Ami et Amile and Jean-Luc Nancy: Friendship vs Community?

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Examining Old French *chansons de geste* with an eye to the "Other Within" yields an anomalous picture. On the one hand, almost every category of important character can be considered an internal "outsider." Heroes and villains are often similarly strange in the eyes of other characters, and are regularly both rebarbative and sympathetic. They alike manifest the overreactions central to the narratives and tend to be comparably heedless of the welfare and opinions of others in pursuing their own ends. Women and kings, for their part, move within the baronial collective without being entirely of it; their behavior, too, is frequently construed as outrageous. Only those who could be qualified in Greimasian terms as adjuvants speak for and out of wider collective interests, and they are marginalized:[1] by secondary status (such as Oliver in the Oxford *Chanson de Roland* and Bernier in *Raoul de Cambrai*), by speaking from a different ideological perspective (Turpin in the Oxford *Roland*), by humorous treatment, or by ethnic or social distantiation (Rainouart in the *Chanson de Guillaume*, Bernier

again). Those who act for one group against another ultimately damage the interests of both, as in the internecine cross-generational feuds of the *Geste des Lorrains*. The constitutive excess noted by François Suard in his concise introduction to the genre means that the *chanson de geste* is peopled predominantly by Others Within: figures who, while not blatantly misfits, do not slide smoothly into some communitarian ethos.[2]

On the other hand, *chansons de geste* have a famously strong collectivist element. An example is the way they interpellate their audiences in the first person plural. "Carles li reis, nostre emperere magnes" [Charles the king, our great emperor], begins the Oxford *Chanson de Roland*, where the narrator joins the characters in referring to men, religion, and cause as "ours."[3] Such a strategy speaks of a desire to build, if only momentarily, a community extending from text to audience and back again. This collectivist rhetoric is commonly understood as an effort to establish, at least fictionally, one of the genre's ideals: a homosociety in which all who matter will be of one sort, harmonious sameness will rule, and discordant difference be banished to the margins.[4] It has long been recognized that *chansons de geste* imply a basis in shared values, though what those values are is less established. Many of the historicizing political readings to which the works lend themselves emphasize their engagement with the "warrior class" of feudal barons in

its internal conflicts and struggles against encroaching powers.[5] Other interpretations consider Christianity to be the determining element, while some accentuate geopolitical links with northwestern Europe or with Italy.[6] Still others pinpoint propaganda for a struggling Capetian monarchy, or for Norman or Angevin expansionism.[7] It is fair to assert, then, that the collectivist impulse in *chansons de geste* could legitimize collectives crystallizing around different principles: ideological, geopolitical, dynastic, and so forth. The sense of values shared is an effect of the process of interpellation-which does not preclude the independent manifestation of such values. Its power to energize such collectives was, presumably, one of the genre's attractions. Certainly it has been so since the nineteenth century.

I shall examine here the relations between this well-documented collectivist impulse and the observation that any identifiable *chanson de geste* character role is what we might term an "irony of the community."[8] Highlighting the ironic presences in the texts allows us to rethink the conception of collectives as primarily homogeneous totalities. In its application to secular societies, this conception owes much to nation-state thinking projected back onto the Middle Ages in which that thinking found many of its inspirations; it is, in short, more medievalist than medieval.[9] The challenge, then, is

how we, today, can think a past collective made up largely of Others Within. In pursuing this question, I focus on *Ami et Amile*, a text whose identical heroes have been influentially read as paradigmatic of the genre's homogenizing tendencies. I shall investigate their close friendship in the light of seminal work on community by Jean-Luc Nancy, then turn to the wider implications for the *chanson de geste*.[10] Finally I shall suggest what *chansons de geste* may bring to a reading of Nancy, and thus to Nancy's project of philosophical intervention in the modern world.

Ami et Amile is generally dated to around 1200. It survives in full in only one manuscript, BN fr. 860 (thirteenth century), where it is preceded by a rhymed *remaniement* of the *Chanson de Roland* (the so-called Paris version) and by *Gaydon* (the continuing story of Thierri d'Anjou after his championship of Charlemagne at Ganelon's trial), and followed by *Jourdain de Blaye* (the story of Ami's grandson) and *Auberi le Bourguignon* (a relative of Charlemagne's counsellor Naimes).[11] These texts notably share an exploration of biological and symbolic kinship inside and outside institutional frameworks: friendship and fidelity, guardianship and formal or informal god-kin, marriage and seduction, and uncle-nephew or parent-child relations. They also include the genre's commonplaces of exile and revenge, lordly ingratitude and mismanagement, extreme loyalty and

treachery. By the late twelfth century, versions in hagiographic and in romance frameworks also circulated in French.[12] In this essay I accentuate the significance of *Ami et Amile*'s self-presentation as a *chanson de geste*. Whether or not the poet reacted against other realizations, the *chanson de geste* frame imposes a distinctive set of aesthetic, ethical, and political concerns and priorities orienting the implications of this particular re-telling.

