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***Otinel*: An Epic in Dialogue with the Tradition**

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The complexities of intertextual allusion in medieval texts have long been recognised (Zumthor, *Essai* 67-70; Boutet 131-58; Kay, *Chansons* 207-19). Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century hunts for sources have served as the foundation for a more sophisticated awareness of the interplay between texts that were reworked and recopied; each step in their evolution added another perspective, a different response to the conventions of a genre or the *données* of the narrative, and another potential layer of intertextual allusion, ‘médiatisée par une mémoire qui est celle du genre tout entier’ (Boutet 131); each text was both created and read (or listened to) within an open system of generic topoi and types as well as demonstrating specific textual interdependence. With texts subsequently labelled ‘courtly’ we have also become increasingly aware of the importance of debate and intertextual exchange, even contradiction both within and between poems (Kay, *Courtly*; Copeland 3). This approach to intertextual discourse has not normally been extended to include *chansons de geste*, though Constance Brittain Bouchard did include in her analysis of this culture of contradiction a discussion of the discourse of opposites established within the epics the *Chanson de Roland* and *Raoul de Cambrai* (69-75). In the unstable world of epic discourse, contradiction and opposition will not be worked out in the same way as in romance and hagiography, as *chansons de geste* continued to be performed as well as read and were particularly subject in their written forms to *remaniement*. The very instability of the *chanson de geste* favours the ability to retain apparently contradictory material and the possibility of engaging in dialogue with other texts or with the topoi of the tradition as a whole. The possibilities of *remaniement* combined with the impulse to

cyclification may suggest harmonisation but also permit dialogical response. The world of the *chanson de geste* was far from univocal.

Such a discourse of opposition is evident in the way the early thirteenth-century *chanson de geste Otinel* responds to other narratives of the *cycle du roi*, specifically the following texts: the *Chanson de Roland* (and the wider tradition around this narrative exemplified by the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*); *Fierabras* (c. 1200¹) and its prequel, the *Destruction de Rome*; and *Ami et Amile*. When examined together they suggest a radical rereading of *Otinel*, a text which has been largely neglected by critics and often perceived as perhaps little more than the stringing together of a series of conventional episodes. The only monograph study of the poem, by Paul Aebischer, concentrated on origins. Even the editors of the text, Guessard and Michelant, were somewhat dismissive of its value: ‘il n’y faut chercher aucune de ces beautés natives qui éclatent dans les plus anciennes *chansons de geste*. C’est une œuvre de la décadence’ (viii). An examination of intertextual elements reveals, rather, that while *Otinel* may appear conventional, it provides a critical response to traditions of the genre as we find them expressed in other texts of the *cycle du roi*.

Otinel opens with the Saracen messenger Otinel arriving at Charlemagne’s court where he calls upon Charlemagne to convert and challenges Roland to individual combat (an episode discussed in Vallecalle 161-64, 241-372). During the subsequent fight between Otinel and Roland, representatives of their religion, God sends His Holy Spirit to convert Otinel, who is then baptised and betrothed to Charlemagne’s daughter Belissant. Otinel joins Charlemagne’s army as they set off to make war against Garsile, Otinel’s lord. Roland, Oliver, and Ogier capture the noble Saracen Clarel in a skirmish, but on their way back they are attacked by 1500 Saracens who release Clarel and take Ogier prisoner, putting him in the charge of Affamie, Garsile’s daughter. Meantime, Otinel has set out in search of the missing peers and engages in

¹ See Ailes, “Date”.

battle. He fights with Clarel, whom he defeats and kills. A general battle follows. Ogier, who has escaped from his captors by force, joins in. Otinel takes on Garsile, who is defeated and taken prisoner. Otinel marries Belissant and becomes king.

Even this brief summary of the narrative reveals that *Otinel* shares major concerns of other *chansons de geste* of the cycle and on first reading seems to use the same narrative conventions and types: crusade and conversion, the noble Saracen, the *belle Sarrasine*. Its links to *Fierabras* have long been accepted and were, in fact, a major factor in the dismissal of the text as a relatively unimportant work, a paler version of the original. The influential nineteenth-century critic Léon Gautier described *Otinel* as ‘servilement calquée sur la légende de *Fierabras*’ (3: 398).

The differences between *Otinel* and the texts with which it interacts can be classified into two groups: contradictions, where the narrative of *Otinel* is incompatible with that of the other *chansons de geste*, and oppositions, which could be seen as complementary or as simply offering a different perspective on an issue. This can be related to the distinction made by Catherine Brown between the exegetical tradition, which entertains contradiction, and the logical, Aristotelian tradition, which contests it (esp. ch. 1; see also Kay, *Courtly* 11-25). The *chanson de geste*, or at least those under discussion here, accepts the coexistence of contraries.

Otinel, Fierabras, Roland and Ami et Amile: the Intertexts

We are invited to read *Otinel* and *Fierabras* together and both in conjunction with the *tradition rolandienne*. Both poems situate the action of the narrative in fictional time with reference to the battle of Roncevaux:

Tant s’entrainerent, ce trovon nos lisant,
Ne se grepirent onques en lor vivant
De ci au jor que il furent morant
En Roincevaux, où furent combatant

Contre Garsile, le riche roi poissant
 Que li fel Guennes, le cuvers sodiant,
 Les i vendi. [. . .] (*Ot.* 6-11²)

Ne tarda que .III. ans qu'Espaigne fu gaste;e
 La fu la traïsons de Rollant pourparlee:
 Guenelon le vendi a la gent desfaee,
 Puis en fu a cevaus sa car detraïnee.
 Pinabiaus en fu mors sous Loon en la pree;
 La le tua Tierris au trencant de l'espee,
 Puis fu pendus armés par la geule baee. (*Fier.* 6396-402)

Such allusions fix the narratives in a pseudo-historical context and thus give them an authority, an element of 'realism', or at least verisimilitude.

