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Author: Anna Czarnowus

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Anna Czarnowus

University of Silesia, Katowice

“Ich mot wende in mi way”: The Construction of Masculinity through Travelling in *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* and the Stanzaic *Guy of Warwick*

The citation appearing in the title of this study comes from the stanzaic *Guy of Warwick*, written c. 1300 and preserved in the so-called Auchinleck manuscript (the National Library of Scotland Advocates' Manuscript 19.2.1), but originating from the Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic*, a romance written in England c. 1220 (Wiggins 2013). Guy's agenda, "I must continue my journey" (GW 2664),¹ is equally applicable to the plans of setting off to the East that are made by Charlemagne in *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*.² The idea of voyage and its sub-category, a pilgrimage, in relation to masculinities seems to deserve a closer inspection in the two texts, one of which is related to the *chansons de geste* tradition and the other rather to romance. In *Women Pilgrims in Medieval England* Susan Signe Morrison notices a gap in the criticism of medieval pilgrimage and its sites of worship consisting in inadequate scope being devoted to female pilgrims. On the one hand it was "a normal social activity for numerous women," but on the other it determined the female travel-

¹ The quotations from *Guy of Warwick* will come from Wiggins' edition (2004) and will be followed by the abbreviation GW along with line numbers.

² According to Anne Lizabeth Coby the poem is not earlier than 1150 (2), even though its dating has usually ranged from the late eleventh to the late thirteenth century (1).

ers' gender identity to a great extent (Morrison, 44). As Morrison claims, the association between pilgrimage and Virgin Mary's maternity and the femininity of virginal female saints shaped medieval images of what it meant to be a woman (44). Here I intend to fill in yet another critical gap, this time the one concerning the relationship between pilgrimage and medieval masculinities in the two texts, one French and one English.³

Voyage or pilgrimage has traditionally been imagined as a deeply transformative activity. In order to prove that point, Morrison quotes Alphonse Dupront, who adopts a spatial perspective on the experience. Morrison writes the following about Dupront's theory of pilgrimage: “the pilgrim is a man who walks on foot through space, becoming ‘other,’ transmuting both man and the space he passes through. The purpose of pilgrimage is to meet the other, and this alterity transmutes the pilgrim ... The act of pilgrimage liberates the pilgrim from quotidian life and makes a rupture with the everyday” (Dupront 373, 412, qtd. in Morrison, 85). We shall analyze here the psychological space of the central characters in the narratives under scrutiny and broach the question of physical space that surrounds them in our search for transformation and gender formation. In terms of the relationship between a wandering male narrative and the domain of history the two poems represent two opposing situations. The author of *Le Pèlerinage* relied on his audience's knowledge of the tradition of pilgrimages to the East and on the historical facts associated with the person of Charlemagne, while the author of *Guy* contributed to the formation of a new legend for England out of utterly non-historical facts. Furthermore, in the French narrative Charlemagne's masculinity is ultimately ridiculed as if to counterbalance his historical role in the political and military world, whereas

³ *Le Pèlerinage* was more likely written in France than in England, despite its Anglo-Norman features and its being seen for the last time in 1879, when the manuscript Royal 16 E VIII of the British Library went missing, but *Guy of Warwick* is undoubtedly an English narrative, as English as the legend of Robin Hood and similar to it in its wide popularity, folk imagery, and relationship to specific historical and geographic sites; the places most often associated with the legend of Guy of Warwick are Warwick, an important Norman kingdom, Winchester, King Athelstan's capital, and Wallingford, from which Guy's father originates in the Anglo-Norman version (Richmond, 14).

the idea of male prowess of the fictitious Guy needs to be constructed from scratch in the course of the plot development, since there is no one historical model for that figure, not to mention a widely-known one.⁴ *Le Pèlerinage* has consequently been termed a satire on politics of the times, a light-hearted comedy, a parody with or without satire, and in generic terms a *chanson de geste*, a folktale, and a pious story (Coby, 2–3), whereas *Guy* was written with a serious, legend-making intent and the outcome is equally non-parodic. *Guy* has been diagnosed as a work inspired by “*chansons de geste*, romances of Chrétien de Troyes, hagiography, chronicles, recent history, and social customs,” as Velma Bourgeois Richmond summarizes it, but it is an elevated text rather than a satirical one (4). The two poems share a courtly style, according to Coby showing that the French poem must have been influenced by the culture of romance (2), while *Guy* is indubitably a fully developed romance, albeit a popular one.

