ROMANCING THE WILD: SIR GAWAIN, APOCALYPSE NOW, FIGHT CLUB

ROMANCING THE WILD

OR

SIR GAWAIN, *APOCALYPSE NOW, FIGHT CLUB*

AND HOW I LEARNED TO STOP BEING SO CIVILIZED

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ABSTRACT

The mytho-philosophical figure of the wild man is one that Western thought has perpetuated, in various epistemological forms, as an abjected Other whose function has been to provide an imaginative exemplar *against which* the West defines itself as a civilization. He is invariably the hypothetical manifestation of a body as yet unmarked by codes that would regulate its behaviour within society and the discourses that would render it a productive body of thought. As a literary phenomenon, the wild man frequently finds expression in narratives that pit him in a violent struggle with a heroic representative of civility, from which the latter (with some exceptions) emerges as the victor. It is a narrative that, in part, allegorizes the violent work culture does on a body to render it an intelligible, human(e) subject, neither too wild nor too civilized. That subject is perhaps more specifically a masculine one, since the narrative, in its most radical form, is played out by characters undeniably male. As the narrative depicts their struggle, the most remote of man's ontological extremes are mapped out, the two figures appearing at the furthest reaches of the topology of male experience, the theoretical spaces they inhabit sharing a border they ceaselessly redefine and reassert in the delimitation of what constitutes the proper (hu)man.

But the very proliferation of the wild man in imaginative literature, the autonomy of his mythology, suggests the wildness he represents to be more than a simple negation of normative civilization; he is not merely man in a raw state of nature, having yet to

undergo or having utterly lost or repudiated the processes by which he is cultivated/cultivates himself into an accepted member of civilized society. The wild is a product of the very "civilizing processes" that creates viable subjects. Productive in and of itself, the wild is a positive term that exerts its own formative power in opposition to civilization. *Romancing the Wild* attempts to exploit the power of the wild as expressed in literature inasmuch as those expressions constitute a philosophy critical of "civilized" codes and practices and, ultimately, of the very distinction between wildness and civility. In order to accomplish this, it intertwines a study of both medieval and contemporary texts, since the term "medieval" itself tends naïvely to connote a certain wildness in relation to the accepted civility of today.

In the Middle English romance tradition, there is arguably no knight so chivalric, so courteous, so "civilized" as Sir Gawain. In the body of Gawain romances, our knight is always pitted against adversaries in various states of wild "undress." *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* especially offers one of the subtlest wild men in Middle English literature, the Green Knight himself. Using the violent conflict between the two knights as a catalyst, the poem performs a critique of the chivalric subject as depicted in romance narrative. Indeed, through an exploration of the violent exchanges between Gawain and the wild personages he encounters, the performances that constitute his particular brand of masculinity and civility are both revealed and contested. Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film, *Apocalypse Now* (re-released in 2001 as *Apocalypse Now: Redux*), and David Fincher's 1999 film, *Fight Club* each carry out an extraordinarily violent narrative dominated by male characters, depicting in its respective way those men interacting

within an inhospitable wilderness (the jungle, the inner city). The action of each film, like that of the Gawain narratives, focuses especially on the opposition between a wild and a "civilized" man, an opposition that becomes less distinct as the action proceeds, ultimately dissolving the boundary between wildness and civility and troubling the coherence of either term.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Getting hairy, getting wild

> CHIEF. How far up this river we goin'?
> WILLARD. It's classified, chief, I can't tell ya. We're goin' up pretty far.
> CLEAN. Is it gonna be hairy?
> WILLARD. I don't know, kid. Yeah, probably.
> CHIEF. You like it like that, Captain, when it's hot and hairy?
> WILLARD. (A beat; then, derisively) Maybe you'll get a chance to know what the fuck you are in some factory in Ohio.
> —*Apocalypse Now: Redux*

> The spectacle is one which repeats itself at the end of great epochs in history when traditional aims and values have become brittle and petrified. In such periods, radical archaism is sometimes an easy way out of a spiritual impasse. Nothing could have been more radical than the attitude of sympathizing or identifying oneself with the wild man, whose way of life was the repudiation of all the accumulated values of civilization.
> —Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, 144-5

This project is first and foremost about a ubiquitous "Other" of Western thought: the wild man. As a myth that appears in its classic form during the Middle Ages, he is a feral man, inhabiting the uninhabitable forests, whose hair has been allowed to grow out over his entire body and whose propensity towards rape and violence makes him a constant threat lurking out beyond the town walls. But the myth is by no means confined to that historical period. He appears as Enkidu in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the oldest piece of narrative literature that survives in the world. The Bible is literally populated with wild men, from those exiled from divine favour—Cain, Ishmael, Esau, Nebuchadnezzar—to those received into it—John the Baptist, even Jesus. Hobbes's man in the state of nature

is nothing if not a wild man, nor is Rousseau's noble savage, or Sade's libertines. The wild man lurks on the outskirts of civilization today as Tarzan, Encino Man, or, more sinisterly, as a terrorist. I plan to do more than simply define and identify the wild man throughout his many literary representations, however. There are already several fine works of criticism that do just that, to which the present study is certainly indebted.[1] I wish, on the other hand, to explode the lines of thought opened up by study of the wild man and demonstrate how the wild man *works*, how the wild and the wilderness function within and against civilization and its processes. I have deliberately selected some very diverse texts, from medieval English romances featuring Sir Gawain—possibly the most popular Arthurian knight in England from the fourteenth through the sixteenth century—specifically, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain*, to two contemporary Hollywood films (a genre very similar to romance), Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979, re-released as *Apocalypse Now: Redux*, 2001) and David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999). I intend to read these texts and experiment with them from a wild perspective, to demonstrate the wild work that they do, how the confluence they share in their representations of violence, masculinity, and militarism fulfill an agenda in opposition to the "civilizing process."[2]

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[1] Most notably, Richard Bernheimer's *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, Edward Dudley and Maximillian E. Novak's editorial volume, *The Wild Man Within*, and Roger Bartra's sweeping *Wild Men in the Looking Glass* and its companion volume *The Artificial Savage*.

[2] I have adopted the term "civilizing process" from Richard Kaeuper's evocation of German sociologist Norbert Elias's "study of changing manners and the 'civilizing process' in European history," in *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (7). At the forefront of both books (according to Kaeuper) is a question that I share as well, "Was the medieval world (in its mentality and practice) significantly troubled by violence?" (7). Likewise, and possibly more pointedly, is *our* world significantly troubled by violence.

Each text under scrutiny emerges "late" relative to traditional periodization, the films a product of what Frederic Jameson has dubbed "late capitalism," the English Gawain romances appearing quite firmly in the "late" Middle Ages, from the mid-fourteenth century to as late as 1500. All are *consciously* political, inasmuch as they stake a claim to critiques of dominant notions of civilization through the introduction of violent, threatening wild men. My analyses will attempt to demonstrate the ways in which these diverse texts represent the wild man, both in the sense of their conducting his artistic/literary *re-presentation* as a set of aesthetic considerations, as well as his being *spoken for* as a set of political considerations. As such, I shall make a conscious effort to come from wild places and wild times: from the industrial bowels of a city, the road to the Holy Land, the forests of North Wales, the jungles of Vietnam; from medieval England or contemporary Hollywood; from an "after" perhaps postmodern, a "before" maybe medieval, but definitely *not* a progressively modern "now."

To introduce the wild man as a theoretical entity, let me begin near the end of Richard Bernheimer's seminal analysis of the medieval wild man, with the statement that serves as an epigram to this section, in which he offers a socio-historical reading of the wild man as a figure who pokes out his shaggy head at "the end of great epochs in history" (144), or, more precisely, at the waning of dominant epistemes, when certain modes of knowing (which, one might say, ultimately constitute historical "epochs") no longer hold currency. At such points, where there seems to be nowhere left to go, it is exactly "nowhere" where Bernheimer suggests men sometimes go—into the wilderness, where they undergo a wilding that counters the civilizing process that has somehow

proved so empty. He first calls this wilding "radical archaism," implying an evolutionary regression of some sort. However, I think he does better when he refers to it as "the repudiation of all the accumulated values of civilization" (145). For wildness is, arguably, most commonly and most simplistically understood to have its essence in negation. It is not civility; it has no manners, no customs, no traditions, no laws, no structures. The wilderness, similarly, as the place where the wilding of man occurs, is a somewhere where there is *no civilization*—no Starbucks, no running water, no buildings, no physical sites that do a civilizing work—a place that is *nowhere*—not the city, not the place of human settlement, not home—where *nobody* (human) lives, as the word's etymology from Old English suggests (*wildeornes*: a place where only wild animals live).

This is how I would initially like to misunderstand the wild man—with the knee-jerk response that is responsible for popular conceptions of what is wild, a response that I shall take the remainder of this dissertation to deconstruct. This simple wild man resists everything that constitutes "proper" or "fit" selfhood. He does nothing that is expected of him, acting without heed to the forces that produce "civilized" men. Indeed, he is takes offence to the pretensions of the latter; more often than not, he lashes out violently at the civilized man and all that he builds. As one who simply repudiates civilization, casting it all aside or blowing it all up, he seems even to resist (post)modern assumptions about how the self occurs. Current discourses of the subject that take a constructionist tack emphasize selfhood as a process, as a becoming, as the adoption and employment of techniques of self-making that one adopts or is coerced into over time. On the other hand, the wild man, with one fell swoop, appears to abandon all those processes, to forget

all of the history that has intervened to make humanity rational as well as animal. Wildness is not usually understood to be constructed, or something that occurs through a process. It is a simple ontological state, almost essential, isn't it? One simply *is* wild, when the pressures of civilization are absent, when they are repudiated, or release themselves, or are simply not there in the first place. On the way from manhood to wild manhood, a threshold is crossed and things immediately get "hairy," like the moment in *Apocalypse Now* when Capt. Willard and the PBR crew pass the Do Lung bridge ("Beyond it was only Kurtz"), following which, those not willing to embrace the wild within are eliminated in quick succession. Becoming wild, when wild is that essential state that is simply not-civilized, is not a gradual becoming; it is sudden and violent—the time it takes to punch somebody in the nose, to swing an axe.

However, the proliferation of the myth of the wild man, the image of the wilderness, their creation and recreation, designates the wilderness, the spaces "out there," as something that surely has a positive value and is productive in itself, capable of exerting pressures that resist and reshape the civilization that keeps it outside. Judith Butler's investigations into the cultural production of sexualities, both licit and illicit, intelligible and unintelligible, leads her to speak of the spaces "out there" that any discourse must create. The demarcation and delimitation that any discursive practice employs inevitably exercises "some normative force and, indeed, some violence, for it can construct only through erasing; it can bound a thing only through enforcing a certain criterion, a principle of selectivity," thereby "mark[ing] a boundary that includes and excludes" (*Bodies That Matter*, 11). Such is the fate of the wild man, not simply

excluded in the process that defines civilization, but the very *product* of the exclusions that are that defining process *in and of itself.* But the wilderness is not only a place that men who are excluded from civilization go; it is also a place where wild men come from: like Enkidu, or Esau, or Tarzan. The wild man has an epistemological presence that one may dig up, hold, and examine, fragment by fragment, hair by hair. The wild may be defined as an opposition to, the sheddings of, or the outright negation of, civilization, but the philosophical fluctuations in understandings of what constitutes civilization itself cause similar, if inverted, fluctuations in understandings of wildness. The wild is something civilization shuns or abjects in order to give bounds to itself, but it is still a tangible something, not simply a configuration of negative space. As a product, it follows that it can in turn produce. Butler's queer project compels her to situate her theory at the fringes "not from a 'position,' but from the discursive possibilities opened up by the constitutive outside of hegemonic positions" in order to subsequently effect "the disruptive return of the excluded" (12). The wild man is nothing if not a similar "disruptive" or "troubling" return of something excluded. The wilderness that he emerges from is a positionless position, a placeless place that nonetheless can somehow be represented, but only after a transgression of the boundary that deems such nonsense "extra-discursive." After stepping beyond the border into that place where things get hairy, one might interrogate wildness, the wilderness, and the wild man, thus forming a wild discourse to bring back to civilization, just to see what kind of hell it might raise.

Perhaps, then, the wild man does come at the end of great epochs, the desperate recourse for one who has exercised the ideals of a particular civilizing process to their

exhaustion, exploding the gaps those ideals harbour till they become all-encompassing, leaving only fragments behind. This is Bernheimer's medieval wild man, who belies, specifically, a "treason to the knightly ideal," heralding "a far-reaching cultural dislocation" (143) of the late Middle Ages. He stands triumphantly over the empty shell of armour, the hollow, man-shaped signifier of a "fainthearted" knighthood that no longer had substance in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Bernheimer certainly points to something very significant about the wild, though his vision of the wild man seems to fashion him as subject to a periodized history, responsive to sweeping gestures of time. Literary images of the wilderness and the wild man are certainly not specific to any one period in history. Bernheimer's own study reveals that wild men roam the borders of imaginative thought as freely in the twelfth century, when the chivalric codes of knighthood definitely did have substance as a regulatory force over the conduct of the nobility, as they do in the fourteenth.

The wild man's protean nature indicates that he is subject to history, as he arrives to harass the civilized man of a particular time and place, though it is a very incremental and local history, one that is eminently epistemological and corporal rather than temporal. His experience of time is entirely earthbound, a measure of how it works upon the arrangement and coherence of individual bodies. The wild man attacks his civil counterpart's *ideas*, his body of knowledge, as well as his corporal body. He bears witness to the violent tensions and the melancholic gaps in the various discourses of civilization. He does not come *when* those tensions and gaps spell the end of a discourse, but because those tensions and gaps were there *in the first place*. He does not appear in

response to the end of a great epoch, rather, he appears in order to work towards that end, to foil the plans of civilization through their inversion. He attacks those sites of civilizing force that he sees to be most inherently limited, where they fail to produce strong, healthy, virile bodies, exploiting the tensions that are always-already capable of bringing the whole edifice down. He indicates the inadequacies of the Ohio factory by replacing it with the jungle. He plants the bombs at the bases of structural supports, whether they be the ideals of high- to late-medieval chivalry, or the urban culture of late capitalism. He is subject to history, but only insofar as he desires to destroy that history. Whether he is successful or not is almost a moot point, his very presence is always-already threatening. Any trace he leaves behind, however minute or puzzling, is always troublesome.

Monstrous (a)historicism and contagious anachronism: some theoretical reflections

> Bands, human or animal, proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields, and catastrophes. Like hybrids, which are in themselves sterile, born of a sexual union that will not reproduce itself, but which begins over again every time, gaining that much more ground. Unnatural participations or nuptials are the true Nature spanning the kingdoms of nature.
> —Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 241

My deliberate miscegenation of medieval and postmodern texts immediately opens up questions of historicism, questions of how I read texts from such diverse periods of time and how I perceive their interaction. Reading occurs with a multiplicity of both losses and gains. Relative to the historical position of the text in question, there are losses and gains in context, as contemporaneousness slides according to the historical position of the reader. It is more than obvious that I do not have mastery of the same knowledges as the

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author or audience who witnessed the complete *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* for the first time. There is undeniably something lost in the translation between the mid-fourteenth century and the early twenty-first that makes my reception of the romance unique, one could say anomalous, relative to it. And what has been lost cannot be accounted for, even with the most scrupulous or exhaustive of research. The only way that loss would manifest itself positively would be through a Connecticut Yankee-esque tumble through time and the observation that the medieval audience I was (accidentally) a part of was laughing at different parts than I was. Any attempt at recovery can only result in an idiosyncratic medievalism, which would betray any claims to the discovery or recovery of a "true" Middle Ages. It is the kind of academic pursuit that finds itself caricatured in popular images of the Middle Ages: the shiny armour of *Excalibur*, the shape-shifting fantasy of *Ladyhawk*, or, on the flip side of things, Hannibal Lecter's enthusiasm for Dante and medieval medical texts in Thomas Harris's novels, or John Doe's similar affinity for Dante, as well as the *Canterbury Tales*, in David Fincher's 1995 film, *Seven*.

At the same time, by virtue of the accident of history I have gained an appreciation of Sir Gawian's adventures, whether it be with the Green Knight or Gologras, in the Welsh forests or en route to the Holy Land, that were not available to those in late Middle Ages. I witness the beheading of the Green Knight in the aftermath of the guillotine, the final scene of *Seven*, the *Evil Dead* films, Charles I, to choose just a few cultural events. I read Sir Gawain's "comlyly" kisses with Sir Bercilak in an academy that has undergone a certain degree of queering in recent years. I analyze

Arthur's desire to force Gologras into vassalage by laying siege to his castle "after" colonialism, and during globalization. I do not think that I display any lack of respect to the Middle Ages by refusing to study it as a purity, in the vacuum chamber of an electron microscope, preferring rather to contaminate it, to infect it with the present in the creation of an anachronistic medievalism, even with such "low" culture as, say, films like *The Evil Dead*,[3] allowing the Middle Ages, in turn, to infect the present. The medievals certainly didn't seem to have any of the hang-ups we have about the purity of history. Indeed, there is an ease about, say, Chaucer's use of Boethius, chivalric ideals, and the courtly-love tradition to tell his story of Troilus and Criseyde and the Trojan War that rages around them. And Robinet Testart did not balk, in the late 1400s, at representing Hercules, hero of antiquity, in fifteenth-century armour for an illustration of the thirteenth-century poem, *Le Roman de la Rose* (Bodleian Library MS Douce 195, fol. 65v., see figure 1). The medievals did not compartmentalize knowledge the way that moderns do—knowledges were permeable, highly susceptible to mixtures, miscegenations, hybridizations, assemblages.

This infectious hybridization of knowledges is generative of a sort of monster theory, which I myself propose to become complicit with through the anachronistic miscegenation of the medieval and the (post)modern. The often-nutty identity theorists Deleuze and Guattari have argued for contagion, the infection of heterogeneous terms by

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[3] Incidentally, the third instalment of *The Evil Dead* series, *Army of Darkness*, involves horror's own Connecticut Yankee, Bruce Campbell as Ash, in trouble with the Middle Ages: "Demonic forces time-warp him—and his '73 Oldsmobile—into England's Dark Ages [!], where he romances a beauty (Embeth Davidtz) and faces legions of un-dead beasts, including a ghastly army of skeletons. Can Ash save the living from the evil dead, rescue his girlfriend, and get back to his own time?" (*Army of Darkness*, VHS liner notes).

one another, rather than their filiation, as a model for proliferating knowledge that resists transcendental or unified truths. And though the hybrids that arise from such an infectious miscegenation are sterile, monstrous births incapable of reproduction, that very sterility will ensure that no legacy, no continuous regime of truth will establish itself, only an ephemeral anomaly, a "line of flight," if you will, that sparkles briefly and disappears. And it is this lack of a sustained legacy that will ensure difference. Carolyn Dinshaw has suggested that the Middle Ages itself has been (mis)understood and recreated in the popular sphere as a sort of monster skulking somewhere beyond our own culture, signalling "all the abjected Others" of popular (post)modernity ("Getting Medieval: *Pulp Fiction*, Gawain, Foucault," 122). As far as my own use of the Middle Ages, I want to "get medieval" in the same way that Dinshaw suggests the film *Pulp Fiction* does: "*Getting* medieval—playing in an abjected space, adopting an abjected role—doubly gets at the impossibility of absolute straightness, whiteness, modernity, of the purely dominant, of essentially *being* anything" (123). Getting medieval in this way is mostly a critical endeavour, an historical one only in terms of my own, highly local historical situation. My monstrous/medieval project thus seems to parallel that of recent queer studies—to play in the margins, to do a fleeting and roundabout investigation of that which is dubbed "normal," "orderly," and "ordinary." Fleeting and roundabout since what is "normal" is most elusive and ill-defined in culture—it is instinctually easier to pick out the things that do not conform, that stand at the outskirts of the/a world order. Placing the deformed, the wild, the queer, in the foreground upsets the norm and the instinctual with evocations of those things that the norm attempts to silence and, at the

project's logical end, dissolves the norm, rendering it instead an assemblage of monstrous aberrations and queer singularities. A thousand tiny monsters, to parallel Deleuze and Guattari's thousand tiny sexualities. Of course, the wild man is the particular monster of the present study, a monster intolerably irascible, contentious, radical, but invigorating in his violence.

In their introduction to *Queering the Middle Ages*, Glenn Burger and Stephen F. Kruger ask, "might we need...to rethink what we have come to know as the Middle Ages...as the *effect* of a certain self-construction of the modern, which gives itself identity by delimiting a 'before' that is everything the modern is not?" (xiii). The attempt to take up the position of "everything the *modern* is not" is a pursuit particular to the *post*modern, as well as the medieval, this monolithic modernity pushing each to its extremes. Getting medieval, getting postmodern, getting wild. (One does not actively *get* modern, for modernity is an unfortunate *a priori* condition of living in history.) But let's push the envelope. At the outskirts of all histories, of even the postmodern and the medieval, there lies the wilderness, and the wild man who is the mouthpiece of the wild-life that resides there. I should say wild *men*, since the wild is a place of multiplicity, of difference. The wild man himself is always a multiplicity—he cannot exist in solitude, even when he is found alone. No transcendentals here, only anomalies. (If we refer to the wild man by that single name, with a definite article, it is because we are ultimately unable to fully repudiate our civility, so we assign wild men an identity, even though the wild man has no identity as such, for identity is always a politics, and the wild man is only political insofar as he is a-political).

The mutual infection of medieval and postmodern will create an anomalous recasting of each into a medieval postmodernism/postmodern medievalism that is neither medieval nor postmodern, disrupting the separation of the two by a modernity defined by, among other things, a progressive, teleological humanism, whose normative forces are more monstrous than any monster. One implicit side effect of this infection will be to demonstrate the quest for a "true" Middle Ages (or even a "true" modernity) to be faulty. It is obvious that one cannot assess the "truth" of the Middle Ages to any positive degree; one can only carry out a discussion of comparative medievalisms, to determine levels of a medievalism's complexity, richness, awareness of ambiguity, perceived seriousness. How, then, does one "get medieval" in a productive way? In the context of a *wild* scholarship, one that is unabashedly masculine, I propose that getting medieval can only be achieved through violence. The violence of a viral infection; a feverish sickness that confuses the distinction between medieval and postmodern, past and present. More insidious still is the thought that I have deliberately caused such an infection in order to witness the sorts of monstrosities that crop up—between *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Fight Club*, say—cultivating my own little Island of Dr Moreau in the world of literary criticism. And I though I'll try to control my creations, the strange –ologies and –isms, the irritable wild men that emerge from my experiments, may just revolt. And secretly, I hope they do.

The jungle

I imagine the exploration of the wild man to proceed through a crowded and wild topography: a forest or jungle full of trees, hills, and crags. This is the sort of landscape typical of science fiction, or of Arthurian romance, the sort that makes the hero tiny, at the whim of the very landscape's meanderings and undulations, its features always concealing some marvel or monster just over that hill or around the next bend. The city as an aesthetic phenomenon can just as easily function in this way as well, especially when it is experienced from ground level. Each movement of my text should be regarded as one more adventure encountered, less in the promotion of a coherent quest, than in the restless pursuit of many adventures. The first chapter begins this journey—on foot, of course—with an exploration of this sort of pedestrian logic that weaves through the successive features of a landscape, always under threat from what is concealed among those landmarks. Our first encounter with the wild man shall be through a critical reading of Robert Bly's influential book for the so-called men's movement, *Iron John*. Using as a jumping-off point the wild man he evokes to formulate his self-help psychology, I shall explore the ways in which masculinity as a subject position is eminently troubled, and how the wild man responds to this troubled, even wounded, masculinity by throwing into sharp relief what is most violent about male subjectivity. Working from Bly, *Fight Club*, and *Apocalypse Now* to Sir Gawain, I hope to establish a back-to-front critical position that will allow the establishment of a medievalism in which the model of manhood that Gawain as a chivalric subject functionally promotes is demonstrated to be itself a masculinity-in-crisis by virtue of its impossibility. Gawain is

a figure who cannot possibly live up to his own standard, broken up moreover by the very violence that he employs as a military figure.

The following two chapters take as their starting points two Freudian texts: "The 'Uncanny'" and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. Through interrogations of the two I hope to reveal the wildnesses they contain, open up the strange relations between them and exploit the potential they hold for reading alternative, even monstrous subjectivities. In chapter 2 I speak briefly of the uncanny experience of watching the media coverage of the September 11 terrorist attacks and question how it is we are to read the wild man after that very palpable display of the threat of foreign terrorism. If we claim that the wild man is the enemy of civilization, that he works to bring down its structures, then he clearly takes up the position of terrorist in the contemporary political climate. Running parallel to this question are issues of military violence and war, of enemies and allies, and of the way we formulate a philosophy of history in light of catastrophes like the events of 9/11. In what ways does the wild man's appearance, as he appears in times of "war" (times which could be said to be perpetual), promote or disrupt the oppositions between enemies and allies, ruthlessness and military necessity? In what ways are the histories he participates in terrorisms in and of themselves?

The third chapter picks up on the themes of terrorism and violence, but with a twist. I have always been fascinated by how the violence of popular cinema is often quite playful. It seems to me a particularly wild moment when scenes of gruesome violence come across as occasions for laughter, as they frequently do. It is far from civilized behaviour to guffaw over somebody else's pain, though such laughter is quite easily

elicited. In light of this macabre subject, I read Freud's book on jokes in the (perhaps perverse) interest of uncovering how his theories of joking and laughter are interchangeable with those of violence and aggression. The joke is often a highly politicized moment, performing its own terrorism on normative sensibilities, attacking logical verbal structures and causing category confusions. Certain jokes can also have a highly erotic function, and are instances of especially violent sexualities. For Freud, dirty jokes or "smut" act as verbal aggressions against sexualized bodies, to the point of performing something of an imaginary rape on the joke's victim. Apropos of this reading of Freud's jokes, I investigate *Fight Club* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in some detail, focusing on those moments when laughter irrupts as a result of some violence done at somebody's (some body's) expense, particularly the protagonist.

Taking a cue from Judith Butler's work on parody from *Gender Trouble*, the third chapter brings many of the issues at stake throughout my study to bear upon the concept of parody and parodic subjectivity as a means of resisting the normatizing forces of "civilization." For, when all is said and done, the wild man is a parody of man, a hyperexaggerated masculinity that one can't help but laugh at. This is not to say that he was and is not taken very seriously, only that he represents a kind of serious cultural play, like any monstrosity, that always functions to work through problems a given culture has with the animalistic aspects of its humanity. The wild man, in the tradition of Western culture, has always been a figure to be enjoyed, a figure of fun, whether it be the fun we make of him, or the fun we have of vicariously experiencing his intrinsic animality, not only its violence and power, but its freedom as well. As a parody man, civilization

inverted, the wild man is a certain kind of *homo ludens*, with something of the trickster about him, though a little less devious and a lot more brutal. And in his play, he reveals what is most ludicrous about civilization.

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WALKING WOUNDED: (WILD) MEN'S MOVEMENTS

The themes that dominate this chapter are, as the title suggests, walking and wounds. They are concepts not exclusive to the wild man, but they are surely proper to him, since he inhabits an inhospitable environment, one that leaves its marks upon his body with unhindered violence, one that has yet to be overlain with the technologies of civilization, least of all with roads suitable for vehicular transport. They are moreover metaphors for modes of discovery, to which I shall ascribe in the constitution of my wildology. Walking is distinct from, say, driving in a car or flying a plane in that it is not strictly linear. One is afforded the opportunity to observe the landscape and how it changes around one as one moves through it, whereas vehicular locomotion demands more concentration on the "road ahead," on the destination. The wound affords opportunities for discoveries of the body and its functions—very immediate and abrupt discoveries. Its pain emphasizes the boundaries of the body. Through the violent imposition of an external phenomenon on the body's surface the wound paradoxically indicates the unmistakable line where the self that body represents ends and the world-out-there begins, just as it reveals its permeability, its susceptibility to being marked by that world. It also *opens* the body, a literal dis-covery of what lies beneath the surface, inviting the

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scrutiny of interior functions. From *Fight Club* and *Apocalypse Now*, I shall theorize

these modes of discovery, indicating how they relate to both wildness and masculinity,

then put them into practise on Sir Gawain's knighthood.

Dude, where's your car?: taking a walk with the footwalker and the *flâneur*

> JACK: Where's your car?
> TYLER: What car?
> —*Fight Club*

> The slow curve is the natural line of a footwalker, as anyone can observe if he [or she]
> looks back at his tracks in the snow across an open field, unless he has consciously tried
> to overcome this tendency.
> —Lewis Mumford, quoted in Howes, "'The Slow Curve of the Footwalker'," 165

Fight Club spends quite some time depicting vehicular disasters, a detail that seems to me

to have something to do with the themes of masculinity that run throughout the film.

Early in the film, the protagonist (Edward Norton) fantasizes that the plane he is on

suffers a mid-air collision. This sequence follows hot on the heels of his investigation of

a fatal car crash. We are taken along as he fills his report on the aftermath. Two

technicians crack jokes as they point out the gruesome details of the victims' deaths

("Here's where the infant went through the windshield. Three points"; "The teenager's

braces around the backseat ashtray would make a good "anti-smoking" ad"; "The father

must've been huge. See how the fat burnt into the driver's seat with the polyester shirt?

Very 'modern art'"). Working for a "major" car company as a "recall coordinator," he

has the semi-crooked job of investigating such fatal crashes and applying "the formula":

"Take the number of vehicles in the field, 'A,' multiply it by the probable rate of failure

'B,' then multiply the result by the average out-of-court settlement 'C.' A times B times C equals X. If X is less that the cost of a recall, we don't do one." Interestingly enough, these wrecks are immediately followed by the first meeting between Jack[4] and Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt), a relationship that reaches a crisis point in another car crash that leaves the former with what seems to be a severe concussion.

