Chaucer’s reading list: Sir Thopas, Auchinleck, and Middle English romances in translation

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CHAUCER’S READING LIST: SIR THOPAS, Auchinleck, and Middle English Romances in Translation

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy in English
Department of English
College of Liberal Arts

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2011
THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

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entitled

Chaucer’s Reading List: Sir Thopas, Auchinleck, and Middle English Romances in Translation

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English

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May 2011
ABSTRACT

Chaucer’s Reading List: Sir Thopas, Auchinleck, and Middle English Romances in Translation

by

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Middle English romance has never attained critical respectability, dismissed as “vayn carpynge” in its own age and treated as a junk-food form of medieval literature or kidnapped for political or psychoanalytical readings. Chaucer’s Tale of Sir Thopas has been explained as an acidly sarcastic satire of the romances’ supposedly clichéd formulas and poetically unskilled authors. Yet such assumptions require investigation of how Chaucer and his ostensible audience might have viewed romance as a genre. Chaucer’s likely use of the Auchinleck manuscript forms a convenient basis for examination of the romances listed in Thopas. With the aid of a modern translation, the poems turn out to form a rich interplay of symbolical, theological, and historical meanings. Viewed in a more sensitive light, the Middle English romances in turn give Thopas new meaning as a poem written affectionately to parody romance but chiefly to effect a humorous contrast. Rather than condemning romances, Chaucer uses their best examples to heighten Thopas’ comic impotence as a knight and to provide self-deprecating carnival laughter at Chaucer the narrator’s failed story.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

My thanks to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas which made this project and my doctoral studies possible with an assistantship. My thanks to my committee of Julie Staggers, Elspeth Whitney, and Philip Rusche, and especially for the continuing assistance of John Bowers as director.

Additional thanks go to the many who have helped or encouraged me at UNLV, in particular Richard Harp and Jacquie Elkouz, the document delivery services of the UNLV library, the University of Alberta library, and family and friends.

I fondly acknowledge my grandmother, Caroline Eckert (1903-1998), who was able to recite to me in the 90s the Chaucer she learned as a schoolgirl during the First World War.
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INTRODUCTION

The Medieval Romance and *Sir Thopas*

*A wit-besoting trash of books.* —Montaigne, on medieval romances.¹

One frustration of engaging in any branch of European medieval studies as an academic pursuit is that few claim expertise about the ancient or Roman worlds, but seemingly everyone on an internet discussion forum believes him or herself knowledgeable about the medieval period, usually based on patently false beliefs. Outside academia, the popular understanding of the period usually presumes one of two stereotypes. The first is the ‘merry-old-England’ cliché of the renaissance fair, where undergraduates dress as Vikings with *Hagar the Horrible* horns and discuss trivial minutiae of medieval weaponry, while flirting with underdressed wenches who serve mead. Hollywood films similarly depict any English century before the nineteenth as one where knights exclaim “forsooth, varlet” in stilted Victorian accents. While puerile and anachronistic, the trope is at least benign in comparison to the second common image of the era, which persistently retains the pejorative mislabel *dark ages*. This Monty Pythonesque world reeks of ignorance, plague, war, an oppressive and misogynist church, violence, inquisitions, and witch hunts, hence the slang *get medieval* on someone. The medieval Europeans enjoyed regular baths, but to state that they bathed at all invites incredulity among non-specialists.

Doubly frustrating is the practice among scholars to belittle and misrepresent the medieval period in order to place other eras in brighter relief. Just as classicists depict

Greco-Roman culture as fantastically idyllic and sophisticated, Renaissance humanists imagine a sudden birth of civilization in post-plague Europe and present, “for purposes of contrast, a grossly simplified image of the preceding age.” The early modern appraisal of the medieval period and its literature was consistently disdainful. Just as gunpowder helped make chivalry obsolete, its poetic values were regarded as primitive. Nashe was typical in writing about Bevis of Hampton in 1589 and asking who “can forbeare laughing” at the “worne out absurdities” of its “plodding meeter.” Milton disparages poetic rhyme itself as “the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame meter.” Caxton ostensibly still held a sentimental view of a passing age when he wrote in 1483, “O ye knyghtes of Englond, where is the custome and usage of noble chivalry that was used in tho days?” Yet in general, medieval literature and romance in particular had few friends in high places in the early modern era.

Much of the condemnation was moral. Even in its own time, the romance genre was dismissed as “vayn carpynge” by medieval churchmen, a sentiment going back as far as Alcuin’s complaint in 797 to the monks at Lindisfarne, “Quid enim Hinieldus cum Christo?” (“What has Ingeld to do with Christ?”) A homily complains that men who are unmoved by an account of Christ’s passion are “stirred to tears when the tale of Guy of

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Warwick is read. Such reproaches evidently did not go beyond sporadic grumbling, for romances required expensive parchment and clerics to write them, but the condemnations intensified in Elizabethan England even as printing eased their transmission. Churchman Francis Meres cautioned that such wanton stories were “hurtful to youth.” The early humanists had equally firm if secular objections against the corrupting moral example of the sensational plots and heroes of romances. Juan Luis Vives, Spanish humanist and friend to Thomas More, warned that romances make their audiences “wylye and craftye, they kindle and styr up couetousnes, inflame angre, and all beastly and filthy desyre.” Roger Ascham thundered in 1545 that their reading leads to “none other ends, but only manslaughter and baudrye.”

Nicola McDonald notes that modern critics have treated such remarks with “humorous detachment,” wondering how the genre could ever be seen as threatening enough to exercise its critics so. Like early fulminations against rock music in the 1950s, the comments seem amusingly quaint. Yet Restoration and Romantic era academics were no less hostile to medieval English literature. Partly the criticism originated in post-medieval and anti-Catholic prejudice. Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

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8 McDonald, 3.


10 McDonald, 3-4.

11 McDonald, 4.
(1782) is still lauded as a magisterial work in historical analysis. Among other feats, he helped to establish the modern footnote system. Nevertheless, his work extols Rome by negatively juxtaposing it against “the triumph of barbarism and religion” following the empire’s decline. For Gibbon’s contemporaries who esteemed the Latin of Cicero as the apex of language and rhetoric, modern English was an inferior replacement and early grammars often forced English into procrustean Latin models. Medieval English romance, mostly treating of non-classical narratives and, even worse, set in a Christian world, would have been beneath contempt.

Yet on the whole modern critics have shifted the basis of their condemnation of medieval romance from moral to aesthetic grounds. McDonald again notes that romance’s putative friends have been no kinder than its enemies, as scholarship has repeatedly been colored by a “veiled repugnance” to the genre. The first major modern anthology of romance, Thomas Percy’s Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765), was considered a sort of youthful indulgence by its author, who declined to sign his name to later editions upon taking up more serious interests. Similarly, in George Ellis’ Specimens

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13 Edward Gibbon, History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1782), Vol. 6, Ch. 71, Part 1. Gibbon argues that “the introduction, or at least the abuse of Christianity, had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman empire. The clergy successfully preached the doctrines of patience and pusillanimity; the active virtues of society were discouraged; and the last remains of military spirit were buried in the cloister” (Vol. 3, Ch. 38, Part 6). While respecting his acumen, some modern historians object that the eastern empire was no less devout and lasted another eleven centuries after Constantine.


15 McDonald, 5.
of Early English Metrical Romances (1805), there is a sort of proper embarrassment at a gentleman dignifying such vulgarisms:

[Ellis] mocks their long-winded plots, ludicrous emotions and general absurdity, retelling romances like Guy of Warwick and Amis and Amiloun, with the kind of smug irony that is designed only to assert his, and his reader’s superiority over the imagined and denigrated medieval.\(^\text{16}\)

Even among medieval specialists of the twentieth century, a critical binary prevails with Chaucer, Gower, Gawain / Pearl, and devotional texts comprising high culture. English romances, conversely, are the junk food of the period, seen as degenerated pastiches of continental originals cobbled together by “literary hacks,”\(^\text{17}\) with formulaic plots and stereotyped characters. Baugh takes it as a commonplace that “every one knows that the Middle English romances are honeycombed with stock phrases and verbal clichés, often trite and at times seemingly forced.”\(^\text{18}\) At best their stylized repetition provides childish diversion, such as “children feel in The Three Bears.”\(^\text{19}\) Pearsall notes his difficulty in comprehending “why poems that are so bad according to almost every criteria of literary value should have held such a central position in the literature culture of their own period.”\(^\text{20}\)

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\(^{16}\) McDonald, 7.


The underlying tone in much criticism is the belief that romance chiefly sins by *being* popular, failing to be more rarified or serious in tone for the aesthete or to be more socially subversive for the revisionist. Unlike epic, which Bakhtin categorizes as a completed genre, medieval romance grew into modern iterations from Una to Elizabeth Bennett to Bridget Jones. The manuscripts stubbornly survive in numbers larger and more geographically varied than any other medieval English genre, and the recorded libraries of everyone from well-off fishmongers to grocers to aristocrats included them. By the thirteenth century the earliest recorded French bookseller appears with the nickname “Herneis le Romanceur.” Although probably not borne in fact, a claimed mark of breeding for a knight was reading romances, and Chaucer depicts Creseyde with ladies listening to a reading of the Siege of Thebes (*TC II.*82-4). Edward II had fifty-nine books of romance in his library. Well into Elizabethan England the tastes of the literate public remained medieval and romances were among the first popular printed books, providing further materials for dramas and ballads. While by the Restoration the

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26 Roland Crane asserts that early English humanists were less concerned with literature than with philosophical or theological matters. Roland S. Crane, 132-33.
Middle English language had become increasingly difficult, some verse and prose modernizations remained popular into the next century.\textsuperscript{27}

McDonald sees a sort of secular Calvinist guilt in academia, which disparages medieval romances because they are enjoyable, with probably more than a little snobbery due to the cliché of present-day romances being the province of teenagers and housewives. Yet the themes and content of English medieval romances are not the same as modern exemplars, with their flavor of improbable chick-flicks and Harlequin novels at supermarket checkouts. Medieval romance suffers the additional problem of a lack of scholarly definition, and there was and is no consensus on just what comprises a romance. The earliest usage referred more to a story’s Old French or Latinate origins, and for many the twelfth-century narratives of Chrétien de Troyes form “the ‘paradigm’ of romance.”\textsuperscript{28} Chaucer and his contemporaries also seem to have generalized romances as secular and not specifically historical works in French,\textsuperscript{29} though later usage has the broader idea of any “fictitious narratives”\textsuperscript{30} involving chivalrous or aristocratic deeds. English romance is thus a blurry designation which bleeds into genres as divergent as Arthurian legend, history, hagiography, and folktale.

Medieval romances often featured some quest or journey, which could be literal or emotional but often spiritual. Such pursuits include courtship and marital love, but not

\textsuperscript{27} See Roland Crane for editions and reworkings of Guy of Warwick, which continued to enjoy a readership, albeit increasingly as juvenilia, until the 1700s. Roland S. Crane, 193.


\textsuperscript{29} Susan Crane, Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales (Princeton: University Press, 1994), 9.

essentially—there are almost no women in *Gamelyn*, although its genre status as a romance is also questioned. Finlayson suggests that romances depict courtly adventure with “little or no connection with medieval actuality… not unlike the basic cowboy film.” Ker states that the old epic warriors always have “good reasons of their own for fighting” which connect to external and real needs, whereas in romance the emphasis falls on the hero’s individual achievements, with the causes a background and often perfunctory device. Hanna asserts the opposite, that although romance heroes lack psychological interiority, the narratives symbolically convey such emotions and meanings. I can make no better synthesis than to argue that romances tend to have an escapist ethos which idealizes rather than realistically portrays. Thus while it serves the purpose here to speak of the style as a subgenre, it may be more accurate to call medieval English romance, like satire, a register or mode.

Identifying the class audience of romance has been an equally contentious pursuit. Detractors assert that English romances, with their sentimental themes and oral-based structures, appealed almost exclusively to lower-class and non-literate audiences. Ostensibly, French stories were for court audiences and English ones for the *hoi polloi,* with Latin, French, and English forming a clear hierarchy of taste and value regardless of content. English romances frequently feature scenes of civic celebration, and if they were

31 Finlayson, 55.
34 Pamela Graden does just this in “The Romance Mode,” in *Form and Style in Early English Literature* (London: Methuen, 1971), 212-272.
recited at such events—Havelock’s coronation features games, music, and “romanz reding on the bok” (2327)\textsuperscript{36}—they would have had a broad lay audience. Even if the Havelock poet lets the mask slip at the end by mentioning how he stayed up long nights writing the story (2998-9), he presents himself as a minstrel, at ease in a public space with an audience and “a cuppe of ful god ale” (14).

Yet recent scholarship points to a widely heterogeneous audience for English romances which included the lower aristocracy. Sir Thopas, albeit in parody, is addressed to “knyght and lady free” (CT VII.892). English works were not automatically seen as ignoble, as attested by rapidly declining levels of French fluency in the English gentry. Late in the thirteenth century, the Arthur and Merlin narrator notes that “mani noble ich haue yseie / þat no Freynsche couþe seye” (25-6).\textsuperscript{37} Scholars have judged English romances as vulgar corruptions of French originals, often misapplying the standards of Chrétien to a fundamentally different genre. Seaman argues that the English preference for less courtly rigor and more dragons in romance reflects a distinct and equally valid poetic culture.\textsuperscript{38} Where continental romances endorse a value system of chivalry, the English ones are often homiletic.\textsuperscript{39} We also forget that many of Chaucer’s narratives (and nearly all of Shakespeare’s) equally derive from continental originals and were praised for their respect and fidelity to auctoritee.

\textsuperscript{36} For Havelock and all other non-Chaucerian romances here I use TEAMS as sources unless noted.

\textsuperscript{37} In Susan Crane, Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 10.


Moreover, the metafictional sense that exists within many romances suggests a skillful author able to appeal to multiple levels. The numerous references to the storytelling narrator, to other romances the audience is expected to know, and the “citation of bookish sources”\(^{40}\) requires a certain sophistication to apprehend information above the narrative plane. Chaucer also occasionally drops metafictional touches, telling his “litel book” to go (\textit{TC} V.1786). The requisite invocation to listen at the beginning of most romances may suggest a traditional oral situation but does not necessarily mean the author is literally a wandering minstrel,\(^{41}\) any more than the fictional audience of “ye lovers” (\textit{TC} I.22) that Chaucer addresses is a real one. Nevertheless, if romances were indeed sung out loud, as the invocation in \textit{King Horn} suggests—“alle beon he blithe / that to my song lythe / a sang ich schal you singe / of Murry the Kinge” (1-4)—their performance may continue the same aristocratic tradition as the Beowulf scop who sings heroic lays before Hrothgar and his retainers.\(^{42}\)

\[\textbf{Chaucer and His Audience}\]

There are few established facts about Chaucer’s original audience for his works. Evidently he had one if his texts survived and were copied into the fifteenth century. Eighty-two manuscripts of \textit{The Canterbury Tales} are extant, a considerable number only surpassed by the \textit{Prick of Conscience}. Much of his verse was disseminated in

\[\textsuperscript{40}\text{McDonald, 14.}\]
\[\textsuperscript{41}\text{Baugh, “Questions,” 3.}\]
\[\textsuperscript{42}\text{Baugh, “Questions,” 18. Hrothgar’s bard is lavishly praised as the "cyninges þegn / guma gilphlæden" ("the king’s thane, a man of skilled eloquence"). Beowulf, ed. and trans. Howell D. Chickering, Jr. (Toronto: Anchor Books, 1977), lines 867-8.}\]
“compilations for gentlemen, lawyers, and merchants,”\textsuperscript{43} and he appears early in print in editions of Caxton and others. Some of his contemporary intimates refer to him in their own fiction. The poem \textit{The Boke of Cupide} (or \textit{The Cuckoo and the Nightingale}), attributed to friend John Clanvowe, begins with a quote from the \textit{Knight’s Tale} (\textit{CT} I.1785-6) and evinces a style deeply responsive to Chaucer’s. Henry Scogan also alludes to \textit{The Wife of Bath} in his works.\textsuperscript{44} Paul Strohm’s \textit{Social Chaucer} asserts that Chaucer and his contemporaries would have considered writing without having an audience absurd. In the \textit{Tale of Melibee}, signally, a wise man shamefully sits down upon losing the attention of his auditors, “for Salomen seith: ‘Ther a thou ne mayst have noon audience, enforce thee nat to speke’ (\textit{CT} VII.1047-49). Chaucer’s recurrent use of abbreviating phrases such as the tag “what nedeth wordes mo?” perhaps suggests a rhetorical anxiety about boring an audience of high-ranking listeners.\textsuperscript{45} But who was Chaucer’s audience in his own lifetime?

Chaucer is depicted reciting to a gentle audience in an early copy of \textit{Troilus and Criseyde} (Cambridge MS 61) of about 1400-10. The picture is enticing but little is known. Richard II encouraged and rewarded cultural pursuits in his court, becoming close to several young literary courtiers.\textsuperscript{46} Chaucer’s poems textually “bespeak a courtly


\textsuperscript{44} Strohm, 77.


\textsuperscript{46} Bennett, 10.
ambience.” Strohm depicts Chaucer as sometimes writing for a specific patron or intimate (Book of the Duchess, L’Envoy to Bukton), but more often writing for fellow civil servants, non-landed esquires, and knights who formed a sort of nascent and emergent class on the lower fringes of gentle rank. Troilus was possibly read at court, but Chaucer’s dedicatees are Gower and Strode and not royalty. This group of aspirants, continually in flux throughout his life, formed Chaucer’s associates and friends, and Strohm even names men such as John Gower, William Beauchamp, Lewis Clifford, Philip la Vache, John Clanvowe, William Neville, Richard Stury, Thomas Hoccleve, and intermittent or later personalities including Ralph Strode, Henry Scogan, and Peter Bukton. All seem to be men who took advantage of the social ruptures and temporary openings of post-plague England to better themselves.

What ties these individuals together otherwise is not only court connections to Richard but their interests as learned and literary men, many of them authors in their own right. Chaucer seemingly encodes Boethian arguments into Troilus that only a Merton College fellow such as Strode can fully appreciate, and Chaucer himself apparently was considered somewhat of a difficult poet. Windeatt notes that some of Chaucer’s scribes added marginal or superscript glosses in the manuscripts where they saw “unusual and difficult” terms, writing explanations to Chaucer’s innovative or archaic usages: Anglo-

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47 Bennett, 7. The royal court was not necessarily a physical place or formal institution. Bennett notes that it referred to a broad “cultural construct” of family, friends, knights, clerics, and visitors (8).

48 Strohm, 11.

49 Strohm, 42.

50 Strohm, 58.

Saxon “wyerdes” is glossed as “destine” (TC III.617). Scogan also famously praises Chaucer in his Moral Balade as “my mayster Chaucer, god his soule have / that in his langage was so curious.” Chaucer’s attention to intricate astronomical symbolism, such as in the Parson’s Tale 1-11, and to technical details in his Treatise on the Astrolabe suggests a varied readership of polymaths.

Strohm asserts that Chaucer avoided openly antagonizing the Appellants by surrendering lucrative offices and removing to Kent during parliamentary hostilities. Some of his less politic friends, such as Thomas Usk who was appointed undersheriff of London by Richard, protested and clung to their positions out of pride or avarice and did not survive the Merciless Parliament. Chaucer’s partial exile from the dangerous court politics of the 1380s perhaps gives the Canterbury Tales a more isolated feel than his other works. Chaucer especially avoids explicit personal or political references and seems to address no familiar community of listeners but rather unspecified, silent readers in posterity. The ostensibly oral character of his earlier poetry becomes more textual: “whoso list it nat yheere / turn over the leef and chese another tale” (CT I.3176-77).

Nevertheless, he likely continued to circulate portions of his stories among his literary circle at least after his return to London, and presumably he assumed his intimates to be familiar enough with the tales to humorously invoke the Wife of Bath in his later poem to


53 Hanna disagrees, arguing that Chaucer already wished to vacate Aldgate and his controllership of customs (205). Nevertheless, Chaucer surrendered a large portion of his income at a moment when the Appelants were agitating for such acts of royal favoritism to be abrogated.

54 Strohm, 66, 67. Clanvowe died in October 1391 and so he must have read the Knight’s Tale before that time in order to include it in his poem.
Bukton. Again, Chaucer’s invitation to his friend to “rede” the *Wife of Bath* (29) signifies a private reading act and not public recitation.55

Chaucer suggests a familiarity with the physical details of acting and staging of drama in the *Miller’s Tale*, where Absolon “pleyth Herodes upon a scaffold hye” (1.3384),56 and he may have witnessed occasions of public festivity where he heard the same sort of “romanz reding on the bok” as is featured in *Havelock*. Some scholars have attempted to draw upon French burlesques instead as the source of his *Tale of Sir Thopas* parody, with Burrow positing the thirteenth-century *Prise de Nuevile*.57 Nevertheless, his usage of *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick* suggest that he had such texts at hand. Strong identifies several narrative similarities. Both Guy and Thopas have bright yellow hair and are educated to hunt and hawk,58 although such might simply be commonplaces trotted out by Chaucer from the romances he read or glanced at, which Loomis posits to be about fifteen to twenty.59

Yet there are also more compelling matches of phrases between the texts, which both Strong and Loomis catalogue in side-by-side comparisons of Guy, identifying some fifty places where the *Thopas* line echoes one in *Guy*.60 Loomis argues strongly that

55 Admittedly, ME *rede* can be broader in meaning than PDE *read* and might also denote “advise, tell” from Anglo-Saxon *rædan*. But for Chaucer to tell Bukton to advise or obey Alison does not make sense.
Chaucer had use of the Auchinleck manuscript while composing *Thopas*, noting that other known manuscripts of such romances all have their own textual variations and none match Chaucer’s borrowings so closely. In particular, the stanzaic version of *Guy* is only in Auchinleck.\(^61\) More compellingly, Chaucer names *Horn, Guy*, and *Bevis* together in *Thopas* (898-9), three works which only occur jointly in Auchinleck. Moreover, *Thopas* contains the only known reference to *Horn*.\(^62\) Loomis concedes that Auchinleck was not necessarily Chaucer’s sole source and that the other works cited in *Thopas* are not in the manuscript, but notes that they could have been in Chaucer’s time, as the codex contained at least seventeen more texts. Another clue links MS Hale 150, copied just after 1400, and containing the Auchinleck romances *Arthour and Merlin, Kyng Alisaunder*, and the *Lybeaus Desconus* cited in *Thopas*.\(^63\)

The Auchinleck manuscript, now National Library of Scotland Adv. MS 19.2.1, is believed the product of London scribes writing between 1330-40. Hanna posits that the manuscript’s frequent geographical references to London and its literary influences from Yorkshire suggest its assembly in the old west end, a “particularly vibrant place for cultural interchanges.”\(^64\) A volume of some sixty Middle English texts with forty-three now at least partly extant, Loomis asserts it was likely the product of a lay bookseller, as it was unlikely for a scriptorium to dedicate the labor of six clerks to copying English

\(^{61}\) Loomis, “Auchinleck,” 118.

\(^{62}\) Loomis, “Sir Thopas,” 489. *Horn Childe* is slightly different from *King Horn*, which appears here and does have older manuscript versions (including Laud Misc. 108).

\(^{63}\) Hanna, 16. *Lybeaus* was less likely to be in Auchinleck as it was supposedly written by Thomas Chestre in the mid-fourteenth century (British Museum MS Cotton Caligula A.ii). See George Shuffelton, “*Lybeaus Desconus*: Introduction,” TEAMS, [http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/sgas20int.htm](http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/sgas20int.htm)

\(^{64}\) Hanna, 129.
romances. This was particularly so in an England where monastic copying was in decline:

“In Chaucer’s day the time was long past when almost all book-making was in the hands of ‘the old monks,’” and long before printing there were dealers in London selling books to order or pre-made for a growing literate readership, with the first venditor librorum recorded as early as 1223. A booksellers guild seems to have formed by 1357 with a London street for their trade, Paternoster Row. While lending hand-copied anthologies between friends in the 1380s would still have been the equivalent of passing around sports cars now (a similar-sized book prepared for the Countess of Core in 1324 cost over £10, about US$5300 now), the manuscript itself is fairly simple in execution and illumination and may have been affordable to the sort of burgeoning gentry in which Chaucer moved.

Sir Thopas and the Project

Chaucer was evidently familiar with the romances he parodies in Sir Thopas, as he explicitly names six in the text in addition to the Sir Percival reference and imitates their phrasings and materials. With limited examples available in the language, his decision to write poetry in English may have been influenced by such romances. That he expects his audience to recognize them in order to understand the parodic intent of Thopas also seems clear. In other texts Chaucer demonstrates an ongoing concern with

65 Tatlock, 108.
66 Hanna, 2.
adjusting his voice to his audience’s needs and aptitudes, explaining that he needs to simplify his tutorial of the astrolabe for little Lewis, as “curious endityng and hard sentence is ful hevy at onys for such a child to lerne” (45-6). Additionally, in *Troilus* he glosses obscure deities—“Thesiphone… thow goddesse of torment” (I.6-8)—as an aid but assumes prior familiarity with Hector. Here Chaucer also seemingly presupposes that his audience already knows who characters such as Bevis and Guy are, as extended explanation would deflate the joke.

Whether Chaucer intended *Sir Thopas* to be a festive, carnivalesque parody of the romance genre or a biting Swiftian satire will be addressed later. For now it suffices to say that, whether his circle of literary friends and associates greeted romances with fondness or eye-rolling, they likely recognized and knew them firsthand as members of the first English-speaking court since Harold Godwineson. Hanna notes that “Chaucerian parody, like all parody, depends upon the accepted status of its target.” But to explore how Chaucer and his audience understood and viewed the works that underlie *Thopas* for the purposes of appreciating its humor requires digging beyond the poem’s references and examining the romances themselves. In this way it will perhaps be possible to see how these romances organically function as source material for *Thopas*, and then finally to speculate with more intelligence on Chaucer’s, and his contemporary audience’s, relationship to them. The question has additional relevance in that usually the

69 Strohm, 61.
70 Pearsall, 65.
71 Hanna, 108.
opposite has happened—romances have been critically defined and evaluated in terms of how *Thopas* allegedly views them.\textsuperscript{72}

The secondary goal of this project is to provide a scholarly translation into Modern English of these romances in order to facilitate both comprehension and appreciation of the texts. Middle English romances are now sparsely anthologized and dedicated volumes such as French and Hale (1930) are increasingly out of print. Many of these stories are only accessible online as very dated works in public domain, such as Ellis’ compilation from 1805, with the provident exception of the excellent TEAMS editions. Yet most importantly, few are available in unabridged translation.\textsuperscript{73} The situation completes a vicious circle: the romances are unpublished because they are obscure, and they are obscure because they are inaccessible in Modern English. A clear academic need stands for close Present Day English (PDE)\textsuperscript{74} renderings of these texts for the non-specialist. Because Auchinleck is so indispensible a source and one which Chaucer likely read, it forms the basic structure of the project, though I also include works from the four other minor manuscripts of English romance which predate


\textsuperscript{74} Within this project I also use OE, Old English, ME, Middle English, EME, Early Modern English, and OF, Old French. These are understood as loose and flexible divisions. For more discussion of these periods and terms, see Millward.
Auchinleck.75 Plendamour is believed lost, and I confess to making some choices based on modern and personal tastes. Ypotis is more didactic poem than romance, and Lybaeus Desconus and Sir Perceval belong more to the Arthurian tradition, already a well-trod subgenre. Moreover, from their absence of textual correspondences in Thopas, they may have been little more than name-dropping for effect by Chaucer.76

Translation is not usually a glamorous academic pursuit, and few works attain the status of Chapman’s Homer. Chaucer is available in translation, but as with Shakespeare, PDE versions are generally considered nonscholarly, consigned to lay readers or non-native English learners. I attended sessions at the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo in 2009 and sat in on a discussion of Beowulf translations. Opinions varied from grudging acceptance that translations such as Chickering’s (1989) were necessary concessions to snide remarks about “Heaneywulf.” While Seamus Heaney’s version is not textually perfect, it serves as an invaluable access point for the non-specialist. The alternative is still more execrable movie adaptations and a tiny pool of readers with the specialized training to interpret Anglo-Saxon English, and fewer still able to move beyond language issues into appreciating the story as an aesthetic product, which was Tolkien’s special cause in “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics” (1936). The same reality is nearing for Shakespeare and long ago arrived for works in Early Middle English. Amazon.com currently lists a “translation” into Modern English of Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress from 1678!

