’, *From Artefacts to Anomalies: Papers Inspired by the Contributions of Arnold Aspinall*, unpublished paper (University of Bradford, 1-2 December, 2006), pp. 1-7.

remains are consistent with those from the mass grave, exhibiting extensive head trauma caused by edged and blunt weaponry. In addition, however, Sutherland argues that these individuals, having been interred independently of the larger grave, likely held elite status. That individuals might be moved or reburied in this way, sometimes years after death, is supported by archaeological surveys of other medieval mass graves.<sup>25</sup> This confuses attempts to classify high- and low-status remains, as there may be other elite individuals who, due to a variety of factors, remained in the mass grave. Unequivocally, knights were dying during the War of the Roses. Thomas Clifford (1414-1455), Edmund Beaufort (1406-1455), and Henry Percy (1393-1455), for example, all died at the battle of St Albans.<sup>26</sup> Even Towton 16, it has been argued, may have held noble status, owing to the amount of medical care he received throughout his life.<sup>27</sup> One of Towton 16's cranial wounds is thought to have severed the facial artery. If this was the case, it would have resulted in rapid blood loss, requiring immediate medical treatment.<sup>28</sup>

In light of this, I suggest that archaeological case studies like Towton offer a good starting-point for considering where upon the body a knight might be wounded during the course of battle. In particular, the high presence of antemortem trauma on the face and limbs indicates the kind of injury which could be survived, and which might contribute to the ongoing embodied experience of the knight, as in Towton 16. It is apparent, however, that additional evidence is needed to contextualise and draw out the details of any such embodied experience. Sutherland, for instance, advocates for interdisciplinary approaches to medieval warfare, combining specialist approaches from different fields.<sup>29</sup> Scholars like Roberta Gilchrist demonstrate how archaeological data can inform insightful social historical analysis, often revealing the lived experiences of medieval people.<sup>30</sup> Most relevant to this study, Rachel Kellet reads medieval German literature alongside contemporary archaeological evidence.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For an overview of the medieval mass graves which have been archaeologically surveyed, and the challenges deriving from reburial, see Anne Curry and Glenn Ford, 'Where are the Dead of Medieval Battlefields? A Preliminary Survey', *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*, 11 (2016), 61-77.

<sup>26</sup> Boardman, *The Battle of Towton*, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Wilkinson and Neave, pp. 1346-47.

<sup>28</sup> One explanation may involve self-care amongst late medieval knights and men-at-arms. See Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practise* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1990) p. 176-7; Richard T. Beck, *The Cutting Edge: Early History of the Surgeons of London* (London: Lund Humphries, 1974), p. 59.

<sup>29</sup> Timothy Sutherland, 'Conflicts and Allies: Historic Battlefields as Multidisciplinary Hubs — A Case Study from Towton AD 1461', *Arms & Armour*, 9 (2012), 40-53.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Roberta Gilchrist, 'Rethinking Later Medieval Masculinity: The Male Body in Death', in *Mortuary Practises and Social Identities in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Duncan Sayer and Howard Williams (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), pp. 236-52; *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012); *Sacred Heritage: Monastic Archaeology, Identities, Beliefs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 71-109.

<sup>31</sup> Rachel Kellett, *Single Combat and Warfare in German Literature in the High Middle Ages: Sticker's Karl de Große and Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal* (London: Maney Publishing, 2008).

Kellet finds in texts like the thirteenth-century *Karl der Große* that the general trend in wounding, which is supported by the archaeological data she cites, suggests a pattern very much like that discussed above.<sup>32</sup> Most wounds, Kellett observes, resulted from edged weaponry, and are located upon the head, shoulders, and arms.<sup>33</sup>

Middle English historical writing can similarly be employed to contextualise the archaeological evidence of antemortem trauma in late medieval England. More than merely clarifying where the knight might be wounded upon his body, literary evidence can further elucidate to what extent forms of physical trauma altered the embodied experiences, and body-selves, of knights. As I noted in the introduction, different genres of medieval literature demonstrate differing approaches to and understandings of the body. This extends to depictions of physical trauma. In the case of chronicle writing, as Chris Given-Wilson has shown, narratives of combat celebrate martial prowess but do not necessarily sanitise war, thereby offering valuable insights on patterns of wounding.<sup>34</sup> Not all chroniclers describing the physical trauma of war would have experienced combat first-hand, however. Chroniclers aim to tell the truth but, in doing so, they often have to first *make* it, creating coherence, credibility, and meaning in their narratives.<sup>35</sup> Caxton's prologue to the 1482 edition of his *Polychronicon* reflects this. The reader, Caxton hopes, might be 'reformed by other and straunge mennes *hurtes* and *scathes*', thereby discovering 'what is requysyte and proufytable in his [own] lyf'.<sup>36</sup> Historical writing, in this, may not simply cohere or conflict with the archaeological record's presentation of wounded bodies, but elaborate upon how *hurtes* and *scathes* accrue meaning in the body-selves of medieval people.

John Shirley (d. 1456)'s fifteenth-century chronicle *Dethe of The Kynge of the Scotis*, describes the 1437 assassination of King James I of Scotland.<sup>37</sup> Following this attack, several knights pursued the murderers. One, 'a worþi knyght þat was called Sir Dauyd Dunbarre', eventually forced a confrontation. 'With hys owne hondez', Shirley says, Sir David 'slowe oon of hem and annoþer he wounded'. As Sir David fought, however, his opponents 'cutte of his fingrez vppon þat oon hande [with which he fought] and soore wounded hym in hys hedde'.

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<sup>32</sup> Rachel Kellet, 'Guts, Gore, and Glory: Representations of Wounds Inflicted in War in Medieval German Literature', in *Battle and the Bloodshed*, pp. 161-76.

<sup>33</sup> M. Geldof has similarly stressed the value, as well as some obstacles, in analysing archaeological evidence alongside medieval literature. See "'And to Describe the Shapes of the Dead": Making Sense of Archaeology and Armed Violence', in *Wounds and Wound Repair*, pp. 57-80.

<sup>34</sup> Given-Wilson, pp. 6-14.

<sup>35</sup> Given-Wilson, pp. 1-6; see also Spiegel, 'Theory into Practice', pp. 1-12; Stephen Mark Carey, 'Fictionality', in *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms, Methods, Trends*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 1500-04.

<sup>36</sup> *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, EETS 176, ed. W. J. B. Crotch (London: Oxford UP, 1928), pp. 64-65.

<sup>37</sup> John Shirley, 'The Dethe of the Kynge of Scotis', in *Death and Dissent: Two Fifteenth-Century Chronicles*, ed. by Lister M. Matheson (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), pp. 45-6.

Sir David's injuries – to the head and limbs – conform to trends in wounding found by archaeological case studies. As discussed, the absence of rib trauma in skeletal analysis is typically accounted for by the presence of armour. Here, however, the spread of wounding is identical, although the encounter was at night, in the palace, with Sir David likely not expecting, and so not being dressed for, combat. In explanation, it is worth noting that several fifteenth-century fight books describe manoeuvres whereby the hands, as well as the head, are targeted in preference to the torso.<sup>38</sup> M.R. Geldof has suggested that deliberate targeting of the face in battle was so common as to represent part of the 'medieval language of violence'.<sup>39</sup> It may be that such practices were so ingrained – so *embodied*, even – that one fought the same way in and out of armour, with Sir David suffering trauma to his face and extremities rather than his chest.

This episode is also valuable for considering how the knight's embodied experience undergoes severe physical trauma. 'With *hys owne hondex*', the chronicle reads, as if inviting the audience to supply their own hands as they read or listen, and so be *reformed*, as Caxton says, by Sir David's hurt.<sup>40</sup> Should one wince in sympathy at David's missing fingers, or relish what it must be to give fingers and flesh for a dead king, embodying that sacrifice, and loyalty, for the rest of one's life? Sir David did survive this encounter; while Shirley does not mention him again, charter evidence records Sir David Dunbar still living six years later in 1443.<sup>41</sup> The scale of his *soore* head wound is unclear, but if Sir David, like Towton 16, exhibited facial disfigurement or impairment in speech or sight, how might these physical changes impact upon his lived experience? One of the central dilemmas that embodiment theory causes us to reflect on, as Turner says, is 'the distinction between the socially constructed body and the lived practical reality of embodiment'.<sup>42</sup> This is a distinction pertinent to men like David

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<sup>38</sup> A particularly good example, with detailed illustrations depicting the strikes can be seen in a 1459 German fight book by Hans Talhoffer. Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, MS Thott.290.2°. See fols 75r, 76v, and 79v for strikes directed at the head (75r and 76v) and the hands (79v). Research on the dissemination of these ideas in late medieval England is ongoing; however, at least one Middle English fight book (c. 1450) reproduces of these ideas. See BL, Harley MS 3542. For fight books, including Harley MS 3542, and martial technique in medieval England see Paul Wagner, 'Common Themes in the Fighting Tradition of the British Isles', in *Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books (14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, ed. by Daniel Jaquet, Karin Verelst, and Timothy Dawson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 410-48.

<sup>39</sup> Geldof, p. 76.

<sup>40</sup> See Catherine Batt for the significance of hands in the romance context as 'the articulation of an individual knight's sense of self', in "Hand for Hand" and "Body for Body": Aspects of Malory's Vocabulary of Identity and Integrity with Regard to Gareth and Lancelot', *Modern Philology*, 91 (1994), 269-87 (273).

<sup>41</sup> *The Laing Charters*, 'No. 122' (Edinburgh: Thin, 1899). See also *The Scots Peerage*, ed. by James Balfour Paul, vol. III (Edinburgh, 1906), p. 275.

<sup>42</sup> Turner, 'The Turn of the Body', pp. 1-18 (10).



Dunbar. What did it mean for David, a *worþi knyght*, that he might be unable to hold a sword or the reins of his horse after losing fingers from his dominant hand?<sup>43</sup>

Loïc Wacquant, in his sociological study of amateur and professional boxers in Chicago, developed the concept of ‘bodily capital’, which Wacquant explains with the French expression: *payer de sa personne* [paying with one’s person].<sup>44</sup> Boxers, Wacquant says, undertake meticulous care of their bodies, particularly their eyes and hands, in order to maintain the value of these physical resources and thus preserve bodily capital. Of course, there are crucial differences between fifteenth-century English knights and twenty-first-century American boxers. The Knight’s body, however, like the pugilist’s, is one ‘at once the tool of his work—an offensive weapon and defensive shield—and the target of his opponent’. This results in what Wacquant calls the great paradox of the boxer, and it is a paradox that I argue applies to the knight, too: ‘one must make use of one’s body without using it up’. In the case of Sir David Dunbar, the question is whether the knight successfully manages this transaction of bodily capital, or whether, as per the French expression, Sir David pays too much.<sup>45</sup>

A similar example can be found in Walsingham’s *Chronica Maiora*, which describes the 1403 Battle of Shrewsbury. During this battle, the 4th earl of Douglas, Archibald (d. 1424), was captured by Henry V’s forces after having been wounded six times (II. 372)<sup>46</sup> Walsingham remarks of Archibald that, had the other rebels shared his vehemence and perseverance [*animositatem et constanciam*], the battle’s outcome may have been different. Walsingham supports this speculation by explaining that Archibald had already been seriously hurt the previous year at the battle of Homildon Hill. During this earlier battle, Archibald, much like Sir David Dunbar, suffered extensive trauma upon his head and face, in this case losing his eye. Homildon Hill was fought in September; yet, by July the following year, Archibald was fighting again at Shrewsbury, where, among the six wounds he suffered, he was injured in the genitals, this time losing his scrotum. As with the loss of his eye, Archibald

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<sup>43</sup> Götz of Berlichingen (d.1562), a German knight and mercenary, lost his right hand during a battle, and began wearing a prosthetic replacement made of iron. The prosthesis appears to have been capable of gripping both a sword and mace, as well as the reins of a horse. In addition, it would have enabled Götz to appear able-bodied, at least while in armour, which may have been equally as important. See Rachael Gillibrand, ‘Assistive Technologies in Sixteenth Century Warfare’, in *The Material Culture of Medieval War* ed. by Alan Murray and James Titterton (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

<sup>44</sup> Loïc Wacquant, *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 127-30.

<sup>45</sup> Irina Metzler has shown that knights would have had ‘most to lose’ as a result of serious physical trauma, in large part because of the danger of disabling the physical ability on which their socio-cultural status depended. See *Disability in Medieval Europe*, p. 163.

<sup>46</sup> For the Percy Rebellion and Archibald’s role within it, see Bryan Bevan *Henry IV* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), pp. 95-109.

recovered from this injury and continued to fight until his death at the Battle of Verneuil in 1424.<sup>47</sup>

Like Sir David Dunbar, Archibald Douglas *pays with his person*, undergoing extreme physical trauma which undoubtedly shaped his embodiment as a knight. Ken Plummer has written on the way in which illness and injury prompt multiple embodiments in the sufferer.<sup>48</sup> Plummer writes in the first person, describing his own embodied experience of liver disease and transplant surgery. ‘I had an exhausted body’, Plummer says, ‘a ghostly body, a cyborg body, a wounded body’.<sup>49</sup> Archibald Douglas, in turn, has a knightly body, a wounded body, a castrated body, and, with the loss of his eye, an impaired body. How do these embodiments engage one another? As mentioned in the previous chapter, Sir John Chandos died in a 1369 skirmish. Notably, Bouchier explains Chandos’ failure to avoid the blow that killed him with reference to the knight’s own partial blindness. In this, there is some awareness of how physical trauma and impairment challenged the embodied experiences of knights. As Plummer might say, Chandos’ wounded body *gets in the way* of his knightly body. Arthur Frank, too, notes that following injury, ‘people who have always *been* bodies have distinctive problems *continuing* to be bodies, particularly continuing to be the sorts of bodies they have been’.<sup>50</sup>

These reflections on the way in which physical trauma might revise the bodily capital of knights, create new embodiments, and thereby inhibit the knight’s ability to *be* the body he has been, however, are unusual in medieval chronicles. As I argued earlier, medieval chronicles ought to be approached as a form of literature, with their own rules and *topoi* that are not easily understood in terms of ‘history’ versus ‘fiction’.<sup>51</sup> This is important because, as Frank notes, the narratives we tell about injury and illness are governed by ‘conventional metaphors and imagery and standards of what is and is not appropriate to tell’.<sup>52</sup> The literary aspirations and rhetorical forms of medieval chronicles may not prioritise or permit narration of how Archibald Douglas’ corporeal identity as a knight changed when he lost his eye and scrotum. In fact, by praising Archibald’s *constancia*, Walsingham valorises the knight’s refusal to *be* a wounded body, in addition to or at expense of an embodied knight. In Caxton’s terms,

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<sup>47</sup> For Archibald, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Douglas, see *The Scots Peerage*, vol. III, pp. 165-68.

<sup>48</sup> Ken Plummer, ‘My Multiple Sick Bodies: Symbolic Interactionism, Autoethnography, and Embodiment’, in *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, pp. 75-93.

<sup>49</sup> Plummer, p. 80.

<sup>50</sup> Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, p. 28.

<sup>51</sup> See Given-Wilson, p. ix; Graeme Dunphy, ‘Chronicles’, in *Handbook of Medieval Studies*, pp. 1714–21; Otter, pp. 109–30.

<sup>52</sup> Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, p. 3.

Archibald Douglas is noteworthy because of his unwillingness to be *reformed* by his *hurtis* and *scathis*; this may have been appreciated by medieval audiences.<sup>53</sup>

In a similar example from Bouchier's *Cronycle*, Sir Oliver de Clisson (d. 1407) 'was stricken on the vyser of his bassenet, so that the point of [his opponent's] axe entered into his eye' (II. 138). Much like Archibald Douglas, Sir Oliver survived this wound but 'lost ever after the sight with that eye'. The chronicle is careful to qualify, however, 'for all that stroke, yet *he delt styll lyke a noble knyght*'. There is a deliberate stylistic attempt here to again present the knight as invulnerable even when explicitly wounded; to endow the knight with a body that is greater than the injuries that should compromise it. One wonders whether Sir Oliver's having *delt* like a knight is a practical observation that his partial blindness did not inhibit his future career fighting and *being* a knightly body. Or, whether what is being praised is Sir Oliver's ability to mentally undergo the loss of his eye and recover emotionally as well as physically – *suffering* like a knight. The meaning of the Middle English *delen* allows for either, being 'to act', 'to behave', or 'to fight'.<sup>54</sup> What could Oliver have done in order to have *not delt* like a knight? Wounds and sickness, Plummer observes, 'shape the body in different ways and at different stages, and each time the body has the project of re-assembling itself'.<sup>55</sup> In this, physical trauma does not test bodily endurance so much as bodily elasticity. To have *delt* like a knight, or to demonstrate *constancia*, seems to require that one undergo this reassembly rapidly, with courage and confidence. The knight must continue to *be* his body-self even when the body is changing.

Records other than chronicles offer a fresh perspective on the multiple medieval bodies caused by physical trauma. Soldier petitions, for example, more readily accept and express the ways in which wounds prompt new body-selves.<sup>56</sup> Like chronicles, petitions employ particular rhetorical strategies and tropes, such as exaggeration and obsequiousness.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The human fascination with and admiration of those who *should* feel physical pain but do not appears universal, and certainly existed in medieval culture. Kaeuper notes the desirability of a knight's 'steel-edged' grit and endurance at the prospect of being maimed or wounded. See *Chivalry and Violence*, pp. 165-169 (165). Elsewhere, impassivity while undergoing physical trauma was idealised in depictions of medieval martyrs. See, Javier Moscoso, *Pain: A Cultural History*, trans. by Sarah Thomas and Paul House (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 13-14.

<sup>54</sup> MED entry *delen* v. 7(a).

<sup>55</sup> Plummer, p. 80.

<sup>56</sup> For the place of injury in martial petitions, see Quentin Verreycken, 'The Experience of War According to Late Medieval Petitions in France, England and the Low Countries', *XXVth Annual Forum of Young Legal Historians*, unpublished paper (Brussels, 5-8 June, 2019).

<sup>57</sup> For the rhetorical strategies used in late medieval English petitioning see the work of Gwilym Dodd, 'Blood, Brains and Bay-Windows: The Use of English in Fifteenth-Century Parliamentary Petitions', in *Petitions and Strategies of Persuasion in the Middle Ages: The English Crown and the Church c. 1200-c. 1550*, ed. by Thomas W. Smith and Helen Killick (York: York Medieval Press, 2018), pp. 11-39; and 'Kingship, Parliament and the Court: the Emergence of 'High Style' in Petitions to the English Crown, c.1350-1405', *The English Historical Review*, 129 (2014), 515-48.

In their particular objectives, however, soldier petitions offer a radically different insight into the way physical trauma shaped embodied experience. The English soldier Thomas Hostelle, for instance, requested a pension from Henry VI in 1429.<sup>58</sup> In composing his petition, Hostelle recalls his presence at the Siege of Harfleur (1415), where he was ‘smyten with a springolt [crossbow bolt] throughe the hede, lesyng his oon eye and [having] his chek boon broken’.<sup>59</sup> Again, the face appears a particularly vulnerable area even for those in armour. Likewise, when fighting at Agincourt, Hostelle had ‘his plates smyten into his body and his hande smyten in sondre’ by an opponent’s iron spear. The rhetorical weight of Hostelle’s petition utilises a body full of ‘sore hurte’, one that has been ‘maimed and wounded [...] sore febled and debrused’.

The outcome of Thomas Hostelle’s petition is unknown; however, the chronicler John Hardyng (d. 1465), who, like Archibald Douglas, fought at the Battles of Homildon Hill and Shrewsbury, made a similar petition to Henry VI, which was granted in 1457.<sup>60</sup> Hardyng, like Hostelle, describes how he was ‘maymed in grete distresse’ at various times throughout his fighting career.<sup>61</sup> Hardyng suffered one wound in particular which he describes as an ‘incurable mayme that maketh my wake’. In this way, Hardyng delineates the physical ontologies that multiply in his wounds, describing maimed, distressed, and weakened bodies. Hardyng was awarded a yearly income of twenty pounds for undergoing this ‘peril of his body’<sup>62</sup> – again prompting reflection on how the medieval soldier ‘paid with his person’.

Neither Hostelle nor Hardyng were knights, however, and, because of this, their bodies are not imperilled in the same way or by the same forces. The demands of each genre discussed here, chronicle and petition, are markedly different, but even so these narratives of the hurts suffered by those in armour wielding edged weapons are particularly divergent. If David Dunbar, Archibald Douglas, and Oliver Clisson ever became wounded bodies – if they paid too much of themselves, entering a deficit of bodily capital – their narratives do not show it. This may in part respond to the findings of Chapter One, and the more strict physiognomy of embodied knighthood. As noted in the introduction, late medieval culture was one familiar with physiognomic readings of character – of *being* a body-self. For both the

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<sup>58</sup> For context on Hostelle’s service see, Michael Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 143-45.

<sup>59</sup> *Letters and Papers illustrative of the Wars of the English in France during the reign of Henry VI*, ed. by Joseph Stevenson, vol. I (London: Roll Series, 1861) pp. 421-22.

<sup>60</sup> For Hardyng’s military career, see Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England vol. II c. 1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 274-82; and Richard J. Moll, *Before Malory: Reading Arthur in Later Medieval England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 158-60.

<sup>61</sup> This description of his injury is taken from the dedication of Hardyng’s first chronicle, which he presented to Henry VI in 1457. See British Library MS Landsdowne 204, folios 3r, 3v, 4r.

<sup>62</sup> *Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, 1216-1509*, IV (London: HMSO, 1891-1901), p. 393.

nobility and knighthood especially, standards of physical aesthetics were important as demonstrable indicators that elite identities could be embodied and in-born. Martial and chivalric customs, too, issued their own observances regarding the bodily composition of their adherents. Caxton's *Ordre* stipulates that 'a squyer lame of *ony membre*, how wel that he be noble and ryche, & born of noble lygnage, is not dygne ne worthy to be receiued in to thordre of chyualrye' (63-4). The text is here likely referring to congenital rather than acquired disfigurement; however, it stresses how important *figure* was to the knight in late medieval English culture.<sup>63</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras interprets the bathing which squires underwent prior to being dubbed as an obligation to 'display the male body' and, crucially, to 'verify a lack of deformity and disease'.<sup>64</sup>

How should one conceptualise the 'peril' of a knight's body, how an embodiment as physiognomically *faire* as the knight's incorporates physical trauma? I have argued that the inevitable wounds borne by armigerous groups in the Middle Ages may have been focussed upon visible areas of the body, prompting consideration of how a knight *wore* those wounds. In the genre of historical writing, prominent wounds to heads, faces, and hands, are acknowledged yet in some manner also glossed over, unlike the wounds of soldiers in petitions. One interpretation of this, I have suggested, is that the wounded bodies of knights were *delt* with, fought against, or resisted in *constanciam* – a resolute physical resolve which reflects the ideological potency of embodied knighthood, invulnerable even while suffering wounds. Alternatively, it may be objected that the *hurtes* and *scathes* discussed were accepted by contemporaries as inevitable for a body-self best discerned in martial prowess. For medieval individuals, it may have been self-evident (and so unproblematic) that knights bore wounds because they were warriors.

I do not find this to be the case. Samantha Riches and Bettina Bildhauer have shown that one focus for medieval anxieties about the body concerned the dynamic of wounding and healing – that which proved characteristic in the lives of men like Archibald Douglas.<sup>65</sup> The authors cite the 'centrality of injury' in the literature and lifestyle of chivalric culture as one manifestation of both this anxiety and an associated preoccupation with the wounded bodies of elite men in particular. Larissa Tracy, similarly, has identified an ambiguity regarding the social status of physical trauma in medieval martial cultures.<sup>66</sup> Tracy argues that serious

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<sup>63</sup> Hannele Klemettilä finds that, whether accidental or congenital, medieval physiognomists interpreted ugliness and physical deformity as negative signifiers, pp. 144-5.

<sup>64</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men*, p. 65.

<sup>65</sup> Samantha Riches and Bettina Bildhauer, 'Cultural Representations of the Body', in *Cultural Representations of the Body in the Medieval Age*, ed. by Linda Kalof (Oxford: Berg, 2012), pp. 181-202 (185-197).

<sup>66</sup> Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries, 'Penetrating Medieval Wounds', in *Wounds and Wound Repair*, pp. 1-23.

physical injury transformed the body in one of two ways, producing either shameful or valiant physiognomic selves. Wounds and scars, it seems to be accepted, signify within the body; yet *how* physical trauma communicates particular statuses and selfhoods is not always clear in medieval culture.<sup>67</sup>

Henry V provides an excellent example of the interpretive dilemma regarding the wounded body in late medieval England. At the age of fifteen, Henry was wounded in the face by an arrow at the Battle of Shrewsbury, supposedly after raising the visor of his helmet. Thomas Walsingham's account mirrors other descriptions of wounded knights (II. 370). Henry's bloody face, Walsingham says, *non concidit* [did not express dismay], as Henry *vulnus parumpendit inflictum* [paid little attention to the wound], but *ad vindictam animavit exercitum* [drove his army to take vengeance]. Henry thus *delt* like a knight, denying his wound in *constanciam*. The wound itself, however, was serious, with Henry's survival resting on the intervention of Henry IV's surgeon, John Bradmore, who developed an instrument to remove the arrowhead, said to be lodged six-inches deep in Henry's flesh.<sup>68</sup> Michael Livingston has discussed how painful this treatment would have been owing to the barbed arrowhead which, having been attached with wax, came loose inside the wound.<sup>69</sup> This injury and its treatment, which necessitated enlarging the wound in order to extract the arrow, would have resulted in 'profound scars and disfigurements' which radically altered the lived experience of the young prince.<sup>70</sup>

In spite of the impression given by the chronicle, then, Henry's wounded body was such that it could not merely be fought through in *constanciam*. In fact, Henry's wound kept him absent from royal duties for over a year. Moreover, as Timothy Arner argues, the resulting scars recalled Henry IV's own skin condition, widely perceived by contemporaries as a sign of moral corruption and divine disfavour.<sup>71</sup> Henry V's supporters, Arner suggests, had to battle these associations, in large part through literary depictions which *reembodyed* Henry as a 'well-formed and muscular' man, with a smooth, flawless aspect.<sup>72</sup> There is no scar

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<sup>67</sup> Patricia Skinner has examined this in the context of early medieval English facial wounds. See, 'Visible Prowess? Reading Men's Head and Face Wounds in Early Medieval Europe to 1000 CE', in *Wounds and Wound Repair*, pp. 81-101.

<sup>68</sup> Carol Rawcliffe, *Medicine & Society in Later Medieval England* (London: Sandpiper, 1999), pp. 76, 140. See also, S.J. Lang, 'John Bradmore and His Book Philomena', *Social History of Medicine*, 5 (1992), 121-30.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Livingston, "The Depth of Six Inches": Prince Hal's Head-Wound at the Battle of Shrewsbury", in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, pp. 215-31 (221-29).

<sup>70</sup> Livingston speculates that the wound may have damaged Henry's left temporal lobe, thereby triggering the extreme change in personality which distinguished Henry's youth from his later life.

<sup>71</sup> Timothy D. Arner, 'The Disappearing Scar of Henry V: Triage, Trauma, and the Treatment of Henry's Wounding at the Battle of Shrewsbury', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 49 (2019), 347-76 (358-363).

<sup>72</sup> Arner, pp. 364-68 (367).

in such depictions; the body that Henry needed to *be* in order to rule and rule well simply had no room for it.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, as Livingston points out, Henry's royal portraiture also deviated from the typical formula – 'face-front or three-quarter-face' – in order to present a left-profile that entirely hid the scar.<sup>74</sup>

As Arner says, Henry's relationship with his wound thus describes an attempt to 'manage different kinds of trauma': personal, familial, and political.<sup>75</sup> Henry's wound could not simply be presented as an unequivocal sign of prowess or natural consequence of going to war.<sup>76</sup> The discourse shaping and erasing Henry's scar, assembling and reassembling the king's body, reveals that late medieval English contemporaries were concerned with what physical trauma *was* and what it *meant* on the body. As Arner says, because Henry's body was 'repaired' as much by discursive as by medical intervention, it invites us to 'interpret and construct the body of the king as text'. In addition, however, this episode also encourages reflection on the constructed nature of the 'single' embodiment, whether of a knight or king. Henry's lived experience of facial trauma reveals multiple bodies, including a young body, a wounded body, a sufferer's body, and a king's body. Most problematic for Henry, his wound confused the distinction between his own and his father's body, corrupted, sinful, unstable.

Thus, the regal body produced by the hegemonic discourse of Henry's court (flawless, well-formed, whole) is a fantasy. This observation is valuable when reflecting upon historical writing about wounded knights, and the rhetorical tropes of knightly 'dealing' and *constancia* identified above.<sup>77</sup> As with the literature and portraiture associated with Henry V's reign, this chronicle language works similarly to suppress or disguise the wounded body. To close this section, I will examine a final chronicle episode which, unusually, deviates from this formula.

John Barbour's *Bruce* (c. 1375) describes a 1330 social encounter between a Scottish knight, Sir James Douglas, and an unnamed Iberian knight.<sup>78</sup> This latter knight's body had been deeply marked by his fighting career; Barbour describes his face in particular as being 'sa fast till-hewyn' that it was 'all neir wemmyt [disfigured]' (367-78). When the Iberian knight

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<sup>73</sup> The associations between head wounds and unstable rule were pronounced in the later Middle Ages. See Larissa Tracy, "'Into the Hede, throw the Helme and Creste": Head Wounds and a Question of Kingship in the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*', in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, pp. 496–518.

<sup>74</sup> Livingston, pp. 229-30.

<sup>75</sup> Arner, p. 368.

<sup>76</sup> This has been argued, however. 'Ambassadors, magnates, men-at-arms and ordinary soldiers alike will now have been immediately struck – and deeply impressed – by such an authentic symbol of the young man's prowess', John Matusiak, *Henry V* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 58.

<sup>77</sup> While the bodies of a knight and king are not interchangeable, much contemporary historical writing about Henry drew on literary depictions of knights. See Gransden, p. 198.

<sup>78</sup> John Barbour, *The Bruce*, ed. by W.M. McKenzie (London: Black, 1909).

encounters Sir James, he anticipates an appearance like his own – one disfigured by the violence which represents the foremost embodied practice of knighthood. Sir James' face, however, had 'nevir ane hurt in it', at which the Spanish knight,

[...] said that he had gret ferly  
That sic a knycht and sa worthy,  
And prisit of sa gret bounte,  
Mycht in the face unwemmyt be  
(371-76)

This encounter highlights the expectations and assumptions shaping what a renowned knight looked like in this period, and particularly what role physical trauma played in shaping the knight's body-self. As Iain MacInnes observes, the disfigurement of the Iberian knight is worn like a 'badge of honour'.<sup>79</sup> He is *all neir wemmyt* – nearly *all wound* – so much so that his wounded body *is* his knightly embodiment. The Iberian knight thus looks for his reflection in Sir James, and is shocked to find instead flawless skin. That *sic a knycht's* body should prove *unwemmyt* is inconceivable because, for the Iberian knight, it is *unknightly*. In response to the wounded knight's implicit accusation, Sir James lightly observes: "Love God, all tym had I handis myne hede for till were" – or, *praise God, I always had hands to protect my head*.

While there is no combat between these knights, there is a strange kind of wound-play in which the two negotiate the status of physical trauma within the corporeal identity of the knight. For Sir James, knighthood is to be read not in the physical tracks of violence, but in its absence – in the unmarked skin where a wound *might have* been. In a sense, Sir James shifts the embodied impetus of knightly prowess from the head to the hands; from the more passive absorption and forbearance of injury seen above to its active avoidance. Barbour, MacInnes argues, 'inverts the image of the battle-hardened and battle-scarred warrior' in favour of a knight for whom prowess is purely performative, but otherwise invisible.<sup>80</sup> In this, Barbour's portrayal of James Douglas speaks to and perhaps represents the epitome of the 'invulnerable vulnerability' identified above in English historical writing. In the cases examined above, we watch as knights lose eyes, fingers, and testicles while, somehow, like James Douglas, remaining unmarked.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has argued that knightly identity, and consequently also the knightly body, were often presented as 'stable and timeless', almost mythically resistant to history.<sup>81</sup> It is worth noting that wounds and scars may be considered the embodied signs of

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<sup>79</sup> MacInnes, p. 119.