That crash, which Tyler precipitates, is the only point in the film where the two take a drive in a car. Indeed, neither owns a car, a subject that is broached directly only in the very short dialogue (serving as the epigraph to this section) when Tyler brings Jack to the house on Paper Street. Except for a few scenes in which the two are seen boarding or departing from a bus, they are always on foot as they traverse the city streets. They are *flâneurs*, city-strollers, taking in the opportunities of the city on foot, at the centre of all the city's geographical, technological and symbolic forces, though their *flânerie* is unique in that, as the narrative progresses, their city strolls soon involve the mischievous trickery or outright destruction Tyler's "homework assignments" entail, several of which involve the sabotage of automobiles. Their carlessness does not proscribe their mastery over the urban environment that they inhabit. On the contrary, it allows them to penetrate the city and its landmarks more effectively, to wreak havoc on its very machinery, even undermining the intuitive markers of geographical mastery (not to mention masturbation) for the modern city: automobiles. Reversing tire-spikes at the exit to a parking lot; activating airbags by bumping bumpers with baseball bats; attracting pigeons to a car

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[4] Edward Norton's character is not named in the film. Fincher: "In the screenplay we call him Jack. In the credits it says 'The Narrator'" (Smith 65). For the sake of brevity and clarity, I shall follow the former practice throughout.

dealership. It is in this destructive mischief that Tyler and Jack resist the masculinity-in-crisis, the virility under threat from urbanity, that David L. Clarke argues the *flâneur*'s relation to the city to signal.

The traditional *flâneur* of the modern city, though predominantly male in gender, does not simply continue or reaffirm "the existing phallocentric order" (Clarke 5). On the contrary, he does not penetrate or have mastery over his surroundings; he observes, but does not affect what goes on around him. A stranger himself, he is impotent in the face of the multitude of strangers. Increasingly too small in relation to his environment, he can only wander about, from site to site, as they appear to view: "In so far as the turbulent space of the modern city was experienced as labyrinthine and disorienting, the *flâneur*'s existence was marked by melancholic nostalgia for a lost (or impossible) world, and by a sense of impotence at the interminable deferral of any sense of arrival at a final destination" (Clarke 5). The *flâneur*'s "ludic peregrinations" are never direct, never straight, but curved or crooked or, put another way, not a single route, but a series of detours. Relations between sites are mediated by those sites that exist en route. It is only in a vehicle that urban travel is direct, that sites relate to one another immediately.

We must remember that the cities of modernity—especially those of North America, which have only flourished in the past two hundred years—though experienced in art primarily by the *flâneur*, have not been built for him. They have been designed, and increasingly so, for carriages, trains, trams, planes, automobiles: those unique spaces that connect sites and establish relations between them, removing the passenger from the passage of the space without. For it is the modern city that works increasingly to extend

the body in place, to make something of a giant. It tries to compress time and space into events that are moments and sites, creating what Foucault calls the "heterotopia," an "other" place in which one experiences many places and many times almost simultaneously, reducing the body's experience of space, connecting point A to point B directly, making them relative rather than discreet, subjects for mastery rather than the constituents of an inhabited environment.[5] The *flâneur*, by remaining small, reveals this heterotopia in all its schizophrenia, as a collection of sites rather than as a homogeneous place. He practices emplacement at the molecular level, tiny and absolutely local, preferring to remain small with respect to his surroundings.

Think of an urban centre like New York's Manhattan Island, laid out in a huge grid of parallel North-South, East-West streets, each absolutely straight (even Broadway, which cuts across on a diagonal, tends not to deviate from its course). The majority of its streets are numbered rather than named. This is a city built for mastery, a geography designed to make men giants and to make a giant out of men (the giant of the urban populace, a concentrated body politic), the full application of humanism (perhaps more correctly in this case, *man*ism) and the modern progressivism that grows out of it. It is, as well (as a result?), fully phallocentric. Not only vertically, as regards its skyscrapers,

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[5] In "Of Other Spaces," Foucault draws a distinction between medieval space, "the space of emplacement" (22), a modern space defined by movement, where "a thing's place was no longer anything but a point in its movement," and the space of today (postmodern space?), characterized by "relations of proximity between points or elements" (23). He marks a break in conceptualizations of space, "starting with Galileo and the seventeenth century" when "extension was substituted for localization" (23). The heterotopia is ambiguous in this respect, both a single space that homogenizes the various sites that it brings together under a single name (the cinema, the Garden of Eden, New York), thus facilitating extension, as well as an "other" space, a space of difference, and one that contains a multiplicity, thus slowing extension, making it necessarily incremental. In addition, the heterotopia is a space of concentrated power-relations, a space that subjects bodies to power-relations. See also Grosz, "Bodies-Cities," in *Space, Time, and Perversion*, 103-110.

but horizontally as well, its streets ostensibly designed for swift, penetrative navigation by automobile, that ultimate mechanical phallus. The irony of the situation is, of course, the incommensurability of vertical and horizontal construction in terms of function, the vertical stacking of human bodies and machines in skyscrapers is too much for even the most rational and comprehensive of road systems; thus the near-madness of NYC's urban congestion. Too many cars and not enough road—being the seemingly-insoluble problem for the modern urban centre—make Jack and Tyler, in their own unnamed urban centre, capable of the potent *flânerie* they practise.

Fight Club works to disrupt vehicular logic with an aggressive pedestrianism. Tyler's particularly wild *flânerie* dis-places the city, deterritorializes it, makes it a place for a nomadic wild man. Though it may seem a strange place to begin, the "slow curve of the footwalker" comes into play with respect to the film's critique of contemporary urban society, a society characterized more by vehicular logic than pedestrian, by relations between sites that are more direct and codified than accidental. The footwalker and his particular brand of locomotion shall be a starting point in our wildology. The function of the slow curve is pivotal towards understanding the aesthetics of wilderness as it disrupts those of civilization. The wild man has no need for vehicles, for direct transportation. He cannot understand the environment through which he walks as a topography, a map drawn from a transcendental perspective, far above the land, informed by geometric considerations. The land is not something walked over; it is walked among,

geometric in only the loosest sense of the term.[6] The wilderness in which he lives is not a set of coordinates, not quite a place that can be pointed to, but a place in which he dwells, constituting his subjectivity from his experience of that place.

The footwalker will also be a starting point in a medievalism, one that contrasts a pedestrian logic of sequential, surrounding space from a more modern vehicular and cartographical logic that flattens space and allows for linear travel. This medievalism shall help our wildology to disrupt modernism's theoretization of space as quantifiable, a mathematics, rather than phenomenological, one that shapes experience. Laura L. Howes discusses pedestrian logic as a particularly medieval understanding of both the world-out-there and the world-as-represented.[7] She suggests that the medieval landscape may have been experienced "processionally, sequentially, rather than all at once, from a particular vantage point" (Howes 167). Quoting from Mumford's work on the medieval town and other studies of medieval architecture, each of which emphasize the spectator's movement *through* the characteristically curving streets, *towards* or *around*, say, a cathedral, she demonstrates how, in approaching that cathedral "along a narrow winding street...From ground level the whole structure is never completely visible to the pedestrian" (166). Painting a picture of "large buildings and narrow streets" (167),

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[6] It would also be correct to say hyper-geometric. The best CGI possible is still unable to accurately produce a life-like image because it cannot generate *enough* polygons. One could say that the world-out-there is not structured by a series of polygons, or a-geometric. But one could just as easily say that it is structured by n-polygons, and thus infinitely geometric.

[7] Howes: "A similar sort of processional, pedestrian experience, I believe, is essential to understanding *all* medieval space and its uses. In our suburban, car culture, it is easy to forget the centrality of walking in human experience—not for routine exercise, around and around the same subdivision, but walking—or ambling along on a horse—in order to get from point A to point B" (171). We must not forget that this medievalism, which I have borrowed from Howes with a full knowledge (and suspicion) of its generality, is almost entirely a theoretical position, contrasted with an equally generalized modernism in which nobody seems to walk for transportation.

Howes evokes a landscape that is always fragmentary and in flux, processional as the pedestrian's experience of time. The slow curve emphasizes the footwalker's experience of parallax, the ever-shifting line of sight never allowing the landscape to fix itself, its elements always revealing themselves in new configurations.

Consequently, parallax makes "the pedestrian experience...essentially one of discovery" (166). It is this process of discovery that allows Howes to draw a parallel between the processional, pedestrian experience and medieval narrative technique: "It may be well to pause here for a moment to reflect upon just how many kinds of medieval narrative rely on movement through space as an organizational tool" (171). Many kinds, from dream visions to pilgrimage narratives, not the least of which is the chivalric romance, which almost invariably involves a heroic journey through inhospitable lands filled with adventure. And, if we think of the confluence (whether accidental or filiative) of narrative techniques in both medieval romance and popular cinema (a confluence that brings the contemporary and the historic together in a way that Howes does not consider in her paper) especially the tradition of the Hollywood blockbuster, a tradition in and from which *Fight Club* and *Apocalypse Now* both participate and deviate, one easily notices the use of spaces walked or traveled slowly *among*, rather than over, to tell a story. It is as a result of what a landscape conceals from the subject *within* it by virtue of its various landmarks, as well as the shifting configuration of those landmarks as the subject moves among them, that discoveries are made.

But the process of discovery is not necessarily a happy one, a fact mostly dependent on the venue of the footwalker's footwalking. Using the slow curve as a

model for the narrative process of romance (medieval or contemporary), the sequential landscape also describes a sequence of conflicts. The accident of parallax may conceal untold horrors just around the next bend, or over the next hill, if one happens to be in the dark forests of medieval North Wales rather than roaming the streets on the way to the town cathedral. Think of Gawain's cold and lonely trek (albeit on horseback) through the forests beyond Camelot in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, at every ford, among each hill, in each crevice, a monster or, at the very least, a "mervayl" lurking. The short account of his journey is literally a catalogue of monsters—dragons, wolves, giants, "bulles and beres, and bores" (oh my!) (*SGGK*, 720-3)—each inextricable from the wilderness that they live in, marking the various undulations and curves in its topos. The journey of the PBR up the meandering Nung River of *Apocalypse Now* is very similar to Gawain's wanderings. In that case, the cinematography quite graphically portrays the horrors of parallax; at each curve of the river, the jungle foliage recedes to reveal another phantasmagoric wreck of war: a broken fuselage, a burnt-out chopper, the vaguely spectral French plantation.

There is a definite tension between the slow *curve* of the footwalker and the walker's *line* of sight, especially with regard to the look back. For a look directly backwards does not necessarily reveal where the walker has been, as Mumford suggests, "unless he has consciously tried to overcome this tendency."[8] It is only the footprints that can lead one back. And since footprints can easily be effaced in time, it is soon

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[8] Next to the notion of a space inextricably linked to time, Einstein's most startling discovery about the nature of space was that it is curved, that even when one thinks one is travelling in a straight line, one is going in circles.

impossible for even the best tracker to trace them from their origin. Thus the slow curve conceals just as much in behind as it reveals in front.[9] As such, this sort of pedestrian logic might precipitate a model for a subjective becoming through citation/site-ation, an ever-changing emplacement both epistemological and topological, in time and space. The footwalker constitutes a typology when he looks back at where he's been, when he cites/sights his previous position. But the slow curve invariably conceals part, if not all of that position, the elements of his previous emplacement fragmented by parallax. The look back that he uses to constitute (retroactively) his present situation brings forth elements of his previous position, as well as new elements uncovered as he traced the curve. Clearly the look back cannot account for the footwalker's history, it can only provide a piecemeal retrospect, the product of his place in the present.

Only the footwalker's body will carry the marks of where he's been—his scars, his wounds, cuts, bruises, the symptoms of some infectious disease: the marks that are left upon and within him by the landscapes through which he has walked. It is a thoroughly Foucauldian body, one eminently epistemological (a body of knowledge) and palimpsestical, its criss-crossing inscriptions betraying the endless series of corrupted citations written over its flesh: "The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration" (Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 83). Instead of mapping out the history of any particular

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[9] Howes cites Orpheus's look backwards in Ovid as "The momentary action that changed everything" (173), but does not elaborate on that action as a moment of concealment and loss, the tragic counterpart to the pedestrian's experience of discovery.

footwalker, a hairy wild man, for instance, we must perform a forensic genealogy, one that does not privilege the chance discoveries of those places where he has been sighted/cited (though it does take those places into consideration), preferring rather to examine the body for the traces of its previous whereabouts, the gruesome crimes is has both endured and committed, and thus "the process of history's destruction of the body" (Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 83). (Indeed, the very fact that he walks belies a certain wounding, a hurt foot, perhaps, since if he were able to walk with complete ease, he would soon turn his attentions to flying, to a transcendentalism that would pull him up and out of the landscape.) The map of sites, as it becomes more and more comprehensive, will suggest, then trace, the winding route of a journey; however, no matter how comprehensive it is, it can hardly disclose the nature of the violences suffered at the hands of the very landscape, its sharp rocks, thorny bushes, the monsters crouching just around the bend. It is the property of wounds and scars to speak of these violences, and sometimes even to place a body at sites where no other evidence hints at its passage. It is to the wounds sustained by the masculine subject in the modern age that I would now like to turn, beginning with one very successful account of modern manhood in the realm of pop-psychology.

Self help: Robert Bly and the genealogy of modern man(hood)

Some people dislike the very phrase "Wild Man." It is rather inflammatory, and I am not fond of it myself. On first hearing, it promises too much. Moreover, I am afraid of how-to-do-it books on the Wild Man. "I ate a bran muffin and I found the Wild Man." "I did mythological thinking for ten minutes, and the Wild Man leapt through the window."
—Robert Bly, *Iron John*, 233

In 1990, Robert Bly, to great popular and critical success, published his own "How To" book on becoming wild. In the production of a self-help psychology for a male audience who are "unhappy" in their masculinity, he provides a Jungian retelling of the Grimm Brothers fairy tale about a ruddy-haired wild man named Iron John and the golden-haired boy who becomes fascinated by this strange creature. The boy eventually lets the hairy man out of a cage, where the king and his men have imprisoned him in connection with the disappearance of several hunters, and runs off with Iron John into the forest, where the latter mentors him for three days before again releasing him into the world at large with the promise of his unconditional aid. In *Iron John: A Book About Men*, Bly evokes the mythology of the wild man as a remedy for what he sees to be the "defective mythologies" with which men identify in the post-Industrial era, mythologies "that ignore masculine depth of feeling, assign men a place in the sky instead of earth, teach obedience to the wrong powers, work to keep men boys, and entangle both men and women in systems of industrial domination that exclude both matriarchy and patriarchy" (x). The result is a culture of wounded masculinities, the successive generations of which, as they attempt to overcome their wounds through unrestrained assertions of their own power, are wounded and wound each other in turn. To outline these defective mythologies at work, Bly constructs a very brief genealogy of "the American man," beginning with the "Saturnian, old-man-minded farmer, proud of his introversion, who arrived in New England in 1630" or the "reckless I-will-do-without culture settlers of the West" (1), and ending with some more recent men, of whose legacies *Iron John* stands in the wake.

The "Fifties male" seems to constitute a polar extreme for Bly, a man's man, who "got to work early, labored responsibly, supported his wife and children, and admired discipline... This sort of man didn't see women's souls well, but he appreciated their bodies; and his view of culture and America's part in it was boyish and optimistic" (1). This man needs structures, opposites, binaries, or at least clear demarcations between self and other: "Unless he has an enemy, he isn't sure that he is alive" (1). The untempered violence that this male's structuralisms imply, Bly argues, resulted in the "unbalanced pursuit of the Vietnam war" (2), that American disaster that seems to have prompted a traumatic rupture in the course of American mythology, a mythological wound, in turn prompting an abrupt shift in the course of manhood that produced a male unsure of himself, of his *him*-self. Something "wonderful" happens because of this uncertainty, men begin, in the sixties and seventies, "to examine women's history and women's sensibility... welcoming their own 'feminine' consciousness and nurturing it" (2). This trend of feminine investigation continues into the present, but Bly senses "something wrong": this male is a "nice boy," but still a boy, like his father before him. The trend crystallizes in the "soft male" (2), a pole that opposes the Fifties male, his aggressiveness, his lack of intimacy. The son revolts against the father.

Iron John is ultimately about the absent father in contemporary society. Bly cites the institution of the urban industrial workplace as the historical event that begins to dissolve the father-son bond. As work becomes more urban, mechanical, compartmentalized, based on very specific information, statistics, the father's labour becomes alien to a father's child; he "has no work to share with his son and cannot

explain to the son what he's doing" (20). Children no longer (for at least a century) live and work in close proximity to their fathers; they no longer learn about a masculinity that is fully human, one with substance, but only about the eviscerated masculine that comes home after work, or the superficial masculine that exists in popular culture. A positive masculinity, one that can be concretely asserted, gets passed over for its negative: a masculinity that manifests as mere simulacrum, an inflated skin, a performance with no impetus. Allowing Iron John out of his cage, for Bly, is tantamount to discovering an older (primal, if you will), more mature masculinity that is dormant in a contemporary "soft" male because he is raised predominantly by his mother, who cannot teach him about that masculinity. The antithesis of this impoverished masculinity, Iron John is earthly, natural, mature, *virile*. He is a proper father, who must be reinserted into the genealogy of modern manhood.

But as he constructs his new male mythology with the aid of the wild man, Bly de-problematizes the wild man, fashions a utopia of the wilderness, creates a new regime of mythological signs that imagines a continuous history of the wild man, a straight trail of footprints that lead straight back and down through the strata to an originary "deep male." A path perhaps not easily followed, but easily traced—at a great distance, but along a direct line of sight. The archetypal gaze is drawn into a black hole[10]: "When we look into the past, holding the Wild Man telescope to our eyes, many fuzzy images come into focus, among them John the Baptist...and Mary Magdalene...Pashupati, Shiva,

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[10] Deleuze/Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*: "The empty eye or black hole absorbs or rejects, like a half-doddering despot who can still give a signal of acquiescence or refusal" (177). Their eye/black hole, placed on a white wall, becomes a face that ensures that choices are made according to binary relations. Yes or no, correct or incorrect. What is accepted does not escape, just like photons in a black hole.

Dionysus, and Cernunnos," Enkidu, Esau, and so on (242). All are crushed together in the black hole's singularity. The poverty of Bly's pop-Jungian analysis is that it establishes a transcendentally symbolic Wild Man that binds and unifies as a ritualized, straightforward citation—Wild Man→ "Wild Man"→ "'Wild Man'"—whose only variation is its position in a series. "[T]his story could be ten or twenty thousand years old" (5). The long and disruptive genealogy of the wild man himself is subsumed in a homogeneous flow of telescoped "ancient" time. Its innumerable convolutions, ruptures, abrupt about-faces are straightened and flattened. Bly betrays his own project of male liberation with a highly ironic statement late in his book: "Iron is usually associated in fairy stories with the imprisonment of men" (208). Iron John's hairy coat comes under intense magnification, each hair a tiny, rusted, iron bar.

It is interesting that Bly himself casts suspicion on his own project late in his book, stating his own fear about "how-to-do-it books on the Wild Man" (233). Clearly the types of how-to-do-it books that he is wary of are those that simplify the process of wilding, offering a quick fix: eating bran muffins, thinking mythologically, but only superficially so. Though Bly's own mythological thinking has its own problems, it is certainly very complex and set forth as a highly involved and delicate process. His Wild Man certainly does not simply leap through the window. "It would be disastrous to throw a net over either [the Wild Man or Wild Woman], or to tranquilize them with jargon, and take them home to our private zoo" (233). He argues that his book is not a definitive

itinerary or program, but just one way of telling the story.[11] Nevertheless, Bly's doubt is still there, the product of his own hesitations between embracing his Wild Man and fearing him. Perhaps in this moment, which arises amidst a discussion of the role of bodily violence and the wound in the initiatory process that his book is designed to describe, he senses that "the distinction between the savage man and the Wild Man"—so crucial for him at the outset of the book (x)—is not so distinct after all. The violence that his Wild Man is *necessarily* capable of, the darkness that he heralds, the ferocity within him, may not be solely nourishing. In this moment, it may be that Bly realizes that the wild man, the true wild man who has nothing transcendental about him, who is pure multiplicity, cannot be contained by his rhetoric and will resist this version of the story. "…I am not fond of it myself" (233). It may be that, in this brief moment, he realizes the unfortunate fact that his book, his project, can and will be disastrously misunderstood, that it carries the potential for misunderstanding because it has, in effect, misunderstood itself.

Support groups: *Fight Club* and being the Wild Man

> BOB: We're still men.
> JACK: Yes, we're men. Men is what we are.

Once again quite late in his book, Bly qualifies the goal of his wild project, writing, "The aim is not to *be* the Wild Man, but to be *in touch with* the Wild Man" (227). Well, why the hell not? The vagueness of this distinction, buried in the middle of the final chapter

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[11] Bly: "The initiatory road in our story includes eight segments, but another story may offer the same stages but in a different order, or entirely different stages" (233).

represents all of the misunderstandings and potential misunderstandings inherent in Bly's text. "No sane man in Greece would say, 'I want to be Zeus,' but in American culture, past and present, we find people who want to be the Wild Man—writers as intelligent as Kerouac fail to make the distinction between being, and being in touch with. Trying to be the Wild Man ends in early death, and confusion for everyone" (227). These comments are interesting in the way that they ascribe to the Wild Man the role of a deity, a cultural role that Bly understands to have been adopted as particularly *American* ("writers as intelligent [not to mention American] as Kerouac..."). An American God, native to its soil, as old as the Trickster cycles of the aboriginal people. Aspiring to be the Wild Man is a hybristic undertaking, an attempt to inflate oneself into America's Zeus. Which makes the reach for the wild state a madness—no sane man in America would say, "I want to be the Wild Man"—a "confusion for everyone," a kind of schizophrenia. The question is, why do Bly's caveats come so late in his book? Why does he wait till the last minute to clearly express his own doubts about the wildology that he has so carefully and methodically constructed?

It is true that he has followed the development of the boy from *his* point of view throughout, described the boy's relations with Iron John, and not Iron John's relations with the boy, not from Iron John's point of view. His warnings remind the reader that he has been careful to use words like "welcome," "contact," "touch" when approaching his Wild Man, that his wildology was never about going all the way. The boy of the Grimm tale only remains with Iron John for three days before being sent on his way. His subsequent contact with the Wild Man occurs in response to the latter's promise to give

aid whenever needed. Iron John is a father, teacher, and mentor, from whom one must part. It is an alliance that cannot be sustained successfully. It is in this way that Bly holds his Wild Man within the constraints of the latter's traditional, civilized meanings as risk, danger, threat—the monster lurking in the darkness of the forest. He uncovers Iron John from the watery depths of the pond, liberates him from the cage, but makes sure to abject and confine him to the forest, well out of reach of the city and castle, touched but unable to touch back. This way, Bly tries to have it both ways, evoking an image of ideal masculinity, cultivating a fascination with it, suggesting a need for it, but ultimately prohibiting its emulation with an appeal to its mysterious dangers. There is a tricksterism about *Iron John* that is hard to pin down, as Bly in effect invites the very misunderstandings that he fears.

Fight Club is all about those misunderstandings, its own tricksterism apparent in its satirical agenda. Targeting the kind of men's movement that promotes primal drum beating at wilderness retreats, it begins with the masculinity-in-crisis that Bly seeks to remedy, but pushes the wild remedy to its extreme.[12] The narrative begins when "Jack," living as a sufferer of chronic insomnia, realizes his impotence in and disaffection with contemporary urban. By chance, he finds emotional release and relief from sleeplessness when he attends a support group for men with testicular cancer. He develops a perverse addiction to the groups and attends several of them, each time under a different name,

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[12] See Smith, "One on One with David Fincher": "*Fight Club* is ostensibly an anti-New Age satire on both the dehumanizing effects of corporate/consumer culture and the absurd excesses of the men's movement" (58). Giroux an Szeman describe the film in a like manner, though less enthusiastically: "*Fight Club*, along with films such as *American Beauty*, *Rogue Trader*, and *Boiler Room*, inaugurates a new sub-genre of film narrative that combines a fascination with the spectacle of violence, enlivened through tired narratives about the crisis of masculinity."

each time silent about the details of his affliction ("If I didn't say anything, people always assumed the worst"). When the intervention of Marla Singer (Helena Bonham Carter) disrupts the effectiveness of the groups in "healing" him ("Her lie reflected my lie"), he turns elsewhere. In the course of several quick disruptions and twists in the narrative, Jack meets his own Iron John, a "slightly outrageous trickster individualist" (Smith 58) in the form of Tyler Durden, whom he ends up living with in the latter's dilapidated house ("It looked like it was waiting to be torn down"). The two of them eventually come up with their own solution to contemporary masculine discontent in fight club, where disaffected blue-collar males gather to beat the snot out of each other.

Jack is arguably the softest of soft males, a caricature of the sort of feminized man that Bly despairs over. Tyler, on the other hand, rages against the urban consumer culture that has weakened Jack. Tyler takes on the frustrations of contemporary man and attempts to tap into a repressed wildness in order to overcome the impotence, the feminization, of the male through consumer culture. Their first extended conversation together over a pitcher of beer at Lou's Tavern is a meditation on wildness and its opposition to consumerism:

> TYLER: Do you know what a duvet is?
> JACK: Comforter.
> TYLER: It's a blanket, just a blanket. Now why do guys like you and I know what a duvet is? Is this essential to our survival? In the hunter-gatherer sense of the word? No. What are we then?
> JACK: You know, consumers.
> TYLER: Right. We're consumers. We're by-products of a lifestyle obsession. Murder, crime, poverty—these things don't concern me. What concerns me is celebrity magazines, television with five hundred channels, some guy's name on my underwear. Rogaine, Viagra, Olestra.
> JACK: Martha Stewart.

> TYLER: Fuck Martha Stewart. Martha's polishes on the brass of the *Titanic*. It's all going down, man! So fuck off, with your sofa units and your green stripe patterns. I say never be complete. I say stop being perfect. I say let's evolve and let the chips fall where they may.

Not only is this a blue-collar rant on corporate capitalism ("some guy's name on my underwear"), but a reaction against domesticity. (The very idea that one can create a "home" in the city, that one's prevailing concerns are with comfort, disregards the threats to stable domesticity—murder, crime, poverty—the local terrorisms of the city.) A knowledge of the semantic nuances that differentiate a blanket from a duvet offends Tyler's hunter-gatherer vision for the ideal masculine.[13] His most violent invective is saved for Martha Stewart, the mother of all clever domestic femininity. He seeks to bring back an abjected wildness, a nomadic, wandering masculinity that has no need for tasteful home furnishings.

As in Bly's book, Tyler's search for a lost wildness addresses a hole left by absent fathers. In a scene in which Tyler lounges in a bath after fight club while Jack scrubs bloodstains out of his trousers, the two of them discuss the people they would fight with if they had the chance to fight anybody:

> TYLER: I'd fight my dad.
> JACK: I don't know my dad. I mean, I know him, but he left when I was like, 6 years old, married this other woman and had some other kids. He, like, did this every six years. He goes to a new city and starts a new family.
> TYLER: Fucker should open up franchises. My dad never went to college, so it was real important that I go. So I graduate, call him up long

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[13] Fincher: "We're designed to be hunters and we're in a society of shopping. There's nothing to kill anymore, there's nothing to fight, nothing to overcome, nothing to explore. In that societal emasculation this everyman [Jack/Tyler] is created" (Smith 61). It is hard to say how much Fincher believes in this "emasculation," considering the extent to which the film sabotages Jack's re-masculation by, not only depicting it as monstrous, but also triumphing over that monstrosity.

distance. I say, "Dad, now what?" He says, "Get a job." Now
I'm twenty-five. I make my yearly call again. I say Dad, now
what. He says, "I don't know. Get married."

JACK: I can't get married. I'm a thirty-year-old boy.

TYLER: We're a generation of men raised by women. I'm wondering if
another woman is really the answer we need.

Their search for the wild man as a substitute for this absent father is, however, an angry one. The film does not speak readily about a rewarding, spiritual adoption of a long-neglected aspect of the male psyche because that aspect emerges only in its viciousness. *Fight Club*'s brutality immediately colonizes the narrative. A truly powerful masculinity is one that, Zeus-like, reserves the power to mutilate or open. Since women do not hold any answers, they are only resented creatures ("Fuck Martha Stewart"). Thus the relationship between Marla and Tyler, characterized by nothing more than the brutalized sex the audience hears but only catches glimpses of. Since the father is irretrievably absent, Tyler and Jack reach for the next best thing—first they beat the hell out of each other, then their peers, then those males in positions of authority. The scene in which Tyler and his cronies drag the police commissioner into a bathroom to castrate him is indicative of his (Tyler's) entire agenda.

The wildness they embrace is a particularly urban one, not found at a woodland retreat, but in the basement of a bar and in a dilapidated house on an industrial thruway. He couches his "war" on contemporary society in terms of spirituality, though his answer to New-Age self-help is, of course, fight club, where spiritual betterment is achieved through the ultra-corporeal, through pain and its infliction. There is little "talking;" there is no weeping. Indeed, fight club is a direct inversion of the guided meditation exercises that Jack participates in at the "Partners in Positivity" support meeting—an ultra-

physical, pain-centred activity set in a sweaty basement as opposed to a purely mental, healing-centred one, set in an icy cavern. The "hugs" the men share are the hurried grapples as they wrestle on the floor; they only share their sufferings inasmuch as they inflict them upon one another. It is a highly ritualized performance of violence, subject to eight rules, the majority of which regulate how the fights are to proceed. It is never in doubt that the sort of masculinity that manifests at fight club is performative. It is a performance that fantasizes a clearly defined manhood by reducing it to displays of violent action, the infliction of pain, and the construction thereby of a "hard" body as opposed to a soft, malleable one: "A guy came to fight club for the first time, his ass was a wad of cookie dough. After a few weeks, he was carved out of wood." At the same time, this performative construction, as it reduces masculinity into eight simple rules and the imperative to enact them only among other men, it reduces also the doubtfulness of being masculine where masculinity as a signifying term carries innumerable complexities, especially as it relates to the negotiations between itself and femininity. A "controlled demolition project," like the destruction of the credit card buildings in the final sequence of the film, the men of fight club *ritualistically* break each other, open their bodies, cause their own destruction as a response to the impossibility of achieving a "complete," unified, masculinity or male body (both a corporeality and a social grouping) in urban society at large. However, as such they also reveal the absurdity of maintaining a male body that defines itself merely by its capacity for violence, for the systematic undoing of the bodies that it faces off against.