Ami et Amile relates how the lives of the eponymous pair intertwine. They are born on a single day, share a miraculous resemblance, and bind themselves in sworn companionship. Serving together at Charlemagne's court, they attract the attention of Charlemagne's steward Hardré and of his daughter Belissant. Both target the heroes. Hardré seeks to kill them and when his plot fails, offers in marriage his niece Lubias, accepted by Ami; Belissant seduces Amile, whom Hardré promptly accuses of treason. Fearing the ensuing judicial combat, Amile appeals to Ami, who secretly fights in his place and wins. For betrothing himself to Belissant, the prize of victory, Ami is afflicted with leprosy and rejected by his own wife. After much suffering, he turns to Amile who, on angelic advice, kills his sons in order to bathe the leper in their blood. The cure successful, the children are miraculously resuscitated. Ami and Amile leave on pilgrimage and

die at Mortara, in Italy, where their tombs are known to pilgrims.

Commentators on *Ami et Amile* tend to focus on the heroes' resemblance. This is signalled throughout the text in numerous other details besides the physical, most obviously in their names: "Amile" could almost be a declension of "Ami," which itself means "friend." Their explicitly miraculous similarities figure an unbreakable, divinely ordained bond open to different interpretations. The two friends may be considered not merely to share a privileged relationship but also to constitute a privileged unit. For some commentators they are ultimately One, each permitting for the other that completion which escapes frustrated human subjects.[13] In strictly hagiographic versions of the story this completion is, indeed, marked as God-given from the start, and the friends' bond is not of this world.[14] Some scholars read the *chanson de geste Ami et Amile* in the hagiographic mould, and maintain that the providential friendship imposes a divinely authorized exemption from earthly rules. The friends' transgressions would therefore be indices of a special relationship with God, whether on a joint or individual basis.[15] However, it is significant that the text is distinctively not a saintly *vita*, and its *chanson de geste* presentation brings secular questions also to the fore. Therefore the pair's extraordinary attachment is often

interpreted as the paradigm of a social ideal espoused by the genre, in which elite male bonding is society's integrating principle and discordant "others" are easily differentiated, clearly inferior and essentially subservient.[16]

Both these approaches tend to conclude that the heroic friendship is presented (if only eventually) as a shining exception in an imperfect world. I propose a different understanding of the friends' exemplary status: one which focuses on their relationship not as encapsulating ideal harmony (whether secular or sacred) but as epitomizing tensions felt to underlie wider social relations throughout the text. Looking at the study of twins, psychologist René Zazzo contended that observers' fascination with similarity and union had led to their overlooking both the more important differences that distinguish twins from each other and the relationships they maintain with each other and with the outside world.[17] I wish similarly to refocus attention on Ami and Amile to emphasize those things that distance them from each other and that disturb their relationship, (emblematized by the extra syllable (-le) that, appended to *ami*, repeats and dislodges friendship). My interest is not in differences of character but in the alienating and self-alienating effects of their mutual commitment. These I read as paradigms of the highly conflictual social model found in *Ami et Amile* and much more widely in

chansons de geste, characterized as they are by prominent discord within the social body.

A first objection to characterizing the friendship as an ideal union rooted in simple homogeneity is that it is replete with difficulties for the heroes themselves. Their fictional lives are dominated by the fact that for each, the other's death is an insupportable prospect. The narrative not only demonstrates this overriding commitment but also establishes the inevitability that the heroes will be required actually to act it out. From the moment the two jointly enter society, they become embroiled in increasingly compromising situations which ultimately lead each to commit terrible deeds in order to preserve the other's life. Whether the definitive catalyst is Hardré's jealous aggression, Ami's marriage with the traitor's niece, Amile's fornication with his lord's daughter, or Ami's adulterous betrothal, the narrative weaves unlikely events into a taut series of causes and effects. To save the guilty Amile from dying in judicial combat, Ami fights Hardré illicitly and hence arguably murders him, before rejecting an angelic warning of leprosy and continuing with a bigamous betrothal. Amile must murder his child-heirs and gruesomely exploit their bodies so as to avert Ami's death-even though Ami himself prefers to die (v. 2904). Each hero chooses his own social and moral isolation over the other's physical annihilation. Each's choice cannot but

affect the other, however, and as the plot thickens, neither hero can do anything which does not somehow become also the other's deed. Amile's sexual guilt is uncannily echoed in Ami's condemnation for his bigamy; Ami's questionable homicide in combat reverberates in Amile's killing of his innocent sons.[18] Sameness here, I submit, contributes not to homogeneity but to a distinctness or singularity (to borrow Nancy's terms) accompanying the heroes' intensifying bond. Each one's deed is not the other's and their acts remain noticeably different, yet each seems to bear and to accept responsibility for the other's deed (vv. 2830–42) even when he himself might have acted differently (vv. 996–1003; vv. 2869–76). Each one acts for and towards the other, who is originator and addressee. The trouble that the two cause to themselves and to each other surfaces in the anguish with which each reacts to angelic messengers urging them to refrain or to act. Amile's final assertion that the two have deserved joint execution acknowledges this co-existence and co-responsibility but does not declare union. It moves between singular and plural first persons to claim the act and its consequences now for Amile alone, now for Ami also:

> Or en venéz, si verréz mon torment
>
> Et mon martyre et mon duel qui est grans.
>
> Quant les avronz enterréz richement,

> Puis noz copéz les chiés de maintenant
>
> Car deservi l'avommez. (vv. 3163–67)

> [Now come, and you shall see my torment and my suffering and my grief which is great. When we have buried them nobly, then cut off our heads at once, for we have deserved it.]

Having ascribed the positive and miraculous part of the previous episode, Ami's cure and return to society (his disease being conceived as a social as much as a physical phenomenon, vv. 2979, 2999), to "Jhesu le Pere qui touz les biens consent" (v. 3162) [Jesus the Father who authorizes all good things], Amile then submits his own action to the common framework of human norms. He does not claim for it a superior meaning beyond the heroes' friendship or use this moment to sacralize the friendship itself. The projected joint death is not the occasion for a vision of union beyond the grave but an expression of surrender to the reality of singularity. The collective posited here is grounded in an estrangement that is shared but does not unite.

This account of the friends' togetherness draws on what Nancy calls "l'être-en-commun" [being-in-common] or "la communauté," a term I shall render by the English "communialty" for reasons explained below. Nancy opposes communialty to

several superficially similar notions: to specular, fusional

models of being; to the atomism implied by such modern notions

as individual, society, and social bonds; and to the myth of an

"immanent" community, a lost golden age in which "la communauté

se tissait de liens étroits, harmonieux et infrangibles" [in

which community was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible

bonds].[19] Communialty presents human existence as so radically

relational that it challenges conventional analytical categories,

and Nancy's rhetoric strains accordingly. Perhaps his simplest

expression, "*toi partage moi*" [you shares me], shares a

paragraph with his most cryptic: "toi (e(s)t) (tout autre que)

moi" [you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I], a formula that

he urges us to read "selon toutes les combinaisons possibles."[20]

You me, you and me, you is me, you and anyone but me, you is

quite different from me, you wholly other than me. But not "you

without me" or vice versa; and not "you are me." The human unit-

insofar as it makes sense to speak of one-is "l'être singulier"

[the singular being], but not an "individual": "Là où l'individu

ne connaît qu'un autre individu, juxtaposé à lui à la fois comme

identique à lui et comme une chose-comme l'identité d'une chose-,

l'être singulier ne connaît pas, mais éprouve son *semblable*:

'L'être n'est jamais moi seul, c'est toujours *moi et mes*

semblables [Bataille]'" [Whereas the individual can know another

individual, juxtaposed to him both as identical to him and as a

thing-as the identity of a thing-the singular being does not know, but rather experiences his *like*: "Being is never me alone, it is always *me and those like me*."] [21] Nancy distinguishes a similarity produced by and productive of true otherness (*le semblable*) from the similarity of specular logic (*le pareil*): "Le semblable n'est pas le pareil. Je ne *me* retrouve pas, ni ne *me* reconnais dans l'autre: j'y éprouve ou j'en éprouve l'altérité et l'altération qui 'en moi-même' met hors de moi ma singularité, et qui la finit infiniment" [The like is not the same. I do not rediscover *myself*, nor do I recognize *myself* in the other: I experience the other's alterity, or I experience alterity in the other together with the alteration that "in me" sets my singularity outside me and indefinitely delimits it.][22] The multiply-similar Ami and Amile can be interpreted as *semblables* rather than-as they are often read-*pareils*.