<sup>80</sup> MacInnes, p. 119.

<sup>81</sup> Cohen, *Identity Machines*, p. 47.



history – the *hurtes* and *scathes* that instruct other men. If one is to be *reformed* by another's hurts, however, they must be accepted, by both the wounded body and its audience. George Ashby (d. 1475), in his *Dicta et Opiniones*, advises the young Prince Edward that: 'yf ye finde any spotte, fylth, or lesion in any personne [...] dishonour hymn not with derision' (659-61). The reason Ashby gives for this is that 'ye be nat in suche suerte [...] but that the same may happ to you' (662-63). As in the chronicles examined above, Ashby displays a reluctance to acknowledge disfigurement, here for fear that he should experience the same. These anxieties, I suggest, respond to the capacity of physical trauma to expose the fantasy that all *hurtes* can be *delt* with, and that following injury one has or *is* the same body as before.

This is the 'peril' of the knight's body: wounds prompt consideration of *what* and *who* that body is, what makes it that way, and how enduring a body-self it enables. The portrayal of wounded knights in late medieval English chronicles does not ignore the fact that physical trauma has occurred, but particular rhetorical tropes work to suppress the wounded body and the difficult questions it raises about the many embodiments of the knight. The knight pays with his body, but the ideological import of his flesh and blood is such that, no matter how much he pays, his body-self escapes all deficit, remaining *his* own. In the next part of this chapter, I will examine the depiction of wounding in a different genre, Middle English Romance. There has been considerably more scholarly attention paid to how physical trauma informs the embodiment of the romance knight, in part because of the willingness with which romance authors at times express, and exaggerate, the spectacle of wounded bodies.

### **'Empty of Blood, Full of Knighthood': Wounds, Blood, and Prowess in Malory's *Morte Darthur***

Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* has been called the most gratuitously violent Middle English romance, allegedly possessing the greatest number of 'wounds per page' within the genre.<sup>82</sup> There have, in consequence, been several scholarly treatments of physical trauma in the *Morte*. One of the most influential of these readings is by Kathleen Coyne Kelly, who discusses what she calls the 'body chivalric': a 'fantasy of intactness' which elides body, masculinity, and knighthood into one 'whole and inviolate' construct, idealised as being 'impervious to destruction'.<sup>83</sup> Once the 'body chivalric' is wounded, however, Coyne Kelly argues that it is revealed to be 'unfinished, in process, subject to change' – all things that are

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<sup>82</sup> See Laura Finke and Martin Shichtman, 'No Pain, No Gain: Violence as Symbolic Capital in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*', *Arthuriana*, 8 (1998), 115-134; Stephen Atkinson, "'They...toke their shyldys before them and drew oute their swerdys...': Inflicting and Healing Wounds in Malory's *Morte Darthur*', in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, pp. 519-43 (519).

<sup>83</sup> Kelly, pp. 53-54, 59.

‘precisely the opposite of what the body chivalric [...] is supposed to be’. There are notable parallels here with the above discussion of wounded knights in English historical writing.

More recently, Christoph Houswitschka has undertaken a similar reading of romance wounding, identifying how the rhetoric of knightly identity is supported by repeated references to the knight’s body.<sup>84</sup> Like Coyne Kelly, Houswitschka notes that physical trauma causes anxiety in romance because of the danger that wounds might disable the body, prohibiting physical prowess and thereby disqualifying the knight’s identity.<sup>85</sup> Importantly, however, Houswitschka adds that the reciprocal giving and receiving of wounds, in so far as it threatens destruction of the body, also represents the foremost means whereby romance knighthood is established and affirmed. As in chronicles, then, the romance knight must barter his body against the threat of physical trauma in order to accrue the bodily capital in which knighthood can be discerned.

Kenneth Hodges has gone even further, arguing that wounding is not merely a necessary evil encountered while performing the embodied practices of knighthood, but that wounds represent indispensable components of the knight’s identity.<sup>86</sup> Malory’s ‘good knights’, Hodges suggest, ‘transform injuries into evidence of courage and commitment’.<sup>87</sup> Hodges’ contribution is significant, as it revises understandings of the way in which violence manufactures meaning upon the romance body.<sup>88</sup> In the previous section, I discussed disfigurement and knightly embodiment as opposing forces. For scholars like Hodges, however, disfigurement in the romance context counterintuitively denotes the unmarked body, while the knightly *figure* needs wounds in order to *be* the body intended.<sup>89</sup> This argument encourages one to reflect upon, and possibly redefine, what *disfigurement* actually means, not only in romance but for knighthood more generally.

In this debate, then, physical trauma is agreed to alter the romance knight’s body, opening new interpretive possibilities through which body-self is either *disfigured* or *refigured* depending on one’s perspective. For the rest of this section, I will attempt to clarify the

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<sup>84</sup> Houswitschka, pp. 75-94.

<sup>85</sup> K. S. Whetter takes the same approach, arguing the anxieties around wounding derive from the potential that injury incapacitates physical prowess. See ‘Weeping, Wounds, and Worshyp in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*’, *Arthurian Literature*, XXXI (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014), pp. 61-82.

<sup>86</sup> Hodges, ‘Wounded Masculinity’, pp. 14-31.

<sup>87</sup> Hodges, ‘Wounded Masculinity’, p. 31.

<sup>88</sup> We typically understand prowess in terms of wounds *inflicted* on the bodies of others. As Richard Kaeuper says, the ‘knight’s nobility or worth is proved by his hearty strokes in battle’, see *Chivalry and Violence*, pp. 129-135 (131). Like Hodges, Ben Parsons argues that fourteenth-century Middle English literature reveals attempts to distance knighthood from active physical aggression. See ‘Changing the Rules of the Game: Chaucer and the *Gawain* Poet Against Aggression’, in *Battle and Bloodshed*, pp. 199-214.

<sup>89</sup> This is similar to Jill Mann’s concept of ‘sacral’ violence in the *Morte*, whereby physical violence is necessary to reveal non-physical truth (238-40).

position of this chapter in the debate by reading a case study taken from Malory's *Morte Darthur*. Like the genre of historical writing, chivalric romance is identified by its own tropes, structural forms, and vocabulary.<sup>90</sup> Many of the tropes in chivalric romance concern how the body does violence and makes wounds. Andrew Lynch's monograph offers the best analysis of Malory's combat tropes, as well as discussing other body motifs such as physical gesture, blood, and emotion.<sup>91</sup> Lynch also exposes the inconsistencies in Malory's attitude to violence. Here, I identify some of the *Morte's* basic assumptions regarding the relationship between physical trauma and embodied identity. This reading will provide context for the rest of the chapter, which considers the more complex factors which shape the romance knight's experience of the wounded body.

As mentioned, the *Morte* offers exaggerated depictions of wounding. The spectacle of knights like Balyn and Balan, each having 'smyten' the other with several 'grete woundes', until, Malory says, 'alle the place theras they fought was blood reed', is common (72. 13-14). When Malory's knights are not actively shedding blood with wounding weapons, they often swear oaths upon, or otherwise speak forth, the blood of their bodies. When Arthur first meets King Pellinore, for instance, Pellinore explains to Arthur that he must pursue the Questing Beast, "othir blede of the beste bloode in my body" (35. 8). Similarly, after Sir Gareth has fought the Red Knight on behalf of Dame Lyonesse, he observes "I have bought your love with parte of the beste bloode within my body" (255. 18-19). In this, identity and bloodshed are interwoven into the ethos of Malory's world. The knight's 'best blood' – a mixture of his familial reputation, individual prowess, and dedication to a cause – flows in constant anticipation of being spilled.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, if blood, as Lynch has argued, is the 'basic currency' of Malory's world, then the giving and receiving of wounds becomes a kind of barter-exchange in which a knight's bodily capital, his physical prowess and social worship, is traded against that of an opponent.<sup>93</sup>

One of the episodes of the *Morte* in which this dynamic of wounding and bleeding becomes clearest is the single combat between Arthur and Accolon. The drama of this episode responds to the deception whereby Sir Accolon is given Arthur's sword, Excalibur, and its scabbard, while Arthur is tricked into using an imitation. Excalibur's scabbard, as

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<sup>90</sup> Cooper, *English Romance*, pp. 4-44.

<sup>91</sup> Lynch, pp. 147-57 (gesture), pp. 60-74 (blood), pp. 135-46 (emotion). Lynch has since elaborated on the operation of emotion in the *Morte*, noting the ways in which affective experiences are embodied in speech and action. See 'Malory and Emotion', in *A New Companion to Malory*, ed. by Mehan Leitch and Cory Rushton (Cambridge: Brewer, 2019), pp. 177-90.

<sup>92</sup> For blood and kinship, see Kate McClune, "The Vengeance of my Brethirne": Blood Ties in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, in *Arthurian Literature XXVII: Blood, Sex, Malory: Essays on the Morte Darthur*, ed. by David Clark and Kate McClune (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011), pp. 89-106.

<sup>93</sup> Lynch, pp. 60-2 (60).

Merlin states when the king first receives the weapon, “ys worth ten of the swerde; for whyles ye have the scawberde uppon you ye shall lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded” (44. 32-4). That Arthur loses this protection during his combat with Accolon is significant. As Lynch notes, the combats of the *Morte* are typically characterised by ‘symmetry and reciprocity, the feeling of two knights sharing’ in an exchange of wounds.<sup>94</sup> The weight and wounding-power of each knight in this encounter, however, is intentionally placed off-kilter. Furthermore, Lynch observes, when the balance of a combat shifts in the *Morte*, with the violence of one knight overwhelming the other, Malory often suppresses ‘the most unpleasant consequences of fighting’ for his protagonists.<sup>95</sup> While this remains the case during Arthur’s combat with Accolon, Arthur is forced into a uniquely vulnerable position. This makes the episode a valuable case study in which to examine the significance of wounding for the text’s eponymous character.

From the moment Arthur and Accolon’s combat begins, it is apparent that the usual structure of reciprocal violence has been misaligned. Malory describes how both knights

went egerly to the batayle and gaff many grete strokes. But allwayes  
Arthurs swerde bote nat lyke Accalons swerde, and for the moste  
party every stroke that Accalon gaff he wounded Sir Arthure sore,  
that hit was marvayle he stood, and allwayes his blood felle frome  
hym faste (111. 33-35)

This unequal pattern of physical trauma and bleeding intensifies throughout the combat, as with ‘every stroke that Accolon stroke he drewe blood on Arthur’, while Accolon himself ‘loste nat a dele of blood’ (112. 7,18). Similarly, and in consequence, Accolon ‘waxte passynge lyght’ while Arthur ‘was passynge fyeble’ (112. 18-19). In this way, Malory stresses the growing contrast between the two knights, one of whom makes great wounds while the other, Arthur, wields a sword that ‘bites’ neither steel nor body. And ‘allwayes’, Malory repeatedly reminds his audience, ‘Sir Arthure loste so muche bloode that hit was mervayle he stooode’ (112. 15-16).

In certain of the critical approaches to wounding discussed above, the bloody wounds which Arthur suffers ought to leave him shorn of bodily capital, his knighthood compromised. If embodied knighthood relies on a fantasy of invulnerability, then that fantasy for Arthur is critically undone when it is shown that he ‘wente veryly to have dyed’ as a result of his injuries (112. 19). This is not, however, the impression conveyed by the text. On the contrary, the more Arthur is wounded, and the more his body bleeds, the more Malory praises Arthur’s physical resilience, much as Walsingham did with Archibald Douglas’

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<sup>94</sup> Lynch, pp. 59-60.

<sup>95</sup> Lynch, p. 50.

*constanciam*. In this way, Malory transforms the excessive violence to which Arthur is subject into a rhetoric of loss and gain that works in Arthur's favour. Thus, when the counterfeit Excalibur shatters in Arthur's hand, he observes: "though I lak wepon, yett shall I lak no worshippe" (113. 10-11), and when it appears that Arthur will die because of his refusal to submit, he resigns himself, saying "I had rather to dye with honour than to lyve with shame": (113. 8-9). Most telling of all, when accounting for the perseverance that allows Arthur to continue fighting through extreme blood loss and pain, Malory explains: 'he was so full of knyghthode that he endured' (112. 16-17).

In these repeated references to particular quantities and the qualities attributed to them, Malory, I argue, is presenting a model central to our understanding of physical trauma and knightly embodiment. We only recognise that Arthur is so *full* of knighthood because he is so near *empty* of blood, as if we find Arthur's chivalry in the bodily apertures of his many wounds. This idea, that loss can produce a kind of gain, is evident when Arthur forgoes his weapon in favour of worship, or prepares to give his life in order to gain honour. Again, the impression conveyed is of loss *as* gain, here as part of the fundamental chivalric assumption that even the loss of life, when undertaken in the right way, can multiply worship and honour. I suggest that this 'loss as gain' motif is the best way in which we can understand the significance of most wounded bodies in the *Morte*. Indeed, while the circumstances of this single combat are exceptional, this characterisation of meritorious wounding is not. "Now may ye se", Sir Launcelot observes while watching Sir La Cote Male Tayle suffer during a battle, "that he ys a noble knyght" (373. 1). Launcelot points to the younger knight's "grevous woundis" and, as with Arthur, remarks that "hit ys mervayle that he may endure thys longe batayle" (373. 2-4).

Arthur's body, then, is at its most knightly when covered in wounds and losing its blood. The wounded body of the romance knight does not contribute to a problematic proliferation of bodies, but an accentuation of knightly embodiment itself: a way of showing what a body like Arthur is *really made of*. Bleeding, and the suffering of wounds, ought thus be read as forms of active embodied practice – means by which the knight reveals his body-self. In accounting for this, one can look to some cultural connotations of blood in the late medieval English mentality. As Peter Murray Jones has observed, medieval medical culture was accustomed not only to 'reading' blood as it was drawn from the body, but to attributing positive value to bleeding in the form of phlebotomy.<sup>96</sup> Bleeding in this respect is again constructive, facilitating a gain – good health – as the result of a loss. More importantly,

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<sup>96</sup> Peter Murray Jones, *Medieval Medicine in Illuminated Manuscripts* (London: British Library, 1998), pp. 46-50, 95-96.

however, phlebotomy indicates one of the ways in which medieval blood signifies to an audience. Sarah Butler has written on the popular medieval belief that blood could ‘speak’, citing cruentation, the phenomenon whereby a murdered body was thought to bleed in the presence of its murderer, as one example of this.<sup>97</sup> Bettina Bildhauer, similarly, discusses the ways in which blood ‘gives immediate access to the truth’, as if blood itself possesses ‘the capacity to know something’ in medieval culture.<sup>98</sup>

In Arthur and Accolon’s single combat, there is an audience to whom Arthur’s vast quantities of spilled blood might speak. Throughout the combat, which is presented as a public duel, Malory repeatedly uses the term *merveille*, denoting ‘a thing, act, or event that causes astonishment or surprise’.<sup>99</sup> Molly Martin, in her work on vision in the *Morte*, has argued that Malory employs this word to signal an in-text audience’s reaction to particularly arresting spectacle, such as Arthur’s bleeding.<sup>100</sup> At times, Malory refers directly to this audience’s perception of the encounter as it progresses. After describing one of the many occasions on which Arthur’s body is wounded and begins to bleed, Malory says: ‘But all men that beheld hem seyde they sawe nevyr knyght fyght so well as Arthur ded, conciderynge the bloode that he had bled’ (112. 21-25). In this, I suggest, Malory is indicating the way in which Arthur’s blood begins to communicate something to this audience.

The signification of Arthur’s bloody wounds is here the same as identified above: Arthur *gives* blood and *gains* knighthood. For this audience, Arthur is the best knight ever seen, simply for having bled so much. Importantly, however, Malory uses this persuasive quality of Arthur’s body in order to resolve the episode. Among the audience is the Damsel of the Lake. When the Damsel ‘*behelde* Arthur’, particularly ‘how *full* of prouesse his body was’, she laments that ‘so *good a knyght* and *such a man* [...] sholde so be destroyed’ (113. 19-22). Beholding the truth of Arthur’s body and bloody prowess, the Damsel of the Lake causes Excalibur to fall from Accolon’s hand, thereby saving the king. It is in this sense that Bildhauer considers medieval blood capable of conveying the total authenticity of an individual: the ‘outlines of the person’.<sup>101</sup> Bleeding becomes a body technique demonstrative of Arthur’s body-self; when he bleeds, Arthur bleeds *his self*, his knighthood and manhood – everything he is.

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<sup>97</sup> Sarah Butler, *Forensic Medicine and Death Investigation in Medieval England* (London: Routledge, 2014) pp. 140-42.

<sup>98</sup> Bettina Bildhauer, ‘Medieval European Conceptions of Blood: Truth and Human Integrity’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 19 (2013), 57-76 (61-2).

<sup>99</sup> MED entry *merveille* n. 1(a).

<sup>100</sup> Molly Martin, *Vision and Gender in Malory's Morte Darthur* (Woodridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), pp. 1-23. See also Lynch, who identifies similar ‘vision moments’, p. 54.

<sup>101</sup> Bildhauer, ‘Conceptions of Blood’, p. 57.

Indeed, Arthur's gender is a factor here. Humoural science understood the body to produce blood continuously, which is why old and corrupted blood had to be released from the body, either through phlebotomy, menstruation, bleeding noses, and so on.<sup>102</sup> The innate heat of male bodies, however, was thought capable of purifying spoiled blood, thereby encouraging perceptions that manhood and manly behaviour, which also corresponded to humoural heat, bespoke a great quantity of *hote* blood. Trevisa discusses this physiological correlation between blood and manhood, explaining that it is due to a 'grete habundance of blood [that] a man is more boolde and hardy', and thus more typically masculine (I. 306). This means that, in late medieval English culture, manhood could be read in relation to the quantity of blood in the male body, and evidenced by the sort of action which that blood sustained. It is natural, in this respect, that the sight of Arthur bleeding is so striking to his audience, as, with every drop spilled, Arthur is literally showing how much of a man he is.

Another late medieval English source, William of Worcester's *Boke of Noblesse*, offers further context for why the sight of spilled blood might be particularly important to other men, especially those from noble backgrounds. This text discusses how the nobleman should season his body by 'haunting in armes' rather than permit himself to be pampered and spoiled (22). As part of this guidance, the text addresses the danger that the sight of one's own blood might prove unmanly for those soft of body. The text thus advises its audience – among them Edward IV, to whom the *Boke* was dedicated – that they should be like a boar when he 'sees his owne blood', urging: 'put forthe youre silf, avaunsing youre corageous hertis to were'.<sup>103</sup> Rather than being cowed, Edward must 'be revyved' and become 'furious, egre, and rampanyng'.

In this way, male blood not only possessed a distinct gendered value in medieval culture, but proved the basis for a physical trial necessary to demonstrate manhood and, arguably, garner worship among other men.<sup>104</sup> Every time the knight is wounded he must measure his manhood and courage against the dispiriting sight of his own blood leaving his body. This, in part, accounts for why the sight of Arthur's bleeding proves so captivating. These onlookers recognise the trial which Arthur takes on, and are mindful of the danger that he might lose more blood than his male body is capable of producing. Just as Worcester advises Edward IV, however, Arthur responds in the right way, becoming 'wroth for the

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<sup>102</sup> Bildhauer, 'Conceptions of Blood', pp. 70-1.

<sup>103</sup> For Worcester's book and its relationship with Edward IV see Christopher Allmand and Maurice Keen, 'History and the Literature of War: The *Boke of Noblesse* of William Worcester', in *War, Government and Power in Late Medieval France*, ed. by Christopher Allmand (Liverpool: Liverpool University press, 2000), pp. 92-105.

<sup>104</sup> See, Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve: The Wound of the Hero Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), pp. 1-20; Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), pp. 76-80.

bloode that he had loste' (112. 30). When the combat concludes and both knights have their wounds treated, Arthur, in spite of his tremendous blood loss, recovers. Accolon, however, who does not shed a drop of blood until the fight's final moments, is said to have 'deyed within foure days, for he had bled so much blood that he myght not lyve' (117. 20-21). As Bildhauer has argued, in medieval culture 'some blood is better than others'.<sup>105</sup> It is as if Arthur simply had more blood in his body to begin with.

If there is a reluctance to admit the wounded bodies of knights in historical writing, it is not shared in the *Morte*. Here, the knight appears most himself when *being* a wounded body. There are questions, however, regarding how and to what extent embodied knighthood positively integrates physical trauma in romance. Disfigurement and disability must be factors in how wounded a body can become whilst retaining its coherence as a knightly physiognomy.<sup>106</sup> Discerning at which point physical trauma might exceed the body's limits to incorporate it whilst remaining recognisably knightly is not always easy. In the French *Lancelot*, only knights bearing scars could sit in King Uther's court, suggesting again a different perspective on disfigurement.<sup>107</sup> Conversely, Malory's King Lot prays: "Jesu defende us from dethe *and* horryble maymes", indicating that some nonfatal trauma might prove *disembodying* for the knight (25. 12). As regards this latter point, it should also be recognised that if a wound is to act as a badge of honour on the knight's body, it must first be survived and treated. In the *Morte*, Arthur is 'well recoverde' following his battle with Accolon only after he 'lete fecch lechis' to treat his many wounds (117. 19,22). For the rest of this chapter, I will continue to examine how wounded bodies and, in addition, wound-treatment inform the romance knight's corporeal identity. In the next part of this chapter, I will further explore the manner in which wounding occurs in the *Morte*, examining which kinds of wound require treatment and how that treatment informs the embodied experience of the literary knight.

### **'Thorow the shyld into the syde': The Wounded Body and The *Leche* in Malory's *Morte Darthur***

During an episode in the Tristram narrative, Malory addresses his reader directly:

Here men may undirstonde that bene men of worshyp that man was never fourmed that all tymes myght attayne, but somtyme he was put to the worse by malefortune, and som tyme the wayker knyght put the bygger knyght to a rebuke (379. 5-8)

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<sup>105</sup> Bildhauer, 'Medieval European Conceptions of Blood', p. 72.

<sup>106</sup> Kristina Hildebrand has argued that depictions of physical disability so unnerved elite males that disabled bodies are hidden in romance (67).

<sup>107</sup> *Lancelot-Grail*, vol V, p. 121.



Here, Malory reflects upon the inevitability that at some point during the knight's career he will suffer defeat at the hands of another knight. This, Malory explains, may be the product of bad luck or, conversely, good fortune for the lesser knight who gets the better of a stronger opponent. It is an experience which Malory expects to be shared by both the exemplary knights about whom he is writing and the contemporary 'men of worshyp' among his first readers. What Malory does not add, but which may be implied, is that this inevitability that a knight be 'put to the worse' includes the likelihood that, whether winning or losing the contest, the knight experiences some form of physical trauma as a result.

Indeed, the *Morte Darthur* is full of often spectacularly bloody wounds. Sir Brascias slashes one opponent upon the forearm so 'that hys arme flowe into the felde', before riding against another and smiting 'hym on the shulder [so] that sholdir and arme flow unto the felde (23. 20-22). Elsewhere in the battle, Sir Griflet 'smote a knyght on the templis, that hede and helme wente of to the erthe', all as part of a battle which, Malory says, was 'passynge harde one bothe partyes' (23. 23-34). Extreme physical trauma, however, such as dismemberment and decapitation, rarely troubles the bodies of Malory's favourite knights. Whilst numerous enemies are subject to horrific maiming, the inevitable wounds realised upon the bodies of Malory's protagonists are approached differently.

Early in the *Morte*, two knights compete in a joust. One of these knights, King Pellinore, wounds his opponent, Sir Griflet, 'thorow the shelde and the lyffte syde, and brake the spere, that the truncheon stake in [Griflet's] body' (39. 23-5). This injury, which pierces the torso after penetrating both armour and shield, deviates from the pattern of wounding (targeting extremities) discussed above in other genres of medieval literature. In the *Morte*, this transfixing blow is immediately understood to be serious. Pellinore, 'passyng hevvy' with the expectation that the wound will prove fatal, takes Griflet back to Arthur's court, where 'passyng grete dole' is made over the imminent demise of a good knight (39. 27-32). 'But', Malory abruptly reveals, 'thorow good lechis [Griflet] was heled and saved' (39. 32-3). No details are given about the treatment which Griflet receives, nor does Malory specify for how long these 'good lechis' worked to repair Griflet's body. What is clear, however, is that it is exclusively through the work of *lechis* that Griflet is brought back from the brink of death.

*Leche* has a broad definition in Middle English, describing either a formal 'physician or surgeon for the body', or, more generally, 'one who saves another, [a] helper, protector, preserver, one who remedies evils'.<sup>108</sup> It is in this latter respect, Jeremy Citrome notes, that Jesus Christ was said to be the *leche* of human bodies by the twelfth-century surgeon, Roger

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<sup>108</sup> MED entry *leche* n. 3(a).

of Parma.<sup>109</sup> It is also in this sense that *leche* describes lay practitioners of medicine, particularly women, whose presence would not otherwise be implied by terms like *fysisyan*, which denotes a particular kind of medic.<sup>110</sup> Malory uses the term *leche* only five times in the *Morte*, and describes groups of these characters nine times across three different forms, *lechis*, *lechys*, and *leches*.<sup>111</sup> The more specific medical term *surgeon* is used three times, twice in the singular and once plural, while *lecheecraftte*, the applied knowledge of these practitioners, is used only twice.<sup>112</sup> In spite of this varied terminology, Malory's *lechis* perform uniform tasks in the text through which they repair the wounded bodies of Malory's knights. For the rest of this chapter, I will outline these duties, and argue for their importance in enabling the embodied practices of romance knighthood.

In carrying out this investigation, I will make use of Middle English surgery books popular during Malory's lifetime. Earlier medieval continental surgeons such as Lanfrank of Milan (d. 1306) and Guy de Chauliac (d. 1368), as well as English surgeons such as John Arderne (d. 1392), remained influential enough that vernacular translations of their work informed the practice of surgery at the time Malory was writing.<sup>113</sup> Late medieval English surgeons like John Bradmore also wrote accounts of their work which circulated widely, influencing the 'discourse community' of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English surgery.<sup>114</sup> I have found, however, that Lanfrank of Milan, Guy de Chauliac, and John Arderne are valuable not only for their discussions of surgical techniques, but for their reflections on who and what the *leche* was, and how he or she engaged with the patient.<sup>115</sup> In addition, the works of these three practitioners were among the most influential in late medieval England, having

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<sup>109</sup> Jeremy J. Citrome, *The Surgeon in Medieval English Literature* (London: Palgrave, 2006), p. 7. See also Karl Whittington, 'Picturing Christ as Surgeon and Patient in British Library MS Sloane 1977, *Mediaevalia*, 35 (2014), 83-115; Virginia Langum, "'The Wounded Surgeon": Devotion, Compassion and Metaphor in Medieval England', in *Wounds and Wound Repair*, pp. 269-90.

<sup>110</sup> Hannah Ingram discusses this in reference to Margaret Paston's medical expertise, which, Ingram argues, is presented throughout her letters to be opposition to that of the male physicians of the period. See, 'Pottes of Tryacle' and 'Bokes of Phisyke': The Fifteenth-Century Disease Management Practices of Three Gentry Families', *Social History of Medicine*, 32 (2018), 751-722. For a more general discussion of 'female leeches', see Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society*, pp. 177-90 (187).

<sup>111</sup> Tomomi Kato, *A Concordance to the Works of Thomas Malory* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1974), p. 1634: 'leches' (1), 'lechis' (6), and 'lechys' (2).

<sup>112</sup> Kato, p. 1651 ('lecheecraftte') and p. 1634 ('lechecraftte').

<sup>113</sup> For late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century continental surgeons in fifteenth-century vernaculars see Siraisi, pp. 153-87; Peter Murray Jones, 'Information and Science', in *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes*, pp. 101-107; Päivi Pahta and Irma Taavitsainen, 'Vernacularisation of Scientific and Medical Writing in its Sociohistorical Context', in *Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-22. For a good overview on the most widely translated surgeons in late medieval England, see Langum, pp. 273-4.

<sup>114</sup> S J. Lang, 'Sources and Resources: John Bradmore and the Case of the Bitten Man: A Tantalising Link Between Medieval Surgical Manuscripts', *Social History of Medicine* (2020), 1-19.

<sup>115</sup> I have selected the best available Middle English editions of these texts by using George Watson, *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature vol.1 600-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 691.

been reproduced numerous times in Middle English.<sup>116</sup> These texts provide a broader context for what happens to the wounded bodies of Malory's knights when they are brought before *lechis*.

Notably, the irregularity of references to medical practitioners in the *Morte*, particularly in contrast to the great frequency with which Malory's characters inflict and experience physical trauma, itself tells us that not all wounds warrant textual exposition, or, at least, not all wounds are *shown* to warrant it. In the *Morte*, the knight is most commonly either killed outright by a blow, such as in the dismembering attacks cited above, or suffers a multitude of bloody, but not necessarily deep cuts, which he presumably either tends to himself or has treated by a fellow knight or lady. The wounds remaining are those not immediately fatal but serious enough to demand medical attention. These are the wounds, I argue, that most problematise the relationship between wounded bodies and embodied knighthoods. Interestingly, these wounds are largely of the same sort: penetrating injuries such as Griflet suffered. What this means, but which has not been stressed enough in relation to wounding in the *Morte*, is that physical trauma is ordinarily either unambiguously fatal or nonfatal, while the *leche* enters only in those less-common cases when recovery from a wound becomes uncertain.

In another example, Sir Tristram, 'with a myghty stroke [...] smote sir Marhalte upon the helme suche a buffette that hit wente thorow his helme and thorow the coyffe of steele and thorow the brayne-panne' (299. 32-35). Again, the knight is wounded to the point of death by a blow that pierces multiple layers of armour, clothing, and flesh. Sir Marhalt, like Griflet, is taken back to court to either recover from or succumb to his wound. Once there, his wounds are examined by his friends, acting as *lechis*. 'Whan his hede was serched', however, 'a pyese of sir Trystrams swerde was therein founden' (300. 21-22). Unlike Griflet,

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<sup>116</sup> R.H. Robbins lists eight extant Middle English manuscript copies of Lanfrank, seven of de Chauliac, and eleven of Arderne, though not all of the Arderne manuscripts are exclusively in Middle English. See Russell Hope Robbins, 'Medical Manuscripts in Middle English', *Speculum*, 45.3 (1970), 393-415. The eight Middle English copies of Lanfrank are remarkably consistent, having been traced to a single 1380 translation, with the majority of copies being made throughout the fifteenth century. See: H. S. Bennett, 'Science and Information in English Writings of the Fifteenth Century', *The Modern Language Review*, 39.1 (1944), 1-8. All Middle English copies of Arderne were made after 1400, and Peter Murray Jones lists eight solely Middle English manuscripts of Arderne's work, across which four separate translations can be identified. See Peter Murray Jones 'Four Middle English Translations of John Arderne', in *Latin and Vernacular Studies in Late-Medieval Texts and Manuscripts*, ed. by A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), pp. 61-89. Four of the Arderne manuscripts share a single translation (c.1450), and it is these four manuscripts that Powers used in developing his edition, which I use in this chapter. For a discussion of the popularity and influence of these three surgeon-authors in Fifteenth-Century England, see Jones, 'Four Middle English Translations of John Arderne', and 'Medicine and Science', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. by Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 433-448; Linda Ehrsam Voigts, 'Scientific and Medical Books', in *Book Publication and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 345-402.