In *Fierabras* the narrative is entirely in keeping with the *Roland* tradition, predicting in the lines quoted above the betrayal of Ganelon and his death as well as that of Pinabel. The portrayal of Ganelon and Roland, though different from what we may expect, represents one way of reading the *Chanson de Roland*, with Ganelon presented as a faithful vassal up to the point of his betrayal and an emphasis on Roland's hot-headedness (Ailes, "*Fierabras* and the *Chanson de Roland*"; van Emden, "Réception du personnage" and "Reception of Roland").

Otinél, however, presents a different response to the *Roland* tradition. As the text now stands, it proceeds to contradict the very narrative it refers to in the prologue. First, the author of *Otinél* posits a return to Paris in the middle of Charlemagne's Spanish campaign, in direct contradiction to the statement of the opening *laisse* of the surviving versions of the *Chanson de Roland* that Charlemagne 'set anz tut plains ad estét en Espaigne' (Oxford ms., *laisse* 2; see also V4, *laisse* 9; Châteauroux and

² Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from *Otinél* are taken from the Guessard and Michelant edition while *Fierabras* is quoted from the Le Person edition (see Works Cited).

V7, laisse 2). This has been considered expediency: ‘L’auteur d’*Otinél* a été obligé de commettre une première invraisemblance, quand il a voulu fixer l’époque où se place l’action de son poème’ (Aebischer 115-16). Yet there is no narrative imperative to move the action to Paris; it would not have been impossible to move the opening scene and set it, like the opening scene of *Fierabras*, in an army camp.

The *chanson de geste* tradition is consistent in keeping Charlemagne in Spain without respite for seven years; however, the more clerical tradition of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* does have Charlemagne return briefly. The *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* was very popular and probably represents a more widespread tradition regarding Charlemagne’s wars in Spain than do the extant *chansons de geste* but with a different textual community. The Latin text had certainly been in circulation for some time before the likely composition date of *Otinél* in the early thirteenth or even late twelfth century (Aebischer 146-48; Dean and Boulton 53; Ribemont 401); the earliest Old French version of the *Pseudo-Turpin* dates from 1195-1205, so again around the same time as the other texts with which *Otinél* seems to interact (Short 2-3).³ It is possible that our poet knew the tradition, although it is perhaps more likely that readers

³ The dating of *Otinél* has never been satisfactorily addressed. Aebischer suggests the very early date of the first half of the twelfth century for an early version of the text, largely on the evidence of the names *Otonellus* and *Ottinelus* being found in Italy in the 1170s and 1180s (146-48). Even if we accept this insubstantial evidence, it would only point to the existence of a narrative about a character named Otinél, not necessarily our *chanson de geste* or anything close to it. Manuscript evidence indicates that the extant *chanson de geste* must have been composed before the middle of the thirteenth century, possibly earlier in the century. The earliest surviving manuscript, a fragment in the Bibliothèque nationale (MS nouv. acq fr. 5094) has been variously dated: the earliest date suggested is by Langlois (434) who proposed the early thirteenth century; it is described as mid-thirteenth century by Dean and Boulton (53).

and listeners of *Otinel* would have known the *chanson de geste* tradition. That the *Pseudo-Turpin* and versions of the *Chanson de Roland* circulated at the same time, and *Otinel* alongside them, reinforces this idea of contradictory narratives being acceptable in a dialectic discourse which may itself be in tension with the harmonisation of texts to form cycles.

The clear departure of *Otinel* from the *Roland* tradition is even more evident when we consider that in line 10 of *Otinel* (quoted above), Charlemagne's enemy, Garsile, is specifically identified with Marsile, the king of the Saracens to whom Ganelon betrays the rearguard in the *Roland* tradition; the Anglo-Norman manuscript of the poem, Martin Bodmer Foundation MS 168, even gives the form of the name as 'Marsile'.⁴ Even though the *Roland* narrative was very well known and required Marsile to be alive to lead his men into battle at Roncevaux, at the end of *Otinel* he is taken by the Christians and put into prison where he will die:

Nostre Emperere a son prison gardez,
Dedens sa chartre fu mis et enserrez.
Illec moru à duel et à viltez; (*Ot.* 2074-76)

⁴ One might want to ascribe the Saracen name to some scribal error were it not that it is consistent throughout the *Otinel* tradition. Only the Anglo-Norman is slightly different: 'Garsile' in the continental French text is 'Garcy' in Middle English and 'Garsi' in Welsh. The Anglo-Norman scribe may have 'corrected' the error. A full analysis of the textual tradition of *Otinel* has not been carried out, but it is not inconceivable that a scribe aware that Marsile should be alive for the battle of Roncevaux changed the name for a common source of the other versions. This is the only instance of the name for a Saracen king, though the name is found in a couple of other texts of about the same period, occurring as a king of Greece in *Florence de Rome*, as a knight in *Beuves de Hantone*, as a vassal of Pepin in *Anseïs de Metz*, as well as being the name of a traitor in the much later *Baudouin de Sebourc* (Moisan).

The author has clearly signalled his departure from the accepted *chanson de geste* tradition and it is inconceivable, given his direct allusion to the betrayal of Roncevaux and the widespread popularity of the *Roland* tradition, that this could have been accidental. Our text is setting up a different, and contradictory, narrative. The prologue could, of course, be a late addition to a pre-existing text, crafted to insert this poem into the wider tradition and, perhaps, to emphasise the parallel with *Fierabras*. This possibility does not negate our argument but rather reinforces it as it suggests a deliberate *remaniement* of the text which highlights its incompatibility with the known narrative. While an individual *chanson de geste* may contradict others or even itself in details, the significance here comes from the invitation to read the text with the *Roland* tradition as an intertext. Since the poet of *Otinél* so clearly connects his work in fictional time to the battle of Roncevaux, it would seem perverse to then write a narrative that contradicts this. In his response to *Roland*, the *Otinél* poet is opposing the very tradition which at the same time he depends on to give his own narrative authority.