Human beings, "les êtres singuliers" [singular beings], come into being in a communicative relation (*la communication*) which can be assimilated neither to social bond (*le lien*)-"un motif du rattachement ou d'un ajointement par l'extérieur" [any notion of connection or joining from the outside]-nor to fusion (*la communion*)-"[un] motif d'une intériorité commune et fusionnelle" [any notion of a common and fusional interiority].[23] Ami and Amile illustrate such an anomalous condition. On the one hand, their sworn *compaingnie* is distinct from the domain of

social *liens*. Even allowing for the relative weakness of social structures in medieval literature, the text gives no evidence for institutional status to the friendship. This accords with other *chansons de geste*, where *compagnonnage* is a-if not the-primary human relation although, or even because, it is not bound by rules or contract, is in fact not "une réalité sociale constituée" [an established social reality](its literary position outside the strictly social domain proves nothing about historical reality).[24] Their friendship nevertheless carries enormous weight in the eyes of the other characters as well as of the heroes themselves. On the other hand, the privileged connection between the pair is never transparent. Ami dreams that Amile is fighting a lion which turns into Hardré (vv. 866–75), an event which could be read as Nancy's *communion*. Prophetic dreams in *chanson de geste*, however, conventionally highlight partial knowledge and its frustrations, and produce anxiety not reassurance.[25] The communialty between the friends is therefore to be distinguished from the complementary forms of institutional bond and of mystical union.

In building our model of communialty in *Ami et Amile*, we must include the friends' relationships, as a pair and individually, with other characters. The providential friendship complicates these interactions. The pair always provokes attention, positive or negative. The suggestion that a

character's presentation as "good" or "bad" depends on whether that character confronted with the heroes manifests desire or animosity, is attractive but not really sustainable. Hostility dominates, and not only because the text represents it as a form of inverted desire, so that Hardré, Lubias, and Belissant are similarly linked to the heroes by a combination of love and harm.[26] Even before the heroes' first meeting, the pattern is set. Each searches for a man who, he has heard, resembles him greatly (vv. 93–94, 152–53), and progresses through encounters with uncomprehending onlookers whose surprise is tinged with mild antagonism (vv. 134–35, 159–60). Even the generally "good" Belissant is disturbed by the sacrifice of her children: "plorant, criant, trestoute eschevelee, por ses anfans a grant dolor menee" (vv. 3185–86) [weeping, crying, her hair all dishevelled, she lamented greatly for her children]. God resuscitates the children before their mother reaches them; but Belissant's reaction contrasts with the relatively unperturbed response of the wife in the story's Middle English version, given even before she knows of the resuscitation.[27] Communialty's jointed disjointedness and communication's painful misunderstandings are evident throughout *Ami et Amile*.

    We can therefore see in the relation between Ami and Amile themselves a *mise en abyme* of the wider collective: "la limite extrême, mais non externe, de la communauté" [the extreme though

not external limit].[28] I borrow here from Nancy's description of
the loving couple in which, he argues, communialty is realized
with a peculiar intensity that makes it exemplary of even as it
distinguishes it from the common run (Nancy is countering the
romantic view of the couple as embodying an ideal communion
inaccessible to society).[29] The model for human relationships
that *Ami et Amile* supplies is one in which discrete entities
infringe on each other in ways that are inevitably, inseparably
positive and negative. This corresponds with reasonable accuracy
to the *chanson de geste* world, where no one can act without
impinging on others and institutions are thought in terms of
human emotion; *toi partage moi*. On the other hand, neither
social bonds, affective links, nor encroachment produce full
integration, and thus arises "la propriété paradoxale du
personnage épique" [the paradoxical property of the epic figure]
highlighted by Suard: "constamment associé à d'autres, il est
condamné à la solitude" [constantly associated with others, he
is nevertheless condemned to solitude];[30] the paradox is perhaps
more apparent, because more unfamiliar, to modern eyes. The same
communialty and *communication* found in *Ami et Amile* mark other
chansons de geste. To take only one famous example, *Raoul de
Cambrai* highlights the tragic disjunctions which prevent Raoul
and Bernier, the text's *couple épique*, from both wanting peace

at the same time, and which make Aalais's maternal curse on

Raoul irretractable.

     Having discussed what Nancy's essay can bring to an

understanding of *chansons de geste*, one may, in turn, argue that

a theory of communialty based in the *chanson de geste* can focus

difficulties with Nancy's analysis. To take one aspect: while

Nancy insists that communialty involves the recognition of real

disagreements between singularities, he downplays the potential

for conflict it must logically encapsulate. In implicitly

promoting adherence to his version of communialty as a safeguard,

if not against quarrelling then at least against its escalation

into violence or oppression, he in effect substitutes an

idealized community for his own communialty. The *chansons de

geste* are truer to his analysis in foregrounding bloodshed and

ferocity even where they condemn them. Their gory

destructiveness and dark energy show up ironically the

abstraction of parts of Nancy's argument, such as the following

crucial passage:

          La communauté est révélée dans la mort d'autrui :

            elle est ainsi toujours révélée à autrui. La

            communauté est ce qui a lieu toujours par autrui

            et pour autrui. Ce n'est pas l'espace des

            "*moi*"--sujets et substances, au fond immortels--

mais celui des *je*, qui sont toujours des *autrui*

(ou bien, ne sont rien). Si la communauté est

révélée dans la mort d'autrui, c'est que la mort

elle-même est la véritable communauté des *je* qui

ne sont pas des *moi*. Ce n'est pas une communion

qui fusionne les *moi* en un *Moi* ou en un *Nous*

supérieur. C'est la communauté des *autrui*.[31]

[Community is revealed in the death of others; hence

it is always revealed to others. Community is what

takes place always through others and for others. It

is not the space of the *egos*-subjects and substances

that are at bottom immortal-but of the *I*'s, who are

always *others* (or else are nothing). If community is

revealed in the death of others it is because death

itself is the true community of *I*'s that are not *egos*.