Le Pèlerinage is based on the historical facts of Charlemagne maintaining good relations with the Patriarch of Jerusalem and with Harun-al-Rashid, the Caliph of Baghdad. Those diplomatic contacts found their reflection in the legend of his travelling to the East and his acquiring relics on the way, which was first recorded in the late tenth century by Benedictus de Sancto Andrea, a monk of Monte Socrate in Italy (Coby, 12). The French narrative was not the first account creating this fiction on the grounds of facts, but the idea of pilgrimage was so important for the text’s editors that the manuscript was titled *The Travels of Charlemagne to Jerusalem and Constantinople* or *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* already in its very first editions in the first half of the nineteenth century (Coby, 14). I would argue that pilgrimage is central to this narrative because it is a transformative experience in the sense of shaping gender identity and constructing a specific type of masculinity. The historical Charlemagne chastized the so-called “false pilgrims,” who put the voyages to their own commercial benefit and mingled with real pilgrims only to be exempt from toll, as Morrison reminds

⁴ Richmond names William Marshall from *L’Histoire de Guillaume le Marechal* written in French as a possible model (16–20), along with St. Alexis and William of Orange (20–30); Judith Weiss mentions other, less obvious, antecedents of that figure, such as William Marshal and Harold Hardrada (Weiss, 8).

us when quoting Charlemagne’s 796 letter to King Offa of Mercia (7). In *Le Pèlerinage* he is made a false pilgrim himself, obviously not in the sense of avoiding paying toll and distributing merchandise on his way to Jerusalem and Constantinople, but through his materialistic and power-crazed plans that he manages to fulfill in the course of his journey undertaken under the cover of religious travelling. Making money and increasing one’s social position could be two intentions of false pilgrims. Aleksandra Witkowska reminds us of yet another goal, that of undertaking a successful journey within what she calls “pilgrimage tourism,” a tendency that partly replaced the originally noble idea of pilgrimage as a special way of ascetic life (9). It needs to be investigated whether Charlemagne’s pilgrimage signals the existence of such pilgrimage industry at the time of the poem’s composition; the industry did not share much with the original design of a religious nature. Yet another version of a pilgrimage venture was a crusade, initially not called a crusade at all, but a peregrination, so perhaps Charlemagne’s venture should more aptly be called a crusade.⁵

From the 1920s traditionalist scholars have been defining the crusade as a journey to the Holy Land. This criterion alone would make the voyage of Charlemagne and the exploits of Guy crusading ventures. A different stance on the issue was expressed by the so-called pluralists, who thought that organization and procedures defined a crusade (Lock, 289). The latter attitude extended the usage of this term to the expeditions against Eastern European pagans, the Albigensians and the Husites (Coby, 11). It seems, however, that the two medieval texts in question include elements of the crusading ideology, the primary element being the emphasis laid on developing a specific type of masculinity: a military-oriented one, centered on gaining fame and reputation, and conquering all that is to conquer. Importantly, the movement eastwards that was made by the Franks meant more or less the same for Muslims there regardless of the Westerners’ intentions: Muslims did not distinguish between pilgrims, crusaders, and settlers and they called all of

⁵ Peter Lock evokes the words *iter* and *peregrinatio* as the ones used during the first three crusades to the Holy Land. From the Fourth Crusade the words *Cruce signati*, *Pasagium generale*, *Negotium Jhesu Christ*, and *Expeditio crucis* started to be used (Lock, 291). The term “crusade” appeared in Western Europe as late as 1638 (Lock, 289).

