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Citation for published version:

Sinclair, F 2008, 'The Imaginary Body: Fantasy, Doubling and Death in Ami et Amile' *Neophilologus*, vol 92, no. 2, pp. 193-204., 10.1007/s11061-007-9070-z

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1007/s11061-007-9070-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11061-007-9070-z)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher final version (usually the publisher pdf)

Published In:

Neophilologus

Publisher Rights Statement:

Sinclair, F. (2008). The Imaginary Body: Fantasy, Doubling and Death in Ami et Amile. *Neophilologus*, 92(2), 193-204doi: 10.1007/s11061-007-9070-z

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The Imaginary Body: Framing Identity in *Ami et Amile*

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Published online: 8 September 2007
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Abstract The Old French version of *Ami et Amile* (c.1200) is a *chanson de geste* which forms part of the *Cycle du roi*, but its focus is neither genealogical nor intertextual. The narrative privileges the individual, rather than the communal, an emphasis which is bound up with its distinct hagiographic tone. The interplay between the epic and the hagiographic, between multiplicity and oneness, and between action and stasis shapes the narrative of *Ami et Amile*, and its preoccupation with producing and maintaining a coherent and cohesive identity. This notion of identity is explored through the transmutations of the masculine body, as represented by the two companions, Ami and Amile. These are twinned entities; their physical sameness is a product and symbol of the miraculous and the divine, and marker of their state of grace. This symbolic twinship, its dissolution, and its renewal becomes the focus for a narrative play between difference and sameness that patterns the relationships between the characters and provides a focus for the *chanson*'s dialogue between the epic and the hagiographic.

The Old French version of *Ami et Amile* dates from around 1200, and is included in MS BN fr. 860 which contains (in order) *Roland*, *Gaydon*, *Ami et Amile*, *Jourdain de Blaye*, and *Auberi le Bourguignon*.¹ These *chansons de geste* of the *Cycle du roi* are linked by a narrative genealogy, but in spite of *Ami et Amile*'s position at their centre-point, this is not a text with an intertextual focus.² *Ami et Amile* does very

¹ All references are to Dembowski (1969). For details of the manuscript see Dembowski's introduction to the edition. For the links between this and the other texts of the *geste du roi* see Kay (1990, pp. 130–131).

² Simon Gaunt points to the genealogical links that exist between these texts, positing their grouping in a "coherent narrative sequence" in this manuscript (Gaunt 1995, pp. 44–45).

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clearly present certain themes and preoccupations which are significant to the Old French epic in general: the importance of male companionship, the homosocial structuring of society, the representation of women as peripheral to narrative action, but also as its catalysts, and the fundamental importance of allegiance to God. Its prime interests, however, are internal and self-referential. The narrative's inward focus privileges the individual, rather than the familial or communal, an emphasis which is bound up with its distinct hagiographic elements.³ It is the relationship between man and God that shapes the narrative, and which is extended from a divine sublimity to shape the relationships between men, here focusing on the creation, loss, and renewal of the close, reciprocal, bond that exists between the two central characters of Ami and Amile.

From the opening of the *chanson*, the strength of the connection between Ami and Amile is clearly marked, as is their link with God: "Engendré furent par sainte annuncion/Et en un jor furent né li baron" (They were engendered by divine decree and the two barons were born on the same day) (ll. 13–14). This is a bond which is not coincidental, but God-given, its significance underscored by its manifestation in physical form:

Il s'entresamblent de venir et d'aler
Et de bouche et dou vis et dou nés,
Dou chevauchier et des armes porter,
Que nus plus biax ne puet on deviser.
Dex les fist par miracle. (ll. 39–43)

(They resembled each other in every way, mouth, face and nose, in the way they rode and bore arms, so that no-one could imagine any finer. God made them by a miracle.)

Ami and Amile are not only companions in arms, but also twinned entities; their physical sameness is a product and symbol of the miraculous, and the marker of their state of grace. Through the difference produced by their sameness and all that it represents, the two men are distanced and set apart from the other characters. Their symbolic twinship becomes the focus for a narrative play between difference and sameness that patterns the relationship between the two companions and the other characters, and also that between the companions themselves.