Willard the Wound Man: *Apocalypse Now* and the infliction of the wound

As a commentary on contemporary masculinity, Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* situates itself in Bly's genealogy of manhood quite well. Making its first appearance in 1979, the film exists firmly in the aftermath of the "trauma" of the Vietnam War, the point of the most significant wounding of Bly's male since the Industrial revolution: "When the young men arrived in Vietnam and found that they had been lied to, they received immeasurably deep wounds" (Bly 32). From its opening sequence it is clear that the film is about a wounding, and the disaggregation of a certain masculine image. Willard (Martin Sheen), the film's anti-hero, seems to be the sort of man that Bly describes as in need of an enemy, conflict, violence, without which he is precariously empty. Willard awakes to find himself in Saigon, "Waiting for a mission…getting softer. Every minute I stay in this room I get weaker, and every minute Charlie squats in the bush and he gets stronger." Willard evokes his own inadequately "soft" man, soft because he has no immediate enemies, though at the same time threatened by a "stronger" enemy who lies in wait for him. As the scene progresses, Willard's rage against his softness intensifies. The song that accompanies the title sequence, "The End" by the Doors, fades back into the film, Jim Morrison's repeated "Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck" building with the music to a violent crescendo as Willard does some slow but delirious Tai Chi. The tension breaks when he puts his fist through the mirror in which is reflected his naked body, following which, a quicker montage depicting his breakdown as he drains the last of a liquor bottle and smears the blood from his injured hand over his face

and body. The final image is of Willard sitting on the floor beside his bed, the sheets smeared with blood from his hand; he weeps uncontrollably (see figures 2 and 3).

He is a version of masculinity and a masculine body out of control. And as he tumbles further and further out of control, something wild takes over. When Willard first comes round from his napalm nightmare, he is surprised to find himself in the city: "Only Saigon. Shit. Every time I think I'm gonna wake up back in the jungle. When I was home after my first tour it was worse. I'd wake up and there'd be nothing... When I was here, I wanted to be there. When I was there, all I could think of was getting back in the jungle." The distinctions between waking and dreaming, city and jungle, home and tour, civilization and wilderness are unstable even from these first spoken words of the film— but it is the jungle that is taking over, that will take over completely as Willard embarks on his mission up the Nung river to eliminate Kurtz (Marlon Brando), a rogue soldier fighting his own private war, who has fully embraced his own mad wildness with the understanding that it will not be through straightforward, "rational" warfare that Vietnam would be won.[14] The wild man Willard himself is becoming as he nears Kurtz emerges almost immediately as he is doing his martial arts, though only as a spectre, half-present in the sustained dissolves that show images of Willard's camouflaged body as he prepares to assassinate Kurtz, looming forward from the end of the narrative. The shattered mirror, the dissolves, the cut and bleeding hand, his blood scattered on his

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[14] See Gray, "Postmodernism with a Vengeance: The Vietnam War," for a discussion of the (failed) American use of technological warfare in Vietnam: "[James] Gibson's analysis is that the Vietnam War was lost because it was prosecuted as a rationally managed production system more interested in the appearance of scientificity (body counts, systems analysis) than real effectiveness....But this vision of rationality isn't a full picture of reality. Beneath official rationality the emotional can, and does, return in crazy and criminal acts" (186-7).

sheets, establish Willard's disunity at the very outset. More than just a disunity, he is a multiplicity, for the shards of broken glass would not necessarily reflect one cracked and crumbling Willard, but a thousand tiny Willards, sundered by a thousand tiny cuts. It is this multiplicity that indicates that he has already begun a process of becoming wild, a violent wild, what Bly attempts to dismiss as mere savagery.

One of the most important elements to consider in any wildology is the wild man's relation to wounds and woundings. Bly's Wild Man is merely contemplative of his own wounds; he claims it is the savage who inflicts, and suffers without contemplation: "The savage mode does great damage to the soul, earth, and humankind; we can say that though the savage man is wounded he prefers not to examine it. The Wild Man, who has examined his wound, resembles a Zen priest, a shaman, a woodsman more than a savage" (Bly x). But the wild man must do his own damage, or else his examination will be fruitless. Willard examines his wounded hand in his wild state and weeps over its complexity of meaning, a complex not signifiable through language. Even Willard's pre-linguistic sobs and cries are silent in the film; only the music is heard. He himself deals the wound, for doing the damage is itself contemplative, emphasizing an awareness of the part of the body injured. Reading the wound is inextricable from its cause, a "language" of violence that is by no means linguistic. Since it is often through violence that the wild man makes his primary significations, the wounds he inflicts or suffers are ciphers constituting a semiotics of their own, a particularly corporeal *écriture*.

The concept of a signifying wound is by no means alien to civilization. In fact, reading the wound is crucial to any civilizing process. Two civil institutions especially

rely on a capacity to decipher wounds for their functioning. The criminal justice systems of most social groups have structures in place to read various wounds, bodily or not, suffered by a victim, so that their cause(s) might be determined. The goal is to identify who has inflicted the wounds and why, in order that the victim's pain may be satisfactorily quantified and a fit penalty issued to the perpetrator for having transgressed against another subject of the social group. In similar fashion, Western medicine bases its practice on identifying and reading the wound, locating it and describing its characteristics in order to determine its source and thus a course of treatment to ease, if not eliminate, its pain. The "wound man" that appears in medieval medical texts is the most strikingly graphic illustration of this exercise of pain identification, the man stoically enduring a catalogue of wounds simultaneously, a brief description appearing adjacent to each. A particularly colourful wound man from the mid-fifteenth century, found in Wellcome Institute Library, Western MS 290, f. 53v, is a delightful example of this figure (see figure 4). Most interesting about the wound man, and perhaps most disturbing to modern sensibilities, is that his single body, moreover cold and expressionless, serves as a medium for innumerable wounds by swords, arrows, and cudgels, all of which are richly illustrated and then scrutinized to provide written descriptions of each, a repetition of the wounding in language. The wound man definitely takes on a macabre resonance in a culture that tends to remember the Middle Ages by its weapons and their brutality as much as by the fantasy of knights in shining armour.[15] However, wound man is not a sadistic nightmare, but a medical resource.

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[15] I must admit that my first exposure to wound man was in reference to it in Thomas Harris's

What is eminently *civilized* about wound man's representations of wounds are, of course, that their goal is to eradicate traces of the wound, to ease the pain, to suppress its threat to one's self, by drawing it into an institutionalized epistemology that redefines the wound as something that signifies a healing regimen, a practice of self-care, re-civilizing the wound by casting it as the first step in a healing regimen.

Despite his grotesque appearance, wound man is by no means divorced from a civilizing process. In fact, he is intrinsic to such a process. Michael Uebel has described the wound man as "emphasizing not only the body's decomposition into local sites of (potential) agony but the body's systematic, integrative functioning" (376). Presumably, Uebel means that that emphasis on "integrative functioning" derives paradoxically from that body's *dys*functioning, from the wounds and pain that intensify the experience of the body, make it remember itself. Wound man is a reminder that "Male bodies are assemblages of dynamic parts, the proper preservation and ordering of which ensure a body's claim to dominance in the social sphere" (376). Though Uebel claims the wound man to depict the "male body...in the process of its undoing," an "un-becoming male body" (373), he makes the mistake of reading the figure as merely representational rather than as a utilitarian representation that does a certain work in the world-out-there. Uebel does not mention the medical *use* that the figure was intended for, covered in sundry wounds in order that they might be identified and fixed, re-membered. The wound man suggests, if nothing else, a body in the process of becoming; he existed in order to help ensure the "proper preservation and ordering" of the male body and its parts. It should

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novel *Red Dragon*, in which the protagonist claims that he had caught serial killer Hannibal Lecter because the latter had modeled one of his victims on the image of a wound man.

also be noted that wound man is a military man, and an exemplary one, at that, patiently enduring wounds from various military implements. Wound man describes in almost absurdly graphic terms what would eventually become of the medieval masculine body as it entered battle, moreover what that body was *expected* to endure, the marks it was expected to bear *as well as heal from* if it were to exercise the prowess that its military station was meant to signify.

Bly's Wild Man, himself somewhat of a New Age wound man, is actually quite civilized—a self-help guru who examines his wounds in order to heal them. This is how I would like to reimagine Willard in his becoming-wild: sitting on the floor, nursing his wounded hand, a metaphor for the many wounds sustained during the war, himself a wound man. Michael Selig indicates that, as Hollywood's Vietnam films perpetuate and respond to the popular perception of the conflict as a cultural trauma or wound, they act as "something like a 'talking cure,'" to use the language of psychoanalysis (174). He argues, "The characteristic voice-over narration of many Vietnam films (e.g., *The Iron Triangle, Platoon, Apocalypse Now*), as well as the aggressive and overwhelming 'dialogue' of Robin Williams in *Good Morning Vietnam*, is similarly focussed on talking about Vietnam in order to subject to language the threat Vietnam poses to the self" (175). So many celluloid wound men represent these threatening wounds as the first step in healing them. They seek to examine their wounds as words, in the hopes that their talking will hold them together, stitch them up. However, Willard doesn't seek to erase his wounds, he makes new ones, breaks himself apart, signifying *by way of* the wound rather than signifying the wound, an acutely wild practice.

The final scenes of the film are very similar to the opening in their hermeneutics. Examining Kurtz's desk, the pictures of the son and wife he has left behind, Willard muses, "He broke from them, and then he broke from himself. I've never seen a man so broken up and ripped apart." At this point, the two have become each other's mirror image, both at each other's mercy, both detesting the "stench of lies" fed to them by a half-hearted military bureaucracy, both having broken away from home with the realization that "it didn't exist anymore." Critics of the film have oft commented on the less conceptual similarities between the two, such as similarities in gestures and body language between the two or, more technically astute, in lighting effects used on the two at different points in the film.[16] Willard slaughters Kurtz with a machete, the somatic realization of his being "broken up and ripped apart," but also a reiteration of Willard's broken mirror. It's the same wound: a body cut into pieces, shattered, a violence issued outward but reflected back. Willard emerges from Kurtz's fortress, mostly naked and covered in blood, and passes in silence through the crowd of Kurtz's savage followers to the PBR. In the last ten minutes or so of the film, there is almost no dialogue. Willard's voice-over never returns. "Almighty" radios the boat, looking for Willard to call in an air strike on Kurtz's compound, to eradicate the wildness it represents, to re-civilize the land, but Willard just turns the radio off. The final spoken words of the film are Kurtz's: "The horror. The horror." Not a talking cure, a signification of his wounds, only a

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[16] Frank P. Tomasulo, in "The Politics of Ambivalence: *Apocalypse Now* as Prowar and Antiwar Film," catalogues several of these: "Both are introduced reclining in bed, heavily shadowed by lit by an odd orange light. The photograph of Willard's wife at his bedside closely resembles that of Kurtz's spouse, seen in his dossier. Similarly, Willard grasps at a fly in his opening scene and Kurtz repeats the same gesture later on…After "terminating" his superior, Willard rubs his face in his hands, mimicking a gesture Kurtz used earlier" (150).

confirmation of their pain. A further wounding, the realization that following the pain is only oblivion.

The wound as medieval, the wound as wild

> Even the Mona Lisa's falling apart.
> —Tyler Durden, *Fight Club*

The corporeal quality of the horror that Merback suggests the wound generates is probably a medieval Christian invention. It relies on the capacity of the wound to reveal spectacularly that which should remain hidden, the rough defilement of a flesh that should remain clean and smooth. It is arguably a pagan (read barbarian, savage, tribal) sensibility that glorifies the wound, honours scars, and even bears its gods from openings in the flesh. (In this way, Christ's passion is still pagan—it is from His resurrection that the abhorrence of the wound stems and the notion that it must be healed and leave no trace.) What is so fascinating about the wound man discussed above as a medical illustration is that he is largely superficial, a fact that distinguishes him from the tradition of bodily representation in medical texts and anatomies from the seventeenth century to the present day, which concern themselves primarily with the interior. Even the section of skin that seems to have been removed from this wound man's chest reveals a highly interpretive interior. The graphic representation of his heart is almost comic in light of the methods by which a modern anatomical illustration would depict the same thing. Dancing illness man, wound man's "oddly jubilant brother," as Uebel calls him (373), has no interior at all, only textual descriptions of his pains and ailments inscribed around

and over his body. The medieval *corporis* that wound man indicates is immediate, a surface whose sanctity must be preserved.

There are definite theological and aesthetic considerations at work in this avoidance of the inside. St Augustine makes clear, during a discussion of the beauty of the human form, the demarcation at the skin as to the bounds of scientific/medical scrutiny:

> Assuredly no part of the body has been created for the sake of utility which does not also contribute something to its beauty. And this would be all the more apparent, if we knew more precisely how all its parts are connected and adapted to one another, and were not limited in our observations to what appears on the surface; for as to what is covered up and hidden from our view, the intricate web of veins and nerves, no one can discover it. For although, with a cruel zeal for science, some medical men, who are called anatomists, have dissected the bodies of the dead, and sometimes even of sick persons who died under their knives, and have inhumanly pried into the secrets of the human body to learn the nature of the disease and its exact seat, and how it might be cured, yet those relations of which I speak, and which form the concord, or, as the Greeks call it, "harmony," of the whole body outside and in, as of some instrument, no one has been able to discover, because no one has been audacious enough to seek for them. (*City of God*, 22.24; 853)

Though he is obviously curious about what lies beneath the flesh and attests to the "exquisite fitness" by which God must have arranged the sundry "inward" parts (22.24; 853), he is very bold in distaste for "the cruel zeal for science." The dissection of the body by anatomists to discover its inner secrets is, for Augustine, an inferior use of man's intellect. It represents the pursuit of man's knowledge of his mortal existence, rather than the contemplation of his immortality. The anatomists despoil the bodies of men in the interests of their own intellects, without regard for the divine intelligence that has organized the parts of the body with such exquisite beauty. Such a disregard for the

beauty of God's design in the pursuit of worldly knowledge is an act monstrous, wild, "inhuman," inasmuch as humanity denotes that which grants respect to the Godhead.

Such a caveat constitutes the premodern notion of *externum corporis decorum*, the external decorum of the body, which Roger Bartra suggests is the conceptual basis for civilization:

> Civilization was, very clearly, made up of a set of rules to control and ritualize the influxes and outflows of the body, along with the postures, gestures, noises, and expressions that accompanied them. In what manner does one insert a piece of meat into the mouth, a finger into the nose, a penis into the vagina, or a sword into the breast? What rules of politeness guide the expulsion of excrement, semen, mucus, sweat, or saliva? What rituals govern the cleaning of the body before or after eating, sleeping, defecating, or fornicating? Which words must accompany, to pardon or disguise, the movements, noises, smells, or moistures of the body? (*Looking Glass*, 145)

Culture defines subjectivity as civilized or not in terms of corporeality, against a set of performances that must fittingly accompany interactions between bodies, or an action concerning one's own body and its functions. A self-cultivation. The fulcrum of civilization, then, is the body's flesh which houses and enfolds substances, objects, and movements that should normally remain hidden. It can only suffer or enjoy penetration, it may only reveal its contents, if and when the action is carried out in a manner that has been codified as "proper," "civil," and thereby deemed appropriately sanctified. The premodern wild man is one distant from these sanctifying codes, "by definition…a being completely removed from civility, incapable of hiding his bodily fluids, channelling his instincts, or covering his nudity with some degree of modesty" (Bartra, *Wild Men*, 145). In his disregard for the sanctifying codes for bodily decorum, the postmodern wild man is not much different from his ancestor.

Modern civilization has inherited and, in large part, still adheres to the *externum corporis decorum*, locating as its objects of surveillance those places where there are regular ingresses and egresses into the flesh. The wound functions to emphasize the permeability of the body, the acute susceptibility of its insides to access by the outside world. Mitchell B. Merback's theoretical work on the wound in medieval iconography describes a civilizing process that privileges a body that is sealed and complete:

> Images of wounds may be the paradigmatic generators of horror, and perhaps also disgust, because of the way they locate perception at the pulsing boundaries of the body. Once a wound appears before our eyes, it is as if a fault line has opened up across the body's topography, one that threatens to tear open ever-wider expanses of the body's hidden interior. We seem to sense, in that 'pre-social' way evoked by Miller…, 'the inappropriateness of destroying the integrity of the body's seal'. Instinctively we fear the dissolution of that literally vital distinction between interior and exterior. (*The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, 113)

So the wound in its violation of bodily decorum is a threat to selfhood itself, not only because it threatens to spoil bodily coherence, but also because the free exchange of things inner and outer dissolves the distinction between self and other, you and me, me and world. The wild man has no respect for these distinctions, and he cannot keep his hands to himself; he is unable to keep his body closed, and similarly unable to resist opening the bodies of others. His monstrosity lies in his attacks, made through unrestrained violence, on the concept of discreet bodies.

Certainly, it is often through violence or the threats of violence that the wild man makes his first attempts to reach out and touch somebody. In his traditional manifestations, of which Bernheimer's great study speaks, he is often marked by "the loss or absence of faculties which make human beings what they are" (Bernheimer 9)

and thus not capable of language (nor those other markers of humanity, recognition of God and the capacity for reason). Bodily violence speaks, but not with language.[17] Bartra's revisions of the wild man keep his aphasia intact, but in a different capacity: "The wild man did not have language, but took words by storm in order to express the murmurings of another world, the signals that nature gave to society. The wild man spoke words that did not have literal meaning, but were eloquent in communicating sensations that civilized language could not express" (124). Taking his cue from Spencer's *Faerie Queene*, Bartra's wild man is one who "expresses himself 'by signes, by lookes, and by other gests'" (124). It is clearly a corporeal semiotics that Bartra's wild man employs, though Bartra's romanticization of his subject makes him a little near-sighted when it comes to the wild man's "warlike violence," which, seemingly unmotivated, raises only questions: "Where then did the violence of the wild man originate? From what power did their hostility and aggression spring?" (110). Bartra senses a structure to the wild man's violence, but prefers to understand it as just "sheer carnal nature," very similar to the "reckless physical self-assertion" of Bernheimer's wild man (Bernheimer 3), rather than as part of the "eloquence in communicating sensations" inexpressible by "civilized language." As a most corporeal creature, one who openly

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[17] Elaine Scarry, in *The Body in Pain*, very emphatically insists on the incommensurability of pain and language: "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). Thus conceived, the body in pain is a something of a wild body. When the wild man inflicts pain, he brings his victim down to his own level, if you will. However, violence does communicate, and very palpably so, though it is a purely phenomenological communication. The inflicted wound is always-already decodable, a semiotic that is immediately understood to be that which *hurts*. Inasmuch as violence means, it means first and foremost those things that one understands when one is in pain, what one understands about one's own body in pain as well as about the body that causes the pain. Pain is all that is intended by the wounding, a pain that undermines the body's capacity as a discreet phenomenon in the world at the same time that it emphasizes the body's unique presence.

displays all the workings of his body, it is not surprising that the wild man prefers to communicate through violence and its pain, the quickest and surest way to communicate in a way that is resistant to speech—pure bodily events. Thus he wages war on civilization.

Becoming tiny: military violence and the giantism of the Gawain function

> Sir, if þou ly at hame,
> Wonderly men wil þe blame.
> Þat knight es nothing to set by,
> Þat leves al his chivalry
> And ligges bekeand in his bed,
> When he haves a lady wed.
> For when þat he has grete endose,
> Þan war tyme to win his lose.
> —*Ywain and Gawain*, 1455-1462

But what of the man of civilization? Does he not himself make use of violence, in his wars and the politics that are wars waged by other means? Does he not produce through violence: the states he builds, the bodies and subjects (of knowledge) he materializes, emerging from the gaping mouths of bloody wounds?[18] Though violence—insofar as the

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[18] Scarry's body in pain is an eminently political (and therefore civilized) one, the pain it experiences symptomatic of an exertion of power upon it, through violence, torture, warfare. Because pain "unmakes" the body afflicted with it, any power derived from acts of violence will be an empty power, one that rushes into the vacuum left when the victim is annihilated. Thus she insists that "war and torture are opposed by the civilizing impulse" (179), unwilling to acknowledge the productive power of violence; making and unmaking are always separate instances. The body in Scarry's work is a fully integral one, one that either builds or destroys. The same body is not unmade and made anew simultaneously, it cannot become as it is undone. It would seem civilization is always a morally good thing for Scarry and, in some ways, an *a priori* place where certain kinds of human activity take place. It is not the product of human activity, whether that activity and that product are good or bad, violent or peaceful. The fact remains that, even within the very philosophical discourse of Scarry's work, where pain is both the pain inflicted upon one as he is tortured to extract certain information and the pain of working that creates an artefact, pain *produces*, and what it produces are the very things of which civilization is made. The "civilizing impulse" is also an impulse to violence, though a violence that is highly systematic, repeated in order to leave

violence can be defined as "warlike"—is typically uncivilized, anti-social, the actions of a nomadic, tribal wild man against the walls of a state, it is, of course, a part of civil state-making itself to employ the power of that violence in its own interests to promote its own civility, while simultaneously keeping that violence apart from the state apparatus, creating an irreconcilable tension. For Deleuze and Guattari, whose "war machine" describes an assemblage of violent tactics employed by nomads against a state, war power and state power can be muddled, but are never reducible to one another: "*The State has no war machine of its own*; it can only appropriate one in the form of a military institution, one that will continually cause it problems. This explains the mistrust States have toward their military institutions, in that the military institution inherits an extrinsic war machine" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 355). While civilization and war are indeed irreducible, they are certainly not irreconcilable. What of a state apparatus that is also a military one? When the king rides into battle as a knight? What is produced is a state that is highly suspicious, both in the sense of being actively suspicious of its own workings, its own power, as well as passively under suspicion by those within its works and the reach of its power.

Arthur is the epitome of the king/knight, a clear exemplar of a state/war machine apparatus conflated, with all of its suspicions, into one body. Bly fleetingly invokes Arthur in the preface to *Iron John* as a mythological figure from whom "we learn the value of the male mentor in the lives of young men" (ix)—a relatively innocuous picture

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multiple bodies with the same formative pain. Wild violence differs in that it is not systematic, not repetitious. It is very close to Scarry's world-unmaking pain, as it works to wreak catastrophe, though its lack of systematicity does not mean it cannot be tactical, targeting individual bodies and disrupting the systematic use of violence deployed by the civilizing process by opening non-regulated wounds (see chapter 2).

of the king/knight, the general/father. The mythological company Arthur keeps is distinguished for Bly, marching between Zeus, exemplar of "positive leadership in men" and, of course, Iron John, in whose story, as we know, we hear "the importance of moving from the mother's realm to the father's realm" (ix). While this pageant of giants drifts by untroubled—this is the lead-in to a book that is attempting to lend positivity to powerful manhood, after all—Arthur's placement in the middle of these two myths indicates the conflicts in Bly's own mythology. For Arthur is at once Zeus-like—giant among kings, king among fathers, creator (of a knightly order, of a nation), giver and overseer of law—and himself a wild man—uncontrolled and uncontrollable in his search for adventure for himself and his protégées. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for example, presents a youthful Arthur as both the "hendest [noblest]" king Britain has ever seen (26), as well as "sumquat childegered [somewhat childish]," who "lovied the lasse...to longe lye or to longe site [he less liked to lie long or sit long]," a restless ritalin candidate too "brayn wylde" and petulant to even eat before he has heard "Of sum aventurus thing an uncouthe tale" (86-93).[19] Arthur's Britain is certainly glorious, the creation of a worthy king, but the wild militarism with which it is won ultimately sabotages its glory and dismantles its giant structure. And his Round Table knights, as the enforcers of his Law, keepers of Arthurian Britain, and heirs to his kingship/knighthood, are likewise both courteous and lusty, godly and wild. The interior tensions apparent in the militarism that Arthurian romances revel in are thus indicative of a state in the process of reconciling its military need for violent confrontation and its

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[19] All translations of *SGGK* are my own, with the guidance of J. J. Anderson's glosses and Marie Borroff's superb translation.

social need for peaceful order.[20] Knights do violent things as a result of a chivalric ethos that informs, even coerces, their actions, so often shaping those actions into violence, but they are also the authors of that ethos, doing violent things in order to maintain the tenets of chivalry.

In the English romance tradition of the mid-fourteenth century and onwards, it is Sir Gawain who is the inheritor and upholder of Arthruian chivalry, almost unfailingly representing the tenets of that chivalry at their most refined and perfected. Thomas Hahn, in "Gawain and Popular Chivalric Romance in Britain," has argued that Gawain's "unconstrained ubiquity within early Arthurian romance elevated Gawain to *chevalier exemplaire*, the paragon against which manhood is measured" (Hahn 220). His Gawain is not just a "knight for all occasions" (221), but also, through his immaculate courtesy "in both martial and domestic situations" and his unwavering loyalty to the "fatherly authority of the king," he is the "chief mediator of the Father's Law, the Young Man who, in demonstrating the suppleness and strength of the rules governing the social order, offers the ultimate reassurance about the status quo" (223). As such he is the literary embodiment of the norm for popular society, the ideal to aspire to—a hero on par with the modern re-appropriation of Ulysses. Hahn's brief article is perhaps at its most insightful when he observes that "Gawain plays a *role*; he routinely facilitates the extravagant adventures that happen around him, and does so to such an extent that one might even think of him almost *as a narrative function*" (my emphasis; 223). The

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[20] See Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*: "Powerful images of the fellowship of Arthur…points us towards the genuine shared interests of kings and knights. Yet this Arthurian literature, with its dénouement of destructive conflict, likewise suggests tensions and contradictions between royalty and chivalry" (93).

Gawain function works as a normativity, a force of civilization and naturalization (223-4). It is a localized articulation of chivalry as an *institution*, the ascendant law governing the social order, another typological black hole drawing all would-be anomalies into its gravity to ensure their conformity.

At the same time, by virtue of his own tactical incognito (crucial in his own encounter with the wild Polyphemus), Ulysses is "Nobody" as much as he is the functional hero of Western modernity.[21] The similar de-individuating of Gawain into pure function "inevitably" marks him as "chief instance by which the hum*an impossibility* of ideal chivalry is illustrated" (Hahn 220). Like a Bruce Willis in any *Die Hard* film, or any other such action flick hero, he is a larger-than-life measure of manhood that is just too large.[22] And it is in this impossible perfection, this near giantism, that the chivalric subjectivity that the Gawain function attempts to sustain is shown to be unstable. The madness that Ywain falls into, the wild man that he becomes when he forgets to return to Laudine on time, suggests the precariousness of knighthood, that the "haunt" of arms Gawain pressures him into, with which he gets preoccupied,

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[21] It is such transcendental mythical figures as Ulysses and Oedipus, those that represent a majoritarian subjectivity, that Deleuze and Guattari seek most to undermine: "Let us suppose that the constant or standard is the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language (Joyce's or Ezra Pound's Ulysses)....But at this point, everything is reversed. For the majority, insofar as it is analytically included in the abstract standard, is never anybody, it is always Nobody—Ulysses" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 105)

[22] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen makes a similar claim about the chivalric subject: "The chivalric hero represents a kind of hypermasculinity, an exaggerated and idealized version of maleness that is promulgated with a social intention: ordinary men of the middle and upper classes are to measure themselves against the impossible standard that the hero embodies and from this conditioned inadequacy strive to fight harder and control themselves better. No human body can actually occupy the impossible space of knighthood's inhuman ideals, and so these same bodies can be compelled to repeat its theatrical rituals through the promise of the possibility of one day coinciding with the permanence that chivalry's fictive models offer. The chivalric subject continues to perform chivalry as a way of continually producing himself. Danger occurs only when the lure to desire is not strong enough to keep the bodily performance in motion" (*Of Giants*, 83).

always carries the potential to spin out of control and grow monstrous. The knight cannot exist without the wild man to harass him, for the latter is his specular image, the nobody who shatters the mirror when his frustrations with the impossibility of chivalric subjectivity reach a critical mass. The wild man, moreover, represents the bestial violence already inherent in the very fabric of the chivalric code.

The critique of military violence that one can read from the contemporary Hollywood Vietnam War film (indeed, in most war films following Vietnam) in its interrogation of violence can occasionally be read in similar fashion from medieval romance, though the former often makes a demarcation between a villainous governmental bureaucracy and the hapless grunts caught up in the former's deployment and manipulation of the war machine that the latter, which has yet to acquire the paranoia of post-modernity, does not. Of course, this distinction reveals a qualitative difference between the admiration accorded to the violence that each depicts. In the romance the admiration has a certain sincerity, whereas the Vietnam War film often attempts to admire its violence with a sense of ironic detachment. Nevertheless, from our current stance, neither is without its ambivalence: though it would seem we should praise the knight and his sword, we don't necessarily do so; while we feel we shouldn't praise the soldier and his fondness for napalm, sometimes we do. Take, for example, Arthur's restless pursuit of military exploit in *Gologras and Gawain*, which results in the long and bloody siege of Gologras's castle, the only motivation being the latter's claim to be without a lord. Another instance of Arthur building the renown and fame of his round table, but at the expense of widespread destruction. Or Colonel Kilgore (Robert Duvall)

in *Apocalypse Now*—quite an Arthur-like giant of militarism himself—swooping down on a small Viet Cong village in an air-cavalry strike, incurring numerous casualties for Americans and VC alike, for the absurd purpose of taking in the unique surf at that location, though some of the satire of this scene is surely allayed by the excitement of the cinematography employed and the invigorating strains of Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries."[23]

In any event, it seems clear that the chivalric ideology almost invariably depicted in romance narratives, as Kaeuper has most convincingly asserted, "meant the worship of prowess, and prowess (whatever gentler qualities idealists wanted to associate with it) meant beating an opponent with really good hacking and thrusting" ("The Societal Role of Chivalry," 99). Chivalric codes served to map out a clearly definable ethos, having the ambivalent function of both restricting violence, demarcating what constitutes honourable and dishonourable uses of the sword, as well as ensuring the effectiveness of violence in its various productive capacities. The ethos of a social group continuously at war or ready for war, always ready to defend their "prickly sense of honour" (Kaeuper, "The Societal Role of Chivalry," 99), chivalry dictated the conduct that would best secure triumph in a contest, whether it be out-and-out swordplay or a more "courteous" diplomacy. And though the rise of courtly society meant the inclusion of a highly codified erotics in what became known as chivalry that may seem to have counter-

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[23] Tomasulo analyzes this scene's "sheer kinaesthetic excitement", "photographed so as to excite the viewer viscerally and to glorify its godlike heroes" in order to demonstrate that such "aestheticization of violence contributes greatly to the film's appeal to a twisted patriotism" (149). See, too, Grieff, "Soldier, Sailor, Surfer, Chef: Conrad's Ethics and the Margins of *Apocalypse Now*." Indeed, the widespread popularity of *Apocalypse Now* as an action-adventure flick—along with many other Vietnam films (*First Blood*, for example, which spawned two sequels in the *Rambo* franchise)—tends to overshadow many of its subversive elements.

balanced the focus on violence, mollifying its knights, romance's aestheticization of hacking and thrusting indicates a popular (which is to say, public) acceptance of prowess as possibly the most significant aspect of knightly identity.

