“Hey, you look like a prince!” Ideology and Recognition in Guillaume de Palerne

Hartley R. Miller

Publisher
Classiques Garnier

Electronic version
URL: http://crm.revues.org/12942
DOI: 10.4000/crm.12942
ISSN: 2273-0893

Printed version
Date of publication: 30 décembre 2012
Number of pages: 347-360
ISSN: 2115-6360

Electronic reference
Hartley R. Miller, “"Hey, you look like a prince!” Ideology and Recognition in Guillaume de Palerne », Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes [Online], 24 | 2012, Online since 01 December 2015, connection on 01 October 2016. URL : http://crm.revues.org/12942 ; DOI : 10.4000/crm.12942

The text is a facsimile of the print edition.

© Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes
“Hey, you look like a prince!” Ideology and Recognition in Guillaume de Palerne

Abstract: This essay considers the phenomenon of recognition between the main character Guillaume and other aristocrats in Guillaume de Palerne in light of the Althusserian theory of ideological subject recognition. The aristocratic characters in the romance understand certain external characteristics as signs of nobility and share an overall belief in aristocratic exceptionality, unaware of the abilities of non-noble characters to identify the signs of nobility.

Résumé: Cet article examine le phénomène de la reconnaissance réciproque du protagoniste, Guillaume, et des autres personnages aristocratiques de Guillaume de Palerne à la lumière de la théorie althussérienne de la reconnaissance du sujet idéologique. Les personnages nobles du roman voient certains traits superficiels comme signes de noblesse et partagent une croyance générale dans le statut exceptionnel du sujet aristocratique, sans être conscients des capacités des non-nobles à identifier les signes de la noblesse.

In the opening lines of Guillaume de Palerne, the anonymous poet begins by asserting that possessors of truth must not keep it hidden, for then it is of no good to anybody. By hearkening to the tale, the reader will gain access to beneficial knowledge, or “sens”, which the author in turn has an obligation to dispense because of its value: “...Cil qui me vaurront entendre / I puissent sens et bien aprendre; / Car sens celés qui n’est ois / Est autresi, ce m’est avis, / Com maint tresor enfermé sont, / Qui nului bien ne preu ne font” (l. 9-14).1 With this opening image, the Guillaume poet presents himself as the conduit through which truth is transferred to the audience, rather than as an artist practicing a craft. The poet’s role is cast merely as that of an unmasker, a revealer of hidden “treasure”.

Though this theme is not unusual in an authorial prologue,2 it merits attention in view of the story that follows: that of a young prince stolen from the court of Sicily by a werewolf who also turns out to be a prince under his step-mother’s enchantment. The story follows the prince, Guillaume, and the werewolf, Alfonso, as the former grows to manhood and the princes’ true identities are revealed.3 These

1 All citations from Guillaume de Palerne: Roman du XIIIe siècle, ed. A. Micha, Geneva, Droz, 1990.
2 The Guillaume poet’s expression of a desire to edify and inform the audience is similar to that in the prologues of Marie de France, to cite a contemporary example.
3 The tendency to classify Guillaume de Palerne as a roman idyllique, based on M. Lot-Borodine’s genre study from 1913, is now on the wane (B. Behrmann’s contribution to this volume, “‘Quel beste cest piax acuevre’: Idyll and the Animal in Guillaume de Palerne’s Family Romance”, is a major step in this direction). The romance seems in fact to draw upon conventions borrowed from many different genres. In portraying the hero’s childhood, adolescence, and coming of age, Guillaume de Palerne shares similarities with Perceval; like the chivalric romance hero, Guillaume’s path leads him to knowledge of himself.

Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales et Humanistes, 24, 2012
Journal of Medieval and Humanistic Studies
two princes are themselves “celés”, treasures hidden by anonymity in the case of one, by a wolf skin in the case of the other. The “sens” of their identities is progressively made known to others as signs of their identities appear. Yet the author’s opening gesture makes it seem like uncovering the “sens celés” of the princes’ true selves ought to be easy. In fact, however, the revelation the author promises is potentially very difficult. How can Alfonso make a sign of his human identity through his animal body? Can Guillaume signal who he is despite his ignorance of his own origins? Even if signs of the princes’ identities can be made, can the signs be recognized for what they are?

This essay will focus on how signs of identity are recognized in the romance, and on the constructions of identity that thereby ensue. Guillaume and Alfonso, the two lost princes at the center of the romance, are subject to different constructions of identity depending on who is recognizing them. The signs Guillaume conveys to others are often grounded in his physical appearance, but Alfonso’s semblance prevents him from being recognized this way. I will argue that though the recognitions of Guillaume enable him to recover his identity, a distinct element of misrecognition is also operative in these scenes. Reference to theories of ideology, and in particular that of Louis Althusser, which will be explained in the course of the discussion, can help explain this misrecognition and how it operates paradoxically to bring about the main characters’ success.