Jean Baudrillard, in his wide-ranging study *Impossible Exchange*, points to the eternal fascination of twinship, with its duplication and mirroring of the self, and its perpetuation of the same:

Hence, no doubt, the sacred, accursed character of twinness in all cultures, and, as its converse, the eternal remorse of individuation. It is, in fact, with this "ontological" break from the twin that the individual being begins, and hence the possibility of otherness and a dual relation. Individuated beings we are

³ The generic classification of *Ami et Amile* has been called into question by several critics. For instance, Jacques Ribard refers to the text as "cette 'fausse' *chanson de geste*", and points to the diverse nature of the influences upon it. (Ribard 1990). The privileging of the themes of male companionship and homosociality and the manuscript's placing of the *chanson* in the middle of other epics from the *cycle du roi* do, however, set the narrative in an epic frame.

– and proud of it – but somewhere, in an unconscious deeper than the psychological, we have never quite come to terms with this... Do we not still hanker after this double, and – going even further back – do we not feel a yearning for all the many fellow beings from which we were wrenched during evolution? Is there not, where all this is concerned, an eternal remorse of individuation?⁴

The image of the twin, or double, is here extended from a kind of magical fascination with the uncanny to represent the innate human desire for a cohesion and synthesis that would ultimately bring about the annihilation of the individual. Baudrillard's study is a critique of the culture of technology and its effect on the human psyche, and links closely with Jacques Lacan's theories on the coming-into-being of the human subject. Like Baudrillard, Lacan points to the human desire for unity and oneness, here manifested as a return to the state of primary narcissism, and synthesis with the maternal body. According to Lacan, this is a state ruptured by the intrusion of the *nom-du-père*, and by the accession to language and the realm of the Symbolic. Beyond the Symbolic and predicated upon it, there lies the realm of the Imaginary, characterised by a wholeness and completeness that figure a return to the originary state of being. The Imaginary is a dream-state, a realm of fantasy that parallels Baudrillard's vision of the hyper-reality of the technological age.

Both Lacan and Baudrillard present an analysis of desires which are posited as fundamental to the human condition, and which are strikingly apparent in the *chanson de geste* of *Ami et Amile*. The driving force of the *chanson* is one that aims towards unity and wholeness, a state ultimately achieved through a oneness with God, but symbolically played out through the intensity of the narrative's focus on the twinned, doubled, bodies of Ami and Amile. This physical unity belongs in the realm of fantasy, an idealised state of perfect being that corresponds to the Lacanian Imaginary. The cyclicity of the *chanson*'s narrative is marked, as the likeness and unity of the doubled male bodies is first manifested, then broken apart through the ravages of leprosy, and later renewed in a divinely-inspired return to their originary state of being. This impetus for a return to origin and to a sense of physical, emotional, and spiritual unity typifies the structure of thought that shapes both Baudrillard's and Lacan's theory. The *chanson de geste* brings to this the added dimension of the hagiographic, and a divine presence which renders fantasy and desire possible, and even inevitable.

Although *Ami et Amile* opens with the narration of a state of harmony and perfection, embodied in the "twinship" of the two companions, this is a state which is recognised as open to rupture through the very existence of its framing in narrative. Baudrillard points to the importance of psychological and social individuation in the development of social relations, while Lacan speaks of the intrinsic connection between the individual's sense of self and its operation as a social and linguistic being. In both cases, society is perceived as a network of individuals whose interactions provoke a kind of narrative, one which by its very nature is neither static nor unchanging. The tale that unfolds in *Ami et Amile*

⁴ See Baudrillard (2001, p. 31).

privileges the physical and spiritual bond between the two companions, yet this bond is intrinsically static in nature, predicated as it is on the continuity of the same. When placed in the context of a network of social relationships this twinned sameness is subject to the pressures of a social and generic narrative that pushes towards evolution, shift and change.