75 Loomis lists the four before Auchinleck as: Cambridge University Library G g.4 27.2 (King Horn, Floris & Blancheflor); Cotton Vitellius D. III (Floris and Blancheflor); Harley 2253 (King Horn); Laud Miscellany 108 (King Horn, Havelock). “London Bookshop,” 626.
76 Loomis, “Sir Thopas,” 487.
Yet first such a project must be seen as worthwhile. The assumption that educated fourteenth-century audiences viewed English romances with disdain for their “worn devices of minstrel style” and “stereotyped diction”\textsuperscript{77} may betray only modern sensibilities with our different expectations of structure and distaste for formulaic language. Chaucer uses such oral patterns as “the sothe to say” or “tell” twenty-three times in \textit{Troilus},\textsuperscript{78} and the \textit{scop} of \textit{Beowulf}, no less prone to lengthy digressions, constantly reiterates titles or family lineages with metrical appositives such as “Hroðgar maþelode, helm Scyldinga” (“Hrothgar made a speech, protector of the Scyldings,” 370). These stock epithets link to those used by the improvisational \textit{guslars} documented by Milman Parry in the Balkans, and occur in works as high-culture as Homer’s \textit{Odyssey} with its repetition of “the blue-eyed goddess Athene.”\textsuperscript{79} Rhyme and alliterative schemes themselves function as oral and memory devices that are not only pleasurable but add form and meaning to poetry.

McDonald also adds the interesting argument that the relative formulism of medieval romance, with its standard exile/return storylines, evinces not a poverty of imagination but functions as a useful frame within which the author can experiment freely. The predictable happy ending is obligatory but can be very brief and perfunctory, as the story’s energy is elsewhere.\textsuperscript{80} The more that romance makes itself internally

\textsuperscript{77} Loomis, “Sir Thopas,” 491.
\textsuperscript{79} Baugh, “Improvisation,” 419. Athena is actually called \textit{glaukopis} (\γλαυκωπίς), “owl-eyed,” variously translated as \textit{blue} and \textit{grey}.
\textsuperscript{80} McDonald, 14.
obvious as a self-aware fictional structure by repeatedly telling us “so hit is fonde in frensche tale” (*Bevis* 888), the freer the teller is to invent heroines who are all simultaneously the fairest in the world, to have heroes starve in dungeons for years and not die, for men in heavy armor to battle for days without fatigue, for lone warriors to defeat entire Saracen armies, and for murdered children to spring back to life without shattering the audience’s suspension of disbelief. The heroes inhabit a world where the normal laws of nature are “slightly suspended.”  

This poetic freedom was especially possible in England, where chivalry had never been as pervasive as in France and was increasingly seen through an antique mist.  

Much recent political commentary faults medieval romance for its affirmation of hegemonic feudal values. As Jameson might say, romances perpetuate the “legitimation of concrete structures of power and domination.” Susan Crane notes that romances maintain class divisions through “the conception that social differences order the world hierarchically.” Yet romances retain a sense of political subversion not only in their lack of official sanction but also in what they conspicuously omit. Events in an overtly fanciful world where the fair and just prosper in the end call sharp contrast to the failings of the actual world where they do not normally prosper. The Auchinleck texts often

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82 Mehl, 4.


84 Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance*, 98.
achieve this statement by placing their stories in a superior previous age. Holford notes that “Horn Child uses the past to compensate for the inadequacies of the contemporary world,” and Wilcox similarly argues that *Guy of Warwick* is set in an alternative time of the crusades where the heroes fight honorably.

Just as modern readers and movie audiences know that in real life the rich boy does not usually marry the poor girl and all prostitutes do not have hearts of gold, a medieval audience was unlikely to be so naïve as to confuse the escapist world of romance with the real one of their own. Popular romances indicate a great deal about actual historical circumstances through their audience’s idealized desires. Yet again, this is not where the energy of the romances lay. Chiefly, a medieval English romance was meant by its compositor to be a fun diversion of love, adventure, and exotic locales. The audience desired “a tale of myrthe” (*CT* VII.706) as Harry Bailly requests, and its *doctrype* was a commendable but secondary addition to its *solas*.

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86 Rebecca Wilcox, “Romancing the East: Greeks and Saracens in *Guy of Warwick*,” in McDonald, 221.
Textual Notes

In translating these works I have attempted a line-by-line rendering, although at times in order to obtain a natural English syntax the line orders may vary slightly. To make the story as understandable as possible I have modernized character and geographical names where practicable and have attempted to simplify the more arcane details of armament and feudal rank.

Stylistically, Middle English’s main fault as a growing and developing language lies in its occasional lexical poverty and grammatical ambiguity. At times pronouns are unclear and the repetition of verbs such as said can be tiresome, and I have made assumptions based on the narrative to give correct or subtler shades of meaning. For this reason the translation is often slightly longer than the original. Despite the metapoetical references of many romances, I have endeavored to avoid breaking the fourth wall of the translation by exposing it as a translation, and so I have not used obviously anachronistic expressions or colloquialisms to render medieval ones. Sir Orfeo does not tune anyone out or step on the gas. Josian is attractive but never hot, except for possibly when she is about to be burned at the stake.

I have gratefully used the TEAMS editions of each poem for the translations and for manuscript details and have referenced the editions as such in footnotes. All Chaucer references are globally from Larry Benson’s The Riverside Chaucer, third edition, 1987. Other references are translation-specific and noted.
CHAPTER 1

Amis and Amiloun

Amis and Amiloun survives in four manuscripts: Auchinleck (c. 1330), Egerton 2862 (c. 1400), Harley 2386 (c. 1500), and Bodleian 21900 (Douce 326) (c. 1500). I take as my text source Edward E. Foster, ed. Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997. 2nd ed., 2007.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>For Goddes love in Trinyté</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Al that ben hend herkenith to me,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I pray yow, par amore,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What sumtyme fel beyond the see</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Of two Barons of grete bounté</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And men of grete honoure;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Her faders were barons hende,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lordinges com of grete kynde</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And pris men in toun and toure;</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>To here of these children two</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How they were in wele and woo,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ywys, it is grete doloure,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In weele and woo how they gan wynd</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And how unkouth they were of kynd,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The children bold of chere,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And how they were good and hend</td>
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<td>And how yong thei becom frend</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In cort there they were,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And how they were made knyght</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>And how they were trouth plyght,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the love of God in Trinity,
I ask all who are courteous
To listen to me, in kindness,
To what once happened beyond the sea
To two barons, men of great generosity
And high honor.
Their fathers were noble barons,
Lords born of distinguished families
And men esteemed in town and tower.
To hear about these two children
And how they experienced good and ill
Is a great sorrow, indeed:
How they fared, in good and ill,
How innocent they were of arrogance—\footnote{Uncouth they were of kynd: There is disagreement on what exactly this means. Kölbing (1884) rendered this as “what unknown ancestry they were,” but contextually the poet is praising their good nature (TEAMS). Eugen Kölbing, ed., Amis and Amiloun, Zugleich mit der Altfranzösischen Quelle, Altenlische Biblioteck 2, Heilbronn: Henninger, 1884.}
The children, natural in manner—
And how they were good and well-raised
And how young when they became friends,
In the court where they stayed,
And how they were knighted
And how they pledged their loyalty,\footnote{2}
The children both in faire,
And in what lond thei were born
And what the childres name worn,
Herkeneth and ye mow here.

In Lumbardy, y understand,
Whilom bifel in that lond,
In romance as we reede,
Two barouns hend wonyd in lond
And had two ladys free to fond,
That worthy were in wede;

Of her hend ladys two
Twoo knave childre gat they thoo
That douthy were of dede,
And trew weren in al thing,
And therfore Jhesu, hevyn king,
Ful wel quyted her mede.

The childrenis names, as y yow hyght,
In ryme y wol rekene ryght
And tel in my talkynge;
Both they were getyn in oo nyght
And on oo day born aplyght,
For soth, without lesyng;
That oon baroun son, ywys
Was ycleped childe Amys
At his cristenyng;

That other was clepyd Amylyoun,
That was a childe of grete renoun
And com of hyghe ofspryng.
The children gon then thryve,
Fairer were never noon on lyve,
Curtaise, hende, and good;
When they were of yeres fyve,
Alle her kyn was of hem blyth,
So mylde they were of mood;
When they were sevyn yere olde,
Grete joy every man of hem tolde
To beholde that frely foode;
When they were twel winter olde,
In al the londe was ther non hold
So faire of boon and blood.

In that tyme, y understond,
A duk wonyd in that lond,
Prys in toune and toure;
Freyly he let sende his sonde,
After Erles, Barouns, fre and bond,
And ladies bryght in boure;

Both of the children together;
And in what land they were born
And what the boys’ names were,
Listen and you will learn.

In Lombardy, as I understand,
It happened once in that land
In the romance as we read it,
That two noble barons lived there,
And had two ladies, proven in their nobility,
Who were regal in their dress.

From those two courteous ladies
They had two boys,
Who were valiant in deeds,
And were true in all things.
And thus Jesus, Heaven’s king,
Fully gave them their reward.
I will properly relate in rhyme
The children’s names, as I promised,
And tell you in my speech;
Both of them were conceived on one night
And born the same day, in fact,
Truthfully, without a lie;
One of the baron’s sons, in honesty,
Was named Amis
At his christening;

The other was called Amiloun,
Who was a child of great renown
And had come from a high lineage.
The children began to thrive.
There were none fairer alive,
More courteous, handsome, and good.
When they were five years old,
All their family was pleased with them,
They were so gentle in their manners.
When they were seven years old,
Every man spoke of them with great pleasure
To behold those admirable children.
When they were twelve years old,
There were none in the land
Regarded so highly in flesh an bone.
In that time, as I understand,
A duke resided in that land,
Esteemed in town and castle.
He graciously sent his message
To earls and barons, free and bound,
And ladies shining in their bowers.

2 *Troth plyght*: To swear one’s *troth* in friendship, duty, or marriage is to make a serious and unbreakable vow of fidelity. See *Athelston*, line 23 for another friendship pledge.

3 *Ladies bryght in boure*: A recurring poetic phrase. A *bower* is a lady’s bedroom, whereas a *chamber* usually refers to any room in a castle. Like *toun and toure* (9) and *worthy in wede* (30), this sort of
A ryche fest he wolde make
Al for Jhesu Cristes sake
That is oure savyoure;
Muche folk, as y yow saye,
He lete after sende that daye
With myrth and grete honoure.
Thoo Barouns twoo, that y of tolde,
And her sones feire and bolde
To court they com ful yare.
When they were samned, yong and olde,
Mony men gan hem byholde
Of lordynges that there were,
Of body how wel they were pyght,
And how feire they were of syght,
Of hyde and hew and here;
And al they seide without lesse
Fairer children than they wesse
Ne sey they never yere.
In al the court was ther no wyght,
Erl, baroun, squyer, ne knyght,
Neither lef ne loothe,
So lyche they were both of syght
And of waxing, y yow plyght,
I tel yow for soothe,
In al thing they were so lyche
Ther was neither pore ne ryche,
Who so beheld hem both,
Fader ne moder that couth say
Ne knew the hend children tway
But by the colour of her cloth.
That riche douke his fest gan hold
With erles and with barouns bold,
As ye may listen and lithe,
For fourteenight, as me was told,
With meet and drynke, meryst on mold
To glad the bernes blithe;
Ther was mirthe and melodye
And al manner of menstracie
Her craftes for to kithe;
Opon the fiftenday ful yare
Thai token her leve forto fare
And thonked him mani a sithe.
Than the lordinges schuld forth wende,
That riche douke comly of kende
He was to host a rich feast
All for Jesus Christ’s sake,
Who is our savior.
He sent his invitation that day
To many people, as I tell you,
With celebration and great ceremony.
These two barons that I spoke of,
And their sons, fair and brave,
Came promptly to the court.
When they were gathered, young and old,
Of the lordings who were there,
Many men looked upon them:
How well-shaped they were in body,
And how fair they were in sight
In skin and complexion and hair.
And they all said, without deceit,
That they had never before seen
Finer young men than they were.
In all the court there was nobody,
Earl, baron, squire, or knight,
Neither fair nor foul,
Like them in their appearance.
And in stature, I swear to you
That I tell you the truth,
In every way they were so alike
That there was no one, rich or poor,
Father or mother,
Who beheld them both and could say
Or tell the two handsome youths apart
Except by the color of their clothes.
That rich duke held his festivities, 4
With earls and with brave barons,
As you may listen and learn,
For fourteen nights, as I have been told,
With food and drink, the merriest on earth,
To cheer the joyful men.
There was entertainment and melody
And all types of musicians
There to show their skills.
Upon the fifteenth day, with earnestness,
They made their goodbyes to leave
And thanked him many times.
When the gentlemen had gone forth,
That splendid duke, noble in lineage,

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Alliterative doublet is omnipresent in ME romances, perhaps a holdover from Anglo-Saxon poetic modes. Chaucer only uses the expression once in his writings, fittingly in *Sir Thopas* (*CT* VII.742).

4 *That riche douke*: In early Middle English the Old English articles / demonstratives *se*, *seo*, and *þæt* were gradually replaced by the definite article *the* (*pe*), and at times *the* and *that* seem poorly distinguished. Recurring formulas such as *that rich duke* might have been phrased for poetic reasons and not grammatical ones. A similar process was happening in Old French where Latin *ille*, *illa* (that) had become *li*, *la* (the). Rich in ME has a variety of nuances, from “powerful” or “high-ranking” to “wealthy.”

26
Cleped to him that tide
Tho tuay barouns, that were so hende,
And prayd hem also his frende
In court thai schuld abide,
And leta her tuay sones fre
In his servise with him to be,
Semly to fare bi his side;
And he wald dubbe hem knightes to
And susten hem for ever mo,
As lordinges proude in pride.

The riche barouns answerd ogain,
And her levedis gan to sain
To that douke ful yare
That thai were bothe glad and fain
That her levely children tuain
In servise with him ware.
Thai gave her childer her blisceing
And bisought Jhesu, heven king,
He schuld scheld hem fro care,
And oft thai thonked the douke that day
And token her leve and went oway
To her owen contres thai gun fare.
Thus war tho hende childer, ywis,
Child Amiloun and child Amis,
In court frely to fede,
To ride an hunting under riis;
Over al the lond than were thai priis
And worthliest in wede.
So wele tho children loved hem tho,
Nas never children loved hem so,
Noither in word no in de
de;
Bituix hem tuai, of blod and bon,
Trewer love nas never non,
In gest as so we rede.
On a day the childer, war and wight,
Trewethes togider thai gun plight,
While thai might live and stond
That bothe bi day and bi night,
In wele and wo, in wrong and right,
That thai schuld frely fond
To hold togider at everi nede,
In word, in werk, in wille, in dede,
Where that thai were in lond,
Fro that day forward never mo
Fallen other for wele no wo:
Therto thai held up her hond.

Called to him on that occasion
The two barons, who were so courteous,
And invited them as his friend
That they should allow
Their two fine sons to stay in the court
And be with him in his service,
To live fittingly by his side.
And he would dub them both knights
And support them for evermore,
As lords proud in honor.
The elegant barons replied in answer,
And their ladies began to speak
To the duke with eagerness,
That they were both glad and pleased
That their two beloved children
Would be in service with him.
They gave their children their blessing
And entreated Jesus, Heaven’s king,
That He would shield them from harm,
And they thanked the duke continually that day,
And they took their leave and went away.
They set off to journey to their own lands.
Thus those lovely youths,
Child Amiloun and Amis, were in truth
Free to dine in the court,
And to ride and hunt under the branches.
In all the land, they were respected
And held as worthiest in appearance.
So well did each love the other that
Never were young men so close to each other,
Neither in word nor in deed.
Between the two, in blood and bone,
There was never truer friendship,
In the stories that we read.
On one day the youths, keen and brave,
Pledged their loyalty together,
That while they might live and stand,
By both day and night,
In good and ill, in right and wrong,
They would freely try
To hold together in every need,
In word, in works, in will, in deeds,
Wherever they were in the land.
From that day forward they would never
Fail the other, neither in prosperity or woe.
To this they held up their hands.

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5 ME is fairly poor in words for friendship, usually resorting to love. Throughout the text I am reading in various synonyms, as the repeated allusions to marital fidelity would not have suggested anything to a romance audience beyond deep amicus. Not everyone agrees: see Sheila Delaney, “A, A, and B: Coding Same-Sex Union in Amis and Amiloun,” in Pulp Fictions of Medieval England, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 63–81.
Thus in gest as ye may here,
Tho hende childer in cuntré were
With that douke for to abide;

The douke was blithe and glad of chere,
Thai were him bothe leve and dere,
Semly to fare bi his side.
Tho thai were fifteen winter old,
He dubbed bothe tho bernes bold
To knightes in that tide,
And fond hem al that hem was nede,
Hors and wepen and worthly wede,
As princes prout in pride.

That riche douke, he loved hem so,
Al that thai wald he fond hem tho,
Bothe stedes white and broun,
That in what stede thai gun go,
Alle the lond spac of hem tho,
Bothe in tour and toun;
In to what stede that thai went,
To justes other to turnament,
Sir Amis and Sir Amiloun,
For douhtiest in everi dede,
With scheld and sperre to ride on stede,

Thai gat hem gret renoun.
That riche douke hadde of hem pris,
For that thai were so war and wiis
And holden of gret bounté.
Sir Amiloun and Sir Amis,
He set hem bothe in gret office,
In his court for to be;
Sir Amis, as ye may here,
He made his chef botelere,
For he was hend and fre,

And Sir Amiloun of hem alle
He made chef steward in halle,
To dight al his meine.
In to her servise when thai were brought,
To geten hem los tham spared nought,
Wel hendeliche thai bigan;
With riche and pover so wele thai wrought,
Al that hem seighe, with word and thought,
Hem loved mani a man;
For thai were so blithe of chere,

Over al the lond fer and nere
The los of love thai wan,
And the riche douke, withouten les,
Of all the men that olive wes
Mest he loved hem than.
Than hadde the douke, ich understand,
A chef steward of alle his lond,
A douhti knight at crie,
That ever he proved with nithe and ond
For to have brought hem bothe to schond

With gile and trecherie.

So in the story as you may hear,
These gentle young men of that country
Were living with that duke.
The duke was pleased and glad at heart,
And they were beloved and dear to him,
And fared honorably by his side.
When they were fifteen years old,
He dubbed both of the youths
As knights at that time,
And gave them all that they needed,
Horse and weapon and fine clothes,
As princes who were proud in bearing.
That rich duke loved them so.
All that they wished for he provided,
Steeds for both, white and brown,
So that in whatever place they went,
All the land spoke of them later,
Both in tower and in town.
At whatever place that they went,
To jousts or to tournaments,
Sir Amis and Sir Amiloun,
Being the bravest in every deed,
With shield and spear as they rode on steeds,
Won great renown for themselves.
That regal duke had great regard for them,
For they were so keen and wise
And esteemed for their great generosity.
He set Sir Amiloun and Sir Amis,
Both of them, in key offices,
In order to be in his court.
Sir Amis, as you may hear,
Was made his chief butler,
For he was courteous and gracious.
And Sir Amiloun was made
Chief steward of the hall over everyone
To keep his household in order.
When they were brought into their services,
They spared nothing to bring themselves praise,
And they acted very gentlemanly.
They served rich and poor so admirably
That all who saw them, many a man,
Cherished them in word and thought.
For they were so graceful in manner
That over all the land, near and far,
They won praise for being loved,
And the mighty duke, without a lie,
Of all the men that were alive,
Loved them most of all then.
At the time the duke, as I understand,
Had a chief steward of all his land,
A formidable knight at his call,
Who incessantly schemed, with spite and malice,
To have them both brought to shame
With guile and treachery.
For thai were so gode and hende,
And for the douke was so wele her frende,
He hadde therof gret envie;
To the douke with wordes grame
Ever he proved to don hem schame
With wel gret felonie.
So within tho yeres to
A messanger ther com tho
To Sir Amiloun, hende on hond,
And seyd hou deth hadde fet him fro
His fader and his moder also
Thurch the grace of Godes sond.
Than was that knight a careful m
To that douke he went him than
And dede him to understond
His fader and his moder hende
War ded, and he most hom wende,
For to resaive his lond.
That riche douke, comly of kende,
Answerd ogain with wordes hende
And seyd, “So God me spede,
Sir Amiloun, now thou schalt wende
Me nas never so wo for frende
That of mi court out yede.
Ac yif ever it befalle so
That thou art in wer and wo
And of min help hast nede,
Saveliche com or send thi sond,
And with al mi powere of mi lond
Y schal wreke the of that dede.”
Than was Sir Amiloun ferli wo
For to wende Sir Amis fro,
On him was al his thought.
To a goldsmithe he gan go
And lete make gold coupes to,
For thre hundred pounde he hem bought,
That bothe were of o wight,
And bothe of o michel, yplight;
Ful richeliche thai were wrought,
And bothe thai weren as liche, ywis,
As was Sir Amiloun and Sir Amis,
Ther no failed right nought.
When that Sir Amiloun was al yare,
He tok his leve for to fare,
To wende in his jorné.
Sir Amis was so ful of care,
For sorwe and wo and sikeing sare,
For they were so good and so courteous,
And because the duke was so close a friend,
He had great envy because of it.
With cruel words to the duke,
He continually tried to do them harm
With some outrageous crime.
So then, within two years
A messenger arrived there,
Skillful in hand, to Sir Amiloun
And said how death had taken from him
His father and his mother as well
Through the grace of God’s command.
Then that knight was a sorrowful man.
He took himself to the duke
And had him understand
That his father and his gracious mother
Were dead, and he had to travel home
In order to receive his land.
That stately duke, of a noble family,
Answered in reply with kindly words
And said, “So God help me,
Sir Amiloun, now that you must go
I was never so sad to see a friend
Go out of my court.
But if it ever happens so
That you are at war or in woe
And have need of my help,
Just come or send your word,
And with all my powers in my land
I will avenge you of that injury.”
Then Sir Amiloun was bitterly sad
To part from Sir Amis.
On him were all his thoughts.
He made his way to a goldsmith
And had two gold cups made.
He paid three hundred pounds for them,
So that both were the same weight,
And both were the same size, truly.
They were fabricated lavishly,
And both were as alike, I know,
As Sir Amiloun and Sir Amis were;
There was no defect at all in them.
When Sir Amiloun was all ready,
He made his goodbyes to set forth,
To travel on his journey.
Sir Amis was so full of sadness,
That for sorrow and woe and sighing bitterly,
Almest swoned that fre.
To the douke he went with dreri mode
And praid him fair, ther he stode,
And seyd, “Sir, par charité,
Yif me leve to wend the fro,
Bot yif y may with mi brother go,
Mine hert, it breketh of thre!”
That riche douke, comly of kende,
Answerd again with wordes hende
And seyd withouten delay,
“Sir Amis, mi gode frende,
Wold ye bothe now fro me wende?”
“Certes,” he seyd, “nay!
Were ye bothe went me fro,
Than schuld me waken al mi wo,
Mi joie were went oway.
Thi brother schal in to his cuntré;
Wende with him in his jurné
And com ogain this day!”
When thai were redi forto ride,
Tho bold bernes for to abide
Busked hem redy boun.
Hende, herkneth! Is nought to hide,
So douhti knightes, in that tide
Traveled out of that toun,
Al that day as thai rade
Gret morning bothe thai made,
Sir Amis and Amiloun,
And when thai schuld wende otuain,
Wel fair togider opon a plain
Of hors thai light adoun.
When thai were bothe afot light,
Sir Amiloun, that hendi knight,
Was rightwise man of rede
And seyd to Sir Amis ful right,
“Brother, as we er trewthe plight
Bothe with word and dede,
Fro this day forward never mo
To faile other for wele no wo,
To help him at his nede,
Brother, be now trewe to me,
And y schal ben as trewe to the,
Also God me spede!
Ac brother, ich warn the biforn,
For His love that bar the croun of thorn
To save al mankende,
Be nought ogain thi lord forsworn,
And yif thou dost, thou art forlorn
Ever more withouten ende.
Bot ever do trewthe and no tresoun
And thynk on me, Sir Amiloun,
Now we asondri schal wende.
And, brother, yete y the forbde
The fals steward felawerede;
Certes, he will the schende!"
As thai stode so, tho bretheren bold,
Sir Amiloun drought forth tuay coupes of gold,
Ware liche in al thing,
And bad sir Amis that he schold
Chese whether he have wold,
Withouten more duelling.
And seyd to him, "Mi leve brother,
Kepe thou that on and y that other,
For Godes love, heven king;
Lete never this coupe fro the,
Bot loke heron and thenk on me,
It tokneth our parting."
Gret sorwe t
hai made at her parting
And kisten hem with eighen wepeing,
Tho knightes hende and fre.
Aither bitaught other heven king,
And on her stedes thai gun spring
And went in her jurné.
Sir Amiloun went hom to his lond
And sesed it al in to his hond,
That his eld
ers hadde be,
And spoused a levedy bright in bour
And brought hir hom with gret honour
And brought hir hom with gret honour
And miche solempneté.
Lete we Sir Amiloun stille be
With his wiif in his cuntré -
God leve hem wele to fare -
And of Sir Amis telle we;
When he com hom to court oye,
Ful blithe of him thai ware;
For that he was so hende and gode,
Men blisced him, bothe bon and blod,
That ever him gat and bare,
Save the steward of that lond;
Ever he proved with nithe and ond
To bring him into care.
Than on a day bifel it so
With the steward he met tho,
Ful fair he gret that fre.
"Sir Amis," he seyd, "the is ful wo
For that thi brother is went the fro,
And, certes, so is me.
Ac of his wendeing have thou no care,
Yf thou wilt leve opon mi lare,
And let thi morning be,
And thou wil be to me kende,
Y schal the be a better frende
Than ever yete was he.
"Sir Amis," he seyd, "do bi mi red,
And swere ous bothe brotherhed
And plight we our trewthes to;
Be trewe to me in word and dede,
And y schal to the, so God me spede,
Surely, he will destroy you!"
As they stood so, the brave brothers,
Sir Amiloun drew out the two gold cups,
Which were alike in every way,
And asked Sir Amis if he would
Choose which one he wished for,
Without more delay.
And he said to him, "My dear comrade,
Keep that one and I will the other,
For God’s love, Heaven’s king;
Let this cup never go from you,
But look on it and think of me.
It is a token of our parting."
They made great sorrow at their leaving
And kissed each other with weeping eyes,
Those knights, noble and free.
Each commended the other to Heaven’s king,
And they jumped on their steeds
And went on their journeys.
Sir Amiloun went home to his land
Which his ancestors had held,
And claimed it all into his hand,
And wedded a lady, beautiful in her bower,
And brought her home with great ceremony
And much stately formality.
We will leave Sir Amiloun alone
With his wife in his country.
God grant that he fare well!
And we will talk of Sir Amis.
When he came back home to the court,
They were very pleased to see him.
For he was so gracious and good
That men blessed the two, both flesh and blood,
Who had conceived and given birth to him,
Except for the steward of that land.
He forever tried with spite and hostility
To bring him into grief.
Then one day it so happened
That he met with the steward,
Who greeted that noble man courteously.
"Sir Amis," he said, "It is very sad for you
Because your friend has gone from you,
And certainly it is the same for me.
But do not be troubled by his going,
If you will trust in my instruction,
And let your mourning go.
You will be kin to me,
And I will be a better friend to you
Than he ever was.
Sir Amis," he said, "Do as I advise,
And swear our brotherhood together
And pledge our fidelity as well.
Be true to me in word and deed,
And I will to you, so help me God,
Be trewe to the also."
Sir Amis anserwed, "Mi treuthe y plight
To Sir Amiloun, the gentil knight,
Thei he be went me fro.
370
While that y may gon and speke,
Y'no schal never mi treuthe breke,
Noither for wele no wo.
For bi the treuthe that God me sende,
Ichave him founde so gode and kende,
Seththen that y first him knewe,
For ones y plight him treuthe, that hende,
Where so he in warld wende,
Y schal be to him trewe;
And yif y were now forsworn
And yif y were now forsworn
380
And breke mi treuthe, y were forlorn,
Wel sore it schuld me rewe.
Gete me frendes where y may,
Y'no schal never bi night no day
Chaunge him for no newe."
The steward than was egre of mode,
Almest for wrethe he wex ner wode
And seyd, withouten delay,
And swore bi Him that dyed on Rode:
"Thou traitour, unkinde blod,
Y warn the wele," he seyd than,
"That y schal be thi strong foman
Ever after this day!"
Sir Amis anserwed tho,
"Sir, therof give y nought a slo;
Do al that thou may!"
Al thus the wrake gan biginne,
And with wrethe thai went atuinne,
Tho bold bernes to.
390
The steward nold never blinne
To schende that douhti knight of kinne,
Ever he proved tho.
Thus in court togider thai were
With wrethe and with loureand chere
Wele half a yere and mo,
And afterward opon a while
The steward with tresoun and gile
Wrought him ful michel wo.
So in a time, as we tel in gest,
400
The riche douke lete make a fest
Semly in somers tide;
Ther was mani a gentil gest
With mete and drink ful onest
To servi by ich a side.
Be true as well."
Sir Amis anserwed, "I gave my word
To Sir Amiloun, the noble knight,
Though he has departed from me.
While I can walk and speak,
I will never break my vow,
Neither for riches nor poverty.
For by the truth that God sends me,
I have found him so good and kind
Since the time I first knew him;
For since I pledged him loyalty, that friend,
Wherever he goes in the world,
I will be true to him.
And if I now swore against him
And broke my oath, I would be lost.
I would rue it bitterly.
Though I get friends where I may,
I will never by night or day
Exchange him for someone new."
Then the steward was in a furious mood;
He almost grew mad with rage
And said, without any pause,
And swore by Him who died on the Cross,
..."You traitor, low blood!
You will pay for this snub!
I warn you well," he said then,
"That I will be your sworn enemy
Ever after this day!"
Sir Amis then answered,
"Sir, I don't care a blueberry about it?"
Do as you like!"
And so the enmity began to rise,
And in wrath they separated,
Those two bold young men.
The steward would never stop,
Always attempting to ruin
That indomitable knight of honor.
Thus in court they coexisted
With antipathy and surly glares
Well more than half a year.
And afterward, upon one occasion,
The steward caused great woe for him
With treason and guile.
So one time, as we say in stories,
The rich duke held a feast,
Fittingly in summertime.
There were many noble guests
With the finest food and drink
Served all around.