Marhalt cannot be saved, because, Malory tells us, this embedded piece of iron ‘myght never be had oute of his hede for no lechecraftte’ (300. 22-23). Medical practice, *lechecraftte*, is again instrumental in apprehending the wounded body of the knight, this time providing the measure whereby healing is shown to be impossible.

The wounds of Griflet and Marhalt are nearly identical in formula, although the bodily site of injury is crucially different. Each wound brings the knight’s body to the point of destruction, though in one case *leche*s manage to return the knight to health. In the case of Marhalt, his friends, rather than a *leche*, attempt to treat the wound; however, while this may be intended to explain the knight’s failure to recover, it is also arguable that the reference to *lechecraftte* implies either the eventual presence of a ‘formal’ *leche*, or else enough medical knowledge amongst Marhalt’s cohort that treatment should have been possible. In 1471, John Paston III (d. 1504)’s letter to his mother, Margaret Paston, written following his wounding at the Battle Barnet, describes the ‘lechecraftte’ and ‘fesyk’ with which he was treated, but similarly avoids mention of a specific *leche*.<sup>117</sup> This does not, of course, mean there was no *leche* in attendance.

The demands of the larger narrative also contribute to the outcome of any particular episode of *lechecraftte*. Sir Gawain suffers a wound nearly identical to the one that kills Marhalt, which ‘clave hys helme and the coyff of iron unto the hede’ (749. 24-5). Gawain, however, survives after being brought to court where a ‘leche [is] founde that he myght lyve’, for possibly no reason other than, this time, the knight is Gawain (750. 13-14). Yet, I argue, even these ambiguities speak to the ways in which transfixing wounds are characterised in the *Morte*. It is as if the uncertainty where such a wound begins and ends as it passes through metal, fabric, and flesh, distorts the text’s grasp of the wound, and any attempts made to heal it. Apparent in these examples of Griflet, Marhalt, and Gawain, is that even in such similar cases the practitioner cannot guarantee safe recovery, and, in the *Morte*, it is this very ambiguity that defines the circumstances in which the *leche* is called.

In accounting for why this kind of penetrating wound may introduce a tension between wounded and knightly bodies, one can look to late medieval English surgery books. One complicating factor of a blow that punches through both armour and clothing to pierce the body concerns the risk that the wound becomes contaminated with foreign matter. In a 1425 Middle English translation of his *Cyrrurgie*, Guy de Chauliac observes that if a thing ‘smyten’ into a wound ‘may nou3t be drawn oute’, the ‘flesche’ will eventually ‘bygnne to wyddre and be rotten’ (I. 188). The description marks a distinct contrast to the aesthetic of

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<sup>117</sup> *The Paston Letters A.D. 1422-1509*, Vol. V ed. by James Gairdner (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), pp. 102-103.

embodied knighthood, finely summarised by Citrome as a ‘discursive reiteration of the ideals of muscularity, seamlessness, and virtual enclosure’.<sup>118</sup> Rotten wounds, Guy notes, putrefy flesh, corrupt blood, and complicate recovery, often ending with fever and lingering sickness. Thus, in commingling the body with pieces fabric and metal, transfixing wounds do not unambiguously produce knightly bodies as did Arthur’s clean but bloody wounds from Accolon. On the contrary, these wounds threaten the knight with the multiple bodies of the sick man, producing corrupted bodies, feverish bodies, and even rotting bodies.

In 1409, Sir Edmund, earl of Kent, was wounded in the head by a crossbow bolt. Like Marhalt, Sir Edmund eventually died from this wound, but not before falling sick with what Walsingham describes as *putrefacto cerebro*: a rotting of the brain (II. 538). The *Morte*, I suggest, recognises the danger presented by this kind of physical trauma and the rotting bodies in which it could result. One sees this reflected in the terminology which Malory routinely employs when describing the work of the *leche*. Malory’s *lechis* do not explicitly close or heal wounds; rather they ‘serche’ them.<sup>119</sup> The Middle English *serche* both conveys the common meaning of exploring or examining a thing, and the more specific surgical process of probing a wound for embedded pieces harmful debris.<sup>120</sup> The *leche*, in this, does not only ‘save’ the knight’s body, but saves it from *becoming* an unknightly body: rotting, withered, corrupt.

Medieval surgeons developed extensive catalogues of tools and techniques necessary to *serche* wounds and extract (and examine) the debris, usually metal, fabric, or bone, which could cause putrefaction.<sup>121</sup> Michael McVaugh reproduces the questions that the French practitioner Henri de Mondeville (d. 1316) encouraged surgeons to ask themselves when treating this kind of wound. Among these questions are whether the object was barbed or poisoned, and whether the wounded person was in armour.<sup>122</sup> Guy de Chauliac, similarly, advises that additional incisions would often need to be made upon the body in order to expand wounds so that embedded objects could be completely removed (I. 182-89). One can see how a technique like this, though traumatic, may have saved a knight like Sir Griflet, whose torso may have been contaminated with pieces of clothing and armour, as well as with splinters from his opponent’s lance. In contrast, the *lebecraffite* brought to bear upon the

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<sup>118</sup> Citrome, *The Surgeon*, pp. 113-16.

<sup>119</sup> Kato, p. 1028: ‘serch’ (2) ‘serche’ (6), ‘serched’ (22) ‘serchid’ (1) are used almost exclusively to describe the treatment of wounds. The exceptions describe the search for loot amongst battlefield dead, or the knight’s search for weaponry.

<sup>120</sup> MED entry *serche* v. 6(a).

<sup>121</sup> See the *Cyurgie*, vol. I, p. 188 for a list of instruments and their application; and Siraisi, p. 155 for a general catalogue of surgical tools.

<sup>122</sup> Michael McVaugh, *The Rational Surgery of the Middle Ages* (Florence: Sismel Edizioni Del Galluzzo, 2006), p. 47.

wounds of Sir Marhalt had ultimately to navigate much more sensitive areas, the skull and brain. Guy de Chauliac conceded that some wounds, particularly in delicate parts of the body, could not be *serched*. Among these he notes a ‘wounde of þe brayne and his pannycles’, which, he said, in the majority of cases would prove ‘dedely’, as it does with Marhalt.

What does this mean for our understanding of physical trauma and embodied knighthood in the *Morte*? In the first instance, we see that that the equation between wounded and knightly bodies suggested by the Arthur-Accolon combat is not without complications. The romance knight could become *disembodied* and lost in the multiple bodies of the sick man, poisoning the knight’s best blood and putrefying his *faire* flesh. By managing the ambiguous, compromising wounds that bring knights to the brink of bodily corruption, Malory’s *lechis* perform a dramatic function. In Arthur’s war with Rome, Sir Kay is wounded ‘betwyxte the breste and the bowellys’ with a spear which, as with Sir Griflet, is broken and left embedded in his side (171. 32). When Arthur summons ‘lechis to seche hym sykerly’, Malory explains that they ‘founde nother lyvir nor lungys nother bowelles that were attamed’ (172. 12-13). Kay is then placed in a tent to recover and the narrative continues without him. It is clear, however, that Kay has been fantastically lucky.<sup>123</sup> Guy de Chauliac lists each of these organs as those apt to become untreatable and fatal. He notes: ‘I haue seyne smale woundes ben heled aboute þe lappes of þe lyver’, but ‘þai were nouȝt depe’, and that more often wounds that touch the liver have an adverse effect upon the ‘herte’, leading the wounded man to ‘perisse’ (I. 182). Similarly, ‘woundes of þe lunges [...] ben also incurable ofte tymes’, as too were bowel and bladder wounds, owing to contamination from ‘euel moystures’ and the fact that ‘medecynes may nouȝt be laide conuenably þerto’.

To include the detail that he did, Malory must have understood the significance of any potential damage to the organs he cites, and what this would have meant for Kay’s chances of recovery.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, that Malory offers no elaboration on either the severity of Kay’s trauma or the consequent relief at the *lechis*’ diagnosis, suggests that his audience, too, would have understood this implicit medical narrative without guidance. What is interesting, however, is that the precariousness of Kay’s wounds was not so apparent that Arthur could be shown to discern this without the presence of the *lechis*, whose only function in the text is to make their diagnosis and then vanish. Consequently, the mortal danger that

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<sup>123</sup> In the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, from which Malory takes this episode, Sir Kay does die, his ‘bewelles entamed’ by the injury. Kay instinctively recognises that the wound will prove fatal upon experiencing it, and Arthur summons a confessor rather than *lechis*. *King Arthur’s Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthure and Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ed. by Larry D. Benson and Edward E. Forster (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), lines 2175-2194.

<sup>124</sup> Scholars have argued for Malory’s practical acquaintance with wounds and their treatment. Lynch, pp. 73-4; Whetter, ‘Weeping, Wounds, and Worshup’, pp. 64-5; Field, *Life and Times*, pp. 105-26.

Kay has experienced, and the drama deriving from it, are articulated entirely through the presence of the *lechis*, through the mere fact that they are shown to be there, and the brief action they perform. Just as with Griflet, the *lechis* appear for the space of a single line, but their presence not only signals that this is a matter of life or death in which the outcome is uncertain, but also determines on which side of that divide the wounded body will come to rest.

In this, Malory's *lechis* are dramatic agents, used to articulate the severity and significance of wounds upon the knight's body. In addition, the *lechis* also enable narrative progression by conducting the cycle of wounding and healing through which Malory's narrative develops.<sup>125</sup> There can be no bleeding of 'best blood' or embodying of physical trauma without the *lechis* who render wounds safe and survivable. The *leche*, in this way, also contributes to the formulation of embodied knighthood, 'making' wounds that shape and define the knight's body instead of those that distort and dissolve it. Indeed, *Lechecraftte* describes a *craft*, which is to say a practice. I suggest that Malory's *lechis* should be understood as carrying out a crucial body technique or embodied practice ('*to serche*') which enables the ongoing construction of the knight's body-self. Kenneth Hodges argued that 'good knights' *transform* their injuries into the physical evidence of chivalric identity; however, he overlooks this crucial role of the *leche*. In demonstrating the danger of mistaking the *leche*'s contribution to the process whereby wounded bodies are transformed into knightly bodies, one can look again at the example of Griflet.

As outlined, Griflet's body is transfixed by a spear which remains embedded in his flesh. The danger of putrefaction and sickness mean that Griflet's embodiment *as* knight is in danger of becoming lost in the multiple bodies of the sick man. Even in this condition, however, Griflet's wound begins to positively inform his corporeal identity. King Pellinore, who gave Griflet the injury, observes: "He had a myghty herte! [...] If he myght lyve, he wolde preve a passyng good knyght" (39. 30-31) Yet, if Griflet is to incorporate this wound as a physical sign of heart and hardiness, he has first to survive it – '*if he myght lyve*', Pellinore says. It may appear obvious, but this qualifier reveals the most glaring oversight in many interpretations of the wounded bodies of the *Morte*. General critical opinion assumes that a wound is survivable and that the knight bears it alone, albeit through struggle, to his betterment. Yet whether a wound is fatal or nonfatal is, as I have shown, neither innate nor inevitable. Moreover, the process whereby a wounded body becomes a knightly body, rather than a sick or rotting body, does not, even for Malory, rest solely on the knight. For the

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<sup>125</sup> Andrew Lynch discusses the importance of this pattern to Malory's narrative, though without this emphasis on the *leche*, pp. 76-8.

penetrating wound to become part of the knight's body-self, it needs to be *searched*, and for that it needs the *leche*.

This is further stressed by the example of Tristram and Marhalt. Following Marhalt's fatal head wound, Tristram must justify his decision to wear the dead knight's armour. In doing so, Tristram distances himself from the act of killing, arguing instead that 'sir Marhalte dyed thorow false lechis', those who could not comprehensively *serche* the wound (596. 13-14). *Lechis*, it was observed, are those that 'save another', who protect, preserve, and remedy. Tristram merely did what any of Malory's knights is supposed to do: *make wounds*. It is the *leche*'s responsibility, on the other hand, to *serche* and secure those wounds. The failure of the *lechis* to do so in the case of Marhalt is, for Tristram, a transgressive betrayal of purpose that renders them 'false'. The inverse of this argument, however, which is apparent in the cases of Griflet, Gawain, and Kay, is that it is not, as Hodges argues, 'good knights' who transform wounds into badges of honour, but 'true' *lechis*.

This insight is valuable for considering the ways in which knightly identity is embodied in a Middle English romance like the *Morte*. Miri Rubin has observed that both 'heroic and traumatic' bodies and bodily experiences 'are constructed [...] never natural, never given, always made'.<sup>126</sup> It is fair to question, as regards the 'making' of the heroically wounded body of the knight, how much of this construction is the work of the knight, and how much relies upon the *leche*. As Gail Weiss notes, being embodied is not a 'private affair' but instead is 'mediated' by the body's interactions with other bodies.<sup>127</sup> In consequence, Weiss argues, embodiment relies not on corporeality – the single body – but on 'intercorporeality' and the coming together of many bodies, such as is the case with Malory's knights and *lechis*. There are different types of physical trauma in the *Morte*, and different forms of wounded bodies. The *leche*'s 'craft' limits the potential proliferation of wounded and sick bodies, and thus allows the knight's body to remain *his* own. This explains the transient presence of these characters in the text. The *leche*'s sudden appearance and disappearance reflects not only the hazardous borderland occupied by the wounded body, but also the fleeting authority which the *leche* holds over the knight's body and self. The knight's embodiment thus becomes bound to the *leche*'s own, as if both knight and *leche* intercorporeally cooperate in the creation of the wounded bodies of romance knighthood. In the following two sections, I will examine the intercorporeality occurring between knights and *lechis* in more detail. There are additional aspects of the romance knight's experience of a

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<sup>126</sup> Rubin, 'Person in the Form', p. 100.

<sup>127</sup> Weiss, *Body Images*, pp. 5-6.



wound, and the processes through which it is reified within the body-self, in which Malory's *lechis* prove crucial.

### **Homosociality, Healing Spaces, and the 'Knight as *Leche*'**

The healing narratives of the *Morte* are not confined to the act of *serching* wounds. In this part of the chapter, I want to consider what follows this, and examine the significance of how and where knights occupy their bodies while their wounds close. Acknowledging that his knights need time to recuperate is a priority for Malory, who commonly specifies a period of rest during which the knight becomes bodily *hole*, or fully healed. A wounded Arthur finds a 'good man and a grete leche' who 'serched the kynges woundis and gaff hym good salves', before having him rest for 'thre dayes', by which time the king's wounds were 'well amended' (43. 8-10). Similarly, after Sir Lambegus's wounds are treated, Malory explains how 'hit was longe or he was hole, but so at the laste he recoverde' (340. 11). Both Jill Mann and Andrew Lynch have noted that Malory's preoccupation with 'wholeness' encompasses both the individual body and the body politic.<sup>128</sup> Thus, Lynch notes, as the *Morte* progresses, the wounding of Malory's protagonists becomes more frequent and takes longer to heal, thereby signifying the growing dissolution of the Round Table.

Here, I will specify in which ways Malory uses wounded and whole bodies to express sentiments about the broader fraternity of his knights. I will stress the homosocial potential of both wounded bodies and the environments in which they become *hole*. Homosociality refers to bonds between any members of the same sex; however, it is most often used when formulating the dynamic of male friendships.<sup>129</sup> In this regard, it has proven a useful tool for analysing communities of knights in Middle English romance.<sup>130</sup> Homosociality has also been connected to homoeroticism, most famously by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who uses the term 'homosocial desire' to indicate the ways in which homosocial practises both occlude and rely on homosexuality.<sup>131</sup> While I recognise the relevance of this approach, particularly in developing an awareness of how queer bodies form embodied knighthoods, my application of homosociality is different. Here, I understand homosociality in terms of the

<sup>128</sup> Mann, p. 322; Lynch, pp. 77-8.

<sup>129</sup> For an overview, see Nils Hammarén and Thomas Johansson, 'Homosociality: in Between Power and Intimacy', *SAGE* (2014), 1-11.

<sup>130</sup> See, for example, Rachel Moss, "'And much more I am sorryat for my good knyghts": Fainting, Homosociality, and Elite Male Culture in Middle English Romance', *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 42 (2016), 101-13. Ying-hsiu Lu, 'King Arthur: Leadership, Masculinity, and Homosocial Manhood', in *Perceiving Power in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Francis So (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 85-101.

<sup>131</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

intercorporeality described above, as a means of conceptualising the way knightly bodies are drawn together in practices of wounding and wound-repair. There is a ‘desire’ at work here, but it refers to the bonds of desire that unite individual body-selves into one body-group defined by martial and medical practices. Indeed, because of the strong ties between the male body and gender, particularly in the Middle Ages, homosocialisation is often read in relation to physical behaviours.<sup>132</sup> In the *Morte*, for instance, the primary vehicle sustaining the homosocial network of the Round Table is combat.<sup>133</sup> Good knights and worthy men, as we have seen, are those that make wounds upon one another’s bodies. It is my contention, however, that the *lebecraffte* following violence, in addition to violence itself, marks a similar homosocial practice by which the bodies and relationships of knights are organised and defined.

For example, after Sir Gawain is wounded during the grail quest, Malory describes how ‘a leche was founde that he myght lyve, and to be hole within a moneth’ (750. 13-14). During this month, Gawain stays in a fortress with Sir Ector, alongside whom he has been travelling. Though Gawain encourages Ector to continue without him, Ector refuses. ‘Thus’, Malory explains, ‘Gawayne and Ector abode together, for Sir Ector would not away till Gawayne were nyghe hole’ (750. 14-16) For Gawain and Ector, this physical recuperation does not represent a period of idleness, but another form of embodied practice – a thing which the knight does *with* his body. This practice is productive, as the process whereby Gawain’s body grows stronger and becomes *hole* mirrors a corresponding strengthening and affirmation of the bond between the two knights. In this way, the wounded body supplies a locus – one not purely metaphorical – for the fraternity of Malory’s knights as they cohere and become *hole*.

This is especially the case for knights who, unlike Gawain and Ector, do not begin as allies. After Sir Accolon has nearly killed Arthur, for example, the knights travel together in search of *lechis*. ‘And whan they were com to the abbey’, Malory says, Arthur ‘lete fecch lechis and serchid his woundis and Sir Accolons bothe’ (117. 19-20). As Dorsey Armstrong notes, combat regularly makes more friends than enemies in the *Morte*, as if in breaking down each other’s bodies, warring knights diminish the grounds for combat itself.<sup>134</sup> In addition, I argue that it is with the reconstitution of wounded bodies during the application of *lebecraffte* that

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<sup>132</sup> Richard Zeikowitz discusses homosociality in the context of chivalry and violence in his *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), pp. 18-25.

<sup>133</sup> See Patricia Ingham, “Masculine Military Unions: Brotherhood and Rivalry in *The Avowing of King Arthur*,” *Arthuriana*, 6 (1996), 25-44.

<sup>134</sup> Dorsey Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory’s Morte d’Arthur* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), pp. 33-44.

former opponents most often recuperate *into* friends. It is important, for instance, in the case of Arthur and Accolon, that these former enemies have their wounds *serched* by the same *lechis*. These are ‘Arthur’s woundis and Sir Accolons bothe’, as if the *lechis* are repairing the same wounds, upon the same body. The *leche*’s location, whether abbey or outpost, thus becomes the homosocial setting in which both the wounded bodies and violent enmities of knights can be reknit and resolved.

Roberta Gilchrist has written on healing spaces in the Middle Ages, highlighting the ways in which physical space governed social interactions and the classification of bodies and identities.<sup>135</sup> Gilchrist notes that medieval healing at times transpired in extramural settings, at topographically liminal spaces. This is often the case in the *Morte*, where wounded knights do not convalesce at hospitals, but hermitages and the other refuges encountered by errant knights.<sup>136</sup> For Gilchrist, topographic liminality mirrors the transitional identity of the sufferer, struggling to regain balance between what, in this context, might be termed sick and *hole* body-selves. A lively historiography has developed around the structural and topographical spaces used for medical treatment in the late Middle Ages. Irina Metzler, for example, criticises Gilchrist for failing to make the distinction between liminal (*on* the border) and marginal (*beyond* the border).<sup>137</sup> Sethina Watson’s work on the placement of medieval hospitals, ‘on the busiest roads, beside every middling town, open to even the lowliest lay person’, similarly complicates designations of medical spaces as topographically liminal.<sup>138</sup> The potential of healing spaces to reclassify bodies and selves, however, remains useful for understanding the knight’s recuperation in terms of homosociality and embodied practice. This can be examined further in Middle English historical writing.

Bourchier’s *Cronycle* describes a mid-fourteenth century battle, in which Sir Thomas Berkley of England, a ‘yong lusti knyght’, is pierced ‘through both thyes’ by the squire Johan de Helenes (I. 377). Sir Thomas is left badly wounded and, the chronicle explains, ‘coude nat

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<sup>135</sup> See Gilchrist, ‘Medieval Bodies in the Material World: Gender, Stigma, and the Body’, in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, pp. 43-61. Gilchrist has since expanded her work on medieval space, discussing how individual experiences, emotions, and memory inform the status of particular ‘places’ (which she distinguishes from more neutral ‘spaces’). See, for instance, *Sacred Heritage*, pp. 145-53.

<sup>136</sup> This is not the case exclusively, as I will attempt to show. It is the case, however, that the archaic and Romance world which Malory is describing is one partly characterised by the assumption that hermitages were reliable places of relief for travellers: ‘there were non ermytis in tho dayes but that they had bene men of worship [...] [that] refreysshed people that were in distresse’ (XVIII.813.30-33). Malory’s contemporaries would have recognised the association between open air and good health. See, for example, Carole Rawcliffe, ‘Delectable Sightes and Fragrant Smelles: Gardens and Health in Late Medieval and Early Modern England’, *Garden History*, 36 (2008), 3-21.

<sup>137</sup> See ‘Liminality and Disability: Spatial and Conceptual Aspects of Physical Impairment in Medieval Europe’, in *Medicine and Space: Body, Surroundings and Borders in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. by Patricia A. Baker, Han Nijdam, and Karine van ’t Land (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 273-296 (274).

<sup>138</sup> See ‘The Origins of the English Hospital’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 16 (2006), 75-94 (76).

*helpe* hymselfe', and so needed a *leche*.<sup>139</sup> In his helpless state, Sir Thomas is taken prisoner by Johan, who reassures the wounded knight: "I shall bring you in *savegarde* and I shall se that you be healed of your hurt". Johan is fulfilling his chivalric obligation to treat his captive well, and, in doing so, he becomes Sir Thomas' *leche* by accepting responsibility for his care. Johan 'drewe forthe the the swerde out of [Thomas]' thyes and the wounde was opyn'. This having been done, 'he wrapped and bounde the wounde and sette [Thomas] on his horse'. Like Arthur and Accolon, the two men then travel together, resting for 'more than fyftene days' at a nearby location in order that Johan can find 'remedy' for Sir Thomas' 'hurt'. Once Sir Thomas' body has been 'somwhat amended', Johan arranges a litter 'and so brought [Thomas] at his ease to his house'. The chronicle uses very similar language to that found in the *Morte* when explaining that the two men lodge together for 'more than a yere' until Sir Thomas's body was 'perfetly hole'.

As in the *Morte*, the *leche*craft by which bodies are categorised as either wounded or *hole*, here achieves a homosocialisation in which knightly identities and allegiances, as much as physical conditions, shift and are reclassified. This process relies upon the intercorporeal exchange between two body-selves, wounded body and *leche*, and the practices they each perform before and upon the other. Notable in this case, however, is how 'unfixed' or, indeed, how *errant* the healing space becomes. During battle, in transit, and finally at Johan's residence – these locations do not conform to Gilchrist's model of liminal sites of healing. Rather, the liminality of this episode responds to the shifting relationship of the two men, Johan's dual status as both squire and *leche*, and the ways in which the wounded body of the knight, not the environment itself, becomes the locus for healing. That is to say, here, it is not the healing space that classifies the body, but the body that *reclassifies* and *makes space* for healing.

We can explore this further by examining another episode from the *Morte*. Sir Launcelot, much as Ector did with Gawain, remains with the young knight La Cote Male Tayle after the latter is badly wounded by Sir Plenoryus. Malory describes how the knights: 'reposed them [...] unto the tyme that Sir La Cote Male Tayle was hole of hys woundis' (375. 6-7). This is typical, but Malory then goes on to observe that, while recovering, the knights 'had myry chere and good reeste and many good gamys, and there were many fayre ladyis' (375. 8-9). Here, recuperation takes place within Plenoryus' tower, which is rewritten as a space for healing and homosocial bonding. Indeed, most apparent in this episode is how strongly Malory stresses the homosocial atmosphere of the healing space in which the fraternity between this group of knights is formalised.

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<sup>139</sup> My emphasis. I refer to the definition of *leche* given above, as 'helper, protector, preserver'.

This is expressed through a series of additional details that establish the ways in which the tower has appropriated, or else been elided with, not only the medical environment but the setting of the Arthurian court. The knights indulge in revelry, games, and, crucially, do so in the company of women. Yet, in spite of this, the tower remains a healing space: a place where the knights not only take *myry chere*, but also *good reste*.<sup>140</sup> Within this court-like setting, then, the wounded body of La Cote Male Tayle recuperates while his bond with Launcelot and Plenoryus develops, each becoming more *hole*. It is important, too, that this coalescence takes place before an audience of other members of courtly society. La Cote Male Tayle's wounded body in this way not only *makes space* in which to heal, but attracts a pseudo-court setting in which he, Launcelot, and Plenoryus can be seen to engage in the embodied practices of knighthood. This means that even when la Cote Male Tayle's body is in the healing space, it remains the dominant agent, reclassifying the setting by which, elsewhere, the body itself is reclassified.

It is also important that, here, much as with Johan and Sir Thomas, it is Sir Plenoryus, acting as *leche*, who takes responsibility for La Cote Male Tayle's care. Plenoryus, Malory explains, 'toke [La Cote Male Tayle] up in hys armys and ledde hym into hys towre' (373. 12-13). Once there, Plenoryus 'made to serche hym and to stop hys bledynge woundys' (373. 14-15). This instance of a knight performing the body techniques of the *leche* for another knight further stresses the homosocial attraction of wounded bodies in the *Morte*. Richard Zeikowitz examines the 'homosocial intimacy' involved when one knight clothes another during the dubbing ritual. 'Is it not possible', Zeikowitz queries 'that the dresser feels brotherly affection toward the novice knight as he touches his body? Might the novice knight also feel affection and gratitude toward the experienced knight?'<sup>141</sup> This is a valuable parallel for thinking about the homosocial dynamic involved in the treatment of wounds. Indeed, the physical intimacy necessitated by *serching* wounds and staunching blood is arguably so much more intense, and thus more apt to invoke affection of the kind Zeikowitz discusses.

Nancy Siraisi has discussed forms of surgery understood and employed by knights and men-at-arms in the Middle Ages.<sup>142</sup> Guy de Chauliac referred to the 'Teutonic knights'

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<sup>140</sup> Good cheer was itself thought to promote the body's natural heat, prolonging the lifespan and fostering good health. See David Tomíček, 'Mental Health in Bohemian Medical Writings of the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Centuries', in *Mental Health, Spirituality, and Religion in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 464-479. In the late medieval English context, Philippa Maddern discusses the widespread understanding that physical health corresponded to merrymaking and mood. See 'It Is Full Merry in Heaven': The Pleasurable Connotations of 'Merriment' in Late Medieval England', in *Pleasure in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Naama Cohen Hanegbi and Piroska Nagy (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 21-38.

<sup>141</sup> Zeikowitz, pp. 168-69.

<sup>142</sup> Siraisi, pp. 76-79.

custom of treating wounds with oil, wood, cabbage leaves, and holy words (I. 10).<sup>143</sup> Bouchier's *Cronycle* evidences this form of *leche* during a Deed of Arms between two squires, French and English, in 1330 (III. 189-90). During the combat, the English squire, Nicholas Clifford, struck his opponent, Johan Boucinell, on the chest with his spear, with the tip glancing off Boucinell's harness and sliding 'up to the gorget of the mayle', where it stuck 'into his throte' (III. 191). Boucinell's 'orgonall vayne' was severed and Clifford's spear shattered, with its head becoming embedded 'in the squiers necke'. In their haste to help him, Boucinell's companions removed the spearhead, at which the squire, 'without any worde speakyng [...] felle downe deed'. Interestingly, the *Cronycle* observes that Clifford became frustrated by this, explaining: 'he had certayne words to have staunched [Johan], that wolde have holpen'.

It is unclear whether these were healing words of the kind discussed by Guy de Chauliac; however, that Clifford possessed both the instinct and, from his perspective, knowledge to staunch bleeding suggests patterns of *leche* amongst knights. Again, the willingness of one knight to heal his opponent's body is important, particularly given that Clifford and Boucinell's combat had been the result of a personal disagreement. In this, one identifies a homosocial bond uniting the two men which is greater than their personal and factional divisions. This bond, crucially, is articulated entirely through the practices of the squire's bodies as they wound and attempt to heal one another. The suggestion in this episode that Clifford, unlike Boucinell's own men, understood that removing the spearhead would expose the squire to rapid blood loss and death is particularly interesting. It is as if Clifford held more intimate knowledge concerning his enemy's body than his enemy's friends, and a greater right (or responsibility) to repair that body. Here, homosociality does not only describe a chivalric fraternity, but the more complex and intimate desire each man feels for the other's body, which he is compelled to both hurt and to help.

Late medieval knights and squires thus understood techniques whereby the wounded body could be stabilised and staunched. By the most basic definition of a *leche*, I argue that men like Thomas Clifford, willing and able to *help*, become momentary *lehis* while doing so. The *leche*, however, can heal anyone, whereas the knights of medieval literature often only heal other members of the chivalric community. In other genres of medieval literature, such as romance, this exclusivity with which knights become *lehis* for other knights is both more pronounced and more enigmatic. In the *Morte*, for instance, Sir Launcelot staunches the

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<sup>143</sup> For an examination of the efficacy of healing words in medieval medicine see Louise Bishop, *Words, Stones, Herbs: The Healing Word in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007). Bishop discusses this passage from Guy de Chauliac (92-3). For healing charms in Middle English literature see Lea Olsen, 'Charms in Medieval Memory', in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 59-88.

wound which he inflicts upon Sir Belleus (196. 27-28), while Sir Priamus and Sir Gawain 'lette clense theire woundys with colde whyght wyne' and 'anoynte them' with balms 'over and over' until they are again *hole* (180. 19-21). Malory's knights at times employ their own methods and vocabularies of healing. Gawain's wounds, for instance, which Priamus heals with ointments, are set apart from conventional *lebecraffte*, with Priamus telling Gawain 'all the barbers of Bretayne shall not thy blood staunce' (178. 1-2). Gawain's wounded body, it seems, can only be healed by Priamus, whose body made the wounds in the first place.<sup>144</sup> The equation governing who can *give* a bodily hurt and thus who can *take it* away is again shown to be more ideological than medical. Similarly, when Launcelot *serches* Sir Melyot's wounds, he performs this action 'with a swerde' and a cloth taken from the body of a dead knight (214. 29-30). No *leche* could have done this; it is a peculiarly 'knightly' healing.

The most famous instance of wound treatment in the *Morte* is Sir Launcelot's healing of Sir Urry. In this episode, a Hungarian knight, Sir Urry, is brought to Arthur's court with seven wounds, 'thre on the hede, and thre on hys body, an one uppon hys lyffte honde' (861. 12-13). The wounds are supernaturally cursed: at 'one tyme [they] fester and another tyme [they] blede', so that Urry's body 'shulde never be hole' (861. 17-18). These are not 'clean' wounds of the kind that show prowess; Urry's trauma is a putrefying *disembodiment* of his body-self as a knight. Malory stresses this by noting that, when Arthur 'loked uppon' Urry, he 'thought he was a full lykly man *whan he was hole*' (862. 32-3). The knightly body that Urry *once was* is thus discernible but is being lost to the festering, bleeding body. This is a very fine illustration of the way which illness prompts multiple bodies in the sufferer. Tellingly, the only remedy by which Urry's embodiment *as* knight can be restored requires that his wounds be 'serched' by the 'beste knyght of the worlde' (861. 18). Again, an ideological magnetism compels the wounded body of a knight toward other knights for healing.