It is not a communion that fuses the *egos* into an *Ego*

or a higher *We*. It is the community of *others*.]

The warfare, killings, and menaces which fuel even the less

combat-ridden *chansons de geste* bring Nancy's rather bloodless

rhetoric into vividly imagined concretion. Differences can and

will emerge in viciousness, and accepting alterity must mean

acknowledging this. The appeal for forbearance can be made only on the basis of this acknowledgement.

One may similarly question Nancy's view that conflict arises primarily between would-be immanent communities, intimating that demolishing the myth of immanent community will reduce such clashes. Nancy depicts warfare *within* the collective as absurd and illegitimate, to the point where naming a particular conflict "une guerre intestine"[32] [intestinal warfare] appears a positive step towards ending it. For *chansons de geste*, contrastingly, civil war represents the primary, essential form of conflict. Internal enemies are more interesting than external ones, unless the latter are constructed along lines of similarity as well as difference, creating a stimulating tension. Thus, the oft-remarked resemblances between Saracens and Christians in the Oxford *Chanson de Roland* are, in my view, evidence not of embryonic or senescent states of community formation but of the predominance of communialty for thinking human relations. Feud, another of the genre's great themes, occurs not between stably separate, internally consistent communities but between shifting groupings of kin and allies. If people are not like us, how are we to fight them? Most interesting of all are "friends" and "companions," where these terms are understood with the freight of disjunction, suffering, and infringement that I have examined in *Ami et Amile*. Hence the

preoccupation with friction within the *couple épique* and the

close family as well as with other kinds of *ami*: lords, allies,

and relatives.[33] Although Nancy downplays it, internal conflict

is the corollary of positing a group based on the *semblable*,

that being in whom and of whom I experience "l'altérité et

l'altération qui 'en moi-même' met hors de moi ma singularité"

[alterity in the other together with the alteration that "in me"

sets my singularity outside me].[34]

This is not to argue that communities are wholly absent

from *chansons de geste*; on the contrary, they prompt a further

observation concerning Nancy. In *CD*, *la communauté* means three

things: (i) the disjunctive common humanity which resists both

(ii) the drive to immanence and the constitution of (iii) any

bounded community. Nancy thus attempts to reclaim *la communauté*

from its associations with, variously, the *communautarisme* that

haunts contemporary French politics, with Soviet-era communism,

and with Christian brotherhood. In order to distinguish it from

the other senses, I have translated the first sense of *la*

communauté as "communialty," an obsolete word whose meaning the

OED gives as "Community; fellowship." Nancy's text, however,

slides between senses so as to suggest that communialty is the

unacknowledged but inescapable condition of particular, actual

communities, which ought therefore to accept their hankering

after immanence for the constitutive fantasy it is: "La

communauté assume et inscrit-c'est son geste et son tracé propres-en quelque sorte l'impossibilité de la communauté" [community acknowledges and inscribes-this is its peculiar gesture-the impossibility of community].[35] In later work he abandons the polyvalent use of *la communauté*, preferring such terms for communialty as "être-en-commun" [being-in-common], "être-ensemble" [being-together], "être-avec" [being-with].[36] His new vocabulary achieves theoretical clarity at the expense of a productive ambiguity. For "community" importantly has a bounded sense as well as the unbounded one which Nancy seeks to impose. Bounded communities distinguish between insiders and outsiders, even if relations between them are friendly and even if boundaries are permeable and shifting. The slide established in the essay "La communauté désœuvrée" between bounded and unbounded communities corresponds to a real association. If it is vital to appreciate the element of estrangement within any apparently consistent community, it is equally crucial to recognise the tendency to form bounded groups--however temporary, contingent, and internally heterogeneous--that is inherent in communialty's fragmenting nature. Moreover, alienation and disjunction, which Nancy deems central to communialty, are not stably divisible from antagonism and exclusion. Communialty includes at its core the potential for both group formation and group hostility. These tendencies may be illustrated by Nancy's

comment on the "dangers" that led him to abandon the term

"communauté," whose use in *CD* he later considers to have

contributed towards empowering a late twentieth-century

"reviviscence de pulsions communautaristes, et parfois

fascisantes"[37] [revival of communitarian and sometimes fascistic

urges]. With their preference for rendering conflicts as

struggles between *semblables*, *chansons de geste* show that human

grouping is not fundamentally opposed to the kind of overlapping

relationality, the *partage*, that Nancy wants to salve the inter-

communal wound. Conflict and violence in these works are not

only destructive of the social fabric nor radically alien to it;

they constitute the social fabric, for good and ill.[38]