7 Sloe: a tart plum-like fruit resembling a blueberry. As the berries were of little value, the idiom is close in meaning to PDE "I don't give a crap."
Miche semly folk was samned thare,  
Erls, barouns, lasse and mare,  
And levedis proude in pride.  
More joie no might be non  
Than ther was in that worthly won,  
With blisse in borwe to bide.  
That riche douke, that y of told,  
He hadde a douhtier fair and bold,  
Curteise, hende and fre.  
When sche was fiften winter old,  
In al that lond nas ther non yhold  
So semly on to se,  
For sche was gentil and avenaunt,  
Hir name was cleped Belisaunt,  
As ye may lithe at me.  
With levedis and maidens bright in bour  
Kept sche was with honour  
And gret solemnité.  
That fest lasted fourten night  
Of barouns and of birddes bright  
And lordinges mani and fale.  
Ther was mani a gentil knight  
And mani a serjaunt, wise and wight,  
To serve tho hende in halle.  
Than was the boteler, Sir Amis,  
Over al yholden flour and priis,  
Trewely to telle in tale,  
And douhtiest in everi dede  
And worthiest in ich a wede  
And semliest in sale.  
Than the lordinges schulden al gon  
And wende out of that worthli won,  
In boke as so we rede,  
That mirie maide gan aske anon  
Of her maidens everichon  
And seyd, “So God you spede,  
Who was hold the douhtiest knight  
And semlyest in ich a sight  
And worthiest in wede,  
And who was the fairest man  
That was yholden in lond than,  
And douhtiest of dede?”  
Her maidens gan answere again  
And seyd, “Madame, we schul the sain  
That sothe bi Seyn Savour:  
Of erls, barouns, knight and swain  
The fairest man and mest of main  
And man of mest honour,  
It is Sir Amis, the kinges boteler;  
In al this world nis his per,  
Noither in town no tour;  
He is douhtiest in dede  
And worthiest in everi wede  
And chosen for priis and flour.”  
Many worthy people were gathered there,  
Erls, barons, high and low,  
And ladies magnificent in appearance.  
There could be no greater joy  
Than there was in that stately place,  
With the pleasures to enjoy in the castle.  
This great duke, which I spoke of,  
Had a daughter who was fair and bold,  
Courteous, attractive, and generous.  
When she was fifteen years old,  
There was no one known in all the land  
So lovely to look on,  
For she was graceful and beautiful.  
As you may listen to me,  
Her name was called Belisaunt.  
She stayed with the ladies and maidens,  
Shining in their bower, living in honor  
And great dignity.  
The feast lasted fourteen nights,  
With barons and beautiful lasses  
And lords, numerous and abundant.  
There was many a gentle knight  
And many a servant, strong and wise,  
To serve those nobles in the hall.  
But the butler, Sir Amis,  
Held the flower and the prize over all,  
To speak truly in the tale,  
And most valiant in every deed  
And worthiest in all his attire,  
And most dignified in the hall.  
When the lordings all had to leave  
And departed from that stately dwelling,  
In the book as we read it,  
The merry maid soon asked  
Each one of her maidens,  
And said, “So God help you,  
Who was considered the bravest knight  
And finest in every aspect,  
And worthiest in attire,  
And who was seen as the fairest man  
In the land at the time,  
The most valiant of deeds?”  
Her maidens answered in return  
And said, “My lady, we will tell you  
The truth, by our Holy Savior.  
Out of earls, barons, knights, and youths,  
The fairest man and greatest of might,  
And the man of highest honor,  
Is Sir Amis, the king’s butler.  
In all this world he has no equal,  
Neither in town nor castle.  
He is bravest in deed  
And worthiest in every clothing  
And takes the prize and flower.”
Belisaunt, that birdde bright,
When thai hadde thus seyd, yplight,
As ye may listen and lithe,
On Sir Amis, that gentil knight,
Ywis, hir love was al alight,
That no man might it kithe.
Wher that sche seighe him ride or go,
Hir thought hir hert brac atuo,
That hye no spac nought with that blithe;
For hye no might night no day
Speke with him, that fair may,
Sche wepe wel mani a sithe.
Thus that miri maiden ying
Lay in care and lovemorning
Bothe bi night and day;
As y you tel in mi talking,
For sorwe sche spac with him no thing,
Sike in bed sche lay.
Hir moder com to hir tho
And gan to frain hir of hir wo,
Help hir yif hye may;
And sche answerd withouten wrong,
Hir pines were so hard and strong,
Sche wald be loken in clay.
That riche douke in o morning
And with him mani a gret lording,
As prince prout in pride,
Thai dight him withouten dueling,
For to wende on dere hunting,
And busked hem for to ride.
When the lordinges everichon
Were went out of that worthli won -
In herd is nought to hide -
Sir Amis, withouten les,
For a malady that on him wes,
At hom he gan to abide.
When tho lordinges were out ywent
With her men hende and bowes bent,
To hunte on holtes hare,
Than Sir Amis, verrament,
He bileft at hom in present,
To kepe al that ther ware.
That hendi knight bithought him tho,
Into the gardin he wold go,
For to solas him thare.
Under a bough as he gan bide,
To here the foules song that tide,
Him thought a blisseful fare.
Now, hende, herkneth, and ye may here
Hou that the doukes douther dere
Sike in hir bed lay.
Hir moder com with diolful chere
And al the levedis that were there,
For to solas that may:
“Arise up,” she said, “daughter of mine,
And go play in the garden
This lovely summer’s day.
There you can hear the birds sing
With joy and great bliss among them,
And your troubles will pass away.”
The sweet creature rose up.
She went straightaway into the garden
With maidens, gracious and noble.
The summer’s day was fair and bright.
The sun shone down in a gleaming light,
Which was pleasant to see.
She heard the birds, great and small.
The sweet note of the nightingale
Sang merrily in the tree.
But her heart was so heavy
That all her thoughts were on love-longing,
And she could not play or enjoy herself.
And so that lovely maid
Went gracefully into the orchard that day
To relieve herself of her cares.
When she saw Sir Amis nearby
Under a bough where he had settled
To better hear the singing.
Then she was both glad and elated.
She could not express her joy to any man
When she saw him there.
She would not stop for anyone
To make her way toward him
And tell him about her feelings.
Then the maiden’s spirits were so light
When she saw where he stood.
She went to him, that sweet one,
And thought that, for all this world’s goods,
She would not let that time pass
Without speaking to the valiant young man.
And as soon as the gentle knight
Saw that lass, so beautiful in her bower,
Coming nearer to meet with him,
He made his way toward her.
With words both noble and gracious
He greeted her courteously.
The merry maiden quickly
Told her ladies to go from her
And take themselves away.
And when they were alone together,
She made her plea to Sir Amis
And said coquettishly,
“Sir Knight, my heart is set on you.
To love you is all my desire,
Both by night and day.”
That bot thou wolt mi leman be,
Ywis, min hert breketh a thre,
No lenger libben y no may.
“Thou art,” sche seyd, “a gentil knight,
And icham a bird in bour bright,
Of wel heighe kin ycorn.
580
And bothe bi day and bi night
Mine hert so hard is on the light,
Mi joie is al forlorn;
Plight me thi trewthe thou schalt be trewe
And chaunge me for no newe
That in this world is born,
590
And y plight the mi treththe also,
Til God and deth dele ous ato,
Y schal never be forsworn.”
That hende knight stille he stode
And al for thought chaunged his mode
599
And seyd with hert fre,
―Madame, for Him that dyed on Rode,
And air of this lond schal be,
Bithenke the of thi michel honour;
Kinges sones and emperour
600
Nar non to gode to the;
Certes, than were it michel unright,
Thi love to lain onpon a knight
That nath noither lond no fe.
“And yif we schuld that game biginne,
Might it undergo,
Al our joie and worldes winne
We schuld lese, and for that sinne
Wrethi God therto.
And y dede mi lord this deshonour,
Than were ich an ivel traitour;
610
Ywis, it may nought be so.
Leve madame, do bi mi red
And thenk what wil com of this dede:
Certes, no thing bot wo.”
That mirre maiden of gret renoun
Answerd, “Sir knight, thou nast no croun;
For God that bought the dere,
 Unless you will be my beloved,
I know my heart will break in three!*
I will not live any longer.
You are,” she said, “a stately knight,
And I am a woman, shining in my bower,
And born into a noble family.
And both by day and by night,
My heart has fallen on you so hard
That my joys are all lost.
Pledge me your vow that you will be true
And will not exchange me for someone new
Who is born into this world,
And I will pledge you my fidelity also.
Until God and death part us in two,
I will never break my vow.”
That gentle knight stood still
And, deep in thought, changed his mood
And said with a dutiful heart,
“My lady, for Him who died on the Cross,
If you have come from noble blood
And will be heir of this land,
Think of your high honor!
The sons of kings and emperors
Are none too good for you.
Surely, it would be a great wrong
For your love to be given to a knight
Who has neither land nor income.
And if we should begin a courtship,
And anyone from all your family
Would discover it, we would lose
All our joys and world’s pleasures,
And for that sin
Anger God as a result.
If I did my lord this dishonor,
Then I would be an evil traitor.
Surely it cannot be so!
Dear lady, do as I advise
And think what will come of this deed.
For certain, nothing but woe.”9
The lovely lady of great renown
Answered, “Sir Knight, you have no tonsure!”10
By God who redeemed you dearly,

8 Medieval hearts seem to break into two, three, or five with no particular significance, although there may be a reference either to the Trinity or to other significant numbers in scripture. See also the essay on Guy of Warwick for more on medieval numerology.

9 Amis believes that his rank and status are too low to become romantically involved with the king’s daughter, and that doing so would be a punishable act of disloyalty. He is also continuing to keep his vow to Amiloun, “Be nought ogain thi lord forsworn” (304).

10 Tonsure: the partly-shaved hairstyle common to medieval clergy. Belisaunt makes fun of Sir Amis by suggesting that he is acting like a celibate monk.
Whether artow prest other persoun,
Other thou art monk other canoun,
That prechest me thus here?

Thou no schust have ben no knight,
To gon among maidens bright,
Thou schust have ben a frere!

He that lerd the thus to preche,
The deovel of helle ichim biteche,
Mi brother thei he were!

"Ac,," sche seyd, "bi Him that ous wrought,
Al thi precheing helpeth nought,
No stond thou never so long.

Bot yif thou wilt graunte mi mi thought,
Mi love schal be ful dere abought
With pines hard and strong;

Mi kerchef and mi clothes anon
Y schal torende doun ichon
And say with michel wrong,

With strengthe tho hast me todrawe;
Ytake thou schalt be londes lawe
And dempt heighe to hong!"

Than stode that hendy knight ful stille,
And in his hert him liked ille,
No word no spac he tho;

He thought, "Bot y graunt hir wille,
With hir speche sche wil me spille,
Er than y passe hir fro;

And yif y do mi lord this wrong,
With wilde hors and with strong
Y schal be drawe also."

Loth him was that dede to don,
And wele lother his liif forgon;
Was him never so wo.

And than he thought, withouten lesing,
Better were to graunthir asking
Than his liif for to spille.

Than seyd he to that maiden ying,
"For Godes love, heven king,
Understond to mi skille.

Astor art maiden gode and trewe
Bithenk hou oft rape wil rewe
And turn to grame wel gril,
And abide we al this sevennight,
As icham trewe gentil knight,

Y schal graunth the thi wille."

Than answerd that bird bright
And swore, "Bi Jhesu, ful of might,
Thou scapest nought so oway.

Are you a priest or parson,
Or are you a monk or clergyman
That preaches to me so here?

You shouldn’t have been a knight,
Mingling among fair maidens;
You should have been a friar!

Whoever taught you to sermonize so,
The devil can take him to Hell,
Even if he were my brother!

But," she continued, "by Him who created us,
All your homilies accomplish nothing,
No matter how long you resist!

Unless you will grant me my desires,
My love will be dearly paid for
With pains, hard and strong.

My headscarf and my clothes,
I will tear all of them down at once
And say with great deception
That you violated me with force!

You will be taken by the law of the land
And condemned to hang high!"

Then the noble knight stood still
And he was troubled at heart;
He spoke no words then.

He thought, "Unless I grant her will,
She will destroy me with her speech
Before I pass away from her.

And if I do my lord this wrong,
I will be drawn as well
Behind wild and strong horses."\(^{11}\)

He was loath to do that deed,
And more unwilling to lose his life.
He was never so woeful.

And then he thought, without lying,
It would be better to grant her plea
Than to lose his life.

Then he said to that young maiden,
"For God’s sake, Heaven’s king,
Listen to my reasons.

If you are a maiden, good and true,
Think how often haste is regretted
And turns to fearful disaster.

And let us wait these seven nights,
As I am a true noble knight,
And I will grant you your will."

Then that beautiful lass answered,
And swore, ‘By Jesus, full of might,
You do not escape so easily!"

---

\(^{11}\) Sir Amis is referring to the capitol punishment for high treason of being hanged and drawn—dragged by horses—for Belisaunt’s false charge of rape. Sir Amis’ squire mentions being ripped apart in 2046, perhaps the final punishment of quartering, having the body cut into four pieces.
Thi treuthe anon thou shalt me plight,
Astow art trewe gentil knight,
Thou shalt hold that day.”
He gaunted hir hir wil tho,
And plight hem trewthes bothe to,
And seththen kist tho tui.

670
Into hir chaumber sche went ogain,
Than was sche so glad and fain,
Hir joie sche couthe no man sai.
Sir Amis than withouten duelling,
For to kepe his lordes coming,
Into halle he went anon.

When thai were comen fram dere hunting
And with him mani an heighe lording
Into that worthy won,
After his douther he asked swithe;

680
Men seyd that sche was glad and blithe,
Hir care was al agon.
To eten in halle thai brought that may,
Ful blithe and glad thai were that day
And thonked God ichon.

When the lordinges, withouten les,
Hendelich were brought on des
With levedis bright and swee,
As princes that were proude in pres,
Ful richeliche served he wes

690
With menske and mirth he to mete.
When that maiden that y of told,
Among the birdes that were bold,
Ther sche sat in her sete,
On Sir Amis, that gentil knight,
An hundred time sche cast hir sight,
For no thing wald sche lete.
On Sir Amis, that knight hendy,
Ever more sche cast hir eyghe,
For no thing wold sche spare.

700
The steward ful of felonie,
Wel fast he gan hem aspie,
Til he wist of her fare,
And bi her sight he perceived tho
That gret love was bituix hem to,
And was agreved ful sare,
And thought he schuld in a while
Bothe with tresoun and with guile
Bring hem into care.
Thus, ywis, that muri may

710
Ete in halle with gamen and play
You will pledge your vow to me at once.
If you are a true and noble knight,
You will hold to that day.”
He granted her will to her then,
And pledged fidelity between them both,
And then the two kissed.
She returned to her chamber.
Then she was glad and pleased;
She could not express her joy to anyone.\(^{12}\)
Sir Amis, without more delay,
In order to prepare for his lord’s coming,
Went into the hall at once.
When the duke came from deer hunting
Into that stately dwelling,
And with him many a high lord,
He quickly asked about his daughter.
Men said that she was cheerful and at ease;
Her troubles were all gone.
They brought the maiden to dine in the hall.
They were very relieved and glad that day,
And everyone thanked God.
When the lordings, without a lie,
Were escorted courteously to the table
As princes that were proud in battle,
With ladies beautiful and sweet,
They were served splendidly
With grace and delight at dinner.
When the maiden that I spoke of
Sat there in her seat,
Among the ladies who were merry,
She cast her glance a hundred times
On Sir Amis, that noble knight.
She would not stop for anything.
On Sir Amis, that handsome knight,
She continually cast her eye;
She would not cease for anything.
The steward, full of wickedness,
Began to watch them attentively
Until he observed her situation,
And by her look he then perceived
That there was great love between the two.
He was sorely aggrieved
And thought he might in a while,
With both treason and with guile,
Bring them into trouble.
Thus, indeed, that sweet maiden
Ate in the hall with playfulness and fun

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\(^{12}\) Hir joie sche couthe no man sai: This, along with 474, 548, and 1238, is a problematic line. The meaning may be that Belisaunt is too coy or timid to reveal her joy, but it seems unlike her when she aggressively threatens Sir Amis with an accusal of rape and flirts with him at the supper table. The poetic idea may be that her joy is so overwhelming that it is beyond expression for her.
Wele four days other five,
That ever when sche Sir Amis say,
Al hir care was went oway,
Wele was hir o live.
Wher that he sat or stode,
Sche bieheld opon that frely fode,
No stint sche for no strive;
And the steward for wrethe sake
Brought hem bothe in ten and wrake.
Well ivel mot he thrive.
That riche douke opon a day
On dere hunting went him to play,
And with him wel mani a man;
And Belisaunt, that miri may,
To chaumber ther Sir Amis lay,
Sche went, as sche wele kan;
And the steward, withouten les,
In a chaumber bisiden he wes
And seighe the maiden than
Into chaumber hou sche gan glide;
For to aspie hem bothe that tide,
After swithe he ran.
When that may com into that won,
Sche fond Sir Amis ther alon,
―Hail,‖ sche seyd, that levedi bright,
―Sir Amis,‖ sche sayd anon,
―This day a sevennight it is gon,
That trewthe we ous plight.
Therfore icham comen to the,
To wite, astow art hende and fre
And holden a gentil knight,
Whether wiltow me forsake
Or thou wilt treweley to me take
And hold as thou bihight?‖
―Madame,‖ seyd the knight again,
―Y wold the spouse now ful fain
And hold the to mi wive;
Ac yif thi fader herd it sain
That ich hadde his douhter forlain,
Of lond he wald me drive.
Ac yif ich were king of this lond
And hadde more gode in min hond
Than other kinges five,
Wel fain y wald spouse the than;
Ac, certes, icham a pover man,
Wel wo is me o live!‖
―Sir knight,‖ seyd that maiden kinde,
―For love of Seyn Tomas of Ynde,
Whi seystow ever nay?
No be thou never so pover of kinde,
Riches anough y may the finde
Bothe bi night and day.”
That hende knight bithought him than
And in his armes he hir nam
And kist that miri may;
And so thai plaid in word and dede,
That he wan hir maidenhede,
Er that sche went oway.
And ever that steward gan abide
Alon under that chaumber side,
In at an hole, was nought to wide,
He seighe hem bothe in that tide
Hou thai seten yfere.
And when he seyghe hem bothe with sight,
Sir Amis and that bird bright,
The doukes douhter dere,
Ful wroth he was and egre of mode,
And went oway, as he were wode,
Her conseil to unskere.
When the douke come in to that won
The steward ogyain him gan gon,
Her conseyl forto unwrain,
―Mi lord, the douke,‖ he seyd anon,
―Of thine harm, bi Seyn Jon,
Ichil the warn ful fain;
In thi court thou hast a thef,
That hath don min hert gref,
Schame it is to sain,
For, certes, he is a traitour strong,
When he with tresoun and with wrong
Thi douhter hath forlain!”
The riche douke gan sore agrame:
―Who hath,‖ he seyd, ―don me that schame?
Tel me, y the pray!”
―Sir,‖ seyd the steward, ―bi Seyn Jame,
Ful wele y can the tel his name,
Thou do him hong this day;
It is thi boteler, Sir Amis,
Ever he hath ben traitour, ywis
He hath forlain that may.
Y seighe it me self, for sothe,
And will approve biforn hem bothe,
That thai can nought say nay!"
Than was the douke egre of mode,
He ran to halle, as he were wode,
For no thing he nold abide.
With a fauchoun scharp and gode
He smot to Sir Amis ther he stode,
And failed of him biside.
Into a chaumber Sir Amis ran tho
And schet the dore bituen hem to
For drede his heved to hide.
The douke strok after swiche a dent
That thurch the dore that fauchon went,
So egre he was that tide.
Al that ever about him stode,
Bisought the douke to slake his mode,
Bothe erl, baroun, and swain;
And he swore bi Him that dyed on Rode
He nold for al this worldes gode
Bot that traitour were slain.
―Ich have him don gret honour,
And he hath as a vile traitour
Mi douhter forlain;
Y nold for al this worldes won
Bot y might the traitour slo
With min hondes tuain.‖
―Sir,‖ seyd Sir Amis anon,
―Lete thi wrethe first overgon,
Y pray the, par charité!
And yif thou may prove, bi Sein Jon,
That ichave swiche a dede don,
Do me to hong on tre!
Ac yif ani with gret wrong
Hath lowe on ous that lesing strong,
What bern that he be,
He leighth on ous, withouten fail,
Ichil aprove it in bataile,
To make ous quite and fre.‖
―Ya,‖ seyd the douke, ―wiltow so,
Darstow into bataile go,
Al quite and skere you make?‖
―Ya, certes, sir!‖ he seyd tho,
―And here mi glove y give ther to,
He leighge on ous with wrake.‖
The steward stirt to him than
And seyd, ―Traiour, fals man,
Ataint thou schalt be take;
Y seigehe it me self this ich day,
Where that sche in thi chaumber lay,
Your noither it may forsake!‖
Thus the steward ever gan say,
And ever Sir Amis seyd, ―Nay,
Ywis, it nas nought so!‖
Than dede the douke com forth that may,
And will swear it before both of them,
So that they cannot deny it!"
Then the duke was in a livid passion.
He ran to the hall as if he were mad;
He would not stop for anything.
With a long curved sword, sharp and good,
He slashed at Sir Amis where he stood,
But failed to hit him.
Sir Amis ran into a chamber
And shut the door between the two of them
To hide his head for fear.
The duke struck such a blow at him
That the blade pierced through the door.
So furious was he that moment
That all who stood around him
Begged the duke to control his emotions,
Both earl, baron, and servant.
But he swore by Him who died on the Cross
That he would not stop for all the world’s goods
Unless that traitor was slain.
““I have given him great honor
And he has behaved as a vile criminal
And slept with my daughter! I wouldn’t turn away for all the world
Until I might slay this traitor
With my own two hands!”
“Sir,” Sir Amis pleaded at once,
“Let your rage first die down,
I beg of you, for charity’s sake!
And if you can prove, by Saint John,
That I have done such a thing,
Have me hanged on a tree!
But if anyone has defamed the two of us
With a foul lie, with great injustice—
Whatever man that he be
Who lies about us—without fail
I will prove it by combat
To acquit and clear ourselves.”
“So!” said the duke, “Will you do so?
Do you dare to go into battle
To clear and prove yourselves innocent?”
“Yes, certainly, sir!” he replied then,
“And I give my glove to you here:
This man lies about us with hatred.”
The steward bolted to him then
And yelled, “Traiour! False man!
You will be seized and condemned!
I saw it myself this very day
Where she lay in your chamber.
Neither of you can deny it!”
The steward continually charged so,
And Sir Amis always said, “No,
In truth, it was not so.”
Then the duke had the maiden come forth
And the steward withstode al way
And voued the dede tho.
The maiden wepe, hir hondes wrong,
And ever swore hir moder among,
“Certain, it was nought so!”
Than seyd the douke, “Withouten fail,
It schal be proved in batail
And sen bituen hem to.”
Than was atuix hem take the fight
And sett the day a fourtennight,
That mani man schuld it sen.
The steward was michel of might;
In al the court was ther no wight
Sir Amis borwe durst ben.
Bot for the steward was so strong,
Borwes anowe he fond among,
Tuente al bidene.
Than seyd thi all with resoun,
Sir Amis schuld ben in prisoun,
For he no schuld nowhar flen.
Than ans wered that maiden bright
And swore bi Jhesu, ful of might,
That were michel wrong.
―Taketh mi bodi for that knight,
Til that his day com of fight,
And put me in prisoun strong.
Yif that the knight wil flen oway
An d dar nought holden up his day,
Bataile of him to fong.
Do me than londes lawe
For his love to be todrawe
And heighe on galwes hong.”
Hir moder seyd with wordes bold
That with gode wil als sche wold
Ben his borwe also,
His day of bataile up to hold,
That he as gode knight schold
Fight ogain his fo.
Thus tho levedis fair and bright
Boden for that gentil knight
To lain her bodis to.