Scenes of recognition: the emperor

At the start of the romance, Guillaume is kidnapped from his home by a wolf apparently intent upon eating him. The author tells us of the chase led by King Embron, Guillaume’s father, who follows the child’s cries and tracks the wolf to the Strait of Messina, where he at last loses them: “Il (the wolf) saut en l’eve a tout l’enfant. / Le Far trespasse, perd l’ont / Li rois et cil qui o lui sont. / Ensi s’en va en tel maniere / A tout l’enfant la beste fiere” (l. 115-20). The child is at this point given up for dead. In removing him from home at such a young age (Guillaume is four years old at the time, l. 35), the wolf saves him from an assassination plot, but also prevents him from knowing his true status as heir to the throne of Sicily. In order for Guillaume to recover his position, the wolf must engineer a way for him to re-enter the spheres of nobility and leave the forest wilderness, where after being initially cared for by the wolf, Guillaume is adopted by cowherds.

It is to meet the need for recognition, or discovery, that Guillaume’s encounter with the emperor of Rome is brought about. The emperor, Nathaniel, happens upon Guillaume in the forest, seemingly led to him by the werewolf. Something in Guillaume’s appearance speaks to the emperor and suggests to him that Guillaume’s place should be among the nobility. Because of his social position, the emperor can act as he pleases upon recognizing the boy, and decides to take Guillaume from his adoptive lower-class parents to the Roman court. Once there, Guillaume is again called a “damoisiaux”. In searching for what makes the emperor’s
recognition of Guillaume successful, it is instructive to look to two characters in surrounding scenes, first Guillaume’s mother, Felise, who mourns her son after the wolf’s attack, and second, Guillaume’s lower-class adoptive father, a cowherd. What the emperor thinks he sees in Guillaume is problematized by the cowherd’s more pragmatic view.

Felise’s lament for Guillaume in the first scenes of the romance constructs his beauty in terms of nobility, setting a precedent for the view of Guillaume’s beauty taken by other characters. Felise expresses the belief that her son has been made to embody noble virtues and to reap the benefits of the life of ease promised by his social standing. The wolf’s violent intrusion seems to sever Guillaume from the life he was meant to lead: “Fix, ou sont ore ti bel œil, / Li bel, li simple, sans orguel, / Tes frons li gens, et ti bel crin / Qui tuit sembloient fait d’or fin, / Ta tandre face et tes clers vis?”. ... Ja devoies tu estre fais / por devises et por souhais. / Or es a leu garoul peuture” (l. 135-9, 149-51). Felise’s description of her son conveys his preciousness in terms that assimilate value and nobility: he has a “frons gens”, and his hair resembles gold. Becoming food for a wolf is, in Felise’s view, a gross misuse of her son’s body, whose value far exceeds that implied in such a base end. In addition to the pain of losing her son, Felise feels that nobility itself, inherent in him and made manifest by his beauty, has suffered a devastating blow.

Guillaume and the emperor are brought together by the werewolf, who, having already acted as Guillaume’s “miracle” by saving him from the murder plot at his parents’ court, appears to lead the emperor straight to the enfant. The wolf runs past the emperor in pursuit of a stag, and the emperor chases them. Nathaniel’s interest in these animals may come from a recognition of them as courtly symbols, as well as their potential to be impressive prizes for a hunter.¹ In the course of the chase Nathaniel encounters a child, whose beauty is striking:

Atant es vos que li garous
Vient devant lui l. cerf chaçant;
De pren en pren la va sivant
Et l’empereres cort aprés;
Tant l’a suï tot a eslès
Que sor l’enfant s’est embatus...
L’enfant regarde, s’arresta:
A grant merveille se seigna
De sa biauté, de sa samblance,
Et de sa noble contenance.
Merveille soi qui il puet estre,
Ne de quel gent ne de quel estre;
Cuide chose faãe soit
Por ce que seul illuec le voit (l. 408-13, 417-24).

¹ L. Sconduto describes Alfonso in these terms in “Chapter Seven: Guillaume de Palerne or a Lesson in Noble Sacrifice”, Metamorphoses of the Werewolf, Jefferson, N.C., MacFarland, 2008, p. 90-126.
² A. Corbellari in “Onirisme et bestialité: Le roman de Guillaume de Palerne” (Neophilologus 86, 2002, p. 353-62) charts the significance of these “animaux à connotations royales” (p. 359).
As in Felise’s lament, certain aspects of Guillaume’s appearance here are assimilated to nobility through the language used to describe them: his “contenance” (l. 419), like his “frons gens” (l. 137), is “noble”. For Nathaniel, as for Felise, the boy’s features suggest that he was made for the maintenance of courtly values and virtues. But the predominating tone in the scene is one of wonder at the child’s beauty and appearance, and indeed at his presence “seul illuec”; Guillaume’s apparition seems as inexplicable as the appearances of the stag and wolf preceding it. Though the emperor does not explicitly make the connection between wolf, stag, and boy, the series of apparitions draws attention to Guillaume as something out of the ordinary, perhaps also non-human. The emperor likens Guillaume to a “faé”, a word that indicates the emperor’s familiarity with courtly literature. For a moment, the emperor may see in Guillaume’s apparition a story coming to life, recognizing himself as the protagonist of his own adventure and Guillaume as a supernatural sign directed at him. The emperor also seems to view the meeting as pre-ordained: at the end of the scene, when the emperor returns to his hunting party carrying the beautiful child, he pronounces the discovery a sign of God’s favor: “Signor, Diex qui pas ne m’oublie / Ce m’a par sa merci douné” (l. 6445).