The narrative of *Otinél* is also inconsistent with that of *Ami et Amile*,⁵ another text of the *cycle du roi*, though it is difficult to know whether that contradiction is the result of deliberate opposition. The *chanson de geste* version of this narrative is found in a ‘chronologically ordered narrative’ of the cycle, a thirteenth-century manuscript containing *Roland*, *Gaydon*, *Ami et Amile*, *Jourdain de Blaye*, and *Auberi le Bourguignon* (Kay, “Seduction” 130), a manuscript which demonstrates the impulse to harmonization of narratives implicit in cyclification. At the heart of the poem is the ‘male couple’, the strong homosocial bond between the main protagonists, Ami and Amile. In *Amis et Amile* Charlemagne’s daughter, Belissant, marries one of the protagonists. In *Otinél* she is given to Otinel himself as part of the reward for his conversion

⁵ The text has a complex textual tradition; Sarah Kay lists the different versions (“Seduction” 141, n. 8); see also Dean and Boulton (92-93). We are concerned here only with the *chanson de geste*.

(Aebisher 149); thus through marriage to the emperor's daughter he is fully integrated into Western society. There is no direct evocation of *Ami et Amile*; only the name of Charlemagne's daughter invites comparison and, as we shall see, the depiction of the princess in these texts is very different in ways that are difficult to ignore. The narrative contradictions could be the result of independent development, but both texts circulated widely, particularly in England, so this seems unlikely.

The invitation to read *Otinel* with *Fierabras* in mind is very clear: the two *chansons de geste* have the same narrative trigger, a Saracen attack on Rome. Otinel the messenger has arrived at Charlemagne's court and begins his message from the Saracen Emir Garsile with an account of their recent sack of Rome and the atrocities he himself carried out there:

Dit Otinel: «Jo vos dirra assez:
 Ore at wit meis, el nefme sui entrez,
 Destruite iert Romme, ta vaillante citez,
 De laquele estes emperere clamez.
 Li reis Garsie la prist o sis barnez;
 Vint mil[le] hummes, tut à cunte numbrez,
 Hummes que femmes uncore plus assez
 I avium mort, n'[en] est un eschapez,
 E jo i feri tant de m'espée de lez
 Ki uit jurs pleners oi les poinz enflez.» (*Ot.* 90-99)

This evokes the beginning of *Fierabras*, in which Fierabras challenges Charlemagne's knights (Ribémont).⁶ Here, however, we initially hear about the sack of Rome through the voice of the narrator:

Ker un Sarrazin vint en l'engarde monter.

⁶ As Bernard Ribémont has pointed out, this embassy also evokes that of Balan in *Aspremont* (411). Ribémont's analysis, from the perspective of the judicial elements in the text, also points to the particularity of *Otinel*.

Ja nus de plus riche honme n'ora mais nul parler:
 Il fu rois d'Alizandre. [. . .]
 [.]
 Et si wuloit par forche desus Ronme regner,
 Et tous cheuz de la terre a servage torner.
 Mais chil dedenz nel woudrent souffrir ne greanter;
 Por tant les fist destruire et Seint Pierre gaster.
 Mort i a l'apostoille et fist a duel finer,
 Et nonnainz et mongnie et mostiers vïoler;
 S'emporta la corronne qui mout fait a loer:
 - Le roi en fist Jhesus en la croiz corronner - ,
 Et le signe et les clouz dont on le fist clouer,
 Et les dignes reliques que ge ne sai nonmer:
 Si a la croiz en garde ou Dex laissa pener
 Son cors a granz ahantz por son peuple sauver;
 Si tint Jerusalem. (*Fier.* 48-50, 54-66)

This account of the preceding events is then echoed in the voice of Richard de Normandie, a witness to the destruction of Rome, as he reprises the events (136-41).

Later, when Oliver goes out to combat against Fierabras, we hear of them for a third time, this time from Fierabras:

Je sui chil qui destruit Ronme vostre chité:
 Mort i ai l'apostoile et pendu maint abé,
 Et moignes et nonnains et mostiers vïolé
 S'emportai la corronne dont Dex fu coronné,
 Som chief [droit] enz la croiz quant on li out levé,
 Et les seintismes clouz et le signe honoré;
 S'ai en garde la croiz par quoi estes sauvé,
 Si tieng Jerusalem, la nobile chité,
 Et le sepucre avoec ou il fu reposé. (*Fier.* 392-99a)

The parallelism across these three accounts stresses Fierabras' personal involvement in the atrocities he carried out. The poet of the extant *Fierabras* was redacting a text that may well have already been well known. A given of the narrative was the sack of Rome and stealing of the relics which led to the war between Charlemagne and the Saracens. Sacking Rome and violence against monks and nuns would have horrified the Western audience but the attack on Rome was necessary to trigger the action. The poet was constrained to keep the outline, but he chooses to reinforce the point through repetition. Fierabras as a character is thus at once the noble Saracen who will treat Oliver with every courtesy and the archenemy who has committed heinous acts against both Christendom and its representatives, the holy men and women of Rome.