them “Al Franj” (Lock, 289). All of those travellers could be equally aggressive and destructive according to the Easterners. Apart from the crusades, which with time started to be called *croiserie* and *croisement*, there were also pilgrimages related to the “pilgrimage industry,” whose association with the distribution of relics was very close.⁶

The French text belongs to a rich tradition which made the Franks on the First Crusade believe that they were following in the footsteps of Charlemagne (Lock, 305). The literary Charlemagne is like those crusaders, because similarly to them he wishes to visit the holy places. He declares: “La croiz e le sepulcre voil aler aurer” [I wish to worship the cross and the sepulchre] (*PC* 70).⁷ Nevertheless, at that point of the narrative the anonymous author ridicules Charlemagne’s masculinity, since the ruler is simply taunted by his wife which is the reason why he undertook the journey in search of fame and riches. She does it with the words: “Del rei Hugon le Fort ai mult oi parole./ Emperere est de Grece e de Constuntinoble./ Il tent tute Perse tresque en Capadoce,/ N’at tant bel chevaler de ci en Antioche./ Ne fut tel barnez cum le sun, senz le vostre” [I have often heard of King Hugo the Strong, Emperor of Greece and Constantinople. He holds all Persia as far as Capadocia and there is no finer knight from here to Antioch. Apart from yours, there has never been such a fine company of men as his] (*PC* 45–50). Charlemagne comprehends the hidden allusion that he is not as powerful as Hugo, since he replies to his wife: “Ne dusés ja penser, dame, de ma vertuz” [My lady, you ought not to have doubted my power] (*PC* 56). Here Charlemagne is inspired to go on a strange journey eastwards, whose intended result is not really specified.

Not all other narratives about pilgrimages to the Holy Land have to, like *Le Pèlerinage*, provide their readers with similarly ridiculous images of dominated husbands. In the stanzaic *Guy of Warwick* we have the story about a kind-hearted man inspired by his beloved to take great effort in the course of his adventures, since he is the son of a provincial

⁶ Villehardouin and Joinville’s accounts also include such nouns as *croize* / *croisse* (crusader), *frent croise* (make crusaders) and *se croizer* (take the cross) (Lock 2006, 291).

⁷ The quotations from *Le Pèlerinage* will come from Burgess’ edition and will be followed by the abbreviation *PC* and line numbers; the translation will also come from this edition.

steward and she is an aristocrat. He declares to Felice’s father that he is motivated by his affection for her rather than by the want of riches:

And Y schuld spouse a wive
Ich hadde lever hir bodi alon
Than winnen al this warldes won
With ani woman o live. (GW 147–150)

The day of their wedding confirms that Guy still reacts to his young and beautiful wife with enthusiasm. Another possible reason for this emotional reaction could be the confirmation of his social status through marriage, since at the wedding he is surrounded by aristocracy: “That frely folk in fere/ With erl, baroun, and mani a knight/ And mani a levedy fair and bright” (GW 183–185). There is a potential here for exposing Guy’s vanity and desire for splendour, but it is quickly concealed by the decision he makes soon after being successfully wedded to Felice. He ponders on “Jhesu omnipotent/ That alle his honour hadde him lent” (GW 244–245). His very low mood results from the reflection that “Mani man he hadde slayn with wrong” (GW 251) and he needs to repent for it. He declares to Felice that, despite his deep devotion to her, he needs to go on a pilgrimage alone: “To bote min sinnes ichil wende/ Barfot to mi lives ende/ To bid mi mete with care” (GW 262–264). As Lee C. Ramsey insists, his need for self-aggrandizement is concealed here (59) under the pretense of a deep spiritual transformation that requires him to abandon his young wife. The pilgrimages that Guy undertakes firstly are not enough for him, since on his return he decides to make yet other trips to the East, where this time he will not fight for the right to marry the woman he loves, but for the good of Christianity.