The emperor, however, is not the first person in the story to marvel at finding Guillaume in the forest, or at his beauty. Instead, it is the cowherd for whom the boy’s appearance is first a “merveille” (l. 206). At a moment when the werewolf has gone to find food and left the toddler Guillaume alone, the boy, “tamed” (aprivoisiés, l. 184) to the benevolent wolf, is frightened by the cowherd’s dog and begins to cry. The cowherd runs toward the sound and finds Guillaume. The cowherd’s interpretation of what he sees, contrary to the emperor’s reaction to Guillaume as a “faé”, is more or less correct: “Bien pense et croit que l’a mis / Beste dont il estoit ravis” (l. 207-8). The cowherd takes the toddler home to his wife, and the couple’s rejoicings in the child indicate that they too prize his beauty: “La preude feme et li preudom / En sont mult lié, mult le conjoent, / Mult forment le present et loent / La biauté dont il avoit tant” (220-3). Guillaume’s adoptive parents also identify noble qualities in Guillaume’s instinctive behavior, as he gives generously to his childhood companions (l. 374-80) and excels at hunting (l. 368-9).

When the emperor meets the cowherd to interrogate him about Guillaume’s parentage, the cowherd certifies Guillaume’s noble qualities: “Mais n’a plus france creature / Tant comme ciex et terre dure / Mix afaitié ne plus cortois, / Plus servicable en tos endrois / Plus large ne plus de bonaire” (l. 503-507).

The aristocracy, represented by the emperor and Felise, and the lower classes, represented by the cowherd and his wife, present two different ways of viewing Guillaume. For the emperor, Guillaume fits into a world of portents and signs, a world in which destiny, designed by God, is an operative force. Similarly, Felise espouses the belief that there are certain things her son was made for. For the lower-class characters, however, Guillaume is real – Guillaume’s presence in the forest can be explained, and the signs of his nobility, including his behavior and the rich garments in which he was found, make him comparable to actual people living within their sphere of knowledge. It is the cowherd who, as his adoptive son is departing with the emperor, gives Guillaume an extensive lesson in how to behave like a nobleman, and, like Perceval’s mother, calls Guillaume “biax fix” (l. 574).
The cowherd’s knowledge of nobility comes, he says, from his own father, who worked in a noble household (l. 575). For the cowherd, Guillaume has shown a natural proclivity for the behaviors catalogued in the lesson (including acts of charity and largesse, “As povres vos humeliés / Contre les riches les aidiés”, l. 563-4), and so is a fertile ground upon which to sow this knowledge. At the end of the story when Guillaume again meets his adoptive father, Guillaume reveals the noble qualities this father instilled in him in their full flower.

Confirmation for the emperor of Guillaume’s nobility, however, does not come until the emperor has before him the clothes Guillaume was wearing when the cowherd found him: “Trestous vermax et pains a flor / Et mainte soie d’or entor” (l. 521-2). These garments are not mentioned in the scene of the cowherd’s discovery, but are now produced in response to the emperor’s request. The noble “skin” of the garments provides the emperor with the evidence he needs to whisk Guillaume away from the place where, the emperor seems to believe, their noble presence is now incongruous: “Mais monte ça, ne t’atargier, / Derriere moi, sor mon destrier. / Si en irons...” (l. 537-9). The emperor is “trop ci”: the mission accomplished, he must return to his rightful place among the noblemen of his hunting party. The emperor’s invitation to Guillaume to mount the charger may be a matter of practicality for the return, but the explicit mention of the animal is significant. “No animal is more noble than the horse”, writes Jordanus Rufus (in the 13th century), “since it is by horses that princes, magnates, and knights are separated from lesser people and because a lord cannot fittingly be seen among private citizens except through the mediation of a horse”.

In the act of lifting him up onto his horse, the emperor effectively lifts Guillaume up the social ladder. On top of the horse, Guillaume is distinguished from his adoptive parents and the childhood companions whose names merely amuse the emperor and to whom he is not even permitted the time to say goodbye (he transmits the message via the cowherd, l. 585-99). The emperor’s invitation to mount, re-emphasized at the close of the scene (“Monter le fait et tient sa voie”, l. 602) effectively confers upon Guillaume a generic sort of nobility that permits him to move, and advance, in the noble circles in which he was “made” to live.