This brings Urry to Arthur's court at the Feast of Pentecost, where 'a hondred knyghtes and ten serched Sir Urryes woundis' (866. 7). Here, as in other healing narratives discussed above, the space chosen to restore Urry's body is not one that naturally conforms to ideas of liminality. Arthur's court, particularly during festival time, is the centre of this world. Any liminality here responds instead to the wounded body, and to how Urry's suppurating, permanently impermanent body dissolves a chivalric centre into a place where a hundred knights become *lechis* who *serche* wounds. In this, the Urry episode typifies the homosocial attraction of wounded bodies. Nearly every knight in Arthur's kingdom places

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<sup>144</sup> Just as Priamus *anoyntes* Gawain with ointments derived from the water of 'Paradyse', Gawain, in turn, has Priamus baptised (180.16). As Hodges notes, the exchange of wounds and waters between these two knights creates a Christian community. See 'Wounded Masculinity', p. 26. For religion and conversion in this episode, see Frank Grady, *Representing Righteous Heathens in Late Medieval England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 109-13.

his hands inside Urry's wounds, thereby incorporating or 'intercorporealizing' their fraternity *into* Urry's wounded body and the project of making it *hole*. In addition, because of the terms of Urry's curse, the knight who can close the wounds will be recognised as *beste knyght* of the Round Table. For the succession of named knights who, Malory says, 'assayed' Urry's wounded body, 'to *serche*' thus becomes an embodied practice not dissimilar to prowess (863. 11).

The culmination of these ideas comes with Lancelot, who is the last to make the attempt and is thus apprehensive that, in *serching* the wounds, he might eclipse over a hundred of his peers. "Ye take hit wronge", Arthur tells him, "for ye shall nat do hit for no presumpcion, but for to beare us felyshyp, insomuche as ye be a fellow of the Round Table" (867. 3-5). The healing of Urry is thus presented, like any of the individual deeds of physical prowess undertaken by Arthur's knights, as an invigoration of the broader homosocial network of the Round Table. In placing his hands in Urry's open wounds, Lancelot will unite himself, the wounded body, and the Table, embodying the collective prowess of the entire kingdom. Lancelot prayed to God, then 'ransaked the thre woundis' on Urry's head, which at once reknit 'as they had bene hole a seven yere'; then he 'serched hys body of the othir woundis and they healed'; before finally he 'serched hys honde, and anone hit fayre healed' (867. 27-33). In a quick succession of physical gestures – raising his hands in prayer before plunging them into Urry's wounds – Lancelot makes Urry *hole*, returning his knightly body to him.

This is one of the most discussed and debated episodes in the *Morte*, not least as it is thought to be original to Malory.<sup>145</sup> The role of Christianity is undoubtedly a factor here, with much scholarly interest concerning the dynamic between spiritual and physical prowess, and whether the incident marks Lancelot's divine redemption following his failure to achieve the Grail.<sup>146</sup> D. Thomas Hanks Jr., for instance, calls this 'the most straightforwardly Christian event in the *Morte*', with Urry in effect being healed *by God through* Lancelot.<sup>147</sup> Conversely, C. David Benson sees Lancelot's 'miracle' as 'purely physical'.<sup>148</sup> My emphasis here is on the

<sup>145</sup> See, Stephen Atkinson, 'Malory's "Healing of Sir Urry": Lancelot, the Earthly Fellowship, and the World of the Grail', *Studies in Philology*, 78 (1981), 341-352.

<sup>146</sup> For a discussion of these competing elements see Raluca Radulescu, "'Now I Take uppon Me the Adventures to Seke of Holy Thynges": Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood,' in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 285-295; for the role of prayer and religious allegory respectively, see J. Moore, 'Outward Seeming: Lancelot's Prayer and the Healing of Sir Urry in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, *Arthuriana*, 24 (214), 3-20; and Kenneth Hodges, 'Haunting Pieties: Malory's Use of Chivalric Christian "Exempla" after the Grail,' *Arthuriana* 17 (2007), 28-48.

<sup>147</sup> D. Thomas Hanks Jr., "'All maner of good love comyth of God": Malory, God's Grace, and Noble Love', in *Malory and Christianity: Essays on Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur*, ed. by D. Thomas Hanks Jr. and Janet Jesmok (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), pp. 9-28 (16).

<sup>148</sup> Benson, p. 229.



role of the body and intercorporeality, and I favour an approach similar to Benson's. In this episode, the radical affinity which one knight has for the wounded body of another is writ large, becoming as Catherine Batt says 'an ambivalent celebration of the redemptive by means of the ritual deployment of chivalric embodiment'.<sup>149</sup>

Launcelot is the best knight *of the world* – of the bodies and flesh of Arthur's secular kingdom. Like the examples above, Launcelot's supreme physical ability to *make* wounds here corresponds to the miraculous prowess needed to take them away. Galahad, as a contrary example, *is* a knight for whom spiritual prowess enables miraculous healing during the *Sankegreal*. Galahad, as Karen Cherewatuk says, is 'so perfect that he bores readers', he 'embodies the Grail's values' and his healing is a product of his virginity – his rejection of flesh.<sup>150</sup> Launcelot, on the other hand, for better (as in this episode) and worse, is a knight who embodies the values of the body. Indeed, as Lynch points out, this episode appears deliberately contrived to enable Launcelot's 'particular version' of Galahad's miracles.<sup>151</sup> Upon realising his success in healing Urry, Launcelot 'wepte, as he had bene a chyld that had ben beatyn' (868. 1-2). The knight's tears are often cited as signifying either a newfound humility, divine forgiveness or chastisement.<sup>152</sup> Here, I see them as a reminder that Launcelot is *a body*, not so far removed from the leaking putrescence of Urry's hitherto perennially bleeding wounds. Launcelot's mastery is, in turn, *of the body*. It is crucial that his 'miracle' of healing extends only as far as the wounded body of one who, like Launcelot, was an 'adventurys knyght' who did prowess 'in all placis' (861. 4)

Thus, if there is a redemption in this episode, it is of the body chivalric, collectively and individually. This is emphasised by the miraculous refiguration of Urry's embodiment as a knight, with Malory noting 'there were feaw bettir made knyghtes [...] for he was passingly well made and bygly' (868. 6-8). "I felte myselffe never so lusty" Urry says, and then proves this by coming joint-first in a tournament which Arthur stages, as if to provide opportunity for Urry to again *be* his body after so many years languishing in (or *as*) his wounds (868. 10-11). The healing of Urry's body thus becomes a celebration of embodiment – of knightly

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<sup>149</sup> Catherine Batt, *Malory's Morte Darthur: Remaking Arthurian Tradition. Series: The New Middle Ages*. (London: Palgrave, 2002), p. xxiii.

<sup>150</sup> Karen Cherewatuk examines the relationship between Launcelot and Galahad along these lines, in 'Born-Again Virgins and Holy Bastards: Bors and Elayne and Lancelot and Galahad', *Arthuriana*, 11 (2001), 52-64 (56-7).

<sup>151</sup> Lynch, p. 45.

<sup>152</sup> Thomas Hanks Jr summarises Launcelot's tears as 'the mixture of awe, wonder, gratitude, and relief [...] his prayers have been answered, though he has not been vindicated', pp. 17-18 (17); J. Moore similarly explains Launcelot's weeping by observing that 'despite his external appearance as the greatest knight, he recognizes he has failed the standards of the spiritual knighthood', p. 16.

bodies and all the things they can do.<sup>153</sup> Even though all but one of Arthur's knights 'fails' in healing Urry, their failure is no greater than that of the 'losers' in a more typical tournament. Whenever physical prowess is performed, knighthood and, as Arthur says, *feblyshyp*, wins. In this, the Urry episode unites several of the themes present in this part of the chapter. In particular, the ways in which knights exert control over each other's bodies by becoming *lechis*, and the corresponding physical prowess by which individual and communal bodies are opened and closed, split and restored. As Csordas notes, embodiment includes the process whereby 'meaning is taken into or upon the body'.<sup>154</sup> We see this with the portrayal of wounded bodies in the *Morte*, the purpose of which is not simply to *make* meaning upon the body, but, in addition, to make the body itself that which is most meaningful for Malory's knights. As Lynch says, 'courtesy, humility, and faith in God' are, for knights like Launcelot, 'adjuncts' to the body and prowess.<sup>155</sup>

### **'As a servant to his lord': A Revised Dynamic between Knights and *Lechis***

So far I have explored the ways in which the wounded body becomes the locus for changes which shape not only individual but fraternal embodiments in the *Morte*. Episodes like Launcelot's healing of Sir Urry not only celebrate the chivalric body (and body politic), but celebrate the knight himself – epitomised in Launcelot – as the core arbiter of knightly bodies, both making wounds and making them *hole*. Previously in this chapter, however, I have also stressed the ways in which knightly embodiment depends on the *leche*, by whose craft the more ambiguous properties of certain wounded bodies are managed and made safe. In this part of the chapter, I want to further contrast these two perspectives by examining some of the ways in which the dynamic between knights and *lechis* works to challenge the typical embodied experience of romance knighthood. To begin, I will discuss the ways in which the *leche* must at times alienate the knight's embodied experience in order to make him *hole*.

In the latter portions of the *Morte*, Sir Launcelot is wounded 'thorow the shyld into the syde, and the speare brake and the hede leffte styll in the syde' (810. 1-2). Like the other transfixing wounds of the *Morte* discussed above, this injury requires treatment by a *leche*. Notably, the *leche* of this episode is given a name, Sir Bawdwyn, who is said to have been 'somtyme [...] a full noble knyght', but is now 'a full noble surgeon and a good leche' (812. 7-

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<sup>153</sup> Lynch discusses this, noting 'though the whole Urré story is not specifically of fighting, its structure and discourse remained centred on knightly prowess', pp. 44-46 (45).

<sup>154</sup> Csordas, 'The Body as Representation', p. 20.

<sup>155</sup> Lynch, p. 45.

8). Sir Bawdwyn might be read as another example of the knight *as leche*; however, Bawdwyn is no longer physically active as a knight, and is presented foremost as a medical practitioner. Following Bawdwyn's *lecheecraftte*, Launcelot, Malory says, 'wexed bygge and lyght', so much so that he prepares to compete in a tournament (821. 31-32). "I fele myself resonably bygge and stronge", Launcelot says (822. 2-3).

Here, Launcelot is not only articulating the lived experience of his physical trauma, but is actively shaping that experience as a form of embodied practice. As Frank suggests, 'narrating' illness restores the body's familiarity with itself – that which has been disrupted during injury or disease.<sup>156</sup> Launcelot is in effect saying: 'I am feeling *like myself* again', with that 'self' being inseparable from a *bygge* and *stronge* body. Launcelot's refamiliarization with his body-self continues when the knight 'thought to assay hymselff uppon horsebacke' and so judge 'whether he myght welde hys armour and speare for his hurte or nat' (822. 14-16). Unfortunately, Launcelot's horse, like the knight himself, has been idle for over a month, in which time it has grown restless. While attempting to bring the animal under control, Launcelot 'strayned hymselff so straytly [...] that the bottom of hys wounde braste both within and withoute' (822. 25-7). Bleeding heavily, Launcelot cries: "Help! For I am com unto myne ende!", before losing consciousness (822. 30).

This chapter has shown how multiple bodies can result from injury in medieval literature. This episode might be read as another example of this, illustrating how Launcelot's embodied practice *as knight* (armed, on horseback) is contradicted by his simultaneous experience as a wounded body. Indeed, Malory shortly reintroduces Launcelot's *leche*, Bawdwyn, noting that the *leche* 'seyde but lityll, but wyte you well he was wroth' (823. 7-8). Bawdwyn must begin treatment of Launcelot's wounded body again. This time, however, Sir Bawdwyn addresses Launcelot, remarking: "youre harte and youre currayge woll never be done untyll youre laste day! But ye shall do now be my counceyle [...] sir, ye shall be hole, so that ye woll be governed by me." (823. 22-28). In this, Bawdwyn imposes his own perspective on the narrative of Launcelot's wound. As Frank notes, the 'embodied stories' which chart injury and recovery are both personal and communal, shaped by the expectations of others and how they perceive the 'body, pain, health, strength, etc'.<sup>157</sup> Importantly, one notes a divergence in these perspectives. While Launcelot's embodied narrative is that of a knight, Bawdwyn's presence in the text more firmly limits Launcelot's experience to that of one not yet *hole*.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, p. 2.

<sup>157</sup> Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>158</sup> For the medical narratives of medieval surgeons, see Peter Murray Jones, 'The Surgeon as Story-Teller', *Poetica*, 72 (2009), 77-91; and Marion Turner, 'Illness Narratives in the Later Middle Ages: Arderne, Chaucer, and Hoccleve', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 46.1 (2016), 61-87.

Miri Rubin has discussed the overlapping discourses which bodies ‘lived between’ during the Middle Ages.<sup>159</sup> We saw this in chapter one, when examining the ways in which the body-self of knight overlapped with the young body of the medieval lifecycle. Medical knowledge or *lebecraffte*, such as is practised by Bawdwyn, represents another discourse shaping medieval perceptions of the body, producing another body for Launcelot to *be*. Deborah Lupton has argued that this ‘medicalised body’ has historically been recast as ‘an object to be prodded, tested, and examined’.<sup>160</sup> During medical encounters, the individual – now ‘*patient*’ – must forgo jurisdiction over his or her body, and, as expressed by Bawdwyn, be *governed* instead by the practitioner. Malory emphasises these competing visions for Launcelot’s embodiment when juxtaposing Launcelot, who *feels himself* strong enough to be armed and horsed – to *be* the body he is used to being – with Sir Bawdwyn, who is shown the woods, seeking ‘diverse erbys’ to continue Launcelot’s treatment (822. 11-12).<sup>161</sup> Bawdwyn thus prepares to treat the passive body of a patient while Launcelot readies the active body of a knight. In this way, a tension emerges between Launcelot’s multiple bodies.

Fernando Salmón has shown that one of the medieval surgeon’s duties involved undertaking the kind of negotiation which Bawdwyn here enters into with Launcelot.<sup>162</sup> Treatment, Salmón suggests, relied on the surgeon’s ability to convincingly and authoritatively communicate the ‘medical body’ at the expense of the ‘experienced body’ of the patient. This need to master the sufferer is well-supported by Middle English surgery books. Guy de Chauliac, for example, says of the ‘pacient’ or ‘sike man’ that he must ‘triste wel on the leche’, and be made to understand that only if he is ‘obedient [...] may he be heled’ (I. 13). This power dynamic is so crucial to good *lebecraffte* that de Chauliac emphasises it by arguing that the patient should ‘be obedient to the leche as a servant to his loorde’ (I. 184). This is the very spirit in which Bawdwyn addresses Launcelot, over whose body he explicitly reasserts his rule. The development of a new dynamic between Launcelot and his *leche* is not confined to speech, either. In the imagery of Launcelot’s over-eager horse, Malory

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<sup>159</sup> See, Rubin, “The Body, Whole and Vulnerable, in Fifteenth-Century England”, in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace, Medieval Cultures, 9 (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 19-28.

<sup>160</sup> Deborah Lupton, *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease, and the Body in Western Societies* (London: Sage, 2016), p. 26

<sup>161</sup> Though this glimpse of Bawdwyn searching the woods near his hermitage for herbs is brief, audiences would have recognised its significance for Launcelot’s ongoing treatment. Peter Murray Jones discusses the depth of this association in ‘Herbs and the Medieval Surgeon’, in *Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden*, ed. by Peter Dendle and Alain Touwaide (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), pp. 162-79.

<sup>162</sup> Fernando Salmón, ‘The Body Inferred: Knowing the Body through the Dissection of Texts’, in *Cultural Representations of the Body*, pp. 77-97. See also Sara Butler, ‘Portrait of a Surgeon in Fifteenth-Century England’, in *Medicine and the Law in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Wendy Turner and Sara Butler, Medieval Law and its Practise, 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 243-66.

combines the knight's unruly body with the self-destructive independence of a headstrong patient, whom the *leche* must rein-in, break, and ultimately master in his efforts to heal.

This dialectic between a medical discourse, which advocates *patience* and obedience in the wounded body, and the chivalric discourse of vigorous, violent, active bodies raises questions regarding the coherence of Launcelot's embodied knighthood. This is a distinct challenge beyond that posed by the process whereby different kinds of wounded bodies refigure or *disembody* embodied knighthoods. Bawdwy'n's *lechecraftte* demands that Launcelot submit his noble body in servitude of another lord, one who disarms him and takes him from his horse to bed. In Foucauldian terms, as Launcelot falls beneath the *leche*'s medical gaze, forgoing power over his own body, he risks becoming alienated from the very thing that makes him, and all knights, what they are.<sup>163</sup>

To explore this further, I will look at a similarly conflicted dynamic between knight and *leche* in the *Morte*. This is the encounter between Sir Gareth and the damsel Lynette. In this episode, Gareth and Lyonesse (Lynette's sister), are unmarried yet 'in hoote love', and so agree to 'abate their lustys secretly' (260. 27-28). Each time they attempt this, however, Lynette, through 'subtyle craufftes', causes them to postpone the act until they are married, thereby saving both her sister's and Gareth's reputations (261. 2).<sup>164</sup> Lynette does this by summoning an enchanted knight who wounds a naked Gareth 'thorow the thycke of the thigh, [cutting] many vaynes and synews' (261. 20-22). In consequence, Gareth is said to have 'bled so faste that he myght not stonde', nor maintain his vigorous lust (261. 25).

Karen Cherewatuk argues that the bloody bed on which Gareth is wounded signifies his desire for illicit sex, while his thigh wound marks the 'symbolic castration' that comes in response.<sup>165</sup> In addition, I suggest the encounter can be read as an example of the dynamic between knight and *leche*. Lynette is emphatically a *leche*, *serching* wounds and *staunching* blood for injured knights (254. 9-10). When Gareth beheads Lynette's knight, hewing his head into 'an hondred pecis', she collects 'the gobbettis' and moulds them back together upon the re-animated body using ointments (263. 3-17). Lanfrank of Milan described the first duty of the

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<sup>163</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. By Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>164</sup> Lynette's *craufftes* concern an enigmatic blend of medicine and magic. Corinne Saunders notes that rather than witchcraft, Malory presents Lynette's art as a 'strange and marvellous technology'. See *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 244-46 (245). Though she does not discuss Lynette, April Harper argues that characterisations of female healers like Lynette present these characters as 'fairy figures' as opposed to physicians. See 'The Image of the Female Healer in Western Vernacular Literature of the Middle Ages', *Social History of Medicine*, 24 (2011), 108-24.

<sup>165</sup> Karen Cherewatuk, 'Malory's Thighs and Launcelot's Buttock: Ignoble Wounds and Moral Transgression in the *Morte Darthur*', *Arthurian Literature XXXI*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and David Johnson (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014), pp. 35-60.

surgeon as ‘undoynge þat [which] is hol’, and the second as ‘helpynge of þat tobroke’.<sup>166</sup> This an apt description of Lynette’s work in this episode, as it is ultimately Lynette who must heal the thigh wound which she herself has prescribed to cool Gareth’s *hoote* body. Only Lynette, a group of other *lecbis* tell Gareth, will be able to heal him so that, as Lynette says, he becomes “as hole and as lusty” as he was before the injury (269. 12).

As with Launcelot and Bawdwyne, Gareth’s and Lynette’s encounter represents a competition between different visions of the knight’s body. Gareth’s *hote*, *corracious*, and *lusty* body is cut and bled, medicalised and, in this way, *remedied*.<sup>167</sup> By opening Gareth’s *vaynes* and pouring his blood onto the bed, Lynette practises a kind of phlebotomy – one of the surgical process which Lanfrank cited when classing the surgeon as one who *undoes* that which is *hole*. This is recognised by Andrew Lynch, who describes Lynette as having ‘purged’ Gareth in this way.<sup>168</sup> Gareth is almost *too hole*, overly-healthy in his excessive lust.<sup>169</sup> By bleeding his thigh, Lynette makes Gareth her ‘patient’ by literally making him *wait*. This etymological implication of the medical ‘patient’ is acknowledged by Guy de Chauliac, who says that, as with Gareth, the patient is called thus because he must ‘*be pacient or suffrynge in hymself*’ (I. 13). Like Bawdwyne, then, Lynette exerts control over the knight’s body, denying his physical agency and making him passive.

By forcing Gareth into the role of ‘patient’, however, Lynette does not *disembody* or disrupt Gareth’s body-self as a knight but instead attempts to *help* it, as a good *leche* should. Lynette expresses this herself when Gareth complains of her adversarial attitude. ‘All that I have done I woll avowe hit, and all shall be for your worship’ she tells the knight (262. 20-1). This characterisation of *lecbis* as authorities who ought to be trusted even when advocating difficult courses of action is reflected by Ashby’s *Dicta et Opiniones*. Here, Ashby groups *lecbis* with court advisors, saying ‘yf a counselor or phisicion of a kynge folowe [the king’s] wille & entente at al tymes’, as Gareth seems to expect of Lynette, then ‘the king is nat suer of good aduisement ner of his body helthful amendement’ (1016-20). Therefore, Ashby says, *lecbis* are among those who must ‘be trewe & playne’ even when speaking hard truths (1022). As Lupton notes, the ‘detachment, reserve, responsibility for the patient’s well-being and an authoritarian stance’ do not only serve the practitioner, but ultimately fulfil the expectations

<sup>166</sup> Lanfrank’s *Science of Chirurgie*, EETS 102, ed. by Robert von Fleischhacker (London: Oxford UP, 1894), p. 18.

<sup>167</sup> Bettina Bildhauer notes how qualities like lust or desire were understood to be carried in the blood. See ‘Conceptions of Blood’, p. 64.

<sup>168</sup> Lynch, p. 67. Although for Lynch, Lynette is read as a magician rather than *leche*.

<sup>169</sup> For medieval medical understandings of extreme sexual desire as a form of disease, see Michael Solomon, ‘Non-Natural Love: Coitus, Desire, and Hygiene in Medieval and Early Modern Spain’, in *Emotions and Health, 1200-1700*, ed. by Elena Carrera (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 147-58.

of the patient.<sup>170</sup> Lynette's contraceptive *lechecraftie* manifests itself as a literal flesh-and-blood antagonist to Gareth's physical desires; yet by her craft she preserves Gareth's body from the damaging influence of pre-marital sex, effectively bleeding Gareth into a better, more chaste knight.<sup>171</sup>

Lynette thus hurts and inhibits the knightly body in order to *amend* it and make it better. This is arguably the central trope of *lechecraftie*, ranging from the painful manipulation of a wound in order to remove harmful debris, to the authoritarian bedside manner needed to render knightly bodies 'patient'. As Citrome has explained: 'the surgeon promises health, but this promise is fulfilled at the cost of suffering great pain'.<sup>172</sup> Citrome suggests that, owing to the way in which surgery appeared at once to both heal and hurt, late medieval literature reflects parallels between the surgeon and religious confessor. There is a sense of this in the relationship between Gareth and Lynette, wherein Lynette works to surgically expose and alleviate the corrupting sin hidden within Gareth's body. This responsibility of the *leche* to not only to cause pain but to guide the sufferer in understanding and overcoming it, represents one of the most ambivalent elements of the dynamic between sufferers and *lechis*. Because of this, it is worth looking at the *leche*'s role in guiding the 'confession' of knightly pain in more detail.

The importance of pain, the ways in which it is articulated by sufferers and addressed by medical practitioners, was highlighted by Roy Porter in his influential article on conducting medical history from the perspective of the patient. In premodern societies, Porter notes, responses to the pain of injury or illness 'went far beyond drug interventions, involving complex rituals of comfort and condolence, the consolations of philosophy and grit, acted out by the suffering, with the physician sometimes sharing in the psychodynamics of the bedside encounter'.<sup>173</sup> The way in which the knight 'acts out' his pain in the form of an embodied practice, demonstrating his body-self as much when *suffering* wounds as when *making* them, is not something which this chapter has yet addressed in detail. There is a rationale for such an approach, however. As has been established by Richard Kaeuper, the positive experience of pain was a central component in depictions of knighthood during the later Middle Ages.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Lupton, p. 121.

<sup>171</sup> Elly McCausland has written on the way in which physical trauma and spilled blood unlock inner states in Malory's knights, who become better men for their hurts. This is why, McCausland argues, Sir Galahad never suffers an injury: he is already perfect. See Elly McCausland, 'Mervayle what hit mente': Interpreting Pained Bodies in Malory's "*Morte Darthur*", *Arthuriana*, 26 (2016), 89-113.

<sup>172</sup> Citrome, *The Surgeon*, pp. 2-15 (9).

<sup>173</sup> Roy Porter, 'The Patient's View: Doing Medical History from below', *Theory and Society*, 14 (1985), 175-98 (193).

<sup>174</sup> Chivalric culture's appropriation of meritorious suffering has been discussed by Kaeuper in *Holy Warriors*, pp. 96-104.

Reading for what Porter calls the ‘language of pain’, however, can prove challenging in the context of medieval literature. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries note that medieval combat narratives often appear reluctant to articulate the pain of being wounded.<sup>175</sup> This is particularly true of romances like the *Morte*, in which mention of pain, whilst not entirely avoided, is nonetheless uncommon. Middle English surgery books, likewise, rarely concede that the techniques they described would often cause immense pain to those undergoing treatment – unless, that is, the pain was so severe as to prohibit treatment itself.<sup>176</sup> Guy de Chauliac, for example, notes that in cases when an existing wound needed to be enlarged in order to extract debris, the sufferer would need to ‘be holden faste’ to avoid disrupting the operation (I. 189).<sup>177</sup> Nancy Siraisi finds that whilst medieval culture recognised the ‘fear of the pain of the knife’, literary accounts of surgery describe the sorts of narrative which Malory would recognise, in which ‘great danger is skilfully overcome’ and ‘the subject of pain is seldom mentioned’.<sup>178</sup> Yet, in both the *Morte* and Middle English surgery books there are telling exceptions to the generally limited discussion of pain.

This can be demonstrated by returning to the example of Bawdwyne and Launcelot. After the tournament in which he suffers the wound, Launcelot, alone save for Sir Lavayne,

groned pyteuously and rode a grete wallop awaywarde from them [other knights] untyll he cam undir a woodys evyse. And whan he saw that he was frome the fylde nyghe a myle, that he was sure he myght nat be seyne, than he seyde with an hyghe voice and with a grete grone, “A, jantill knyght, Sir Lavayne! Help me that thys truncheune were oute of my syde, for hit stykith so sore that hit nyghe sleyth me” (811. 18-24).

Launcelot thus reveals that his intense trauma, rather than the wound itself, has nearly slain him.<sup>179</sup> It is significant that, in expressing this, Malory’s focus narrows to just Launcelot and Lavayne, with the pair deliberately moving away from the greater party of knights.<sup>180</sup> In the

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<sup>175</sup> Tracy and DeVries, p. 3.

<sup>176</sup> See McVaugh, *The Rational Surgery*, p. 109.

<sup>177</sup> On physical restraint in medieval surgery, see Siraisi, p. 172; Jones, *Medieval Medicine*, p. 84.

<sup>178</sup> Siraisi, pp. 153, 171.

<sup>179</sup> See Esther Cohen, ‘The Animated Body’, *The American Historical Review*, 105 (2000), 36-68. Cohen discusses the medieval repertoire of non-verbal pain expression as well as the concept of ‘fatal pain’, and pain as both symptom *and cause* of illness in medieval medical understanding. For physical and emotional trauma, and their representation in medieval romance, see Wendy Turner and Christina Lee ‘Conceptualising Trauma for the Middle Ages’ (3-12) and Sonja Kerth ‘Narratives of Trauma in Medieval German Literature’ (274-297) in *Trauma in Medieval Society*, ed. by Wendy J. Turner and Christina Lee (London: Brill, 2018).

<sup>180</sup> This is not necessarily an indication that Launcelot, who has been competing *incognito*, is ashamed of his pain. For such a reading, however, in which it is argued that this wound, and the pain it causes, can be read as punishment for Launcelot’s pride, see Robert L. Kelly, ‘Wounds, Healing, and Knighthood in Malory’s *Tale of Launcelot and Guenevere*’, *Studies in Malory*, ed. by James Spisak (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1985) pp. 173-97.



context of Porter's work on the languages of pain, Launcelot's trauma is so far registering through and at expense of him, rather than being spoken, or articulated, *by* him.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, the pain is intense enough to not only demand 'pyteyou' groans from Launcelot, but also to alter his voice, heightening it as if in shock and alarm at the scale of his hurt. This effect intensifies when Launcelot gives 'a grete shryche' and further 'gresly grone', as his pain further distorts his ability to communicate (811. 32). Launcelot's physical trauma is thus presented by Malory as a sudden and *disembodying* experience in which the knight is physically distanced from his friends and, owing to the distorting effect of the pain itself, made a stranger to his own body.<sup>182</sup>

This formulation of pain changes entirely once Lavayne takes Launcelot to the *leche*. Almost immediately upon meeting Sir Bawdwyne, Launcelot conveys the extent of his suffering with a frankness hitherto unexpressed and shocking not only for having come from a knight, but for having come from *the* knight, Launcelot. "For Goddys sake!", Launcelot says, "I wolde be oute of thys payne at onys, *othir to deth othir to byff*" (813. 20-22). As Frank notes, during intense pain 'the body is often alienated, literally "made strange"'.<sup>183</sup> Here, we see both Launcelot's alienation from, and desire to get *oute of*, his pained body, as well as his corresponding disgust at both his pain and his inability to tolerate it. It is uniquely important that Launcelot gives this ultimatum to the *leche*, confessing that his pain has become so intense that Launcelot, of all people, has reached a point at which he can no longer endure it and go on living. Indeed, his phrasing, *othir to deth othir to byff*, is a perfect expression of the fraught extremity between *wholeness* and fatal trauma that seems to attract the *lechis* of the *Morte*. In order to fully appreciate the significance of Launcelot's decision to bear his pain to Bawdwyne, it is necessary to say a little about how Middle English surgery books discuss the place of pain in medical treatment.

John Arderne's *Treatises of Fistula in Ano* was widely circulated in Middle English throughout the fifteenth century, and is especially detailed when discussing the relationship between surgeon and sufferer.<sup>184</sup> Arderne, who lists a number of knights among those for

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<sup>181</sup> An alternative interpretation of Launcelot's groans and shrieks might see this as an example of what Arthur Frank calls 'the rarest prose', when the body itself appears 'to speak'. This something which Frank discusses exclusively in terms of pain, in 'The Varieties of my Body', p. 390.

<sup>182</sup> For the ways in which pain alienates the individual, see Jean Jackson, 'Chronic Pain and the Tension Between the Body as Subject and Object', in *Embodiment and Experience*, pp. 201-28.

<sup>183</sup> Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, p. 2.

<sup>184</sup> *Treatises of Fistula in Ano: Haemorrhoids and Clysters by John Arderne from an Early Fifteenth-Century Manuscript Translation*, EETS 139, ed. by D'Arcy Powers (London: Oxford UP, 1910). There are eight extant Middle English manuscripts of Arderne's *Treatises*, across which four different translations have been identified, dating from the first quarter of the fifteenth century to its end. Four of these Arderne Manuscripts share the same translation, dated c.1450, and it is this translation and these four manuscripts (Sloane MSS 6, 277, 563, and British Library Addit MS8093) that Powers used in developing his edition. Subsequent page numbers given in text.

whom he cared, became famous for the techniques and tools he developed in treating *fistula in ano*, an ulcerous rotting of the anal canal which was both notoriously dangerous and painful.<sup>185</sup> In a Middle English translation of his *Treatises* (c. 1450), Arderne discusses not only how to speak with the patient, but especially how to anticipate and account for their pain.<sup>186</sup> Arderne advises that the surgeon learn ‘gode proverbe3 pertenyng to his craft in [the] counfortyng of paciente3’ (7).<sup>187</sup> These speeches were used to ‘induce a li3t hert to þe pacient’, and ‘to comforte þe pacien in monysshynng hym that in anguisshe3 he be of gret hert’ (8). The courage and positivity of a great or light *bert* were crucial for Arderne because, he explains, a ‘gret hert makeþ a man hardy and strong to suffer sharp þingis and greuou3’. A *gret bert*, in this, becomes a form of anaesthetic which the *leche* aims to foster in his patient.