16 Trial by combat was an established practice in Germanic law, with the victor assumed to be in the right. The practice faded away by the renaissance in favor of trial by jury and would have been slightly antique even in Auchinleck’s time, but dueling continued up to the twentieth century, even in America.

17 Borwe: Similar to the surety agreement that Gamelyn’s brother enters into, the steward finds supporters who will assume legal responsibility if he absconds, and Sir Amis does not find a guarantor as the royal court believes he will flee from the steward’s formidable strength. Skeat etymologizes bail as coming from OF baillier, to keep in custody. As with the Anglo-Saxons, the system seems to have been originally based on hostages and not money. The fact that no one helps Sir Amis after the affection shown him earlier (342-5) may partly underscore the fact that he is in the wrong, but also highlights Sir Amiloun’s unquestioning loyalty.
Than seyd the lordinges everichon,  
That other borwes wold thai non,  
Bot graunt it schuld be so.  
When thai had don, as y you say,  
And borwes founde withouten delay,  
And graunted al that ther ware,  
Sir Amis sorwed night and day,  
Al his joie was went oway,  
And comen was al his care,  
For that the steward was so strong  
And hadde the right and he the wrong  
Of that he opon him bare.

900
Of hi
s liif yaf he nought,  
Bot of the maiden so michel he thought,  
Might noman morn mare.  
For he thought that he most nede,  
Prior to going to battle,  
To swear an oath beforehand,  
That God might support him  
As much as he was guiltles of the deed  
Which he had been accused of.  
And then he resolved, without wrong,  
That he would rather be hanged  
Than to swear falsely.  
But he continually called on Jesus  
That He would save both of them  
So that they would not be lost.  
So it happened that one day  
He met the lady and the maiden  
Under the shade of an orchard.  
“Sir Amis,” her mother began to say,  
“Why do you grieve so without any joy?  
Tell me the truth this time.  
Do not be afraid,” she continued,  
“To fight with your enemy,  
Whether you will walk or ride.  
I will equip you so lavishly  
That you need never have fear of him  
In enduring your battle.”  
“Madam,” said that gracious knight,  
“For Jesus’ love, full of might,  
Be nought wroth for this deed.

910
He hadde lever to ben anhong  
Than to be forsworn.  
Ac oft he bisought Jhesu tho,  
He schuld save him bothe to,  
That thai ner nought forlorn.  
So if bifel opon a day  
He mett the levedi and that may  
Under an orchard side.  
“Sir Amis,” the levedy gan say,  
“Whi mornestow so withouten play?  
Tel me that sothe this tide.  
No drede the nought,” sche seyd than,  
“For to fight with thi foman,  
Whether thou wilt go or ride,  
So richeliche y schal the schrede,  
Tharf the never have of hi drede,  
Thi bataile to abide.”  
“Madame,” seyd that gentil knight,  
“For Jhesus love, ful of might,  
Be nought wroth for this deed.

920
Ich have that wrong and he the right,  
Therfore icham aferd to fight,  
Al so God me spede,  
For y mot swere, withouten faile,  
Al so God me spede in bataile,  
His specche is falschede;  
And yif y swere, icham forsworn;  
Than liif and soule icham forlorn;  
Every one of the lordings said  
That they needed no other guarantors,  
And granted that it should be so.  
When this was done, as I say to you,  
And seconds were arranged without delay,  
And all who were there were in agreement,  
Sir Amis was in sorrow night and day.  
All his joy had gone away,  
And all his troubles had multiplied.  
For the steward was so formidable  
And was in the right, and he was guilty  
Of the offence that was laid on him.  
He did not care about his life,  
But he thought so much about the maiden  
That no man might mourn more.  
He felt that it was necessary for him,  
Prior to going to battle,  
To swear an oath beforehand,  
That God might support him  
As much as he was guiltles of the deed  
Which he had been accused of.

930
Do not be afraid,” she continued,  
“To fight with your enemy,  
Whether you will walk or ride.  
I will equip you so lavishly  
That you need never have fear of him  
In enduring your battle.”  
“Madam,” said that gracious knight,  
“For Jesus’ love, full of might,  
Do not be anxious about that day.  
I am in the wrong and he is in the right,  
And so I am afraid to fight,  
So help me God!  
For I must swear, without fail,  
That God should support me in battle  
As much as his words are falsehoods.  
And if I swear, I swear falsely,  
And then in life and soul I am lost.

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18 So God me spede: ME is full of emphatic oaths and this line is likely meant as such.
Certes, y can no rede!"
Than seyd that levedi in a while,
“No mai ther go non other gile
To bring that traitor doun?"
“Yis, dame,” he seyd, “bi Seyn Gile!
Her woneth hennes mani a mile
Mi brother, Sir Amiloun,
And yif y dorst to gon,
Y dorst wele swere bi Seyn Jon,
So trewe is that baroun,
His owhen liif to lese to mede,
He wold help me at this nede,
To fight with that feloun.”
“Sir Amis,”
the levedi gan to say,
“Take leve to morwe at day
And wende in thi jurné.
Y schal say thou schalt in thi way
Hom in to thine owhen cuntray,
Thi fader, thi moder to se;
And when thou comes to thi brother right,
Pray him, as he is hendi knight
And of gret bounté,
That he the batail for ous fong
Ogain the steward that with wrong
Wil stroie ous alle thre.”
A morwe Sir Amis made him yare
And toke his leve for to fare
And went in his jurnay.
For nothing nold he spare,
He priked the stede that him bare
Bothe night and day.
So long he priked withouten abod
The stede that he on rode
In a fer cuntray
Was overcomen and fel doun ded;
Tho couthe he no better red,
His song was, “Waileway!”
And when it was bifallen so,
Nedes afof he most go,
Ful careful was that knight.
He stiked up his lappes tho,
In his way he gan to go,
To hold that he bighet;
And al that day so long he ran,
In to a wilde forest he cam
For sure, I know no solution!”
Then after a while the lady said,
“Is there no trick that will work
To bring that traitor down?"
“Yes, my lady,” he said, “By Saint Giles!”
Many a mile from here, there lives
My brother in arms, Sir Amiloun.
And if I dare to go,
I would swear by Saint John,
That baron is so loyal that
He would help me in my need,
Even if he lost his own life as a reward,
To fight with that criminal.”
“Sir Amis,” the mother said,
“Leave tomorrow at daybreak
And travel on your journey.
I will say that you are on your way
Home to your own country
To see your father and your mother.
And when you come to your friend,
Ask him, if he is a noble knight
And of great generosity,
That he accept the battle for us
Against the steward, who will unjustly
Destroy all three of us."
In the morning Sir Amis readied himself
And took his leave to travel
And went on his journey.
He would not stop for anything.
He spurred the horse that carried him
Both day and night.
So long did he spur the steed
That he rode on without rest,
That in a faraway country
It was exhausted and collapsed dead.
Then he knew no other course.
His refrain was “Alas the day!”
And when it happened so
That he had to go on foot,
That knight was sorely aggrieved.
He tucked up the hems of his coat
And began to go on his way
To keep what he had promised.
And so all the day long he ran
Until he came into a wild forest

---

19 Dame: From Latin domina, dame is difficult to translate here as the sense is highly contextual in ME. It can be a formal title, serving as the female counterpart to Sir (Lady), or it can simply mean a matron or mistress of a household (madam, ma’am). It seldom has the disrespectful nuance of modern slang.

20 Lappes: Leach explains that “knights wore long coats that had to be tucked up for walking or riding” (quoted in TEAMS). MacEdward Leach, ed., *Amis and Amiloun*, EETS OS 203 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).
Between the day and the night.
Such a strong fatigue came upon him
That for all this world’s possessions
He could not go any further.
The knight, who was so gracious and noble,
Laid himself comfortably under a tree
And fell asleep at that moment.
All the night he lay still
Until the morning when men might see
The day on all sides.
At the time his brother, Sir Amiloun, 21
Was esteemed as a lord of great renown
Over all that wide country
And lived only half a day’s journey,
Whether on foot or riding,
Away from where he lay.
As Sir Amiloun, that gracious knight,
Lay asleep that night,
In his nightmare he dreamed at once
That he saw Sir Amis with his eyes,
His brother, who was bound in loyalty,
Surrounded by his enemies.
By means of a bear, wild and crazed,
And other beasts that stood nearby him,
He was about to be killed.
And he stood among them alone
As a man who hoped for no help.
He was in great despair.
When Sir Amiloun was awake,
He felt great sorrow in himself
And told his wife immediately
How he dreamed he saw dark beasts
Around his friend with rage
Ready to kill with sorrow and grief.
“Surely,” he said, “By some wrong
He is in peril, great and strong.
He is bereft of joy!”
And then he said, “For sure, in truth,
I will never have happiness or rest
Until I know how he is doing.”
Just as quickly he started up that moment.
He would not wait there longer,
But prepared himself at once.
And all his company, on each side,
Equipped themselves to be ready to ride
To set forth with their lord.
But he ordered all who were there
To keep still, for the love of God, in peace.
He spoke to every one of them
And swore bi Him that schop mankende,  
Ther schuld no man with him wende,  
Bot himself alon.

Ful richeliche he gan him schrede  
And lepe astite opon his stede,  
For nothing he nold abide.

Al his folk he gan forbede  
That non so hardi were of dede,  
So al that night he rode til day,

Til he com ther Sir Amis lay  
Up in that forest wide.

Than seighe he a weri knight forgon  
Under a tre slepeand alon;  
To him he went that tide.

He cleped to him anon right,  
―Arise up, felawe, it is light  
And time for to go!‖

Sir Amis biheld up with his sight  
And knewe anon that gentil knight,  
And he knewe him also.

That hendi knight, Sir Amiloun,  
Of his stede light adoun,  
And kist hem bothe to.

―Brother,‖ he seyd, ―whi listow here  
With thus mornand chere?  
Who hath wrought the this wo?‖

―Brother,‖ seyd Sir Amis tho,  
―Ywis, me nas never so wo  
Seththen that y was born;  
For seththen that thou was went me fro,  
With joie and michel blis also  
Y served mi lord bifo

Ac the steward ful of envie,  
And with gile and with trecherie,  
He hath me wrought swiche sorn;  
Bot thou help me at this rede,  
Ccertes, y can no nother rede,

Mi liif, it is forlorn!‖

―Brother,‖ Seyd Sir Amiloun,  
―Whi hath the steward, that feloun,  
Ydon the al this schame?‖

―Ccertes,‖ he seyd, ―with gret tresoun  
He wald me driven al adoun  
And hath me brought in blame.‖

Than told Sir Amis al that cas,  
Hou he and that maiden was  
Bothe togider ysame,

And hou the steward gan hem wrain,  
And hou the douke wald him have slain  
With wretie and michel grame.  
And also he seyd, yplight,  
Hou he had boden on him fight,  
Batail of him to fong,
And hou in court was ther no wight,  
To save tho tuay levedis bright,  
Durst ben his borwe among,  
And hou he most, withouten faile,  
Swere, ar he went to bataile,  
It war a lesing ful strong;  
“And forsworn man schal never spede;  
Certes, therfore y can no rede,  
‘Allas’ may be mi song!”  

When that Sir Amis had al told,  
Hou that the fals steward wold  
Bring him doun with mode,  
Sir Amiloun with wordes bold  
Swore, “Bi Him that Judas sold  
And died opon the Rode,  
Of his hope he schal now faile,  
And y schal for the take bataile,  
Thei that he wer wode;  
Yf y may mete him aright,  
With mi brond, that is so bright,  
Y schal sen his hert blode!  
Ac brother,” he seyd, “have al mi wede,  
And in thi robe y schal me schrede,  
Right as the self it ware;  

And y schal swere so God me sped  
As icham gittles of that dede,  
That he opon the bare,”  
Anon tho hendi knightes to  
Alle her wede chaunged tho,  
And when thai were al yare,  
Than seyd Sir Amiloun, “Bi Seyn Gile,  
Thus man schal the schrewie bigile,  
That wald the forfare!  
“Brother,” he seyd, “wende hom now right  
To mi leve, that is so bright,  
And do as y schal the sain;  
And as thou art a gentil knight,  
Thou ly bi hir in bed ich night,  
Til that y com again,  
And sai thou hast sent thi stede ywis  
To thi brother, Sir Amis;  
Than wil thai be ful fain,  
Thai wil wene that ich it be;  
Ther is non that schal knowe the,  

And how in the court there was no one  
Except those two beautiful ladies  
Who dared to be among his seconds,  
And how he must, without fail,  
Swear before he went to battle  
That it all was a foul lie.  
“And a false man will never succeed.  
Therefore, for certain, I know no answer.  
My song will be ‘Alas’!”  
When Sir Amis had told all,  
How that false steward wanted to  
Bring him down with angry passion,  
Sir Amiloun swore with bold words:  
“If I can meet him to his face,  
With my blade, which is so bright,  
I will see his heart’s blood!  
But friend,” he said, “take all my clothes,  
And I will dress myself in your robe,  
Right as it were yourself.  
And I will swear, so help me God,  
That I am guiltless of that deed  
Which he charged upon you!”  
At once those two wily knights  
Exchanged all their clothes.  
And when they were all ready,  
Then Sir Amiloun said, “By Saint Giles,  
Thus so a man will trick the criminal  
Who would destroy you!  
Brother,” he said, “now go right home  
To my lady, who is so beautiful,  
And do as I tell you to do.  
And if you are a virtuous knight,  
Lie beside her in bed each night  
Until I come back again.  
And say you have sent your steed, in truth,  
To your brother, Sir Amis.  
Then I will be very glad.  
They will assume that you are me;  
The two of us are so alike  
That there is no one who will know you!”  
And when he had spoken so indeed,

22 Sir Amis’ moral conundrum is that they have sworn to be truthful to their lords, and he will be a liar if he swears to the court that he never slept with Belisaunt. The steward is justified in accusing Amis, however spiteful his motives. Sir Amiloun’s trick is to impersonate Sir Amis, as Amiloun will technically be telling the truth if he vows that he has not corrupted the king’s daughter.

23 Seyn Gile: Saint Giles (c. 650-710), a hermit saint from Athens associated with cripples and beggars.
Sir Amiloun, that gentil knight,  
Went in his jurnay,  
And Sir Amis went hom anon right  
To his brother levedi so bright,  
Withouten more delay,  
And seyd hou he hadde sent his stede  
To his brother to riche mede  
Bi a knight of that countray;  

Sir Amiloun, that noble knight,  
Went on his journey.  
And Sir Amis went home at once  
To his brother’s lady, who was so beautiful,  
Without any more delay.  
And he explained how he had sent his stede  
To his brother as a valuable gift  
Via a knight of that country.

And al thai wende of Sir Amis  
It had ben her lord, ywis,  
So liche were tho tuay.  

And all of them thought that Sir Amis  
Was their lord, in fact,  
So alike were the two of them.  

When Sir Amis had fully  
Told them what had happened to him,  
He surmised full well that  
Small and great, high and low,  
All who were ever in the court,  
Believed that it had been so.  

When it was comen  
To the night,  
Sir Amis and that levedi bright,  
To bed thai gun go;  
And whan thai were togider ylayd,  
Sir Amis his swerd out braid  
And layd bituix hem tuo.  
The levedi loked opon him tho  
Wrothlich with her eighen tuo,  
Sche wend hir lord were wode.  
―Sir,‖ sche seyd, ―whi farstow so?  
Thus were thou noght won to do,  
Who hath changed thi mode?‖  
―Dame,‖ he seyd, ―sikerly,  
Ich have swiche a malady  
That mengeth al mi blod,  
And al min bones be so sare,  
Y nold nought toche thi bodi bare  
For al this warldes gode!‖  
Thus, ywis, that hendy knight  
Was holden in that fourtennight  
As lord and prince in pride;  

Ac he forgat him never a night,  
Bituix him and that levedi bright  
His swerd he layd bside.  
The levedi thought in hir resoun,  
It hadde ben hir lord, Sir Amiloun,  
That hadde ben sike that tide;  
Therfore sche held hir stille tho  
And wold speke wordes no mo,  
Bot thought his wille to abide.  
Now, hende, herkneth, and y schal say  
Hou that Sir Amiloun went his way;  
For nothing wold he spare.  
He priked his stede night and day,  
As a gentil knight, stout and gay,  
To court he com ful yare  
That selve day, withouten fail,  
Now, good people, listen and I will say  
How Sir Amiloun went his way.  
He would not stop for anything.  
He spurred his steed by night and day,  
As a noble knight, sturdy and cheerful.  
He came to the court in haste  
The same day, without fail,
That was set for the battle,
And Sir Amis was not there.
Then the two ladies were seized by the hand
To undergo their judgment,
With sorrow and bitter sighing.
The steward waited upon a horse
With shield and spear to offer battle.
He began to chatter great boasts.
He quickly went before the duke
And said, “Sir, as God protects you,
Listen to my speech!”
This traitor has gone out of the land.
If he were here in person,
He would be hanged and drawn.
Therefore I ask for judgment,
That his guarantors be burned,
As it is the law of the land.”
The rich duke, with wrath and anger,
Ordered men to take hold of the ladies
And bring them forth beside everyone.
A raging fire was readied there,
And a barrel for them to wear,
To burn them on that day.
Then they looked toward the field
And saw a knight, with spear and shield,
Come spurring there gallantly.
Then everyone said, indeed,
“Here comes Sir Amis riding!”
And asked that they would wait.
Sir Amiloun did not rest at any milestone.
He rode past each one of them,
Making his way toward the duke.
“My lord, the duke,” he said at once,
“For shame, let those women go,
Who are both good and noble!
For I have come back here today
In order to save them, if I can,
And bring them out of bondage.
For, certainly, it would be a great wrong
To make a roast of beautiful ladies.
You are going against nature, indeed.”
Then the ladies were glad and relieved.
They could express their joy to no man;
Their troubles had all departed.
And then, as you may listen and learn,
They went into the chamber as quickly
Without any more delay,
And they dressed that knight splendidly
With helmet and armor and shining mail.

24 *Unkende* can mean either *cruel* or *unnatural* (i.e. to one’s own kind), and here Sir Amiloun is likely suggesting both senses.

49
His tire, it was ful gay.
And when he was opon his stede,
That God hem schuld save and spede
Mani man bad that day.
As he com prikand out of toun,
Com a voice fram heven adoun,
That noman herd bot he,
And sayd, “Thou knight, Sir Amiloun,
God, that suffred passioun,
Sent the bode bi me!
Yif thou this bataile underfong,
Thou schalt have an eventour strong
Within this yeres thre;
And or this thre yere be al gon,
Fouler mese
In the world, than thou schal be!
—Ac for thou art so hende and fre,
Jhesu sent the bode bi me,
To warn the anon;
So foule a wreche thou schalt be,
With sorwe and care and poverté
Nas never non wers bigon.
Over al this world, fer and hende,
Tho that be thine best frende
Schal be thi most fon,
And thi wiif and alle thi kinne
Schul fle the stede thatow art inne,
And forsake the ichon.‖
That knight gan hove stille so ston
And herd tho wordes everichon,
That were so gret and grille.
He nist what
him was best to don,
To flen, other to fighting gon;
In hert him liked ille.
He thought, “Yif y beknowe mi name,
Than schal mi brother go to schame,
With sorwe thai schul him spille.
Certes,” he seyd, “for drede of care
To hold mi treuthe schul y nought spare,
Lete God don alle His wille.”
Al the folk ther was, ywis,
Thai wend it had ben Sir Amis
That bataile schuld bede;
He and the steward of pris
Were brought bifor the justise
To swere for that dede.
The steward swore the pople among,
As wis as he seyd no wrong,
God help him at his nede;
And Sir Amiloun swore and gan to say
As wis as he never kist that may,
Our Levedi schuld hem spede.
When thai hadde sworn, as y you told,
To biker tho bernes were ful bold
His appearance was magnificent.
And when he was upon his steed,
Many men prayed that day
That God would save and support them.
As he came galloping out of town,
A voice came down from Heaven,
Which no one heard but him,
And said, “You knight, Sir Amiloun!
Christ, who suffered passion,
Sends you a warning through me!
If you go through with this battle,
You will have a great reckoning
Within the next three years.
And before these three years are all gone,
There will never have been a fouler leper
In all the world than you will be!
But because you are so generous and good,
Jesus sent the warning through me
To warn you at once.
You will be so foul a wretch,
With sorrow and trouble and poverty.
There was never a worse one before,
Over all this world, near and far.
Those who are your best friends
Will be your greatest foes,
And your wife and all your kin
Will flee the room that you are in,
And desert you, every one.”
The knight stood as still as a stone
And heard every one of the words,
Which were so serious and terrifying.
He did not know what was best to do,
To flee or to go fighting.
He was aggrieved at heart.
He thought, “If I reveal my name,
Then my brother will go to shame.
They will kill him in sorrow.
For sure,” he said, “for fear of worse trouble,
I will spare nothing to keep my pledge.
Let God do all that He wills!”
All the people who were there, indeed,
Assumed that it was Sir Amis
Who was to offer battle.
He and the renowned steward
Were brought before the justice
To swear on that deed.
The steward swore in front of the people
That for certain he spoke no wrong;
God help him in his need.
And Sir Amiloun affirmed and said
That for certain he never kissed that maid,
And that Our Lady should reward them.
When they had pledged, as I told you,
The men were very keen to fight.
And busked hem for to ride.

All who were there, young and old,
Beseeketh God yif that He wold
Help Sir Amis in that moment.

On stedes that were stithe and strong
They rode together with long spears,
Until they were shattered on each side.

And then they drew out good swords
And clashed together as if they were mad.
They would not stop for anything.

All who were there, young and old,
Beseeched God yif that He wold
Help Sir Amis in that moment.