Love as mutual recognition

In the scene of the emperor’s recognition of Guillaume, it was in fact an initial misrecognition, of Guillaume as a “faé”, that led to the emperor’s identification of him as noble. The emperor’s recognition was a misrecognition because he saw in Guillaume something he believed to be directed specifically at

---

7 Noble clothing in its relation to skin is discussed in P. McCracken, “Skin and Sovereignty”, in this volume.
9 The emperor laughs upon hearing the names of Guillaume’s companions. R. Schiff, in “Cross-Channel Becomings-Animal: Primal Courtliness in Guillaume de Palerne and William of Palerne” (Exemplaria, Vol. 21 No. 4, Winter 2009, p. 418-438), sees this laugh as a sign of the emperor’s “mocking glee” at the pretentions of his social inferiors.
him, a sign of favor from God (and indeed he remained attached to this idea, as his report to his hunting party suggested), while in fact Guillaume was merely tending his cows as usual. The sign the emperor believed he saw allowed him to construct a perceived relationship of likeness between the foundling and himself, defining this likeness first as shared exceptionality and then as shared nobility. It is perceptions of shared likeness, I will argue, that inform recognition and condition the revelation of signs in the romance; Althusser’s definition of recognition as misrecognition can help to illuminate this point. Recognition is misrecognition, according to Althusser, because the signs or manifestations of the thing being recognized are always constructed by ideology, or a dominant belief system. In the emperor’s recognition of Guillaume, the emperor’s belief in aristocratic exceptionality led him to the initial conclusion that Guillaume was a magical being whose appearance to him was portentous. Even though Guillaume turned out not to be a “faé”, Guillaume’s exceptionality was still confirmed for the emperor in the revelation of Guillaume’s noble baby clothes. Though the emperor was wrong about the details, he was nevertheless confirmed in the belief that his recognition of Guillaume as exceptional (and therefore like him) was right. For Althusser, this is the “ideological effect,” the belief that what we see as fact, or truth, is indeed “obviously” true.

Once at the Roman court, Guillaume falls in love with the emperor’s daughter, Melior. The adolescents’ love expresses a desire for mutual likeness that can be read as the desire of nobility for itself. Desire arises in Melior and Guillaume despite the interference of the rational mind: since they believe Guillaume is an orphan, they reproach themselves for loving where they think they should not. The proof of generic nobility evidenced by the noble clothing in which Guillaume was found as a child is insufficient once Guillaume is put in competition with pedigreed princes for Melior’s hand. Their desire for shared likeness is performatively demonstrated when the lovers are sewn into identical white bear skins in order to escape undetected from the city.

What the teenagers misrecognize is the fact that a shared likeness between them already exists, since both are in reality not only members of the nobility but are royal as well. Lacking this information, Guillaume’s unknown parentage is immediately the source of amorous despair for both him and Melior. Melior becomes aware of her love first, and strives to understand why her heart, which ought to be a vassal to her reason, seems to be in open rebellion in desiring below her station. Her lament creates a parallel between the vassalage of heart to head and the social inferiority of her object of desire:

\[
\begin{align*}
N’\text{ai je mon cuer en ma baillie’} \\
N’\text{ai je sor lui la signorie’} \\
N’\text{ai je si grant pooir sor lui} \\
Que s’il me fait mal ne anui
\end{align*}
\]


Que j’en puisse prendre amendise?
Naie. Por coi? Car trop sui mise
En lui et trop abandonee.
Ne sai por coi sui si menee
Que ne li puis riens escondire.
Or sui a lui, il est mesire,
Si m’estuet faire son voloir (l. 885-95).

But Melior’s attraction to Guillaume has, unbeknownst to her, done the work of aristocratic subject recognition. Like her father, she has instinctively recognized in Guillaume’s beauty the sign of something she desires. But the mystery of Guillaume’s parentage makes it impossible to rejoice in this attraction. Melior’s expressions of confusion convey the sense of a loss of self-control typical amongst courtly romance heroines, but they also resonate in this context with class anxieties. Melior interprets her love as an overthrow of order: her heart has overturned the rule of her head, just as an uprising of the masses might threaten the rule of a sovereign. Melior’s lament assimilates the danger of loving Guillaume with that of allowing the dominant power structures to be overturned.

Guillaume too is aware of the impropriety of his love for the emperor’s daughter. Guillaume’s first expression of love for Melior occurs in the context of an erotic dream, in which he encounters a beautiful maiden who extends an amorous hail to him: “Je sui la bele Meliors / Qui merci te requiert et prie / Que tu de moi faces t’amie. / Tot t’abandon en ta francise, / Mon cors au tien et mon servise” (l. 1133-40). Guillaume then dreams that he takes her in his arms and begins to kiss her. In reality (the narrator is quick to say), Guillaume is embracing his pillow. He gets so excited that he wakes himself up, but continues to kiss the pillow for some time before he becomes fully conscious and starts to explore the troubling implications of his dream. He accepts the dream unequivocally as evidence that he is in love with Melior (suggesting that the dreams of aristocrats can reveal truth). This