Arderne’s treatment thus employed vocal encouragement and the rhetoric of a great *bert*’s struggle against pain.<sup>188</sup> Arderne even includes a formal address in his *Treatises* to be given to the patient prior to treatment. The speech ends with the assurance that ‘paynful things passeþ sone when at the next foloweþ glorious helthe’ (22). Insights like these, I suggest, help account for why Launcelot is shown privileging Sir Bawdwyn as regards the extent of his physical trauma. In turn, Bawdwyn’s encouragement that Launcelot’s *harte* and *currayge* will never be done takes on a new therapeutic value. Indeed, Bawdwyn’s response to Launcelot’s confession of life-threatening pain marks a pronounced and abrupt contrast to the despair and despondency that has characterised consideration of Launcelot’s wound up until that point. “Have you no doute”, Bawdwyn reassures Launcelot, “for ye shall lyve and fare right well” (813. 23-4). This authoritative prognosis, very much like the one recommended by Arderne, signals the beginning of Launcelot’s treatment. In addition, Bawdwyn’s encouragement not only begins the knight’s passage toward becoming *hole*, but also seems to alleviate his pain. Shortly after the *leche*’s speech, Malory describes Launcelot as having been ‘well refygowred’, so much so that the knight again ‘knew hymself’ (813. 28-29).

Like Arderne, then, Bawdwyn sees pain as part of a bodily narrative in which *hole* health is recovered with *gret bert* – an embodied practice which blends medical and chivalric ideals. In this, the *leche* guides the knight through trauma in such a way as to make pain not only bearable but meaningful in the formation of body-self. Pain becomes a fundamental

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<sup>185</sup> Jones, *Medieval Medicine*, pp. 88-9. Jones reproduces Arderne’s illustrations of the tools he developed for treating *fistulae*.

<sup>186</sup> In this method and the design of his tools, Arderne adopted a gradual approach, often opening an ulcer over a period of weeks. Arderne was mindful that, while the ulcer needed to be open in order to heal, rapid surgical intervention would prove intolerably painful for the sufferer.

<sup>187</sup> Albrecht Classen discusses the combination of ‘words or poetry with medicine in order to establish health and happiness’. See his introduction to *Mental Health*, pp. 1-154 (152).

<sup>188</sup> For rhetoric in medical treatment, see David Harley, ‘Rhetoric and the Social Construction of Sickness and Healing’, *Social History of Medicine* 12:3 (1999), 407-35.

practice in the bodily genesis through which the role of sufferer is exchanged for that of the *hole* and healthy knight. Indeed, as argued above, wounds and physical trauma act as lasting inscriptions upon the body, often enabling multiple meanings and interpretations. For Launcelot, the ability to bear his pain speaks both to his embodiment as a knight, and to his medicalised identity as a sufferer struggling towards health. As both body-selves, Launcelot does a kind of prowess. As *leche*, Bawdwyn facilitates this affective experience by both recalling the heart and courage of Launcelot, and, like Arderne with his own patient, reconciling Launcelot to his pain by prognosticating the good health that will follow. “Ye shall lyve”, Bawdwyn says, “ye shall be hole”.

This explains why Malory describes Launcelot as having been *refygonwed* by Bawdwyn’s *lechecraftte*. After recovering the coherence of his body-self through the embodied experience of his suffering, Launcelot once again *knew hymselff* as a knight both *bygge and stronge*. The painful alienation that the knight has experienced, whilst disrupting the physical cognisance in which such self-knowledge can be apprehended, also provides an opportunity in which that knowledge can be reified upon and within the body-self.<sup>189</sup> This positive *incorporation* of trauma relies again upon the guiding hand and reassuring words of the *leche*. Thus, as with other instances of *lechecraftte*, the knight’s experience of pain is apt to be understood collaboratively, or intercorporeally, with the *leche* shaping the knight’s physical trauma so that it has both place and purpose as part of the embodied experience of knighthood.

This chapter has examined the ways in which wounded bodies and *lechecraftte* produce embodied knighthoods. Different genres of medieval literature approach this in varied ways, sometimes suppressing the ‘lived’ experiences of wounded bodies as part of the ideological portrayal of embodied knighthood. In Middle English chronicles, the result is a kind of invulnerable vulnerability, where, whilst the body is changed by physical trauma, the knight’s essential embodiment endures in *constanciam*. Elsewhere, such as in Middle English romance, the process whereby wounded bodies come to embody knighthoods relies on the spectacle, rather than the suppression, of a knight’s *grevous woundis* and *beste bloode*. Even here, however, different kinds of physical trauma produce different embodiments, some of which may corrupt or putrefy the robust muscularity of the romance knight. In such cases, the multiple bodies of suffering knights are managed by *lechis*, by whose agency the embodiment of the romance knight is protected. It is perhaps because *lechecraftte* is so charged in its capacity to reclassify bodies and selves that *lechis* like Bawdwyn are former knights: this renders less

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<sup>189</sup> Jamie McKinstry discusses the ‘embodying’ of traumatic experience in the context of *Gawain and the Green Knight*. See ‘Perpetual Bodily Trauma: Wounding and Memory in the Middle English Romances’, *Medical Humanities*, 39 (2013), 59-64; See also Paul Reichardt, ‘Gawain and the Image of the Wound’, *PMLA*, 99 (1984), 154-61.

problematic the governance which the *leche* takes up over the bodies, and body-selves, of wounded knights. This also means, however, that the knight's embodiment at times relies on the work of *other* bodies – other hands and eyes and voices. The final chapter will build on this topic, assessing the nonhuman 'adjuncts' and bodily prostheses on which embodied knighthood intercorporeally relies.

## Chapter Four: The Cyborg Body

The harness, particularly the full plate of the later Middle Ages, has proven the foremost visual signifier of medieval knighthood, continuing to characterise representations in modern art, literature, film, and, more recently, video games.<sup>1</sup> Distracting from yet accentuating the flesh-and-blood human beneath, the thing which one first encounters when considering the body of the knight is his emblematic ‘shining armour’. The knight has even been read as a form of cyborg, his body-self and embodied practices reliant upon a metal prosthesis finely crafted from interlocking rings, plates, rivets, and straps.<sup>2</sup> This assemblage, moreover, articulates its own bodiliness, being fundamentally human-seeming in its structure and shape. Late medieval English contemporaries recognised this, with medieval literature often emphasising the intimate symbiosis between man and metal from which the knight emerges. This intercorporeal bonding between human and nonhuman may have been as important to the embodiment of the knight as the more fleshy and physiognomic traits analysed in the previous chapters.

John Lydgate’s Arthurian knights, for example, share in the same youth-inflected morphology outlined above. The Arthur of Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* is described in ‘yong and tendre age’, being ‘curteis, large [...] hardi, [and] strong’ (III. 2712). Lydgate’s Arthurian cohort have also built their body-selves in the performance of active marital prowess. Lydgate says of Arthur and his Table that these are knights ‘preeued of ther hond’ (III. 2731). Arthur and his friends are thus knights both *in body* and *of hand*, possessing a knighthood at once biologically inborn and discernible in embodied practice. In addition, however, Arthur’s court adheres to a further precept. Lydgate stresses the importance of this by referring to it as their ‘first statut [...] fro which thei sholde nat declyne [but] be ful assurance of oth and custum [be] bounde’ (III. 2739-40). This oathbound consideration is that Arthur’s knights must ‘be armyd in platis forgid briht’; a condition which is understood to be constant, with the single exception of ‘a space toreste [sic] hem on the niht’ (III. 2741-42).

For Lydgate, the status of the Arthurian knight as *armyd* is critical, with the bright plate adhering to the knight’s body in so unremitting a fashion as to form the basis of his lived experience. As Turner explains, ‘as far as I apprehend my body at all, it is through objects in the world that indicate my location’.<sup>3</sup> For Lydgate’s knights, this nonhuman context for human embodiment presses close at all times, save for the period of sleep. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> See, Raymond Papica, *The Armor Network: Medieval Prostheses and Degenerative Posthuman Bodies* (University of California, Riverside: Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, 2016), pp. 162-208.

<sup>2</sup> Papica, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Turner, *Body & Society*, p. 51.

when Turner observes: ‘my embodiment is indicated by the typewriter in front of me and the chair underneath me’, one can reapply this sentiment to the embodied experiences of Lydgate’s knight, for whom virtually every action which the body performs is mediated through metal enclosure. In other Middle English texts, such as *Gawain and the Green Knight* (299) or *The Squire of Low Degree*, the knight errant remains in armour even while sleeping.<sup>4</sup>

This stress which Lydgate and others place on the harness contributes to armour’s importance within what Elizabeth Scala has called the ‘signifying economy’ of knighthood.<sup>5</sup> In Lydgate, as elsewhere in Middle English literature, the knight is often better recognised when covered head-to-toe by his armour than he is without it. This is expressed in particularly direct terms by Caxton’s *Ordre*, which states that ‘a knyght without harnoys may not be, ne ought to be named a knyght’ (54). In this, the self of the *knyght* becomes impossible – ‘*may not be*’ – without the ‘cyborg’ body of the harness. Embodied knighthood thus relies on what Weiss terms ‘corporeal exchange’, the process describing how the properties of one body extend to and define another.<sup>6</sup> A good medieval example can be seen in the practice of human bodies wearing, borrowing, and *embodying* parts of animal bodies in the form of heraldic insignias.<sup>7</sup> Whilst it might appear counterintuitive that one of the knight’s body ‘parts’ is not *of* the human body, Turner points out that, ‘in socio-historical terms, “the body” is not necessarily the individual animate organism’.<sup>8</sup> The beginnings and the ends of the knight’s body, and what we classify as *a* ‘body’ in the Middle Ages, thus warrant reconsideration.

In this chapter, I will examine the knight’s embodiment as a species of cyborg. In particular, I will investigate the ways in which the harness hardens, extends, and delineates the body and morphology of its wearer, functioning as a form of prosthesis which enables the body-self of the knight. In addition, I will consider the potential for armour to imply its own non-human body – a potential seemingly acknowledged and emphasised in late medieval English material culture. In such cases, this chapter will reflect upon the ways in which this crucial prosthetic adjunct of embodied knighthood might, as with age and physical trauma, also raise questions about the coherence and ‘completeness’ of knightly body and self. This chapter will be structured around five sections. Here, and in the following section, I will

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<sup>4</sup> ‘The Squire of Low Degree’, in *Sentimental and Humorous Romances* ed. by Erik Kooper (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), line 183.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Scala, ‘Disarming Launcelot’, *Studies in Philology*, 99 (2002), 380-403 (381).

<sup>6</sup> Weiss, *Body Images*, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> This topic requires more research. The principle described here, however, is discussed by Yamamoto, pp. 75-85.

<sup>8</sup> Turner, *Body & Society*, p. 54.

review some definitions and precedents regarding armour as well as its use and manufacture in late medieval England.

### **The Armoured Body in Late Medieval England: An Overview**

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the most common form of European armour was the mail shirt or ‘hauberk’: a tunic-like garment woven from interlocking metal rings.<sup>9</sup> The hauberk protected the torso, arms, and thighs, at times hanging down as low as the knees and requiring the wearer to cinch the garment at the waist and wrists. Mail shirts like this weighed around twenty-five pounds, with that weight falling largely upon the wearer’s shoulders.<sup>10</sup> Long before John Lydgate presented steel plate as the essential marker of Arthurian chivalry, the mail hauberk was an established and iconic feature of medieval knighthood. Ian Pierce has said of eleventh- and twelfth-century chivalric culture that it was impossible for one to perform the part of knight without ‘shield, helmet and hauberk’.<sup>11</sup> This is apparent in the Arthurian romances of the twelfth-century French author Chrétien de Troyes, who makes particular use of the visual and material culture of knighthood. In *Perceval*, the first knights whom both the reader and Perceval encounter are announced foremost by their armour. Before even seeing the knights, Perceval hears the grinding sound made by the ‘the mail-rings of their hauberks.’<sup>12</sup> When Perceval inspects this garment further, the knight wearing it explains: ‘It’s my hauberk [...] and it’s heavy as iron’.

In England, several different Middle English terms were used to describe the armour that succeeded the hauberk during the later Middle Ages. Malory’s *Morte* regularly refers to *armour*, *armoure*, and *armure*, as well as to the knight’s *armys* or *arayment*, which suggest martial materials, including armour, as well as clothing, coats, and heraldry more generally.<sup>13</sup> Most commonly, the knight’s body armour is called ‘harness’ (*harnes*, *harneys*, *harneyse*, etc.), which is generally understood to refer to a knight’s personal fighting equipment.<sup>14</sup> There has been some discussion regarding how generic a term ‘harness’ was for medieval authors, and whether it indicated any particular style or quantity of armour. Alan Williams, for example, defines the harness as ‘a homogeneous suit of plate’, made to fit a specific wearer, while

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<sup>9</sup> DeVries and Smith, pp. 66-73.

<sup>10</sup> Helmut Nickel, ‘Arthurian Armings for War and for Love’, *Arthuriana*, 5 (1995), pp. 3-21 (7).

<sup>11</sup> Ian Peirce, ‘The Knight, his Arms and Armour in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries’, in *The Ideals and Practise of Medieval Knighthood* ed. by Christopher Harper-Bill and Ruth Harvey (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1986), pp. 152-64 (153).

<sup>12</sup> *The Complete Story of the Grail: Chrétien de Troyes’ Perceval and its Continuations*, trans. by Nigel Bryant (Cambridge: Brewer, 2015), pp. 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Kato, pp. 161-2.

<sup>14</sup> Kato, pp. 487-8. MED entry *harnes* n. 1(a).

Ralph Moffat suggests that medieval “harnest men” might be wearing a combination of both mail and plate armours.<sup>15</sup> Tobias Capwell has more recently clarified that, in the context of English armour manufacture during the fifteenth century, the *harneys* entails a complete set of fitted plate armour, and thus the most comprehensive means of armouring the body in the Middle Ages.<sup>16</sup>

The late medieval plate harness, generally defined, weighed between fifty and sixty pounds for use in the field, or around one-hundred pounds for the tournament.<sup>17</sup> Unlike the hauberk, this increased weight was evenly distributed throughout the body, across several different components which, in concert, provided considerable protection.<sup>18</sup> Over a mail shirt, the individual plate pieces comprising the *harneys* in the later Middle Ages included: *sabatons* protecting the feet, with *greaves* and *cuisse*s defending the lower and upper leg; *gauntlets* and *vambraces* guarded hands and arms, with *pauldrons* at the shoulders. The torso was enclosed by a *cuirass*, commonly consisting of multiple segments: a front and back plate, as well as a lower skirt to defend the waist. Finally, the head was entirely covered by a great helm or great bascinet, similar to the helm save with an elongated snout, while a *gorget* or *bevor* guarded the neck. Vulnerable articulated points, such as arm and leg joints, were reinforced by *poleyns* at the knees and *couters* at the elbow.<sup>19</sup>

The difficulty in judging how much and what kind of armour might comprise the *harneys* in Middle English literature partly concerns the Arthurian cycle ostensibly taking place in the distant past. Likewise, the sources of fifteenth-century romance authors like Malory dated from earlier centuries, in which different styles of armour were popular. Because of this, in the later Middle Ages, the romance exploits of Arthur and his Table were filtered through overlapping lenses of nostalgia and anachronism, making it hard to judge how contemporary or antiquated a romance author may imagine his knights’ armour to be. Helmut Nickel has argued that the anonymous author of the fourteenth-century romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* carefully describes what Nickel calls a ‘transitional harness’: somewhere between an earlier mail hauberk and the full plate of the fifteenth century.<sup>20</sup> This

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Williams, ‘The Metallurgy of Medieval Arms and Armour’, in *A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour*, ed. David Nicolle (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), pp. 45-54 (51); Ralph Moffat, ‘The Importance of Being Harnest: Armour, Heraldry and Recognition in M $\acute{e}$ l $\acute{e}$ e’, in *Battle and Bloodshed: The Medieval World and War*, ed. by Lorna Bleach and Keira Borrill (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), pp. 5-24 (5).

<sup>16</sup> Capwell, p. 306.

<sup>17</sup> DeVries and Smith, pp. 83-4.

<sup>18</sup> DeVries and Smith, p. 79-87; Capwell, pp. 202-62.

<sup>19</sup> Nickolas Dupras provides a particularly detailed head-to-toe breakdown of the pieces and production of the late medieval harness. See ‘Armourers and their Workshops: The Tools and Techniques of Late Medieval Armour Production’ (University of Leeds: Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, 2012), pp. 149-229.

<sup>20</sup> Nickel, p. 11.



is the sort of armour that would have been visible around the time of the poem's composition, suggesting that the author prioritised contemporary practices over imagined historical accuracy. Yet, *Gawain and the Green Knight* is not typical in the amount of detail it provides regarding the arming of the Arthurian knight. By contrast, Thomas Malory's later work is largely content to describe knights as being simply *armed* or *unarmed*, such as during their departure from or arrival at court.

This is not to suggest, however, that late medieval authors like Malory lacked an awareness of or interest in how the bodies of knights might be armed. At some moments in the *Morte* it is clear that Malory's knights fight in earlier style mail shirts; at other times something more contemporary seems intended. Indeed, it is apparent, judging by other fifteenth-century writers like John Lydgate, that late medieval English authors were comfortable arming Arthur and his ancient knights in the bright steel plate emblematic of knighthood in their own day. This chapter will thus assume that, in most cases, when imagining the *harneys* worn by a knight like Sir Launcelot, Malory and his readers would supply the later-style plate with which they were most familiar. This chapter thus follows Tobias Capwell in interpreting the use of *harneys*, in romance and elsewhere, to mean a complete 'full body' plate armour.<sup>21</sup> This is relevant as the amount of armour appended to the body would shape the embodied experience of the wearer to differing degrees. Before elaborating on this, however, I will discuss the significance of the *harneys* in late medieval English culture.

As mentioned, whether hauberk or harness, body armour appears as the knight's natural outfit, especially in romance. In the mid-fourteenth century *Octavian*, the aspiring knight Florent observes that he “wanttes me no thyng bot [...] þat I were dyghte [armed]”.<sup>22</sup> Florent, who otherwise possesses the physiognomic complexion of the knightly body, needs only to be, as he says “armede ryghte” for his body-self to be complete (761). Norris Lacy notes something similar in the unspoken assumption that each Arthurian knight possess a single set of equipment: one horse, sword, shield, and harness by which his peers recognise him.<sup>23</sup> It is for this reason, Lacy suggests, that Sir Gawain is mistaken for a merchant in Chrétien de Troyes' *Conte del Graal*, when the knight is seen leading several horses and carrying two shields. It is also through this maxim that Malory's Sir Balyn, 'The Knight of Two Swords', is foreshadowed as an ambivalent, even transgressive character. This

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<sup>21</sup> Capwell, p. 306.

<sup>22</sup> *Octavian: Zwei Mittelenglische Bearbeitungen der Sage*, ed. by Dr Gregor Sarrazin (Heilbronn: Henninger, 1885), lines 756-58.

<sup>23</sup> Norris Lacy, 'On Armor and Identity: Chrétien and Beyond', in *De sens rassis: Essays in Honor of Rupert T. Pickens*, ed. by Keith Busby, Bernard Guidot, and Logan Whalen (New York: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 365-74 (367).

impression is eventually borne out in the narrative, with Sir Balyn's adventures being plagued by controversy. In a similar fashion, this same axiom supplies the pathos to Sir Launcelot's decision near the close of the *Morte* to remove his *barneys* in favour of a monastic habit. With this gesture, Launcelot begins his gradual *disembodiment* as a knight.

As Helmut Nickel has observed, however, in late medieval chivalric culture a knight like Sir Gawain *would* have had use for several horses and, indeed, two shields: one for each of the jousts of war and peace, which also required alternate sets of *barneys*.<sup>24</sup> In this way, the romance genre abridges the social experiences of late medieval chivalry, including those of its material culture, in order to better characterise its world as one of ideal literary types formed by essential components. Perhaps the greatest example of this comes in recognising that, despite the centrality of armour in depictions of knights, this martial group was not alone in making use of the *barneys*. Before continuing to examine the armoured body, it is worth reviewing the evidence regarding which social groups had access the forms of armour in late medieval England.

Tobias Capwell recognises that 'full plate armour is synonymous with the concept of the knight', but adds that within the orders of knighthood one might find the gentry, counts, earls, dukes, princes, and king, many of whom utilised the material culture of chivalry.<sup>25</sup> Among the Latin designations applied to different but often overlapping armigerous groups are *armiger* and *scutifer*, denoting squires, and *armati* or *loricati*, which refer to the more general and ambiguous 'armoured men'. Indeed, knights, esquires, and mercenaries could all be classed as *homines armati*, or 'men-at-arms' – at different times both a diverse collective of armigerous warriors *and* a specific military designation applied exclusively to those from elite social backgrounds.<sup>26</sup> By the fifteenth century, the title of *esquire* entitled its bearer to many of the same privileges belonging to the knight, such as land ownership, leadership of a military retinue, participation in the tournament, and possession of heraldic coats-of-arms.<sup>27</sup> Similarities extended to the ownership of steel plate, which the squire, with access to an equal and sometimes greater annual income than the knight, could afford. Robert Jones has thus argued that, while armour continued to be perceived and portrayed as a 'particular costume of the knight', those fighting in *barneys* during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were more likely to be *esquires* than knights.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Nickel, pp. 12-14.

<sup>25</sup> Capwell, pp. 1-4.

<sup>26</sup> *Soldier in Late Medieval England*, pp. 103-7.

<sup>27</sup> Heng, pp. 131-32.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Jones, *Bloodied Banners: Martial Display on the Medieval Battlefield* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), pp. 120-23.

It is also important to observe that the terms of knightly service, and thus practices governing who wore armour, and *how*, changed during the later Middle Ages. Capwell cites the example of Sirs Nicholas (d. 1473) and Ralph (d. 1483) Fitzherbert, English lawyers whose effigies depict them in contemporary-style plate harnesses.<sup>29</sup> Neither Nicholas nor Ralph, Capwell suggests, would have worn armour in battle, yet it was manifestly important that their effigies depict them as model knights.<sup>30</sup> This is telling. Nicholas and Ralph Fitzherbert *were* members of the English knighthood, although they administered their service as lawyers rather than soldiers. This socio-cultural status, irrespective of any actual military experience, rendered ideologically intelligible the depiction of each man in *barneys* during death. It seems to have been understood in this way that knights *were armoured* in late medieval England, whether or not they were ever actually ‘armed’. Indeed, Caxton’s *Ordre*, with its blunt statement that in order to *be* a knight one must *be in barnoys*, was printed just a year after Nicholas Fitzherbert’s death.

Consequently, the purportedly iconic equation between the knight and *barneys* is partly belied by the variety of individuals who had both practical and identificatory access to armour in late medieval England. This, however, does not detract from the significance of texts like the *Ordre of Chyualry*, and the essential equivalence they posit between the ‘who’ of the knight and the ‘what’ of the *barneys*. Roberta Gilchrist understands material culture not as the background before which medieval social discourse played out, but *as* social discourse itself. Objects like the *barneys* were ‘used to construct, maintain, control and transform social identity’ – all through engagement with the body.<sup>31</sup> ‘Armour’, Capwell says, ‘transformed its wearer into a kind of living sculpture, expressing visually his character, affiliations, and position in the social order’.<sup>32</sup> This capacity of armour to materialize selfhoods and transubstantiate the body’s material form and shape means that, in a sense, the *barneys* supersedes blood, physiognomy, and genetics – the traditional signifiers of knighthood. Armour, not unlike Arthur himself, *makes* knights in the act of ‘arming’ them. Scholars have discussed the ‘materiality’ of the medieval body, and the associated tension regarding ‘the body *as real* and the body *as ideal*’.<sup>33</sup> There are arguably few better manifestations of this tension than the knight within/without a garb that reproduces the look and limb of his body in durable, dazzling steel. To a greater extent than the previous chapters, then, the armoured body raises questions regarding body and self, and the distinction between embodiment as

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<sup>29</sup> Capwell, p. 42.

<sup>30</sup> Dressler’s work suggests this held true for other men depicted in knightly effigy, pp. 30-57.

<sup>31</sup> Gilchrist, ‘Bodies in the Material World’, pp. 44-46 (44).

<sup>32</sup> Capwell, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Introduction’, in *The Body and the Arts*, ed. by Corinne Saunders, Ulrika Maude, and Jane McNaughton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1-10 (2).

essential or constructed. It also challenges the findings of the previous three chapters by questioning *which* body, or rather which *material*, matters most in constructing embodied knighthood. In the next part of this chapter, I will explore the materiality of armour further, addressing both the composition and manufacture of steel plate, and what it meant for the human body to clothe itself in metal.

### **Stuff that Shines: The Materiality of Armour and Embodied Experience of ‘Arming’ in Late Medieval England**

After the strongest and most noble man has been chosen, Caxton’s *Ordre* states that ‘ther shold be chosen alle the armures suche as ben most noble and moste couenable to batayll’ (16). A distinct type of human in this way reaches intercorporeal completion with an outfit of noble non-human things, specifically metals. This equipment primarily ‘defende[s] the man fro dethe’; yet, as I will show, the materials of the *barneys* also worked more fundamentally to embody the knight. ‘He is *made*’, Caxton says, in the act of having chosen these most noble armorial adjuncts (17). With ‘fayr harnoys’, the knight is able to ‘honoure his body’ (119).

This awareness of the normative material constituents of knighthood, however, also arguably implies the existence of their non-normative counterparts. It is apparent, for instance, that for *noble* and *couenable* armours to exist, there must also be ignoble or, at least, *less* noble armours. There is a hint of such danger in Malory’s *Morte*. Here, the knight Sir Balyn, ‘poore and poorly arayde’, attempts to accept a challenge at Arthur’s court (49. 3). The damsel offering the quest, however, refuses, explaining that ‘for hys pour araymente she thought he sholde nat be of no worship’ (49. 13-14). Balyn’s *araymente* here might not necessarily include his armour, with the term suggesting generally one’s equipment, gear, and clothing.<sup>34</sup> This interaction, moreover, takes place at court, in which setting Balyn would not be armed. It would be unlikely, however, for *poore* Balyn, who is *poorly arayde*, to be lacking in all material possessions with the single exception of his *barneys*. The impression is thus that Sir Balyn’s wardrobe is not of a quality to unequivocally assert his *worship* – his reputation as a knight – before the court. Balyn eventually manages to convince the damsel by arguing that “worthiness and good tacchis [traits] [...] is nat only in araymente, but [...] ys hyd within a mannes person” (49. 18-20). In spite of this sentiment, however, Balyn’s career is punctuated by several ignominies, such as the murder of damsels and the tragic killing of his brother.

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<sup>34</sup> MED entry *arraiment* n. 2(a).

Balyn's misdeeds, the most transgressive of which notably derive from the arms and armour in which he clothes himself, have led some scholars to classify him as an 'anti-knight'.<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, just as Caxton's knight is *made* by his choice of noble materials, there emerges the attendant danger that flawed materials may yield a knighthood which, like Balyn's, can appear blemished. Balyn's story suggests that the identificatory affinity between the knight's clothing, body, and selfhood manifested as a form of physiognomy in late medieval England. This episode thus offers a good example of the tension between a *mannes person*, or body, and his *arayment*, in the formation of body-self. Balyn effectively argues that human interiority is of more value than outer artefact; however, Arthur's court is notably unconvinced. In this portion of the chapter, I will analyse what renders certain materials 'noble' in the late medieval English mentality. I will also consider the way in which elite materials *made* and *honoured*, as Caxton says, knightly bodies through the act of arming.

During the later Middle Ages, the dominant method of armour construction involved the use of blast furnaces or bloomeries to create steel, which was the most desirable material used in manufacturing armour.<sup>36</sup> Prior to this, iron, from which steel is made, was the iconic ore of medieval warfare. John Trevisa described iron as possessing a 'most hard and sadde' complexion, by which 'innocent men [are] defended' and the 'foolhardynesse of wikked men is chastised' (II. 848-49). In this, Trevisa not only accounts for the practical utility of iron as a war material, but implicitly equates iron with the *hard* and *sadde* characteristics earlier identified as important physiological motifs in embodied knighthood. The resulting 'drede of iren', combining the animus of both metal and the bodies that wore it, was arguably magnified and refined with the steel of later medieval England. Steel represents a far more durable and *hardy* material than iron, being created from iron via the method of tempering, which involves iron being heated and then rapidly cooled – or, indeed, *saddened* – in water.<sup>37</sup> Quickly submerging red-hot iron in cold water can make the metal warp or crack through a process known as 'cold shunting'.<sup>38</sup> When successful, however, the steel produced in this way becomes a material perfectly *conuenable*, as the *Ordre* would say, *to batayll*. Indeed, medieval metallurgical thought understood steel to be not unlike a nobler form of iron; that is, an iron from which impurity had been 'cooked' and 'quenched' in extreme heat and cold.<sup>39</sup> Through

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<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, D. Thomas Hanks Jr., 'Malory's Anti-Knights: Balin and Breunys', in *The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory's Morte Darthur*, ed. by D. Thomas Hanks Jr (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), pp. 94-110; and James Wade 'Ungallant Knights', in *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, ed. by Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012), pp. 201-18.

<sup>36</sup> DeVries and Smith, p. 79.

<sup>37</sup> Alan Williams, *The Knight and the Blast Furnace: A History of Metallurgy of Armour in the Middle Ages & the Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> See also Dupras, pp. 68-9 (69).

<sup>39</sup> Williams, *Knight and Blast Furnace*, pp. 893-4.

a recognisably humoural process, then, raw iron was refined, tempered, and elevated *into* steel. Late medieval contemporaries may have viewed this tempering process as a natural counterpart to the training and toughening of the elite male bodies that would wear steel plate.

This capacity of armour's materiality to convey, or even embody, insights into both the harness's own composition and that of its wearer has been explored elsewhere. Bonnie Wheeler shows how armour articulates themes of identity alongside alchemical composition in Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth*.<sup>40</sup> Wheeler sees Gareth's journey as an alchemical quest during which the knight 'subdues and subsumes' the four elements, which appear as four knights wearing different coloured harnesses.<sup>41</sup> Wheeler emphasises the alchemical processes of *nigredo*, the 'blackening' by which material is dissolved, and *rubedo*, the heating through which matter is reformed. These concepts are represented by black and red armoured knights whom Gareth defeats and disarms, thereby engaging alchemical process in the formation of his own identity. In this way, the materiality of armour is not just a prop or accessory, but the central symbol through which Gareth is reformed and matured into a knight. The alchemical concepts of *nigredo* and *rubedo* are also arguably analogous to the process whereby iron is broken down before being reforged into steel.

In the late Middle Ages, the most prominent centres for manufacturing plate armour were northern Italy and southern Germany, each of which developed its own distinct style.<sup>42</sup> Italian and German harnesses were imported into England during the fifteenth century and, later, Henry VIII employed Italian and Flemish armourers when establishing the Royal Workshop in 1509.<sup>43</sup> Later still, in 1520, the Royal Workshop at Greenwich recruited primarily German armourers to produce English plate of German style.<sup>44</sup> The apparent popularity of German and Italian plate has led to speculation that England held no cultural style or pedigree of its own in producing armour.<sup>45</sup>

Whether or not this was the case, continental-style armours were evidently highly-valued in late medieval England, as Rebecca Beal demonstrates by analysing armours in the

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<sup>40</sup> Bonnie Wheeler, "The Prowess of the Hands": The Psychology of Alchemy in Malory's "Tale of Sir Gareth", in *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend*, ed. by Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley (Albany: State of New York Press, 1994), pp. 180-195.