Medieval armor could be so heavy that a warrior thrown from his horse might only get up off the ground with difficulty. Sir Amiloun shows a chivalric sense of fair play in lifting the steward and being willing to fight on foot, not wanting to cheapen his victory by killing a nearly helpless man. A horse being killed is an everpresent romance cliché, perhaps enabling the hero to show off his physical prowess on foot.
Anon togider thai fight gan
With brondes bright and bare;
So hard togider thai fight than,
Til al her armour o blod ran,
For nothing nold thai spare.
The steward smot to him that stounde
On his schulder a gret wounde
With his grimly gare,
That thurch that wounde, as ye may here,
He was knowen with reweli chere,
When he was fallen in care.
Than was Sir Amiloun wroth and wode,
Whan al his amour ran o blode,
That ere was white so swan;
With a fauchoun scharp and gode
He smot to him with egre mode
Al so a douhti man,
That even fro the schulder blade
Into the brest the brond gan wade,
Thurchout his hert it ran.
The steward fel adoun ded,
Sir Amiloun strok of his hed,
And God he thonked it than.
Alle the lordinges that ther ware,
Litel and michel, lasse and mare,
Ful glad thai were that tide.
They com ogaines him out of toun
With a fair processioun
Semliche bi ich a side.
Anon thai ladde him to the tour
With joie and ful michel honour,
As prince proude in pride.
In to the palais when thai were gon,
Al thai was in that worthli won
Wende Sir Amis it ware.
“Sir Amis,” seyd the douke anon,
“We have given these lordings everichon
Y graunt the ful yare,
For Belisent, that miri may,
Thou hast bought hir ful dere today
With grimli woundes sare;
Ful blithe was that hendi knight
And thonked him with al his might,
Glad he was and fain;
In alle the court was ther no wight
That wist wat his name it hight;
To save tho levedis tuain,
Leches swithe thai han yfounde,
At once began to fight together
With blades that were shining and bare.
So hard did they battle each other
Until all their armor ran with blood;
They would not stop for anything.
At that moment the steward struck on him
A great wound on his shoulder
With his fearsome weapon,
So that through that wound, as you may hear,
He knew, with a remorseful expression,
That he had fallen into danger.
Then Sir Amiloun became wild and enraged,
As all his armor ran with blood
Which was before as white as a swan.
With a curved sword, sharp and fine,
He struck at the steward with a fierce heart
As a hardy man,
So that even from the shoulder blade
Into the breast the blade traveled
And ran through his heart.
The steward fell down dead.
Sir Amiloun cut off his head,
And then thanked God for it.
All of the lordings who were there,
Small and great, low and high,
Were greatly pleased that moment.
They bore the head upon a spear.
They made their way excitedly to town
And would not wait for anything.
They came back to him outside town
In a grand procession,
Splendid on every side.
Soon they escorted him to the tower
With joy and great honor,
As a prince proud in nobility.
When they had gone into the palace,
All who were in that stately dwelling
Thought it was Sir Amis.
“Sir Amis,” the duke soon began,
“Before every one of these lords,
I readily grant you Belisaunt,
That sweet maiden,
For you have bought her dearly today
With sore and horrible wounds.
Therefore I grant you here now
My land and my dear daughter,
To hold forevermore.”
The noble knight was overjoyed
And thanked him with all his might.
He was glad and pleased.
In all the court there was no one
Who knew what his real name was,
Who had saved the two ladies.
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<th>Line</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1400</td>
<td>That gun to tasty his wounde And made him hole ogain, Than were thai al glad and blithe And thonked God a thousand sithe That the steward was slain. On a day Sir Amiloun dight him yare And seyd that he wold fare Hom into his cuntry To telle his frendes, lasse and mare, And other lordinges that there ware, Who examined his wounds And made him whole again. Then everyone was glad and relieved And thanked God a thousand times That the steward was slain. The next day Sir Amiloun hastily readied Himself and said that he would travel Home into his country To tell his friends, low and high, And other lords that were there, How he had fared that day. The duke gave him permission at that time And offered him knights and great ceremony, But he answered, “No.” No man should go with him, But with equal speed he prepared himself And went forth on his way. He went alone on his journey. No other man could go with him, Neither knight nor servant. The knight, sturdy in flesh and blood, Did not rest at any milestone Until he came home again. And Sir Amis, as I tell you, Waited for his coming every day Up in the forest plain. And so they met together in reunion, And Sir Amiloun told him with joy and laughter How he had slain the steward, And how as a reward he would marry That same maiden of noble dres Who was of such royal heritage. Sir Amiloun dismounted from his steed, And they exchanged their clothes As they had done before. “Brother,” he said, “go back home.” And he told him what he should say When he arrived there. Then Sir Amis was happy and glad And gave thanks a thousand times For the time that his friend was born. And when they had to part ways, Sir Amis continually thanked him For his trouble and his good deed. “Friend,” he said, “if it happens so That you encounter trouble or woe, And need my help, Just come or send your messenger, And I will delay no longer, So help me God!” No matter how much the danger, I will help you, in right or wrong, Even if I lose my life as a reward.” They then parted from each other.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1410</td>
<td>Hou he had sped that day. The douke graunted him that tide And bede him knightes and miche pride, And he answerd, “Nay.” Ther schuld noman with him gon, Bot as swithe him dight anon And went forth in his way. In his way he went alone, Most ther noman with him gon, Nother knight no swain. The douke graunted him that tide And bede him knightes and miche pride, And he answerd, “Nay.” Ther schuld noman with him gon, Bot as swithe him dight anon And went forth in his way. In his way he went alone, Most ther noman with him gon, Nother knight no swain.</td>
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<td>1420</td>
<td>That douhti knight of blod and bon, No stint he never at no ston Til he com hom ogain; And Sir Amis, as y you say, Waited his coming everi day Up in the forest plain; And so thai mett togider same, And he teld him with joie and game Hou he hadde the steward slain, And hou he schuld spousy to mede That douhti knight of blod and bon, No stint he never at no ston Til he com hom ogain; And Sir Amis, as y you say, Waited his coming everi day Up in the forest plain; And so thai mett togider same, And he teld him with joie and game Hou he hadde the steward slain, And hou he schuld spousy to mede</td>
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<td>1430</td>
<td>That ich maide, worthli in wede, That was so comly corn. Sir Amiloun light of his stede, And gun to chaungy her wede, As thai hadde don biforn. “Brother,” he seyd, “wende hom ogain.” And taught him hou he schuld sain, When he com ther thai wom. Than was Sir Amis glad and blithe And thanked him a thousand sithe That ich maide, worthli in wede, That was so comly corn. Sir Amiloun light of his stede, And gun to chaungy her wede, As thai hadde don biforn. “Brother,” he seyd, “wende hom ogain.” And taught him hou he schuld sain, When he com ther thai wom. Than was Sir Amis glad and blithe And thanked him a thousand sithe</td>
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<td>1440</td>
<td>The time that he was born. And when thai schuld wende ato, Sir Amis oft thonked him tho His cost and his gode dede. “Brother,” he seyd, “yif it bitide so That the bitide care other wo, And of min help hast nede, Savelich com other send thi sond, And y schal never lenger withstond, Al so God me spede; The time that he was born. And when thai schuld wende ato, Sir Amis oft thonked him tho His cost and his gode dede. “Brother,” he seyd, “yif it bitide so That the bitide care other wo, And of min help hast nede, Savelich com other send thi sond, And y schal never lenger withstond, Al so God me spede;</td>
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<td>1450</td>
<td>Be it in peril never so strong, Y schal the help in right and wrong, Mi liif to lese to mede.” Asonder than thai gun wende; Be it in peril never so strong, Y schal the help in right and wrong, Mi liif to lese to mede.” Asonder than thai gun wende;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Sir Amiloun, that knight so hende,
Went hom in that tide
To his levedi that was unkende,
And was ful welcome to his frende,
As prince proude in priding;
And when it was comen to the night,
Sir Amiloun and that levedi bright
In bedde were layd biside;
In his armes he gan hir kis
And made his joye and michel blis,
For nothing he nold abide.
The levedi astite asked him tho
Whi that he hadde farn so
Al that fourtennight,
Laid his swerd bituen hem to,
That sche no durst nought for wele no wo
Touche his bodi aright.
Sir Amiloun bithought him than
His brother was a trewe man,
That hadde so done, aplight.
―Dame,‖ he seyd, ―ichil the sain
And telle the that sothe ful fai
Ac wray me to no wight.‖
The levedi astite him frain gan,
For His love, that this warld wan,
Telle hir whi it ware.
Than astite that hendy man,
Al the sothe he teld hir than,
To court hou he gan fare,
And hou he slough the steward strong,
That with tresoun and with wrong
Wold have his brother forfare,
And hou his brother that hendy knight
Lay with hir in bed ich night
While that he was thare.
The levedi was ful wroth, yplight,
And oft missayd hir lord that night
With speche bituix hem to,
And seyd, ―With wrong and michel unright
Thou slough ther a gentil knight;
Ywis, it was ivel ydo!‖
―Dame,‖ he seyd, ―bi heven king,
Y no dede it for non other thing
Bot to save mi brother fro wo,
And ich hope, yif ich hadde nede,
His owhen liif to lesse to mede,
He wald hlep me also.‖
Al thus, in gest as we sain,
Sir Amis was ful glad and fain,
To court he gan to wende;
And when he come to court ogain
With erl, baroun, knight and swain,
Honoured he was, that hende.
That riche douke tok him bi hond
And sese him in alle his lond,
To held withouten ende;

1510
And seththen with joie opon a day
He spoused Belisent, that may,
That was so trewe and kende.
Miche was that semly folk in sale,
That was samned at that bridale
When he hadde spoused that flour,
Of erls, barouns, mani and fale,
And other lordinges gret and smale,
And levedis bright in bour.
A real fest thai gan to hold
Of erls and of barouns bold
With joie and michel honour;
Over al that lond est and west
Than was Sir Amis helden the best
And chosen for priis in tour.
So within tho yeres to
A wel fair grace fel hem tho,
As God almighti wold;
The riche douke dyed hem fro
And his levedi dede also,
And graven in grete so cold.
Than was Sir Amis, hende and fre,
Douke and lord of gret pousté
Over al that lond yhold.
Tuai childer he bigat bi his wive,
The fairest that might bere live,
In gest as it is told.
Than was that knight of gret renoun
And lord of mani a tour and toun
And douke of gret pousté;
And his brother, Sir Amiloun,
With sorwe and care was driven adown,
That ere was hende and fre;
Al so that angel hadde hem told,
Fouler messel that nas non hold
In world than was he.
In gest to rede it is gret rewthe,
What sorwe he hadde for his treuthe
Within tho yeres thre.
And er tho thre yere com to thende
He no wist whider he might wende,
So wo was him bigon;
For al that were his best frende,
And nameliche al his riche kende,
Bicom his most fon;
And his wiif, for sothe to say,
Wrought him wers bothe night and day
Than thai dede everichon.
When him was fallen that hard cas,
A frendeleser man than he was
Men nist nowhar non.
So wicked and schrewed was his wiif,
Sche brac his hert withouten kniif,
With wordes harde and kene,
And seyd to him, “Thou wrecche chattif,
With wrong the steward les his liif,
And that is on the sene;
Therfore, bi Seyn Denis of Fraunce,
The is bitid this hard chaunce,
Dathet who the bimene!”

Wel oft times his honden he wrong,
As man that thenketh his liif to long,
That liveth in treye and tene.
Allas, allas! that gentil knight
That whilom was so wise and wight,
That than was wrought so wo,
Than fram his levedi, fair and bright,
Out of his owhen chaumber anight
He was yhote to go,
And in his owhen halle o day

Fram the heighe bord oway
He was ycharged also
To eten at the tables ende;
Wald ther no man sit him hende,
Wel careful was he tho.
Bi than that half yere was ago
That he hadde eten in halle so
With gode mete and with drink,
His levedi wax ful wroth and wo
And thought he lived to long tho

Without ani lesing -
“In this lond springeth this word,
Y fede a mesel a t mi bord,
He is so foule a thing,
It is gret spite to al mi kende,
Bi Jhesus, heven king!”

On a day sche gan him calle
And seyd, “Sir, it is so bifalle,
For sothe, y telle it te,
That thou etest so long in halle,
That i eten this way in the hall
With good food and drink,
His lady grew spiteful and aggrieved
And thought he had lived too long,
Without any lie.
“Talk is flying throughout this land
That I feed a leper at my table!
He is so foul a thing,
It is a great disgrace to all my kin.
He will no longer sit near at hand to me
By Jesus, Heaven’s king!”

One day she called for him
And said, “Sir, it has come to happen—
I tell it to you, in truth—
You have eaten so long in this hall
That it is a great disgrace to us all.
My family is angry with me.”

The knight began to weep and said softly,
“Have me put where it is your will,
Where no man may see me.
I will ask no more of you
Than a meal’s ration each day,
For holy charity.”

The lady, for her lord’s sake,
At once had men take wood.
She would not hesitate for anything.
And half a mile from the gate,
She had a little cabin made,
To stand beside the way.
And when the lodge was all built,
Of his gode no wold he noght,  
Bot his gold coupe an hond.  
When he was in his loge alon,  
To God of heven he made his mon  
And thonked Him of al His sond.  
When he was in his loge alon,  
To God of heven he made his mon  
And thonked Him of al His sond.

Into that loge when he was dight  
In al the court was ther no wight  
That wold serve him thare,  
To save a gentil child, yplight,  
Child Owaines his name it hight,  
For him he wepe ful sarere.

That child was trewe and of his kende,  
His soster sone, he was ful hende;  
He sayd to hem ful yare,  
Ywis, he no schuld never wond  
To serven hem fra hond,  
While he olives ware.

That child, that was so fair and bold,  
Owaines was his name ytold,  
Wel curteys, hend and gode.  
Bi his lord ich night he lay  
And feched her livere ever day  
To her lives fode.

Thus Amoraunt, as y you say,  
Com to court ich day,  
No stint he for no strive.  
Al that ther was gan him pray  
To com fro that lazer oway,  
Than schuld he the and thrive.

And he answerd with milde mode  
And swore bi Him that dyed on Rode  
And tholed woundes five,  
For al this worldes gode to take  
His lord nold he never forsake  
Whiles he ware olive.

Bi than the tuelmoneth was al gon,  
Amorant went into that won  
For his lordes livereay;  
The levedi was ful wroth anon  
And comaunde hir men everichon  
To drive that child oway,
And swore by Him that Judas sold,  
Thei his lord for hunger and cold  
Dyed ther he lay,  
He schuld have noither mete no drink,  
No socour of non other thing  
For hir after that day.  
That child wrong his honden tuain  

1670  
And weping went hom again  
With sorwe and sikeing sare.  
That godeman gan him frain  
And bad him that he schuld him sain  
And telle him whi it ware.  
And he answerd and seyd tho,  
“Ywis, no wonder thei me be wo,  
Mine hert, it breketh for care;  
Thi wiif hath sworn with gret mode  
That sche no sc hal never don ous gode;  
Alas, hou schal we fare?‖  
―A, God help!‖ seyd that gentil knight,  
―Whilom y was man of might,  
To dele mete and cloth,  
And now icham so foule a wight  
That al that seth on me bi sight,  
Mi liif is hem ful loth.  
Sone,‖ he seyd, ―lete t hi wepeing,  
For this is now a strong tiding,  
That may we se for soth;  
For, certes, y can non other red,  
Ous bihoveth to bid our brede,  
Now y wot hou it goth.‖  

1680  
Allas, hou schal we fare?’  
“A, God help!” seyd that gentil knight,  
“Whilom y was man of might,  
To dele mete and cloth,  
And now icham so foule a wight  
That al that seth on me bi sight,  
Mi liif is hem ful loth.  
Sone,” he seyd, “lete thi wepeing,  
For this is now a strong tiding,  
That may we se for soth;  
For, certes, y can non other red,  
Ous bihoveth to bid our brede,  
Now y wot hou it goth.”  
Amorwe astite as it was light,  
The child and that gentil knight  
Dight hem for to gon,  
And in her way thai went ful right  
To begge her brede, as thai hadde tight,  
For mete no hadde thai none.  
So long thai went up and doun  
Til thai com to a chepeing toun,  
Five mile out of that won,  
And sore wepeand fro dore to dore,  
And bad here mete for Godes love,  
Ful ivel couthe thai theron.  
So in that time, ich understond,  
Gret plenté was in that lond,  
Bothe of mete and drink;  
That folk was ful fre to fond  
Of al kines thing;  
For the gode man was so messais tho,  
And for the child was fair also,  
Hem loved old and ying,  
And brought hem anough of al gode;  
Than was the child blithe of mode  
And lete be his wepeing.
Than wex the gode man fote so sare
That he no might no forther fare
For al this worldes gode;
To the tounes ende that child him bare
And a loge he bilt him thare,
As folk to chepeing yode;
And as that folk of that cuntray
Com to chepeing everi day,
Thai gat hem lives fode;
Thus in gest rede we
Thai duelled there yeres thre,
That child and he also,
And lived in care and poverté
Bi the folk of that cuntré,
As thai com to and fro,
So that in the ferth yere
Corn bigan to wex dere,
That hunger bigan to go,
That ther was noither eld no ying
That wald yif hem mete no drink,
Wel careful were thai tho.
Amoraunt oft to toun gan gon,
Ac mete no drink no gat he non,
Noither at man no wive.
When thai were togider alon,
Reweliche thai gan maken her mon,
Wo was hem o live;
And his levedi, for sothe to say,
Woned ther in that cuntray
Nought thennes miles five,
And lived in joie bothe night and day,
Whiles he in sorwe and care lay,
Wel ivel mot sche thrive!
Sende me so michel of al mi gode,
An asse, on to ride,
To begge our mete with sorwe and care,
For himself may nought gon,
Then the good man’s feet grew so sore
That he could travel no further
For all this world’s goods.
The youth carried him to the town’s edge
And built him a cabin there,
Where people passed by to the market.
And as the locals of that country
Came to the market every day,
They received their sustenance.
And Amoraunt often walked to town
And begged them for food and drink as well
When they stood in greatest need.
And so we read in the story
That they lived there for three years,
The youth and him also,
And lived in hardship and poverty
Through the people of that land
As they came to and fro,
Until the fourth year,
When grain began to grow scarce.
Hunger started to increase,
So that there was no one young or old
Who would give them food or drink.
They were in hard straits then.
Amoraunt often walked to town,
But he got no food or drink,
Neither from man nor woman.
When they were together alone,
They began to lament ruefully
That it was woe to be alive.
And the knight’s lady, to tell the truth,
Lived there in that country
Not five miles away,
And lived in ease both day and night
While he lay in sorrow and suffering.
May she have foul fortune!
One day, as they sat alone,
That fatherly knight began his plea
And said to the child at that moment,
“Son,” he said, “You must go
To my lady at once,
Who lives nearby here.
Beseech her, for Him who died on the Cross,
To send me a portion of all my goods,
For a donkey to ride on,
And we will journey out of the land
To beg our food in sorrow and hardship.
We will not stay any longer.”
Amoraunt went to the court
Before that beautiful and well-born lady.
At once he spoke very courteously to her.
“Madam,” he said, “in truth,
My lord has sent me as a messenger,
For he himself cannot travel,
And praieste with milde mode
Sende him so michel of al his gode
As an asse to riden opon,
And out of lond we schulen yfere,
No schal we never com eft here,
Thei hunger ous schuld slon."
The levedi seyd sche wald ful fain
Sende him gode asses tuain,
With thi he wald away go
deficient skip."

1780
So fer that he never eft com again.
“Nat, certes, dame,” the child gan sain,
Than was the levedi glad and blithe
And commaund him an asse as swithe
And seyd with wrethe tho,
That child no lenger nold abide,
His asse astite he gan bistride
And went him hom ogain,
And told his lord in that tide
Hou his levedi proude in pride
Schameliche gan to sain;
Opon the asse he sett that knight so hende,
And out of the cité thai gun wende;
Thurch mani a cuntré, up an doun,
They begged her mete fram toun to toun,
Over al that lond thurch Godes wille
That hunger wex so gret and grille,
As wide as thai gun go;
Almest for hunger thai gan to spille,
Of brede thai no hadde nought half her fille,
Ful careful were thai tho.
Than seyd the knight opon a day,
“Ous bihoveth selle our asse oway,
For we no have gode no mo,
Save mi riche coupe of gold,
Ac certes, that schal never be sold,
Thei hunger schuld me slo.”
Than Amoraunt and Sir Amiloun,
With sorwe and care and reweful roun
Erliche in a morning
Thai went hem to a chepeing toun,
And when the knight was light adoun,
Withouten ani duelling,
Amoraunt went to toun tho,
And he pleads in a gentle manner
For you to send him enough of his goods
To buy a donkey to ride on,
And we will journey out of the land.
Nor will we ever come back here,
Even if hunger should finish us.”
That lady said she would very gladly
Send him with two good donkeys
Provided that he would go away
So far that he never came back again.
“No, certainly, my lady,” the youth answered,
“You will never see us again.”
Then the lady was pleased and glad
And as promptly ordered him a donkey
And then ordered sourly,
“No you will travel out of the land.
God grant that you never come back here,
And make sure that it is so.”
The young man did not linger any longer.
He immediately got on his donkey
And took himself home again
And told his lord in that moment
How his lady, haughty in her dignity,
Had spoken so shamefully.
He set that honorable knight on the donkey
And they began to ride out of the city
And were very pleased to do so.
Through many a land, up and down,
They begged for their food from town to town,
Both in the wind and the rain.
Over all the land, through God’s command,
Their hunger grew so sharp and intense
As far as they travelled.
They were almost dying from hunger;
They did not have half their fill of bread.
They were then very miserable.
Then one day the knight said,
“We need to sell our donkey away,
For we have no goods anymore,
Except my rich cup of gold.
But for sure that will never be sold
Even if hunger should kill me.”
Then early one morning,
With sorrow and worry and doleful words,
Amoraunt and Sir Amiloun
Took themselves to a market town.
And when the knight had dismounted,
Without any delaying,
Amourant went into the town.

28 Sir Amiloun’s wife has just agreed to *asses tuain* (1778), but either there is a scribal error or the poet wishes to emphasize her grudging parsimony in promising two but only delivering one donkey.
His asse he ladde with him also
And sold it for five shilling.
And while that derth was so strong,
Ther with thai bought hem mete among,
When thai might gete no thing.
And when her asse was ysold
For five shilling, as y you told,
Thai duelled ther dayes thre;
Amoraunt wex strong and bold,
Of fifteene winter was he old,
Curtays, hende and fre.
For his lord he hadde gret care,
And at his rigge he dight him yare
And bare him out of that cite;
And half a yere and sum del mare
About his mete he him bare,
Yblisced mot he be.
Thus Amoraunt, withouten wrong,
Bar his lord about so long,
As y you tel may.
That winter com so hard and strong,
Oft, ―Allas!‖ it was his song,
So depe was that cuntry
The way was so depe and slider,
Thai fel doun in the clay.
Ful trewe he was and kinde of blo
And served his lord with mild mode,
Wald he nought wende oway.
Thus Amoraunt, as y you say,
Served his lord bothe night and day
And at his rigge him bare.
Oft his song was, ―Waileway!‖
That winter slush was so deep
That his bones grew sore.
All her catel than was spent,
Save tuelf pans, verrament,
Therwith thai went ful yare
And bought hem a gode croudewain,
His lord he gan ther-
in to lain,
He no might him bere namare.
Than Amoraunt crud Sir Amiloun
Thurch mani a cuntré, up and doun,
As ye may understand;
He led the donkey with him as well
And sold it for five shillings.²⁹
And while the bad harvest was so biting,
They bought food among themselves with it
When they could not beg anything.
And when their donkey was sold
For five shillings, as I told you,
They stayed for three days there.
Amoraunt had grown strong and hardy.
He was fifteen years old,
Courteous, handsome, and generous.
For his lord he had great concern,
And he placed him cheerfully on his back
And carried him out of the city.
For half a year and somewhat more
He bore him about for his food.
May he be blessed for it!
Thus Amoraunt, without fail,
Carried his lord around for so long,
As I can tell you.
That winter came so hard and fiercely
That ―Alas!‖ was constantly his song,
The country was so muddy.
The way was so slushy and slippery
That they often both together
Fell down into the dirt.
He was faithful and kind-natured
And served his lord with a gentle spirit
And would not turn away.
Thus Amoraunt, as I tell you,
Served his lord both night and day
And carried him on his back.
His refrain was continually ―Woe is us!‖
The winter slush was so deep
That his bones grew sore.
All their money was spent then,
Except for twelve pennies, in truth.
With that they quickly went
And bought themselves a sturdy pushcart.
He laid his lord inside it;
He could carry him no more.
Then Amoraunt carted Sir Amiloun
Through many a land, up and down,
As you may understand.

²⁹ Five shilling: About £130 (US$200) in modern money (UK National Archives). This is two to three days wages for a knight, but enough for simple provisions for a long time. Hodges gives the typical price of a chicken in 1338 at 2d (1/12 of a shilling, £2.25 in modern money). Kenneth Hodges, “Medieval Sourcebook: Medieval Prices,” Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies. Accessed 19 May 2010 at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/medievalprices.html#WAGES. The Lombards would of course have used florins or other coins rather than shillings and pounds, but romance audiences would have cheerfully ignored such inaccuracies just as Shakespeare’s did with his Italian settings.
So he com to a cité toun,
Ther Sir Amis, the bold baroun,
Was douke and lord in lond.
Than seyd the knight in that tide,
“To the doukes court here biside
To bring me thider thou fond;
He is a man of milde mode,
We schul gete ous ther sum gode
Thurch grace of God es sond.
“Ac, leve sone,” he seyd than,
―For His love, that this world wan
Astow art hende and fre,
Thou be aknowe to no man
Whider y schal, no whenes y cam,
No what mi name it be.‖
He answerd and seyd, ―Nay.‖
To court he went in his way,
As ye may listen at me,
And bifor al other pover men
HeCrud his wain in to the fen;
Gret diol it was to se.
So it bifel that selve day,
With tong as y you tel may,
It was midwinter tide,
That riche douke with gamen and play
Fram chirche com the right way
As lord and prince with pride.
When he com to the castelgate,
The pover men that stode therate
Withdrough hem ther beside.
With knightes and with serjaunce fale
He went into that semly sale
With joie and blis to abide.
In kinges court, as it is lawe,
Trumpes in halle to m ete gan blawe,
To benche went tho bold.
When thai were semly set on rowe,
Served thai were upon a throwe,
As men miriest on mold.
That riche douke, withouten les,
As a prince served he wes
With riche cupes of gold,
And he that brought him to that state
Stode bischet withouten the gate,
Wel sore ofhungred and cold.
Out at the gate com a knight
And a serjaunt wise and wight,
To plain hem bothe yfere,
And so he came to a city
Where Sir Amis, the brave baron,
Was duke and lord of the land.
Then the knight said at that moment,
―Try to bring me forth
To the duke’s court near here.
He is a man of a gentle nature.
There we will get us some help
Through the grace of God’s blessing.
But, dear son,” he added then,
“For His love, who redeemed this world,
If you are noble and gracious,
Do not let slip to any man
Where I am going, or where I am from,
Or what my name is.”
He answered and said, “No, I will not.”
He went on his way to the court
As you may listen from me.
And before all the other poor men
He pushed his cart through the mud.
It was a great sorrow to see.
So it happened that same day,
As I may tell you with my tongue,
That it was the midwinter time.30
The rich duke, with festive cheer
And laughter, came that way from church
As lord and prince with honor.
When he came to the castle gate,
The poor men who stood there
Withdrawd themselves out of the way.
With knights and many men-at-arms
He went into that fine hall
To dwell in joy and ease.
In the king’s court, as was customary,
Trumpets in the hall announced dinner.
The bold men went to their benches.
When they were fittingly seated in place,
They were served in a moment,
As the merriest men on earth.
That elegant duke, without a lie,
Was served as a prince
With rich cups of gold.
And he who brought him to that state
Stood shut outside the gate,
Sore with hunger and cold.
Out of the gate came a knight
And a servant, strong and able,
To amuse themselves together.

30 Midwinter: The winter solstice immediately before Christmas, and a festive time of celebration. Just as Odysseus appears as a beggar to his decadent household, the poet here also contrasts Sir Amiloun’s extreme hardship against the drunken revelry of midwinter in the court.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Text</th>
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</table>
| 1920 | Of fairehed half his pere,  
The gode man gan to him go,  
And hendeliche he asked him tho,  
As ye may understand,  
Fram wat lond that he com fro,  
And whi that he stode ther tho,  
And whom he served in lond.  
“Sir,” he seyd, “so God me save,  
Icham here mi lordes knave,  
That lith in Godes bond;  

1930 | And thou art gentil knight of blode,  
Bere our erand of sum gode  
Thurch grace of Godes sond.”  
The gode man asked him anon,  
Yif he wald fro that lazer gon  
And trewelich to him take;  
And he seyd he schuld, bi Seyn Jon,  
Serve that riche douke in that won,  
And richeman he wald him make;  
And he answerd with mild mode  

1940 | And swore bi Him that dyed on Rode  
Whiles he might walk and wake,  
For to winne al this wordes gode,  
His hende lord, that bi him stode,  
Schuld he never forsake.  
The gode man wende he hadde ben rage,  
Or he hadde ben a folesage  
That hadde his witt forlorn,  
Other he thought that his lord with the foule visage  
Hadde ben a man of heighe parage  

1950 | And of heighe kinde ycorn.  
Therfore he nold no more sain,  
Bot went him in to the halle again  
The riche douke biforn,  
“Mi lord,” he seyd, “listen to me  
The best bourd, bi mi leuété,  
Thou herdest seththen thou were born.”  
The riche douke badde him anon  
To telle biforn hem everichon  
Withouten more duelling.  