---

12 For example, Iseut’s queasiness as she professes love for Tristan, or the fatalistic determinism Soredamor of Cligès sees in her own name.
13 R. Schiff calls the Middle English translation of Guillaume a “romance of the anti-nation” for its systematic promotion of aristocratic hegemony with language similar to this. Though more pronounced in the Middle English version, according to Schiff, several scenes in Guillaume de Palerne, such as Melior’s love monologue here, are expressions of support for aristocratic dominion. See Schiff, op. cit., p. 419.
14 The narrator places prophetic dreams in the minds of aristocratic characters at several turns. Guillaume’s erotic dream reveals his desire, but the dreams of other aristocrats, both of them women, foretell events: Melior’s dreams allow the couple to avert discovery in the forest (l. 4004), and Felise’s dream of two white bears and a white wolf prophesies her son’s arrival (l. 4715). Macrobius’s commentary on the dream of Scipio may be one source for the idea that only the dreams of people of a certain rank are significant: “Dreams concerning the welfare of the state are not to be considered significant unless military or civil officers dream them, or unless many plebeians have the same dream” (3.14, trans. W.H. Stahl). Dreams in Guillaume de Palerne can also be seen to be intertwined with the realm of the animal, as Corbellari suggests. While Corbellari sees both dreams and animals as expressing “les pulsions mal maitrises de l’homme” (op. cit., p. 360), I would suggest a more positive link between prophetic dreams and the reliability of animal recognition; see discussion below.
love, however, is a source of grief and not rejoicing, since Guillaume believes it is woefully misplaced and therefore transgressive:

Qui onques a si fait outrage
Osa penser, n’a tele error,
N’a tel fille d’empereor,
Et ma damoisele demain!
Ce n’est pas garce ne vilaine,
Mais la ou nus de cest empire
Por chose que il peust dire...
N’en porroit ja a nul chief traire...
Dont me doi bien de ce demetre,
Et ceste grant error laissier,
Qui ains me puet nuire qu’aidier,
Enseurquetout que tex hom sui
Que je ne sai cui fix je fui,
Ne de quel terre estrais et nés (l. 1208-14, 1216, 1220-25).

Guillaume and Melior’s laments both express the fear that their sexual attraction to each other will transgress social boundaries. 

15 Twice Guillaume uses the word error in his self-castigation, but from the standpoint of mutual aristocratic recognition, the love between the two adolescents could not be more right. Given their actual social standing, it could even be a positive political development allying two Italian kingdoms. The teenagers’ fears can be entertained at a safe distance by the reader, who is secure in the knowledge of Guillaume’s true identity.

With the escape in the bear skins that follows the dream scene, the symbolic differences that prevent the lovers from enjoying their love are performatively neutralized. 

16 The donning of animal skins in this episode can be seen as an aristocratic rite de passage, but can also be viewed as a performance of recognition: similitude in nobility is here symbolized by the identical white bear skins into which Melior’s lady-in-waiting sews the lovers. 

17 This staged mutual recognition even takes on a sacramental quality similar to a marriage scene, as each partner authenticates resemblance to the other through a verbal exchange: “Bele, faï
il, ne celés mie, / Dites de moi que vos en samble? / --Certes, sire, li cuers me tramble, / Quant vos esgart, si samblez fier” (l. 3096-3099). Melior’s use of the word “fier” describes the savage appearance of her bearskin-clad lover, but it also resonates with the noble male virtue of fierté. Her language in relation to Guillaume seems here to have undergone a shift in comparison with the scene of her amorous lament. “Fier” as a noble virtue is a term that places Guillaume on a par with her. While the donning of animal skins is a “privileged crossing into the animal world” that confirms the exceptional status of nobility,\(^\text{19}\) the shift in Melior’s language suggests a more productive role for the bearskin in Guillaume’s case. The bear skin produces the “sens” of nobility; Guillaume’s “becoming-animal”\(^\text{20}\) in this scene can be understood as a simultaneous becoming-noble. His participation in this aristocratic rite is not simply available to him because he already belongs to the nobility; rather, his nobility is both conferred and confirmed by his participation. In the scene of Guillaume’s recognition by the emperor, the ground for Guillaume’s becoming-noble was another animal body, that of the emperor’s horse, by which Guillaume was literally and metaphorically raised above his childhood companions. Here, noble identity is constructed inside an animal body. In the scene of Guillaume’s recognition of the werewolf Alfonso as “more than beast”, the animal body in which Alfonso resides becomes a point of interest for Guillaume in his fashioning of a chivalric identity.

Alfonso: Likeness and animality

Within the shared disguise of the bearskins, the lovers temporarily invalidate the dissimilarities in rank between them caused by Guillaume’s lack of known parentage. Melior and Guillaume also become both marginal and exceptional, like the werewolf Alfonso, though they only mimic a state of hybridity that for Alfonso is a permanent reality. In placing these three beings together in the forest, the Guillaume poet opens a space of experimentation in which relationships of likeness are explored and tested.\(^\text{21}\) It is in this scene that Guillaume begins to transfer recognition of his idyllic resemblance to Melior to recognition of Alfonso as a chivalric peer. By the end of the romance, after Alfonso has regained his proper form, the bond between the two princes comes to overshadow the relationship each one has with his queen. Alfonso marries Guillaume’s sister (l. 8814) and Guillaume marries his sweetheart Melior, but it is the personal and political connection between the two men that is most on display: “Diex, dist li bers, or sui garis / Quant or ravrai mon compaignon” (l. 7822-3).\(^\text{22}\)

Alfonso protects and aids the two lovers as they travel through the forest, and provides them with new disguises when they are in danger of being discovered, a stag skin for Guillaume and a doe skin for Melior. The stag and doe skins reconfer a

\(^{19}\) Schiff, op. cit., p. 418.