Inasmuch as knightly identity was founded in public renown, it was violent deeds witnessed in public that established, maintained, and enhanced that renown.[24] Consider Gawain's advice to the recently-hitched Ywain, in *Ywain and Gawain,* not to "ly at hame" with his wife, Laudine, lest he be blamed for, essentially, being a wuss. It is in "war tyme" that a knight of chivalry wins his "lose [renown]," and though while off in some foreign country "His lady es þe more jelows,/ Also sho lufes him wele þe bet [His lady is jealous all the more,/ She also loves him all the better" (1464-5). Chivalric subjectivity as depicted in romance was constituted in an economy of violence as much or more as it was in a sexual economy. Indeed, as Gawain's advice suggests, a knight's love life, his ostensibly private affairs, are informed by his military accomplishments, those public deeds that achieve the praise of other men. The knightly subject brings his work home with him, constituting a violent sexuality/sexual violence ultimately informed by the homosocial bonds between "men" (read, knights) on the battlefield rather than by the heterosexual bonds between men and women in a domestic setting.

More often than not, we find Gawain pitted against some instance of impossible subjectivity, a monstrous manhood or, occasionally, womanhood, invariably encountered in the midst of a wilderness. The Green Knight is, of course, the most renowned of

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[24] Susan Crane, in "Knights in Disguise: Identity and Incognito in Fourteenth-Century Chivalry," locates knightly identity "in renown, in the estimation of the community" and argues "that chivalric ideology sustains a peculiar kind of individuality based on one's capacity to win renown" (65-6).

Gawain's adversaries, though he is only one example of the many rivals who wage war on chivalric codes that Gawain must confront and normalize. The wounds that they inflict upon him threaten to take him apart, to disassemble the Gawain function. They show the immortality accorded to the Gawain function as institutional to be mortal after all.[25] As Merback insists, "Extend the wound far enough beyond its already unstable boundaries and the body, as an organic whole, threatens to disappear" (Merback 113)— but only *as a whole*. Like Willard's mirror the wounding is a splitting that creates a multiplicity. One must not forget that the splits happen where the structure was already weak, that the wounds inflicted are by no means fresh, but ones reopened, at best a scab that won't heal. The wild monstrosities that our hero encounters may be knighthoods gone wrong, but they are still knighthoods. A thousand tiny chivalries. Thus they are also so many wounded Gawains, the Gawain function chopped up and spread out.

The many monsters as many wounded Gawains indicate the rapidity with which the wound can change the body into something (possibly) unrecognizable: "For Julia Kristeva the wound is profoundly disquieting because...it *'show[s] me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live'. When the wound is transformed into spectacle, we glimpse in it our own future disarray" (Merback 113). To see one's future disarray is to experience the wound that splits, to be broken into a multiplicity. As the wound opens and deforms the flesh, it exposes to the world a newly sensitive body, along with what lies inside, and heralds an instantaneous becoming. Recall Bakhtin's grotesque body,

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[25] Deleuze and Guattari formulations of a *productive* desire (rather than a desire-as-lack) in *Anti-Oedipus* suggest that such a desire allows for a revolutionary subversion of institutionalism: "The revolutionary pole of group fantasy becomes visible...in the power to experience institutions themselves as mortal, to destroy them or change them according to the articulations of desire and the social field, by making the death instinct into a veritable institutional creativity" (63).

which "is a body in the act of becoming" (Bakhtin 317). It can manifest as a wounded body, since it is one that fails to distinguish between outward and inward, open to any influxes and outflows, merging with the world around it. As such, "the grotesque ignores the impenetrable surface that closes and limits the body as a *separate and completed phenomenon*" (my emphasis, 318). Bakhtin's grotesque body, modeled on Rabelais's Pantagruel is a giant, but only insofar as it is an enormous conglomeration of innumerable diverse elements, revealing itself to be in fact a landscape filled with cities, an assembly of many smaller men.[26] They are not, however, a unified social body, like a Hobbsean Leviathan, but are totally unaware that the world they live in is actually the body of Pantagruel.

It is no mistake that there is, as with most any hero, one Gawain and so many monsters. One Civilization and many wild men. They are the splinters of shattered glass that reflect many fragments of the giant ideal, their own giantism only an extreme zoom-in on those fragments, like the human perspective of something much larger than itself, subject to a pedestrian logic, the whole only revealed in successive pieces as one walks around them, monsters around every bend.[27] As long as Gawain can remain a function, along a direct line of sight, giant and whole and singular in his transcendental abstraction like a Ulysses or an Oedipus, he resists the becoming that his wild counterparts represent.

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[26] See *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 2.32, wherein the author enters Pantagruel's mouth by way of his tongue, where he spends over six months, wandering amongst the towns and villages that reside within the Giant's mouth and gullet.

[27] Cohen: "Just as the Lacanian mirror stage in the impossibility of its full success is its own guarantee that 'Boschian monsters' will continue to haunt the embodied subject, fights against monsters in romance are never a final victory" (75).

To see the whole means to be giant oneself, a *Being* floating in mid-air, but nobody.[28]

But this giant is not the same as Rabelais's giants. His giants, read through Bakhtin, aren't giants in and of themselves so much as becoming-giants, mankind seen from a microscopic perspective, the object of a tiny pilgrimage, a body-in-pieces in the continuous process of pulling/failing to pull itself together. Inasmuch as wild men always appear as gigantic—whether corporeally or as larger-than-life presence—they are becomings-giant, incomplete bodies that demonstrate the absurdity of being complete.[29]

Each time Gawain "meets his match" in the various wild folk he is continuously paired with and pitted against, during the brief moments when he has yet to triumph, when the Gawain function is placed in temporary doubt, he enters into a becoming-wild, which breaks him up, splits him in two (at the very least). In this way, Gawain loses his unified, transcendental being, gets small. His becomings-wild, like Deleuze and Guattari's becomings-animal, -woman, etc., are the repudiation of a majoritarianism that "assumes a state of power and domination"—a state expressed by the Gawain function and the chivalric subjectivity it maintains—and the assumption of a minoritarianism that "is the becoming of everybody, one's potential becoming to the extent that one deviates from the model" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 105). For those anamolous moments, it is the Gawain function, the Whole Being, complete and stable, that is revealed to be most

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[28] In the introduction to his book *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, Cohen speaks of the cognitive work that one must do when one encounters a giant: "To gaze on the giant as something more than a body in pieces requires the adoption of an inhuman, transcendent point of view; yet beside the full form of the giant, the human body dwindles to a featureless outline, like those charts in museums that depict a tiny silhouette of *Homo sapiens* below a fully realized *Tyrannosaurus rex*" (xiii).

[29] Bernheimer, addressing the observation that "the wild man may assume the guise both of dwarfs and of giants" makes this distinction: "[W]hen wild men occur in more than average numbers, they shrink and become dwarfs, while the lone individuals tend to retain their powerful physique" (45-6). If we maintain the confusion between giants and dwarves, one can see how easily the body of the giant becomes a "body" of dwarves.

inhuman in its claims to be human. The warlike violence buried—repressed, if you will—just below the surface of the ascendant ideology (chivalry) Gawain adheres to returns to terrorize him in each uncanny (re)reappearance of the wild man.

Figure 1: Robinet Testard's Hercules, a delightful anachronism (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 195, fol. 65v., used by permission)
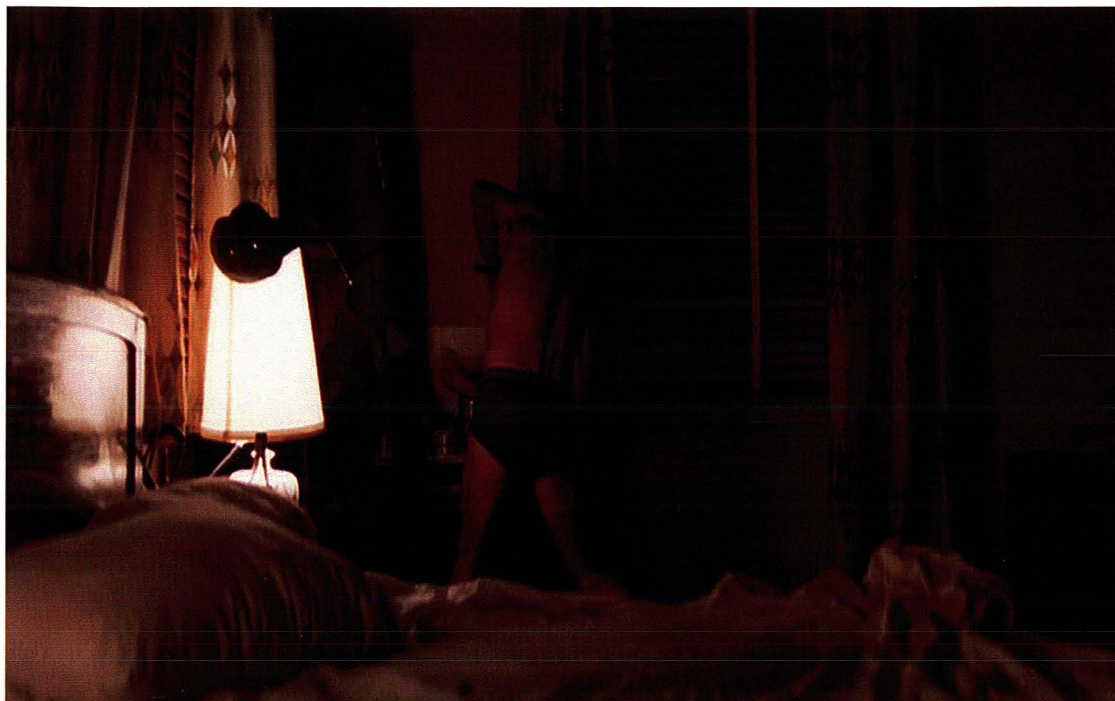
Figure 2: Willard attacks the man in the mirror
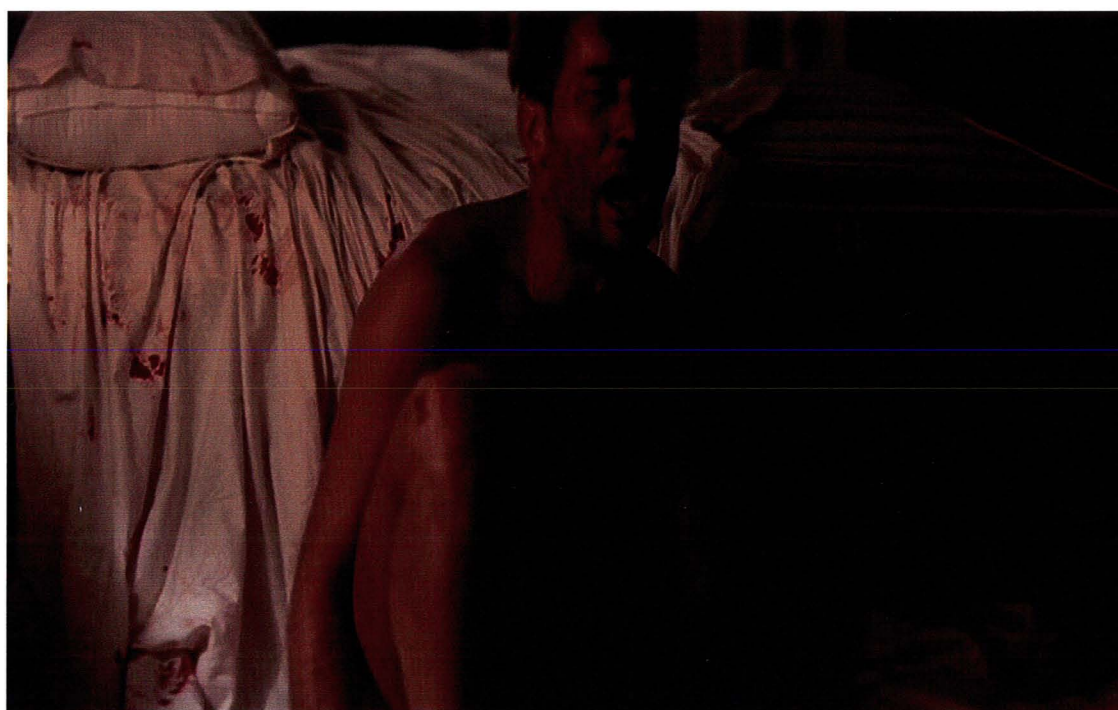
Figure 3: Willard's wounded self
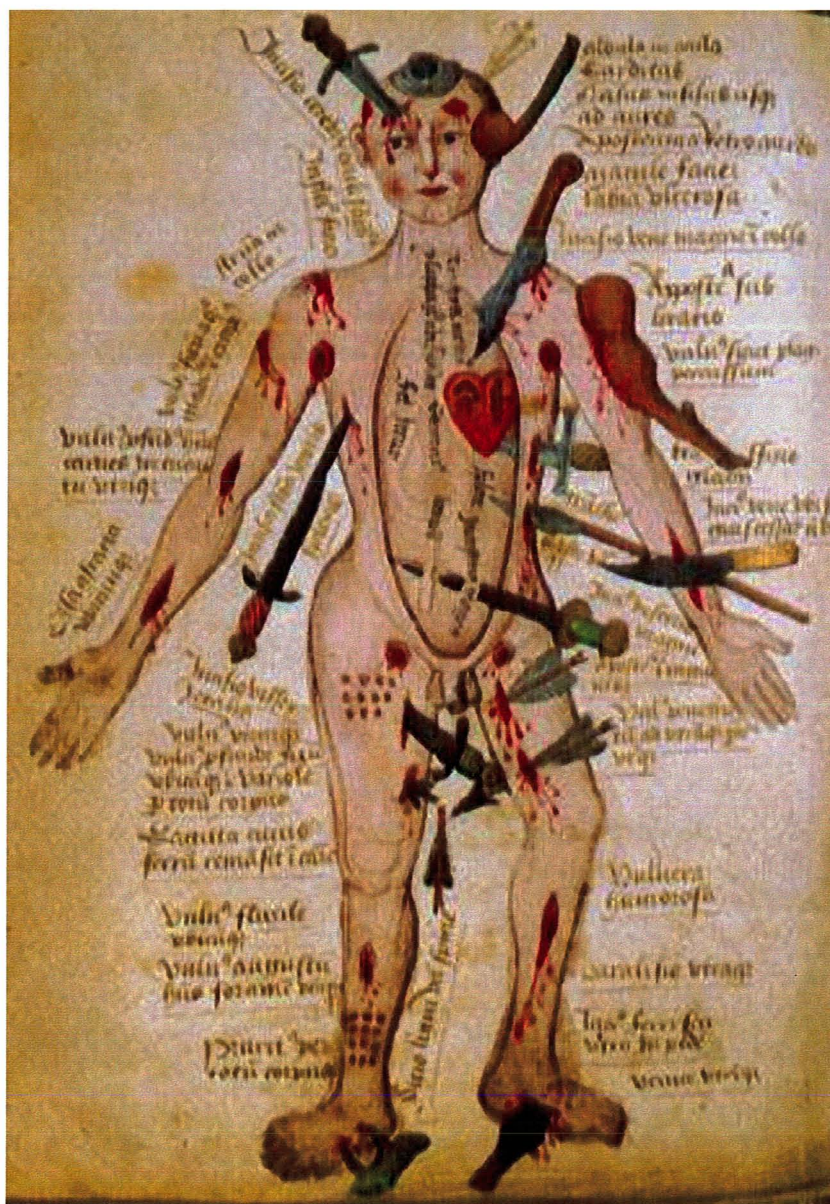
Figure 4: The curiously stoical wound man, an exemplary soldier (London, Wellcome Institute Library, MS Western 290, fol. 53v., used by permission)
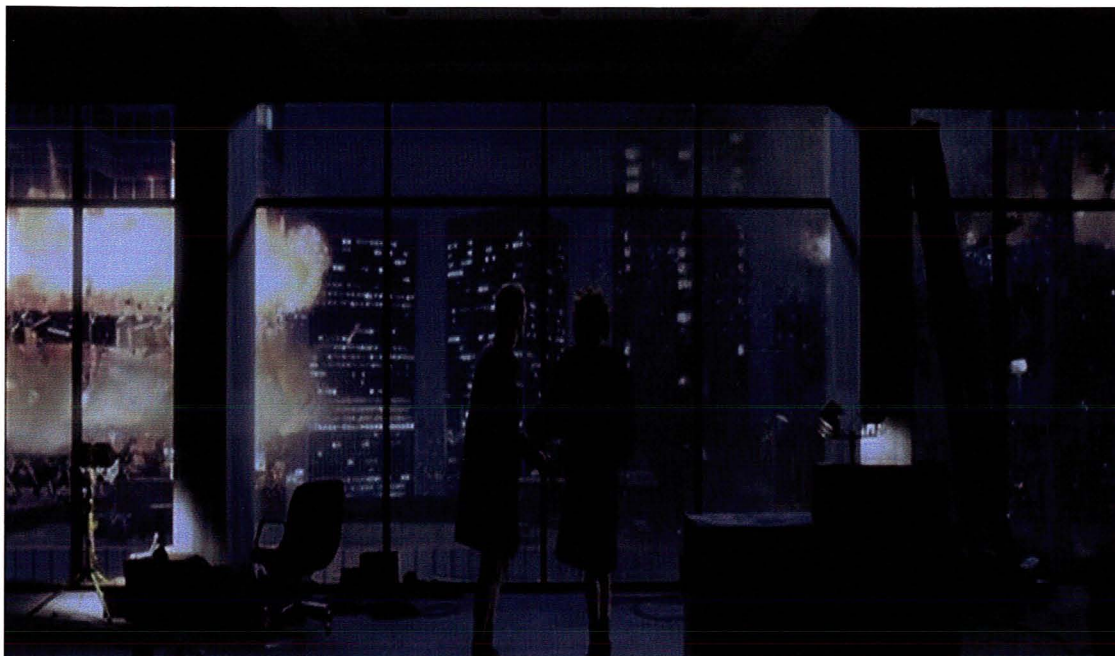
Figure 5: A few square blocks...

Figure 6: ...reduced to smouldering rubble

Figure 7: The hyperreal comes down to the discomfit of everyday reality

Figure 8: The grotesque comedy of *Army of Darknes*
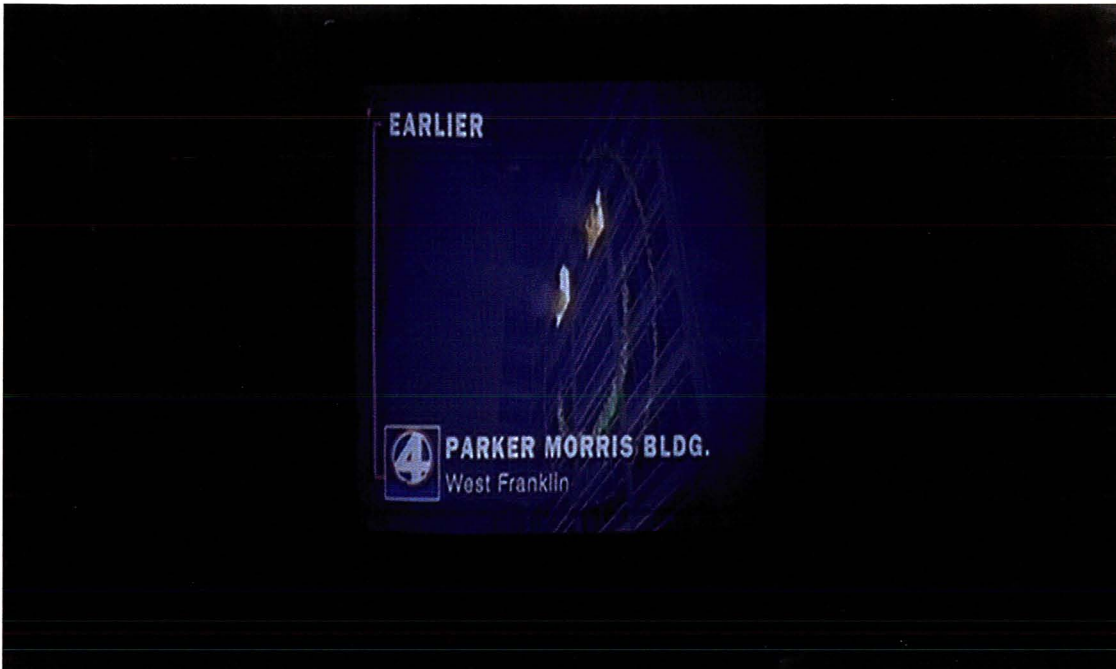
Figure 9: A childish prank writ large

Figure 10: "Is that how a man should look?"

Two

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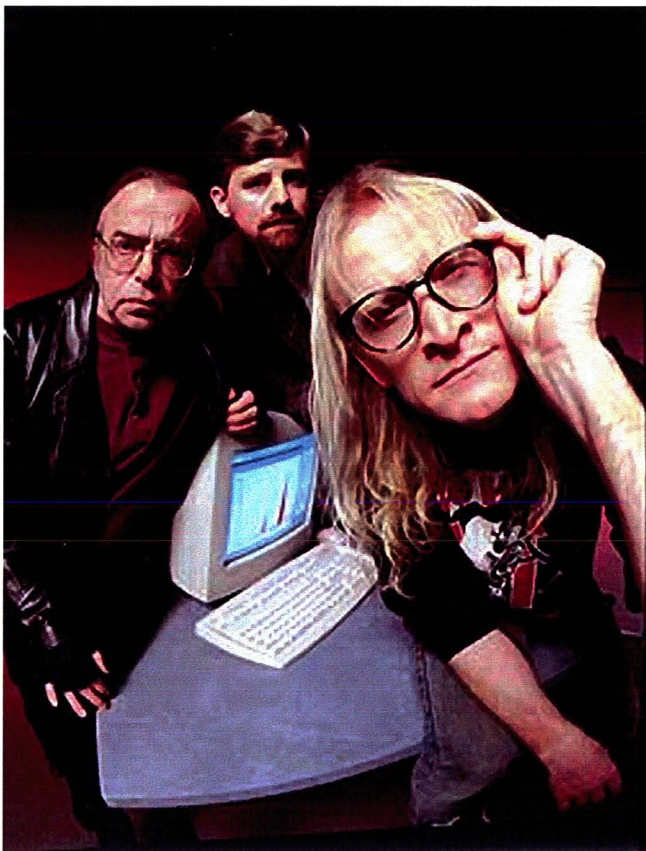
WILD MEN AND THE TERROR(ISM) OF HISTORY

In the aftermath of the September 11th "bombings," it has become more than clear that the terrorist has become the wild man of the late-twentieth/early-twenty-first centuries, against which America, as the forerunner of Western capitalistic "civilization," has spearheaded an opposition, both as a military operation and as a program whereby private citizens observe their neighbours for signs of suspicious activity. The paranoid cliché "the enemy is among us" has become a cause for national policy, now that it has been proven (once again) that the apparatuses of American civilization are inadequate to suppress the sorts of violent occurrences that are proper to other less "advanced" nations of the world. In an explosive literalization of Freud's formulation of the "uncanny," what should have remained hidden has come to light, what was homely has become less so through the use of terror. This chapter explores the parallel between terror(ism) and the wild in *The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain* and *Apocalypse Now*, especially as it relates to the theme of military violence. Accompanying this exploration is a query into the nature of a history defined by terror and violence.

Doubling back: the footwalker gets a little uncanny

One of the more detailed of Freud's illustrations of what he terms the *unheimlich*, the "uncanny," involves a personal anecdote of a peculiar pedestrian experience that finds him walking in circles. Before we resume our walk with the wild man, it behoves us to pay some attention to Freud's breath of air. He tells a little anecdote about "walking, on hot summer afternoon, through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was unknown to [him]," a stroll that soon finds him "in a quarter whose character [he] could not long remain in doubt":

> Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another *détour* at the same place yet a third time. (237)

Freud describes his "adventure" as *unheimlich* by virtue of the feelings of "helplessness" that accompany his inability to escape from his potentially embarrassing presence in this neighbourhood of undoubted (but not unquestionable) character. The series of repetitions enfetter him in a place that is not welcoming for him; the circular paths he traces overlap and bind him to the spot where the painted ladies murmur about his presence. He becomes, temporarily, the dupe of the detour, deceived by the footwalker's slow curve. It is a situation at once unsettling and comedic.[30] This chapter is about the unsettling

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[30] One may ask, too, what the nature of the excitement is Freud attributes (presumably) to the prostitutes. There is an ambiguity about how they perceive Freud's reappearances, whether it is as a potential, though somewhat shy, customer or as a pervert, a potential threat scoping out the whores as he circles.

aspects of the *unheimlich*, its terror(ism) and its relation to historicism. Its relation to comedy and ahistoricism will be the subject of the next chapter.

It is only from ground level, as an unfortunate *flâneur*, that such an adventure could occur. If, by the workaday magic of a map, Freud could fly up above his position in the questionable quarter, he would obviously have been able to escape his predicament. The winding, narrow streets of the provincial Italian town, much like those of Mumford's medieval town, the buildings on all sides preventing him from accurately determining his route, make the direct route *away* impossible. For this short time, he becomes subject to geography, rather than its master. It is walking that conditions the labyrinth, the seemingly endless detours through streets that double back on themselves, for it is through the footwalker's slow curve, and his being earthbound, that the slow succession of landmarks are allowed to emerge in space, configure and reconfigure themselves by parallax, and become deviously disorienting while promising orientation: "So, for instance, when, caught in a mist perhaps, one has lost one's way in a mountain forest, every attempt to find the marked or familiar path may bring one back again and again to one and the same spot, which one can identify by some particular landmark" (237). Thus the *unheimlich* arises when a landscape becomes wilderness. It doesn't matter if this is because of an impinging mist or the shadows between densely-packed city buildings; the wilderness occurs along with a certain degree of inhospitability, unlivability, and hence occurs just as well with an urban backdrop as a sylvan.

If the wilderness is merely a place where nobody human lives, then it is clear the parallel we can draw between the *unheimlich*, whose literal meaning in the German is,

significantly enough in this connection, "unhomely" (219n1), and the wilderness, a place where nobody makes a home. It is also, from the point of view of a civilized man who finds himself in the wilderness, that which "ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (225). Think of the common fairy-tale scenario: one or two children are trying to find their way home through the forest, but, despite their attempts at a direct route home, their meanderings through the trees lead them instead to an unhomely home, one inhabited by a witch, or bears, or wolves. The *unheimlich* is that feeling in the pits of their stomachs when they look back to discover that the route taken was not direct, the moment of realization that *this* is *not* home. At this point, the children discover that the wilderness has tricked them into the accidental discovery of a forbidden wilderness place. The scenario, as it evokes the terror of the wilderness, is designed as a step in the civilizing process by which children who hear it learn to be responsible, rational, civilized. Of course, the *unheimlich* discovery of the wilderness also works in the reverse. When the forest encroaches on the city untamed, when a schizophrenic or a wild man is found raving or lurking on the common, these are the *unheimlich* invasions of a forbidden (super)nature that offend the sensibilities of civilization.

Not one to live in fear or be duped by a nature beyond his control, the man of civilization does work to nullify these invasions. He regulates the forest with herbicides, medicates the schizo, teaches the wild man English. What he cannot make homely he casts back into the wild. The trouble is the tenacity of the *unheimlich*, since it works through recurrence, specifically, the recurrence of that which was once repressed, overcome, abjected, cultivated, in accordance with anthropocentric considerations: "the

uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). At some point the rigid structures that surround the civilized man like a knight's armour have to buckle, if only temporarily, and distinctions break down (between psychic and material, reality and fantasy, past and present, here and now, rational and animal, etc.). That which was cast away or buried will leap through those structures and harass the man inside. At some point he will double back, and accidentally stumble upon the unhomely something once left behind. A frightening supplement to the civil order, like a superfluous limb that needed to be amputated, the *unheimlich* appears by pure accident to show the *heimlich* what was much too much for it.

Call 9/11

> This is it: Ground Zero. Would you like to say a few words to mark the occasion?
> —*Fight Club*

Beginning at its narrative end, the majority of *Fight Club* is one long, disrupted flashback that finally doubles back on itself. It is thoroughly postmodern, residing in an "after" space ostensibly removed from history. It makes no reference to anything in the past, let alone anything medieval. It doesn't need to. Even Tyler Durden's evocation of a "primitive" way of living ("In the world I see, you're stalking elk through the damp canyon forest, around the ruins of Rockefeller Center") has no relation to a past. This is no "back" to nature movement; it is merely the destruction of today. It is wholly visionary, occurring immanently, just around the bend, taking hold of a potential that is only a disaster away. Its future has already happened, creating a fully enclosed

chronology. It is up to the audience to constitute the history outside this circuit, to set a context. The film is the sort of artefact that can only exist "after" everything. It is everything *post*, or *late*. At the same time, there is no future. The film closes with the collapse of the credit card buildings and the "end of financial history as we know it."[31] No new beginning, just the end. There is very little recent (mainstream) cinema that has exhibited such fatigue and been so popular. It is a film that irrupts where the things it depicts have been exhausted—consumer capitalism, masculinity (gender in general, for that matter), violence, revolution. The film is walking sleep. Never has insomnia been so fashionable.