The comparison between *Otinel* and *Fierabras* invited by the accounts of a destruction of Rome is reinforced by other similarities. In both texts the attack on Rome is followed by a messenger making a challenge to Charlemagne to which, in each case, one of his main warriors will respond. *Fierabras* is perhaps surprising here in that it presents Roland behaving in a reprehensible manner, refusing to respond and arguing with his uncle, the emperor, while Oliver rises to the challenge (Ailes, "*Fierabras* and the *Chanson de Roland*" 11; van Emden, "Réception du personnage" and "Reception of Roland"; Vallecalle 241-72). In *Otinel* Roland responds as a hero should and is eager to fight against the Saracen. *Otinel* and *Fierabras* are proud and fierce warriors: both issue challenges to the peers; both bear named swords; both represent the power of the Saracens. *Fierabras* d'Alexandre is described as holding a number of lands, including 'Roussie' and Spain; *Otinel* declares that his lord Garsile owns 'Espanie, Alexandre et Roussie'. However, in the build up to the combat, and in the combat itself, the two Saracens exhibit different characteristics. *Fierabras* is well known to be the 'type' of the noble Saracen who will in the end convert, as is exhibited in his insistence on fighting only someone of equal rank, while at the same time being prepared to help Oliver (in the guise of a newly dubbed, insignificant knight, Garin) to save face, offering to dismount when he has unhorsed Oliver/Garin

and offering a sword when he has disarmed him (Ailes, “Chivalry” 7-8; Guidot 77-81, 95-98). Otinel, on the other hand, displays no such sign of chivalry. He is rather insulting to the Franks and in particular to Charlemagne, whereas Fierabras admires them as warriors. Paul Bancourt, in his seminal study of Saracens in the *geste du roi*, suggests that Otinel and Fierabras are both worthy Saracens who are, therefore, expected to convert (527); I would argue, rather, that Otinel is only worthy in terms of his boldness and the ability to fight. The imperative behind the conversions is in fact rather different.

Both texts display a concern with the status of the participants in the combat. In *Otinel* it is largely on account of his birth that Charlemagne accepts Otinel as a worthy challenger, though some sense of worth as a warrior is also implied (Vallecalle 161):

Et dit li rois: « Tu es assez gentis;
Mar fu ton cors quant n’as bapteme pris. » (*Ot.* 246-47)

In *Fierabras* it is Fierabras himself who is concerned with lineage when his opponent, Oliver, presents himself as the unknown Garin:

« Mout me poise que n’es de plus haut parenté:
Së a toi me combat, encor m’iert reprové. » (*Fier.* 617-18)

An examination of narrative motifs and themes in the two texts reveals a number of similar parallels in the early part of the narrative from the arrival of the pagan warrior at Charlemagne’s court or camp, seeking combat with one of Charles’ peers: Otinel wants to fight with Roland; Fierabras will take on any of the twelve peers or up to six of them at one time. In *Otinel* one of Charlemagne’s knights, Estout, strikes the pagan and is condemned by the narrator for doing so. He is immediately killed by Otinel, who is described as like a maddened animal:

Les oilz roïlle, les grenuns a levez,

Liun resemble qui seit enchaenez. (*Ot.* 120-21)

The lion was certainly a noble beast, but Otinel's rolling eyes suggest madness or at least uncontrolled rage on the point of madness. A similar expression is used, for example, in line 1855 of *Amadas et Yvoine* to describe Amadas' 'manic frenzy': 'Les oex rouelle et raisve et rit' (Huot 176). When Otinel goes on to insult Charlemagne, Naimon pulls his beard and Roland has to be restrained. This depiction of a hot-tempered Roland recalls the opening of *Fierabras* where Roland has to be prevented from striking Charlemagne himself when the emperor has first struck Roland. In *Fierabras*, however, the messenger, Fierabras himself, behaves with restraint.

In many ways the combats are standard affairs with elements that would have figured in the repertoire of any *chanteur de geste*. In each text we have a *congé* scene as Roland in *Otinel* and Oliver in *Fierabras* take their leave of Charlemagne before going out to fight. In both works we have an arming scene as a Christian arms the pagan: Oliver arms Fierabras and Belissant arms Otinel. A series of *laisses* in each text begin with formulaic descriptions suggesting the ferocity of the combat, the equality of the warriors, and the oppositional norm between Christian and Saracen, formulae such as:

Mult fu l'estour orgeillous et felon (*Ot.* 509)

Molt par fu grant et ruiste la mellée (*Ot.* 545)

Mult fu l'estur orgeillous et pessant (*Ot.* 564)

Mout fu grant la bataille et le caple pesant (*Fier.* 954)

Mout fu fort le meslee et laide, gente et bele (*Fier.* 1031)

Mout fu fort le estor et ruiste l'envaïe (*Fier.* 1051)

In *Fierabras*, Oliver's horse is killed during the combat and Fierabras offers to dismount so that they can (literally) fight on an equal level (1186); in *Otinel*, Roland's horse is killed (470-72) and later in the

text *Otinel* is clearly not mounted, though we are not told why (555). In *Fierabras*, Fierabras offers his sister, Floripas, to Oliver (1376-77); in *Otinel* Roland offers his cousin Belissant, Charlemagne's daughter, to Otinel (514ff.). In each case this would be a reward for conversion and would integrate the Other fully into the upper echelons of the society of the donor.