\(^{20}\) Schiff, op. cit., p. 420.

\(^{21}\) See B. Berhmann’s discussion in “Quel beste cest piax aceuvre”, in this volume.

\(^{22}\) The bond between Alfonso and Guillaume recalls the male bond prominent in chansons de geste, whose ethic, according to S. Gaunt, is a “monologic masculinity” in which female characters often merely serve the overall priority given to male bonding. See Gender and genre in medieval French literature, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995.
gender difference on the lovers, thus re-establishing a significant dissimilarity between them. It is in the moment when Guillaume is between skins, sloughing off his identical resemblance to Melior, that he is able to explore the possibility of resemblance to his protector wolf. He addresses the wolf in recognition of the wolf’s service:

Et dist Guillaumes: “Franche beste,
As tu donques doute de moi?
Ja ne puis garir sans toi.
Se Diex ne fust et li tiens cors,
Pieça que fuisses ocis et mors.
Ne sai se as de moi doutance.
En toi est toute ma fiance.
Bien pens et croi que entendés
Et que raison et sens avês.
Je ne sai que ce est de vous,
Que an nule riens ne fus lous” (l. 4370-80).

Though Guillaume’s recognition of the wolf’s “raison et sens” makes this scene at first seem like a scene in Marie de France’s *Bisclavret,* it in fact more closely resembles the scene of Guillaume’s own recognition by the emperor earlier in the romance. Like the emperor encountering Guillaume, Guillaume here senses a generic nobility or “franchise” in the creature, which is connected to divine or magical power, but the degree of nobility (or humanity or animality) to which this creature belongs remains unknown. “Doutance” could be interpreted generally as “fear”; in the moment Guillaume addresses him, the wolf is not present, having deposited the deerskins and gone, so Guillaume may be making reference to the wolf’s perhaps natural aversion to humans. This term may, however, also refer to the proper stance of a subject toward a superior. Guillaume’s question may reflect his uncertainty as to whether he is addressing a subject, an equal, or an otherworldly figure. The rhyme “doutance / fiance” gets to the heart of the matter: Guillaume takes a leap of faith in placing his trust in the wolf, making a sort of vow that eclipses the authentication of shared resemblance made to Melior in the bearskin scene. The foundling and the werewolf share a special state of exceptionality within aristocratic exceptionality that excludes Melior. Though she is also an exile from home, Guillaume comes to construct his identity in relation to the wolf rather than in relation to her, perhaps because, unlike Melior, the reason-endowed wolf is also anonymous and marked only by signs of a generic “franchise”.

---

23 Guillaume’s assessment of the beast as having reason puts him into a position reserved for kings in several other werewolf stories from around the year 1200. In *Bisclavret* and *Melion,* for example, the king is the sole member of court who can recognize the wolf’s behavior as a sign that it is more than beast. These stories display a concern with cementing the bonds of fealty, whereas the Guillaume poet is more interested in international alliances, since Guillaume, prince of Sicily, and Alfonso, prince of Spain, have a relationship of equals that is often constructed as familial. It is not until Alfonso meets his own father that the motifs of other werewolf stories are replayed, such as the beast’s attack on the malignant woman who was the source of his transformation (l. 7633-7639).
In this scene, Guillaume correctly identifies the lycanthrope as “not a wolf”. But, similar to the emperor’s misrecognition of Guillaume, he here mistakes the wolf’s substance as divine: “Diex” must be inhabiting the wolf body, rather than a poor, exiled prince. Guillaume’s adoption of the wolf as his heraldic symbol upon arrival at the Sicilian court also constitutes a misrecognition of the wolf’s identity. Though the adoption of arms was not reserved to members of a certain class, coats of arms were passed on from one generation to the next at all levels of society. In taking on the wolf as a heraldic emblem, Guillaume could therefore be said to adopt him as a type of symbolic father; Guillaume may view the wolf this way because of the services the wolf has performed for him, especially when Guillaume was a little boy. The wolf’s expressions of grief at losing the child to the cowherd at the beginning of the romance echo the lament of Guillaume’s mother from only a few lines before, and are strongly parental in nature: “Qui li oist uller et braire / Et les piès ensamble detordre / Et la terre engouler et mordre / ...Bien peust dire si grans dex / Ne fu par nule beste fais” (l. 236-8, 244-5). In contrast to such expressions of tenderness, Guillaume’s instructions for the image of the wolf to be painted on his shield reflect a misrecognition of this wolf as ferocious: “Mais qu’en mi lieu / I ait portrait et paint un leu / Grant et corsu et fier de vis” (l. 5395-7).