The difference and change that rupture the unity of Ami and Amile is represented most evidently by the women they marry: Lubias and Belissant. Like the rest of the characters in the *chanson*, the women are intrinsically different from the divinely-inspired duo, but an important aspect of *their* difference is, of course, the fact that Lubias and Belissant represent the radical “other” of femininity. If Ami and Amile can on one level be taken to represent the vision of masculine harmony dreamed of by the epic, the two women are inevitably positioned on its margins, peripheral to the masculine focus of both society and text.⁵ Despite this positioning as external, Lubias and Belissant are nonetheless catalysts for narrative. It is through the actions of their characters that narrative is produced and through which the text’s fantasy of integrity is either shored up or broken apart, as we shall see below.

Lubias is offered to Ami and Amile in marriage by her uncle, Hardré:

Je voz donrai de mon avoir mil onces,
Et Lubias, la cortoise, la blonde.
L’un de voz ferai riche. (ll. 467–69)

(I will give you a thousand measures of my wealth and Lubias, the courtly, the blonde. One of you will be rich.)

This indiscriminate offer points up the identical nature of the two men; they are completely equivalent, but the bestowing of Lubias will crucially introduce difference—a difference which will destroy the harmonious balance that exists between them. Hardré’s words may seem to act as a temptation (to wealth, sex, and status) marking a potential transition from the divine to the worldly, but this entry into marriage is an essential aspect of epic narrative. In a society and a genre where relationships are produced and mediated through the gifting of women, lands and wealth, marriage is a key element. This is a point on which the text of *Ami et Amile* differs fundamentally from the hagiographic narratives with which it can be seen to share certain features. In the *Vie de Saint Alexis*, the Christian hero does marry, but immediately rejects marriage, while for female saints such as Catherine their whole sainthood is predicated on the active rejection of marriage, despite the torment this entails. Ami and Amile may be product of the divine, but they nonetheless exist within a matrix of social and epic relations. It is Ami who takes up Hardré’s offer, and who marries Lubias.

Lubias at this point is a passive and silent token of exchange, although her marriage to Ami marks her as a source of disruption. The case of Belissant, niece of

⁵ “Belissant et Lubias, définies plutôt par rapport aux hommes auxquels elles sont associées que de façon autonome, n’existent que dans la mesure où elles peuvent soutenir, promouvoir, exalter l’amitié des compagnons—ou, au contraire, la combattre et chercher à la détruire” (Rosenberg 1987, p. 67).

Charlemagne, is quite different, however. Belissant is both an active protagonist and a sexual being. She enters Amile's chamber in the dark, approaching his bed (ll. 662–91) even though he asks her only to come forward if she is of “bas paraige” (low birth). Their subsequent betrayal to Charlemagne by Hardré (ll. 726–33) places Amile in the position of having to fight in a judicial combat to clear his name of the charge of seduction. In order to prevent Amile from being killed in the duel (an outcome perceived as inevitable because of Amile's guilt in the eyes of God), Ami substitutes for his friend. No-one can tell the difference between the two men, and Ami, quite naturally, survives the ordeal. However, Ami (still in the role of Amile) is then offered Belissant's hand in marriage by her father. Since Ami is by this point already married to Lubias, his acceptance of the betrothal, albeit in the name of Amile, is highly problematic. The seriousness of Ami's transgression of the vows of marriage is emphasised by the narrator:

Savéz, seignor, quex chose est de couvent?
Des que li hom prent fame loiaument,
Moult fait que fox quant il sa foi li ment (ll. 1803–05)

(Do you know, seigneurs, what manner of thing is a contract? As soon as a man takes a wife in good faith he is exceedingly wicked if he breaks his word.)