<sup>41</sup> Wheeler, "The Prowess of the Hands", pp. 183-4.

<sup>42</sup> See Williams, *Knight and Blast Furnace*, pp. 53-329 (for Italy) and pp. 331-680 (for Germany).

<sup>43</sup> Williams, *Knight and Blast Furnace*, pp. 731-4.

<sup>44</sup> Thom Richardson, 'The Royal Armour Workshops at Greenwich', in *Henry VIII: Arms and the Man*, eds. Graeme Rimer, Thom Richardson, and J. Cooper (Leeds: Royal Armouries, 2009), pp. 148-217 (150-1).

<sup>45</sup> See Capwell, who reviews and refutes this argument, pp. 1-29.

Alliterative *Morte Arthure*.<sup>46</sup> Beal gives the example of Arthur himself, whose armour in the text is stressed in relation to the cities, such as Basel in southern Germany, in which armour was historically produced to the highest standard. This, Beal suggests, means that whenever Arthur puts on his armour, he is aligning his body with the cities, guilds, and craftspeople associated with the systemisation of armour production.<sup>47</sup> Beal argues that, in this way, Arthur becomes a ‘bearer of civilization’, while his opponent, a giant, is dressed in materials originating from places of tyranny and rebellion. Beal’s work shows how Arthur’s body-self incorporates both flesh and artefact, with the king being transformed not only *by* but *into* the ‘the noblest product’ of chivalric culture. As through a form of corporeal exchange, then, the materiality of the *harneys* engages and elevates the body of its wearer, communicating the ways in which body-selves are built, or *forged*, in the later Middle Ages.

To further explore the significance of this intercorporeal combination of body and artefact, it is useful to consider the material qualities of steel itself. The ‘noble’ materiality of steel can be understood, firstly, in terms of the costs associated with shaping it into a harness. Alan Williams cites the price of steel c. 1400 at 1.60 pence per pound, sold by the ‘sheaf, garb, fagot, cake, or barrel’.<sup>48</sup> Robert Woosnam-Savage and Kelly DeVries suggest that, because of its great cost, steel plate would have been affordable only by the wealthiest.<sup>49</sup> Andrew Ayton has likewise noted that while the mass-production of plate components may have alleviated some financial burden, possession of a *harneys* – a complete, ‘tailored’ set of steel armour – would have remained an undeniable indicator of social prestige.<sup>50</sup> As a material, then, steel possessed an elite economic status, in which the bodies capable of clothing themselves in this costly metal likely shared. Indeed, late medieval English contemporaries referred to full-body steel plate as ‘white armour’, indicating an awareness that treated steel was visibly distinct from other metals, possessing a luminosity.

The phenomenon of ‘shining armour’ existed prior to the later Middle Ages and the advent of steel plate. Prestwich suggests that the ‘visual effect’ of armour and armorial decoration, combined with the sounds of metal and men, would have played a part in warfare throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the twelfth-century French *Chanson d’Antioche* records Oliver of Jussi encouraging his companions before battle by observing “our hauberks, far

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<sup>46</sup> Rebecca Beal, ‘Arthur as the Bearer of Civilization: The Alliterative *Morte Arthure*: 901-19’, *Arthuriana*, 5 (1995) 32-44.

<sup>47</sup> Beal, pp. 34-9 (39).

<sup>48</sup> Alan Williams, ‘Metallurgy’, p. 47.

<sup>49</sup> Woosnam-Savage and DeVries, p. 53.

<sup>50</sup> Ayton, ‘Arms, Armour, and Horses’, pp. 200-1.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, p. 325.

from being ripped open, are still shiny”.<sup>52</sup> Jones cites other examples from the twelfth century, in which knightly *arayment*, such as bright banners and gleaming armour, are admired by contemporary chroniclers.<sup>53</sup> In *Perceval*, Chrétien’s knights are glimpsed through a multi-coloured spectrum of noble materiality, ‘their hauberks shimmering, their burnished helmets dazzling [...] the red and the white shining brightly in the sun, and all the gold and blue and silver’ (2). When Perceval first voices his desire to become a knight, he blurs the human and nonhuman materials of the knight’s body, positing one rarefied embodiment. ‘I wish I were the same’, Perceval says, ‘*made* like you, and shining so!’ (3).

The desirability of ‘white armour’ in the later Middle Ages was likely indebted, at least in part, to these earlier depictions of shining knights. Thus, those who could afford to fight in full-steel plate did so without fabric coverings, such as the heraldic surcoat, as these garments muddied the metal’s own brilliance.<sup>54</sup> Prestwich argues that steel itself began to fulfil the role of heraldic display, indicating not only the status of the wearer but the skill of the armourer.<sup>55</sup> *Knyghthode and Bataile* demonstrates this, advising its reader to keep his harness ‘cler, as gold or gemme it were’, for ‘one that hath his herneys bright’ is ‘corraged’ at the sight of it (492-93). In this respect, the gleam of steel might not only modify the body’s appearance, but favourably recast the lived experience of body within armour. Caxton’s *Ordre* is perhaps hoping to create this effect when advocating the skills and duties required of the squire, who must know how ‘to have harnoyes fayr & good’ (54). Jones cites a mid-fourteenth-century Italian commentator who observed how English mercenaries employed pages to polish their harnesses in order that they shone brightly during battle.<sup>56</sup> Thomas Walsingham’s chronicle makes several references to the persuasive materiality of shining armour in late medieval English warfare. In 1402, the armour of a Scottish force is said to have ‘shone brightly like silver when struck by the rays of the sun’ [*armatura ad instar argenti, repercussi solis spiculis resplendebat*] (II. 330). In 1404, a similar psychological effect to that suggested in *Knyghthode and Bataile* is recorded with reference to a French attack at Dartmouth. Here, however, the glorious equipment [*gloriosus apparatus*] and shining armour [*fulgens armatura*] unintentionally inspire the English defenders, who determine to kill and plunder the finely dressed enemy (II. 402).

When choosing the *most noble armures* with which to *honoure* his body, the knight of the *Ordre* may thus have been drawn to the shining full-steel plate *harneys*. This affinity is

<sup>52</sup> The *Chanson d’Antioche: An Old French Account of the First Crusade*, trans. by Susan B. Edgington and Carol Sweetenham (London: Ashgate, 2011), p. 143.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Jones, pp. 108-9.

<sup>54</sup> DeVries and Smith, *Medieval Military Technology*, p.79; Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, p. 24.

<sup>55</sup> Prestwich, ‘Miles in Armis’, p. 208.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Jones, p. 109.



especially pronounced in Middle English literature describing the customs of Arthurian knighthood. Lydgate, as noted, stressed the *briht platis* of Arthur's knights, and elsewhere takes particular care to characterise his depiction of Arthurian chivalry through imagery associated with shining steel. Prior to Arthur's introduction, Lydgate has already established that his idealised Golden World, *Aureat*, was a utopia in which 'knythod in prowess gaff out so cleer a liht' [sic] (III. 1176). When Arthur and his knights are introduced, they are said to have 'shon be report as doth the midday sonne' throughout 'every cristen lond' (III. 2733-34). Later, Arthur appears 'as a briht sonne', gloriously 'set amynd the sterres' (III. 2795-96). This effect continues until Britain itself becomes 'of noblesse the lantern', within which Arthur is personified as 'the cleer liht of chevalrye and of hih prowesse, which thoruh the worlde shadde his bemys briht' (III. 2850-56) For Lydgate, Arthur not only possesses and commands shining steel, but in this way embodies its *cleer liht*. When Lydgate describes Arthur's death and his kingdom's decline, he presents it as 'the sunne eclipsyng' (III. 3169).

Lydgate thus develops a singular 'materialisation' of Arthurian knighthood, in which the *cleer liht* of chivalry, the *briht* steel of the *harneys*, and Arthur's own body, produce one transubstantiated embodiment. The division between human and nonhuman materials disappears here; the knight appears not only *in* but *as* his shining armour. This characterisation is not restricted to Lydgate. Barbara Ehrenreich argues that, to onlookers, the armoured body must have appeared at 'superhuman' height, via a protruding 'exoskeleton' that commanded space by reflecting light before spectators.<sup>57</sup> Missing in such depictions, however, is an awareness of what it meant practically for knights to arm themselves in luminous steel. The level of protection offered by the *harneys* necessitated a meticulous enclosing of the body into a relatively small steel-walled space. From Lydgate's perspective, the *liht* of the armoured body extends far outward, but the embodied experience of the wearer would have been much different. These two perspectives, the first-hand 'lived' experience versus that of the spectator, may each register a different terminus for where the body *in* or *as* armour 'ends'.

The French knight and author, Geoffroi de Charny (d. 1356) reflects this. Geoffroi discusses developments in French fashion which exacerbated the already tight-fitting *harneys*, so much so that some knights were unable to move. 'One has seen many of those thus constricted', Geoffroi says, 'who have to take off their armour in a great hurry, for they could no longer bear to wear their equipment'.<sup>58</sup> Those who remained in armour, Geoffroi goes on,

<sup>57</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: The Origins and History of the Passions of War* (London: Granta, 2011), p. 150.

<sup>58</sup> *The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny: Text, Context, and Translation*, ed. by Richard W. Kaeuper and Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) pp. 190-91.

became ‘handicapped’ by the cramped combination of metal, flesh, and fabric. ‘Many’, he says, ‘have died inside their armour for that reason’. Geoffroi’s perspective is valuable for indicating the practical knowledge that armour could be worn well or poorly, and that the body inside the harness was, in effect, measured and tested by this experience. Indeed, *Knyghthode and Bataile* advises the knight to train his body so that it can bear ‘LX ponde of weght’ while moving at ‘a chivalerys pace’ – that is, the brisk pace required during battle (481-82). English military strategy during the later Middle Ages frequently had knights fight on foot; however, this tactic did not result in any substantial reduction in the amount of armour being worn.<sup>59</sup> Those fighting in full-plate thus had to be able to mount and dismount without assistance, while also keeping pace while moving on foot.<sup>60</sup>

Walsingham offers a good example of this. In 1416, the English forces of the earl of Dorset were ambushed while on campaign in France. While the French ambushers were routed, they succeeded in depriving the English forces of their horses and supplies. Walsingham describes the English perspective, saying ‘our men, carrying their arms as they were, now had to return on foot for many miles’ [*nostros prout errant in armis, reuerti pedites per plura miliaria*] (II. 686-7). The English, ‘weighed down by their arms’ [*armis onusti*] marched for the rest of the day and night, becoming exhausted. Similarly, in the *Morte*, Launcelot’s horse is killed, forcing him to trek ‘sore acombird of hys armoure, hys shyld, and hys speare’ (847. 23-4). ‘Wyte you well’, Malory says, ‘he was full sore anoyed’ (847. 24-5). In the chronicle, the earl of Dorset’s troops had to fight a second time during their march, but proved victorious. In episodes like this, Middle English literature does not disguise the fatigue of those exerting themselves in armour for extended periods. Despite this, however, it is clear that, when necessary, knights could carry this burden into battle, even while weary, and succeed.

At the same time, the full-plate *harneys* clearly did pose some practical and physical challenges for wearers in late medieval England. Among these, Kelly DeVries and Robert Douglas Smith identify a greater susceptibility to increases and decreases in temperature, as well as reduced ventilation.<sup>61</sup> In collaboration with the Royal Armouries in Leeds, a team of researchers conducted experiments on the impact of full-plate armour upon the wearer’s stamina and physical condition.<sup>62</sup> In particular, the study measured the net-metabolic cost and

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<sup>59</sup> Capwell, pp. 20-21.

<sup>60</sup> Daniel Jaquet, a practitioner-researcher, has attempted to illustrate the wide range of movement possible for armoured bodies. See ‘Range of Motion and Energy Cost of Locomotion of the Late Medieval Armoured Fighter: A Proof of Concept of Confronting the Medieval Technical Literature with Modern Movement Analysis’, *Historical Methods*, 49 (2016), 169-86.

<sup>61</sup> DeVries and Smith, p. 84.

<sup>62</sup> Graham Askew, Federico Formenti, and Alberto Minetti, ‘Limitations Imposed by Wearing Armour on Medieval Soldiers’ Locomotor Performance’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society* (2011), 640-44.

oxygen consumption of locomotion in subjects armoured and ‘unloaded’.<sup>63</sup> Each of the study’s four subjects were experienced at being in *harneys*, being fight-interpreters at the Royal Armouries. In addition, the study used the subjects’ own custom-built harnesses, all of which were of mid- to late-fifteenth-century styles of either English, German, or Italian design.

This research found that the armoured body’s speed of locomotion was considerably slower while both walking and running at different paces. The locomotive power required to propel the body in *harneys* increased by approximately sixty-three percent, primarily due to the greater mechanical work required to move the lower limbs. Interestingly, the net cost of locomotion was higher in full-plate than when the subject wore equally-weighted loads applied individually to the torso, thighs, shanks, and feet. The researchers thus argue that ‘wearing armour appears to incur additional energetic costs’ in comparison to bearing similar weight in a different format. One explanation for this responds to the way in which wearing steel plate increases the wearer’s respiratory frequency and oxygen consumption.

For example, this research discovered that the increased energy demand of locomotion while armoured led ventilation and respiratory frequencies to increase dramatically, becoming considerably higher than in unloaded conditions. The study found that the breathing patterns observed while in *harneys* suggested a limited inspiratory capacity similar to that seen in other studies measuring the effects of externally applied thoracic restriction. Late medieval full-plate evidently restricted expansion of the chest and lungs to a degree that is consistent with limitations imposed by inelastic corsets and chest-wall restrictors. Modern scientific investigations into prolonged exercise while experiencing restricted inspiratory capacity find correspondingly high rates of respiratory discomfort, fatigue, and compromised physiological functions such as hyperventilation and oxygen desaturation.<sup>64</sup>

Modern experimental conditions cannot comprehensively reproduce or explain the late medieval lived experiences of the armoured body. The bodies of this research were modern bodies, produced by modern standards of nutrition and exercise, and shaped, in their embodied experiences, by contemporary sensitivities to discomfort and fatigue. It is impossible to disclose when and how the medieval body began to feel overburdened by its *harneys* because the physical and cultural apprehension of ‘burden’ itself is not historically

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<sup>63</sup> Askew et al, p. 640-44, notes 12 and 15.

<sup>64</sup> See Helen Hartly et al, ‘External Thoracic Restriction, Respiratory Sensation, and Ventilation during Exercise in Men’, *Journal of Applied Physiology*, 86 (1999), 1142-50; Sinéad O’Connor et al, ‘Ventilatory Response to Incremental and Constant Workload Exercise in the Presence of a Thoracic Restriction’, *Journal of Applied Physiology*, 89 (2000), 2179-86; Sarina Verma et al, ‘The Effects of Chest Wall Loading on Pulmonary Function, Muscle Perfusion, Exercise Performance and Fatigue’, *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* 48 (2016), 454.

constant. The findings of this research, however, do provide an additional context for considering late medieval evidence provided by Geoffroi de Charny, Walsingham, and Thomas Malory. Lengthy exertion in *harneys* was likely to result in fatigue or potentially more debilitating physiological impairments like hyperventilation. Such extreme outcomes may not have been common; however, it is unlikely that they were entirely unheard of. Middle English literature offering guidance on how best to bear the *harneys* supports this.

*Knyghthode and Bataile*, for instance, recommends that members of armigerous groups begin training in armour's use while young, thereby developing the appropriate level of stamina. The book elaborates, 'and exercise him vche in his armure, as is the gise adayes now to were, and se that euery pece [of] herneys be sure, go quycly in, and quyk out of the gere' (488-91). The late fourteenth-century French chivalric handbook, the *Tree of Battles*, makes similar points, adding that 'if a knight has long borne arms and harness, merely because he knows their use he will find courage' (121). It is apparent in each source that being in *harneys* meant learning new body techniques from which the individual acquired confidence to undergo the experience of moving, breathing, and living inside armour. The writers agree that the knight who knows his equipment, and understands how to quickly arm and disarm himself, will fight better for having what the *Tree of Battles* calls a harness 'of proof, and true'.

The existence of this guidance, however, itself indicates that some bodies, like those described by Geoffroi de Charny, might not sufficiently master these body techniques. The experience of *being* an armoured body potentially included disability, claustrophobia, hyperventilation, and, as Geoffroi said, death. Caxton's *Ordre* says of the *harneys* that it clung 'ferme & cloos on al partes' of the body, being 'closed al aboute' the knight like a 'fortresse' (78). William Marshal (d. 1219) required a blacksmith to cut his helmet from his head after the equipment had become so battered and twisted that it could not otherwise be removed.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, when Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval first attempts to disarm a defeated knight, he finds that he cannot free the human body from its metal enclosure. 'I'll have to chop the knight to bits before I get them', he complains, 'they're so tight to the body that inside and out are all one piece [...] they're stuck together solid' (11). Middle English chronicle evidence similarly reveals that the embodied experience of being armed at times proved disabling and inimical.

Walsingham describes the death of Sir Robert Goushill during the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403. During the fighting, Robert became exhausted and injured [*lassatus et uulneratus*] until, under these conditions, Robert dragged himself [*se subduxisset*] from the

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<sup>65</sup> *History of William Marshal*, ed. by A. J. Holden, trans. by S. Gregory, vol.1 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2002), lines 3111-3114.

battlefield (II. 374). After finding refuge beneath a hedge, Robert was discovered by one of his household, who asked what had happened. Walsingham records Robert's reply as: "*Armīs p[ro]p[ri]e suffocatus sum; quapropter, detrahe michi cirothecis et arma, si forte reuiuiscat anima mea.*" [I am nearly suffocated by my armour; please, take off my gauntlets and my armour, if by chance my spirit might revive]. The oppressive weight of the *barneys* here proves disabling, inflicting exhaustion and air deprivation (*suffocatus*) much as suggested by the Royal Armouries research.

Once Robert had been disarmed, however, his vulnerability was exploited, as he was robbed and killed. Remarkably, the encounter is recorded only because another individual, a squire, was also recuperating beneath the same hedge, having similarly been *armorum pondere pregranatus* [weighed down by the burden of his armour]. This squire, like Sir Robert, had crawled [*reptando*] on his hands and knees [*manibus et genibus*] until he found a cool breeze [*gracia aur[a]e*] in which to recover his breath. Walsingham does not criticise either knight or squire for exposing themselves to injury in their need for respite. Likewise, he does not indicate if any others were resting beneath the hedge, or whether doing so would be considered unusual. Other chronicles do, however, offer further context. Bouchier, for example, describes an incident during the battle of Poitiers (1356). Here, a wounded Sir James Audley (d. 1369) was attended by companions, who 'brought hym oute of the felde, and layed hym under a hedge syde, for to refresshe hym, and unarmed hym' (I. 375). Elsewhere, Bouchier defends this practice as a means of ensuring enemy horses could not trample incapacitated combatants (IV. 297).

Though both the squire and Sir Robert are described as *vulneratus*, it is apparent that their incapacity responds foremost to the stress and exhaustion of being armoured, from which each seeks escape. Robert's *pectus*, his chest or heart, is described as both *percitum* and *palpitantem*, depicting what might cautiously be considered hyperventilation during the physiological (and psychological) responses to acute panic.<sup>66</sup> The unnamed squire similarly drags himself from the battle not to have any wounds he may have suffered treated, but to gain respite in the form of fresh air. In this respect, it may be important that the Battle of Shrewsbury took place in July, with warm weather perhaps proving a factor. As noted earlier, it was during this battle that the young Henry V (d. 1422) suffered a facial injury after lifting

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<sup>66</sup> The problems involved in retrospectively diagnosing aspects of medieval health (particularly mental health, which is partly implied here) have been identified. Katherine Foxhall analyses the merits of Charles Singer (1913)'s retrospective diagnosis of Hildegard of Bingen's 'migraines' in 'Making Modern Migraine Medieval: Men of Science, Hildegard of Bingen and the Life of a Retrospective Diagnosis', *Medical History*, 58 (2014), 354-74. Similarly, Iona McCleery criticises retrospective diagnoses of King Duarte of Portugal (d. 1438)'s melancholy as "madness" or "anxious masculinity". See 'Both "illness and temptation of the enemy": melancholy, the medieval patient and the writings of King Duarte of Portugal (r. 1433-38)', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 1 (2009), 163-78 (168, 167).

the visor of his helmet, perhaps to take a breath. Bouchier tells how the French John III (1359-1391) suffered in Italy, when it was ‘so hooted that [his men] such as were in their harness thought verily they had ben in a furnes’ (V. 452). If it was heat which caused some of those at Shrewsbury to similarly struggle in *harnesys*, however, Walsingham does not recognise this; indeed, the battle itself took place during the evening. The problem, it seems, originates in the armoured body itself, not its environment.

As further context, one can cite other instances, in both chronicle and romance, wherein the knight is compelled to interrupt combat to recover his breath and recuperate. In the *Morte*, for example, Sir Gareth and his opponent, Sir Ironside, agree to pause a gruelling duel in order that the two might ‘sette hem downe uppon too mollehylls there besydys the fyghtyng place’ (252. 4-5). Once seated, Malory describes how ‘eythir of them unlaced their helmys’ while being attended by pages, whose responsibility is ‘to unlace their harnyse and to sette hem on agayne at there commaundment’ (252. 7-8). Once the two knights have rested and, like Sir Robert and the unnamed squire, after they ‘toke the colde wynde’, Gareth and his opponent are armed and quickly resume their combat (252. 6). This ‘breather’ need not be construed as a failure; rather, knowing when and how to go *quyckly in* and *quyck* out of *harnesys* refers back to the body techniques needed to wear armour well. In the aforementioned case of John of Armagnac’s experiences in Italy, the count behaved similarly when, ‘with moche payne [he] dyd of his basenet and sate bareheded’. John, however, had become so overwhelmed with heat and fatigue that, after drinking, he ‘fell in a palvesy, so that he lost the strength of his body and speche’.

These incidents highlight the human challenges involved in properly aligning with and adapting to the material conditions of the armoured body. Ruel Macaraeg approaches the contemporary praxis of bearing arms in the context of modern fashion theory.<sup>67</sup> The central assumption of fashion theory, Macaraeg explains, concerns ‘the close association between object (clothing and adornment) and individual (body)’, which allows fashion to be read as part of individual personhood.<sup>68</sup> Importantly, Macaraeg argues that one of the ways in which weapons become fashion, aligning object with body, concerns how ‘wearing’ weaponry communicates the body’s implicit knowledge of a weapon’s function. These are relevant ideas in the context of the embodied experiences of medieval knights. The armoured body, even when perfectly still, silently recalls the body techniques – years of training and experience – its effective use demands. Whether the mail hauberk or plate *harnesys*, the materiality of armour in this way redefines the body and self of the wearer, endowing novel capabilities

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<sup>67</sup> Ruel Macaraeg, ‘Dressed to Kill: Toward a Theory of Fashion in Arms & Armor’, *Fashion Theory*, 11 (2007), 41-64 (46).

<sup>68</sup> Macaraeg, p. 44.

while also imposing new limitations. The Middle English texts discussed here indicate an awareness of the tacit knowledge involved in *materialising*, as it were, one's embodiment as a knight. They also, however, reveal the *disembodying* potential of armour, which could shape an embodied experience characterised by sweat, stress, and suffocation. In the next part of this chapter, I will consider in more detail how armour constructs, declares, and at times distorts the body-self of the knight in late medieval English culture.

### **Armed Knights and Naked Men I: Embodied Knighthood and the *Harneys* as Prosthesis**

In the *Morte*, Sir Gareth arrives at Arthur's court as an unknown aspirant to knighthood. Although Gareth is described as 'the goodlyest yonge man and the fayreste' whom Arthur and his knights have seen, being 'large and longe and brode in the shuldrys', Gareth chooses to withhold his familial identity and name (223. 24-6). He appears instead as a 'Fair Unknown', an individual whose body implies a knighthood and nobility not always explicit in social position. Ordinarily, this embodied impression is proven correct – often through the revelation of family history – with the young knight's body having thus physiognomically communicated his radical complexion before the audience. This formula is followed in this episode, although it is complicated by the choices which Gareth makes regarding the materials in which he clothes his body.

One of the instances in which this relationship between *arayment* and identity is most clear comes early in the episode. When requesting a gift from Arthur, rather than asking for a *harneys* or horse to complete the knighthood he already so obviously embodies, Gareth instead asks for a twelve-month supply of meat and drink. The knight Sir Kay immediately seizes upon this request as indicating inferior status, declaring: "I dare undirtake he is a vylane borne, and never wolle make man, for and he had be com of jantyllmen, he wolde have axed horse and armour" (224-25. 35;1-2). For Kay, both Gareth's social status and manhood are understood to attend the inclination toward certain materials. Rather than selecting the noble materials outlined by Caxton, Gareth favours the diet of a *vylane*, or rural labourer, thereby distancing himself from the knightly body-self. Kay summarises this equation by observing "as he is, so he askyth" (225. 2). As with Malory's Sir Balyn, then, Gareth's disconformity within the elite material culture of Arthurian knighthood carries the potential to render him not only ignoble, but unmanly. The culmination of this degeneration comes with Kay's decision to lodge Gareth in Arthur's kitchen. Here, Kay says, Gareth "shall have fatte browes [broth] every day" so that, after his stay, Gareth will appear as "fatte [...] as a

porke hog” (225. 5-6). In his apparent ignorance of the noble *things* that would best reveal his knightly embodiment, Gareth is in danger of appearing more beast than man.

Will Fisher has written on the innate relationship between dress and gender identity in the medieval and early modern periods.<sup>69</sup> In particular, Fisher notes how humoural theory could be drawn upon as a way of accounting for the ‘natural’ costume favoured by different groups of men and women. Fisher finds that decisions made by individuals regarding what they wore (or didn’t wear) carried the potential to ‘deeply make’, or unmake, social identities. Gilchrist similarly shows that certain social groups, such as prostitutes, lepers, heretics, and minstrels, were recognised, almost physiognomically, by a particular style of dress in late medieval England.<sup>70</sup> It is arguable that, in late medieval English culture, the knight represented another social type in large part recognisable by his outfit. It is this correlation between dress and identity, mediated by the body, which Malory’s Sir Gareth throws into confusion, with the aspiring knight becoming *disembodied* before his embodiment is even affirmed.

Indeed, for others in the court, the contrast between Gareth’s physiognomy and his stay in the kitchen creates a kind of cognitive dissonance. Arthur repeatedly observes to Gareth that “thou arte one of the goodlyest yonge men that ever I saw” (224. 28), or asserts “thou arte com of men of worshyp” (224. 19), even while Gareth, Malory says, ‘lay nay nyghtly as the kychen boyes dede’ (225. 31-2). Similarly, Sir Launcelot and Gareth’s older brother, Sir Gawain, meet with Gareth in order to ‘gyff hym golde to spende and clothis’ (225-26. 35;1). In this way, the knights are hoping to urge Gareth toward accoutrements that would better suit the knightly identity he is obviously poised to embody. Indeed, Gareth’s ‘disguise’ – counterintuitively comprised by the things which he *does not* put on – is so successful that his brother Gawain fails to recognise him.

Gareth eventually does align the ‘what’ of his body with the ‘who’ of knighthood. This transformation is largely instantaneous and, significantly, it responds almost exclusively to Gareth’s donning of *harnays*. After being granted a quest, Gareth’s *arayment* unexpectedly arrives at court. Along with a horse and armour, Gareth receives ‘all thyng that *neded hym* in the rycheste wyse’ (227. 21). When Arthur and his knights see Gareth so well equipped, Malory describes how they ‘mervayle’ – especially when beholding ‘all that gere’ (227. 21-22). All at once, Arthur and his court witness the fulfilment of Gareth’s embodied promise: ‘*whan he was armed*’, Malory explains, ‘there was none or but fewe so goodly a man as he was’ (227. 22-24). Gareth, in defiance of Sir Kay, thus does *make man*, and his manhood is directly tied

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<sup>69</sup> Will Fisher, *Materialising Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge University press, 2006), pp. 8-15.

<sup>70</sup> Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, p. 68.



to his being *armed*. Gareth shortly goes on to bodily practice his courtesy and prowess before being dubbed by Sir Launcelot. At the above point in the narrative, however, all Gareth has done to undergo the metamorphosis from kitchen boy to goodly man is put on his *gere*.

The function of armour in the Gareth episode will be considered in more detail below. For the time being, this opening incident valuably articulates how the body-self of 'knight' engages both body and dress in Middle English romance. Gareth's knighthood is a cumulative assemblage that requires not only a noble body both physiognomically *faire* and good, but one that is *faire*, good, and *armed*. The role of armour here is more than mere ornamentation, being closer to physical augmentation or the addition of a crucial prosthetic appendage. Gareth quite literally becomes a new man once he finally accepts and bedecks his body with this equipment. The sense of completeness that comes with Gareth's gear is clear in the narrative; it is as if Arthur's court at this moment finally 'sees' Gareth – indeed, the verb *mervayle* emphasises this impression.<sup>71</sup> In order to further elucidate the depth of Gareth's transformation here, it is necessary to consider the ways in which the *barneys* alters the morphological motifs of its wearer, thereby shaping in sharper relief the embodied proportions of the knight.

Robert Jones has written at length on how he understands medieval armour to have altered the physical and psychological aspect of those who wore it.<sup>72</sup> In particular, he argues that while all armour refashions the 'shape' of the wearer, the full-plate *barneys* made its wearer taller, broader, and shapelier. 'Leg armour', Jones explains, 'lengthens the leg' while 'the unnaturally high waist of the breastplate [...] serves to emphasise the breadth of the chest'. This 'narrowing of the waist' and 'broadening of the chest' emphasises the wearer's shoulders, which are then 'further exaggerated' by plate protection like 'spaulders' or 'pauldrons'. The *gorget* and helmet, finally, increase the wearer's height by 'lengthening the neck and lifting the head'. The overall effect of these changes in form, shape, and silhouette is that a character like Malory's Sir Gareth is not the *same* body in armour as he is outside it.

As reflected in this romance episode, an awareness of how gender might be perceived before and after being armed is also important here. Anne Hollander argues that plate armour marked a pronounced shift in the way in which men's clothing had previously enhanced the wearer's figure.<sup>73</sup> Unlike the hauberk, which hangs like a fabric, Hollander describes 'the dynamic formal ingenuity of plate armour' which appears deliberately designed 'to enhance the articulated beauty of complete male bodies'. For Hollander, the harness

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<sup>71</sup> As noted in Chapter Three, Malory's use of 'mervayle' signifies audience recognition of particular sights.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Jones, pp. 97-130 (99).

<sup>73</sup> Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits* (Wiltshire: Claridge Press, 1994), p. 42.

constitutes an important entry in the history of men's fashion, reinterpreting the male body along an 'abstract imagery of multifaced brilliance and unearthly-looking strength'. This is to say, plate directly engages with, and arguably redesigns, the masculine aesthetic and embodiment of a particular type of medieval man. The *harneys*, in this way, can be read as a gendered and *gendering* material in the later Middle Ages.

This helps account for how Gareth not only presents as a different man upon donning his armour, but as *more* of a man. As Fisher notes, the gesture of putting on gendered clothing like the *harneys* is as an ideological act, demanding new values and ratios for the body and self.<sup>74</sup> In addition to changes in silhouette, the weight distribution of the harness encourages a more upright posture with thrust-out chest and shoulders, while the full-faced helmet recasts the physiognomy of facial features.<sup>75</sup> All of this endows the armoured body with an aggressive and domineering aspect. Movement, and perception of how the body moves, is also a factor. Gilchrist has remarked upon the way in which clothing transforms the body's participation of medieval "gesture culture", which coded the 'posture, movement, and comportment' of the individual with physiognomic data. It is precisely this range of gesture and movement over which the close-fitting steel plate of the late middle ages exerted such a considerable control. These alterations in morphology, physiognomy, gesture, and movement thus cumulatively work to distinguish the embodied experience of the armoured knight in late medieval English culture.