In the French poem the satirized Charlemagne travels to Jerusalem, where he is warmly welcomed by the Patriarch. The Frankish ruler firstly sits on the chair on which Jesus once sat in the company of his apostles: “Cum il vit la chaere, icele part s’aproctet/ Li emperere s’asists, un petit de reposit” [Seeing the chair, he approached it and sat down to rest a while] (PC 119–120). The comparison of Charlemagne and his twelve peers to Jesus and the apostles must have seemed ridiculous to the text’s medieval audience, but the Patriarch in the text reacts to it in a different manner: “Sis as en la chaere us sits mames Deus” [You

... have sat in the chair in which God himself sat] (*PC* 157). The act of sitting on a piece of furniture validates Charlemagne's power and the Patriarch is the first one to ever call the ruler "Charles Maines" (*PC* 158). The Patriarch is then no wiser than the ruler, or perhaps he understands the law of the stronger in the world dominated by lust for possessions and power. During pilgrimages stress was laid on the issues of sin, penitence, and absolution, which meant that relics became most important (Lock, 305). Hence it is not surprising then that both *Le Pèlerinage* and diverse versions of Guy's legend include the topic of relics. The heroes are offered relics by the powerful people in the East, who acknowledge their greatness.⁸ In *Le Pèlerinage* the transfer of relics follows the initial acknowledgment of the Frankish ruler's power: the Patriarch gives Charlemagne Jesus' "sudarie" [shroud] (*PC* 170), "un des clous averez que il out en sun ped" [one of the nails from his feet] (*PC* 175), "la sainte corone que Deus out en sun chef" [the holy crown from his head] (*PC* 176), and "le calice que il benesquid" [the chalice which he blessed] (*PC* 177). Minor relics are also handed over only to be followed by "del leyt sainte Marie dunt ele aleytat Jhesus" [some of the Virgin Mary's milk with which she fed Jesus] (*PC* 187). This special relic had a gender-specific background. Morrison devotes this gender-specificity a lot of critical attention in her considerations of female pilgrimages, since she discusses the belief that Saint Thomas à Beckett had the ability to turn water into milk (18) and the importance of a vial of Mary's milk that the second most popular English shrine of Walsingham boasted of (23). Special ampullae filled with holy water and a drop of this milk were sold there in order to bring the female pilgrims aid in their potential problems with fertility, childbirth, and lactation (24). Morrison defines this relic as more "gender-specific," as she calls it, than others (16). In the French narrative Charlemagne, whose children are not mentioned in the text, is given this relic perhaps in order to question his masculinity a little, or at least to add a new aspect to the literary figure customarily associated with belligerence and other chivalric virtues. The textual image undermines what we know of Charlemagne from *chansons*

⁸ The version of the Guy legend where particular importance is attached to relics is William of Malmesbury *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (Richmond 12).

de geste and hints at the possibility of his having to form his masculinity in the course of the voyage, since before his pilgrimage he is boyish rather than manly and no father to his (hypothetical) children, but rather a more effeminate figure. Here femininity becomes symbolic rather than literal and gender can be attributed to literary characters on the grounds of how they behave.

Charlemagne's possible lack of agency, while agency was a quality conventionally attributed to men in medieval culture, becomes even more realistic in the scene of his arrival at Constantinople, where he enters Hugo the Strong's palace. The palace turns out to be situated in the realm of the marvellous, since it is an architectural construction swiveling at the slightest gust of wind:

... L'estache del miliu neelee d'argent blanc.
 Cent coluns i ad tut de marbre en estant,
 Cascune est a fin or neelee devant.
 de quivre e de metal tregeté douz enfanz:
 Cascun tient en sa buche un corn d'ivoire blanc.
 Si galerne ist de mer, bouse ne altre vent,
 Ki ferent al paleis devers occident,
 In le funt truner e menut e suvent,
 Cumme roe de char qui a tere decent.
 Cil corn sunent e buglent e tunent ensement
 Cumme taburs u toneires u grant cloches qui pent.
 Li uns esgardet le altre ensement cum en riant,
 Que co vus fust viarie que tut fussent vivant.