Although Amile has managed to avoid divine punishment through Ami's substitution for him in the duel, the law of God is ever present, and it is God's judgement of the fundamental guilt of the two men which brings down punishment upon them. This punishment initially appears to fall upon Ami alone, as, prior to his acceptance of Belissant's hand, an angel warns him that he will be struck down with leprosy for the sin which he is about to commit (ll. 1807–20). Since leprosy was seen in the Middle Ages as punishment for sexual sins in particular, the infliction would be as appropriate for Amile (for his fornication with Belissant), as it would for Ami (for his potential bigamy).⁶ The parallels between the two companions are again underscored by the nature of their transgression and by the form taken by the divine punishment, yet while this punishment draws attention to the similarity of the men's conduct, it simultaneously appears to differentiate between them, as its burden falls entirely upon Ami. The rift between the companions becomes physical as well as social, a falling away of symbolic coherence revealed through the disintegration of the body and the loss of stable visual identity which this entails.

It is the marriage of Ami and Lubias that first disrupts the exclusive male companionship, but, as seen above, this marriage does form part of the epic's network of homosocial relationships. Belissant's act of seduction is likewise dual in nature: it can be read as socially disruptive, as she acts on her own initiative, rather

⁶ As pointed out by Roberta Gilchrist: “In medieval society leprosy represented a conflation of diseases of the skin and was accorded a moral, rather than clinical, definition. All disease was viewed to be as much spiritual as physical, but leprosy was believed to be sexually transmitted and was considered to be a punishment for sexual sin. Medieval lepers were stigmatised both by the appalling disfigurement of their disease and by its perceived connection with lascivious behaviour” (Gilchrist 1994, p. 48). For the theme of leprosy in *Ami* see also Pichon (1987).

than waiting to be given in marriage by her father, but it is also an action that ultimately supports the social network and creates a bond between men.⁷ The fact that Belissant is Charlemagne's daughter emphasises the nobility and worth of Amile (and of his double, Ami), her aim is that of marriage, and her choice of partner is legitimised by Charlemagne's own offer of her hand in marriage to Amile once Amile's name has been cleared of the charge of seduction. The epic impetus towards consolidation and the continuation of lineage is evident here, yet Belissant's unconstrained sexuality unleashes a chain of events that threaten the life of both Amile, through death in combat, and Ami, through fatal disease. The epic demands of the narrative become a form of seeping contamination that threatens the ideal of divine perfection represented by the male duo. Social connection, progression, and continuation, all theoretically epic ideals, here conflict with the text's desire to retain the idealised vision of the unified, doubled, masculine body. The threat posed by marriage and continuation is clearly portrayed by the negative repercussions of Belissant's seduction of Amile, and this is taken up by the emphatically negative depiction of Lubias following her marriage to Ami. In contrast to her previous passive silence, Lubias attempts to destroy the bond between the two companions, falsely accusing Amile, to her husband Ami, of having protested his love for her (ll. 501–05), and of trying to seduce her (ll. 1204–15).⁸

The two women are defined in terms of a gendered, sexualised, otherness, and are clearly opposed to the homosocial cohesion embodied by their husbands, but Belissant and Lubias carry a significance that goes beyond their feminine difference. Within the narrative structure the women represent the social world of alliance and marriage, and also that of narrative, action, and progression through time. In contrast to the majority of Old French epics, where it is the male characters through which narrative is structured and played out, in *Ami et Amile* the epic impetus of social and narrative continuation is embodied by women. It may be the influence of contemporary misogyny that sees both Belissant and Lubias portrayed in terms of a threatening and disruptive sexuality, but the threat they pose to the wholeness and completion represented by Ami and Amile is also that of the social and secular, as opposed to the Imaginary and the divine.

The conflict between the epic and the hagiographic, between multiplicity and oneness, and between action and stasis shapes the narrative of *Ami et Amile*, and its preoccupation with producing and maintaining a coherent and cohesive identity. The

⁷ Rosenberg sees the two women as opposites: "Belissant, volontiers, sans réserve, vient d'adopter une position diamétralement opposée à celle de Lubias. Ses fiançailles, puis son mariage auront constitué, outre une alliance avec Amile, une ratification décisive du compagnonnage des héros" (Rosenberg 1987, p. 75). I see the portrayal of the two as considerably more nuanced and complex than this.