1960 | “Now sir,” he seyd, “bi Seyn Jon,  
Ich was out atte gate ygon  
Right now on mi playing;  
Pover men y seighe mani thare,  
Litel and michel, lasse and mare,  
Bothe old and ying,  

And through the grace of God Almighty  
They cast their eyes on Sir Amiloun,  
Seeing how hideous he was to look on.  
And then they looked at Amoraunt and saw  
How noble he was and fair in appearance,  
In the story as you may hear.  
Then they both said, by Saint John,  
In all the court there was no one  
Half his equal in handsomeness!  
The good man went to him then  
And courteously asked him,  
As you might expect,  
What land he had come from  
And why he stood there then,  
And who he served in the land.  
“Sir,” he said, “so God help me,  
I am the servant of my lord here,  
Who endures in God’s bonds.  
If you are a gracious knight in blood,  
Bring some good out of our efforts,  
Through the grace of God’s plenty.”  
The good man asked him at once  
If he would leave that leper  
And stay with him faithfully;  
And he said, by Saint John, that he should  
Serve the rich duke in that residence  
And he would make him a prosperous man.  
The youth answered with a gentle manner  
And swore by Him who died on the Cross  
That while he could live and breathe,  
For all this world’s goods  
He would never forsake  
His beloved lord, who stood nearby him.  
The good man believed he was mad,  
Or that he had been a court fool  
Who had lost his wits.  
Or else, he thought, that foul-looking lord  
Might have been a man of noble heritage  
And born from an aristocratic lineage.  
Therfore he said no more,  
And only went into the hall again  
Before the regal duke.  
“My lord,” he said, “listen to me  
About the best joke, by my word,  
You ever heard since you were born.”  
The rich duke asked him immediately  
To describe it before every one of them  
Without more delay.  
“Now sir,” he said, “by Saint John,  
I was just outside the gate  
Right now to have some fun.  
I saw many poor men there,  
Small and great, low and high,  
Both young and old,
And a lazer ther y fond;  
Herdestow never in no lond  
Telle of so foule a thing.  
“The lazer lith up in a wain,  

1970  
And is so pover of might and main  
O fot no may he gon;  
And over him stode a naked swain,  
A gentiler child, for sothe to sain,  
In world no wot y non.  
He is the fairest gone  
That ever Crist yaf Cristendome  
Or layd liif opon,  
And on of the most fole he is  
That ever thou herdest speke, ywis,  

1980  
In this worldes won.”  
Than seyd the riche douke again,  
“What foly,” he seyd, “can he sain?  
Is he madde of mode?”  
“Sir,” he seyd, “y bad him fain  
Forsake the lazer in the wain,  
That he so over stode,  
And in thi servise he schuld be,  
Y bihete hem bothe lond and fe,  
Anough of warldes gode;  

1990  
And he answerd and seyd tho  
He nold never gon him fro;  
Therfore ich hold him wode.”  
Than seyd the douke, “Thei his lord be lorn,  
Par aventour, the gode man hath biforn  
Holpen him at his nede,  
Other the child is of his blod yborn,  
Other he hath him othes sworn  
His liif with him to lede.  
Whether he be fremd or of his blod,  

2000  
The child,” he seyd, “is trewe and gode,  
Also God me spede.  
Yif ichim speke er he wende,  
For that he is so trewe and kende,  
Y schal quite him his mede!”  
That douke astite, as y you told,  
Cleped to him a squier bold  
And hendelich gan hem sain:  
“Take,” he sayd, “mi coupe of gold,  
As ful of wine astow might hold  

2010  
In thine hondes tuain,  
And bere it to the castelgate,  
A lazer thou schalt finde therate  
Liggeand in a wain.  
Bid him, for the love of Seyn Martin,  

And I found a leper there.  
You will never have heard of  
Such a foul thing in any land!  
The leper sits up in a cart  
And is so poor in strength and vigor  
That he cannot go on foot.  
And over him stood a half-dressed servant,  
A nobler youth, to tell the truth,  
Than any I know in the world.  
He is the fairest creature  
That Christ ever gave to Christendom  
Or endowed with life,  
And one of the biggest fools  
That you ever heard speak, in truth,  
In all this world’s lands.”  
Then the rich duke said again,  
“What silliness,” he asked, “does he say?  
Is he mad in his behavior?”  
“Sir,” he answered, “I gladly invited him  
To leave behind the leper in the cart  
That he took care of so,  
And said he would be in your service.  
I offered him both land and a living,  
And enough of worldly goods.  
And he answered and said then  
That he would never go from him.  
For this I believe he is mad.”  
Then the duke said, “Though his lord  
Is wretched, by chance the good man  
Helped him in his need before,  
Or the youth is born from his blood;  
Or he has sworn him oaths  
To lead his life with him.  
Whether he is a stranger or his kin,  
The youngster,” he added, “is loyal and good,  
So help me God!  
If I can speak to him before he goes on,  
He is so loyal and good-natured  
That I will give him his reward.”  
Just as quick, as I tell you,  
The duke called a bold squire  
And said to him graciously,  
“Take,” he said, “my gold cup,  
With as much wine as it can hold,  
In your two hands,  
And carry it to the castle gate.  
You will find a leper there,  
Lying in a cart.  
Invite him, for the love of St. Martin,  

31 Seyn Martin: Martin of Tours (316-397), a Christian saint who tore his soldier’s cloak to split it with a beggar, leading to his conversion. Here the choice of saint is likely thoughtful.
He and his page drink this win,  
And bring me the coupe again.”  
The squier tho the coupe hent,  
And to the castel gate he went,  
And ful of win he it bare.

To the lazer he seyd, verrament,  
“This coupe ful of win mi lord the sent,  
Drink it, yf thou dare.”  
The lazer tok forth his coupe of gold,  
Bothe were goten in o mold,  
Right as that selve it ware,  
Therin he pourd that win so riche  
And noither lesse no mare.  
The squier biheld the coupes tho,

First his and his lordes also,  
Whiles he stode hem biforn,  
Ac no couthe  
Chese the better of hem to,  
So liche bothe thai worn.  
Into halle he ran ogain,  
“Certes, sir,” he gan to sain,  
“And so thou hast lorn this dede now;  
He is a richer man than thou,  
By the time that God was born.”  

The ri

che douke answerd, “Nay.  
That could never happen  
By night or day;  
It were ogaines the lawe!”  
“Yis, sir,” he gan to say,  
“He is a traitour, bi mi fay,  
And were wele worth to drawe.  
For when y brought him the win,  
He drough forth a gold coupe fin,  
Right as it ware thi nawe;  
In all this world, by Saint John,  
There is no man so wise  
That he could tell them apart.”  

“Now, for sure,” Sir Amis then said,  
“In al this world were coupes nomo  
So liche in al thing,  
Except for mine and my brother’s as well,  
Which were given between us two  
As a token of our parting.  
And if it is so, my gracious friend,  
Sir Amiloun, was killed with treason,  
Without a lie.  
And if he has stolen his cup away,  
I will slay him myself this day,  
By Jesus, Heaven’s king!”  
He reared up from the table  
And seized his sword as a madman  
And drew it out with anger,  
And he ran to the castle gate.
In all the court there was no man
Who might overtake him.
He went to the leper in the cart
And grabbed him by his two hands
And slung him into the lake
And attacked him as if he were crazed,
And all who stood around there
Began to make a great commotion.

―Thief!‖ said the duke in boldness.
―Where did you get this golden cup from?
And how did you get it?
For by Him that Judas betrayed,
My brother Amiloun used to have it
When he went away from me!‖

―Yes, certainly, sir,‖ the leper answered.
―It was in his country,
And now it has passed on so.
But as sure as I am here,
The cup is mine, and I paid for it dearly,
And I came to it rightfully.‖
Then the duke was in a furious mood.
There was no one would stand near him
Who dared to lay a hand on him.
He kicked him with his foot
And charged at him, as if he were mad,
With his naked sword.
And by the feet he dragged the leper
And raged over him in the mud.
He would not stop for anything,
And said, ―Thief, you will be slain
Unless you reveal the truth
About where you found that cup.‖
Young Amoraunt stood among the people
And saw how dreadfully his lord was treated
With wretchedness and injustice.
He was both hardy and strong;
He seized the duke in his arms
And held him still upright.

―Sir,‖ he said, ―you are ungracious
And ignorant of what you are doing
To slay that gentle knight.
He might well sorely regret the time
That he ever suffered wounds for you
To save your life in battle.
For this is your brother, Sir Amiloun,
Who once was a stately baron
Both as he rode and as he walked,
And is now driven down by sorrow!
Now may God, who suffered anguish,
Bring him out of his woe!
Because of you he is deprived of joy,
And you only burden him with trouble
And break his bones in two.
After he helped you in your need,
Well evell aquitest thou his mede,
Alas, whi fairest thou so?"
When Sir Amis herd him so sain,
He stirt to the knight ogain,
Withouten more delay,
And bicblept him in his armes tuain,
And oft, “Allas!” he gan sain;

2130
His song was “Waileway!”
He loked opon his scholder bare
And seighe his grimly wounde thare,
As Amoraunt gan him say.
He fel aswon to the grounde
And oft he seyd, “Allas that stounde!”
That ever he bode that day.
“Allas,” he seyd, “mi joie is lorn,
Unkender blod nas never born,
Y not wat y may do;

2140
For he saved mi liif biforn,
Ichave him yolden with wo and sorn
And wrought him michel wo.
“O brother,” he seyd, “par charité,
This rewely ded foryif thou me,
That ichave smiten the so!”
And he forgave it him also a swithe
And kist him wel mani a sithe,

2150
You reward him so fouilly.
Alas, why are you acting this way?”
When Sir Amis heard him say so,
He leaped toward the knight again
Without any more protest
And grasped him in both his arms
And began to cry “Alas!”
His constant refrain was “Woe is me!”
He looked upon Amiloun’s bare shoulder
And saw his savage scar there,
As Amorant began to explain.
He fell faint to the ground
And repeatedly cried, “Alas the time!”
That he had seen that day.
“Alas!” he said, “My joys are lost;
More shameful flesh was never born!
I do not know how I can amend this!
For he saved my life before,
And I have repaid him with pain and sorrow
And caused him great woe.
“My friend,” he cried, “For charity’s sake,
Forgive me this lamentable deed,
That I have struck you so!”
And he forgave him just as quickly
And kissed him many times over,
Weeping from both eyes.
Then Sir Amis was glad and joyful.
He wept from his eyes with happiness
And embraced his brother then,
And held him in his two arms
Right until they came back into the hall.
No other man carried him.
The lady stood in the hall
And thought that her lord had gone mad.
She ran toward him.
“Sir,” she cried, “what are you thinking?
In the name of Him who saved the world,
Why have you brought him into the hall?”
“Oh, my lady!” he said, “by Saint John,
I was never so full of remorse!
If you would only understand.
For there is no better knight in the world,
But I have almost killed him
And have disgracefully brought him to harm.
For it is my brother, Sir Amiloun,
Who has been ruined by sorrow and hardship,
Who was once noble in times of trial.”
The lady fell faint to the ground
And wept and said, “Alas the moment!”
Sorely wringing her hands.
As foul a leper as he was,
The lady kissed him in that place;
She would not stop for anything,
And continually she cried “Alas!”
That him was fallen so hard a cas,
To live in sorwe and care.
Into hir chaumber she gan him lede
And kest of al his pover wede
And to a bedde swithe him brought;
With clothes riche and wele ywrought;
Ful blithe of him thai ware.
And thus in gest as we say,
Tuelmoneth in her chaumber he lay,
Ful trewe thai ware and kinde.
No wold thai nick him with no nay,
What so ever he asked night or day,
It nas never bihinde;
Of everich mete and everi drink
Thai had hemselve, withouten lesing,
Thai were him bothe ful minde.
And bithan the tuelmonth was ago,
A ful fair grace fel hem tho,
In gest as we finde.
So it bifel opon a night,
As Sir Amis, that gentil knight,
In slepe thought as he lay,
An angel com fram heven bright
And stode biforn his bed ful right
And to him thus gan say:
Yif he wald rise on Cristes morn,
Swiche time as Jhesu Crist was born,
And slen his children tuay,
And alien his brother with the blode,
Thu rch Godes grace, that is so gode,
His wo schuld wende oway.
Thus him thought al tho thre night
An angel out of heven bright
Warned him ever more
Yif he wald do as he him hight,
His brother schuld ben as fair a knight
As ever he was biforn,
Ful blithe was Sir Amis tho,
Ac for his childer him was ful wo,
For fairer ner non born.
Wel loth him was his childer to slo,
And wele lother his brother forgo,
That is so kinde ycorn.
Sir Amiloun met that night also
That an angel warned him tho
And seyd to him ful yare,
Yif his brother wald his childer slo,
The hert blod of hem to
Might bring him out of care.
A morwe Sir Amis was ful hende
And to his brother he gan wende
And asked him of his fare;
And he him answerd again ful stille,
“Brother, ich abide her Godes wille, For y may do na mare.”
Al so thai sete togider thare
And speke of aventours, as it ware,
Tho knightes hende and fre,
Than seyd Sir Amiloun ful yare,
“Brother, y nil nought spare
To tel the in privité,
Me thought tonight in me sweven
That an angel com fram h
even;
For sothe, he told me
That thurch the blod of thin children to
Y might aschape out of mi wo,
Al hayl and hole to be!”
Than thought the douk, withouten lesing,
For to slen his childer so ying,
It were a dedli sinne;
And than thought he, bi heven king,
His brother out of sorwe bring,
For that nold he nought blinne.
So it bifel on Cristes night,
Swiche time as Jhesu, ful of might,
Was born to save mankunne,
To chirche to wende al that ther wes,
Thai dighten hem, withouten les,
With joie and worldes winne.
Than thai were redi for to fare,
The douke bad al that ther ware,
To chirche thai schuld wende,
That non bileft in chaumber thare,
As thai wald ben his frende,
And seyd he wald himselfe that night
Kepe his brother that gentil knight
That was so god and kende.
Than was ther non that durst say nay;
To chirche thai went in her way,
At hom bileft tho hende.
The douke wel fast gan aspie
The kays of the noricerie,
Er than thai schuld gon,
And priveliche he cast his eighe
And aparceived ful witterlye
Where that thai hadde hem don.
And when thai were to chirche went,
Than Sir Amis, verrament,
Was bileft alon.
He tok a candel fair and bright
And to the kays he went ful right
“Brother, I wait here for God’s will,
For I can do no more.”
As they sat together there,
Those noble and gracious knights spoke
About adventures, such as they were.
Sir Amiloun then said in earnestness,
“Brother, I will not hesitate
To talk to you in secrecy.
I dreamed last night in my sleep
That an angel came from Heaven.
In truth, he told me
That with the blood of your two children
I might escape from my affliction,
To be all healthy and whole.”
The duke thought, without a lie,
That to kill his children, so young,
Would be a deadly sin.
But then he resolved, by Heaven’s king,
To bring his brother out of hardship.
From that he would not flinch.
So it happened on Christmas Eve,
At such time as Jesus, full of might,
Was born to save mankind,
That all who were there readied themselves,
Without a lie, to go to church
With joy and all earthly pleasure.
When they were ready to set forth,
The duke requested all who were there
That they should go on to church,
Small and great, less and more,
So that if they were his friends,
None would be left in the chamber there.
He said he would himself that night
Keep his brother, that noble knight
Who was so good and kind.
There were none there who dared to say no.
They went on their way to church
And left those noble men at home.
The duke had swiftly located
The keys to the nursery
Before they were to go,
And he secretly cast his eye
And perceived clearly
Where they had been set.
And when they were gone to church,
Then Sir Amis, truly,
Was left alone.
He took a candle, fair and bright,
And went straightaway to the keys
And tok hem oway ichon.
Alon him self, withouten mo,
Into the chaumber he gan to go,
Ther that his childer were,
And biheld hem bothe to,
Hou fair thi lay togider tho
And slepe bothe yfere.
Than seyd himselfe, “Bi Seyn Jon,
It were gret rewethe you to slon,
That God hath bought so dere!”

His kniif he had drawen
For sorwe he sleynt oway biside
And wepe with reweful chere.
Than he hadde wopen ther he stode,
Anon he turned ogain his mode
“Mi brother was so kinde and gode,
With grimly wounde he schad his blod
For mi love opon a d
day;
Whi schuld y than mi childer spare,
To bring mi brother out of care?
O, certes,” he seyd, “nay!
To help mi brother now in his need,
God graunt me therto wele to spede,
And Mari, that best may!”

To bring mi brother out of care?
O, certes,” he seyd, “nay!
To help mi brother now at this nede,
God graunt me therto wele to spede,
And Mari, that best may!”

No lenger stint he no stode,
Bot hent his kniif with drer
And tok his children tho;
For he nold nought spille her blode,
Over a bacine fair and gode
And when he hadde hem bothe slayn,
He laid hem in her bed ogain-
No wonder thei him were wo
And hilde hem, that no wight schuld se,
As noman hadde at hem be;
Out of chaumber he gan go.
And when he was out of chaumber gon,
The dore he steked stille anon
As fast as it was biforn;
The kays he hidde under a ston
And thought thai schuld wene ichon
That thai hadde ben forlorn.
To his brother he went him than
And seyd to that careful man,
“Swiche time as God was born,
Ich have the brought mi childer blod,
Ich hope it schal do the gode
As the angel seyd biforn.”

And took each one of them away.
Alone himself, with no more delay,
He went into the chamber
Where his children were,
And beheld the both of them,
How beautifully they lay together
And slept beside each other.
Then he said to himself, “By Saint John,
It would be heartbreaking to slay you,
Who God has bought so dearly!”

He drew his knife out at that moment;
For sorrow he laid it away nearby
And wept with a remorseful heart.
When he had wept, he immediately
Regained his composure where he stood
And said without delay,
“My brother was so kind and good.
With horrible wounds he shed his blood
For my love one day.
Why should I spare my children then
To bring my friend out of peril?
Oh, surely, no!” he said.
“To help my brother now in his need,
May God grant me all success in it,
Along with Mary, that blessed maid!”

He did not waver a moment longer,
But gripped his knife with a heavy heart
And seized his children then.
Because he would not spill their blood,
He cut their throats in two
Over a basin, good and strong.
And when he had slain both of them,
He laid them in their bed again—
It was no wonder he was in anguish!—
And covered them, so no one would see
That anyone had been at them.
He made his way out of the chamber.
And when he was outside the room,
He fastened the door closed at once,
As tight as it was before.
He hid the keys under a stone
And thought that everyone would believe
That they had been murdered.
He then went to his brother
And said to that troubled man,
“At the same time as God was born,
I have brought you my children’s blood.
I hope it will do you good
As the angel said before.”

32 Alon him self, withouten mo: The withouten mo may mean “with no more ado” or also “without anyone else.” ME rhetoric is fond of piling on synonyms, as well as double or triple negatives, for added emphasis.
“Brother,” Sir Amiloun gan to say,  
“Hastow slayn thine children tuay?  
Allas, whi destow so?”  
He wepe and seyd, “Wailaway!  
Ich hat lever til domesday  
Have lived in care and wo!”  
Than seyd Sir Amis, “Be now stille;  
Jhesu, when it is His wille,  
May send me childer mo.  
For me of blis thou art al bare;  
Ywis, mi liif wil y nought spare,  
To help the now therfro.”  
He tok that blode, that was so bright,  
And alied that gentil knight,  
That er was hend in hale,  
And seththen in bed him dight  
And wreighe him wel warm, aplight,  
With clothes riche and fale.  
“Brother,” he seyd, “ly now stille  
And fall le on slepe thurch Godes wille,  
As the angel told in tale;  
And ich hope wele withouten lesing,  
Jhesu, that is heven king,  
Schal bote the of thi bale.”  
Sir Amis let him ly alon  
And in to his chapel he went anon,  
In gest as ye may hear,  
And for his childer, that he hadde slon,  
To God of heven he made him mon  
And preyd with rewely chere  
Schuld save him fram schame that day,  
And Mari, his moder, that best may,  
That was him leve and dere;  
And Jhesu Crist, in that stede  
Ful wele He herd that knightes bede  
And graunt him his praiere.  
Amorwe astite as it was day,  
The levedi com home al with play  
With knightes ten and five;  
Thai sought the kays ther thai lay;  
Thai founde hem nought, thai were oway,  
Wel wo was hem olive.  
The douk bad al that ther wes  
Thai schuld hold hem still in pes  
And stint of her strive,  
And seyd he hadde the keys nome,  
Schuld noman in the chaumber come  
Bot himself and his wive.  
Anon he tok his levedi than  
And seyd to hir, “Leve leman,  
Be blithe and glad of mode;  
For bi Him that this world wan,  
Bothe mi childer ich have slan,  
That were so hende and gode;
For me thought in mi sweven
That an angel com fram heven
And seyd me thurch her blode
Mi brother schuld passe out of his wo;
Therfore y slough hem bothe to,
To hele that frely fode.”
Than was the levedi ferly wo
And seighe hir lord was also;
Sche comfort him ful yare,
―O lef liif,‖ sche seyd tho,
―God may sende ous childer mo,
Of hem have thou no care.
Yif it ware at min hert rote,
For to bring thi brother bote,
My lyf y wold not spare.
Shal noman oure children see,
Tomorow shal they beryed bee
As they faire ded ware!”
Thus the lady faire and bryght
Comfort hur lord with al hur myght,
As ye mow understonde;
And seth they went both ful ryght
To Sir Amylion, that gentil knyght,
That ere was free to fond
When Sir Amylion wakyd thoo,
Al his fowlehed was agoo
Through grace of Goddes sonde;
Than was he as feire a man
As ever he was yet or than,
Seth he was born in londe.
Than were they al blith,
Her joy couth noman kyth,
They thonked God that day.
As ye mow listen and lyth,
Into a chamber they went swyth,
Ther the children lay;
Without wemme and wound
Hool and sound the children found,
And layen togeder and play.
For joye they wept, there they stood,
And thanked God with myld mood,
Her care was al away.
When Sir Amylion was hool and fere
And wax was strong of powere
Both to goo and ryde,
Child Oweys was a bold squyer,
Blithe and glad he was of chere,
To serve his lord beside.
Than saide the knyght uppon a day,
He wolde hoom to his contray,
To speke with his wyf that tyde;
For I had a vision in my sleep
That an angel came from Heaven
And instructed me that through their blood
My brother would pass out of his troubles.
Therefore I killed the both of them
To heal that noble man.”
Then the lady was grief-stricken
And saw that her lord was also.
She was eager to comfort him.
“Oh, dear one!” she said,
“God may send us more children.
Do not be troubled for them.
If it were at the base of my heart
To bring your brother a remedy,
I would not spare my own life.
No one will see our children;
Tomorrow they shall be buried
As if they died naturally!”
Thus the lady, fair and beautiful,
Comforted her lord with all her might,
As you may understand.
And later they both went straight
To Sir Amiloun, that gracious knight,
Who had been so generous in facing trials.
When Sir Amiloun woke up then,
All his foulness was gone
Through the grace of God’s command.
He was as fair a man then
As he ever was before,
Since he was born on the earth.
Then they were all happy;
They could not express all their joy
And they thanked God that day.
As you may listen and learn,
They went quickly into the chamber
Where the children were laying.
They found the children safe and well,
Without blemish or wound,
And sitting together playing!
They wept for joy where they stood,
And thanked God with grateful hearts
That their troubles were all gone.
When Sir Amiloun was healthy and whole
And had grown so vigorous in strength
Both to walk and ride,
Child Owen was made a brave squire.
He was glad and content at heart
To serve beside his lord.
Then one day the knight said
He would travel home to his country,
To have words with his wife at that time.
And for she halp him so at nede,
Wel he thought to quyte hur mede,
No lenger wold he abyde.
Sir Amy sent ful hastily
After mony knyght hardy,
That doughly were of dede,
Wel fuye hundred kene and try,
And other barons by and by
On palfray and on steede.
He preked both nyght and day
Til he com to his contray,
Ther he was lord in lede.
Than had a knyght of that contré
Spoused his lady, bryght of ble,
In romaunce as we rede.
But thus, in romaunce as y yow say,
They com hoom that siff day
That the bridal was hold;
To the gates they preked without delay,
Anon ther began a soory play
Among the barouns bold.
A messengere to the hal com
And seide her lord was com hom
As man meriest on molde.
Than wox the lady blew and wan;
Ther was mony a sory man,
Both yong and olde.
Sir Amy and Sir Amylion
And with hem mony a stout baron
With knyghtes and squyres fale,
With helmes and with haberyon,
With swerd bryght and broun,
They went in to the hale.
Al that they there araught,
Grete strokes there they caught,
Both grete and smale.
Glad and blyth were they that day,
Who so myght skape away
And fle fro that briedale.
When thei had with wrake
Drove oute both broun and blake

For the help she had given him in his need,
He fully intended to give her what she deserved.
He would delay no longer.
Sir Amis hastily sent
For many hardy knights
Who were valiant in deeds—
A good five hundred, tried and keen—
And other barons by and by,
On palfreys and on steeds.
They galloped both day and night
Until he came to his country
Where he was lord of the land.
A knight of that country
Had married his lady, beautiful in her face,
In the romance as we read it.
But as it happened, in the story as I tell you,
They came home the same day
That the wedding celebration was held.
They dashed to the gates without delay.
Soon there began a grim play
Among the bold barons.
A messenger came to the hall
And said that her lord had come home,
As the merriest man on earth.
Then the lady turned pale and ashen;
There was many a sorry man,
Both young and old!
Sir Amis and Sir Amiloun,
And with them many a stout baron
With knights and countless squires,
With helmets and with mailcoats,
With swords bright and gleaming,
Went into the hall.
All who they confronted there,
Both great and small,
Were caught by fierce strokes.
It was a glad and thankful man
Who was able to escape that day
And flee from that bridal feast.
When they had driven out
Both free and bound in vengeance.

33 Quyte hur mede: Other than the Anglo-Saxon *litote*, a sort of humorous understatement, irony and sarcasm is rare in medieval English literature. Here the sense of Sir Amis paying his traitorous wife her međe, ‘reward,’ seems close to PDE ‘just desserts.’

34 On palfray and on steede: Neither term refers to a breed. Steed suggests a warhorse, but a palfrey is a small horse used for riding or hunting. They were prized as fast and comfortable horses, but unsuited for battle. Sir Thopas riding out to war in full armor on a palfrey would have been humorous. A real knight would be humiliated.

35 Both broun and blake: See Havelock, 1009, and Athelston, 291. A ME idiom here likely meaning ‘all different types of ordinary people,’ based on the colors of their clothing.
Out of that worthy woon,
Sir Amylyon for his lady sake
And grete logge he let make
Both of lym and stoon.
Thereyn was the lady ladde
And with bred and water was she fed,
Tyl her lyvedays were goon.
Thus was the lady brought to dede,
Whoe therof rought, he was a queede,
As ye have herd echoon.
Then Sir Amylion sent his sond
To erles, barouns, fre and bond,
Both feire and hende.
When they com, he sesed in hond
Child Oweys in al his lond,
That was trew and kynde;
And when he had do thus, ywys,
With his brother, Sir Amys,
Agen then gan he wende.
In muche joy without stryf
Togeder ladde they her lyf,
Tel God after her dide send.
Anoon the hend barons tway,
They let reyse a faire abbay
And feffet it ryght wel thoo,
In Lumbardy, in that contray,
To senge for hem tyl Domesday
And for her eldres also.

Out of that stately hall,
Sir Amiloun, for the sake of his lady,
Had a large cabin made
Of both mortar-lime and stone.\(^{36}\)
The lady was placed there in it
And she was fed with bread and water
Until her life’s days were over.
Thus the lady was brought to death.
Whoever cared about it was worthless!
As each one of you has learned.
Then Sir Amiloun sent his summons
To earls and barons, free and bound,
Both fair and noble.
When they came, he placed all of his land
In young Owen’s hand,
Who had been faithful and kind.
And when he had done this, in truth,
Then he made his way on again
With his brother, Sir Amis.
They led their lives together
In great joy without conflict
Until God sent for their souls.
At once, they established a fair abbey
For the two noble barons,
And endowed it generously
In Lombardy, in that country,
To sing for them until Judgment Day
And for their parents also.\(^{37}\)
They both died on the same day
And they were laid in one grave,
Both of the two knights.
And for their loyalty and their godliness,
They have the bliss of Heaven as a reward,
Which lasts forevermore.

\(^{36}\) Lym and stoon: The equivalent of cement and brick. Unlike Sir Amiloun’s lodge made from wood, lime and stone is more expensive but can last centuries. Sir Amiloun may be being more generous with his lady, or he may be making the point that it is a true and much more permanent prison, along with the ‘bread and water’ diet.