This point is distinct from but connected to Nancy's

argument about immanence, to which I now turn. As already quoted,

Nancy affirms that communialty is to be distinguished from the

community that "fusionne les *moi* en un *Moi* ou en un *Nous*

supérieur" [fuses the *egos* into an *Ego* or a higher *We*]. This

cannot fail to recall the collective *nous* [we, us] with which

chansons de geste often interpellate their audiences. My

suggestion is that whereas we moderns tend to read such a *nous*

as indicating a self-consistent community, *a fortiori* when it

issues from a premodern past, the same supposition does not

orient medieval audiences of *chansons de geste*. Their

collectives are not immanent communities but communialties, in

which "[les] *je* [...] sont toujours des *autrui* [...], ne sont pas des *moi*" [the *I*'s are always *others,* not *egos*]. It is a truism that modern modes of what we call subjectivity, individuality, singularity, and personhood are not identical to medieval ones, though this appreciation of historical difference is not always extended to the corresponding matter of group formation. In fact, *chansons de geste* do occasionally, and in specific circumstances, refer to the formation of communities comparable to those Nancy criticizes. A character may attempt to channel the power of the collective for his or her particular ends, for instance speaking authoritatively for others in council or initiating fighting that entangles many. An example of the first is Hernaïs d'Orléans in the *Couronnement de Louis*; of the second, Thiébaud de Bourges in the *Chanson de Guillaume*. The "community" that these figures attempt to actualize can validly be called a "sujet collectif" [collective subject] or "*Moi* supérieur" [higher *We*]. Although not always ascribed to traitors or troublemakers, the move to embody such a community sooner or later attracts comment expressive of a wider perspective, thus restoring the element of *autrui*. As Oliver comments in the Oxford *Chanson de Roland*: "Vostre proëcce, Rollant, mar la veïmes!" (v. 1731) ["Your prowess, Roland, in an evil hour we saw it!"].

Chansons de geste thus draw on the myth of immanent community to explain civil war. They turn to a different aspect of that myth in the effort to prevent it, notably calling for the formation of a Christian community that will fight as one against the infidel. *Girard de Vienne* ends with the indecisive combat between Roland and Oliver, opposing champions in an inter-Christian war halted by an angelic summons to direct their energies into crusade. Such solidarities, however, remain wishes to be fulfilled beyond the text's narrative ken. Similarly, at the end of *Ami et Amile*, the miraculous restoration of the heroes' physical similarity brings the text to a rapid close; their withdrawal from earthly society, pilgrimage, and joint deaths hint at full union with and in the divinity-but if this occurs, it is outside the text's own order. Immanent community certainly functions in numerous *chansons de geste* as an incitement to ideological violence. Nevertheless, *chanson de geste* violence is not primarily produced by or productive of groups that function harmoniously because water-tightly "same" and opposed to a "different" other.

If we take Ami and Amile's friendship as the image in miniature of the *chanson de geste* collective, then it is evident that the way of being-together that the genre foregrounds is not a harmonious union, homosociety, or immanent community based on the erasure or expulsion of difference. Nancy's model of non-

totalized, non-totalizing communialty[39] stimulates us to re-examine the collectivist urge of *chansons de geste*, and to find a place in that collective for the Others Within who observably compose it. A communialty such as that of Ami and Amile can be made up only of "Others Within," a not inadequate alternative term for Nancy's *êtres singuliers* [singular beings] or *semblables* [likes]. Nancy critiques the immanent community, whose location in the lost past (or as yet unattainable future) he considers to be a myth constitutive of modern societies.[40] Medievalists, whose specialist period is prone to be co-opted to embody that myth, can be grateful. Like other modern theorists, he further moves us beyond the polarity of "individual" and "society" which, notwithstanding notably exciting work in the 1970s and 80s, is recognized to be ill-adjusted to medieval relations between the person and the collective. Nancy encourages us to reconceive what preceded this post-Enlightenment discourse. We can utilize his work without diminishing the many differences between his thought and agenda and those of the *chansons de geste*. Conversely, attentiveness to *chansons de geste* collectives exposes ways in which Nancy's analysis of the *communauté désœuvrée* is obscured by the political and ethical "work" that he calls on it to do.

[1] Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtès, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (Paris: Hachette, 1979), 10.

[2] François Suard, *La Chanson de geste* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), 19.