⁸ The latter of these occasions is depicted with a certain irony, as Lubias does not realise that she is speaking to Amile himself, in the guise of her husband, Ami. Kay sees this transition from object to subject on the part of Lubias as an "access of sexual agency" which appears to have been brought about by her marriage. Yet she states: "It is noteworthy that the object of Lubias's seduction is not Ami in himself, but in his relationship with Amile [...] She fantasizes a rival triangle to those proposed earlier, one in which Amile's love for her would be stronger than his loyalty to his companion (ll. 501–05). The male (homosocial) bond between the two friends would thus be superseded by the heterosexual ones linking her with either" (Kay 1990, p. 132).

text's generic identity is an obvious issue, but the patterning of epic and hagiographic themes and motifs is concentrated around the identity of the masculine body, as represented by Ami and Amile. The idealised identity that they embody is not that of the individual, of the single being differentiated from all others, but the fused and cohesive identity of undifferentiated beings. As discussed by Baudrillard and Lacan, among others, this is an emotional and psychological state that does not belong in the social world or in the sphere of the Lacanian Symbolic. Baudrillard sees such a fantasy beyond reality as a play-acting of transcendence, "a phantasmagoria without the power to ward off [...] uncertainty and deregulation."⁹ Once Ami and Amile begin to interact and integrate with others in a way that compromises their duality, the fragility of their symbiotic unity is revealed and the twinship is laid open to a fracture and decay which are both ideological and physical.

When Ami's leprosy begins to manifest itself Lubias shifts from the position of trying to strengthen the bond between herself and her husband, to the detriment of that between Ami and Amile, and attempts to divorce him: attraction turns to repulsion. The miraculous sameness of the two men and the emotional bond that exists between them initially act as a powerful marker of perfection and wholeness. Once the physical symbol of this is lost, the two men are seen to fall from their state of grace, a shift that reflects Baudrillard's notion of twinship as being both sacred and accursed.¹⁰ Ami and Amile represent both the sublime and the abject, a duality figured in terms of their changing relationship to God, and in the bodily transition from an identical beauty to a fractured decay. Paradoxically, although the sickening of Ami's body manifests the loss of perfection and loss of sameness, it also reveals the identical nature of the male bodies and their ability to substitute and double for each other. Ami's substitution for Amile in the judicial duel with Hardré is compounded by his bearing of the physical punishment that should rightly belong to both companions. If Ami sinned by accepting the hand of Belissant while married to Lubias, then so too did Amile, in his acceptance of Belissant's seduction and his concealing of the truth, but only Ami bears the burden of leprosy, and its risk of death. This gifting of body and flesh is the kind of a gifting that Derrida describes as: "the *gift that is not a present*, the gift of something that remains inaccessible, unrepresentable, and as a consequence secret".¹¹ The transposition and substitution of one identical male body for another has formed a motif throughout the narrative; this is now extended from a straightforward physical substitution to one linked to the metaphysical and the divine.

The doubled body of Ami and Amile forms the central focus of the narrative, but the notion of cohesion and unity which the duo represent is extended to encompass their sons.¹² When Lubias fails in her attempt to divorce the sickening Ami, she tries to starve him to death while he lies incapable in the forest:

⁹ Baudrillard (2001, p. 15).

¹⁰ For a study of the relationship between twinship and the divine see Shapiro (1990).

¹¹ Derrida (1995, p. 29).

¹² The fact that the offspring of both Ami and Amile are all sons who support their fathers does suggest that marriage and the extension of the lineage do have their advantages. As with sexual relationships and with marriage, the text's treatment of the subject is nuanced.

Or croist au conte et painne et encombrier
 De faim morir, qu'il n'avra que mengier,
 Se Dammeldex n'en panse. (ll. 2317–19)

(Then she thought to cause pain and torment to the count, starving him to death; he will have nothing to eat, if not by the grace of God.)