When Guillaume de Palerne was written in the late twelfth century, heraldic systems can only have been in their nascent forms, yet heraldry is surprisingly prominent in the romance, especially where Guillaume is concerned. The importance of heraldry in the construction of identity generally is highlighted during one of the battle scenes between the Sicilian forces, led by Guillaume, and the Spaniards. The narrator includes a detail that in later centuries would become so commonplace as to not need remarking upon: the queen’s seneschal, disfigured by the fighting, is identified by the arms he carries: “As armes l’ont reconneu” (l. 6092). Here, the symbol is the most fundamental and reliable marker of identity. The ferocity of the wolf on Guillaume’s shield similarly comes to determine Guillaume’s identity as he ravages the Spanish forces: “Li chevaliers dont je vos di / Qui si par est de grant vertu / Un leu a paint en son escu” (l. 5952-4). Guillaume’s identification with this symbol, by himself and others, is less an identification with the actual wolf than with a quality the wolf is supposed to represent. Animality in this scene is wrongly associated with savageness. In truth, the werewolf is benevolent, and only once does he attack a human out of malice, the stepmother who cast the spell on him.

Happy endings and the revelation of “sens”

In the scenes discussed above, identities were constructed according to self-evidences, or “obviousnesses” that characters seemed to see in each other; in other words, the revelations of truth in these scenes depended on the construction of that truth by ideology. As Althusser’s theory of ideology helps to show, facts, or truths, “never speak for themselves but are always made to speak” by a network of

25 On Alfonso’s father-like behavior, especially in the “idyll” at the romance’s center, see B. Behrmann, “’Quel beste cest piax acuevre’”, in this volume.
26 See Pastoureau, op. cit., p. 11.
discursive devices". Ideology, a certain belief system or “network”, is what makes the facts appear to speak in a certain way. “Discursive devices”, like noble clothing, gestures of service, and the performance of elite rituals like the donning of animal skins, produced sense and enabled characters to see others as somehow like themselves in the romance’s scenes of recognition. In the resolution of the romance, by contrast, gestures of recognition like the ones that previously conferred and confirmed Guillaume’s nobility (the emperor’s lifting him onto the horse, Melior’s change of language in reference to him, and his own adoption of a pedigree in the heraldic shield) no longer propel Guillaume forward to meet his destiny. This is because the truth waiting to be revealed at the end of the romance can only be constructed in one way: Guillaume and Alfonso are either princes or they are not. No matter how strongly the truth of their core identities can be discursively signaled, it is not until speech is restored to Alfonso that the facts can be made known.

The discursive evidence that Guillaume has landed in his true place of origin quickly begins to mount, but is not recognized as such. The first of these incidents is when Guillaume’s father’s warhorse, who since the king’s death had been disconsolate, recognizes Guillaume as his master: “Or saut, or trepe, or se desroie, / Fronche, henist et clot la teste, / Hurte des piés et fait grant feste, / Car son signor sent et alaine” (l. 5414-17). In an echo with the construction of noble identity through the addition of an equine body to the human in the scene of the emperor’s recognition, the warhorse’s behavior here begins to construct Guillaume’s paternity. The warhorse is one of the few true animals presented in the romance, and its expressions of emotion, neighing and bucking with joy, provide a point of contrast by which to highlight Alfonso’s hybridity, as he expresses human emotions with an animal body throughout the romance. The way this animal seems to know Guillaume contrasts with the human inability to sense Guillaume’s identity with equal certainty: though the human characters in the scene marvel at the horse’s behavior, their deductions stop there. Successful animal recognition is raised here as a counterpoint to the possibly flawed phenomenon of human recognition, subject as the latter is to ideology.

Recognition of Guillaume by the warhorse as the king’s biochemical replacement foregrounds the series of human attestations of Guillaume’s resemblance to King Embron, whom nobody yet knows to be Guillaume’s father. Upon his return from the second battle, Felise sees such a striking resemblance between Guillaume and her late husband that she begins to weep, and in parallel with her first lament upon the loss of Guillaume, she enumerates his physical features as if they could be tokens of recognition: “De cors, de membres, de visage, / Se vos fuissiés de tel aage / Qu’estoit li rois, ainc ne vi rien / Qui autre resamblast si bien” (l. 6341-44). In the moments before Alfonso emerges newly released from the wolf skin that was covering him, the narrator describes Guillaume’s now kingly (not only generically noble) mien:

28 This motif is familiar from the story of Alexander the Great, known to the Guillaume poet perhaps from Latin sources, like Walter of Châtillon’s Alexandreis or from the 12th-century Roman d’Alexandre.
29 Alfonso performs elaborate dumb shows in which paw functions as hand in his expressions of homage to the Sicilian royal family and in his supplication for mercy from his father; see McCracken, “Skin and Sovereignty”, in this volume.
Guillaume de Palerne

359

Ideeology and Recognition in Guillaume de Palerne

Guillaume fu enmi la sale;
N’avoit mie la chiere pale,
Mais bien aperte et bien formee,
La face tendre et couloree,
Le cors furni, bien fait et gent.
Bien li sieent si garniment;
Em pur le cors fu defublés.
De mult de gens fu esgardés,
Car mult resambloit bien baron.
Cil qui virent le roi Embron
Endementiers que il vivoit
Dient que bien li resambloit (l. 7595-606).