After the collapse of the World Trade Centre on 11 September, the ending of *Fight Club* could be said to reposition itself "in the wake of" that disaster. The paradox of the Baudrillardian hyperreal occurs with the juxtaposition of the WTC collapse and the collapse of the credit card buildings witnessed by the newly-unified (in more ways than one) Jack/Tyler Durden and Marla Singer. Both images, occurring in what Baudrillard would term "a field *unhinged by simulation*" (Baudrillard 177), where convincing images of buildings exploding, collapsing, under threat, have saturated the cultural consciousness while maintaining their value as simulations, dissolve in their juxtaposition the distinction between simulation and reality to reveal, at first glance, only simulacra.[32]

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[31] In Chuck Palahniuk's novel the destruction of history is more acute; Tyler engineers the office building—repeatedly referred to as "the tallest building in the world"—to fall on the national museum below it (Palahniuk 14).

[32] It may be interesting to note that Baudrillard considers criminal violence during his discussion of simulation and the hyperreal, in "Simulacra and Simulations," in order to theorize the consequences to reality of "a perfect simulation," proposing a simulated hold up as a test: "[A] real hold up only upsets the order of things, the right of property, whereas a simulated hold up interferes with the very principle of reality. Transgression and violence are less serious, for they only contest the *distribution* of the real.

The use of CGI to depict "A few square blocks...reduced to smouldering rubble" by explosives made with soap is eerie in its similitude to the CNN replays of a few square blocks similarly reduced after an attack using an equally surprising and bizarre "homemade" bomb (see figures 5, 6, and 7). "Everything's a copy of a copy of a copy." Indeed, *Fight Club* has a near obsession with airplanes, with two montages of planes taking off and landing, Jack in airports and mid-flight, including a CGI-created sequence that takes the audience inside the torn and broken fuselage of a plummeting aircraft following a mid-air collision. At one point the airplane is the site of Tyler's "culture jamming," as in-flight safety guides are replaced with ones depicting panicking passengers and flames. A system of coincidental images arises between the film and the CNN coverage of the WTC disaster that bring the hyperreal down to the discomfit of everyday reality.[33]

Seeing the events of September 11 unfold on television, particularly because it looked so much like a Hollywood movie in its grandeur and spectacle (a point belaboured by much of the media coverage in the aftermath), was certainly an uncanny experience. This makes sense if we consider Freud's assertions that the uncanny has to do with

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are indistinct, that reality bursts onto the scene. The fake hold up Baudrillard proposes ultimately cannot succeed as a "perfect simulation" exactly because "the web of artificial signs will be inextricably mixed up with real elements (a police officer will shoot on sight; a bank customer will faint and die of a heart attack; they will really turn the phoney ransom over to you). In brief, you will unwittingly find yourself immediately in the real, one of whose functions is to devour every attempt at simulation, to reduce everything to some reality" (181). In this connection, see, too, Žižek's remarks on the WTC collapse, in "Welcome to the Desert of the Real," especially his provocative suggestion that "the 'terrorists' themselves did it not...primarily to provoke real material damage, but FOR THE SPECTACULAR EFFECT OF IT. The authentic XXth century passion to penetrate the Real Thing...through the cobweb of semblances which constitute our reality thus culminates in the thrill of the Real as the ultimate 'effect,' sought after from digitalized special effects through reality TV and amateur pornography up to snuff movies."

[33] Žižek: "One should...turn around the standard reading according to which, the WTC explosions were the intrusion of the Real which shattered our illusory Sphere...It is not reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality."

repetitions and resurgences, a "so it's true!" that remarks on an occurrence thought to be rationally impossible.[34] Watching the buildings collapse elicited its own "so it's true," tapping into all of those images tucked away from our movie-going of American landmarks exploding (*Independence Day, Deep Impact, Armageddon,* the end of the original *Planet of the Apes*) or of terrorists laying siege to a major urban centre or institution (*Under Siege, The Rock,* any *Die Hard* film, *True Lies*). So it's true that the invincible U.S. of A. might be attacked unexpectedly with no way to prevent it! The media coverage seemed somehow to double back onto those Hollywood images, tapping into that aesthetic (inadvertently?) in order to exploit, in much the same way that Hollywood does, the terror those images evoke.[35]

Re-released in the summer of 2000, *Apocalypse Now: Redux* takes up a cultural position roughly contemporaneous with *Fight Club.* Like the latter, Coppola's film creates resonances with 9/11 that make the experience of the film eminently "topical," bringing certain elements into play "after" the WTC disaster. One reviewer of the film makes the connection more than clear:

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[34] For Freud, the *unheimlich* is sometimes the result of a clash between modes of belief, most notably between rational structures of thought and superstition. "Let us take the uncanny associated with the omnipotence of thoughts, with the prompt fulfilment of wishes, with secret injurious powers and with the return of the dead…We—or our primitive forefathers—once believed that these possibilities were realities, and were convinced that they actually happened. Nowadays we no longer believe in them, we have *surmounted* these modes of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs…As soon as something *actually happens* in our lives that seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny; it is as though we were making a judgement like this: 'So, after all, it is *true* that one can kill a person by the mere wish!' or, 'So the dead *do* live on and appear on the scene of their former activities!' and so on" ("The 'Uncanny'," 247-8).

[35] Žižek: "Of course, the point is not to play a pseudo-postmodern game of reducing the WTC collapse to just another media spectacle…the question we should have asked ourselves when we stared at the TV screens on September 11 is simply: WHERE DID WE ALREADY SEE THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AGAIN?"

> Following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center (and the US-led bombing of Afghanistan), the film *can't help but take on a macabre resonance*. As an archetype Kurtz—the Magus in the jungle who sees a kind of genius in the way Vietcong soldiers are prepared to stifle their own humanity in pursuit of their aims—isn't so far removed from Osama Bin Laden, a former *de facto* US ally in his campaign against the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. (my emphasis; Macnab 42)

That *Apocalypse Now* "can't help" but resonate with the events of 9/11, more specifically, that Kurtz falls so easily into a typological congruence with Osama Bin Laden, indicates the extent to which terrorism and, more generally, catastrophe have influenced, one might say infected, the historical awareness of aesthetic representation and reception. In the months that followed the "bombings" of the Pentagon and WTC, it seemed that many Hollywood films scheduled for release couldn't help but take on a "macabre resonance" with the disaster, and had their release dates postponed: among many, *Big Trouble*, a comedy about a nuclear weapon slipped onto a plane past lazy airport security; *Collateral Damage*, which pits Schwartzenegger against dark-skinned terrorists who bomb an L.A. skyscraper; and, to more ridiculous extents, romantic comedies such as *Sidewalks of New York* and *Serendipity*, earmarked as possibly inappropriate due to their settings in New York city. Can the same macabre resonance be said to occur with six- or seven-hundred year old romances like *Gologras and Gawain* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, causing them to take up the same preposterous (in the literal sense of the word) position *after* 9/11?

A history of catastrophe

Walter Benjamin, in his aphoristic "Theses on the Philosophy of History," allegorizes history as a contemplative angel caught up in a storm of "progress" with his face turned

towards the past. But the past in his look back is of a particular nature: "Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" but the storm "irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward" (Benjamin 257-8). I would like to make it a peculiarity of this wildology to look back in the same way as Benjamin's angel of history, and see only the catastrophes of history, catastrophes wrought by the wild man. Bernheimer's wild man, who appears in force at the end of great epochs (144-5), thus comes into sharp relief as the activator of just such a history of violence (both a violent history and violence's history), initiating and destroying it in one stroke. Like Cain, that original wild man whose initial violence against Abel inaugurated a history from which urban and technological civilization arose (Gen. 4.17-22).

With all this in mind, the doubling back that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* performs in its structure, quite similar to that of *Fight Club*, takes on renewed significance. Like the film, its circular narrative closes in on the images of a ruined city. The much-belaboured first stanza describes the destruction of Troy, a "borgh brittened and brent to brondes and askes [city broken and burned to brands and ashes]" (2), as well as a certain Aeneas, "that the trammes [traps] of tresoun ther wroght" (3). Undoubtedly such "trammes of tresoun" resulting in widespread destruction would today surely fall under the charge of terrorism. What is interesting is that here this "tricherie" and the subsequent destruction of an entire civilization, an entire history, inaugurates a new

history as Aeneas's lineage descends through Romulus and Remus to Felix Brutus, the legendary founder of Britain. This new history is moreover a military one, this brief genealogy being that of so many warriors. A distinctively violent vision of the workings of history arises from this short mytho-history of the Britain our poet knew and loved, one that imagines historical events to progress by way of treacheries, plots, and catastrophes, marking the passage of time by ruins and wilderness spaces as much (or more) as monuments and cities.

When the same line that opens the poem appears at the end ("After the segge and the asaute was sesed at Troye" [2525]), right after a description of a happy, laughing Round Table, we are reminded of the latter's inevitable destruction as a result of its own various treacheries. Camelot will never resemble Troy so much as when it lies in ruins. The ominous warning at the very close, "Hony soyt qui mal pence [Evil be to he who evil thinks]" (2531), which is, of course, the motto of Edward III's order of the garter, only reaffirms the notion that the history of civilizations moves by way of treason, violence from within that lays waste to institutions, burying them beneath a wilderness while time marches onwards.[36] Such a history is its own terrorism.

Which brings us to the importance of a study of the wild man myth in today's socio-political climate. As one whose purpose is, first and foremost, to not only resist but also outright attack the sites from which the forces of the civilizing process exert their pressures, to destroy even the histories of those pressures, the wild man always conducts

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[36] The motto, of course, carries a sentiment and a censure familiar to any conservative regime. It is not unlike the thinking which effected the suppression of any and all opinions considered tendentious in the wake of September 11, to the absurd extent of even banning "politically charged" songs from the radio.

a certain terrorism. Or so we would say, firmly straddling the late-twentieth/early-twenty-first centuries. Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass write, in *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and faces of terrorism*, "we might say that 'terrorism' is the latest embodiment of an old theme—civilization locked in deadly struggle with wildness" (150). At least, that is how the particular state under the threat of terrorism re-casts the motivations behind terrorist action in order to efface its own involvement in the politics that prompt such violence. The ease with which Tyler Durden's *Iron John*-esque philosophy so quickly and easily morphs into militant terrorism implies just how much the terrorist has become the postmodern wild man, waging war on civilization. Even in its medieval form the myth of the wild man functioned, as Bartra asserts, in close proximity to "one of the most common activities of human government and misgovernment, namely war" (*Wild Men in the Looking Glass*, 109). But it was a particularly anarchistic warfare, not the result of "any infidel or perverse form of politics or religion... not exercised in the name of strange customs, pagan gods, or barbarian forms of authority or law" (110). Like the wild man's home, which is *not* a place for civilized humanity to inhabit, the wars he wages on civilization *seems* merely destructive, their only creative capacity the reestablishment of a wilderness space where it once had been tamed, a flat space that can once again be built up into cities.

The fact is terrorism, as it stands in the late-twentieth/early twenty-first centuries, is paradoxically integral to the mobilization of domestic politics, especially in North America. Zulaika and Douglass:

> Terrorism is now becoming a functional reality of American politics, an autonomous prime mover of enormous consequence affecting national

policy and legislation. This is no longer mere phantasmagoria but rather an irreducible dimension of a political ideology that profoundly affects the material reality of American society. Terrorism has been 'naturalized' into a constant risk that is omnipresent *out there*, a sort of chaotic principle always ready to strike and create havoc, and against which society must now marshall [sic] all its resources in an unending struggle. Now that it has become a prime *raison d'état*, its perpetuation seems guaranteed. (my emphasis, 238)

Terrorism thus stands as that which North American politics identify and define themselves *against*; it becomes functional as the automatic (re)definition of any political action exerted in opposition to North American statesmanship, ascribing that action to an entity that comes from "out there." Zulaika and Douglass's formulation of a "naturalized" risk from an indeterminate "out there" that nevertheless works as a prime mover for political action is very similar to Butler's arguments concerning the formative power of abjection, which she also articulates in spatial (even geographical) terms. She evokes an abject that "designates... 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the stature of the [normative] subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject" (*Bodies That Matter*, 3). The ground between these unlivable "zones" of abject subjectivity and the livable "domain" of the normative seem to become a something of a battleground, a contested space where political assertions take place: "This zone of uninhabitability... will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and life" (3). In other words, what is "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" affords vital opportunities for the declaration of what is livable and inhabitable.

Think of the warlike, yet seemingly unmotivated violence of the medieval wild man as represented in romance works in a similar way in relation to hegemonic knighthood. Bartra makes an assertion that seems especially apt in our present connection: "Wild violence was not after all a satanic or miraculous power in traditional pagan folklore but a portentous force obliging the medieval knight to model his behaviour in keeping with the chivalric code of honor" (Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass*, 110). The wild man and the knight, as well as the "uncontrolled" animal and "controlled" chivalric brands of violence that they employ respectively, are inextricably linked, doppelgangers, neither able to function without the complementary/conflicting function of the other. Like wild men from the uninhabitable forest that threaten the civilized men in the livable spaces inside cities and towns, terrorism is the monster that looms over contemporary American society. And like the knight, the embodied declaration of normative (hu)man being, whose job it was, in part, to patrol the limits of a political domain in order to assert and ensure the sanctity of civilized living against the inhabitants of the wild zones beyond, the American New Right has mobilized its resources against a foe from "out there" in order to assert and ensure the maintenance of traditional values at home. Terrorism is the evil twin in the mirror, compelling it to adopt a particular image and a certain set of codes. Terrorism is the wild body that the American body politic constructs as its adversary, the catalyst for all of its political action, which it justifies as mere *re*action to a threat.

To be two too much

> 2 TERRIFYING!
> 2 FRIGHTENING!
> 2 MUCH!
> —Tag line for *Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn*

> People do it every day. They talk to themselves. They see themselves as they like to be. They don't have the courage you have, to just run with it…Little by little, you're just letting yourself become Tyler Durden.
> —*Fight Club*

The *unheimlich* is often the result of a violence done upon civilized expectations. The terror it evokes is also a terror*ism*. Freud does not emphasize this violence, mostly because he doesn't seem to take the *unheimlich* very seriously, preferring to understand it as primarily a literary phenomenon (*"there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction that there are in real life"* [Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," 249]) or as the result of "infantile complexes" or "primitive beliefs" that are "revived" by chance, the embarrassing result of a momentary naïveté or foolish superstition. Admittedly, "The 'Uncanny'" is by no means of paramount importance in light of Freud's body of work at large, and by no means do I wish to claim otherwise.[37] At the same time, the *unheimlich* would not belong to the province of "dread" and "terror" if it were not serious business, even if those feelings are merely the result of an aesthetic effect. As the resurgence of something that *ought to have* remained secret and hidden, the subversive power of the *unheimlich* is undeniable as that which breaks a juridical proscription to obscurity. Think

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[37] Despite the subsequent interest in the uncanny for literary criticism and certain specialized branches of critical and cultural theory (namely: monster theory and cyborg studies), Freud's confession that "It is only rarely that a psycho-analyst feels impelled to investigate the subject of aesthetics" (219) firmly establishes his own interest as a passing fancy. Indeed, the *Standard Edition* lumps it under the "and Other Works" rubric.

again of the knight's armour as a metaphor for civilizing structures. After all, the knight's armour, or, perhaps more correctly, the knight who wears it, is animal violence moulded into the shape of a man. In order to make use of that violence, the knight binds it, controls it through the technology of the suit and the weapons he wields. But the morphological constraints put upon that beastliness do not change its function, only how the deployment of that function is adorned and performed, its aesthetic and its theatricality within a military setting. The figure of the wild man reminds us of the beastly morphology normally repressed by an anthropocentrism concerned with maintaining its own good image as more rational than animal. When he is depicted as engaged in war, he moreover belies the secret alliance between warrior and beast that allows the beast its freedom on the battlefield, on the condition of its tactical restraint in other more "refined" settings. The wild man, thus conceived, is clearly conditioned by a predominant militarism, the allegory of a wary state or social apparatus suspicious of the war machine it has at its behest. He acts out the monstrous scenario wherein the war machine slips out of state control. He is the beast of human violence that finds freedom of expression away from the battlefield. The animal gets loose in the house, making it particularly unhomely. In short, the wild triumphs when it is too much for civilization.

There is a doubling that occurs when the wild man and the knight meet, as the former expresses the violence that is at the disposal of the latter. Though the critical consensus has been that the wild man lives a life of solitude or, at most, in packs of other wild men, it is obvious that he cannot exist without being paired with civilized man. At the very least, he is unintelligible without the contrast his civilized counterpart, in all his

coherence and restraint, provides. The wild man may be individuated, solitary in that he cannot identify with any group to establish a politics or participate in the gigantic body of a socius, preferring to retain his tinyness, but his aesthetic dictates that he not be alone. Indeed, it would seem that the theme of the double is integral to that of the wild man, casting him as an especially *unheimlich* figure. For the *unheimlich*, which works primarily through repetition, resurgence, "the constant recurrence of the same thing" (Freud, "The Uncanny'," 234), piles instances on top of one another or assembles discreet elements together, but does not make a unity, ensuring that the excess is recognizable. It is obvious that the wild man, acting without restraint, reaching out (violently) beyond acceptable limits again and again, is a subjectivity *in excess* of the norm—out there, too much.

After all, the wild man has always been there to represent the parts of man that civilization shed in order to delimit its boundaries—his very being is presupposed by the civilized man and the work of exclusion and abjection the latter does in order to feign his own coherence. As an *unheimlich* resurgence of the excluded and abjected, as the embodiment of being out there and too much, as the civilized man's double, the wild man heralds a grotesque becoming. His appearance reminds the civilized man of the impossibility of the coherence civilized man pretends to, that the individuality of the "civilized" subject is in fact not so indivisible after all, that it, in fact, is always already divided, caught between realized and potential multiplicities of selves. "In fact, the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities. Each multiplicity is defined by a borderline functioning as Anomalous" write Deleuze and Guattari (*A*

Thousand Plateaus, 249). At each defining moment of this becoming of the self, something is shed while there is something yet to come. The becoming self is thus defined by a knowledge that cuts, that amputates.

The double can be understood as a peculiar manifestation of the gigantic body-in-pieces, a (psychic) body and a selfhood in excess of itself such that it needs to express itself as more than one (corporeal) body. When stripped naked, shown to be a "body in the act of becoming," it is revealed at the same time to be like the grotesque body of Bakhtin's giants: "It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and *builds and creates another body*" (my emphasis; Bakhtin 317). The wild man is the body that is shorn away and left behind in that creation. He is a body in excess, out of control, the one that was left behind because it was too much to fit through the door. He gets his revenge by returning as this symbol of what was abjected in the grotesque process of becoming, contesting his banishment, which, if nothing else, reveals the grotesquery of his selfhood to force the civilized man to witness the effects of his own self-cultivation, to experience the monstrosity by which he constitutes the fantasy of his coherent, unified imago.[38] Just like Jack, whose doubling into Jack/Tyler, whose becoming-Tyler "little by little," is his becoming all the things he had cast away in order to define the limits of his yuppie subjectivity. As Jack engages in that becoming, he must also become monstrous, in excess of himself and in conflict with himself. And he couches this conflict in terms of history and war, a history defined by wars and

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[38] Peter L. Thorslev Jr., "The Wild Man's Revenge": "The Wild Man...takes his revenge on the civilized man...by standing as a symbol for what we have lost or what we have repressed in becoming civilized" (286).

catastrophes. In the absence of enemies "out there," the doubling occurs, and there is a

war with the self ("We are the middle children of history…Our Great War is a spiritual

war. Our great depression is our lives").

Men of war

The man of war has an entire becoming that implies multiplicity, celerity, ubiquity, metamorphosis and treason, the power of affect. Wolf-men, bear-men, wildcat-men, men of every animality, secret brotherhoods, animate the battlefields…And together they spread contagion.
—Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 243

Neither "wild man", nor "knight" are stable terms, for each draws upon the other for confirmation of its identity. And, as the two sides skirmish, the boundary between them becomes fluid, and is re-invented as a site of play.
—Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human*, 169

In the context of a military conflict, in which there *are* enemies out there, a strange

doubling occurs specific to the military man, the man of war, by virtue of the wounds that

he sustains and inflicts. Merback suggests that the wound functions to incite a strange

becoming between bodies through the empathy that pain can invite: "[T]he wounded

body of our vision somehow ceases to be *that* body and becomes, in an uncanny way, *our*

body as well" (Merback 113). In a struggle between enemies, this uncanny becoming

between bodies would logically flow in both directions. In his struggle with the enemy,

the man of war enters into a becoming with the enemy, or perhaps more correctly, with

the animality of the enemy: that animal violence that the state ascribes to the actions of its

opponent, but never to the violence enacted in its own name, which is purely a defensive

retaliation, always human and good. In their mutual wounding, mutual enemies become

doubles of one another. Recall the final scenes of *Apocalypse Now*, in which Willard slaughters Kurtz with a machete, a subtle echo of the opening scene in which Willard shatters his mirror image. Being immersed in the "out there," the wilderness space wherein Coppola's Vietnam War is fought, Kurtz becomes his enemy in order to defeat them, and, likewise, Willard becomes Kurtz in order to defeat *him*. In the confusion of the wilderness, their narratives align: "It was no mistake that I got to be caretaker of Colonel Walter E. Kurtz's memory...There is no way to tell his story without telling my own. And if his story is really a confession, then so is mine."[39] The effect of these doublings is ultimately the dissolution of boundaries, not only those between selfhoods, but between the moral and ethical boundaries in place to maintain distinctive selves.

The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain is also about this confusion between enemy and ally. The climactic battle between the poem's namesakes reaches a crescendo with just such a doubling: "Thai mallit on with malice, thay myghtyis in mude,/ Mankit throu mailyeis, and maid thame to mer;/ Wraithly wroght, as thai war witlese and wod [They struggled on with malice, they (were) mighty in spirit, maimed through mail, and made them (i.e. the links) to break; wrathfully reckless, as they were witless and wild" (*Gologras and Gawain*, 1012-14).[40] The two in their mutual pummelling are indistinguishable, mirror images. His enemy becomes his double, the wounded other in the mirror ("the wounded body becomes our body as well"). The wilderness that serves as a site for war is a disruptive space that loosens the men that fight there from state

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[39] This doubling is of a sort that Freud indicates is marked by a self in doubt, when a subject "identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own" (234).

[40] All the translations of *Gologras and Gawain* are my own, though with substantial guidance from the glosses as provided by Hahn in his collection of Gawain romances.

sponsorship, making them "witlese and wod," causing their (political) identities as state citizens to disintegrate, and their alliances to jump from the structures of the state to the movements of war itself, leaving in place of those former identities the wild man of war. It is to the men of war and the wilderness spaces they inhabit that I would like to turn, with reference to *Apocalypse Now* and *Gologras and Gawain*, which are both interesting in their ambiguous enjoyment and suspicion of the quasi-epic, military heroism they depict.

Possibly the most overtly militaristic of English Gawain romances, *Gologras and Gawain* is a something of an Illiadic tale about the siege of Gologras's castle and the trickery that wins the day. Due to its relative unfamiliarity, I shall provide a brief summary of its action. The main narrative begins when Arthur happens by Gologras's castle during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and is told by Sir Spynagros that "Yone lord haldis of nane leid [Yonder lord holds (his land) through no liege (lord)]" (262). Arthur is appalled, and, despite warnings of the latter's ferocity and the danger to his own men, he swears, "Sall never my likame be laid unlaissit to sleip,/ Quhill I have gart yone berne bow [Never shall my body be laid to sleep unlaced (i.e., without armour), till I have gotten yonder knight to bow down]" (294-5). Gologras's stance outside of the feudal order is clearly unacceptable. As a rogue, without any allegiances, he is a potential threat, free to act on his own politics. Arthur and his knights continue to the Holy Land (a merely-spiritual narrative that fittingly lasts only two or three lines [302-3]) and then "buskit [hastened] hame the samye way that he before yude [went]" (304) in order to begin the fight. Gawain is sent to convince Gologras that Arthur, "the raillest Roy,

reverend and rike [the kingliest king, reverend and powerful]" (402), seeks his "grant for to get [submission to receive]" (427), and that it would be to his (Gologras's) benefit to give himself over. Gologras is courteous, offering "all my pane to do hym plesance,/ Baith with body and beild, bowsum and boun [all my pain to please him, both bodily and materially, friendly and eager]" (444-5), but, as expected, will not bend his back to any man for fear of conflict (448-9). And the siege begins.

It is a long a bloody conflict that results in several deaths on both sides through a series of duels that finally culminate in the lengthy duel between the rogue knight and our hero as representative champions for each side. For much of the battle, the two are each other's equal, inflicting so much damage on one another that they become indistinguishable. Finally, however, Gawain gets the upper hand, and, knife-to-throat, once more asks his opponent to surrender. And once more, Gologras is obstinate and, like the chivalric subject with the prickly sense of honour he is, thinks it "farar to dee,/ Than schamyt be, verralie,/ And sclander to byde [fairer to die than be shamed, truly, and bide slander]" (1035-7). He will not compromise his renown by accepting the gifts Gawain offers (of a dukedom and all the riches that come with it [1068-72]) in exchange for life without his sovereign freedom. Gawain is impressed. It would seem that they share the chivalric ethos that places shame on a man "that mare luffis his life than lois upone erd [that loves more his life than renown upon earth]" (1078). In that moment, the tension between shame and death gives way under Gawain's own respect for, even worship of, prowess and renown, and he decides there must be some way to preserve Gologras's honour as well as his life.

This they accomplish by a "devis [a well-devised plan, a charade]" (1095). Gologras suggests that Gawain pretend to be taken in battle and allow himself to be led into the former's castle, a trickery that Gawain almost immediately accedes to, at obvious risk to himself, and in full knowledge of the extent to which it could be a treasonous action, fatal to those who rely on him as champion: "To leif in thi lauté, and thow war unlele,/ Than had I cassin in cair mony kene knight [(If I were) to live on your loyalty, and you were untrue, then had I encased in care many a brave knight]" (1107-8). They stage the rest of the fight and Gawain allows himself to be taken to Gologras's castle, where he is shown all the hospitality that the castle has to offer. At supper, Gologras tells his court what has befallen between himself and Gawain: that the outcome of their duel was a trick and he has actually been captured by the latter, who has graciously agreed to this charade in order to save his honour. He invites the court to decide what is to become of their lord, and, consequently, the political standing of their realm: whether they give him up as honourably lost to the battle, or keep him on despite his defeat. Ultimately, they decide that they would prefer to keep him as their lord, even if it means his sworn allegiance, and thus his subordination, to Arthur.

Thus Gawain's impeccable courtesy to a fellow knight and his use of that courtesy as a military strategy, wins the day. This laudable respect given to one's opponent is a warrior's ethos, not that of a statesman. The action that Gologras and Gawain take together is that of two men of war repudiating affiliation to any state apparatus. It is eminently "Knightly," as the poem's title suggests, but knightly in a military sense; it is chivalry at its most tactical. They form an affinity and a friendship

through battle in the interest of upholding each other's honour as well as for their mutual tactical advantage. Gologras later remarks: "Quhen my lyfe and my dede [death] wes baith [both] at thi will,/ Thy frendschip freely I fand [found]" (1215-16). The time between the initialization of their pact and Gologras's official supplication to Arthur is by no means a cessation of their duel, but its continuation by other means. When Arthur finally hears of the whole affair, he reminds everyone of the danger that continued to threaten Gawain's life during the whole of his stay with Gologras: "Had only prejudice apperit [appeared] in the partyce [party (i.e. Gologras's)],/ It had bene grete perell" (1305-6). Neither enemies nor allies, they stand in a wild place where the terms are entirely at play, quite outside the enemy/ally structure erected by the state at war.

Apocalypse Now is less subtle in its disruption of the civilized structures a state attempts to maintain in a time of war. When the Willard's COs brief him on his upcoming mission to "terminate" Kurtz and his command, the general stages the mission on a starkly ethical battleground. The general suggests that the mission has a metaphysical aspect to it, which is to re-establish a sense of stable, somewhat Manichean ethics and morals in the "out there" space that Kurtz has taken up, where things are definitely not stable:

> Well, you see, Willard, in this war things get confused out there. Power, ideals, the old morality, and practical military necessity. But out there with these natives, it must be a temptation to be God. Because there's a conflict in every human heart, between the rational and the irrational, between good and evil, and good does not always triumph. Sometimes the dark side overcomes what Lincoln called the better angels of our nature. Every man has got a breaking point. You and I have them. Walt Kurtz has reached his. And very obviously he has gone insane…He's out there operating without any decent restraint, totally beyond the pale of any acceptable human conduct.

Being "out there with these natives," having himself "gone native" so to speak, away

from any semblance of civilization, has caused Kurtz's "methods" to become "unsound"

in terms of the general's rigid ethics of waging war. Kurtz has been set firmly on one

side of a set of binaries—native/American; rational/irrational; good/evil—that the men of

state have established. Though two of the three men are officers, a colonel and a general,

they are not quite men of war; instead they are representatives of the military

bureaucracy, the state apparatus in place to help regulate the war machine it sponsors

exactly through this establishment of binaries, which codify military action in terms of a

dialectical set that ultimately reduces issues to one *a priori*: enemy/ally.[41]

But, as Dorothy Yamamoto has pointed out, in the wilderness ground that divides

the wild man and his civilized, soldierly counterpart (whether chivalric knight or US

special forces operative) "becomes fluid, and is reinvented as a site of play" (Yamamoto

169). The wilderness is a special space that is both battleground and playground.[42]

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[41] I feel I must further qualify the depiction of the three "men of state" as I've called them, especially as regards the man wearing the white shirt and tie, referred to only as "Jerry" by the general (the actor's actual name) and "Civilian" in the credits. This man, whose only spoken lines—"Terminate with extreme prejudice"—answer Willard's question of whether his order to "terminate" Kurtz's command is in fact an order to terminate Kurtz, takes on special significance considering the secretive nature of Willard's mission. Saying nothing except the speech act that prefigures the brutal slaughter of Kurtz, he is the guardian of secrets, a representative of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a "secret hindsociety" that accompanies any secret society, "which either perceives the secret, protects it, or metes out punishment for its disclosure" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 287). Though the two officers who give Willard his mission, especially the general, codify the mission in terms of a moral conflict, the actual nature of the conflict seems to have something to do with ensuring secrets. Indeed, Kurtz's repeated accusations of the US military's bad faith ("What do you call it when the assassins accuse the assassin?"; "[T]here's nothing more I detest than the stench of lies") seem to be most threatening by the end of the film, not his reputed insanity. The termination of Kurtz has more to do with silencing his philosophy of war, stifling the secrets that he seems to know, than with any "decency."