Although God does not intervene directly to save him, Ami is kept alive by his young son, Girart, who steals food to bring to his father, a nourishing that contrasts directly with Lubias' attempts at starvation. Girart is clearly placed on the side of his father: linked to Ami through the ties of blood, Girart is also emotionally, morally, and spiritually linked to him. Despite Ami's suffering a God-given punishment, Girart becomes the tool of divine intervention through his sustaining of his father, and the continuing connection to God is made evident through his prayers (ll. 2249, 2288). This allying of the son with the father is compounded by the further replacement of one male body for another. The switching between Ami and Amile, which has operated throughout, is echoed by the physical substitution of Girart for his father when Lubias discovers his "treachery":

Voit le sa mere, si le chose et menace,
 Qu'encontre terre et a poins et a paumes
 Le batra tant que i parront les traces.
 "Fiz a mezel, a delgiet et a ladre!
 Ja n'iert uns jors que por lui ne voz bate.
 Ja ne verréz un mois apréz la Pasque
 Que sor le col te metrai tel parrastre,
 S'il ne te tue, il fera trop que lasches,
 Por l'ammor de ton pere". (ll. 2235–43)

(When his mother saw this, she accused and menaced him, threw him to the ground and beat him to such an extent with fists and hands that the marks were visible. "Son of a miserable, sickly leper! From now on there will never be a day when I don't beat you because of him [in his place]. Now you will not see a month out after Easter before I inflict you with such a step-father. If he does not kill you he will be truly a coward – this for the love of your father".)¹³

Girart becomes the focus of Lubias' rage, his body taking the place of Ami's as Lubias beats him and threatens him with death.

The importance of the son as mirror of the father, and the son's function as surrogate is made even more plain following the angel's second visit to Ami (ll. 2769–813). The first visit announced the forthcoming onset of leprosy, the second announces its cure. As Ami tells Amile, this entails a considerable sacrifice:

Sire, il me dist, je nel voz quier celer,
 Que voz deïsse et volsisse rouver

¹³ The image of the future step-father reflects that of Lubias herself—wicked and disruptive both of the legitimate bonds of marriage and of those between parents and children. This echoes the portrayal of many step-parents and parents-in-law in Old French narrative, notably Ganelon in *La Chanson de Roland*.

Se voz douz fiuls que tant poéz amer,
 Ce est Morans et Gascelins li ber,
 Se voz por moi les voléz decoper,
 Le sanc resoivre dedans un bacin cler
 Et le mien cors de celui sanc laver,
 Adonc porroie ma santé recouvrer. (ll. 2909–16)

(Sire, I do not seek to conceal from you what he [the angel] said to me. If you should be able to and should want to give up your two sons that you love so much, the noble Morans and Gascelin, if you want to cut off their heads for me, catch the blood in a clear basin and wash my body with this blood, then I could recover my health.)

Ami jeopardised himself through his substitution for Amile in the duel with Hardré, and it is his body which has been ravaged by leprosy following his further role-playing in the betrothal to Belissant. Amile is now called upon to sacrifice in his turn, yet this is a mortification of the flesh that is displaced from Amile's own body to that of his sons. The reciprocal interplay between the bodies of Ami and Amile is now extended to include their male offspring, who appear as surrogates to bear the displaced pain and punishment that should rightly fall upon their fathers. Ami's son kept his father alive and bore Lubias' blows; Amile's sons provide the means for a return to the original state of unity and perfection in which identity is clearly defined as masculine and unified. Like Girart, the two boys prove themselves as emotionally and spiritually on the side of their father and his "twin"; the elder son agrees immediately to the sacrifice:

"Biax tres douz peres", dist l'anfes erramment,
 "Quant vos compains avra garissement
 Se de nos sans a sor soi lavement,
 Nos sommez vostre, de vostre engenrement,
 Faire en poéz del tout a vo talent". (ll. 3000–04)

("Dearly beloved father", said the child immediately, "if your companion can be healed through washing him in our blood know we are yours, of your seed, you can do whatever you like with us".)