Not only does Guillaume look strong, healthy, and regal, but he looks almost identical to the previous king, his father, suggesting that kingsness resides within the material body as well as within symbolic titles. Attention is momentarily turned away from Guillaume, however, as the work of changing Alfonso from a wolf back into a man ensues. Brande, the stepmother who had changed him into a wolf, undoes her enchantment using a magic ring. Once in human form, Alfonso first uses his restored powers of speech to request that “li chevaliers” who had vouched for Alfonso and prevented the Spanish king’s men from attacking him dress him in human clothes. No other person is fit to “dub” him with an equal gesture: “D’autrui ne voel estre adobés” (l. 7789). The service Guillaume here returns to Alfonso is like the solidification of the vow begun by Guillaume in the forest, which Alfonso is now verbally able to return. The authentication of the personal bond between the two princes is effected before it is made public; upon Alfonso’s revelation that Guillaume is a king, the strength of their personal bond becomes the foundation of a political alliance. After he emerges transformed, accompanied by Guillaume, Alfonso addresses Felise and the court and makes known the “sens celés” at the center of the drama:

Dame, sachiés certainement
La terre est soie et tu sa mere.
Li rois Embrons il fu ses pere;
Ses peres fu li vaillans rois.
Dame, tu le portas nuef mois;
Tu le portas, de toi nasqui.
Je sui li lous qui le ravi.
Je le ravi et n’oi pas tort,
Car il estoit jugiés a mort (l. 8096-104).

Alfonso’s revelation shows Felise and the other onlookers that their instincts were correct, and restores Guillaume to the full complement of the rights and privileges

---

30 The Guillaume poet here highlights the idea of the “twinned nature” of the king, who is both body politic and body natural, that is the subject of E. Kantorowicz’s landmark study, “The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology,” Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957.
which, as his mother expressed from the outset, he was made to enjoy. Alfonso’s revelation emphasizes Guillaume’s parentage through repetition and through explicit mention of Guillaume’s physical birth. Guillaume has arisen to defend his kingdom in his people’s time of need, which is due to an instinctive gravitation to what is physically like him: “Se il le regne a maintenu, / De nature li est venu” (l. 8093-4).

Alfonso’s restitution of identity effects the revelation of the whole truth, since the listeners are now able to connect the dots that describe the outline of his and Guillaume’s stories. With “Je sui li lous qui le ravi” (also repeated), the figures of wolf and lost boy become components of two contiguous personhoods. The kingly Guillaume occupying the most prominent place in the realm is connected to the small boy in a vermilion tunic who was torn from his parents’ home by what seemed to be a ferocious animal. Alfonso, the man who has just undergone the magical conversion of his body from the body of a wolf, has been connected to the lost prince of Spain and to the swift blur of fur that so altered the course of Guillaume’s life, yet crucially preserved it for this moment of revelation.

The restitution of Guillaume’s identity comes with manifold rewards. Guillaume is restored to his family, and can now marry Melior and consolidate the realms of Rome and Sicily. Alfonso too reclaims the land, wealth, and family connections that are rightfully his. Guillaume even extends his good fortune to the adoptive lower-class parents who raised and nurtured him as a child, coming good on the former emperor’s long-ago promise to make them rich (l. 9388). While Nathaniel’s promise was made as recompense, Guillaume’s promise to them is a reward for their service. His interview with the cowherd enacts a final scene of recognition: “Preudom, reconnisîes me vous? / – Comissons? Voire, sire, oil. / Ja vos tenîmes por no fil ... – Sachîès tel paine i avès faite, / Jamais disète ne souffraîte / N’averès jor de vostre vie” (l. 9394-6, 9413-15). The cowherd’s recognition here, an echo and a reformulation of his discovery of Guillaume as a lost boy, brings Guillaume’s adventure full circle.

Ending the romance with this interaction between Guillaume and the cowherd highlights the crucial role played by animals and non-nobles in recognizing the aristocrats in the story for what they are. It seems that these beings, outside aristocratic ideology (or aristocrats’ beliefs about themselves) are better in a position to see the aristocrats and recognize them objectively. Aristocratic recognition of other aristocrats, as we have seen, is often misrecognition, while the beings outside human aristocracy more consistently hit upon the right interpretation of aristocratic being. Aristocrats, when confronted with each other, often look higher, seeing (misrecognizing) in each other a spark of the divine. Although inevitably the victims of misrecognition, the aristocrats in the story are still successful, personally and politically, and perhaps this is the ultimate “sens” the author wishes to reveal: the story instructs us, its readers, to view the non-aristocratic recognitions of aristocrats as incidental to the misrecognitions the aristocrats in the story are privileged to make, protected as they are by the grand destinies they are bound to fulfill. Aristocrats, the author would have us believe, are exceptional, cosmically influential, and rightfully at the top of the heap.