Ribémont has commented on how differently the texts deal with the legal framework of the judicial combat; they also deal with the religious aspects in contrasting ways. In both texts the account of the combats is interspersed with prayers from Charlemagne and the watching French. God responds to these prayers in different ways, and it is here above all, at the actual point of conversion, that we see the poems standing in opposition to each other. Bancourt classes the conversion in each of these texts as 'illumination miraculeuse' (531), but they are described quite differently in the texts. The conversion of Fierabras is prepared by his nobility, but above all by his defeat: 'la vérité de la religion dépend du succès ou de l'échec des fidèles', as Bancourt affirms (515). In response to Charlemagne's prayer in *Fierabras*, an angel is sent by God to reassure him, and we have the conventional scenario of the noble Saracen converted following a defeat which proves the impotence of his gods (Bancourt 154). During the course of the combat Oliver had set out the Christian faith, the opposition between Christian and Saracen expressed in dialogue as well as violence. But it is not this reasoning which leads to conversion; it is simply that defeat proves that the Christian God is more powerful. Seriously wounded, Fierabras looks towards heaven:

[De] Damledex li membre, de seinte Trinité,
Del saint Esprit a tout le cors enluminé. (*Fier.* 1571-72)

This bringing together of God's power, as demonstrated through the success of God's champion, with the action of the Holy Spirit combines a theological understanding with the convention of the genre. The Holy Spirit is part, but only part, of the process, and the conversion is triggered

by his defeat (Bancourt 532; Ailes, “Chivalry” 10-11). Jean-Claude Vallecalle presents the conversion as a matter of submission more than a spiritual matter, while acknowledging that Fierabras’ fears of dying unbaptized belong in the spiritual realm (272-73).

In *Otinel* the poet presents an alternative path to conversion, with the spiritual in the foreground. Here we have a dramatic conversion as, following the prayers of the onlookers, and with Roland on the point of being defeated, God sends the Holy Spirit to alight on Otinel in the form of a dove and convert him:

Moult fu l'estur orgueilleus et pessant,
 Li uns va l'autre durement domagant.
 [Li chevalier regardent fierement,]
 Durement doutent les cops qui sont pessant;
 De lor espées taille bien le trenchant,
 François se jetent en croiez contre Oriant,
 Grant p[a]or ont de lor seignor Rollant;
 Durement prient le pere tot poissant
 Qu'il le garisse contre le mescréant,
 Et qu'il n'i soit vaincu ne recréant,
 A ces paroles vint .i. colon [volant];
 Karles le vit et tote l'autre gent.
 Seint Espirit sus Otinel descent,
 Le cuer li mue par le Jhesu comment;
 Puis dit .ii. mos qui sont bien avanant:
 « Rollans, dit il, trè toi là maintenant,
 Ne soi quel chose me va ci conseillant,
 Qui m'a mué mon cuer et mon talent,
 Je relinquis Mahon et Tervagant. » (*Ot.* 564-82)

The obvious intertextual reference here is, of course, the baptism of Christ. With the Spirit of God descending as a dove on Otinel, he is transformed into a hero whose conversion echoes the descent of the Spirit

on the Son of God (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; John 1:32) in a way that is not conventional in the genre. First, it looks as though the great hero of the genre, Roland, is about to be defeated. Secondly, God is expected to show his strength through the success of his champion: Roland's near defeat makes this impossible, so Otinel is granted the unprecedented 'road to Damascus' type conversion. He is converted by the Holy Spirit, not by the success of his opponent like Fierabras or even by reason (Bancourt 532-53). The conventional narrative of defeat is removed. Norman Daniel describes the miracle of Otinel's conversion as 'in poor taste and even poorer as theology' (185); it is, according to Daniel, 'arbitrary' (191), a conclusion which contrasts with that of Bancourt for whom the conversion is inevitable, 'comme le couronnement des vertus chevaleresques du Sarrasin' (533). Otinel's conversion is unique in the *chanson de geste* and is neither inevitable nor arbitrary: conversion, according to the teachings of Augustine, required the intervention of God, so it makes sense theologically.⁷

The narrative structure of *Otinel* parallels that of the 'Vulgate' version of *Fierabras*: the defiant messenger, a combat which ends with the conversion of the Saracen, followed by a series of adventures.⁸ In *Fi-*

⁷ In addition to in the account of his own conversion in the *Confessiones*, the theme recurs in Augustine's writings with stress on the grace of God and the need for supernatural intervention. See in particular his expositions of the Psalms in volumes 36-37 of the *Patrologia Latina*; note for example 86.16: 'You are, great God, the one who works marvels in bodies and souls.' For a discussion of Augustine's theology of conversion see Reta (239-42). Thomas Aquinas, writing the *Summa Theologica* not long after our poems were composed, deduced that 'man's will needs to be prepared by God with grace' (9:87 part 2, question 6), writing of the cause of faith; see also question 109 'On the necessity of grace' (8:323-45).

⁸ There are two distinct extant *chansons de geste* of the *Fierabras* narrative: the 'Vulgate' version, surviving in several manuscripts and edited

erabras these adventures are related to the recovery of the stolen relics and Fierabras himself appears only sporadically. In contrast, the series of adventures which follow the conversion of Otinel showcase Otinel's role as Charlemagne's warrior. We find the text also setting up an opposition within itself. The unconverted Saracen Clarel shows what Otinel could have been, had he not converted, with all his warrior potential at the service of the Saracen cause. When Clarel arms himself to challenge the Christians, he is described in terms which are positive and which recall the description of Fierabras:

Et cil les prent. Qui mult est prouz et gient.
 N'ot si bel home de ci en Oriant,
 .XV. piez a, quant il est en estant (*Ot.* 1327-29)

Fierabras, who is also fifteen feet tall, is described as 'grant et membru et corsus et mollés' (700). In an earlier battle from *Otinel* we see Clarel take Ogier prisoner, not only sparing the Christian's life, but actually killing a Saracen who wanted to dispatch Ogier (980-110). Clarel is described by Dorothee Metlitzki as the 'one case [in the Middle English tradition] in which an unbaptized Saracen, prominently endowed with a significant role, is treated with respect for his moral qualities' (178). In this respect the Middle English versions, the focus of Metlitzki's work, do not depart significantly from the Old French. Otinel must defeat Clarel, of course, but Clarel is not without positive qualities and shows, in his treatment of Ogier, that he knows how knights are supposed to behave towards each other. Clarel here stands in opposition to Otinel himself, both physically, in the violence of the combat, and conceptually.