\(^{37}\) One employment for clerics was to sing prayers for the dead in order to shorten their time in purgatory. Abbeys could be founded for this purpose, as was All Soul’s College, Oxford.
Amis and Amiloun: Treuþe and the Heroes’ Spiritual Journey

The 1990s Star Trek films and television shows attempted to conform to the plot rules of the original series, occasionally exposing logical inconsistencies unforeseen in the cartoonish 1960s episodes. Similarly, the characters and imaginary settings of animated shorts often translate poorly when expanded into feature-length movies. The same analogous criticism has been attributed to the romance Amis and Amiloun for its supposed inability to reconcile its simpler folktale tropes and Anglo-Norman sources into a coherent structure. Attempts to create realistic and sustained narratives based on folktale characters and stories can be problematic. Reasons are needed to explain why dragons and wolves are evil. But in fairy tales such motives are tautologically assumed: the dragon is evil because dragons are evil, even if deeper psychological or symbolic themes operate underneath the narrative machinery.

Partly the values of Amis and Amiloun simply do not age well. The poem has a strange morality where its protagonists “quite literally get away with murder.”\(^1\) Amis slaughters his children and lies about Belisaunt’s virginity. Amiloun kills the steward through a deceitful act of impersonation. All of this happens in order to uphold a rarified code of conduct without any censure from the poet. How then can the poem be homiletic, as the Auchinleck compilers seemed to feel it was?\(^2\) If the text has no ethical answers to these questions in either Christianity or courtly treuþe, “we at least expect it to be logical,


and *Amis and Amiloun* seems to be neither.‖ At best, the morals perplex a modern audience. A middle position argues that the English redactor has done his best to resolve the limitations of his sources, consisting of earlier versions and various folktale tropes of evil stewards, wooing women, and trials by combat.  

At worst, the poem is a failure. Foster throws up his hands in defeat at a text where “sleaze abounds and is respectfully rewarded,” concluding that perhaps critics vainly wish to attribute artifice to the poet “rather than admit ineptitude.”

Amis and Amiloun share matching initial As in this and earlier analogues, and the poem does conform to a certain symmetrical binary construction. In the first half, Amis faces hardship and is rescued by Amiloun, and these roles reverse in the second half. At the centrepoint lies the combat between Amis-Amiloun and the steward, forming the narrative and moral nexus of the story, as it sets in motion the successive action and issues of the second portion of the poem. Yet the moral problem with the scene remains: “we know that this is all wrong. When Amiloun wins, we are relieved; after all, the steward is a scoundrel and Amis was ensnared; but we are not reconciled to the fraudulent ruse.” Both the poet and the narrative seem to excuse Amis and Amiloun while condemning the steward, whom even the narrator concedes “hadde the right” (908). Yet upon finer inspection, a consistent morality does function in the poem justifying its

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3 Hume, 27-8.
5 Foster, 419.
6 Foster, 419.
7 Hume, 25.
8 Foster, 414.
categorization as homiletic: duty rooted in Christian love and charity is preferable to self-righteous legalism. The steward follows only the letter of the law for personal advantage, whereas Amis and Amiloun, through the tests given them, gradually prove and temper their *treupe* into a more Christlike fraternity informed by faith.

The steward’s actions demonstrate a fundamental contrast between his and Amis and Amiloun’s conception of *treupe*. They also set the narrative conflict of the poem in motion. After witnessing Amis and Belisaunt making love, he scurries to the king to expose the two, lamenting “in thi court thou hast a thef / that hath don min hert gref/ schame it is to sain / for, certes, he is a traitour strong / when he with tresoun and with wrong / thi douhter hath forlain!” (787-92). The steward indeed tells the truth that Amis has taken Belisaunt’s virginity, but salted in with the charges are some misrepresentations and lies. The steward has no evidence of premeditated long-term subterfuge, that “ever he hath ben traitour” (800), and the claim that Amis has “don min hert gref” is either an outright falsehood—the steward clearly delights in incriminating his enemy—or else refers to the *gref* of Amis’ refusal of his proffering of brotherhood, a dishonest attribution of his feelings of outrage to an unrelated situation.

The steward displays his own calculated self-interest in his actions. Plainly he does not care about the king or Belisaunt as people, for he has full warning of Amis and Belisaunt, “that gret love was bituix hem to” (704) for “wele four days other five” (711), but waits until after the damage is done for his own benefit. As a fellow steward in the household, he has equal responsibility for Belisaunt but glosses over the ticklish question of why he failed to intervene if he had foreknowledge of her seduction, distracting the king with lurid details of the *tresoun*. The steward delays naming Amis until the dramatic
climax of his deliberation, progressively building the king’s emotions through his frustrated suspense into a primal rage. The steward concludes his histrionics by subtly inserting the imperative that Amis should be “hong this day” (798) while the king is thinking less than lucidly, hoping that he will spend his energies in summary justice without coming to any uncomfortable questions.

Delaney sees sexual jealousy toward Amis in the steward, who “responds like the proverbial scorned woman” after Amis’s rejection of his offer to replace Amiloun in his affections exclusively. Equally, the steward really has no need to spy on Amis and Belisaunt the entire duration they are together (769), but perhaps his voyeurism has another purpose: “he likes to watch.” Delaney points to historical same-sex unions such as that of the young Edward II and Piers Gaveston as possible influences, and finds the A-A (same) / B (Belisaunt, different) figuration suggestive. Romances were certainly capable of pursuing multiple levels of meaning through contemporary allusions or word-devices, but asserting that Amis and Amiloun “form the real couple” of the poem attempts to read in a homoerotic submeaning which does not easily fit the hagiographic tone of the English text. After hearing praise of Amiloun’s saintly tribulations and Amoraunt’s caritas, an audience would have found deeply offensive a sexual reading of

10 Delaney, 69.
11 Delaney, 65.
“at his rigge he dight him yare” (1832), referring to Amoraunt’s carrying of his leprous maternal uncle on his back through the winter.\textsuperscript{12}

The steward seems less a jilted lover and more a Malvolio figure, driven by pride. Early in the poem he resents Amis and Amiloun, but for their intimacy with the duke and not with each other: “for the douke was so wele her frende, / he hadde therof gret envie” (212-3). The steward also shares Malvolio’s self-serving legalism. Baldwin notes that “Amis and Amiloun embody a genuine (if flawed) treuþe—fidelity in motive and spirit. The steward represents a false treuþe, technically correct but malicious in motive.”\textsuperscript{13} This Christian distinction between obeying the intent and the letter of the law (Mark 3:1-6) also plays out in Amiloun’s harridan wife, who sides with the steward and condemns Amiloun’s leprosy as divine revenge: “the is bitid this hard chaunce / dathet who the bimene!” (“This hard luck is fated for you! Damn whoever feels sorry for you!” 1568-9). Although Amiloun’s wife has a legal pretext in banishing him, she “lacks any redeeming spiritual virtue, such as mercy and compassion, which would have prompted her at least to alleviate her husband’s distress,”\textsuperscript{14} just as the steward insists under law that Belisaunt and her mother be burned. If \textit{Amis and Amiloun} does consist of binary pairs, the wife’s Pharisaic legalism makes her the structural correlative to the steward.

\textsuperscript{12} Delaney (69) asserts that this can be a sexual pun: “he dight him yare” might also mean “at his back he serviced him.” While \textit{dight} is recorded with a sexual meaning in MED, it seems about as strong as “I did her” in vulgar PDE. Benson notes that the prudish editors of MSS Harley 7333 \textit{Canterbury Tales} were intent on bowdlerizing the text and censored most examples of \textit{swyven, ers}, and \textit{even fart}, but left in \textit{dight}. Larry D. Benson, “The ‘Queynte’ Punnings of Chaucer’s Critics,” \textit{Studies in the Age of Chaucer} 1 (1984): 32-3.


The theme of virtue through fidelity to *treuþe* is carried by a series of tests, “arranged roughly in ascending order of difficulty,”\(^\text{15}\) from the heroes’ separation, through the blandishments of the steward and Belisaunt, up to Belisaunt’s deflowering. Her impulsive passion forces Amis into a test of his knightly integrity, which he fails, only to be rescued by Amiloun’s ruse. The trick is worthy of “wily Odysseus,” and the audience cheers the result. Yet a nagging sense remains of a moral and logical violation in a world where *treuþe* also means telling the truth. Here the central dilemma of the pledge emerges: Amiloun is bound to never fail Amis “for wele no wo” (155, 296) in a situation where his brother faces shame and possible death (1281), but must be an accessory to Amis’ perjury against his lord (304) to save him. The strict terms of *treuþe* are breached in either case. Amiloun may with courtly justification condemn Amis as first violator and avoid such an impasse outright,\(^\text{16}\) but he selflessly impugns his own personal honor instead in fidelity to the spirit of his vows.

The poem’s judgment of Amiloun’s actions seems inconsistent here. An angel intones that “Jhesu sent the bode bi me / to warn the anon” (1262-3) against impersonating Amis in battle. If so, Amiloun should certainly not *win*, “since the trial by combat is predicated upon the belief that the right will be shown by God’s fighting on its side.”\(^\text{17}\) Nor does the poet imply any divine anger, twice stating that the folk “bisought God” (1301) to help Amis and then having Amiloun decapitate the steward and thank

\(^{15}\) Baldwin, 358.


\(^{17}\) Kratins, 350.
God (1368) without any hint of irony or censure. Upon parting, Amis thanks him repeatedly for “his cost and his gode dede” (1443). What then to make of Amiloun’s consequent tribulations? After defeating the steward, he is scourged by leprosy as the voice warns, is betrayed and banished by his wife, and wanders the countryside in poverty and hardship. For those who would prefer not to spend an English winter half-starved, leprous, and homeless in a wheelbarrow, Amiloun does not seem well-rewarded by God for his sacrifice.

Numerous critics have asserted that the angel does not threaten Amiloun with punishment, but rather he “puts Amiloun’s trewþe to the test by placing before him a choice.”\(^\text{18}\) The statement “thou schalt have an eventour strong” (1256) conspicuously omits any suggestion of sin or wrongdoing. The angel warns “if thou this bataile underfong” (1255) without mentioning the steward at all. Rather, the vision functions as “a visitation of divine grace”\(^\text{19}\) intended to intensify Amiloun’s virtue by increasing his sacrifice. The poet either has trouble reconciling his sources or perhaps intends some ambiguity here, for Amiloun is no Gawain who can escape with the technical penalty of a nick\(^\text{20}\) as he has taken a life. Hume proposes that the leprosy suggests punishment without actually being so in order to drive home the point that Amiloun owes God penitence for his lesser act of deceit.\(^\text{21}\)

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\(^\text{18}\) Kratins, 351.
\(^\text{19}\) Kratins, 351.
\(^\text{20}\) Baldwin, 361.
\(^\text{21}\) Hume, 29.
Another path out of this ethical quagmire consists of interpreting Amiloun’s troubles as a divine test but also as a progression of his *treuſe* toward a more saintly perfection. Amiloun does not have the steward’s or his wife’s cold legalism, but his fidelity does have a whiff of proud self-sufficiency. The poet makes considerable use of binary structure and prefiguration, and here Amiloun’s role in court as chief steward (191), with possible policing duties (in the Anglo-Norman *Amis e Amilun* he is a military chief\(^\text{22}\)) becomes significant. Amiloun’s victory also comes with martial glory befitting his court honors, and he accepts the laurels of the procession “as prince proude in pride” (1380). Langland writes of his lepers, “for love of here low hertes / oure lord hath hem graunted / here penaunce and here purgatorie.”\(^\text{23}\) Similarly, Amiloun’s trials and indignities humble him toward a *treuſe* more closely resembling what the poet would call ‘the pattern of Christ.’ The narrator consequently pulls every stop in portraying Amiloun’s abasement with maximum sentimental pathos as they go “sore wepeand fro dore to dore” (1702). If any heavenly punishment is intended, it is ameliorative, ‘medicinal’ chastisement rather than condemnation, in contradistinction to Amiloun’s faithless wife, who cannot see the difference.

Amiloun accepts his condition passively without complaint as a model of saintly patience. The genre outlines of medieval romance are vaguely limited, and *Amis and Amiloun* has been marked out as a “homiletic romance,” as “secular hagiography,” or as not even a romance. Childress feels that Amis, in his patient suffering of ridicule and

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\(^{22}\) Dannenbaum, 613.

hardship, does not behave as a romance hero at all. Yet while Amis and Amiloun do not slay real monsters and Saracens, as in the stanzaic Guy of Warwick, the heroic quest here is internal, one of growing spiritual progress. Leprosy was commonly seen as divine punishment, but for saints medieval tradition also saw aspects of blessing and sacrifice in the ailment: St. Hugh preached that such sufferers were “beloved of God as was Lazarus.” Additionally, like Redcrosse, Amiloun has his own Una here in the form of Amoraunt, who demonstrates “a selfless and uncomplicated loyalty that is seen nowhere else in the poem.” Amoraunt, who shares yet another Ami- prefix, has been explained as “a personification of the love between Amis and Amiloun,” both guiding Amiloun as a model of selfless caritas and literally carrying him toward Amis.

Thus far, a self-serving application of treuþe has brought destruction to the steward and foreshadowed it for Amiloun’s wife, in distinction to Amiloun’s journey toward a fidelity grounded in Christlike sacrifice. The angel implicitly patterns Amiloun after Christ, who “suffred passioun” (1253). Amis, however, does not seem to undergo any particularly Dantean cleansing by fire in being a riche douke, happily married to Belisaunt, who “with gamen and play / fram chirche com the right way” (1888-9). His carefree exuberance seems designed to highlight Amiloun’s ragged saintliness. Yet a parallel test of Amis’ loyalty also awaits in another heavenly intervention by Christ, “the

26 Foster, 415.
perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2), designed to assay and purify Amis’ trust and sense of duty. The trial is also designated for Christmas Eve, a symbolically matching occasion of Christ’s sacrifice.

Amis receives an order to slaughter his two children from an angel, for “yif he wald do as he him hight” (2210-2), their blood will save Amiloun’s life. The bode portends not only a test straining Amis’ fidelity to treuþe to its limits but also the ultimate abasement of his former role as protector of the household. Where God’s test of Amiloun sought to humble his knightly pride, Amis’ test now structurally matches his earlier self-regard in his station as chief butler. The poet again perhaps suggests that a hint of hubris in Amis’ acquiescence to Belisaunt’s passions needs to be burned away:

Amis gave his sons to help his friend, but his anguish at giving up the most valued ‘fruits’ of his former sinful adventure serves as atonement for those sins. We are meant to feel that his debt to God, like that to Amiloun, is finally paid, though in strict logic, this could not be.28

The scene obviously recalls Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22), with God’s orders to Abraham a similar test of his trust and humility. Although modern critics find the violence of Amis’ actions and the poet’s moral approval distasteful, Amis has an additional complication Abraham lacks: the latter has no promise of reward, whereas the children’s death will save Amiloun “thurch Godes grace, that is so gode (2208). Nor does the poet present the decision as easy for Amis, depicting their murder in a considerably lengthy treatment with realistic touches of candles and nursery keys and their father’s tormented heart: “for sorwe he sleynt away biside / and wepe with reweful chere” (2291-2). Lastly, the

28 Hume, 29.
harshness of the scene needs to be read in light of the genre. The audience knows they are hearing a romance and not a Greek tragedy, and that according to its rules the children are unlikely to remain dead for long. As Hume notes sympathetically, few romanciers “had to deal with problems as complex as this.”

Belisaunt is perhaps easier to parse. In her first appearances, she is impetuous and perhaps a touch imperious, telling Amis, “thou nast no croun” (“you have no tonsure,” 614), mocking his ethics by comparing him to a monk. Similar to Lady Bertilak’s testing of Gawain, Belisaunt aggressively pursues Amis while the master is hunting, in both poems a Venusian allusion. To underscore Belisaunt’s passionate desire, the poet has nightingales singing (536), birds associated with carnality. The final stroke is for her to threaten Amis like Potiphar’s wife, to which he capitulates. Yet at the end of the poem she has evidently also developed a more Christlike nature, obediently accepting a contagious leper into her household as she “kist him in that plas” (2174), kindly taking care of the man who saved her from a “strong fer” (1216) when she was in danger of execution. The strongest indication of her changed temper, which the poet emphasizes, and which modern audiences have the most difficulty with, is her dutiful endurance of having her children slain by her husband. In an answer Chaucer’s Griselde would have trouble sputtering, she replies that “God may sende ous childer mo / of hem have thou no care” (2393-4). As indigestible as the scene seems, like the other heroes, Belisaunt has undergone a saintly evolution.

\[29\] Hume, 30.

\[30\] Hume, 35.
In the final denouement both Amiloun and the children become healed and reanimated. Aquinas writes that God “knows how to make orderly use of evil by ordering it to good,” and a Christian audience would have been expected to see such an outcome as providential grace. Perhaps objections to the protagonists deserving such mercy in the “moral confusion” of the story in fact miss the point in demanding that characters must merit forgiveness, as the emphasis of the scene lies in God freely endowing both Amis and Amiloun with the purest form of grace, unmerited, which they are now meant to emulate themselves. Gawain receives the same deliverance when he is spared by being gently laughed at by the Green Knight for his “devotion to an ideal he cannot achieve.”

The action underscores God’s generous mercy in the poem just as Aurelius’ grace toward Dorigen distinguishes him as *fre*.

Blood-brotherhood was not always viewed as ennobling or benign. James tells his followers, “do not swear, not by heaven or by earth or by anything else” (James 5:12). The ceremony seemingly originates in Norse rites where blood was actually exchanged, and the English descendants of the Danelaw may have had “cherished memories” of such bonds. By the fourteenth century such ideals were apparently viewed as debased in practice. Strohm notes that such oaths “held for the medieval sensibility a possible implication of connivance and dubious alliance, of self-advancement that neglects the

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32 Foster, 416.

33 Baldwin, 365.

34 Trounce, 14.
total Christian community.” Chaucer’s most hellish characters exemplify this pursuit of opportunistic confederacies, with the despicable revelers of the *Pardoner’s Tale*, the summoner and devil of the *Friar’s Tale*, and the merchant and John of the *Shipman’s Tale* all betraying each other through calculated and insincere vows. Even Chaucer’s Palamon and Arcite are divided through *tewe* when Palamon invokes their earlier pledge in order to claim Emily for his own, and Arcite summarily brushes off such agreements, stating “who shal yeve a lover any lawe?” (*CT* I.1164). In the *Early South English Legendary*’s life of St. James, a pilgrim conspicuous for not being bound by oaths of *tewe* turns out to be the most loyal, and the moral lesson is clear: “betere is trewe dede þane fals word.”

Much of the ethos of the poem now seems implausible to a modern audience which doubts that St. Edmund’s severed head really called “here, here, here!” Other analogues of the poem, such as *Ami & Amilice*, depict both a more secular mindset and less interest in loyalty as a moral or religious theme. The English redactor, however, has a considerably more pious tone, possibly modeled on the ostensibly earliest version of the poem written by a French monk named Raoul le Tourtier around 1090. Loomis asserts that this text, thoroughly pietistic in form, has its own source in church legends surrounding Charlemagne. *Athelston*, with its similar plot vehicle of the violation of brotherhood oaths among four men, also seems to have been altered by the English

37 Baldwin, 358.
redactor to have a newly devout tone. Kratins objects that Amis and Amiloun are not saintly because their bond is to men and not God. The clergy apparently remained wary of romance, as the stories borrowed hagiographic themes but still looked to temporal baronial ends such as honor, land and family rather than purely heavenly ones. Yet the poet praises “her trewth and her godhede” (2506), arguing that the purest bonds of fraternity concomitantly serve both earthly and spiritual goals, even if the lay knight does not wholly conduct himself as an imitatio Christi.

A homiletic reading of Amis and Amiloun demonstrates that the imperatives of chivalric treuþe and Christian morality do not necessarily conflict. Rather, in the protagonists the latter surpasses the former. Amis and Amiloun pass through a series of ascending tests which not only prove their fidelity to each other but also display a spiritual progression toward a purer form of selfless love, contrasted against the steward’s and wife’s mania for legal self-justification. Just as God tells the Israelites that He is tired of burnt offerings perfunctorily given (Isaiah 1:11), the Amis and Amiloun poet reveals the shallowness of contractual duty. The moral theme begins with Amiloun’s acceptance of a duty that transcends the letter of their ‘rash promise,’ continues with his sacrifice to fulfill the imperative to protect Amis, and finally echoes in Amis’ surrender of his children, an act dovetailing perfect obedience to God with a higher love of one’s brother.

39 Trounce, 4.
40 Kratins, 354.
42 Baldwin, 357.
A hero’s “process of education” was a fitting didactic theme for romance writers, and Amis and Amiloun demonstrate heroism not by blind adherence to vows but through growing toward a superior maturity of spirit.

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CHAPTER 2

Athelston


Main characters:
- Athelstone, king of England
- The queen
- Egelond, earl of Stone
- Edith, countess to Egelond and sister to Athelstone
- Alaric, bishop of Canterbury
- Wickmond, earl of Dover
- Athelstone the messenger

| 1 | Lord that is off myghtys most,  
|   | Fadyr and Sone and Holy Gost,  
|   | Bryng us out of synne  
|   | And lene us grace so for to wyrke  
|   | To love bothe God and Holy Kyrke  
|   | That we may hevene wynne.  
|   | Lystnes, lordyngys, that ben hende,  
|   | Of falsnesse, hou it wil ende  
| 2 | Our Lord, who is of the highest might,  
|   | Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
|   | Deliver us from sin  
|   | And grant us the grace to bring ourselves  
|   | To love both God and holy church  
|   | So that we may win Heaven  
|   | Hear, lordings, in your graciousness,  
|   | About disloyalty and how it will end  

90
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>A man that ledes hym therin. Of foure weddyd bretheryn I wole yow tell That wolden yn Yngelond go dwel, That sybbe were nought of kyn. And all foure messangeres they were, That wolden yn Yngelond lettrys bere, As it wes here kynde. By a forest gan they mete With a cros, stood in a strete Be leff undyr a lynde, And, as the story telles me, Ylke man was of dyvers cuntré, In book iwreten we fynde — For love of here metyng thare, They swoor hem weddyd bretheryn for evermare, In trewthe trewely dede hem bynde. The eldeste of hem ylkon, He was hyght Athelston, The kyangys cosyn dere; He was of the kyangys blood, Hys eemes sone, I undyrstood; Therefore he neyghyd hym nere. And at the laste, weel and fayr.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>A man who leads himself into it. I will tell you about four sworn brothers Who wished to dwell in England, Who were related, but not by family. All four of them were messengers Who would carry letters in England, As it was their trade. They met in a forest Near a cross standing on a road By the leaves under a linden tree. And, as the story tells me, Each man was from a different country, As we find it written in the book. For the fellowship of their meeting, They swore themselves brothers forever, Binding themselves earnestly in oaths. The oldest one of them Was called Athelstone, The king’s dear cousin. He was of the king’s blood, His uncle’s son, as I understand. Therefore he stayed near to him. And at the end, fair and clear.</td>
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1 *Of foure weddyd bretheryn:* The four men are not married, but like Sir Amis and Amiloun, they have taken an oath of brotherhood to be loyal to each other until death. In pagan Nordic culture men cut themselves and literally intermingled blood to become ‘blood brothers.’ This pledge was seen as nobler than marriage vows: in 306-7 the queen realizes that the bishop will honor the king before he does her (TEAMS). A. McIntyre Trounce, ed., *Athelston: A Middle English Romance*, Early English Text Society O.S. 224 (London: Oxford University Press, 1951).

2 *Cosyn:* ME is not very exact on family titles and the term can indicate various familial relationships. There were several ruling Athelstans before the Norman conquest and the poet may not mean any of them, but see Treharne, who believes that King Athelstan (c. 894-939) is clearly meant. Athelstan also had a sister named Edith. Elaine M. Treharne, “Romanticizing the Past in the Middle English Athelston,” *Review of English Studies* 50:197 (1999): 1-21. There was no bishop Alaric of Canterbury and Wymonde was apparently a stock villain’s name.

3 *Weel and fayr:* This may simply be a formula saying that the king had a graceful passing, but it may also be emphasizing that there was no foul play in the king’s death and thus a peaceful succession took place, which was certainly not always the case for an English king.
The king died without an heir.
There was at the time no one his peer
Except Athelstone, his uncle's son.
They did not refuse to make him king,
To crown him with shining gold.
Now he was king, a fitting sight.
He sent for his three friends
And gave them their reward.
He made the oldest brother Earl of Dover,
And thus the poor man was elevated,
A lord of town and tower.
The other brother he made Earl of Stone —
Egelond was his name,
A man of great renown —
And he gave him as his wedded wife
His own sister, Dame Edith,
With great solicitude.
The fourth brother was a cleric
Who knew much about God's work.
His name was Alaric.
Canterbury was vacant,
And fell into that king's hand.
He gave him that posting
And made him bishop of that place,
That noble cleric, who could read a book;
There were none like him in the world.
Thus through God's grace he advanced his friends,
And Athelstone himself was
A good and prosperous king.
And he who became Earl of Stone,
Sir Egeland was his name,
Was faithful, as you will hear.
Thorwgh the myght of Goddys gras,
He gat upon the countas
Twoo knave-children dere.
That on was fyftene wyntyr old,
That other thryttene, as men me told:
In the world was non here pere —
Also whyt so lylye-flour,
Red as rose off here colour,
As bryght as blosme on breere.
Bothe the Eerl and hys wyff,
The kyng hem lovede as hys lyff,
And here sones twoo;
And oftensythe he gan hem calle
Bothe to boure and to halle.
To counsayl whenne they scholde goo.
Therat Ser Wymound hadde gret envye,
That Eerle of Dovere, wyttylye.
In herte he was ful woo.
He thoughte al for here sake
False lesyngys on hem to make,
To don hem brenne and sloo.
And thanne Ser Wymound hym bethoughte:
“Here love thus endure may noughte;
Thorwgh wurd oure werk may sprynge.”
He bad hys men maken hem yare;
Unto Londone wolde he fare
To speke with the kyng.
Whenne that he to Londone come,
He mette with the kyng ful sone.
He sayde, “Welcome, my derelyng.”
The kyng hym fraynyd seone anon,
By what way he hadde igon,
Withouten ony dwellyng.
“Come thou ought by Cauntyrbury,
There the clerkys syngen mery
Bothe erly and late?
Hou faryth that noble clerk,
Through the might of God’s blessings,
With the countess the earl fathered
Two dear boys.
One of them was fifteen years old,
The other thirteen, as men have told me.
In the world they had no peer.
They were as white as a lily,
Red as a rose in color,
As bright as a blossom on a briar.
The king loved both the earl and his wife
As much as his own life,
Along with their two sons.
And often he would call them
Both to his chamber and to the hall,
For counsel when they were there.
For that, the Earl of Dover,
Sir Wickmond, had great envy for certain.
He was aggrieved at heart.
He wished on their account
To impugn false lies on them,
To have them burned and slain.
And then Sir Wickmond resolved to himself,
“Our love will not endure as it is!
The job might be done through words.”
He ordered his men to get themselves ready;
He would go to London
To speak with the king.
When he arrived in London,
He met with the king immediately,
Saying, “Welcome, dear friend!”
The king asked him soon after
By what way he had come,
Without any stopover.
“Did you pass near Canterbury,
Where the monks sing merrily;
Both early and late?”
How does that noble cleric fare,
That mekyl can on Goddys werk?
Knowest thou ought hys state?
And come thou ought be the Earl of Stone,
That woorthy lord in hys wane?
Wente thou ought that gate?
Hou fares that noble knyght,
And hys sones fayr and bryght
My sustyr, yiff that thou wate?"