[The pillar in the centre was inlaid with white silver and a hundred columns of marble stood there, each inlaid with pure gold at the front. There was a sculpture in copper and metal of two children who carried in their mouths horns of white ivory. If any wind, blowing from the sea, struck the palace on the west side, it would make the palace revolve repeatedly, like a chariot's wheel as it rolls earthwards. Their horns blared and bellowed and thundered, just like a drum or a clap of thunder or the tolling of a huge suspended bell. They looked gaily at each other and you would have sworn they were alive.] (PC 349–357)

In her study "The Palace of Hugo de Constantinople" Margaret Schlauch mentions the theory that historic Byzantine architectural structures inspired the description of this palace and she even suggests that the author either made a similar voyage to Constantinople or at least read accounts of the existence of numerous buildings of the kind, in our times put together by Jean Ebersolt (501). Schlauch focuses particularly on one architectural detail of the edifice, which is the mysterious statue that represents two boys, "two smiling youths, each holding an ivory horn, who acted as weathervanes" (500). The statue is an integral part of the palace, as before the storm the air flows through the ivory horns that the boys hold and makes the whole construction vibrate. She identifies it as the so-called "vocal statue," that is a statue meant not only to please the eye, but also to produce sound (502). The sight experienced by Charlemagne would thus be a literary equivalent of the Eastern man-made marvels, as Scott Lightsey calls the artifacts produced for European and Oriental, including Byzantine, rulers, in order to please them and the people gathered at their courts (55–87). Georgius Codinus' *De Antiquitatibus Constantinopolitanis*, a description of Byzantine edifices, records a statue similar to that in *Le Pèlerinage*. The figure depicted in the statue blew its horn whenever the one who asked it the question was a cuckold: "if the suspicion were true, the statue groaned; if not, it remained silent upon being questioned" (Schlauch, 502). Is the fact that Charlemagne walks under the statue of the two boys and perhaps awaits them to blow their horns indicative of his possible problems with the wife? It cannot be proved that the poem's medieval audience did not have such associations, if they knew such legends associated with the real vocal statues. The weakness of Charlemagne's masculinity is then exposed upon his coming to Constantinople even though he "wins" the confrontation with King Hugo. This is not at all a situation of Lévi-Strauss' transfer of women between men as summarized by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in the following citation: "woman is definitionally a 'mystery' in the exchange system; her voice and agency are wholly excluded" (Cohen viii). The situation in the French poem is the opposite: Charlemagne's agency seems to be superficial since he sets off on a pilgrimage exclusively because of his wife's words. The narra-

tive on becoming male is subversive, since it presents the Frankish ruler as if he was an object sent abroad by his wife. The “becoming male” never happens, since Charlemagne’s masculinity is thoroughly undermined in the course of the pilgrimage and not created or solidified. Still, Charlemagne clings to his self-image that he disseminated through the boasts he uttered at Hugo’s court, so he does not realize the frail nature of his own masculinity.

The plot of *Guy* reveals how the formation of masculinity was imagined in medieval culture, but it does not adopt a satirical take on it. Guy undertakes his pilgrimages despite the initial erotic attraction of Felice, who was consistently presented as beautiful in all the versions of the legend. He adopts the way of humiliation in order to repent for his sins and does not commit further ones during the pilgrimage. The plot of the stanzaic poem commences when the Middle English *Guy* in couplets, also from the Auchinleck manuscript, ended: it takes its readers from the marriage between Guy and Felice to Guy’s death as a hermit once he has finished all his journeys. If the twisted geography of *Le Pèlerinage* was only a pretext for presenting the supposed maturation of Charlemagne, the space in the stanzaic *Guy* constitutes a genuine opportunity for exploration and the changing of oneself. This is how Rebecca Wilcox writes about the series of Middle English legends about Guy from the Auchinleck manuscript: “the collection suggests that the person or family who commissioned the book was interested in the East as a place of *exploration*, adventure, conquest, and Christian faith” (219). In the stanzaic poem Guy sets off, as A.S.G. Edwards called it, on a “one-man crusade” (94), which here mingles the masculine belligerent and militaristic effort with the process of becoming like a monk and, ultimately, a hermit. Being a knight is not enough: one needs to become a *miles Christi* fighting against demons in his hermitage in the end. Felice herself calls Guy’s first venture a pilgrimage (“Mi lord is went fro me his way/ In pilgrimage to fond” (GW 426)), but this does not exhaust the list of activities that he undertakes on the way, which includes fighting against infidels, cultural confrontations with Eastern Christians and slaying Amoraunt, a Saracen giant. Paradoxically, the point at which he decides to become a hermit appears to be a natural consequence of his crusading, since the Orient was where he encountered his role model for