Otinel clearly echoes *Fierabras* in a way which is more specific than just the use of common topoi. Yet the conversion scenes, as we have noted, are very different; one might even see in Otinel's conversion a

by Le Person, and the abbreviated Anglo-Norman text of British Library MS Egerton 3028, edited by Brandin.

kind of critique of the conversions in which ‘right is might’ and the defeated pagan converts—a kind of conversion which is exemplified by that of Fierabras. Again the text of *Fierabras* fits the conventions of the genre while *Otinél* modifies them, stressing the need for the action of the Holy Spirit. The two are not in contradiction but present different perspectives on a common narrative thread.

The Female Protagonists

Many *chansons de geste* from the latter part of the twelfth century or the thirteenth century feature a love interest. In both *Otinél* and *Fierabras* a bride may be an object of exchange between men; in *Ami et Amile* she should be. The depiction of the women themselves is very different in these texts.

The depiction of Charlemagne’s daughter in *Otinél* differs markedly from her portrayal in *Ami et Amile*. On her first appearance in *Ami et Amile* she seems conventional, at her father’s side, sharing his joy at the good news of a military success (226-27). We are predisposed positively towards her (Rosenberg 68). Yet she goes on to behave in a very unconventional way, rather like the expected behaviour of the *belle Sarrasine*:⁹ she is sexually forward, offering herself to Amile, then, after being refused, insinuating herself into his bed, deceiving him into thinking she is a servant and therefore sexually available to him. He is not entirely innocent but ‘aware who she may be [...] that he may be sleeping with a woman who is forbidden him, but proceeds regardless’ (Gaunt 48). Moreover, her behaviour, so clearly affronting the sexual mores of the

⁹ There is a considerable amount of critical literature on the *belle Sarrasine*. See in particular de Weever (3-52) and Bancourt (575-79). Kinoshita (46-73) and Bennett focus on Orable/Guibourc. I agree with Kinoshita’s political interpretation: the Saracen princess may represent the love interest but the underlying concerns are with land and seigniorial loyalties. On *Fierabras* see Ailes, ‘Romance and Epic Elements’.

time, is almost condoned by the narrator (Rosenberg 68; Kay, 'Seduction' 133-36; Calin 77-89 [a response to Kay]; Zink 101-14; Planche). Eventually Belissant gets what she wants and marries Amile. She behaves in a way that dishonours her father and is against God and yet is accepted because her attitude enhances the presentation of Amile, as if, as Samuel Rosenberg expresses it, 'c'est un désir qui fait honneur à la beauté et à la vaillance de son objet' (72). She then moves from defiant daughter to dutiful wife; her commitment to Amile leads her to accept his leprous friend, Ami, into their household with warmth and then to support Amile after he has sacrificed their sons to ensure Ami's cure. She shows appropriate maternal love but her primary commitment is to her husband. Here, again, she can be compared to the beautiful Saracen princess who, once she is married to the Christian knight of her choice, turns into the strong, supportive wife figure, as seen in the transformation of Orable into Guibourc in the Guillaume cycle.

If in *Ami et Amile* Belissant goes from being 'la fille Charle' to being 'la fame Amile' (Rosenberg 78), in *Otinel* she is very much her father's daughter and Otinel his warrior. The couple do not even marry until Otinel has fulfilled his duty to Charlemagne by ensuring the defeat of his former allies and coreligionists, the Saracens. Belissant's voice is almost silenced in this text. The few words she utters are significant in that they are uttered in support of the still pagan Otinel: ordered by her father to arm the Saracen challenger she does so and warns him against Roland's sword, Durendal. Her words of support for the Saracen are part of a pattern of indicators that he will convert (Ailes, 'Chivalry'), but they do not achieve anything. Whereas in *Ami et Amile* Belissant 'realises' her words, turning them into action, in *Otinel* they are passive comments, lacking power or consequence. The only words she utters that are also acts are her words of consent to the marriage (648-90). The defiant princess of *Ami et Amile* is now a compliant princess, conforming to expected behaviour. Again it is *Otinel* which diverges from the norms of the genre. In *Fierabras*, Floripas engineers an outcome that she wants, essentially forcing Gui de Bourgogne to accept her; Belissant, though clearly quite

happy to help Otinel to arm, does nothing. She is never an agent: when her father gives her as a reward to Otinel she is nothing loath but she does not cause it to happen:

« Ber, pren ma fille, Belissant l'echevie;
 Por li auez mult riche manantie,
 Sires serez de tote Lumbardie. »
 Otes l'entent, vers la terre se plie:
 « Sire, dit-il, te ne refuse je mie;
 Se la pucelle me veut, je bien l'otrie. »
 Dit Belissant: « Ge m'en tien à garnie;
 De tel mari doi je bien estre lie,
 Jamès m'amor n'ert de vos eslongnie. »
 Dit Otinel: « Par foi, je vos afie,
 Por vostre amor feraie chevalerie
 Desus païen la [pute gent] haïe,
 Au branc d'acier, par devant Atilie
 Droiz emperere, je vous lais en balie
 La vostre file, qui a ma druerie,
 Tant que vendrons [es] plains de Lombardie;
 Les nosces erent es prez souz Atylie. » (*Ot.* 642-58)

The language here is borrowed from courtly literature: he will perform great deeds for her love, and he refers to her having his *druerie*, a term associated with the refined love of the courtly romance (Bancourt 782-84). On the other hand the marriage is a matter of state. Marriage in the *chanson de geste*, however presented with the trappings of love, is largely about dynasty and producing heirs, so this is exactly as it ought to be (Sinclair 11; Kay, *Chansons* 33). Again this picks up an issue addressed in both *Fierabras* and in *Ami et Amile*. In *Fierabras* Gui de Bourgogne wants a socially acceptable betrothal and is concerned, when Floripas offers herself to him, that he should only take a bride arranged for him by his lord:

« Sire, che dist li quens, ne plache Damledez
 Ke gè aie moilliers en trestot mon aez,
 Se nel me donne Karles, le fort rois corronnez. » (*Fier.* 2914-16)

He is only persuaded to take Floripas, by Roland, because the peers, her father's prisoners, are at her mercy; they need her help to escape (Ailes, 'Romance' 41-49). The issue here is the lord's right over his vassals. Any concerns that a daughter has no right to give herself away are swept aside by the fact that she is a Saracen offering to help the Christians (de Weever 112-47; Kay, *Chansons* 37-43). In *Amis et Amile*, on the other hand, we would expect the issue of a father's right to dispose of his daughter to enter into the situation. Kay has pointed out that the concerns are the more wide-ranging implications and 'the relationship between [women's] sexuality and the social fabric of family and feudal bonds' ('Seduction' 135). One might add there is also concern about the teaching of the Church, given that Belissant prays before lying down beside Amile, as though prayer could be used as a prophylactic like a medication. Belissant in *Otinel* is an obedient daughter; Belissant in *Amis et Amile* behaves more like a Saracen princess. *Ami et Amile* goes against the conventions of society and yet does not offer a *belle Sarrasine* either; *Otinel's* response is to reinforce conventional behaviour while offering a critical response to the norms of the genre.

In some ways the betrothal of Belissant and Otinel echoes the failed betrothal of Floripas and her father's favourite, Lucafer, in the *Destruction de Rome*, the prequel to *Fierabras*:

« Si jeo vous rent Rollant et le conte Oliv[i]er,
 Et Charlon [...]
 [.]
 Donés moi vostre feil[e] Floripas a mullier;
 De trestote mon servise ne quier ge altre loier,
 Et jeo li durrai France desi k'a Monpell[i]er. »

Volunters! dist Labam, s'e[l] l[e] volt otraier.»
 Atant es la pucel[e]. [...]
 [.]
 « Feil[e] dist l'admirals, moult vous puis [ge] prais[i]er:
 Jeo vous ai marié si volés otraier,
 Par Mahonet mon dieu, au melior chival[i]er.
 Që hom poeit trover pur Franceis detrench[i]er. »
 « Sire, qi est il donc? Ne moy devés celer! »
 « Bel[e] dist l'admirals, qe vous deit nocier,
 Pur vostre amour deit [il] Charlon le chief trenchier
 Et Rollant, son neveu, et le conte Oliv[i]er. »
 « Sire, dist Floripas, lassés m'ent conseillier! »
 Lucafer passe avant qe l'em quide enbracier,
 Et Floripas le fiert que ne l'ad guer[e]s chier.
 [.]
 « Feile, dist l'admirals, léés tai fiancier,
 Et apres la fiance te ferai nocier »
 « Sir[e] dist Floripas, ceo ert au repair[i]er;
 Quant vous avrés pris France et conquis Monpell[i]er.
 [.]
 [A]dunk le prendrai jeo, së il moy deigne aver. »
 (1981 ed. 244-45, 248-52, 265-75, 283-86, 290)

Here Floripas is a reluctant object of exchange between men. She acquiesces but, unlike Belissant, does so unwillingly. This betrothal, almost entirely ignored in critical literature, appears to support patriarchy, in that Floripas submits to her father's wishes. Nevertheless, the patriarchy is seen to fail since the betrothal will never become a marriage, and instead Floripas will marry the man she wants. In both the *Destruction de Rome* and *Otinel*, the fiancé is expected to prove his worth by defeating the enemy and marriage will wait until after victory.

Although an older version of *Fierabras* and an older account of the *Destruction de Rome* almost certainly existed, so there could be a direct

link between the *Destruction de Rome* and *Otinel*. It is not necessary to posit one. The connection between them is provided by *Fierabras*. The betrothals are conventional in broad terms, but both texts could well be responding, albeit differently, to the betrothal of Gui and Floripas in *Fierabras*. Both texts reflect normal social conventions. In rewriting Floripas as Belissant in *Otinel*, the threat posed by the unconventional behaviour of the *belle Sarrasine* is neutralised. Belissant in *Ami et Amile* also offers a threat to patriarchal authority by giving herself to the hero; Belissant in *Otinel* accepts her father's authority and rejects the position of both these women. The *Destruction de Rome* treats societal norms critically with a conventional, patriarchal betrothal that fails.

If Belissant in *Otinel* offers a challenge to the behaviour of Floripas, then Alfamie, the beautiful daughter of the Emir Garsile in the same poem, does so even more emphatically as a *belle Sarrasine* who behaves with some propriety and stays loyal to her own people. Alfamie is the beloved of the Saracen champion, Clarel, who hands his prisoner Ogier over to her and her ladies. In *Fierabras* anxiety is shown about handing prisoners to the care of the princess, an anxiety justified when Floripas betrays her father by supporting the prisoners. In *Otinel* we see Alfamie and her ladies disarm Ogier in a reversal of the conventional arming sequence that we have earlier seen enacted when Belissant arms Otinel. In a parallel to Floripas' administration of mandrake to heal Oliver in *Fierabras* (2316-18), Alfamie, in *Otinel*, uses herbs to heal Ogier (1042-54). In her medical skills, Alfamie is constructed according to the reader's expectations; similarly physically, the external marker of difference is lacking—she is described as 'al vis cler' (1113)—but unusually she resists assimilation. She is loyal to her pagan lover. Jacqueline de Weever, whose corpus does not include *Otinel*, points out that only two out of twenty poems in which Saracen princesses play an important role depict the princess as not crossing 'the boundaries into Frankish culture' (xvii). When she hears of Clarel's death, Alfamie gives orders for Ogier to be punished (1918-23), and he is held in the conditions under which Balan expected Floripas to hold his prisoners, chained and guarded.