[42] Drawing inspiration, in part, from Willard's sardonic comment that the Vietnam conflict was being led by "a bunch of four-star clowns who were going to wind up giving the whole circus away," Michael Bellamy, in "Carnival and Carnage: Falling Like Rock Stars and Second Lieutenants," discusses the ways in which the carnivalesque has influenced representations of the Vietnam war. He suggests that

Things get confused out there. Pre-coded, molar binaries no longer hold when it comes to the wild man as man of war. Willard is sent off to execute Kurtz on a charge of murder, having taken "matters into his own hands" in the assassination of four Vietnamese intelligence agents, whom he believed to be double agents. Willard finds this charge highly suspect from the very outset ("Charging a man with murder in this place is like handing out speeding tickets at the Indy 500"), and especially so when he finds evidence that, following the assassinations Kurtz orders, "Enemy activity in his old sector dropped off to nothing," concluding, "Guess he must have hit the right four people." Kurtz gets wild when he goes rogue, detaching his war machine from the state, becoming a god, the all-American God of wildness, fighting the war as a nomadic warrior and not as the representative of a state. He has enemies, but his enemies are determined by a pedestrian logic, around the next bend and in succession, chosen as the tactical threats of those enemies become apparent, not necessarily as the result of any *a priori* codification. "He and his men were playing hit and run all the way into Cambodia." It is an animalistic way of waging war, seemingly random, but effective, on a small but highly tactical scale, "playing hit and run," opposing individual threats instead of a conglomerate Enemy.

"[M]ultiplicity, celerity, ubiquity, metamorphosis and treason, the power of affect": these are the qualities that characterize the becoming-animal of the man of war, according to Deleuze and Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 243). This is how Kurtz fights

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this phenomenon is symptomatic of a "Puritan" repression of carnival that is traditional to America, a repression that was sublimated into fighting wars: "Both wars and carnivals involve 'lifting off the corner of the universe and looking at what's underneath.' We might rather say, given the American tendency to repress traditional carnival, that the pressure built up and blew the lid off" (Bellamy, 22).

his war, all broken up, tiny and therefore fast, able to be everywhere, burrowing into enemy territory like an animal, betraying those whom it is tactically fit to betray. In a letter to his son that Willard reads in his dossier, Kurtz speaks of taking "ruthless action—what is often called ruthless, but what may in many circumstances be only clarity—seeing clearly what there is to be done and doing it, directly, quickly, awake" (*Apocalypse Now*). This is the "power of affect." And while the term "affect" for Deleuze and Guattari refers not to "a personal feeling," but to "an ability to affect and be affected," a "prepersonal intensity...implying an augmentation or diminution in [a] body's capacity to act" (Massumi xvi), I would argue that the power of affect refers both to this capacity to act as well as to the more usual usage that denotes a personal feeling. For the colonel's "unsound" methods, his wild ways of fighting the war, which he learns by the example of his enemies, have the effect of spreading fear ("The VC knew his name by now, and they were scared of him" [*Apocalypse Now*]). And it is this fear that is most quick, ubiquitous, treacherous, contagious.

Indeed, during Kurtz's ramblings on his philosophy of war that he addresses to Willard, he meditates at some length on horror and terror. "I've seen the horrors—the horrors that you've seen...It's impossible for words to describe what is necessary to those who do not know what horror means. Horror. Horror has a face, and you must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral terror are your friends, and if they are not, they are enemies to be feared. They are truly enemies." He tells Willard that he has no right to call him a murderer, that he has no right to make the ethical judgement the charge implies because his alliance with horror and the terrorism that he wreaks are "necessary." This

claim echoes the concept of "military necessity" of which the general speaks earlier in the film, but suggests that a different understanding of necessity is required in the wilderness, where the war is fought with an element of play. Horror demands this revision of necessity, demands that the war machine employ terrorism, for committing to warfare is to commit to the wilderness that is battleground and playground, to reach the breaking point at which what is human falls away and what is animal returns. At this point, violence becomes most honest: when it is no longer human violence.

In a file from Kurtz's dossier, Willard reads, "As long as our officers and troops perform tours of duty limited to one year, they will remain dilettantes in war and tourists in Vietnam. As long as cold beer, hot food, rock and roll, and all the other amenities are the expected norm, or conduct of the war will gain only impotence." Brief close-ups of the document show that it continues thus (in part):

> The wholesale and indiscriminate use of firepower will only increase the effectiveness of the enemy and strengthen their resolve to prove the superiority of an agrarian culture against the world's greatest technocracy... The central tragedy of our effort in this conflict has been the confusion of sophisticated technology with human commitment. Our bombs may in time destroy the geography, but they will never win the war...

Kurtz calls out for something less technological, less domestic, less civilized: what one might call "primitive" or "atavistic." The technological warfare of this vision is like the rage of a huge, impersonal giant, one that wages a war against a landscape viewed from above, as a map, sets of coordinates, rather than against men. A leviathan that sweeps its sword across the wilderness in an attempt to flatten everything. Think of the napalm strike Kilgore orders—"Smells like... victory!"—a victory that won from a stationary

position, far away, from the giant's vantage point, and thus entirely indiscriminate. Indeed, the napalm explosion is filmed from a position high above the ground. The enemy, invisible to Kilgore's or even the audience's point of view, is a large-scale area to be eradicated instead of men behind trees or burrowed into crags. But the mobility of those men, the innumerable trees and crags, their irreducibility to the map, which is the giant's representation, diminishes the affective power of a giant's strike. In *Gologras and Gawain*, for instance, though Arthur and his men break out the "Pellokis paisand to pase [Cannonballs heavy to place]" and "Gapand gunnys of brase [Gaping guns of brass]" (463-4), the relatively new use of artillery contemporaneous with the poem's publication in 1508, the battle is won and lost through a series of man-to-man duels.

Kurtz's commitment to horror and terror, pure affect (in both senses of the term), dissolve any structuring principles behind war action. It is the animality of the extrinsic war machine, removed from a state and its juridical ethics: "You have to have men who are moral, but able to utilize their primordial instincts to kill, without feeling, without passion, without judgement—without judgement. Because it's judgement that defeats us." It is the assignation of sets of ethics, of ideology and reasoning to the violence of war and the judgement of certain uses of violence against those structures that is most monstrous for Kurtz in its hypocrisy. The humanization of what is most bestial, the attempt to restrain it through technological and rhetorical mediation, the pacification of the animal with the comforts of home, only prolongs the violence with the deception of effectiveness (the "stench of lies" that he so detests). At conflict between the stately militarism endorsed by the general and what could be called the terrorism of Kurtz's

primordial men of war is, in the end, a difference of moral stance in line with the concept of commitment of which he speaks. Fighting in direct response to enemy action, adopting the enemy's likeness and position, becoming his double and fighting him from the other side of the mirror, acceding to his terms (which may involve forging a friendship): this involves a commitment to the war machine that exceeds commitment to the state apparatus. For the war machine, the defeat and capture of the enemy that it hates but, at the same time, reveres, by swift, direct, and honest means, dictates its only morals. The man of war is dedicated only to waging wars; his victory and the peace it brings are only a means to other wars, like a terrorist whose pre-emptive strike serves only to goad a military state to war.[43] Far from recent, this cycle is more than apparent in the tradition of Arthurian romance of which *Gologras and Gawain* is exemplary. Arthur is a man of state when he acts against Gologras in order to promote the feudal economy and its codes; but he is never more a man of war than when he declares war merely for the sake of picking a fight, causing some trouble (at Arthur's decision to provoke Gologras, Spynagros tells him, "Your mycht and your majesté mesure but mys [your might and your majesty measure only mischief" [*Gologras and Gawain*, 291]). For the man of war is committed absolutely to promoting history by enacting a series of treasons, catastrophes, and necessary horrors.

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[43] See Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "You should love peace as a means to new wars. And the short peace more than the long" (74).

The horror! The horror!: the terror of being left behind

It's interesting to note that, after all the trouble that Arthur and his cronies go to in order to elicit supplication from Gologras—the deaths on both sides, the mortal peril that one of his very best knights, Gawain, voluntarily puts himself through to gain the victory— the king lets his new vassal off the hook, announcing, "Heir mak I the reward, as I have resoune...I make releisching of thin allegiance [Here, as I have reason, I make thy reward...I release [you] of thine allegiance" (*Gologras and Gawain*, 1354-8). He leaves the knight as anomalous as he was found, if not something of a monstrosity, then a marvel for sure—a knight without a lord! "Herd thair ever ony sage sa selcouth ane saw! [Was there any man ever heard so marvelous a saying!]" Arthur exclaims when he first hears of Gologras's lack of allegiance (266). A formidable knight, but absolute, singular, Gologras is not included among the knights of Camelot, who march along to the next adventure, leaving their new friend behind. For those of us suspicious of the post-colonial colonialism of globalization, this ending is quite agreeable, though something of a surprise considering romance's penchant for ending with inclusion and unity. But what do we make of this aberration from the conventions of romance narratology?

The poem just leaves it at that, with Gologras's release, without anything said either way as to how he perceives this gift of Arthur's. One may assume that he is pleased, once again returned to the state of free sovereignty that he enjoyed before the Brits arrived. His renown and honour as a free agent, so to speak, are intact. However, when one considers the relatively unheralded status of the poem in the history of English literature, Gologras being left behind by the Camelot knights takes on something of a

different significance. The adventures of Gologras do not perpetuate. His honour, though laudably maintained through his insistence on individuation, his differentiation from the feudal economy that could have attached him to the Arthurian court, is at the same time not augmented by that of the Round Table. He does not become part of their socius, remaining outside, anomalous, somewhere in the wilderness *between* the national and spiritual homes of Britain and Jerusalem respectively. The individuation that he retains is, unfortunately, obscured by the giantism of Arthurian legend—just one more adventure among thousands of others.

At work in this reading is an irreconcilable tension between mytho-typological and historical time. Gologras and the poem he inhabits thus become metaphors for what is most terrifying about individuation, because the individual inhabits a history that is relentlessly linear and progressive, the history of catastrophe that successively and accidentally builds and lays to waste all that it builds. It must be noted that these successive catastrophes do not form a typology. Purely destructive, they are not ritualized, burying what was to make way for what is now, a now that creates its past in its own image. This is the cause of the sorrow that Benjamin's angel of history feels, that its look back is only upon catastrophe, that nothing prevails through the ages, that the pure accident of time destroys everything that is unique in an instant and that the storm called progress (Benjamin 258) prevents any resuscitation.

Doubling back on *SGGK*, we can see the tensions at work upon our hero, how the becoming he undergoes in that text subject him to a fate similar to that of Gologras. For though in his return to the Round Table from his adventure with the Green Knight he is

immediately reintegrated within the court, something has happened to him out in the "Wylde ways in the worlde" (*SGGK*, 2479) that makes his return something of a painful one and his reintegration not quite complete. Martin B. Shichtman's work on *SGGK* and what he dubs the "terror of history" explores just this tension between typology and history. He reads the court at Camelot from which Gawain departs and to which he returns again as representative of a "traditional" being in history, a ritualized, cyclical process of renewal through "eternal returns."[44] Gawain himself begins as a so-called "traditional man," belonging to a collective body of chivalric subjects (Shichtman 4-5). A knight of Camelot, his subjectivity is fully constituted by his identification with the court. Indeed, in a telling example of Gawain's nobly humble speech (for which we discover he is famous for upon his arrival at Hautdesert [*SGGK*, 915ff]) he claims to be "the wakkest [weakest]...and of wyt feeblest" (354), further attributing any honour he holds to his Uncle Arthur: "Bot for as much as ye [Arthur] are myn em [uncle], I am only to prayse" (356). And though the renown that apparently precedes him to Bercilak's court indicates something to the contrary, this modest self-deprecation on Gawain's part is indicative of the typological subjectivity at work in Camelot, its knights deriving their chivalric identities from something of an archetypal original—Arthur. A ritual performativity predicated on a "do as I do" uttered by the king who dictates the conduct of all rituals. The poet depicts at the poem's very outset a rather petulant Arthur directing

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[44] In formulating his own theories on the terror of history, Shichtman quotes from Mircea Eliade's book, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*: "For traditional man, the imitation of an archetypal model is a reactualization of the mythical moment when the archetype was revealed for the first time....We have seen that all rituals imitate a divine archetype and that their continued reactualization takes place in one and the same atemporal mythical moment...Every construction is an absolute beginning; that is, tends to restore the initial instant, the plenitude of a present that contains no trace of history" (Eliade, qtd. in Shichtman 4).

the Christmas festivities, never eating till all were served, but also not eating on such a "dere day [dear day, ie, a serious occasion]" until he has been entertained, "devised were/ Of sum aventurus thing an uncouthe tale,/ Of sum mayn mervayle that he might trawe,/ Of aldered, of armes of other aventurus [told an uncouth tale of some adventurous thing, of some great marvel that he might believe, of princes, of arms, or of other adventures]" (92-5), or possibly treated to the spectacle of a joust (96ff). The rituals described by Arthur's wishes, occurring moreover at Christmas and on the eve of the new year, the court itself "in her first age" (54), function to (re)renew the tradition of chivalric subjectivity, a (re)rebirth of all the Camelot knights (as denizens of romance, as worshippers of prowess) brought about by the (re)citation of feats of arms set down in romances (as speech acts?), and by the semi-theatrical performance of arms in the jousts and tournaments. "Eternal returns" to a transcendental, originary knighthood.

At stake for Shichtman in the course of the poem, in fact, from the very arrival of the gigantic Green Knight at line 136ff, is the status of individuality: "[T]he eternal returns, which kept 'traditional man' comfortably ensconced in the past, also, by necessity, served to suppress his sense of individuality. His identity was subsumed in the rituals of the community, rituals which demanded only the repetition of certain paradigmatic acts or gestures" (Shichtman 5). The Green Knight disrupts the Christmas festivities, its traditional conduct, not only by barging in unexpectedly, but with the proposition of his strange Christmas "gomen," involving an exchange of blows by a massive axe, one to be delivered to himself now, and the retaliatory blow in one year's time at his "chapel." Of course it is Gawain who accepts the challenge, and deals a blow

that results in the Green Knight's famous beheading. Indeed, it is the Green Knight's corporeality, made grotesque in this instance but emphasized throughout his appearance that really exacerbates the tension between individuation and tradition. This is immediately clear to Shichtman (as to many critics) by the sheer amount of poetry the author devotes to the Green Knight's appearance (85 lines, by his count) compared to the paltry nods to the mere names of those knights present, a discrepancy that immediately ensures "the Green Knight appears as an individual standing before a collective body" (9). Not until fitt two, in which Gawain departs from Camelot to find the Green Knight's chapel, does the poet give any visceral attention to the protagonist, and even then he seems to be only armour with no meaty insides, the pentangle blazoned on his shield the only marker to differentiate him from other knights.[45] It is this pentangle, an "endeles knot" (*SGGK*, 630) symbolic of all the ways he is the perfection of knightliness, whose ideal proves to be unattainable and precipitates the shame that heralds Gawain's confrontation with the terror of history.

The overdetermination of the pentangle as "a syngne that Salamon set sumquyle/ In bytoknyng of trawthe [a sign that Solomon set somewhile (ago) in the betokening of truth (or troth)]" (625-6) proves in the end to be too much for our hero when his devotion to "trawthe" comes into conflict with the love he has for his own life. It is exactly by way of the logic of too much that Gawain finds himself into trouble in the first place. When, in the final stage of the Christmas "gomen" that Gawain pledged himself to, the

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[45] See Kinney, "The (Dis)Embodied Hero and the Signs of Manhood in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," for a discussion of Gawain's corporeal journey from disembodied to embodied. I discuss her observation in more detail in chapter 3.

Green Knight reveals himself to be in fact that same Bercilak at whose castle Gawain has been passing the last few days, it all falls apart. This sudden doubling is a crushing blow to Gawain since, upon arriving at Hautdesert, he promised to engage in another game with Bercilak involving an exchange of the days winnings, one which implicates the lord's wife as she sneaks into Gawain's room each morning, while her husband is off hunting, to bestow kisses upon our hapless hero and, in one instance, a green girdle, apparently with the power save him from harm in his upcoming encounter with the Green Knight. This promise he fails to fulfill in its entirety. For, while he exchanges the kisses he receives with his host, he does not exchange the gift of the green girdle that lady Bercilak gives. The doubling of the Green Knight/Bercilak trammels Gawain up in a sort of "endeles knot" of games and troths, one that unravels from his small infidelity done to ensure his survival in what he believes to be a deadly encounter.

It is significant that the pentangle is not mentioned in the final confrontation between Gawain and the Green Knight, since its virtue as a token of "trawthe" no longer holds true to Gawain. As we discover in the conclusion to the Green Knight's Christmas "gomen," it was all a big joke (but a serious one) on Gawain, one that he claims reveals him to be "fawty and falce," guilty of "trecherye and untrawthe" (2382-3), having been found out as the "traytor" to his host's hospitality that he did not want to become through an infidelity with lady Bercilak (1775). Gawain becomes full and fleshy, not only by the "nirt in the nek" (2498) that finally reveals him in his corporeality, but by "The faut and the fayntyse of the flesche crabbed [the fault and the faintness of the crabbed (i.e.. perverse, diseased) flesh]" (2435), which he valued more than his obligation to his

chivalric identity. Not only does he betray his knightly promise to his host in the game of winnings, he also betrays the ideal he adheres to in *Gologras* of loving his renown, the ma(r)ker of his knighthood, more than his very life. He gains a body, and thus an individuality, by breaking with the ideals of the pentangle for the love of his body. (The Green Knight, almost hypercorporeal in his half-giantness, fully supports this bodily safe-keeping, despite its compromises: "the lasse I yow blame" [2368].) But in his individuation, he no longer performs like a perfect knight. The typology is broken, troubling his identification with the Round Table.

Gawain's return to Camelot is not a happy one. The identification with his former chivalric brethren he loses in his adventure with the Green Knight is the cause of a certain melancholia that he is left with as the poem closes upon itself. His return to the knights of the Round Table is not a happy one. He shows them the scar from the "nirt" he received at the Green Knight's hand, but we are told, "He tened quen he shulde tell,/ He groned for gref and grame;/ The blod in his face con melle,/ When he it shulde shewe, for schame [he was troubled when he had to tell (i.e., about his wound), he groaned for grief and embarrassment; the blood suffused his face, when he must show it, for shame]" (2501-5). Gawain feels acutely his difference from the other knights, which he experiences as a loss: "This is the bende of this blame I bere on my nek;/ This is the lathe and the losse that I light have/ Of couardise and covetyse that I haf caght thare [This is the bend of this blame that I bear on my neck; this is the loath and the loss that I have sustained from the cowardice and covetousness that I have caught there]" (2506-8). The court tries to comfort him; they all share a laugh and celebrate our hero's return, but the

reader is left with the impression that Gawain has become a terminal bummer. At least that is how Shichtman reads the final scene of *SGGK*: "Certainly Gawain has become more serious. He has also become more serious in tone, perhaps excessively so. No longer can this knight find comfort in repetitions; no longer can he enjoy celebrations. But despite the risks, Gawain's experience has left him with a more finely delineated sense of self-definition. He has gained insight" (15).

Thus Gawain wins his individuation, but it is a terrifying revelation. Despite the pretty common-place arguments that the "historiography of the Middle Ages placed the individual at the center of the historical process" (Shichtman 5), or, similarly, that chivalry in specific "tended to privatize all historical action" (Lee Patterson, qtd. in Cohen 83), in romance at least, the triumph of individuality is merely feigned. Despite the adoption of various individuating marks (a pentangle, a lion, the colour green), as long as the chivalric subject remains heroic (there are exceptions, of course—Sir Kay, for example, may be a knight but he is not heroic) a knight is a knight is a knight. Don Quixote's retrospective look on the history of the chivalric subject, the ease with which Cervantes was able to evoke the typological marks of the chivalric subject in order to parody them is perhaps suggestive enough of the derivativeness of the knights "individuality." And it is this derivativeness that affords the chivalric subject the force of myth, his giantism, for in the typological scheme of things, a subjectivity that proceeds by repetition, a *ritualized* performance, continuously augments itself. Individuation seems, on the other hand, to be a terrifying prospect, for the individual is, in the end, ephemeral, within history but, subject to its laws of catastrophe, within it for only a brief

time before being subsumed by its relentlessly progressive course, one which piles catastrophe upon catastrophe. One is moreover absolutely responsible for one's existence, since there is no ritual to fall back on or blame. Mythology makes one giant, seamlessly piling repetition upon repetition; history makes one small, each mote of debris different.[46]

Gawain's return to the Round Table, the doubling back of his adventure to where it all began, is something of an uncanny one. Wounded with a significant wound, marked as an individual living in and responsible for a history of syntagmatic events that pass and are gone, not to be renewed by repetitions and rituals, he returns to a typological world, where a knight is a knight is a knight, armoured, unwounded, and undifferentiated. Somehow, after wandering the wild ways of the world, after entering something of a doubling with the Green Knight/Bercilak out in the forest, all this civilization is no longer homey. And Gawain, having surmounted these repetitions, is now haunted by them, forced to double back on former times again and again in terrifying recurrences of what he is no longer.[47] The terror of history, the terror of individuation and individuality, is that the self is always alone and always comes short of the comfortable typologies it tries to re-enact. It is vulnerable, able to be wounded and ruined. The knight's armour is the dreamy ideal of the chivalric hero, but wound man is its reality. Once again, we are

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[46] The tiny life of the historical subject, however, makes history just that much more full: "A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments" (Benjamin 254).

[47] It seems strangely apropos here, where we are discussing individuality, that Freud describes the uncanniness of the double thusly: "They are a harking-back to particular phases in the evolution of the self-regarding feeling, a regression to a time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world and from other people" ("Uncanny," 236).

reminded of Kurtz's final gasps—"The horror! The horror!" They are expressions of an absolute pain, the pain of a catastrophe localized upon his body. It is also the pain of knowing that that catastrophe is also absolute, the terror that he is destroyed but history simply marches on, leaving him behind in ruins. Such is Gawain at the end of *SGGK*, more fully a man, but grieving over the ruins of the pentangle knight he was, "caght" of cowardice and covetousness. Without the containing powers of Solomon's "endeles knot," his heroic giantism lies in pieces. He is the butt of a terrible joke, and, unable to live up to the impossible subjectivity his armour stands for, he shrinks in embarrassment.

THREE

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JOKERS ARE WILD

It would be an oversight to claim that violence results only in terror. A close examination of both Freud's essay on the "uncanny" and his book on jokes indicates more than just a passing similarity. Indeed, it is only a very subtle, almost imperceptible, movement that transforms terror into laughter. This chapter concerns itself with the pleasures of violence and the violence of pleasures as depicted in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Fight Club* in order to illustrate the violence, even terrorism, inherent in the formulation and performance of jokes and the laughter that sounds at their occurrence.

A handy segue: from the *unheimlich* to the joke

The film *Army of Darkness* (Sam Raimi, 1992) has everything you could want in a low-grade horror flick: a chainsaw, a shotgun, a skeleton army, limbs being lopped off, demons, screaming women in trouble. Set in the Middle Ages as a result of the hero's accidental Connecticut-Yankee tumble through time, the film also has everything you could want in a medieval romance: swords, sorcery, knights, limbs being lopped off, demons, screaming women in trouble…It's gory, it's scary, but, in keeping with a trend of modern cinema that finds its culmination in the recent *Scream* series, it mixes its

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horror with a self-consciously kitschy comedy, makes the terror of graphic violence an occasion for laughter. For instance, in one scene very early in the film, Ash (Bruce Campbell), our hero, finds himself in a pit battling undead zombies as walls of rusty spikes close in upon him. With the help of a wise man, Ash recovers his "sword," the chainsaw he uses in place of his severed hand, and with it decapitates one zombie then slices a second zombie's hand off at the wrist. This hand soars upwards towards the crowd gathered at the mouth of the pit and, wait for it, in a gruesomely silly moment, it sticks to the face of a rather surprised crowd member, a horrific accident that results in the roaring laughter of the rest of the crowd (see figure 8). Of course, the marriage of horror and comedy, or violence and laughter, is nothing new. Rabelais did much the same thing for literature in the sixteenth century, his grotesque and often violent giants frightfully funny and horrendously hilarious. Nor is it new to Hollywood. Abbot and Costello in their various encounters with classic movie monsters realized quite early a kinship between horror as a genre and comedy in Hollywood cinema. Indeed, the severed-hand gag in *Army of Darkness* is merely another instance of slapstick comedy, but taken to a ghastly extreme.[48]

At this point we might return to Freud's *unheimlich* and recast it in something of a different light. Freud would easily identify what is uncanny about the scene described above: "Dismembered limbs, a severed head, *a hand cut off at the wrist*...feet which dance by themselves...all these have something particularly uncanny about them,

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[48] The film pays explicit homage to the Three Stooges in a sequence much later in the narrative in which Ash is harassed by a bunch of skeletal arms emerging from below a graveyard. He is punched and slapped from various directions, his eyes are poked, his head is knocked against a rock.

especially when, as in the last instance [or in the case of a hand that holds onto a man's face], they prove capable of independent activity in addition" (my emphasis; Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," 244). Freud provides an explanation as to why these instances are terrifying in their "proximity to the castration complex" (244), a statement that seems a rather simplistic reduction, a stock Freudianism that has a comedy of its own about it, exemplary of the ridiculous lengths to which Freud's theories may be taken whereby everything becomes genitalized (trains and tunnels, rockets, the cigar-butts Freud himself holds on the covers of many editions of his books, so easily making him the butt of a dick-joke). Dirty jokes aside—at least for a moment—we have still to ask why the hand gag is so funny. Looking back at the description of the scene I've written above, it is clearly outrageous even before the severed hand. It revels in its too-muchness: a creepy pit, not one but two undead zombies, the deliberate suspense of the rusty spikes, a chainsaw hand. The severed-hand gag ensures that the logic of too much is carried too far; the piling action that the *unheimlich* does reaches a critical level and the terror it would otherwise have created falls into absurdity.

Crossing this line is quite easy, as the *unheimlich* and the comedic are closely related; one could say that there is a highly permeable boundary between the two. After Freud describes his uncanny experience in the illicit quarter of the Italian town, he makes a brief reference to Mark Twain's use of the experience of "wander[ing] about in a dark, strange room, looking for the door or an electric light switch, and collid[ing] time after time with the same piece of furniture" to effect "something irresistibly comic" (237). The fact is, if we compare Freud's work on the uncanny and his work on jokes, in *Jokes*

and their Relation to the Unconscious, we find that both the horror of the uncanny and the comedy of the joke work by similar mechanisms and under similar conditions. Each has to do with "the economy of a long détour" (Freud, *Jokes*, 123) that leads one away from an expected destination to one unexpected; though this detour is really a circle, leading one (back) to the "rediscovery of what is familiar" (*Jokes*, 122), a phrase that overshadows both the book on jokes and the essay on the *unheimlich* (cf. "The 'Uncanny'," 220: "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar").

Each concept works through repetition, piling, the logic of too much. Freud claims that "laughter arises if a quota of psychical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable so that it can find free discharge" (*Jokes*, 147). For "unusable" substitute "excessive" and this explanation of the mechanism of laughter remains intact. Both the *unheimlich* and the psychical energy created by the joke are too much and need to be shed. It is in this way that both find their subversive potential, as eruptions of unacceptable excesses into the civilized order that must be gotten rid of. They are each indicative of a violence worked against that order, though laughter and the joke are much more covert about this violence than the frightfulness of the *unheimlich*. In order to illuminate the ways in which the joke enacts its own violence, let us turn first to another scene of amusing dismemberment.

A punch(line) in the ear: exorbitant violence and the hostile joke

> The serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian; they are combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations and always contain an element of fear and of intimidation…Laughter, on the contrary, overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. Its idiom is never used by violence and authority.
>
> —Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 90

Despite the gory details of the Green Knight's beheading in fitt 1 of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, there is something quite comic about the scene, at least to the sensibilities of one attuned to the comedy of horror. The poet, whose attention to the visceral details of his subject matter is often exhaustive, follows the blade of the massive "giserne" as Gawain swings it across his counterpart's neck. The audience rides the weapon's edge as it "schyndered the bones/ And schrank thurgh the schyire grece and scade hit in twynne,/ That the bit of the broun stel bot on the grounde [shattered the bones/ And sank through the sheer grease and sheared it in two/ So that the bite of the bright steel bit into the ground]" (424-6). His "blod brayd [burst] fro the body" (429); the head rolls across the ground, and the knight, without seeming to have suffered any ill effects of the injury, strolls across the hall and retrieves the lost appendage. Before he does so, however, the surrounding knights kick the head along as it nears them (428), a detail that is almost absurd in its exorbitance. Isn't the anatomical detail of the scene enough to elicit a response from the audience? Does the poet really need to add this one last image, a superfluous grotesquery that serves only to display an (albeit delightful) utter lack of subtlety?

Admittedly, a certain black sense of humour may be needed to laugh at such a detail, as it may also to laugh at the knight's nonchalance as he mounts his horse and, head in hands, tells Gawain to seek him in a year, "other recreaunt be calde the bohoves" [otherwise you deserve to be called a coward]" (456). At the same time, something about the strange occurrence evidently delights both Arthur and Gawain, a pleasure that transcends the uncanniness of their experience. The Green Knight "rout the raynes" of his steed, which dramatically gallops out the door, fire flying from the hooves (459), just as eerily mysterious as he arrived. And the poet asks, "What thenne?/ The kyng and Gawen thare/ At that grene thay laghe and grenne" (462-4). Since the audience discovers much later that Morgan la Faye engineered the incident in order to have frightened Guinevere to death (2460-1), why does the poet seem to go out of his way to achieve the opposite effect, both for the audience and for the participants in the fiction? What is at stake for the poem when it uses violence and horror for comic effect?