I argue, then, that the knight's 'being-in-the-world' becomes fundamentally different – a discrete embodied experience – when in *harneys*. One of the assumptions of embodiment theory, however, holds that transformations in the body impact upon the self. There are indications of this above; however, it is worth further exploring the relationship between body, dress, and self in the romance context. Norris Lacy has discussed what he calls the difference between *identity*, defined as what a romance knight 'is and knows and thinks', and *identification*, which refers to how others perceive these same epistemological and ontological values through the knight's actions.<sup>76</sup> Lacy suggests that there are more disjunctions than connections between *identity* and *identification*, casting doubt on the idea of an 'essential' knightly identity. Malory, who in Lacy's terminology is more interested in *identification* than *identity*, exacerbates this tension. Dorsey Armstrong has argued that Malory favours 'exterior action over interior feeling', with his knights *being* largely indistinguishable from how they *seem*

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<sup>74</sup> Fisher, p. 23.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Jones, pp. 99-101.

<sup>76</sup> Lacy, pp. 366-69.

before an audience.<sup>77</sup> As recognised, it is the *harneys* that guides and gives meaning to external action as part of an embodied experience. Thus, if Malory's characters declare their identities primarily through their *seeming*, then the appendage, as it were, through which they *seem* most themselves is armour.

This is arguably why Lacy finds romance knights to be incomplete, lacking some fundamental part of themselves, when separated from their armour. The great range of the knight's ontological dependencies upon his *harneys* recall observations made earlier, regarding how one is to disentangle the body and artefact of knighthood, and discern which material most embodies the knight's body-self. My solution to this problem is to approach the *harneys* as a form of prosthesis. As Fisher explains, prostheses are objects 'both integral to the subject's sense of identity or self, and at the same time resolutely detachable or "auxiliary."<sup>78</sup> This definition finely accommodates my understanding of the *harneys* as a nonhuman adjunct necessary for *being* the complete and able body-self of knight. Richard Godden also discusses the prosthetic qualities of armour, though he does so through the lens of disability studies.<sup>79</sup> For Godden, as I suggest here, the romance knight must modify his body with armour in order to become 'whole, unpenetrated, [and] complete'.<sup>80</sup>

As noted, however, the crux of the prosthesis is that, whilst essential, it can be removed. Similarly, this thesis has shown that the bodies (young or wounded) which 'complete' embodied knighthood also threaten forms of *disembodiment*. What happens to the knight when he loses the object by which his body-self is intercorporeally enabled? If what the *harneys* does *for* and *to* the body is understood as prosthetic modification, does the loss of that prosthesis imply impairment or disability? Can the body *be* knightly, both performatively in its embodied practice and essentially in its materialised morphology, when *disarmed*? In the next section of the chapter, I will examine three interconnected tropes concerning the use and misuse of armour in the *Morte*, and consider how they reflect these more complex associations between the *harneys*, body, and self. These tropes cover: the exchange of armours whereby one knight adopts another's social self; the use of an unknown armour to appear *incognito*; and the loss of armour as occasioned by either damage or disarming. Each of these tropes threatens the potential for *disembodiment* of the armoured body.

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<sup>77</sup> Armstrong, p. 2. Meredith Reynolds has observed similar, noting 'if Malory individualizes his characters, he does through their external actions'. See 'Interior Monologue in Malory', *Arthuriana*, 24 (2014), 79-88 (79).

<sup>78</sup> Fisher, p. 26.

<sup>79</sup> Richard Godden, 'Prosthetic Ecologies: Vulnerable Bodies and the Dismodern Subject in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Textual Practice*, 30 (2016), 1273-1290.

<sup>80</sup> Godden, pp. 1274.

### Armed Knights and Naked Men II: Three Case Studies

In Malory's *Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake*, Sir Kay is harassed by several knights who pursue him until Launcelot unexpectedly intervenes on Kay's behalf. The next morning while Kay sleeps, Launcelot dresses himself in Kay's gear, leaving behind his own *barneys* and shield. When Kay wakes up, he surmises his friend's intention, remarking "Now, by my fayth [...] on hym knyghtes wolle be bolde and deme that hit is I, and that wolle begyle them. And bycause of his armoure and shyld, I am sure I shall ryde in pease" (210. 13-16). Launcelot's ploy works: he is mistaken for Sir Kay and subsequently attacked several times. Even Sir Ector de Marys, Launcelot's brother, believes 'by his armys that hit had bene Sir Kay' (212. 18-19). Kay, on the other hand, returns to court safely, "in Goddys pece", because, as he later reflects, "no man wolde have ado with me." (221. 27-8).

Sarah Gordon has noted that when a romance knight changes his armour, as Launcelot and Kay have done here, 'he alters his identity in the public eye'.<sup>81</sup> This is in large part because of how identity in the *Morte* relies on public identification. When wearing Launcelot's Armour, Kay is "Launcelot" to the other knights who, in consequence, avoid him. Launcelot's *barneys* in this respect offers the greatest defence in Arthur's kingdom, more often than not making its wearer untouchable. Conversely, this exchange of armours and social selfhoods is valuable to Launcelot for the opposite reason. The knights of Arthurian romance must continually demonstrate prowess in order to maintain their worship within the community of Arthur's knights. For a knight like Launcelot, whose renown dissuades others from challenging him, the constant need for prowess constitutes an existential dilemma to which borrowed armour supplies the solution. As Scala explains: 'he can prove he is Launcelot only by denying that he is Launcelot in order to perform and therefore assume his identity as "Launcelot"'.<sup>82</sup>

Godden discusses recent understandings of disability which include not only physical and mental, but social and political impairments.<sup>83</sup> 'All bodies', Godden notes, 'exist within social and political networks made up of other bodies and forces'. The actions of bodies within these networks, either in opposition to or accordance with other bodies, governs perceptions of ability and impairment. Disability is thus defined as "a set of social relations", while prosthetics, in this context, enable individuals 'to join and be functioning members of

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<sup>81</sup> Sarah Gordon, 'The Man with No Name: Identity in French Arthurian Verse Romance', *Arthuriana*, 18 (2008), 69-81 (69).

<sup>82</sup> Scala, p. 385.

<sup>83</sup> Godden, pp. 1274-5.

communities'. In the case of Sir Launcelot, I suggest that the knight's celebrated physical prowess has, counterintuitively, become one such form of social impairment, actually inhibiting Launcelot's ability to engage in the embodied practices of knighthood. Elsewhere in the *Morte*, the knight Sir Dynadan expresses this irony when discovering Launcelot at a tournament. Dynadan observes to Launcelot that, "may no meane knyghtes wyne no worship for the" (528. 34-5). Dynadan says this even of himself, admitting: "I shall no more mete with the [...] I shall beware of thy boysterous body that thou beryst" (529. 1-3). Launcelot is thus explicitly confronted with the paradox of his body-self. He has become so renowned for his *boysterous body* that his knighthood now relies on a form of physical abnegation. Again, Launcelot must compete in disguise in order to compete at all.

The physical gestures involved in taking off, putting on, and exchanging armours are central to Launcelot's disavowal of body-self and navigation of social impairment. As argued, this capacity of the *barneys* to be both integral to and separable from the knight's embodiment is that which allows it to be classified as prosthesis. It is, however, precisely this prosthetic detachability of armour that threatens to disrupt as well as reassert these same ontological values. If Launcelot's social self can be so easily discarded and taken up, for instance, one might question how innate and immutable "Launcelot" is, and from where this selfhood truly derives.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, if Launcelot 'borrows' the *barneys* and self of another body, is he not borrowing the body itself – its form and shape – and so sharing in another's embodied identity? How fixed are these fields which Launcelot is manipulating? One answer can be found in those moments during which Launcelot's disguises inevitably fail. Thus, Sir Ector comments that "methynkyth that knyght is muche bygger than ever was Sir Kay", after "Sir Kay" has succeeded in unhorsing Sir Sagramoure (212. 27-8). Similarly, Sir Dynadan, who, despite his caution, finds himself jousting against a disguised Launcelot, realises his opponent's true identity even as Launcelot hurtles towards him. In such cases, Launcelot's *boysterous* body proves too *bygge* even for his prosthetic disguise.

As a result, Launcelot's body and *barneys* enter into a kind of competition. His embodied knighthood, in so far as it occurs in this combination of parts human and nonhuman, appears unbalanced. Citrome has recognised that the ideal body-image for knighthood stresses armour's ability to seamlessly enclose and cover the knight.<sup>85</sup> This is problematic for Launcelot. Alex Mueller identifies other instances in which the *arayment*

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<sup>84</sup> On armour and 'essential' identity in Arthurian romance, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'The Armour of an Alienating Identity', *Arthuriana*, 6 (1996), 1-24 (3).

<sup>85</sup> Citrome, 'Bodies That Splatter: Surgery, Chivalry, and the Body in the Practica of John Arderne', *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 13 (2001), 137-72 (163).

intended to convey chivalric identity often instead confuses or fragments that identity.<sup>86</sup> Mueller shows how bodies and their armorial coverings conflict, such as when a wounded body bleeds through, and disfigures, its own coat-of-arms.<sup>87</sup> A similar phenomenon arguably obtains with Launcelot. This is not to say that Launcelot's essential identity as knight is ever truly in question. Rather, Launcelot's joint reliance *upon* and resistance *of* prosthesis reveals that the identifying relationship between body and *barneys*, human and nonhuman, is often more complex and, indeed, more compromising than it may first appear. When one knight fights in the amour of another, the act produces tensions between body and artefact, and raises questions about how each force constructs knightly identity. Most of all, as Godden remarks, this sort of tension, occurring in ostensibly normative or able bodies, prompts recognition that even the nominally 'complete' body is ultimately a fantasy of disparate parts.<sup>88</sup>

A closely related armorial trope, *incognito*, raises similar questions about the competing forces which construct embodied identities in Arthurian romance. *Incognito* describes the phenomenon whereby a knight uses an unknown harness or blank shield in order to conceal his identity from spectators.<sup>89</sup> As Susan Crane has noted, *incognito* works to prompt a 'public dialectic concerning [the knight's] two or several identities'.<sup>90</sup> Unlike the method of exchanging armours, however, the alter ego of the *incognito* knight is not borrowed from another knight but from armour itself. That to say, Launcelot could only appear as "Sir Kay" because of the existing association between the 'who' of Sir Kay and the 'what' of his *barneys*. *Incognito* occurs when no such associations exist, with the knight effectively appearing *as barneys*. The self of an *incognito* knight is thus often derived from metallurgical detail or colouration, affording titles such as "the Red Knight". Arguably the most complex and fraught example of a knight attempting to maintain *incognito* status is that of Malory's Sir Gareth of Orkney.

As seen above, Gareth leaves Arthur's court shortly after arming his body for the first time and thus appearing, through a cumulative public identification, as an embodied knight. Notably, however, Gareth continues to keep his personal identity as "Gareth of Orkney" a secret. On his quest, Gareth makes further choices regarding *barneys* and dress that similarly announce, but also distort, his developing knightly identity. For instance, Gareth is formally

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<sup>86</sup> Alex Mueller, 'The Historiography of the Dragon: Heraldic Violence in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 (2010), 295-324.

<sup>87</sup> Mueller, pp. 298-99, 319-20.

<sup>88</sup> Godden, p. 1274.

<sup>89</sup> Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) p. 125-33.

<sup>90</sup> Crane, *Performance*, p. 139.

knighthood by Launcelot almost immediately after setting out, with Launcelot agreeing to this once Gareth finally admits his relationship to Sir Gawain (229. 11-12). This is significant, as it is the first time that a member of Arthur's court (Launcelot, no less) discovers Gareth's familial identity. Soon after this, however, Gareth encounters a knight 'all armed in blak harneys' upon 'a grete blak horse' (232. 20-22). Gareth and 'the Blak Knyght' fight, with Gareth overcoming his opponent. Then, although already in possession of both horse and *harneys* of established quality, Gareth 'alyght downe and armed hym in his [the Black Knight's] armour, and so toke his horse' (234. 4-5).

As Sarah Gordon notes, *incognito* is achieved only by anonymising the adjuncts of knighthood, horse and armour, as Gareth does here.<sup>91</sup> This detail is important because, for the first time in the episode, there are those, like Launcelot, who know Gareth's identity and, crucially, know "Gareth" as the *harneys* in which he left court. When Gareth takes on the *harneys* of the Black Knight, the earlier revelation regarding Gareth's noble birth and connection to other members of the court is again deferred. The Black Knight *is* the Black Knight because of his equipment, which now conceals Gareth's body. Thus, two of the deceased Black Knight's brothers, the Green Knight and the Red Knight, greet Gareth as "my brothir" (234. 22) and "brothir" (238. 11) respectively. Like Launcelot in the Kay episode, then, Gareth succeeds in crafting an alternative armoured body-self. Unlike Launcelot, however, Gareth's armour does not recast him as another individual; rather, Gareth's armour transforms him into a living colour, "The Black Knight", thereby achieving *incognito* in material alone.

There is precedence for the existence of coloured armour like Gareth's in later medieval England. Tobias Capwell and Helmut Nickel both note that armour might be painted, either as a form of identification or, possibly, to disguise signs of repair.<sup>92</sup> Ruel Macaraeg goes further, noting that forms of decoration, such as colouring or engraving, work to fundamentally alter both the object's and wearer's 'essence'.<sup>93</sup> As noted, for Macaraeg, the ability of fashion to signify personal selfhoods relies on the closeness between body and object. In the case of Gareth, however, this intimacy between object, body, and self is being dismantled, or used in a counterintuitive manner. From the beginning of the episode, Gareth's relationship with armour reflects a desire to continually postpone the capacity of clothing to reveal something of the wearer's personal identity. Gareth does not even remain the Black Knight for long. Later, he accepts another 'passynge good horse' and yet more 'good armour' (272. 10). As Raymond Papica notes, in such cases armour in the *Morte*

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<sup>91</sup> Gordon, p. 77.

<sup>92</sup> Nickel, pp. 131-32; Capwell, p. 130.

<sup>93</sup> Macaraeg, p. 44.

functions not as an essential indicator of identity, but as a ‘silent, miscommunicating symbiote’.<sup>94</sup>

The climax of this use of clothing to confuse rather than confirm the body-self comes when Gareth is to compete in a tournament against the rest of Arthur’s knights. Gareth intends to remain unknown, and so incorporates a final material adjunct into his outfit. This is a magic ring, the property of which is that, for the wearer:

grene woll turne to rede, and that that is rede woll turne in lyknesse  
to grene, and that that is blewe woll turne in lyknesse to whyghte, and  
that that is whyghte woll turne in lyknesse to blew; and so hit will do  
of all maner of coloures (271-72. 35;1-4)

These are, significantly, many of the ‘tinctures’ associated with medieval heraldry – the system of representation in which select pictorial devices and colours were used to express both individual character and family lineage.<sup>95</sup> Heraldry is a particularly good medieval example of the capacity of clothing to enable personal expression, such as discussed by Macaraeg. Different heraldic colours, for instance, convey different character traits, ranging from red’s assertion of ferocity to white’s suggestion of innocence.<sup>96</sup> Importantly, Maurice Keen understands heraldry to operate through its own language, ‘blazoning’, which entails a set of rules regarding which colours, shapes, patterns, and animals could be used in which order.<sup>97</sup> If heraldry is language, however, then Gareth’s ring represents an insensible kaleidoscope of miscommunication. Gareth himself recognises this when remarking: ‘hit woll turne all maner of lyknesse that I am in, and that shall cause me that I shall nat be knowyn’ (272. 7-8). In this, Gareth admits his intent, particularly as it concerns his use of *harneys*, throughout the episode. Gareth seeks to *turne* – that is, to subvert and upend – his body-self in such a way that he is, in effect, always *incognito*.

Malory describes this effect from the perspective of onlookers, saying how Gareth ‘at one tyme [...] semed grene, and another tyme [...] he semed blue’ (274. 12-13). At ‘every course that he rode too and fro’, Malory explains, Gareth ‘changed whyght to rede and blak’ (274. 13-15). As a result, Gareth becomes a kind of polychronic enigma and, Malory notes, ‘myght neyther kynge nother knyght have no redy cognysaunce of him’ (274. 15-16). This term *cognysaunce* is significant. Its meaning suggests both the knowledge or understanding of a thing, and so that which is lacking in the case of Gareth; also, tellingly, a *cognysaunce* is a

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<sup>94</sup> Papica, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> For the role of heraldry in this episode, see Kenneth Tiller, ‘The Rise of Sir Gareth and the Hermeneutics of Heraldry’, *Arthuriana*, 17 (2001), 1-18.

<sup>96</sup> Tiller, pp. 2-5.

<sup>97</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, pp. 128-29.



term used for a heraldic device or emblem which reveals knightly identity.<sup>98</sup> This term features elsewhere in the *Morte*, in reference to banners and coats-of-arms. Here, its use conveys that Gareth has not only again succeeded in frustrating public identification, but that, in the grand tradition of magical rings, Gareth, in heraldic terms, has achieved invisibility.

Crane notes that *incognito* is best understood in respect to what she calls the two main registers of noble self-representation: familial blood and personal deed.<sup>99</sup> *Incognito*, Crane explains, is an act of ‘definition and redefinition’ which seeks to balance these competing forces. While the trope relies on concealing personal identity, this concealment is only temporary, intended ‘to focus attention on the judgement of present actions without regard for lineage, past achievements, or past failures’. Though Crane does not discuss Malory’s Gareth, her work helps contextualise what Gareth is attempting and why. Gareth is the younger brother of Sir Gawain; he is the son of Queen Morgause and King Lot, and nephew to King Arthur. Gareth thus has considerable motivation to defer recognition of this esteemed familial blood in order to demonstrate his own prowess. By dissembling his body through tincture, metal, and magic, Gareth becomes a knight from nowhere and, crucially, from no one.

This episode thus manifests the tension between *barneys* and body in a different way. Gareth’s body most strongly connotes his blood, so he must continually attempt to suppress it. This is why Gareth says of his ring, “I may hyde my body withall” (277. 24). The *disembodying* subtraction and addition of different materials to and from Gareth’s body is desirable, because this way Gareth can subtract his body, and thus his blood, from his self. The ‘what’ of Gareth is constantly out of focus, but the ‘who’ of the Fair Unknown building his knighthood in prowess is clear. The dilemma here is again between an essential or ‘inborn’ embodiment and one to which certain processes or parts must be applied. Gareth’s refusal to unveil his body marks a striking, if inverted parallel to the Kay and Launcelot episode, where Launcelot’s body would not be hidden. In both cases, the bodies, selves, and armours of these knights seem to overlap and align, but also pull apart and contradict one another. Much like Launcelot’s borrowed prostheses, the plurality of armours and armorial tinctures through which “Gareth” is hidden prompts consideration about which material ultimately matters most in embodying knighthood. This question can be explored further in a final case study examining *disarming*, and the degree to which this may imply *disembodiment*.

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<sup>98</sup> MED entry *conissance* n. 2(a).

<sup>99</sup> Crane, *Performance*, pp. 107, 129.

The knights of the *Morte* often find themselves unwillingly stripped of *harneys*. Sir Tristram, for instance, after defeating Sir Palomydes, forbids his opponent ‘armys nother none harneys of werre’ for twelve months in recognition of his defeat (305. 15-16). Palomydes, Malory says, ‘kut of his harneys and threw them away’, saying “I am shamed!” (305. 18-21). Elsewhere, different forms of disarming occur. Balyn and his brother, for instance, fight until ‘their hawberkes unnailed, that naked they were on every side’ (72. 20). Similarly, when Sir Gareth fights Sir Ironside, each knight ‘hew grete pecis of othyr harneys [...] that a grete parte felle in the fylde’ (251. 19-20). As with Balyn and his brother, by the end of their combat, both Gareth’s and his opponent’s ‘armoure was so forhewyn that men might se theire naked sydys, and in other placis they were naked’ (251. 33-4). The ‘nakedness’ that follows disarming is open to various interpretations. The Middle English *naked* suggests, primarily, vulnerability and defencelessness rather than bare flesh.<sup>100</sup> Thus, in many cases, nakedness in the *Morte* marks a combat’s close and a disarmed knight’s defeat.<sup>101</sup> In other cases, however, *naked* signals a more obvious sense of lacking all or some clothing, with the naked man being bare, stripped, *mere*, bereft, or, as with Palomydes, shamed.

Nakedness and the loss of *harneys* appear with unusual regularity in Malory’s *Sir Launcelot du Lake*. In this section of the *Morte*, Launcelot encounters the knight Sir Tarquyn, whose custom is “to destroye good knyghtes” (205. 27). Tarquyn, unusually, does not kill his victims, but disarms them and flogs their bare flesh: ‘he garte unarme them’, Malory says, ‘and bete them with thornys all naked’ (191. 25). Tarquyn then emphasises his captives’ nakedness and vulnerability by suspending their stripped equipment from a tree. Tarquyn’s torture is so transgressive because in disarming his captives, Tarquyn is *disembodying* them of cyborg bodiliness outlined above, stealing their shape, aspect, and luminous steel strength. Indeed, when Launcelot confronts Tarquyn, the latter claims to have ‘maymed [his captives] uttirly, that they might never aftir helpe themselves” (202. 27-8). How Tarquyn is maiming his prisoners is unclear; however, in being separated from their enabling, identifying, and embodying prostheses, Tarquyn’s captives might indeed be understood to have been *maymed* – that is, crippled and made impotent.

Late medieval English audiences would have appreciated the *disembodying* trauma which Tarquyn’s torture inflicts upon his victims. Similar punishments were carried out in the later Middle Ages when a knight was found guilty of treason.<sup>102</sup> *Warkworth’s Chronicle*, for instance, records the trial of Sir Ralph Grey, a Lancastrian, tried for treason following the

<sup>100</sup> MED entry *naked* adj. 2(a).

<sup>101</sup> Robert Jones, p. 118.

<sup>102</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, pp. 174-8; Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses*, p. 89.

siege of Bamburgh castle, which Grey had defended against the Yorkists in 1464.<sup>103</sup> Grey's punishment was death, prior to which he was to have his 'sporys striken of by the hard heles' and his coat-of-arms torn from his body. The intention, as it was explained to Grey, was that he be 'disgraded of thy worshipp, noblesse, and armes, as of the order of Knyghthode'. In this, while Grey was ultimately to perish, his knighthood was intended to die first, being literally struck from his body. A similar punishment is recorded in Caxton's *Cronycles of Englund*, this time for Sir Anthony Harding, Earl of Carlisle. In 1323, Harding, like Grey, was accused of treason and sentenced to death. Prior to this, Harding was held while another 'hewe of his spores of his heles' before, again, stripping him of any clothing which might identify him as a knight.<sup>104</sup> The outcome of this ritual divestment was clearly expressed shortly after, with Harding being told: "nowe art thou no kny3t but a knave".

Just as Malory's Sir Gareth was transformed from kitchen boy into a knight by the acquisition of his *barneys*, the reverse was thus also possible. This power to unmake knightly body-selves is that which Tarquyn directs against his naked captives, over whom he assumes power as a knight among knaves. This relationship between disarming and *disembodiment* is further stressed when Launcelot challenges Tarquyn and attempts to restore his captives: Launcelot 'lepte uppon [Tarquyn] fersly and gate hym by the bavoure of hys helmette and plucked hym downe on his kneis, and anone he raced of hs helme and smote his necke in sundir' (203. 14-16).

The 'racing off' of helms is a common form of disarming in the *Morte*. During a tournament, for instance, Sir Lamerok alone 'rushed here and there and raced of many helmys' (523. 4-5); 'smote downe many knyghtes, and raced of helmys' (526. 9); and 'raced of helmys and pulled downe knyghtes' (528. 1-2). In such cases, the localised disarming that comes with the loss of a helm becomes a shorthand for the knight's defeat. In Launcelot's combat with Tarquyn, however, the act is crucial, as an additional detail makes clear. The 'bavoure', or *bevor*, which Launcelot grips refers to the piece of plate armour designed to defend the neck, very much like the *gorget*. Caxton's *Ordre* describes this as a collar symbolising 'obedyence', figuratively limiting the knight's action 'withynne the commaundements of his souerayne & within thordre [sic] of chyualry' (82). In gripping Tarquyn by this particular piece of his *barneys*, Launcelot assumes sovereign power over Tarquyn, who is physically forced to kneel, knave-like before Launcelot.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>103</sup> *Warkworth's Chronicle of the First Thirteen Years of the Reign of King Edward the Fourth*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell (London: Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1839), pp. 37-9.

<sup>104</sup> *The Cronycles of Englund* (London: William Caxton, 1480), fol. M4 r.

<sup>105</sup> For kneeling and other gestures see Burrow, *Gestures and Look in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 18-23.

Though Launcelot does not reduce Tarquyn to nakedness, the series of gestures by which Launcelot simultaneously brings Tarquyn to his knees, removes his helmet, and snaps his neck, very closely aligns the act of disarming with the knight's destruction. Conversely, after defeating Tarquyn, Launcelot redeems his captives by directing them to their gear, and ordering them to "take suche stuff [...] as they fynde" (204. 4-5). Malory thus reaffirms that the loss of *harneys* can connote the annihilation of the knight in both figurative and literal terms. This threat is reiterated later, when Launcelot himself is disarmed. In this instance, Launcelot is tricked into unarming himself, shortly after which he is attacked by a knight in full *harneys* 'with his naked swerde in his honde' (218. 4). Launcelot stresses his disadvantage by juxtaposing his opponent's status as 'an armed knyght' with his own as a 'naked man' (218. 10-11).

The irreconcilability of naked and knightly bodies is again emphasised, this time with the added disparity between Launcelot's naked body and his aggressor's naked sword. Though Launcelot is not unclothed, for the brief moment in which he is disarmed, even Launcelot becomes, like Tarquyn's prisoners, *disembodied* – a *naked man* set in contrast to an armed knight. As Lacy has stated, 'nakedness makes [the knight] unrecognizable'.<sup>106</sup> Disarming, then, along with *incognito* and the exchange of armours, reveals the more ambivalent connotations attending the armoured body's role in constructing embodied knighthood. Often, *harneys* and body generate a fraught dialectic between human and nonhuman through which knightly body-selves are gained, lost, and revised. In all cases, questions are raised regarding which material – boisterous flesh, familial blood, or shining steel – matters most in embodying knighthood. I will finish by examining the possibility that armour might constitute its own form of nonhuman embodiment, discarding the human element entirely.

### **The Bodies in Armour: The *Harneys* as Nonhuman Embodied Thing**

This chapter has demonstrated that the embodied practices and identity of knighthood are in part reliant on prosthetic technologies like the *harneys*. Susan Crane suggests further that the prostheses of the knight 'seek both to emulate *and supplant* the body part' which they modify.<sup>107</sup> Crane identifies here not only the ways in which material is added to the body, thereby enhancing it, but the degree to which that enhancement also effaces or even *replaces* the body it amends. The knight, Crane argues, can be read as a human-thing hybrid – 'a

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<sup>106</sup> Lacy, p. 368.

<sup>107</sup> Crane, 'Pre/Postmodern', pp. 76, 70.

superbly enabled man *and* a combat mechanism'. When Malory's Sir Launcelot pledges warriors to Arthur's war against Emperor Lucius, he objectifies his offering as "twenty thousande helmys in haubirkes attyred that shall never fayle you" (148. 2-3). It is clear that Launcelot is discussing men, but his language omits their flesh-and-blood bodies in favour of the nonhuman materials which enable their participation. As Crane suggests, the knights of passages like this one become 'just so much equipment'. This prompts a more novel form of *disembodiment*, whereby the body-self is not so much disabled or disfigured by the subtraction of a particular element, but is instead dehumanised as a 'thing'. In Launcelot's inexhaustible *haubirkes*, one is confronted by the 'knight as cyborg'.

Michel Foucault dated the mechanisation of the human body, which he reimagined as an automaton with 'functions and utilities [...] predictabilities and precisions', to eighteenth-century Europe.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, which in many respects acts as successor to Foucault's biopolitical model, approaches the cyborg as a distinctly modern, or postmodern, phenomenon.<sup>109</sup> Haraway defines cyborgs as 'creatures simultaneously animal and machine [...] ambiguously natural and crafted'.<sup>110</sup> Importantly, because the cyborg is a postmodern creation, Haraway maintains that it 'has no origin story' in premodernity.

Yet, the knight, as I have shown, can comfortably be read as a body-self both animal and machine, natural and crafted. Raymond Papica, similarly, has used the work of critical theorist Giles Deleuze to conceptualise medieval armour as a 'wearable technology'.<sup>111</sup> For Papica, armour is 'not simply attached to the body [but] can function separately from the body that "wears" it'. In contrast to Haraway, Papica argues that the intercorporeality of knight and armour represents a clear medieval chapter in 'cyborg-history'. Another scholar, Schuyler Eastin, cites similar evidence to Papica when arguing that the knight should be understood as an 'assemblage' of equal parts human and machine.<sup>112</sup> As with Papica, Eastin's argument attempts to decentre the human component of what I term embodied knighthood, asserting even that 'armor [sic] was not merely a covering for the chivalric body, it *was* the knight'.<sup>113</sup>

Both Papica and Schuyler take this approach far beyond what has thus far been demonstrated in this thesis. I have found no evidence, for instance, that armour could

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<sup>108</sup> Vernon W. Cisney and Nicolae Morar, 'Why Biopower? Why Now?', in *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond*, ed. by Vernon W. Cisney and Nicolae Morar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 1-28 (4).

<sup>109</sup> Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

<sup>110</sup> Haraway, pp. 6-8.

<sup>111</sup> Papica, pp. 1-15 (2).

<sup>112</sup> Schuyler Eastin, *(Dis)arming the Middle Ages: Chivalric Materiality in Medieval Romance* (University of California, Riverside: Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, 2017), pp. 1-14.

<sup>113</sup> Eastin, p. 5.