Rather than being set free by the princess, Ogier must fight his way to freedom. Ogier's behaviour is unsurprising; he is a warrior hero. But this is not how we expect a Saracen princess looking after male prisoners to behave (Kay, *Chansons* 47). The white Saracen woman, whose external signs of difference are erased, may behave in socially unconventional ways, but it is expected that in the end she will integrate with Christian society. De Weever presents the 'black woman warrior' as the mirror opposite of the white Saracen (xxvi-xxvii, 53-109). Alfamie resists this categorisation, presenting a clear contrast with the conventional *belle Sarrasine* in her behaviour, not through monstrosity, as de Weever suggests, but through conventionality.

Otinél, *Fierabras*, and the *Destruction de Rome* all exploit topoi of the genre but respond to them differently. *Fierabras* presents us with the liveliest of the *belles Sarrasines* who negotiates her own terms and eventually converts. *Otinél*, on the other hand, presents us with Belissant, a conventional, silent and obedient Christian princess, and uses the language of courtly literature in the presentation of the betrothal; the same poem presents her counterpart in the loyal Saracen princess, Alfamie, who does not marry and does not become a Christian. The depiction of both can be read as a response to Floripas. The *Destruction* uses similar courtly language for a betrothal which is clearly about homosocial exchange and which is destined to fail. Floripas is far from idealised in either text of the *Fierabras* tradition, but nor is she explicitly condemned. The *belle Sarrasine* in the *chansons de geste* is at once Other and capable of assimilation because she lacks external markers of alterity. She poses a threat to patriarchal authority by her defiance of her father, yet in the end that threat is neutralised by her marriage. In *Ami et Amile*, the challenge Belissant presents to patriarchal authority is similarly neutralised by her marriage. In *Otinél*, the type of the *belle Sarrasine* is rewritten twice; in both cases the challenge to the authority of the father is erased and replaced by a dutiful Christian princess, Belissant, and an equally dutiful Saracen princess, Alfamie, who, for this very reason, can never be assimilated into Christian society.

Reception and Manuscript Tradition

It seems that the texts are responding to currents in the *chansons de geste*. The dialogue between *Fierabras* and *Otinel* is developed in the reception of the texts. An association in their reception is partly revealed by the manuscript tradition. *Otinel* survives in one fragment and two manuscripts: Bodmer 168, an Anglo-Norman manuscript which also contains *Waldef* and *Gui de Warewic* (Vielliard 93-99) and Vatican Regina 1616, which contains, with other texts, *Fierabras*. In the Vatican manuscript, at some point the copies of *Fierabras* and *Otinel*, written in different hands but roughly contemporary, were bound with a group of eleventh- and twelfth-century Latin texts. An error of binding resulted in a substantial section of *Fierabras* being bound in the middle of the *Otinel*. While this insertion of one within the other was presumably accidental, binding the two texts together was probably intentional, perhaps even inevitable. Reading the texts together, keeping them together in one codex, would invite an awareness of the other text during reading. The conventions of the genre used so effectively in *Fierabras* are rejected in its mirror image *Otinel*.

The invitation to read the texts together became stronger in the insular tradition. The corpus of Middle English Charlemagne romances is limited. Translations from French are essentially centred on the three narratives: *Fierabras*, *Otinel* and the *Roland* material (Cowan). This in itself would invite the reader to see points of similarity and difference between them. Of the Middle English translations of *Fierabras*, only one is in a manuscript with another text, the Fillingham *Firumbras* found in BL Additional MS 37492, where it is followed by one of the three versions of *Otinel*, known as *Otuel and Roland*.

Conclusion

There are strong intertextual links between *Roland* and *Fierabras*; *Otinel* alludes to, and sets itself aside from, the *Roland* tradition, but it

also responds to elements of the *Fierabras* narrative. Aebischer, judging the poem in a vein similar to that of the editors, described *Otinél* as a 'recueil de lieux communs' but far from being 'rigoureusement contraint selon les schémas habituels' (158-59), our poem responds to and uses the conventions in a way that highlights its departures from them. Its rejection of narrative elements of the *cycle du roi* is a pointer to its rejection of some of the norms of the genre, the literary code within which it is operating: the forward Saracen princess and the noble Saracen prince, converted for no better reason than his defeat at the hands of a Christian. The text is 'calqué sur *Fierabras*' certainly (Gautier 398), but not slavishly so. The reception of *Otinél* in its association with both *Fierabras* and elements of the *Roland* tradition suggests that for some medieval readers at least they formed a *thèse* and *antithèse* of the *chansons de geste* of conversion. *Otinél* is both a supplement and, arguably, a complement to *Fierabras*.

Arguing that these *chansons de geste*, in particular *Otinél* and *Fierabras*, belong within a culture of a discourse of opposition implies that the study of the *chanson de geste* is not separate from 'courtly' literature, but rather that the *chansons de geste* are coming from the same cultural milieu, one which delights in bringing together differences, whether they are contradictory or complementary. The cultural milieu in which the *chanson de geste* is being composed is not detached from that in which romances and lyric poems are circulating. The uncertain dating and the particular subjection of the *chansons de geste* to *remaniement* also means that sometimes the direction of interaction is not clear. There is no need, it seems, to reconcile opposition. The reception of *Otinél* and its occasional pairing with *Fierabras* in manuscripts suggests rather that the medieval readers were willing to read even contradictory texts in relation to each other. Thus *Otinél* participates in a dialogue of oppositions through a manipulation of the very topoi of the tradition with which it is engaged.

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