[3] *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. Cesare Segre, rev. edn, French trans. Madeleine Tyssens, 2 vols, TLF (Geneva: Droz, 1989), vol. 1.

[4] The case is made eloquently by Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapter 1. Sarah Kay critiques readings of the genre as monolithically monologic in her "Introduction," *The "Chansons de Geste" in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

[5] For example, John Benton, "'Nostre Franceis n'unt talent de fuïr': The *Song of Roland* and the enculturation of the warrior class," *Olifant* 6 (1979): 237–58.

[6] Christian readings include William Calin, *The Epic Quest: Studies in Four Old French "Chansons de geste"* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966); and Gérard J. Brault, most influentially in his edition of the text with English translation, *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition*, 2 vols (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978). Christian geopolitics are stressed by Sharon Kinoshita, "'Pagans

are wrong and Christians are right': Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 80-111; a slightly different version is found in her *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), chapter 1. Italian diffusion is discussed by Juliann M. Vitullo, *The Chivalric Epic in Medieval Italy* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

[7] Capetian links are argued notably by Hans-Erich Keller, *Autour de Roland: Recherches sur la chanson de geste* (Paris: Champion, 1989); Keller's conclusions need revision in the light of more recent work on circulation and reception. On Norman expansion, see D. C. Douglas, "The *Song of Roland* and the Norman Conquest of England," *French Studies* 14 (1960): 99-116, and André de Mandach, *Naissance et développement de la chanson de geste en Europe*, 6 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1961-93), especially "Le commonwealth normand et le mythe de Charlemagne et de Roland" (VI, 123-37). Luke Sunderland emphasizes the varied and complicated medieval identifications with and investments in *chansons de geste*, and relates these to English and to French kingship, to places that those kings and others contested-Burgundy, Occitania, and the Low Countries-and to Italy; *Rebel*

Barons: Resisting Royal Power in Medieval Culture (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[8] The reference, of course, is to Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 475. I do not intend to invoke a Hegelian analytical framework in borrowing the phrase.

[9] Martin Thom, *Republics, Nations and Tribes* (London: Verso, 1995); Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[10] I refer primarily to the essay "La communauté désœuvrée" as printed in the collection of the same title: Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Communauté désœuvrée*, 3rd edn (Paris: Bourgois, 1999), 11-102, hereafter *CD*. English translations are from "The Inoperative Community," trans. Peter Connor, in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 1-42; hereafter *IC*. First published in *Aléa* 4 (1983): 11–49, Nancy's essay elicited an indirect response from Maurice Blanchot, who disputed Nancy's interpretation of Bataille: *La Communauté inavouable* (Paris: Minuit, 1984). Nancy continued the debate not only with *La Communauté désœuvrée* (first published in book form in 1986), but also in *La Communauté affrontée* (Paris: Galilée, 2001) (hereafter *CA*), the body of which was written to preface an Italian translation of Blanchot's book, and in *La Communauté*

désavouée (Paris: Galilée, 2014), which combines a critical reading of *La Communauté inavouable*, a detailed account of the whole exchange, and further development of Nancy's thought.

[11] All references are to *Ami et Amile*, ed. Peter F. Dembowski, CFMA, 97 (Paris: Champion, 1969). Valuable introductions to critical issues raised by the text are the volume of essays, *"Ami et Amile. Une chanson de geste de l'amitié*, ed. Jean Dufournet (Paris: Champion, 1987), and the special number of *Bien Dire et Bien Aprandre* entitled *Sur "Ami et Amile"* (Lille: Presses de l'Université de Lille 3, 1988). The themes of BN fr. 360 are studied by Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 44–45.

[12] On the different versions, see especially Alice Planche, "*Ami et Amile*, ou le Même et l'Autre," *Beiträge zum romanischen Mittelalter (Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie: Sonderband zum hundertjährigen Bestehen)*, ed. Kurt Baldinger (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1977), 237–69 (241–42), and the introduction to *Amis and Amiloun*, ed. by MacEdward Leach, EETS OS, 203 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), ix–xiv.

[13] Dominique Boutet, "Individu et société dans *Ami et Amile*," in *Actes du XIe Congrès international de la Société Rencesvals*, 2 vols (Barcelona: Real Academia de Buenas Letras, 1990), I, 75–86.

[14] A redaction of the Latin *Vita* is printed in *"Amis and Amiloun." Zugleich mit der altfranzösischen Quelle*, ed. Eugen

Kölbing, Altenglische Bibliothek, 2 (Heilbronn: Henninger, 1884). *Li Amitiéz de Ami et Amile*, in *Nouvelles françoises en prose du XIIIᵉ siècle*, ed. L. Moland and C. d'Héricault (Paris: Jannet, 1856), 35-82, is a thirteenth-century French redaction.