The hagiographic elements of the tale come more forcefully into play with the angelic visitation, divine pronouncement, and call to sacrifice.¹⁴ The original bond between God and the two companions, signified through their simultaneous birth and identical appearance, is now reinvoked, as is the integrity of the twinned body. The parallel with the Biblical tale of Abraham and Isaac is clear, but God's call to sacrifice is here not only a call to manifest a supreme faith; it also promises a specific gift, that of the return to the lost state of grace and the renewal of the divided body.¹⁵ The fact that this is a state evidently desired by God, and that it can

¹⁴ These elements are, however, evident throughout. For a detailed analysis of the hagiographic features of the text see Shapiro (1990).

¹⁵ This return to grace and to a state of synthesis reflects the Christian belief of death as a conjoining with God, here expressed in physical, as well as spiritual, terms.

only be achieved through a divine miracle, places the intact body and undifferentiated appearance of the two men firmly in the realm of the miraculous and the divine. This is not a state of being that belongs in the real world, nor can it operate there without fracture and decay.

The proposed sacrifice is morally and spiritually validated by the fact that it responds to a call from God; in Derrida's terms this is a "hyper-ethical sacrifice", which operates on a level beyond that of the everyday.¹⁶

In a word, ethics must be sacrificed in the name of duty. It is a duty not to respect, out of duty, ethical duty. One must behave not only in an ethical or responsible manner, but in a nonethical, nonresponsible manner, and one must do that *in the name of* duty, of an infinite duty, *in the name of* absolute duty. And this name which must always be singular is none other than the name of God as completely other, the nameless name of God, the unpronounceable name of God as other to whom I am bound by an absolute, unconditional obligation, by an incomparable, nonnegotiable duty.¹⁷

The sacrifice is further validated through the reaction of Amile's sons.¹⁸ The hagiographic and the epic elements of the text both come into play here, as the boys offer themselves as willing participants in God's plan, and also reveal themselves as supportive of their father and his companion. Their allegiance to God, to their lineage, and to the maintaining of the homosocial ideal posits them as heirs to the religious and epic ideals of the narrative; it is through the spilling of the boys' blood that the will of God may be carried out, and the perfection of the unified masculine body restored. The only drawback is that through the death of Amile's sons his lineage will be cut short, a condition inherent in many *chansons de geste*, but not one which is desired. Contrary to the tale of Abraham and Isaac, God does not intervene at the last minute, and the two boys are put to death by their father. In line with the narrative's pull towards the miraculous and the restoration of the wounded body, the two children are, however, restored to life; when their mother enters the room where her sons supposedly lie dead, she discovers them happily playing ball. All give thanks to God and Ami and Amile eventually retreat from the world, go on pilgrimage, die simultaneously on their return journey, and are buried together in the same tomb.

Ami's body is saved from the metaphorical "death" of leprosy through the spilling of the children's blood. Amile's sons likewise die and are reborn.¹⁹ All are restored to full life, and Ami regains his full identity as an integral part of the divinely-ordained

¹⁶ Derrida (1995, p. 71).

¹⁷ Derrida (1995, p. 67).

¹⁸ Belissant also supports her husband's actions (ll. 3228–32), but this affirmation of loyalty follows the narrative's *dénouement*; Belissant does not play any part in the scene of sacrifice itself.

¹⁹ Symbolic death and rebirth were ritualised forms of response to leprosy, linking together medical and religious attitudes in purification rites that aimed to cleanse the leper both physically and morally. "They [lepers] underwent a formalised rite of stigmatisation, which took the form of a symbolic funeral and burial; it is not surprising that their treatment may have involved a symbolic rebirth" (Gilchrist 1994, p. 48).