‘function’ without the human body, although I have argued that the significance of the *barneys* goes far beyond that of an accessory. In concluding this chapter, I will address this topic and highlight some instances in which the cyborg potential of the knight is discernible. For example, there are moments in Middle English romance wherein the distinguishing boundary between the human body and nonhuman thing appears to blur, with often ambiguous results. We see this, for instance, at those times during which the practical closeness shared by the knight and his gear manifests as a kind of physical intimacy. Malory’s Sir Launcelot places ‘his helmet undir his hede’, as a pillow, when sleeping outdoors (191. 2-3) and, on a different occasion, ‘layde hym downe to slepe uppon hys shyldre’ (693. 17-18). Similarly, the Gawain of the fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* ‘sleped in his yrnes’ (229) and remained ‘harnayst’ even while attending mass (592). Most unusually, Gawain, upon taking up his helmet, ‘hastily hit kysses’ before placing it over his head (605). In Chapter Two, it was noted that the poet and knight Charles d’Orléans described his armour as having become rusty in parallel to his own aged flesh. This sympathetic and symbiotic bonding between knight and *barneys* approaches something like the cyborg, wherein ‘the continuum from warrior through equipment appears entirely seamless’.<sup>114</sup>

The depth of this cyborg integration of metal and flesh becomes especially noticeable during combat. One particularly good example of this comes in the *Morte*, in the encounter between Sir Gawain and Sir Priamus. In this combat, the knights,

Com on spedyly with full syker dyntes, and there they shotte thorow shyldys and mayles, and thorow there shene shuldrys they were thorowborne the brede of an hande [...] [they] rushed oute their swerdys and hyttys on theire helmys with hateful dyntys, and stabbis at hir stomakys with swerdys well steled [...] Than Sir Gawayne [...] clevis the knyghtes shyldre in sunder, and thorowoute the thycke haubirke made of sure mayles; and the rybbys that were ryche, he rushed hem in sunder, that men myght beholde the lyvir and longes (177. 15-27)

Here, Malory’s description appears to deliberately confuse the body and *barneys* of each knight. *Shyldys*, *stomakys*, *shuldrys*, and *swerdys* elide within a sibilant blur in which all materials, human and nonhuman, begin to look like *stele*. This effect is penetrating and profound for the body of the romance knight. When Gawain cleaves his opponent’s armour in two, the *sure mayles* and *ryche rybbys* of Priamus’ hauberk part, like flesh and bone, to reveal *lyvir and longes*. There is no intermediary layer of skin and tissue to partition body and artefact; the two seem, as Chrétien’s Perceval said, ‘all one piece’. The same is observed when Priamus returns a blow against Gawain, ‘and brastyth the rerebrace and vambrace bothe, and kut

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<sup>114</sup> Crane, ‘Pre/Postmodern’, p. 77.

thorow a vayne' so that Gawain's 'armure was all bloody' (177. 29-32). Gawain's armour, which is finely detailed here as including upper-arm and forearm pieces, bursts along with his vein, creating the effect of not only bloody, but *bleeding* metal.<sup>115</sup> As Citrome notes in relation to other literary depictions of armoured combat, 'there is no spatial distinction made here between the organic and the constructed', the two condense into one body.<sup>116</sup>

When examining the creation of medieval relics, Roberta Gilchrist discusses the process of *objectification*, occurring when 'the agency of persons and things become entwined'.<sup>117</sup> This process can justifiably be extended to the discussion of the romance knight's intercorporealization *as* and *into* his *barneys*. It is in this sense that Crane argues for the knight as a premodern example of the "thingliness of persons".<sup>118</sup> For the knight, the dividing line between human, nonhuman, body and thing, is permeable. Just as this process of *objectification* transforms the knight into an armoured artefact, however, it also enables armour to undergo a corresponding change. If people become or operate as things, Gilchrist notes, things at times also manifest as people, with a parallel life course punctuated by breakage, repair, and even death.<sup>119</sup> We see this idea in the example above, wherein armour breaks like a rib or bleeds like a cut vein.<sup>120</sup> There are other examples in the *Morte* during which *arayment* come to possess a kind of personhood, or, at least, a vital agency. An awareness of these living *things* proves useful in contextualising the personification of the *barneys* itself.

Early on in the *Morte*, Malory introduces King Royn, an antagonistic figure who, having conquered several kings, demands as homage that they 'gaff their bearded clene flayre off, as much as was bearde' (45. 18-19). From these cuttings, Royn fabricates a 'mantell' which he wears as a symbol of his opponents' subjugation. This beard mantle is an artefact literally fashioned from bits of bodies, confusing the criteria by which bodies and things can be discerned in the *Morte*. Moreover, the mantle, like armour, operates as a prosthesis capable of attracting and conferring its own embodying qualities. For instance, as Laura Cark shows,

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<sup>115</sup> Note that, while this imagery can appear unusual, the French surgeon Henri de Mondeville (d. 1320) conceptualised the surgeon as a blacksmith, surgery a kind of metalwork, and the body as a material to be cut, opened, and cauterised. See Marie-Christine Puchelle, *The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Rosemary Morris (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 95-106.

<sup>116</sup> Citrome, 'Bodies that Splatter', p. 161.

<sup>117</sup> Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, pp. 223-24.

<sup>118</sup> Crane, 'Pre/Postmodern', p. 76.

<sup>119</sup> Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, pp. 242-43.

<sup>120</sup> For an overview of the life courses and 'personalities' of things, see Janet Hoskins, 'Agency, Biography and Objects', in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. by Chris Tilley et al (London: Sage, 2006), pp. 74-85 (77-9).

because of the strong cultural and intellectual ties between beards and manhood, an item woven from beards invariably possessed a masculine and masculinising bodiliness.<sup>121</sup>

Another example occurs later in the *Morte*, in the episode concerning La Cote Male Tayle – another iteration of the Fair Unknown trope. Though the youth is ‘bygly made’ and ‘rychely beseyne’, Malory observes that ‘his overgarmente sate overthwartely’ upon him (360. 2-4). The young man, Brunor le Noyre, is mockingly dubbed “La Cote Male Tayle” by Sir Kay, with Kay explaining that his refers to “The Evyll-Shapyn Cote” which the youth wears (360. 10-11). La Cote Male Tayle gives an explanation for this unusual dress, revealing that his father was murdered while sleeping, and “thys same cote had my fadir on that tyme” (360. 18). Thus, Brunor explains, “that makyth this coote to sytte so evyll uppon me, for the strokes be on hit as I founde hit, and never shall it be amended for me” (360. 18-20).

Brunor’s coat possesses considerable bodiliness. While wearing it, Brunor’s own body-self carries a set of open wounds, as in a kind of sartorial re-enactment of his father’s death or grisly form of heraldry. Indeed, Brunor observes: “to have my fadyrs deth in remembraunce I were this coote tyll I be revenged” (360. 21-2). This conforms to the broader symbolism of the coat in chivalric culture as a mnemonic garb for toil and trauma. Caxton’s *Ordre* explains that the garment is given ‘in sygnefauce of the grete trauaylles that a knyght must suffre’; because the coat is worn over the armour, it ‘receyueh the strokes to fore the hawberke and the other armures’ (87). Unlike the more invulnerable *barneys*, then, the *cote* bears the signs of travail, becoming a nonhuman doppelgänger in which the wounds of the human body are duplicated. One sees this in other forms of chivalric *arayment*, too. The Earl of Salisbury ennobled a squire who had fought at the Battle of Verneuil (1424), presenting him with a coat-of-arms depicting three ox heads *sable* upon a field *argent*. The rationale given for this device by Nicholas Upton (d. 1457) was that the squire had been maimed in the genitals during the battle, and ‘the ox is a gelded beast’.<sup>122</sup> Much like Brunor’s coat, the squire’s coat-of-arms reveals the way in which nonhuman artefacts share and in some manner help bear the trauma of human bodies.

This human-thing intercorporeality continues to develop in the case of La Cote Male Tayle, with Brunor being warned “wete thou well thy skynne shall be as well hewyn as thy cote” (362. 34-5). In this, the seamlessness between Brunor’s flesh-and-blood body and the ‘body’ *in* the coat becomes both explicit and ambivalent. The ill-fitting coat not only demands future action in Brunor’s quest for revenge, but also threatens a potential outcome as a garment which Brunor may be doomed to fit. This produces an ambiguity regarding which

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<sup>121</sup> Laura Clark, ‘Fashionable Beards and Beards as Fashion: Beard Coats in Thomas Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur, Pareragon*, 31 (2014), 95-109.

<sup>122</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, p. 164.



'body', human or nonhuman, is agent, and which conforms to the shape of the other. As Gilchrist notes, medieval people at times attributed intentionality to objects, imbuing things with the 'power to affect people'.<sup>123</sup> To clarify these ideas in the context of embodied knighthood, it is necessary now to look at some examples of late medieval armour. There is evidence to suggest that medieval armourers appreciated these tensions between human and artefact, with some pieces designed to communicate the personhood and bodiliness of nonhuman things.

Two examples relating to Henry VIII are valuable here. Though later than much of my evidence, it is rare to identify a medieval *barneys* alongside its human body. Henry, contrastingly, provides both an identifiable material culture and a body much discussed by historians. The two pieces are foot-combat armours made for Henry in 1520 and 1540 respectively.<sup>124</sup> Both pieces were designed for Henry's participation in tournaments at radically different stages of his life.<sup>125</sup> The 1520 armour [fig. 1], for example, was made in England by German armourers, and is often cited for its extreme technical precision.<sup>126</sup> This *barneys* is so closely tailored to an adolescent Henry's exact bodily proportions that it would have offered near total protection whilst allowing for considerable articulation and flexibility, particularly around the joints and feet.<sup>127</sup> The 1520 armour materialises in minute detail Henry's young body, its vigorous and masculine body-type enhanced by an armoured codpiece. The armour's external waist was measured at thirty-seven inches, and its chest at forty-four inches. In contrast, the 1540 *barneys* [fig. 2] was made much later in Henry's life, again in England, when he was age 49.<sup>128</sup> Henry staged two tournaments during this time, which are thought to have been his last.<sup>129</sup> While this piece is recorded as having been made for Henry, it is unclear whether it was worn in the event. This uncertainty responds both to Henry's older age, as well as his grosser physique, which, again, is meticulously reproduced in

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<sup>123</sup> Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, p. 216.

<sup>124</sup> Both armours are held at the Royal Armouries, Leeds, under object numbers II.6 (1520) and II.8 (1540).

<sup>125</sup> See Ian Eaves, 'The Tournament Armours of King Henry VIII of England', *Livrustkammaren: Journal of the Royal Armoury* (1993), 2-45.

<sup>126</sup> Karen Watts, 'Tournaments at the Court of Henry VIII', in *Arms and the Man*, pp. 116-118.

<sup>127</sup> Thom Richardson, 'The King and the Astronaut', *Arms & Armour* 10 (2013), 3-13.

<sup>128</sup> Richardson, 'Armour Workshops', pp. 152, 214-17.

<sup>129</sup> From 1537, Henry began suffering from leg ulcers which complicated his participation in public life and eventually required the use mobility aids. See Milo Keynes, in 'The Personality and Health of King Henry VIII (1491-1547)', *Journal of Medical Biography*, 13 (2005), 174-83 (177-79).

metal.<sup>130</sup> This armour's external waist is increased to fifty-one inches, its chest now fifty-four inches.<sup>131</sup> Like the 1520 armour, this harness features an armoured codpiece.

These two harnesses provide a useful case study for exploring the personification of things, and corresponding exchange of body-selves between humans and nonhumans. Each of Henry's armours retains a mimetically synthetic embodied 'identity', as materialised in a distinct human morphology. These pieces, as Geraldine Heng has noted in regards armour more generally, 'project a surrogate body piece by piece.'<sup>132</sup> When combined, these surrogate embodiments simulate a kind of entropic passage through the lifecycle, charting Henry's dramatic physical decline as he aged. Much like Sir Brunor's coat, which worked to 'remember' a particular embodiment, these two armours thus re-enact Henry's gradual *disembodiment*.<sup>133</sup> Interestingly, the one feature which does not change, and does not degrade, is the codpiece. Henry's armoured codpiece is durable to a degree that attains ideological force, constituting a virility that outlives the body's deterioration.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, in the seventeenth century, one of Henry's armoured codpieces was displayed in the Tower of London, where it became the object of a folk-fertility superstition in which women reportedly stuck pins into the codpiece's lining in order to improve their chances of conception.<sup>135</sup>

Henry's harnesses thus possess a persuasive vitality, simulating growth, decay, and even a form of generative virility. These personified things challenge the boundaries between human and artefact in a way that is consistent with the above textual evidence. Henry's harnesses are not isolated examples, however. Several other armorial pieces illustrate that medieval armourers developed an appreciation for the morphology, anatomy, and, as with Henry's disembodied yet vital codpiece, 'lives' of armours. Two helmets demand detailed consideration.

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<sup>130</sup> Henry's diet caused constipation, insomnia, and chronic dehydration, as well as compromising physical fitness. See Elizabeth Hurren, 'Cultures of the Body, Medical Regimen, and Physic at the Tudor Court', in *Henry VIII and the Court: Art, Politics and Performance*, ed. by Thomas Betteridge and Suzannah Lipscomb (London: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 65-89 (67-8).

<sup>131</sup> The dimensions of this enormous *harnays* are so accurate that the piece has been used as a source in studies of Henry's health. See, CR Chalmers and EJ Chaloner, '500 Years Later: Henry VIII, Leg Ulcers, and the Course of History', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 102 (2009), 513-17 (514).

<sup>132</sup> Heng, p. 168.

<sup>133</sup> The capacity of things to remember and 'make the past present and tangible' is discussed by Bjørnar Olsen, *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects* (Plymouth: AltaMira Press, 2010), pp. 107-116. (108).

<sup>134</sup> Or a disease that outlives the body. C. S. Reed argues that codpieces suggest syphilis, with the bulky fashion used to conceal dressings administered during treatment. See 'The Codpiece: Social Fashion or Medical Need?', *Internal Medicine Journal*, 34 (2004), 684-686.

<sup>135</sup> Fisher, pp. 71-4 (73).

The first [fig. 3] is a German double-visor helmet made around 1520. Its exaggerated physiognomic traits again stress the personhood of this nonhuman thing. The most prominent feature of this helmet is its moustache, which blurs categories of body and artefact by reproducing the embossed metalwork visible at the collar and crest. The moustache is finely decorative in this way, although emphatically inorganic. In its twisting pattern and rounded tips, the helm's moustache is openly – indeed, provocatively – artificial. The nose, however, sitting directly above the moustache, is of a glaringly different design. The metalwork of the nose is recognisably plastic and fleshy. In profile, the nose even appears crooked, as if having been broken. Further animating the helm are anatomically placed nostrils, visible once the visor is raised. The lines of the cast become softer and more lifelike around and beneath the nose, moving from a lined mouth into a pronounced but rounded chin. The manufactures, obviously capable of linear precision, may have deliberately (mis)shaped the nose in this way, intending for it to *grow* out of the metal itself. The overall effect is to allow the body wearing armour to echo outwards into the armour itself, thereby blurring the line between metal and flesh.<sup>136</sup>

Another helm [fig. 4], a 1512 grotesque-style 'armet', goes even further than the moustached helm in representing anatomically detailed physiognomic features. The armet's metalwork features stubble, crow's feet, and laughter lines. The armourer has, in addition, etched a furrowed brow and wrinkled nose, from which drips embossed mucus. The metalwork here is markedly porous and tactile, having numerous openings around the eyes, mouth, and nose – which, like the moustached helm, feature anatomical nostrils. This means that the wearer could see, breathe, and perhaps smell *through* metal. The armet also features gaps between the teeth which not only facilitate further breathing but audible speech. As a result, the separation between the body wearing this armour and the body etched and shaped into it is especially indistinct. Both the piece's horns and glasses may have been added later, making its original conception difficult to judge.<sup>137</sup> Even if one removed the horn and glasses, however, the armet remains distinguishable through a number of embodied characteristics. Notably, these features are largely prosaic, in contrast to the exaggerated moustache above. The armet is unshaven and wrinkled with care and age; it has developed sickness, as

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<sup>136</sup> Alternatively, the effect may be intended to 'efface the wearer's identity and supplant it with whatever identity was embodied by the mask', as has been argued in the case of Anglo-Saxon moustached helms. See Melissa Herman, 'Something More than 'Man': Re-Examining the Human Figure in early Anglo-Saxon Art', in *The Art, Literature and Material Culture of the Medieval World*, ed. by Meg Boulton, Jane Hawkes, and Melissa Herman (London: Four Courts Press, 2015), pp. 278-94 (288).

<sup>137</sup> Richardson, 'Workshops', p. 166.

suggested by its dripping nose.<sup>138</sup> The armourer's intent in this may have been to contrast something as potentially pristine and durable as metal with the physical signs of human infirmity, many of which relate to age and illness. As a result, more than even Henry's growing and aging harnesses, the armet is an emphatically 'living' *thing*.

In the nonhuman bodies visible in Henry VIII's harnesses and these two helms, one recognises the blending of physiognomic lines, shapes, and details into metal, thereby expressing, almost as a kind of pun, an awareness of the bodies that live 'in' armour. As in romance evidence, material culture reveals the way in which human and nonhuman bodies overlap, collaborate, and at times compete in the construction of embodied identities. Theorist Jane Bennett discusses what she calls 'thing-power', defined as 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle'.<sup>139</sup> This definition is applicable here, as one might confidently discuss the 'thing-power' of a piece like the armet to animate, act, and arrest without human assistance. Bennett argues that, by operating as actants rather than objects, things escape from and exceed their immediate contexts and purposes. Alfred Gell, similarly, has theorized how things behave as social agents, using the metaphor of a child protecting the welfare of a cherished toy, even at the expense of other humans.<sup>140</sup> A similar relationship can develop, Gell argues, between adults and their cars, which may attain personal names, genders, and, he speculates, ethnicities.<sup>141</sup> In such instances, 'the car does just reflect the owner's personhood, it has a personhood'. I have speculated similarly about the nonhuman personhoods of armour. In fact, the relationship between knight and *harnays* is even more complex, because here the object *is* the subject – not friend *to* but facsimile *of* the human. To conclude, I will consider some implications for these findings.

In her work on premodern automata, Wendy Hyman offers an understanding of the automaton which includes not only vivified nonhuman things but also the 'human being viewed materially'.<sup>142</sup> Elsewhere, in *Medieval Robots*, E.R. Truitt notes that automata exist as a class of manufactured things whose core distinguishing feature is their mimicry of natural

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<sup>138</sup> Graeme Rimer convincingly argues that the helm's features resemble contemporary depictions of the 'Fool' character, such as by Peter Flotner (d. 1456), though he is yet to publish on this. For the fool in the medieval medical context see, Eliza Buhner, "But What is to be said of a fool?": Intellectual Disability in Medieval Thought and Culture', in *Mental Health*, pp. 314-43.

<sup>139</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 2-18 (5).

<sup>140</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), pp. 16-22.

<sup>141</sup> Gell's car, 'Olly', is a Toyota and, hence, Japanese (18).

<sup>142</sup> Wendy Hyman, 'introduction', in *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. by Wendy Beth Hyman (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 1-17 (5).

forms.<sup>143</sup> In these two understandings of automata – things as people and people as things – we find a relevant context for the depictions of armoured ‘cyborg’ bodies analysed above. Can one, in consequence, class the medieval knight as a form of automaton or cyborg? Raymond Papica has argued the affirmative, but mostly in relation to post-medieval sources, from Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* to twenty-first century depictions of knights in popular culture.<sup>144</sup> It might be better to ask whether late medieval individuals could conceptualise the knight as evoking a ‘thingliness’ or nonhuman vivacity.

Automata were not unknown by the end of the Middle Ages. Hyman identifies literature as the earliest vehicle for representations, with depictions of animated statuary or metalwork.<sup>145</sup> Truitt finds similar, identifying examples of automata in *chansons de geste* and Arthurian romance.<sup>146</sup> Of particular relevance, Truitt cites a thirteenth-century French romance in which Lancelot fights several *chevalier de cuivre*, ‘copper knights’, who are animated by demonic enchantment. Ironically, when examining manuscript illuminations of this scene, Truitt finds that the copper knights tend to be represented as bronzed naked men, complete with genitalia and body hair. Conversely, Launcelot appears as the more obviously automatized figure, ‘completely covered in metal from head to toe’. It is as if, in this, the knight retains exclusive right to even the suggestion of *barneys* – the body *as* metal. Yet, by the thirteenth-century, automata had passed out of literature and into everyday life. Thus, in fountains, clocks, sundials, mystery plays, and memorial statuary, late medieval people would have been familiar with *things* performing as animals or people.<sup>147</sup>

Any cultural awareness of the reverse of this equation, ‘people as things’, such as in the process of *objectification* discussed above, is less clear. I have, however, argued that the ‘thingliness’ of embodied knighthood works to occlude the distinction between body and artefact in Middle English romance. In summarising this approach, Steve Dixon’s work on ‘metal performance’ is valuable.<sup>148</sup> Dixon argues that the fear and fascination surrounding automata do not occur in response to whatever engineering method allows objects to move as living things; rather, such feeling responds to the unique features of that movement *as performance*.<sup>149</sup> Automata ‘fail to accurately mimic human and animal movement’, Dixon notes,

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<sup>143</sup> E.R. Truitt, *Medieval Robots: Mechanism, Nature, and Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), pp. 2, 40.

<sup>144</sup> Papica, pp. 116-95.

<sup>145</sup> Hyman, pp. 3-4. Mary Flowers Braswell argued that Chaucer’s writing suggests he ‘knew and understood machinery in more than a cursory way’. See ‘The Magic of Machinery: A Context for Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*, *Mosaic*, 18 (1985), 101-110 (101).

<sup>146</sup> Truitt, pp. 5-6, 59, 116.

<sup>147</sup> Truitt, pp. 96-115, 122-25, 138-53.

<sup>148</sup> Steve Dixon, ‘Metal Performance: Humanizing Robots, Returning to Nature, and Camping about’, *The Drama Review*, 48 (2004), 15-46.

<sup>149</sup> Dixon, pp. 15-17.

instead exhibiting ‘exaggerated gaits and gestures’ and thus ‘theatricality and artificiality’. The appeal of the automaton, then, does not derive from its flawlessness in reproducing of the human body but the uncanniness and awkwardness that occurs in its failure. This imperfect resemblance is the essence of metal performance, and, for Dixon, it is what attracts people to the spectacle of things behaving like humans.

I suggest that, if one intends to follow the above argument to its fullest extent, and begin conceptualising the knight *as automaton*, this is the best way of doing so. The armoured body possesses a performative and embodied ‘thingliness’, manifesting in nonhuman-seeming movement, gesture, and, physiognomy. The armoured body, in this, is not an object trying and failing to mimic human life, but a human unintentionally simulating inorganic life. That late medieval individuals may have appreciated this is reflected in the material culture I have identified. It might also be apparent in particularly rare creations such as Leonardo da Vinci’s ‘robot’.<sup>150</sup> Da Vinci’s robot, a humanoid automaton, was developed with German and Italian plate harnesses, within which da Vinci placed a series of gears and pulleys. The automaton does not survive, but was said by commentators in the court of Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan (d. 1508), to walk, sit, and gesture *as* an armoured body.<sup>151</sup> Indeed, Felix Jäger dubs da Vinci’s robot an ‘artificial knight’, which is to perhaps miss the point. Da Vinci’s robot is of interest because it implies, and perhaps relies for coherence upon, a contemporary belief that the knight was, in a performative sense, *already* artificial. This would render the inventor’s instinct to render unnatural life and movement in the nonhuman *harneys* of a knight an appreciably ironic and ‘natural’ choice.

This chapter has evaluated the presence of nonhuman materials in embodied knighthood. The armoured or ‘cyborg’ body constitutes one of the many bodies – young, aged, wounded – that intercorporealize to form the ‘complete’ body-self of knight. The lived experience of the armoured body is one involving particular challenges and limitations. This has been examined in the Middle English depictions of what it was to move, breathe, fight, bleed, and ultimately live, in *harneys*. The resulting prosthetic dependence, I have argued, confuses the categorisation of human and nonhuman, body and artefact. Moreover, whilst this prosthesis enforces a distinct posture, luminous materiality, and vocabulary of gesture to embodied knighthood, its loss threatens a *nakedness* which may be read as a form of *disembodiment*. The fullest manifestation of this follows the potential that the *harneys* might animate and exert its own embodiment, or else become so fundamentally incorporated within

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<sup>150</sup> For Da Vinci’s mechanical knight, its appearance and operating systems, see Michael E. Moran, ‘The Da Vinci Robot’, *Journal of Endourology*, 20 (2007), 986-90.

<sup>151</sup> Felix Jäger, ‘Bodies of Knowledge: Renaissance Armor and the Engineering of Mind’, in *Wearing Images*, ed. by Diane Bodart (Madrid: University of National Distance Learning, 2018), pp. 89-118 (112-13).

the human that flesh, blood, and metal elide as one material. Ultimately, as elsewhere in this thesis, it is those bodies and things which most *make* embodied knighthood that, in turn, expose how disparate and interdependent this embodiment was. Like the *harnes* itself, the body of the knight is a construction, needing to be shaped, tempered, and set to motion by a host of other bodies, things, and practices.

## Conclusion

The body of the medieval knight, Jeffrey Cohen observes, is a ‘strange and open assemblage’, both caught in and generating a ‘circuit of forces’ that form knightly identity.<sup>1</sup> Cohen, like Susan Crane, recognises that the knight comes to us ‘in parts’, the product of a ‘continuum’ of other bodies, objects, and forces.<sup>2</sup> The strangeness and openness of this assemblage, these forces, this continuum, are both alluring and challenging to study. What *is* the knight’s body, and how can it be *a* body when it seems so reliant on other bodies, human and otherwise? What is unique about this body, and how might understanding embodied knighthood help explain how other bodies and selves interact? As Arthur Frank admits, the formation of body-self – the way in which identity becomes flesh and form – is hardly understood at all. This thesis has offered a model for understanding this process. It has shown how a particular style of flesh became physiognomically aligned with a particular self, before being further modified by select forms of bodily practice and prosthesis. In sum, this thesis has provided one taxonomical reading of the body ‘in parts’ of the late medieval English knight. It is worth now reviewing the details of this taxonomy, the consequences of these findings, and the possibilities for future research.

My investigation shows that the knight’s body-self is codifiable, with each body, part, and piece systematically enabling a particular embodiment. Examining Middle English romance, chronicle, medical, and philosophical texts with my methodology, I have developed an understanding of embodied knighthood based on the composition of young, old, wounded, and cyborg bodies. I have shown that, through this continuum of bodies and physical ontologies, the body-self of knight gained a specific morphology, physiology, and set of embodied practices. This body is *byge*, *faire*, and *wight*, of sanguine or choleric complexion, and caught, at the depths of its interiority, between noble virtue and violent, lascivious vice. This embodiment is one at times difficult to distinguish from that of the *lusty bachelor*. This body-self, however, is also not entirely human, being like metal, both *briht* and *sad*. In its gestures, posture, movement, and silhouette it appears partly robotic, a cyborg. The *who* of this body at times becomes indistinguishable from the *what* of its steel prosthesis. This entanglement of human and nonhuman yields a singular embodiment, recognisable enough in late medieval English culture that, through it, broad discussions took place regarding the limits and durability of body and self.

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen, *Identity Machines*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Crane, ‘Pre/Postmodern’, p. 76.



I have shown that one of the preoccupations of such discussions concerned *disembodiment*, or how the body resists or revises self. Natural humoral processes occurring in the old body *resolved* – diminished, dissolved, broke down – the knight’s physiognomic profile. The ‘old knight’ becomes oxymoronic, with knights having to learn how to *be* different body-selves as they grow old. I read the resulting *disembodiment* of knighthood as both triumphant self-abnegation and humiliating emasculation, depending on the context. The topic of medieval age requires more investigation, however, and this thesis prompts consideration of how, in particular, different medieval social groups ‘learned to be’ different old bodies. I found little evidence of aged knights having to contend with failing eyesight, hearing, and mental faculties, for instance. Why is this? Elsewhere, I showed that the body-self of the knight was at times ideologically invulnerable, incorporating often extreme physical trauma without becoming disabled or *disembodied*. This thesis thus encourages reflection on what disfigurement and disability mean in Middle English romance and chronicle, wherein loss of blood and even body parts can be interpreted as *enabling* knightly body-selves. This opens the possibility for further research into how different forms of weaponry create more diverse wounded bodies and body-selves. The embodied experiences of trauma caused by poison, enchantment, siege artillery, or gunpowder, for example, demand attention.

Analysis of wounded bodies also produced an unexpected finding, in that embodied knighthood is often *collaborative*, reliant upon the embodied agencies – eyes, hands, appendages – of other bodies. Some wounds, for example, those which fester and corrupt, do threaten *disembodiment* for the knight, thereby requiring the care of *lechis*. By reading for the ‘lived’ experiences of literary knights, the thesis uncovered the knight’s experience as a patient or sufferer. I found considerable intertextuality between Middle English romance and surgery books, which should encourage similar approaches in the medical humanities. Literary portrayals of emotional and psychological trauma, for instance, could be pursued by similar means, revealing unidentified ‘patient histories’. The knight’s dependence on *lechecraftie* also exposes a paradox regarding social interconnectivity and the knight-errant’s extreme individuality. The romance knight’s critical agency is repeatedly stressed by references to what *he* does with *his* body and *his* hands. This thesis, however, shows that literary knights relied upon a much broader network of actors, bodies, and things. Further research should aim to expand this actor-network to include not only *lechis* but pages, armourers, animals, and animal-care practitioners, in both literature and medieval culture more generally.

This intercorporeality – the exchange of parts and properties *between* bodies – is the crux of the knight’s embodiment, and one of the major findings of this thesis. Throughout, I have shown that the body of the knight, and the embodied practices it must perform to *be*

itself, require constant augmentation. The other bodies and things thus intercorporeally engaged, however, pose troubling questions regarding the relationships and distinctions between human and nonhuman, flesh and artefact, and different kinds of men. Research on medieval manhood recognises the importance of the body; however, the male body, like the body of the knight, is composite and subject to questions of *which* male body at *what* time? Medieval masculinities were *hote* but aged bodies were cold; are ‘old men’, like ‘old knights’, oxymoronic? More investigation into the multiple male bodies of the medieval man is needed. The play of multiple bodies identified by this thesis challenges assumptions regarding how essential the body that is ‘I’ or ‘us’ truly is. By enabling embodied knighthood, *lechis* and harnesses decentre the knight from ‘his’ body, which is ultimately revealed to be a body shared, not entirely his own. The essence of the knight’s embodiment is, in this, itself a form of *disembodiment*, with the knight continually looking *outside* of and *apart* from himself in order to find, as it were, where ‘he’ is, where the body-self begins and ends.

In demonstrating this, the thesis clarifies the ‘strange and open’ continuum of the knight’s embodiment. My taxonomy of the knight’s body-self, and investigation of specific intercorporealized bodies, demystifies the process of body-self formation and exposes the fantasy that *a* body generates *a* self. As mentioned, however, there are other bodies which might be involved in this process, particularly those which can be identified by different theoretical frameworks and interdisciplinary combinations of texts. Given how pronounced the relationship between body and self was in the Middle Ages, other medieval socio-cultural types require research of this kind. What taxonomy, for example, could be developed for the body of an aristocratic woman like Malory’s Lynette? Do all such female embodiments include a ‘supernatural body’, acknowledged or suppressed, and could the embodied experience of this ‘craft’ be read in relation to archaeological evidence on female folk magic traditions?<sup>3</sup> How should the supernatural body of the aristocratic woman be read in relation to her sexual body, married body, and old body? Alternatively, one could approach the ‘bodies’ of medieval heraldry, intercorporeally human, animal, and textile. Medieval literature contains examples of ‘living’ heraldry, such as fire-breathing dragon-banners and flesh-and-blood heraldic lions. This thesis has identified human protagonists who fight *like* lions, boars, and bears, as if the beneficiaries of heraldic bodies. The presence of animal bodies *in* the embodiments of humans itself warrants more research.

In a thesis that stresses the interdependency of human and nonhuman bodies, the lack of extended commentary on the horse would seem an obvious omission. This is a

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<sup>3</sup> Roberta Gilchrist discusses such archaeological evidence in ‘Magic for the Dead? The Archaeology of Magic in Later Medieval Burials’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 52 (2008), 119-59.

project on which I am currently working by investigating how the knight's physiognomic and humoural profiles were connected to the animal body and passions of his horse. The knight, in this, may be both cyborg and centaur. Ultimately, when the young squires of the *Prose Merlin* finally achieve their knighthoods, the stereotypical values of the knight's body-self undergo momentary flux. So Galashin is shown to be 'shorte and fatte', and Ewein 'longe and yonge', while Sagamore remains 'moche and semly and well shapen' (II. 373). Here is further evidence of the multiple bodies and body-types involved in the formation of embodied knighthood. This thesis has explored four, but the centaur bodies, emotional bodies, sexual bodies, dead bodies, and queer bodies of knighthood may all provide further insight into what it meant to *be* the body of a knight in late medieval England.

## Illustrations



Figure 1: 'Foot combat armour' (1520), Leeds, Royal Armouries, object number II. 6



ROYAL ARMOURIES

Figure 2: 'Foot combat armour' (1540), Leeds, Royal Armouries, object number II. 8



Figure 3: 'Close Helmet' (1520), Leeds, Royal Armouries, object number IV. 29



Figure 4: 'Armet' (1512), Leeds, Royal Armouries, object number IV. 22

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