[15] The case has been argued recently by Huguette Legros, *L'Amitié dans les chansons de geste à l'époque romane* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2001), esp. 288-94, 369-89. Legros meticulously details the ethically questionable dimensions of the heroes' behavior and of tensions within their friendship; elements that in her view are resolved by divine sponsorship. Although I do not challenge the text's drive towards divine ends, nor do I consider the problems to be exhausted by this teleology.

[16] Different feminist critiques of the text's social modelling are given by Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*; Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 47-51; Yasmina Foehr-Janssens, "La Mort en fleurs. Violence et poésie dans *Ami et Amile*," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 39 (1996): 263-274; Sarah Kay, "Seduction and Suppression in *Ami et Amile*," *French Studies* 44 (1990): 129-42.

[17] René Zazzo, *Les Jumeaux, le couple et la personne*, 2 vols (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960).

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[18] The uncanny tendency of acts to adhere to both heroes is emphasized by Finn E. Sinclair, "The Imaginary Body: Framing Identity in *Ami et Amile*," *Neophilologus* 92 (2008): 193–204.

[19] Nancy, *CD*, 30; *IC*, 9. "The French word 'immanence' means to be fully present with oneself, to be closed upon oneself"; Ignaas Devisch, "Jean-Luc Nancy," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, www.iep.utm.edu/nancy/, 4.a. Consulted 19 October 2018.

[20] Nancy, *CD*, 74; *IC*, 29.

[21] Nancy, *CD*, 81; *IC*, 33.

[22] Nancy, *CD*, 83–84 ; *IC*, 33–34.

[23] Nancy, *CD*, 74; *IC*, 29.

[24] The quotation is taken from Micheline de Combarieu du Grès's magisterial *L'Idéal humain et l'expérience morale chez les héros des chansons de geste: Des origines à 1250*, 2 vols (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1979), I, 248. The argument for sworn brotherhood as social institution throughout the Middle Ages and beyond is made notably by Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[25] Herman Braet, *Le Songe dans la chanson de geste au XIIe siècle* (Ghent: Romanica Gandensia, 1975): "Le rêve et la glose [du rêve] découvrent et voilent tout ensemble l'avenir: le héros appréhende les dangers qui le menacent, sans les comprendre pleinement. Il ne possède pas l'information nécessaire pour

conjurer une catastrophe que l'on sent imminente" (201) [The dream and its interpretation at once reveal and obscure the future: the hero apprehends the dangers that threaten him without fully understanding them. He does not have the information necessary to avert a disaster that we feel to be imminent].

[26] Kay, "Seduction and Suppression"; and William Calin's critique, "Women and Their Sexuality in *Ami et Amile*: An Occasion to Deconstruct?" *Olifant* 16 (1991): 77–89.

[27] *Amis and Amiloun*, vv. 2392-400.

[28] Nancy, *CD*, 95; *IC*, 38.

[29] Nancy, *CD*, 89-99; *IC*, 36-40. "Les amants"; I translate as "loving couple" rather than as "lovers" because Nancy is keen to argue, against Bataille and Blanchot, that such couples are not necessarily heterosexual. I put aside for lack of space the thorny issue of the homoerotic both in Nancy's writing and in *Ami et Amile*.

[30] Suard, *La Chanson de geste*, 48.

[31] Nancy, *CD*, 42; *IC*, 15.

[32] Nancy, *CA*, 11.

[33] The various terms for friendship are analysed by Huguette Legros, *L'Amitié dans les chansons de geste*. Combarieu du Grès argues that friendship and enmity similarly express a perpetual

antagonism: "lorsque l'un et l'autre adversaire se seront
(re)connus comme des égaux, quelle issue plus indiquée trouver à
un affrontement qui ne peut, par lui-même, se résoudre, si ce
n'est l'alliance des deux qui iront alors, de concert, mesurer à
d'autres leurs forces additionnées?" *(L'Idéal humain*, I, 247).
Related to French philosophical work on community has been an
exploration of friendship as the paradigmatic communal relation.
The positions of some of Nancy's principal interlocutors are
mapped by Patrick Ffrench, "Friendship, Asymmetry, Sacrifice:
Bataille and Blanchot", *Parrhesia* 3 (2007): 32-42. I am indebted
also to Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to
the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University
Press, 2006).

[34] Nancy, *CD*, 84; *IC*, 33.

[35] Nancy, *CD*, 42; *IC*, 15.

[36] Nancy, *CA*, 42; *IC*, 14.

[37] Nancy, *CA*, 42-43.

[38] Sunderland similarly stresses the socially constitutive nature
of feud, and its concurrence with kinship and friendship; *Rebel
Barons*, 175—212 (especially 192-98).

[39] Nancy, *CD*, 68; *IC*, 26-27.

[40] Nancy, *CD*, 33-35; *IC*, 11-12.