twinship. Although Ami and Amile's sons do not partake of their fathers' identical appearance, they nonetheless share in the "communal body" of masculine identity. They all support the values represented by the earthly and the divine father, and are physically and ideologically a part of the doubled body of the two companions: "the seed and the blood" of their fathers. Through their sacrifice, Amile's sons metaphorically give birth to Ami, as he is washed in their blood and his life is restored, yet this is also Amile's blood that is spilled. The two men are not only mirror images of one another, but also flesh of one flesh; the decay of Ami's leprosy-stricken body is paralleled by the lacerating of Amile's flesh and the pouring out of his blood, albeit in the guise of his sons. The narrative played out between these male characters is bounded and cyclical: the doubled father produces sons who in their turn produce the father's rebirth, the body fragments and is then restored, a perspective that turns around sameness, substitution, and the return of the same. This vision produces a strong notion of identity, but this is an identity which is homogenous and exclusive: bodies reveal themselves as interchangeable and as aspects of the same, unified body.

Simon Gaunt refers to *Ami et Amile* as a text which "represents a fantasy solution to the problem of potential enmity between companions, a solution in which difference is wilfully suppressed".²⁰ The contrast between *Ami et Amile* and other *chansons de geste* such as the *Chanson de Roland*, or, more markedly, *Raoul de Cambrai*, is quite evident, as no contrast or conflict exists between the two companions in *Ami et Amile*. Gaunt's comment also points towards the text's "hyper-real" or fantastical construction of the male-male relationship, which operates through the radical exclusion of otherness and difference. The physical and ideological bond that exists between Ami and Amile is much more than a simple representation of an idealised homosociality. The doubled body is divinely inspired, the prime relationship of Ami and Amile is with each other, but this is an integral aspect of their relationship with God, and even though this symbolic union is broken apart through the intrusion of worldly difference, it is restored through the power of faith and divine miracle.

The masculine identity of this *chanson de geste* is bound up with the notion of the body as ideally intact, stable, and homogenous, an image that responds to the hagiographic and the epic elements of the text, although in different ways. The unbreached body recalls the contemporary ideal of female virginity, and the sealed body of female saints and the Mother of God, a link that calls into question the vision of masculinity generally propounded by the *chanson de geste*, both in terms of genre and of gender. The narrative focus on masculine sameness, homosociality, and the exclusion of difference correspond, however, to the epic ideal of a community focused on ideological cohesion and inter-male bonding. Ami and Amile represent the aim and the desire of both genres, yet it is through the religious impetus of the text that the masculine bond between the companions, and between them and their sons, is lifted to a level beyond that of the ideological or the

²⁰ Gaunt (1995, p. 46). Gaunt also remarks, "Ami et Amile is a fantastic narrative. [...] The potential threat of schism within the male community is suppressed, and a model of masculinity is constructed which is entirely unitary, attempting to be entirely monologic, but which is also entirely implausible. In its efforts to minimize the flaws in the ideology it promotes, Ami paradoxically makes them all the more evident" (pp. 51–52)

genealogical to enter the realm of the divine and the Imaginary. It is at this point of transcendence that the two generic paradigms of the epic and the hagiographic text are brought into conflict. While on the one hand the epic narrative introduces the shift and rupture inherent in the evolving progression of events, the impetus of the hagiographic and unificatory elements of the tale presses towards a state of grace which is perfect and unchanging.

The *chanson* may form part of the *Cycle du roi*, as seen at the beginning of this paper, but its emphasis on masculine sameness and a homogenised identity is not one that favours the epic ideal of continuation and chronological progression. Its focus is inward, rather than intertextual, towards the body and the maintaining of a physical, ideological, and spiritual identity that depend upon lack of change and lack of difference. Rather than linking with an epic cycle, this focus produces an internal cyclicity in which the body, at once symbolic and physical, is pulled between the demands of narrative and those of a transcendent vision of wholeness and completion. It is with the return of this vision that text closes: the restored, doubled, body is as complete and perfect in death as it was at birth. The *chanson's* idealised vision of unified identity may be read in terms of man's relation to the divine, as an epic vision of an untroubled homosocial world, as Lacan's return to the pre-Symbolic state of being, or as Baudrillard's dream (or nightmare) of the hyper-reality of the technological age. In all cases it is revealed as a fantasy: fragile and unsustainable in the context of time, society, and narrative.

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