The same question may be asked for those contemporary films that turn jokes out of seriously violent images, such as *Army of Darkness* and *Scream*. It could be argued that *Fight Club* works to make a genuine critique of this phenomenon, juxtaposing spectacularly graphic scenes of violence with the narrator's tired apathy and black cynicism, not only demonstrating a prevailing desensitization to violent images, but even shoving it in the audience's face. In one particularly disturbing sequence, Lou, the owner of the roadside bar in whose basement Tyler and Jack have been holding their weekly fight clubs, unexpectedly arrives on the scene with a gun-toting henchman. Obviously a gangster, Lou wants to know how much money fight club is making in his bar. When

Tyler tells him there is no money involved, Lou beats him to an extent that has heretofore been unseen in the movie. As Tyler's face is broken, however, he laughs hysterically. The effect is more than disconcerting. Signs of apprehension start to appear in Lou, as well as the other witnesses. The laughter is madness, horrific, unlike the carnivalesque laughter in *SGGK*, though just as black. Lou turns away when he believes that Tyler is not capable of getting back up again, just to have the latter tackle him and shake his cracked and dripping face inches from his own, shouting "You don't know where I've been!" and reducing Lou to tears.[49]

It is obvious that the two texts depict a pleasure in violence, though it is also obvious that this pleasure is of a different nature than a mere pop sado-masochism. Here the terror of pain becomes laughable, though in a much more serious way than in a slapstick routine. So what's so funny? Robert Longsworth has pointed out that laughter and mirth are perhaps the most persistent moods in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and that "this laughter makes an important claim on our efforts to understand the poem...particularly by frustrating the task of interpretation" (Longsworth 142). And while mirthful is definitely not an adjective that I would use to describe *Fight Club*, it is true that laughter persists throughout that narrative as well. (More than just frustrating, the persistent laughter excites a certain masochism present in literary critics that causes us to seek pleasure in the task of interpretation, *especially* when that task is frustrated.) Moreover, it would seem that, for the most part, it is the protagonists, either Jack or

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[49] Interestingly enough, Carolyn Dinshaw has remarked, with regards to Morgan La Faye's plot against Guenevere, "if his [Bertilak's] enterprise has really been to scare Guenevere, as Bertilak says it has been, then he has done this quite well by holding his severed head, Medusa-like, dripping and bloody, in her face" ("A Kiss is Just a Kiss," 216).

Gawain, at whom the laughter is directed. The very structure of each text works to make poem and film play out like an elaborate joke on the (anti)hero (and, to an extent, the audience), with the unexpected appearance in each of the doppelganger theme and the revelation, late in the narrative, of an entire complex of schemes that have been manipulating the protagonist all along without his knowledge.

Indeed, by the end of each, the protagonist's own frustration is more than apparent; each knows he is being laughed at, that there is a lot more going on behind the scenes that he is somehow implicated in but not a party to. Tyler's maniacal laughter echoes in the background of the second airport montage as Jack scrambles to discover just what Tyler has been up to for the past weeks while he, Jack, has been unconscious, a scramble that culminates in the revelation scene in which Jack discovers that he and Tyler are in fact the same person. This laughter sounds at the expense of Jack's paranoia concerning the uncanniness of his own presence for others, as well as the immanent discovery of his own madness. The audience laughs at his frustration as he interacts with the awe-struck, brain-damaged fight-club members in various bars across the country. However, Fincher suggests that the audience may feel that they, too, are the butt of some obscene prank, considering the "twist" of the double theme:

> But if you trick people, it's an affront, and you really better be careful about what you're doing. A wise friend of mine once said, 'What people want from the movies is to be able to say, I knew it and it's not my fault.' And it's so true. I've had this argument with a couple people we've shown the movie to. Like, 'Fuck you man, this is like *The Game* [Fincher's third major film, 1997], you're just looking for some way to dick with me.' (Smith 62)

Gawain, too, begins to get antsy when he starts to clue in that he is being "dicked with." As he approaches the Green Chapel where he is to receive the returning blow from the verdant chevalier, the poet once again employs his skills to proliferate the creepy details. Our hero muses to himself over the "wysty [inhospitable]" setting, "ugly" and "overgrowen," obsessing over his sense he has been led to this evil place by the devil, imagining the Green Knight performing "his devocioun on the develes wyse" in this "chapel of meschaunce [mischance]...the corsedest kyrk [place] that ever I com inne" (2189-96). A "wonder breme noyse [wonderfully brutal noise]" begins, like an axe grinding, and with the poet's repeated interjections—"What!" (2201; 2203; 2204)—the narrative jumps quickly between images, emphasizing Gawain's growing anxiety. "Bi Godde," Gawain gasps, "that gere as I trowe,/ Is ryched at the reverence me...Let God worche!...Hit helppes me not a mote [that gear, I think,/ Is being prepared in my honour...Let God work!...It helps me not a mote]" (2205-9). Gawain becomes aware of the contrivance of the scene, that it has all been "ryched" somehow and that the circumstances of his arrival have had nothing to do with his own actions, even though he is unmistakably the centre of attention.

It is now apparent to the knight that what is about to transpire is not the "nys [foolish, silly]" game he derisively claimed it was back in Camelot (358). Though he claims no fear over any noise, he wastes no time in demanding that the business he came for be dealt with quickly (2215-6). The poet raises the suspense to such a level that Gawain himself grows weary of it. When the Green Knight feints the axe-blow Gawain so eagerly wants to get over with not once but twice, and mocks him merrily, the latter

grows clearly angry, lashing out at his tormentor, "Wy, thresh on, thou thro mon, thou

thretes to longe;/ I hope that thi hert arwe with thyn awen selven" [Why, thrash on, you

fierce man, you threaten too long;/ I feel that you are frightened of your own self]"

(2300-1). It is all too much for Gawain. This is serious business, a matter of life and

death, for which he has broken a chivalric troth (accepting the green girdle and not

exchanging it viz. his agreement with Bercilak); but only *he* seems to be taking any of it

seriously. The amusing manner in which both the Green Knight/Bercilak and the

narrative itself takes the protagonist for a ride delights both the Green Knight and the

author, and they share a cruel laugh that Gawain finds offensive to his preconceived

notions of civility. Jokers are wild.

In his study of jokes, Freud spends a good deal of time exploring the

aggressiveness of the joke in his pursuit at the psychical/physical motivations for

laughter. For him, the *hostile* joke is directly related to fighting, for

> Though as children we are still endowed with a powerful inherited
> disposition to hostility, we are later taught by a higher personal civilization
> that it is an unworthy thing to use abusive language; and even where
> fighting has in itself remained permissible, the number of things which
> may not be employed as methods of fighting has extraordinarily increased.
> Since we have been obliged to renounce the expression of hostility by
> deed…we have…developed a new technique of invective [the hostile
> joke]…By making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we
> achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him…(*Jokes*,
> 103)

The joke gives one permission to fight, to bring the wild into the civil sphere and resist

forces of civility through the use of those very forces. It uses language, that most

civilized of faculties, as well as laughter, to do harm, to exercise a "rebellion" against

authorities, a liberation from their pressures (105).[50] It uses language in a roundabout way, skirting the uncivilized but always looking backwards toward it, exploiting the detachment of words and things, signs and signifiers, ensuring that they "short-circuit," to harness the linguistic play that arises as a result of this detachment (120-1). Thus the joke may escape the criticism that it is purely hostile (133). The joke is a wild language, harnessing *"jouis-sense"*—a pleasure in signification (Cohen 66)—to build a word-structure that seeks only to pick a fight, to tear down other word-structures, bodies of thought and knowledge, edifices of identity.[51] A homemade bomb.

The victims of such explosive jokes, both Jack and Gawain discover that the laughter is not simply at the expense of violence against them, but violent in itself. Each voluntarily enters into an economy of violence with his counterpart, giving up his "civilized" customs for those more wild. Jack renounces his Ikea-catalogue condo life when he accepts Tyler's offer: "I want you to hit me as hard as you can." The strange, and absolutely coincidental, parallelism between *Fight Club* and *SGGK* begins when Gawain dares to "stiffly strike a strok for an other" at the Green Knight's behest (287). All of the exchanges between Jack and Tyler, Gawain and the Green Knight/Sir Bercilak, can be traced back to that early point in the two narratives where the urban(e) hero strikes that first blow with the full knowledge the blow will be returned, that violence can only proliferate and perpetuate. The jokes are just another exchange of violence, one more

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[50] Of course, Mikhail Bakhtin has conducted the best sustained inquiries into the revolutionary potential of laughter. See especially *Rabelais and His World*, in which Bakhtin's discussion of laughter and the grotesque coincide somewhat with that of Freud's jokes, though with more of a mythological consideration: "Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power" (94).

[51] See Cohen's use of Žižek in *Of Giants*, especially the chapter, "The Body in Pieces."

punch(line) in the ear. Jokes wound; they open the body to scrutiny. Laughter is pleasure in aggression, both the epitome of culture and a terrorist action.[52] Laughter is at once most civilized and most definitely not. Recall the similar conclusion drawn about soap in the course of Tyler Durden's meditations: soap which is "The yardstick of civilization," though, at the same time, "With enough soap we could blow up just about anything."

Don't lose your head

The joke is a bomb that blows apart civilized inhibitions. A mechanism for the production of illicit pleasure. A pleasure bomb. Freud claims that illicit pleasure is the essence of the joke: it *"will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible"* (103). Later, during his discussion of so-called "innocent jokes," he revises his claim as to their innocence: "Jokes, even if the thought contained in them is non-tendentious and thus only serves theoretical intellectual interests, are in fact never non-tendentious" (132). The linguistic game a joke plays, its finely negotiated, meaningful nonsense, resists the inhibitions of language and logic, invites pleasures that the regime of signification itself tries to suppress. Even the pleasure of a child's riddle

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[52] In *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism*, Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass speak very briefly about the irruption of laughter in the face of terrorism: "Carnival-like laughter in the midst of torture, the experience of systematic agony suddenly turned into a kind of illumination, the pain of ultimate disintegration mixed with the lucidity of madness...these conditions, too, are engraved in the faces of terror and underscore the view of the body as a political institution" (210). The accounts of torture victims tend to demonstrate a laughter that emerges when the victim realizes a certain absurdity of his/her situation, the surrealism of the real world.

carries the seeds of rebellion. The joker takes on a highly performative role, *acting out* the upside-down world of carnival. It is always a serious game.

The jokes and games that Tyler and the Green Knight play open up avenues for enjoying forbidden things—destroying buildings, hurting and being hurt. The big green smiley face that Tyler and his Project Mayhem "space monkeys" paint on the side of an apartment building with burning condos for eyes is the perfect allegory for the terrorism of the joke (see figure 9). A childish prank writ large. As they watch the news coverage, Tyler and his space monkey's burst into laughter. The police commissioner treats the situation very seriously, vowing that a complete investigation will be initiated. Jack is horrified. Compare this giant green face with flames for eyes with the face of a green giant, who "runischly his rede yyen he reled aboute [fiercely rolled about his red eyes]" (304) at the knights of Camelot, proposing a strange game to Arthur's court, the same face that in only a short while will rest in the palms of its own body's hands. The appearance of this countenance, too, is part joke and part act of terrorism, a "selly" and a "mervayl" that the court finds quite amusing, as well as an elaborate trick whose botched purpose was Guinevere's death and the disruption of Arthur's court.

Nevertheless, Arthur's court is still the butt of the joke. The severed head is the grisly result of nothing more than a "gomen." Whatever the actual nature of the game that the Green Knight proposes, it is unmistakable that Arthur and Gawain misinterpret. The Green Knight assures Arthur, "I passe as in pes, and no plight seche...I wolde no were [I pass in peace, and seek no plight...I wish no war]" (266-71), pointing out that he has left his armour and weapons at home, to which Arthur replies, in a telling display of

his obtuseness, "If thou crave batayl bare,/ Here fayles thou not to fyght [If you crave naked battle,/ You won't fail to fight here]" (277-8). The Green Knight must then repeat, "frayst I no fyght, in fayth I the telle [I seek no fight, I tell you in faith]" (279), that he only wants to play a game. Though the game is a violent one, at no time does the Green Knight say that the first blow must be mortal, though Arthur makes the (apparently reasonable) suggestion to Gawain that "if thou redes hym right, redly I trowe/ That thou schal byden the bur that he schal bede after [if you manage him right, I readily think/ That you shall bide the blow that he shall deliver afterwards" (373-4). "He can't hit you back if you kill him!" seems to be what Arthur intuits here. At the same time, the Green Knight's appearance is like nothing the court has ever seen—surely something counter-intuitive must apply to his game.

There is surely something fishy about the entire situation, and he does go out of his way to insult Arthur's knights. The target appears to be Arthur in particular; perhaps he deliberately provokes Arthur so that he will "wex as wroth as wynde [wax as wrath as wind]" (319)—as he does—and become himself implicated in the game; but the plot is bungled when Gawain unexpectedly intervenes. Nevertheless, it would seem to me that the Green Knight's game is specially designed to reveal Arthur and his court as the group of rash, "brayn wylde" (89), "berdles chylder [beardless children]" (280), whose "sourquydrye [pride]" is so easily insulted by a few pointed words: in short, a bunch of trumped-up *juvenes* who cannot understand a challenge that is not a battle. The game is parodic of the court's "rych revel [splendid revels]" and "rechles merthes [reckless mirths]" (40), an exchange of violence that is highly controlled, just one blow for one

blow that the participants must simply abide without any reaction at all, the second of which, moreover, is not to be delivered for an entire year. It is not the dynamic, all-out fight of the tournaments; it is a preposterous exchange, with the "combatants" static, just suffering blows without immediate retaliation, more a performance than a fight. The parody of a fight—absurd, like Jack's fistfights with himself in *Fight Club*, or even fight club itself, which encourages men to beat each other up in order to feel better about themselves.

Both film and poem realize the opportunity parody opens up for a subversive identity politics. That each requires the irruption into the narrative of an outlandish wild man who asks to be attacked indicates that what follows will not be an expected course of events. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler suggests that parodic laughter sounds when normative expectations have been breached:

> The loss of the sense of "the normal," however, can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when "the normal," "the original" is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one *can* embody. In this sense, laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived. (*Gender Trouble*, 176)

Realizing that the normal, is derivative, a simulacra, a repetitive and ritualized performance, is central to Butler's queer project, which seeks to break the chain of repetitive "citation" by employing parodic practises that caricaturize the absurdities of normative performances, demonstrating where they come short—"failed copies, so to speak" (186). Compare Jack's insomnia, standing over the photocopier: "With insomnia, nothing's real. Everything is far away. Everything is a copy of a copy of a copy." Or Arthur's court: a group of knights named once and then forgotten as individuals.

Photocopy knights. Butler's agenda is, ultimately, a utopic disturbance of photocopy identities—a "politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects" (189). Foremost in her mind is the dissolution of gender binaries and the establishment of a gender plurality, an agenda that *Sir Gawain* and *Fight Club* do not seem to share, forcibly demarcating the distinction between male and female. Both maintain a palpable phallocentrism—the focus is on men and remains on men. However, each performs a critique of what is hegemonically male through the sustained parody of that gender identification. *Gender Trouble* ends with a call for "local strategies for engaging the 'unnatural'" in order to effect "the denaturalization of gender as such" (190). The unnatural fight scenes that poem and film depict are surely such denaturalizing engagements.

The fight between Tyler and Lou prompts the former to assign the first homework assignment in which fight club members are to start a fight with somebody and make sure they themselves lose. It is a task that requires a conscious performativity, conscious in its counter-intuitive, if not outright parodic, demand to be the aggressor without the intention of following through with that aggressiveness to its logical end: the infliction of pain on another. It is instead a demand to see that aggressiveness backfire, to reflect back as in a mirror; the next best thing to beating oneself up is arranging for the same result. This homework assignment, the first in a series that involve sabotaging or outright destroying various artefacts of consumer culture, is most explicitly about Tyler's philosophy of self-destruction as an answer to the contemporary male's spiritual slump. Fight club itself is not about winning the fight, but voluntarily putting oneself in the position of getting hurt.

"I want you to hit me as hard as you can," the request that sets the tone for Tyler's role in the film, is the first invitation to self-destruction as spiritually healing, to the violent critique of the sort of masculine body that he and Jack see on a Gucci underwear ad, which reveals that sleek, toned, flawless body to be itself dismembered, with the head effaced by the camera angle (see figure 10). Hence Tyler's answer to Jack's sardonic question, "Is that how a man should look?": "Ahh, self-improvement is masturbation. And self-destruction." Tyler inverts the logic of the sort of self-cultivation promoted by consumer culture. He casts as truly destructive the self-improvement pursued by "guys packed into gyms, trying to look like how Calvin Klein or Tommy Hilfiger said they should," whereas the self-destruction pursued at fight club is what makes a truly improved man.

The image of the ripped male body on the Gucci ad appears once again in the following scene in Brad Pitt's own abs and pecs, a clearly ironic recurrence that generates a strange paradox (see figure 11). Brad's bod is starkly and deliberately distinguished from that of scrawny Ed Norton's in order to emphasize physically that Tyler Durden is the schizophrenic projection of all Jack's desires, Jack's own personal *ubermench*, constructed to make up for all of his perceived inadequacies and limitations: "All the ways you wished you could be...that's me! I look like you wanna look, I fuck like you wanna fuck, I'm smart, capable and most importantly, I'm free in all the ways that you are not." At the same time, we see the perfect physique Tyler sports, much the same one he ridicules as self-destructive when it appears on the Gucci ad, rise and stumble backwards after a fight at fight club, having been subjected to (but also dishing out) the

physiological self-destruction of bodily violence. Tyler's body is hurt, it bleeds, it drinks and smokes. It is the fulfillment of Jack's desire for a perfect male body, but it is one that threatens its own perfection. Opening itself to pain, inviting its own annihilation, Tyler's battered body is emphasized in its corporeality. In a strange way, the Gucci bod, laughable to Tyler and Jack, strangely phasasmatic in its unattainability, becomes fleshy through the immediacy of pain. Tyler proves the existence of the perfect male body by hurting it, like a god who bleeds. However, when all is said and done, both bodies are similar in their impossibility, both mere projections of men's desires.

The ritualized act of violence in *SGGK*, the Green Knight's beheading, unfolds parodically, keeping in mind the traditional course of the romance gigantomachia. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen explores the typology of a hero's endeavours in giant slaying, from David and Goliath to *Beowulf* to Monmouth's Arthur and so on, demonstrating that the beheading of a giant figures crucially in the identity formation of a (male) romance hero: "Battle against inimical giants that culminate in a decapitation uncannily recur in the myth, literature, and historiography of the West... These scenes function formally as a rite of passage, inextricably linking the defeat of the monster to a political, sexual, social coming of age" (66). The rite of passage is, of course, a significant point of maturation for the hero; it is his renunciation of the reckless and wild existence of the *juvenus* and his integration into a more patient civilization. Knightly self-improvement. Since the giant is, in essence, the image of "desire prior to its full social coding, appetite before (or read back from) its limit" (81), a body out of control, literally too big to fit within a human(e) frame of reference, his death through decapitation in effect designifies the

giant's excess, culturally reinscribing those desires and appetites on a body in control of their violence, the body of the civilized hero. In terms of narratology, this cultural integration is made intelligible for the audience through a shift in the narrative gaze from the disaggregate monster to unified hero, which usually follows that of a group of witnesses within the narrative itself: "The men first gape at the severed head, but their attention quickly moves from the fragment of the giant whole to the warrior who fragmented the giant and remained whole" (66). The severed head is always held up by the hero for scrutiny, and though there is a clear enjoyment in this monstrous display, it must be only temporary:

> The stupefying pleasure of the monstrous arises from its frightening ambiguity, which invites a fascinated *jouis-sense*, an obscene enjoyment in the contemplation of its dreadful signification. The horrifically thrilled, fixated gaze of the men must be "bumped," made to stick on the one who presents the Medusa-like object for visual consumption. The monster's uncanny power is thus harnessed and attached to the hero's body. (66-7)

The severed head means too much—so much, in fact, that it threatens to transfix the critical gaze while repelling signification in what Žižek refers to as "an excess of sticky enjoyment" (qtd. in Cohen 66). The hero comes into his own when he brings that meaning under control by containing it in his own body, realizing the mythological potential of the act and fashioning its power into an ideology of heroic individualism.

The end of *Fight Club* ultimately betrays its initial political agenda of resisting a traditional Hollywood narrative line when it falls into this Western master narrative. The larger-than-life Tyler is finally tricked by Jack in a deft switcheroo with the gun they have been threatening each other with, and (with a move whose logic is a little hazy for me) Tyler has the back of his head blown open. This displaced decapitation brings about

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the consolidation of Jack's identity and his inevitable sexual union with Marla Singer through a violently forced realignment of Jack's intimacies (from Tyler to Marla) as well as the audience's gaze. Something fails, however. Jack's differentiation from Tyler is undermined by his relationship with Marla since it was, of course, the Tyler persona that initiated sexual contact. Perhaps more blatant than this are the two or three frames of a giant cock (penis doesn't seem to fully describe it) that appears immediately following the collapse of the credit card buildings, just before the final credits. Harkening back to Tyler's night-time job as a projection operator and the opportunities it affords for filmic sabotage, the movie ends on a disconcerting note: through Jack's possession of Marla the audience is reminded that, when all is said and done, he and Tyler remain same person, that Tyler's monstrosities were and are still his monstrosities, the ends of which can be seen and felt just outside the window; and, through the appearance of the penis, the audience is fed the suggestion that Tyler still lurks in some metafictional capacity *behind* the film itself, that he has been tampering with the it from the beginning, that he may have lost his head (the naked body that sports the huge penis indeed has its head out of frame) but he is still dicking with us.[53]

The typologically similar scene in *SGGK*, however, reverses the traditional hermeneutics, making the whole affair preposterous. Occurring at the very outset of the narrative, it serves, not as the culminating moment in the hero's journey of self-figuration, but the beginning of that journey. Gawain's decapitation of the Green Knight

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[53] In his interview with David Fincher, Gavin Smith comments, "I didn't know what the flash frames were but I took them to mean that the movie we're watching has been tampered with by Tyler Durden" (65).

does not halt his gigantic over-signification. On the contrary, the giant keeps on talking, informing Gawain that he must travel to the Green Chapel, a locale that he is less than specific about. Like the giant's body, the game is much too large to be viewed all at once; its meanings extend far beyond Gawain's blow.

The narrative remains solely with the Green Knight from the point that Gawain swings the axe to the point that he disappears out the door. The audience's gaze is not redirected from the Green Knight and his severed head to Gawain; we are not given the chance. The poet locks the audience's gaze in a very specific triangulation throughout the poem (especially the first fitt) that causes its view of Gawain to be mediated through that of the Green Knight. In the lengthy description from line 136 to 220, the Green Knight's body and all his trappings are presented to full scrutiny (even his clothes are "ful streght [strait, ie tight] that stek [stuck, closely fitted] on his sides" [152]). But the power of that body is only for the *audience's* scrutiny. The Camelot crew take it all "for fantoum and fayryye" (240), doubting the substantiality of that body. For the length of his intrusion on the Christmas festivities, the emphasis is on the Green Knight's gaze as he sizes up Arthur's knights. The first thing he does when he enters and asks for "The governour of this gyng [gang]" (225) is to "kest his yye" upon the knights (228), subject them to his "studie" (230). It is his red eyes that glower when the knights hesitate to play his little game; it is his eyelids that pop open on his dismembered head, which "loked ful brode [broadly, widely]" (446). His body, his gaze, are clearly the seats of phallic power, his fully materialized, ultra-masculine body contrasted to the all-but-invisible bodies of Arthur and his knights, the true phantoms of the poem's first fitt.

And while Gawain is described in some detail during a sequence that is clearly a response to the Green Knight's entry, it is nevertheless true that, as Clare R. Kinney has so astutely indicated, Gawain remains a manhood that is disembodied. After all, it is only Gawain's armour that the narrative presents to our inspection. In her article on manhood and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Kinney ironically (?) states that

> the narrative presentation of Gawain in the romance's first two fitts encourages us to assume that to represent Camelot's manhood properly is to become disembodied...Supernatural champions, alien aristocrats, and alien women are embodied and dissected by the poem as thoroughly as the animals hunted and ritually broken apart in the third fitt, but real men— that is, representative Arthurian heroes—don't have bodies, or at least while their power to articulate themselves on their own terms remains unchallenged. (49)

For Kinney, Gawain remains an "impossible abstraction" (50), a "transcendental ideal that plays down his material body and its material connection with other bodies" (51), until he is, first, trapped naked in his bed by Lady Bercilak and, second, wounded at the Green Knight's hand in fitt 4, at which point "the romance quietly insists that he is just like everybody (and every body) else" (54). Whereas the Green Knight's embodiment establishes and sustains his powerful virility, when Gawain is revealed to have some flesh beneath that armour of his, Gawain proves to be like "every body else," just one more Knight of the Round Table, instead of the utterly perfect Pentangle Knight. The Green Knight, on the other hand monopolizes the power of embodied manhood. He contains Gawain's body and the body/bodies of Arthur's court within his gigantic frame of view, makes them exclusive to himself, locking them out of the audience's gaze so that it can only focus on his form.

Even when the Green Knight exits the narrative at the end of fitt 1, Gawain and Arthur share a laugh, the former hangs the axe he won, but the poet quickly returns to the strange business with the Green Knight with some words of warning for the hero in a direct address: "Now thenk wel, Sir Gawan,/ For wothe that thou ne wonde/ This aventure for to frayn,/ That thou has tan on honed [Now think well, Sir Gawain,/ That you do not shrink for the danger/ Of undertaking this adventure/ That you have taken in hand]" (487-90). The threat that the Green Knight poses has not been contained at Camelot and it still threatens to subsume the hero. Gawain does not achieve the rite of passage one might expect from conventional romance gigantomachia, since the convention itself has been upturned. In picking up his severed head and riding away, the Green Knight performs a "subversive bodily act" the likes of which Butler most certainly did not have in mind, though the outcome is just as politically contentious in terms of a medieval masculinity. His performance renders laughable the normative knightly action, the decapitation of the monstrous giant defusing the cultural ascendancy of Arthurian chivalry. Moreover, at the end of fitt one, Gawain and the audience are left with the terrifying prospect that it will be the giant who decapitates the hero.

Setting it down for preposterity

> What's more chivalric than homosexual relations…?
> —Carolyn Dinshaw, "Getting Medieval: *Pulp Fiction*, Gawain, Foucault," 127

The butt of the joke. Made an ass of. Being "dicked with." The language of the tendentious joke, of parody, is the language of sodomy. Thus the act of joking might be

said to be a queer moment. Its only product is pleasure—illicit pleasure, at that. Which is, of course, the argumentation that underlies much of the theologically-informed homophobia in the Middle Ages (in the modern ages, for that matter). It is preposterous: an inversion of the normative logic of cause and effect. Backside before the front. In the final moments of this chapter, I would like to return to the laughter of the joke and flush out its ambiguities more clearly, revising some of my wild provocations made above. For the destruction laughter wreaks is accompanied by a new, anomalous construction. It is not procreative in the strictest sense—it does not perpetuate into history. What it creates is immediate. A fleeting moment, an anomaly. The laughing subject is a queer subject, taking pleasure only in the immediate moment, singled out, absolutely individuated. S/he has an identity that aligns itself with the highly localized pleasures of one's body, briefly a-historic (liberated from cause and effect) as well as a-mythological (liberated from typology or citation) though eminently contextual, formed by the release of specific historical and mythological pressures.[54] The joke is not a pure terrorism but a revolution, though one that does not establish a new regime of signification—both its saving grace and its limitation. For the laughing subject must soon face the terror of history and the uncanniness of mythology. One loses the laugh to the past and is subsumed once more into perpetual citation.

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[54] In searching for a way to utilize parody effectively, Butler indicates that "A typology of actions would clearly not suffice, for parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered" (*Gender Trouble*, 177). Parody cannot be universal, it must always be highly local, a response to immediate hegemonic pressures. Freud's discussion of the topicality of jokes, which "borrow" material from "other interests" (*Jokes*, 123), usually political, makes a similar argument.

Freud begins his investigation of the tendentious function of jokes and "the origin of the pleasure that we take in jokes" (*Jokes*, 96) with a discussion of "smut": "We know what is meant by 'smut': the intentional bringing into prominence of sexual facts and relations by speech" (97). Smut differs slightly from the hostile jokes discussed above in that their primary objective is not aggression but obscenity, "serving the purpose of exposure" (97). More specifically, smut works to expose the body of another person:

> By the utterance of the obscene words it compels the person who is assailed to imagine the part of the body or the procedure in question and shows her that the assailant is himself imagining it. It cannot be doubted that the desire to see what is sexual exposed is the original motive of smut. (98)

It is a displaced act of seduction, "directed to a particular person, by whom one is sexually excited and who, on hearing it, is expected to become aware of the speaker's excitement and as a result to become sexually excited in turn" (97). It does contain elements of aggressiveness, since it works regardless of the other party's consent: "Instead of excitement the other person may be led to feel shame or embarrassment, which is only a reaction against the excitement and, in a roundabout way, is an admission of it" (97). (Apparently, for Freud, no means yes.) For Freud, obscenity is also the frightening invitation for a third party (whether an individual or a group) to join in the fun, since "A person who laughs at smut that he hears is laughing as though he were the spectator of an act of sexual aggression" (97). All within hearing range are invited to join in the pleasure of denuding the joke's victim—a verbal gangbang.