the pious life, Earl Jonas. The confused geography of the land he visits becomes a background for real transformation from a masculine knight to a reclusive religious man. The actual geographical location does not matter, as the anonymous author implies, once the crusading male constructs his new mature self in the course of it. Becoming a deeply religious man seems to be the highest stage of perfection in this imaginary rather than real world.

Guy's story is no parody of "becoming a man," but a genuinely religion-oriented narrative, in contrast with the French poem. Furthermore, in *Le Pèlerinage* there was no close identification between Charlemagne and his wife. The voyage was not presented in the context of courtly love, but rather against the background of two types of violence: the violence of henpecking and the one the ruler threatened to use against his wife. In *Guy* courtly love between the characters develops only to be replaced by higher virtues: the military exploits in the name of Christ, that is becoming a *miles Christi*, and the humble life of a hermit. Felice agrees to all those and does not demonstrate any agency at all, since, to quote Ramsey, "after her marriage to the hero, she becomes closely identified with him, as is implied by the fact that she always dies when he does or immediately afterwards" (46). The ideology of the poem seems to be claiming that he develops his masculinity to the full by becoming a recluse. A perfect medieval man, such as Guy, should overcome the limitations of flesh and become an epitome of piety. The hero already issues lengthy supplications to God before he starts his life of a penitent; he prays before he has to confront Colbrond, a champion of the Danes who attack England:

"Lord," seyð Gii, "that rered Lazeroun
 And for man tholed passioun
 And on the Rode gan blede,
 That saved Sussan fram the feloun
 And halp Daniel fram the lyoun,
 Today wisse me and rede.
 Astow art mighti heven-king
 Today graunt me thi blisseing
 And help me at this nede;
 And Levedi Mari ful of might

Today save Inglondes right
 And leve me wele to spede.” (GW 3013–3024)

The piety manifested in such prayers was the element which greatly contributed to the text’s popularity, as Marianne Ailes insists (26), hence it may be assumed that the attitude of Guy presented the standards of how a man should evolve as he matures. The later versions of the legend of Guy even evolved in the direction of a saint’s life, as John Lydgate’s fifteenth-century *Guy of Warwick* demonstrates (Edwards, 88).

In *Le Pèlerinage* the physical space of the pilgrim alters considerably, following its own logic, but the psychic one does not, even though Charlemagne returns home cherishing the illusion that it did. In *Guy* the highest achievement appears to be: “In the forest hermite bicombe/ Mine sinnes forto bete” (GW 3446–3447), that is a radical psychological transformation. Characteristically, neither of the two heroes changes his heart upon contact with the religious and ethnic others, since their meetings with alterity only solidify their feeling that they represent the one true religion and that their ventures that mingle pilgrimage with crusading are a righteous cause. Charlemagne becomes thirsty for power over other kingdoms, whereas Guy is not interested in them, as Ramsey comments on it: “The kingdom is not such an important matter, and Guy ... never actually wins one, although he is offered several” (46). Male pilgrimages in the two narratives are not a normal social activity, but the opportunity for self-aggrandizement and for constructing one’s masculinity. Traversing physical space is only a pretext for focusing on one’s mental one, which results in Charlemagne solidifying his idea of being a perfect masculine figure and Guy taking on certain qualities of his pious medieval masculinity to the full, as it occurs when he becomes a hermit.

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