Of course, Freud's insistent phallocentrism and homophobia cause him to see smut as "originally directed towards women" (97), "an exposure of the sexually different

person to whom it is directed" (98), a verbal exposition and announcement of straight sexual desire, conditioned by "The woman's inflexibility" in succumbing to immediate sexual relations, though "If the woman's readiness emerges quickly the obscene speech has a short life; it yields at once to a sexual action" (99). The woman in the joke loses the power of control over her own body's (imaginary) existence—she is undressed, exposed, castrated anew. It does not take much queering, however, to liberate smut from its straight prerogative and indicate where the obscene joke plays out as a sexual aggression on the part of a female or male, and towards the exposure of a *male* body. As such, the obscene joke can serve as an act of resistance to straight male sexuality, an appropriation of the monstrous sexuality that Freud's dirty jokers represent, for the purpose of parodying that sexuality.

Marla Singer (Helena Bonham Carter), the hypersexualized femme fatale in *Fight Club* is the perfect example of a queer smut-talker. In the scene between Jack and Tyler that follows Marla's first visit to the house on Paper Street, Tyler takes up the position of the obscene male joker ("You've got some fucked up friends, I'm telling you! Limber though...silly coos."), though from the flashbacks that support Tyler's story about his encounter with Marla, it is apparent that Tyler is on the receiving end. He describes her as "a predator posing as a house pet" and exclaims, "And the shit that came out of this woman's mouth, I ain't never heard," following which, a brief flashback, post coitus, in which Marla muses, "My God! I haven't been fucked like that since grade school." The offensiveness of this outrageous statement is enough to give Tyler a moment's pause and a disgusted shudder, an astonishing fact considering his mischievous penchant for

splicing single frames of pornography into children's films.[55]   Many of Marla's

interactions with Jack especially involve obscene riddles that she assails him with, much

to his disgust, from "The condom is the glass slipper of our generation" to likening a

thrift-store dress to a discarded Christmas tree, or sex-crime victim.

Marla's "shit talk" serves, of course, to reveal a violent male heterosexuality, but

in a particularly offensive way. At one point while the two converse, she reaches her

hand down towards Jack's groin, cigarette hung between her fingers. Brilliantly smutty

camera-work focuses on his groin, the cigarette smouldering limply as a grotesque penis.

Marla's appropriation of "male" smut reveals it to be symptomatic of a corrupt

masculinity, a phallic utterance at once cancerous, dirty, invasive, falling slowly into

ashes. Here she enlists the aid of the camera as her third party, forcing the audience to

become complicit in her smutty commentary and her attack on Jack's sexuality, in a way

that her foul mouth might fail to do. Jack is placed in the victim position, threatened with

castration by Marla's obscene verbal denuding. This is a position that Jack finds himself

in again, in a much less displaced scene of *homo*sexual aggression. After Jack makes the

discovery of his schizophrenic self-estrangement, he begins to piece together the nature

of Tyler's larger plans for Project Mayhem, uncovering the plot to collapse the credit

card buildings in the city's business district. When he goes to the police with his

findings, the detectives who interrogate him turn out to be a group of Tyler's space

monkeys. They speak to Jack/Tyler with total admiration as they hold him down, strip

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[55] In an earlier cut of the film, Marla's "pillow talk" followed Chuck Palahniuk's novel more
closely: she says that she wants to have Tyler's abortion (Palahniuk 59). The deleted dialogue is included
on the second disk of the *Fight Club* DVD, with the following description: "The infamous line of dialogue
changed before release. Those at the studio who had called for its alteration begged for its reinstatement
when they heard what Fincher replaced it with [the grade-school comment]."

him of his pants, and fumble about in preparation to castrate him, claiming that he (as Tyler) had given orders that if anyone compromised the goals of Project Mayhem, even him, they "gotta get his balls." They state with reverence, "It's a really powerful gesture, Mr Durden. It'll set quite an example." It would seem that homosexuality here is rendered monstrous, the horrific flip side of straight relations in the absence of normative sexualities. Jack does manage to get away from his assailants, and much to the audience's relief, though he does spend the remainder of the film without his pants.

However, as I read it, the near-castration sequence is indicative of a monstrosity inherent in a straight sexuality, one that sustains gender binaries, setting up a regime where "the men are men and the women wish they were," so to speak. Such a regime makes non-violent homosexuality impossible, for there must always be a gender distinction, even where biological sex is the same. The detectives can only love Jack/Tyler if he doesn't have any balls, just as the men at the support group for testicular cancer only love him because they think that his testicles have been removed. On the same note, since he does in fact have his full compliment of male genitalia, Jack's intimacy with Big Bob (Meatloaf) is eased by the latter's signs of womanhood, his missing testicles and his so-called "bitch tits."[56] Homosexuality fails because the desire for same-sex intimacy is straight jacketed. Tyler's "I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer we need" may seem like an invitation to homosexuality, but it is in

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[56] While it is true that Jack's relationship with Bob is probably the most genuine in the entire film, there is still a lack of good faith between them. At one point early in the film, Marla says derisively of Jack attendance at the testicular cancer group: "I have more right to be there than you. You still have your balls." In itself a parody of a phallocentric regime, this statement makes an attempt to *exclude* Jack because of his lack of lack. He is invading an intimate space, inviting others to reveal themselves through their stories of misery while he himself remains silent: "If I didn't say anything, people always assumed the worst."

actuality just a more forceful reinscription of gender segregation. *Fight Club*'s males do not embrace a monstrous homosexuality, but a monstrous heterosexuality; they remain straight, with the feminine as the object of their desire, though they are highly suspicious of relations with female bodies. Male-male sexuality in a regime of straight gender binaries requires that one of the two be not-male, the victim of an aggression, a woman.

In Carolyn Dinshaw's reading of *SGGK*, she makes a point of outlining the ways in which our knight "acts like a woman" ("A Kiss," 211). Indeed, in a parodic reversal of a courtly love triangle, Lady Bercilak, wife to Gawain's host at Hautdesert (and therefore the Green Knight himself), makes great efforts to seduce Gawain. The morning after Gawain's arrival at Bercilak's castle, she slips into his room in secret and lingers by his bed, gazing at his naked body while he sleeps (*SGGK*, 1191-4), the significance of which is essential to Dinshaw's critique: "In the bedroom Gawain is the hunted, the object of a feminine gaze" ("A Kiss," 211). For this morning, as well as the subsequent two, Gawain is ensnared by her arrivals and pursued in a hunt—one that parallels the hunt for game that Bercilak conducts beyond the castle walls. Instead of an obscene smut, the lady engages with Gawain in a cunning repartee, playfully revealing Gawain as the smooth-operator of repute and simultaneously divesting him of that repute ("So god as Gawayn gaynly is halden...Couth not lightly haf lenged so long with a lady/ Bot he had craved a crosse [So good (a man) as Gawain is rightly held to be...could not easily have lingered so long with a lady without having craved a kiss]" [1297-1300]). She scrutinizes him, conducting a commentary on his abilities in the bedroom in order to provoke him. It

is an "asay" of his pride in his reputation, not unlike that of the Green Knight toward Arthur.

The lady puts Gawain in a sticky situation, the latter having to do his best not to betray honour his host's hospitality, though careful not to offend the sensibilities of his sexual assailant. Even in the more public forums of meal-times and Carol-dances she traps him with her glances, cornering the poor fellow, provoking his disconcertion at an increasingly impossible situation:

> Such semblaunt to that segge semly ho made,
> Wyth stille stolen countenaunce, that stalworth to plese,
> That al forwondered was the wyye, and wroth with hymselven;
> Bot he nolde not for his nurture nurne hir ayaynes,
> Bot dalt with hir al in daynté, how-se-ever the dede turned
>   towrast. (*SGGK*, 1658-63)

> [Such a seemly affectation did she make towards that man, with secret stolen looks, to please that stalwart (man), that all bewildered was the man, and perturbed (lit. wroth) with himself; but he would not for his manners repel her advances, but dealt with her in all courtesy, howsoever the deed (might) turn out awry.]

At one point he even tries to get out of staying with Bercilak, but the latter will have none of it (1669-72). He is a "prysoun [prisoner]" (1219), transfixed and denuded by her unrelenting scrutiny ("A Kiss," 212), not just in his own bed but throughout Hautdesert as well. She's the one on top. As Dinshaw states "The reversal of courtly roles here couldn't be clearer" (212).[57]

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[57] In a discussion of medieval transvestism, Ad Putter argues that romance narratives often make women out of their heroes in order to reinforce their masculinity. Demonstrating that the knightly transvestite was something of a joke, he states that "chivalric romance makes transvestism laughable because it allows us to see through it. By dis-mantling the transvestite on our behalf, it liberates us from the need to endure the transvestite's challenge to perceptual challenge" (Putter 297). The laughter realizes the distinction between man and woman's clothes that was present all along and divests him of those clothes, re-establishing a male identity. It would seem to me that Gawain is never so lucky. He plays the

More than just a simple role-reversal within the heterosexual matrix, the playful relations between the lady and Gawain implicate the latter in homosexual play between him and his host. The lady's advances, the trysts he proposes, the kisses that she is actually able to coerce from Gawain, are further complicated by Bercilak's bargain of exchange that he has sworn to participate in by troth (*SGGK*, 1108), for he must share with the latter all of his spoils of the day. Dinshaw reminds us that "if Gawain had succumbed fully to the lady's seduction *and* if he had honoured the terms of his promise to the lord he would in fact have had to have sex with the lord...Homosexual sex is thus one hypothetical fulfillment—in fact we might say *the* logical end of the interlocking plots the lady and Bertilak play out" ("A Kiss," 206). As it stands, the only exchanges that Gawain makes are those of the lady's kisses, one on the first day, two on the second, three on the third. And they seem quite the kisses. "Savoury and solemn," as Dinshaw puts it (205, her translation of "sauerly and sadly," *SGGK*, 1937), the kisses that Gawain bestows on Bercilak even cause him to exclaim, on the second day, "Bi saynt Gile,/ Ye ar the best that I knowe;/ Ye ben ryche in a whyle,/ Such chaffer and ye drowe [By saint Giles, you are the best that I know; you will shortly be rich, if this is what you offer" (*SGGK*, 1644-7). The best kisser? Whether Bercilak is complimenting the knight on his prowess in delivering or procuring, he is undoubtedly pleased with what Gawain gives him. While Dinshaw indicates that kissing between men is not problematic in the context of medieval chivalric romance—"such kisses represent conventional cultural practice, informed by the rules of courtesy and hospitality...kisses of peace, of greeting, of

girl, but doesn't ever get the chance to reassert his masculinity, either through a sexual conquest (over the lady) or one of violence (over the Green Knight).

partings, of homage, and so on" (210)—she points out that "the narrative of *SGGK* locates the particular kisses between Bertilak and Gawain in reference to a highly charged erotic plot and thus raises the question of their sexual force and valence" (210). Surely the kisses that Gawain and Bercilak share still retain their capacity to pleasure the two men.

Of course, Bercilak is "dicking" with Gawain all along, as is his wife. The two of them gang up on him for a bit of sexually-charged fun. For when the Green Knight divulges to the knight that he is in fact Bercilak in disguise, he tells him, "Now know I wel thy cosses and thy costes als,/ And the wowing of my wyf; I wrought hit myselven [Now I know well all about your kisses and your conduct, and the wooing of my wife; I wrought it myself]" (*SGGK*, 2360-1). Looking back, the audience can now make some better sense of the lady's seemingly unceasing laughter during those bedroom scenes— apparently she was more than delighted to be a party to a prank on the renowned Gawain. It's been a game all along, engineered as part of the game of exchanges, and the Green Knight reveals Gawain to be a winner. But Gawain is not amused. When the Green Knight also reveals to his counterpart that the latter did falter in his perfection when he accepted the lady's green girdle and did not exchange it viz. the game of winnings because its reputed magical properties would save him from harm in his encounter at the Green Chapel, Gawain is "So agreved for greme he gryed withinne [So grieved for mortification he shuddered within]" (2370). A broken troth! Gawain is disgusted with himself: "Now am I fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben ever/ Of trecherye and untrawthe—both bityde sorwe/ and care! [Now I am faulty and false, and I have ever

been afraid of treachery and dishonour (lit. un-troth), may both sorrow and care betide both]" (2382-4). Betrayed by a woman! He rails against an entire Biblical history of false and treacherous women, from Eve to Bathsheba (2415-28). Gawain's reputation as a paragon of knightly honour and manly manhood has been tarnished! The Green Knight only laughs merrily, tells him it is all okay, offers his friendship and that of his wife.

Dinshaw does not seem to be amused, either. She adopts some of Gawain's sorrow, though for different reasons: "But courtly games—literal and figurative fencing—such as this one, with its role reversals, are in fact a serious business in a world in which identity is constituted by the performances and acts precisely coded according to normative configurations of gender and desire" ("A Kiss," 212). Duped into kissing a man! She sees the poem as ultimately failing to do *any* queer work, that it evokes the possibility of a homosexual relationship just so that it may render that possibility impossible, "the constantly abjected shadow of the heterosexual regime, produced in order to reinforce the claims to strength and propriety of the norm" ("A Kiss," 223). But those kisses linger, never disavowed of their erotic valence and the pleasure they give the two men. It is my suggestion that it is precisely *because* identity constructions along normative lines are "serious business," that the jokes and games that *SGGK* plays with those normativities are all the more delightful. As Freud says, "A non-tendentious joke scarcely ever achieves the sudden burst of laughter which makes tendentious ones so irresistible" (*Jokes*, 96). And though the poem admittedly does not consummate the queer possibilities that it sets up, it does not promote the hard-and-fast normative regime Dinshaw seems to believe it does. The poem's good humour and highly parodic tone,

from the bungled beheading, to Gawain's subjection to a woman with more chutzpah than he, to some hugs and kisses between men that may be more than just friendly shows of gratitude, all work towards a subversion of the sort of normative chivalry that Arthur's court represents at the beginning of the poem. For Arthur's court is a brash and bloody group of men; what is normative in *SGGK* is brought about through violence. As in the world of *Fight Club*, relations between men and men, and men and women, are like fistfights, needing a winner and a loser, one on the floor and one still standing. The Green Knight/Bercilak's appearance makes all that look silly, especially the violence.

The cut and the kiss

The Green Knight does wound Gawain in their final encounter, but the significance of the wound is highly ambiguous, made suspect by the parodic wounding that the former suffered at the hands of the latter in fitt 1. The language with which the poet describes the Green Knight's blow echoes that of Gawain's, drawing a relation between the two events: "The scharp schrank to the flesche thurgh the schyre grece,/ That the schene blod over his schuldered schot to the erthe [The sharp (blade) shrank to the flesh through the sheer grease (fat), (so) that the sheen blood shot over his shoulder to the earth]" (*SGGK*, 2313-14). The violence of cut is not immediately a differentiating one, like that of the beheading, which was meant and succeeded (though in the opposite way it was meant) to draw an unmistakable distinction between knight and giant. Gawain's very presence at the Green Chapel indicates a social bond, the maintenance of a knightly troth between the two from the time that Gawain took up the game. This cut is an intimate moment between

the two, drawing them together, fully establishing a social bond—they have both suffered each other's axe-blow and lived to tell about it. Ultimately, the Green Knight seems to propose a male-male relationship that does not problematize its intimacy, that does not require one of the two men to play the woman. Feminized and stripped of his phallic power under the influence of the Green Knight/Bercilak's interweaving pranks, the wound (re)establishes Gawain's masculine corporeality exactly through the hermeneutic similarity between his and the Green Knight's wounds. Wounded, they are both winners, a cause for celebration, and the Green Knight invites Gawain back to his castle to complete the New Year's festivities together.

Fight Club, on the other hand, never reaches a point where male-male intimacy is possible. The masculinity that Tyler Durden offers is entirely anti-social. He bestows his own kiss upon Jack (and others), but his kiss is also a wound. It is the chemical burn, the saliva from the kiss reacting with the lie he dumps on the wet spot to create an ugly, smouldering wound that becomes a grotesque scar in the shape of pursed lips. The symbol of "hitting bottom," of repudiating society, Tyler gives this kiss while regaling Jack with a rant about how their fathers "bailed" on them and how God, modeled on their fathers, must hate them, "in all likelihood." The film only depicts an *extimité*, the "'intimate alterity' of identity: its inescapable self-estrangement, the restless presence at its center of everything it abjects in order to materialize and maintain its borders" (Cohen 4). The intimacy is shunned in favour of pure physicality—your body and my body. The only hugs that men have in the film are the grappling of men wrestling with each other. The embraces at fight club are not a coming together, but an attempt to repel. Ultimately,

Jack cannot even be intimate with himself. He abjects part of himself outwards as Tyler, a separate self, a separate body, of which, in the end, he must dispose.

Topicality

In the end of *SGGK*, too, Gawain does not return to Hautdesert with the Green Knight/Bercilak. He cannot conceive of a game in which there is no loser, where one can fail but still be a perfect "perle" of a knight, and since it was the cowardly protection of his frail and "crabbed [perverse]" flesh that compelled him to conceal the girdle from Bercilak, causing him to break his troth, the loser must be he. He insists on his own imperfection, carrying his self-loathing all the way back to Camelot, showing off the girdle, not as that which he kept for love of his life, because he did not want to find his head detached from his shoulders, but as "the token of untrawthe [dishonour (lit untroth)] that I am tan [taken] inne" (2509). He is merely human, like everybody else, not possessed of a giant's strength. The knights at Camelot laugh loudly at Gawain's recounting of his tale and what he believes to be the significance of the girdle, but once again, Gawain is not amused. Nevertheless, the court appropriates Gawain's adventure and the girdle is reinscribed within the regime as a token of honour. This appropriation leaves one with some discomfit, as it is clear that somewhere along the line the true meaning of Gawain's experience has been utterly lost. The poem ends as it began, with the evocation of the Trojan War, the most distant event in "British" history: its very political origins. Gawain's unique adventure, the coming into individuation that it offered briefly, is subsumed back into history and its terrifying straightness. A residue

does remain, however: the scar on Gawain's neck is not something that the other knight's can so easily appropriate. Something of his queer experience has left him anomalous and ultimately unable to reintegrate with full success back into the boisterous court at Camelot. Jack, likewise, will retain the scar of Tyler's kiss. Indeed, for all the betrayals of its own politics, *Fight Club* does not fall back into history, the "happily ever after" where everything has been put back the way it always was. It ends with buildings exploding, an absolute break with history. Tyler's revolution is not thwarted, but succeeds.

The parodies that *Fight Club* and *SGGK* perform as wildologies, the jokes they make of normative civilization, are ultimately short-lived. They can only sustain themselves up to a certain point, at which they are either subsumed into normality (Gawain's companions appropriate his adventure as a point of honour, Jack "decapitates" Tyler and unites with Marla), or vanish into obscurity (Gawain's adventure with the Green Knight ends with "the knight in the enker grene" ambling off, "Whiderwarde-so-ever he wolde" [*SGGK*, 2477-8]). Such jokes reside in a fully disruptive history, one that proceeds by a cause and effect only accidentally, marking the passage of time with catastrophes. They have a "topicality" that limits them to their very specific contexts, that causes them to be washed away by the violence of history. When Freud discusses the peculiar phenomenon of the topical joke, he indicates that they, like tendentious jokes, are highly pleasurable: "There are jokes that are completely independent of this condition... But we cannot forget that, in comparison with these perennial jokes, we have perhaps laughed even more heartily at others which it is difficult for us to use now

because they would call for long commentaries and even with such help they would not produce their original effect" (*Jokes*, 122). This is because "The vital force of topical jokes is not their own; it is borrowed, by the method of allusion, from those other interests, the expiry of which determines the fate of the joke as well" (123). Parody, as a particular brand of topical joke, must always borrow, must always be preceded by that which it parodies. Thus it dissolves if the parodied expires, or reconstitutes itself to account for the parody. Parody will always be lost to history, as will its subversive political potential. The queering that it performs can thus never be continuous. Only a normative regime can be continuous, establishing itself in an unremittingly straight line of history, a chain of citations that can reach all the way back to an original moment—Britain to Troy.[58] In her complaints about *SGGK*'s shirked queer project, Dinshaw is seeking a queer regime, one that can establish and *maintain* itself. But the queer always expires, with its erratic, crooked course. It veers while history just keeps on going. The queer can be perpetual, however. Its resistance to normativity lying in parody, it must incessantly *renew* itself. Its reactions and inversions must be ever-changing, ever-metamorphosing, ever-becoming. One joke after another, rapid-fire, like a machine gun. Always topical. Always different. Always laughing a contagious laughter.

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[58] See Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger's introduction to their editorial volume, *Queering the Middle Ages* for a brief but good discussion of the queer possibilities of preposterous history: "Mainstream historicism insists on understanding the 'flow of time' as uninterruptedly 'progressive'…insist[ing] on straight chronologies that privilege a value-based movement of supercession and progress…The preposterous thinking of queer theory might usefully interrupt such teleological sequences and the causal explanations…that accompany them" (xii).

OUTRO AND BEYOND: THE WILD HYPOTHESIS

ℬ

> I hopid þat he no wittes kowth,
> No reson forto speke with mowth.
> To him I spak ful hardily
> And said, "What ertow, belamy?"
> He said ogan, "I am a man."
> I said, "Swilk saw I never nane."

—Sir Colgrevance encounters the Giant Herdsman, *Ywain and Gawain*, 275-79

The Lone Gunmen of TV's *The X Files* are a trio of computer nerds often enlisted by protagonists Mulder and Scully to lend their technological know-how to the infiltration and recovery of secrets buried deep in the shadows of US intelligence. The three are the very epitome of the popular image of the "hacker," awkward misfits at the fringes of society, doing their part to undermine state authority to conspiracy and cover-up (see figure 12). They are the rogue wild men of the information age, not as brutal in the wars they wage against the state as a Tyler Durden or a Walter Kurtz, but just as violent. Their violence is worked against regimes of information manipulation, just like Tyler Durden and Walter Kurtz, both of whom resist the "lies" of the regimes that they situate themselves against: North American urbanity and a half-hearted military bureaucracy. However, it is a violence that makes its battleground in cyberspace, itself a wilderness unique to our particular historical situation at the turn of the twenty-first century. For cyberspace is the ultimate place where nobody lives (to return to our most simple

definition of the wilderness). In fact, unlike, say, the forests of medieval Europe, cyberspace has no bodies within it at all, human or otherwise.

Largely conceptual, purely technological, an embodied mind can only visit it through technological interface and an acceptance of its modicum of reality. However, it is cyberspace's lack of embodiment seems to constitute the larger part of its power. One is pure information in a world of information, all of which is highly malleable. There is no corporeal experience; there is no bodily risk. Complete anonymity is more possible than it is even in the largest city. And absolute performative agency is just as possible; within the confines of cyberspace: one is only what one purports to be, if anything at all. One is capable of complete wildness in cyberspace, the subject to very few laws, absolutely singular with no compulsory identification to any political category. One can very easily attack the state, though in the full knowledge that such an attack would be on a minuscule scale, and entirely transitory. The hacker is the ultimate microscopic terrorist, utilizing the potential held out by the cyber-wilderness for "multiplicity, celerity, ubiquity, metamorphosis and treason" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 243).

In fact, the Internet is strangely similar to the story of the terrorists we have glanced at in the preceding chapters: Kurtz, Osama, even Jack/Tyler. Created in the first place for military purposes then ported over to the popular sphere, the Internet seems, under its new management, to be exacting its own micro-treasons. At least, such are the cyber-paranoiac nightmares that imagine monstrous intelligence organizations or technologically ingenious cyber-criminals and breed characters like the Lone Gunmen to

resist them. The dominant representations of the Net and cyberspace depict an "out there" space that lacks any regulatory apparatuses to check its content or the movements of those within it. Sites exist devoted to every "deviant" predilection imaginable (and beyond, I'm sure), from serial killer idolatry to scat porn. More newsworthy in the past few years, it would seem, are those sites that allow for the free trade of music and movies, undermining copyright laws, and, more widely, notions of ownership of thought so dear yet so new to Western culture. It's a jungle out there, surely, but it's one with many eyes staring from the darkness of the undergrowth. There may be few checks on content and movement, one may not even have a body, but cyberspace is nothing if not the epitome of all of (post)modern culture's scopophilic desires. You can go anywhere, do anything (or anyone, for that matter), without much hindrance, but the traces of those movements, the footprints, the blood spatters, the semen drops, remain forever, in your own computer, that of your server, those of the sites you visit. The cyber-subject is continuously under surveillance, even as it constructs its own subjectivity through surveillance.

Such is the case with any wild man, wandering throughout the wilderness, forever with a civilized counterpart tracking his movements and habits. In any representation of the wild man, there is a something of a "wild hypothesis" at work, the paradox of which has lain just beneath the surface of this entire study. The hypothesis works in much the same way as the repressive hypothesis Foucault describes, casting the wild man into a taboo space beyond the walls of a heavy-handed, puritanical civilization, where he can easily be monitored and used as a negative instance in the oppressive formation of

acceptable subjectivities. The free play of the wild man accordingly heralds a wider freedom from all inhibitory laws, though a double-edged freedom, both a boon and a monstrosity: bodying-forth without any interdictions on his actions or thoughts, no correct or incorrect determining the decorum of his conduct, acting and reacting to all that he sees to be inhibitory, pure possibility, which, on the other hand, imposes itself upon and at the expense of other bodies, requires violence to the level of catastrophe, unleashes the terrors and monstrosities with which it has allied itself. However, one must never forget that the wild is the product of the very powers from which it claims to be free. It is civilization that proclaims, "Such is the wild man, and behold, the wilderness in which he dwells!"

When, in *Ywain and Gawain*, Sir Colgrevance encounters a grotesque wild man, the Giant Herdsman, he asks the creature what he is, to which the wild man returns, quite simply, "I am a man" (279). He tells Arthur's court, to whom he relates his adventure, that he "hopit þat he no wittes kowth,/ No reson forto speke with mowth [hoped that he was witless, (with) no reason for to speak with mouth]" (275-6). It is the hope of the knight and courtier that the monstrous creature he encounters possesses no humanity. To be told that creature is a man seems the last and most frightening thing he could hear. Colgrevance tries to deny the Herdsman his manhood, spouting that he had never seen such a man (282). Even so, the wild man's definitive "I am a man" echoes long after the creature leaves the scene. His exclusion by the utterances of civilization is a failure.

At the beginning of Roger Bartra's first volume on the wild man, he indicates that the purpose of his study is to demonstrate that "the wild man and the European are one

and the same" (*Wild Men in the Looking Glass*, 4). The wild man and the wilderness civilization designates as untenable and unliveable, those appearances, behaviours, desires, and pleasures, it excludes in order to constitute the fantasy of its own unified and coherent being are simply those parts of itself of which it is ashamed, the parts it hopes are witless and dumb. However, there are many ways of saying the things that are left unsaid.[59] According to Bartra, the wild man can function to "fill the disquieting lacunae left by the established, hegemonic patterns of thought...allow[ing] one to think and feel the empty spaces left by the normal and accepted explanations" (Bartra, *The Artificial Savage*, 115). This is because he is the product of a civilizing process that *excludes*, that produces its wild ways from bits of itself. Walter E. Kurtz, a crazed maniac in the jungles of *Apocalypse Now*, is still a formidable U.S. Army colonel ("He was being groomed for one of the top slots in the corporation, general, chief of staff, anything"). *Fight Club*'s scrawny Jack is as much the victim of the "Ikea nesting instinct" as he is the leader of a multi-celled terrorist organization. The Green Knight is a giant, supernatural monster living in the inhospitable Welsh forests, but he is also the most gracious and elegant example of knighthood in the whole of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

In maintaining that the wild man is the monstrous product of an *exclusion*, I follow Butler's more psychoanalytically informed theories of repression, rather than Foucault's more rigidly implied distinction between productive power and a prohibitory

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[59] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*: "Silence...is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies...There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (27).

law in my refutation of the wild hypothesis.[60] The wild man's appearance in "civilized"

culture is always a disruptive or troubling return, an uncanny, threatening moment,

precisely because of his exclusion, the taboos he represents, the laws he breaks.[61] His

arrival, even when it is the occasion for laughter, realizes a terrifying truth about being a

man, being human, being civilized. Man is wild, not because of any laws he fails to

enforce, nor because of any civilizing process that is incomplete; he is in actual fact, and

directly, wild.[62] The civilization he inhabits is the creation of animal bodies as much as

"rational" minds. The wild men man creates are subsequently mirror images of himself,

his wounds, his violences, his crimes, which all come back to haunt him. But they are

also fleeting images, ones that appear briefly, only to be forgotten. He'll never claim

responsibility for them. So the wild man's returns can only be ephemeral, eminently

topical; he must always be abjected once more. Such is the fate of this wildology, my

own topical joke, the product of parody and whimsy, which I would like nothing better

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[60] Indeed, Butler "take[s] issue with Foucault's account of the "repressive hypothesis as merely an instance of juridical power, and argue[s] that such an account does not address the ways in which 'repression' operates as a modality of productive power" (*Bodies That Matter*, 22). Indeed, for Foucault, what is popularly conceived as the repression of sex and sexuality in nineteenth-century "bourgeois" society, to which we are the inheritors, is not so much prudish and juridical as the exercise of "[t]he pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it" (*The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, 45). He claims that "this power had neither the form of the law, nor the effects of the taboo" (47), seeming to draw a distinction between a power that excludes and denies and power that produces. Butler seems to be striking a middle ground, theorizing a notion of power that is productive, but productive by virtue of the exclusions it makes.

[61] At the end of her introduction to *Bodies That Matter*, Butler claims: "My purpose here is to understand how what has been foreclosed or banished from the proper domain of 'sex'...might at once be produced as a troubling return, not only as an *imaginary* contestation that effects a failure in the working of the inevitable law, but as an enabling disruption, the occasion for a radical rearticulation of the symbolic horizon on which bodies come to matter at all" (23).

[62] This statement is, of course, an echo of Foucault's conclusion about the "modern society" that produces perversions through surveillance and discourse: "Modern society is perverse, not in spite of its puritanism or as if from a backlash provoked by its hypocrisy; it is in actual fact, and directly, perverse" (*The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, 47).

than to see excite for a brief, shimmering moment before falling apart, allowing its parts free play to find different configurations, breeding new hybrids to terrorize the wild ways beyond these pages.

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