“Sere,” thanne he sayde, “withouten les,
Be Cauntyrbery my way I ches;
There spak I with that dere.
Ryght weel gretes thee that noble clerk,
That mykyl can of Goddys werk;
In the world is non hys pere.
And also be Stane my way I drowgh;
With Egelond I spak inowgh,
And with the countesse so clere.
They fare weel, is nought to layne,
And bothe here sones.” The king was fayne

And in his herte made glad chere.
“Sere kyng,” he sai he, “yiff it be thi wille
To chaumbyr that thou woldest wenden tylle,
Consayl for to here,
I schal thee telle a swete tydande,
There comen nevere non swyche in this lande
Of all this hund ryd yere.”
The kyngys herte than was ful woo
With that traytour for to goo;
They wente bothe forth in fere;

And whenne that they were the chaumbyr withinne,
False lesyngys he gan begynne
On hys weddyd brother dere.
“Sere kyng,” he sai he, “woo were me,
Ded that I scholde see thee,
So moot I have my lyff!
For by Hym that al this worl wan,
Thou has makyd me a man,
Who knows so much of God’s work?
Do you know anything about his condition?
And did you pass nearby the Earl of Stone,
To the residence of that admirable lord?
Were you anywhere near their gate?
How does that noble knight fare,
And his sons, fair and bright,
Or my sister, if you know?”
“Sire,” he said, “without a lie,
I chose to go by Canterbury.
There I spoke with that dear person.
That noble priest greeted you courteously,
Who knows so much about God’s work.
There are none his peer in the world.
And I also took my way past Stone.
I talked enough with Egelond,
And with the beautiful countess.
They are doing well—there is nothing to hide—
Along with both their sons.” The king was
Pleased and was cheered in his heart.
“Sire king,” he said, “If it is your will
That you would go to your chamber
To hear private counsel,
I will give you an interesting report.
Nothing like it has come to this land
In a hundred years.”
The king’s heart was distraught
In going forth with that traitor.
Both of them went in together.
And when they were within the chamber,
He began to ply falsehoods
On his dear sworn brother.
“Sire king,” he said, “it would be horrible
If I were to see you dead,
So long as I am alive!
For by Hym who redeemed all this world,
You have made me a man
And iholpe me for to thryff.
For in thy land, sere, is a fals traytour.
He wole doo thee mykyl dyshonour
And brynge thee of lyve.
He wole deposen thee slyly,
Sodaynly than schalt thou dy
By Chrystys woundys fyve!"
Thenne sayde the kyng, "So moot thou the,
Knowe I that man, and I hym see?
His name thou me telle."
“Nay,” says that traytour, “that wole I nought
For al the gold that evere was wrought —
But yiff thou me thy trowthe will plyght
That thou schalt nevere bewreye the knyght
That thee the tale schal telle.”
Thanne the kyng his hand up raughte,
That false man his trowthe betaughte,
He was a devyl of helle!
“Sere kyng,” he sayde, “thou madyst me knyght,
And now thou hast thy trowthe me plyght
Oure counsayl for to layne:
Sertaynly, it is non othir
But Egelane, thy weddyd brothir —
He wolde that thou were slayne;
He dos thy sustyr to undyrstand
He wolde be kyng of thy lande,
And thus he begynnes here trayne.
He wolde thee poysoun ryght slyly;
Sodaynly thanne schalt thou dy.
And helped me to prosper.
But in this land, sir, there is a false traitor.
He will do you great dishonor
And will take away your life.
He will depose you slyly,
And then you will suddenly die,
By Christ’s five wounds!" Then the king said, “As you live and breathe,
Would I know the man if I see him?
Tell me his name.”
“No,” said the traitor, “I will not do that
For all the gold that was ever made,
By mass-book or bell,
Unless you pledge your vow
That you will never betray the knight
Who has told you the story.”
Then the king raised up his hand,
Giving his promise to that false man.
He was a devil from Hell!
“Sire King,” he said, “you made me a knight,
And now you have pledged your word
To conceal our conversation.
Certainly, it is no other
Than Egelond, your brother.
He wishes that you were dead.
He has your sister under the impression
That he will be king of this land,
And so he leads her astray.
He intends to poison you cunningly.
You will then suddenly die,

5 *By Chrystys woundys fyve*: Like lines 135 and 146, simply an oath for emphasis. Scripture reports that Christ received five wounds during crucifixion, four by nails through his limbs and one by a spear in his side.

6 *Masse-book and belle*: Similarly, church hymnals, bibles, and bells and all of the implements of service were also used for oaths, whether in seriousness or in profanity. Here their use emphasizes Sir Wickmond’s hypocrisy.
By Him who suffered pain!
Then the king swore, by the wooden Cross,
“Neither food or drink will do me good
Until he is dead,
Both he and his wife, and his two sons!
They will no longer be in England
In that place.”
“No,” said the traitor, “so help me God,
I will not see my brother dead.
But follow your best advice.”
Then he would not stay any longer.
He said his goodbyes and left for Dover.
May God give him shame and death!
When the traitor had gone home,
A messenger was afterwards summoned
To speak with the king.
I believe he had his own name;
He was also called Athelstone.?
He was an orphaned child.
The letters were made out in full there,
For him to go to Stone
Without any delay
To fetch the earl and his two sons
And the countess also,
Dame Edith, that sweet lady.
It was also stated in the letter
That the king would make
Both of the earl’s sons knights,
And to this he set his seal.
The messenger did not delay;
He rode the way swiftly.

7 Athelstone: This is a different Athelston. There may be a poetic significance or it may simply reflect the popularity of the name. Dickerson argues that the youth is “the alter ego of the arrogant King Athelston, who was once a messenger.” A. Inskip Dickerson, “The Subplot of the Messenger in Athelston,” *Papers on Language & Literature* 12 (1976): 124.
The messenger, the noble man,  
Takes his horse and forth he wan,  
And hies a full good sped.  
The earl in his hall he fande;  
He took him the letter in his hand  
Anon he bad hym rede:  
“Sere,” he sayde also swythe,  
“This lettre oughte to make thee blythe:  
Therto thou take good hede.  
The kyng wole for the cuntas sake  
Bothe thy sones knyghtes make —  
To London I rede thee sped.  
The kyng wole for the cuntas sake  
Bothe thy sones knyghtes make,  
The blythere thou may be.  
Thy fayre wyff with thee thou bryng —  
And ther be rught no lettyng —  
That syghte that sche may see.”  
Thenne sayde that earl with herte mylte  
“My wyff goth ryght gret with chylde,  
And forthynkes me,  
She may nought out of chaumbyr wyn,  
To speke with non ende of here kyn  
Tyl sche delveryd be.”  
But into chaumbyr they gunne wende,  
To rede the lettrys before that hende  
And tydingys tolde here soone.  
Thanne sayde the cuntasse, “So moot I the,  
I wil nought lette tyl I there be,  
Tomorwen or it be noone.  
To see hem knyghtes, my sones fre,  
I wol nought lette tyl I there be;  
I schal no lengere dwelle.  
Cryst foryelde my lord the kyng,  
That has grauntyd hem here dubbyng.  
Myn herte is gladyd welle.”  
The earl hys men bad make hem yare;
He and his wife set out, 
Traveling quickly to London. 
The king’s home was at Westminster. 
There they met with Athelstone, 
Who had sent for them. 
The good earl was at once seized 
And chained fast, in truth, 
And his two sons as well. 
The countess began to cry loudly, 
And said, “Good brother, have mercy! 
Why do you want to execute us? 
What have we done against you, 
That you will have us dead so soon? 
I feel like I am your enemy!”

The king behaved at that moment like a madman. 
He ordered his sister sent to prison; 
He was distressed at heart. 
Then a squire who was the countess’ friend 
Made his way to the queen 
And soon gave her the news. 
She threw off her garlands of cherries, 
Finally coming into the hall, 
Well before it was noon. 
“She, sire king, I have come before you 
With a child, a daughter or a son. 
Grant me my plea, that I might 
Act as guarantor to my brother and sister 
Until tomorrow morning when they 
Can be released from their strong pains, 
So that we may decide this by common assent 
In the open parliament.”

Gerlondes of chyryes off sche caste: A mysterious line, perhaps only meaning that the queen is snacking on cherries to emphasize her innocence of what is happening. Wright notes that cherries were very popular in medieval England (TEAMS). T. Wright and J. O. Halliwell, Reliquiae Antiquae, Vol. 2 (London: J. R. Smith, 1845), 85-103.
“Dame,” he said, “go fro me! Thy bone shall nought igraulted be, I doo thee to undyrstande.

270 For, be Hym that weres the corowne of thorn, They schole be drawn and hangyd tomorn, Yff I be kyng of lande!” And whenne the qwene these wurdes herde, As sche hadde be beten with yerde, The teeres sche leet doun falle. Sertaynly, as I yow telle, On here bare knees doun she felle, And prayde yit for hem alle. “A, dame,” he sayde, “verrayment Hast thou broke my comaundement Abyyd ful dere thou schalle.” With hys foot — he wolde nought wonde — He slowgh the chyld ryght in here wombe; She swownyd amonges hem alle. Ladyys and maydenys that there were, The qwene to here chaumbyr bere, And there was dool inowgh. Soone withinne a ltyl spase A knave-chylde iborn ther wase, As bryght as blosme on bowgh.

280 Hast thou broke my comaundement Abyyd ful dere thou schalle.”

“My lady,” he replied, “get away from me! Your request will not be granted, I will have you understand! For, by Him who wore the crown of thorns, They will be drawn and hanged tomorrow, If I am the king of this land!” And when the queen heard these words, She let the tears fall down As if she had been beaten with a stick. For certain, as I tell you, She fell down on her bare knees And begged for them all. “Well, madam,” he said, “Truly you have Defied my commandments! You will pay for it dearly.” With his foot—he would not hold back— He killed the child right in her womb.10 She fainted before them all. The ladies and maidens who were there Bore the queen to her chamber, And there was commotion enough. Soon, within a short time A baby boy was delivered, As bright as a blossom on the bough. He was both white and red;11

9 As with *Amis and Amiloun*, the queen asks if she can be a guarantor to her brother and sister so that they can be freed. The queen, who is also heavily pregnant, is evidently worried about her sister’s condition in prison, making the king’s response even more callous.

10 *He slowgh the chyld ryght in here wombe*: TEAMS notes a little dryly that “many critics have commented on the cruelty in this passage.” Although the poet’s tone clearly disapproves strongly, Rowe notes that this act would not have been seen as a crime in the time period. Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, “The Female Body Politic and the Miscarriage of Justice in Athelston,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 17 (1995), 87. Alternatively, Loomis states that ballad-form stories still conventionally retained scenes of violence that were no longer usual in romance. Laura A. Hibbard Loomis, “Athelston, a Westminster Legend,” *PMLA* 36:2 (1921): 232.
Of that dynt was he ded —
His owne fadyr hym slowgh!
Thus may a traytour bare to rayse
And make manye men ful evele at ayse,
Hymselff nought afftyr it lowgh.
But yit the qwene, as ye schole here,
Sche callyd upon a messangere,
Bad hym a lettre fonge.

And bad hym wende to Caunturybery,
There the clerks sygen mery
Bothe masse and evensonge.
“This lettre thou the bysschop take,
And praye hym for Goddys sake,
Come borewe hem out off here bande.
He wole doo more for hym, I wene,
Thanne for me, though I be qwene —
I doo thee to undyrstande.
An eerldom in Spayne I have of land;
Al I sese into thyn hand,
Trewely, as I thee hyght,
And hundryd besauntys of gold red.
Thou may save hem from the ded,
Yff that thyng hors be wyght.”
“Madame, brouke weel thy moregeve,
Also longe as thou may leve.
Therto have I no ryght.
But of thy gold and of thy fee,
Cryst in hevene foryelede it thee;

From that blow he was dead.
His own father had killed him!
Thus may a traitor raise havoc
And make many men ill at ease.
He would have nothing to laugh about later!
But still the queen, as you will hear,
Called for a messenger," 12

A messangere: The poet uses the indefinite article a, but this is evidently the same Athelston (not the king) who rides to Stone to fetch Egelond and his wife. The messenger complains that he has ridden thirty miles (321). London to Stone near Faversham is forty-six miles, but to Stone near Dartford is fifteen—a return journey? For further discussion see Dickerson, 115-16.

11 Whyt and red: This is not a macabre description of the stillborn boy’s bruises but the colors of aristocratic breeding, used approvingly by romance poets. French & Hale argue that the “brown and black” of Amis & Amiloun and of Havelock alternatively suggest the common people, although the idiom is disputed (TEAMS). Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, ed., Middle English Metrical Romances (New York: Prentice Hall, 1930).

12 A messangere: The poet uses the indefinite article a, but this is evidently the same Athelston (not the king) who rides to Stone to fetch Egelond and his wife. The messenger complains that he has ridden thirty miles (321). London to Stone near Faversham is forty-six miles, but to Stone near Dartford is fifteen—a return journey? For further discussion see Dickerson, 115-16.
I will be there tonight.
Madam, I have ridden thirty miles
Of rough road since it was sundown.
I have done hard work.
And to ride now another twenty-five
Would be a difficult thing to do,
In truth, so far as I can see.
My lady, it is nearly six in the morning,
And it is right for me to eat,
And to drink both wine and ale.
When I have eaten, then I will set out.
May God relieve them from their cares
Before I sleep a wink.”
When he had finished, he went his way,
As fast as he could.
He rode by Charing Cross
And entered into Fleet Street
And then through London, I assure you,
Upon a splendid horse.
The messanger, that noble man,
Soon reached London Bridge.
For his labors he had no praise.
From Stone into Sittingbourne,
In truth, he did not alter his course.
He did not stop for mud or bog.
And in this way he traveled
From Ospringe to the Blean forest.
Then he could see the town

13 *Prime* is about 6 AM, according to the monastic prayer divisions of the day: matins, prime, terce, sext, nones, vespers, and compline. Medieval time was much less clock-bound and was often reckoned by the canonical hours or by movements of the tides (such as undertide). *Nona hora*, the ninth hour of the day, was originally 3 PM, only shifting to 12 and becoming modern *noon* in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. *Bevis of Hampton* seems to have the modern meaning when the barons believe that Miles has slept through mid-morning until noon (3237).

14 *He hadde no los*: Some commentators read this as ‘loss,’ as in “he lost no time.” I agree with TEAMS that the sense is that the poet is extolling the the unsung messengers throughout the story, describing their labors in detail and complaining that it is thankless work, without *los*, praise.
Of Canterbury, that noble work,
Where that powerful bishop lived,
That lord of great renown.
When they had rung the morning bell,
He was still riding in London, I tell you.
He was not ready earlier.
And yet he reached Canterbury
Long before the six o’clock songs;
He rode fifty miles.
The messenger did not linger.
He rode forth into the palace
Where the bishop was inside.
There was a warm welcome for the messenger,
Who had come from the radiant queen,
Who was of such a regal family.
He gave him a letter with urgency
And said, “Sir Bishop, take this and read,”
And asked that he come with him.
Before he had read half the letter,
He thought his heart had been pierced for sorrow.
The tears fell from his chin.
The bishop ordered his palfrey saddled.
“As fast as they can,
Have my men make themselves ready.
And go on ahead,” the bishop stressed,
“To my manors along the way.
Spare no difficulty.
And see that at every five miles’ space
I will find a fresh horse,
Shod and never barehooved.
I will never be at peace
Until I see my blood brother,
To deliver him from trouble.”
On nyne palfrays the bysschop sprong,
Ar it was day, from evensong —
In romaneunce as we rede.
Sertaynly, as I yow telle,
On Londone-brygge ded doun felle
The messangeres stede.
“Alas,” he sayde, “that I was born!
Now is my goode hors forlorn,
Was good at ylke a nede;
Yistyrday upon the grounde,
He was wurth an hundryd pounde,
Ony kyng to lede.”

Thenne bespak the erchebysschop.
Oure gostly fadyr undyr God,
Unto the messangere:
“Lat be thy menyng of thy stede,
And thynk upon oure mykyl nede,
The whylys that we ben here;
For yiff that I may my brother borwe
And bring hym out off mekyl sorwe,
Thou may make glad chere;
And thy warysoun I schal thee geve,
And God have grauntyd thee to leve
Unto an hundryd yere.”

The bysschop thenne nought ne bod:
He took hys hors, and forth he rod
Into Westemynstyr so lyght;
The messanger on his foot alsoo:
With the bysschop come no moo.
Nether squyer ne knyght.
Upon the morwen the kyng aros,
And takes the way, to the kyrke he gos,
As man of mekyl myght.

The bishop rode nine palfreys
Before it was day, from evensong, 15
In the romance as we read.
For certain, as I tell you,
The messenger’s horse fell down dead
On London Bridge.
“Alas!” he cried, “that I was ever born!
Now I have lost my good horse,
Who was ready in every need!
Yesterday on the ground
He was worth a hundred pounds,
Fit for any king to ride!”

Then the archbishop,
Our spiritual father under God,
Spoke to the messenger.
“Let go your moaning for your horse,
And concentrate on our great need,
The reason that we are here.
For if I can rescue my brother
And bring him out of his great sorrow,
You will be of good cheer.
And I will reward you with an income,
Even if God grants you to live
For a hundred years.”

The bishop did not stay any longer.
He took his horse, and rode
Into the morning sun of Westminster,
With the messenger on foot as well.
No more came with the bishop.
Neither squire nor knight.
In the morning the king arose
And made his way to the chapel,
As a man of great authority.

15 *Evensong*: Early evening and the sixth of the seven canonical hours, also known as vespers. The poem betrays a rather working-class concern with time.
With hym went bothe preest and clerk,
That mykyl cowde of Goddys werk,
To praye God for the ryght.
Whenne that he to the kyrke com;
Tofore the Rode he knelyd anon,
And on hys knees he felle:
“God, that syt in Trynyté
A bone that thou graunte me,
Lord, as Thou harewyd helle —
Gyltless men yiff thay be,
That are in my presoun free,
Forcursyd there to yelle,
Of the gylt and thay be clene,
Leve it moot on hem be sene,
That garte hem there to dwelle.”
And whenne he hadde maad his prayer,
He lokyd up into the qweer;
The erchebysschop sawgh he stande.
He was forwondryd of that caas,
And to hym he wente apas,
“Welcome,” he sayde, “thou erchebysschop,
Oure gostly fadyr undyr God.”
He swoor be God levande,
“Weddyd brother, weel moot thou spede,
For I hadde nevere so mekyl nede,
Sith I took cros on hande.
Goode weddyd brother, now turne thy rede;
Doo nought thyn owne blood to dede
But yiff it wurthy were.
For Hym that were the corowne of thorn,
Lat me borwe hem tyl tomorn,
That we mowe enquire,
And weten alle be comoun asent
In the playne parlement
Who is wurthy be schent.
And, but yiff ye wole graunte my bone,
It schal us rewe bothe or none,
Be God that alle thyng lent.”

It schal us rewe bothe or none,
Be God that alle thyng lent.”

Thanne the kyng wax wrothe as wynde,
A wodere man myghte no man fynde
Than he began to bee:
He swoor othis be sunne and mone:
“Thy scholen be drawen and hongyd or none —
With eyen thou schalt see!
Lay doun thy cros and thy staff,
Thy mytyr and thy ryng that I thee gaff;
Out of my land thou flee!
Hyghe thee faste out of my syght!
Wher I thee mete, thy deth is dyght;
Non othir then schal it bee!”

Thenne bespak that erchebysschop,
Oure gostly fadyr undyr God,
Smertly to the kyng:
“Wel I wot that thou me gaff
Bothe the cros and the staff,
The mytyr and eke the ryng;
My bysschopryche thou reves me,
And Crystyndom forbede I thee!
Preest schal ther non syngge;
Neyther maydynchyld ne knave
Crystyndom schal ther non have;
To care I schal thee brynge.
I schal gare crye thorwgh ylke a toun
That kyrkys schole be broken doun
And stoken agayn with thorn.

And thou shalt lygge in an old dyke,
As it were an heretyke,
Allas that thou were born!

We will both regret it before noon,
By God, who gave all things.”

Then the king grew as furious as the winds.
No one might find a man more enraged
Than he became.
He swore oaths by the sun and moon:
“They will be hanged and drawn before noon!
You will see it with your own eyes.
Lay down your cross and your staff,
Your miter and your ring that I gave you.
Flee out of my land!
Get yourself quickly out of my sight!
Wherever I meet you, your death is decided.
It will not be any other way!”

Then the archbishop,
Our devout father under God,
Spoke sharply to the king:
“I know very well that you gave me
Both the cross and the staff,
The miter and the ring as well.
You rob me of my bishop’s office,
And in turn I excommunicate you!
No priest shall sing.
No one shall have church or sacrament,
Neither maiden-child nor boy.
I will bring you to grief!
I will go proclaiming through each town
That churches shall be broken down
And struck at with thorns.
And your body will lie in an old ditch,
As if you were a heretic;16
Alas that you were born!

16 As it were an heretyke: This is a very serious matter. The archbishop is not only excommunicating the king and his realm but denying him a Christian burial, which was also refused to heretics, criminals, and suicides. King John was forced to submit to Innocent III in 1213 after interdiction had threatened his rule.
Yiff thou be ded, that I may see,
Assoylyd schalt thou nevere bee;
Thanne is thy soule in sorwe,
And I schal wende in uncouthe lond,
And gete me stronge men of hond;
My brothir yit schal I borwe.
I schal brynge upon thy lond
Hungry and thirst ful strong,
Cold, drougthe, and sorwe;
I schal nought leve on thy lond
Wurth the gloves on thy hond
To begge ne to borwe.“
The bysschop has his leve tan.
By that his men were comen ylkan:
They sayden, “Sere, have good day.”
He entryd into Flete-strete;
With lordys of Yngelond gan he mete
Upon a noble aray.
On here knees they kneleden adoun,
And prayden hym of hys benysoun,
He nykkyd hem with nay.
Neyther of cros neyther of ryng
Hadde they non kyns wetyng;
And thanne a knyght gan say.
A knyght thanne spak with mylde voys:
“Sere, where is thy ryng? Where is thy croys?
Is it fro thee tan?”

If you are dead, I will see to it
That you will never be absolved.
Then your soul will be in torment.
And I will travel to faraway lands
And gather strong men of might.
I will save my brother yet.
I will bring upon your land
Fierce hunger and thirst,
Cold, drought, and misery.
I will leave nothing on your land
Worth the gloves on your hand,
To beg or to borrow.”
The bishop took his leave.
By then all of his men had arrived.
They said, “Sire, good day.”
He entered into Fleet Street;
He proceeded to meet with the lords of England
In a noble array.
They stooped down on their knees
And beseeched him for his blessing.
He refused them with “no.”
They had no idea at all where
Either his cross or his ring were.
And then a knight spoke up.
The knight said in a low voice,
“Sir, where is your ring? Where is your cross?
Have they been taken from you?”
The bishop replied, “Your accursed king
Has left me without all of my things
And all of my worldly goods.
And I have excommunicated England.
There will be no priests singing mass with hands
And no child will be christened.
Unless he releases to me that knight,
And his wife and children, fair and innocent.
He wrongly wishes to slay them.”
The knight answered, “Bishop, change your mind!”
Of thy body we are ful fayn;
Thy brothir yit schole we borwe.
And, but he graunte us oure bone,
Hys presoun schal be broken soone,
Hymselff to mekyl sorwe.
We schole drawe doune both halle and bounes,
Bothe hys castelles and hys toures,
They schole lygghe lowe and holewe.
Though he be kyng and were the corown,
We scholen hym sette in a deep dunjoun:
Our Creystydond we wole folewe.”
Thanne, as they spoken of this thyng,
Ther comen twoo knyghtes from the kyng,
And sayden, “Bysschop, abyde,
And have thy cros and thy ryng,
And welcome whyl that thou wylt lyng,
It is nought for to hyde.
Here he grauntys thee the knyght,
Hys wyff and chyldryn fayr and bryght;
Again I rede thou ryde.
He prayes thee pur charyté
That he myghte asoylyd be,
And Yngelond long and wyde.”
Hereof the bysschop was ful fayn,
And turnys hys brydyl and wendes agayn —
Barouns gunne with hym ryde —
Unto the Brokene-cros of ston;
Thedyr com the kyng ful soone anon,
And there he gan abyde.
Upon hys knees he knelyd adoun,
We are very glad of your presence.
We will secure your brother yet.
And unless he grants us our demand,
His prison will soon be broken into,
And himself driven to great sorrow.
We will pull down both halls and rooms,
Both his castles and his towers.
They will lay low and razed.
Even if he is king and wears a crown,
We will throw him in a deep dungeon.
We will follow our Christian faith.”
Then, as they spoke about this matter
Two knights came from the king
And said, “Bishop, please wait,
And have your cross and your ring,
And be welcome while you wish to stay.
There is no need to hide.
The king grants you here the knight
And his wife and children, fair and innocent.
Again I advise you to come back.
He petitions you for charity’s sake
That he might be forgiven,
Along with England near and far.”
For this the bishop was gladdened
And turned his bridle and went back,
With the barons riding alongside him,
To the Chester Cross of stone.17
The king came there immediately after
And there he waited.
He kneeled down upon his knees

17 The Broken-cros of stone: Zupitza identifies this as the Chester Cross in the Strand in Westminster, near present-day Charing Cross. Among other functions, the cross marked the limits of Westminster. J. Zupitza, “Die Romanze von Athelston,” Englische Studien 13 (1883): 331-414. Trounce (123) and other scholars believe the line refers to the Broken Cross near St. Paul’s Cathedral, which existed by 1379 and until 1390, supplying a possible dating for the poem. See also the discussion in Rowe, 94.
And prayde the bysschop of benysoun,
And he gaff hym that tyde.
With holy watyr and orysou
He asoylyd the kyng that weryd the coroun,
And Yngelond long and wyde.
Than sayde the kyng anon ryght:
“Here I graunte thee that knyght,
And hys sones free,
And my sustyr hende in halle.
Thou hast savyd here lyvys alle:
∴
And implored the bishop for his blessing.
This time he gave it to him
With holy water and prayer.
He absolved the king who wore the crown,
And England far and wide.
Then the king at once said,
“Here I grant you that knight,
And his noble sons,
And my sister, so gracious in the hall.
You have saved all of their lives.
May you be blessed.”
The bishop replied just as promptly,
“And I will render such a judgment
That you will see it with your eyes.
If they are guilty of that deed,
They will dread an even sorrier doom.
Present their crimes to me.”
When the bishop had spoken so,
At once a great fire was made,
In the romance as we read it.
It was raised, as men might know,
As long as nine plow lengths in a row,
As red as any glowing coal.
Then the king said, “What is this for?”
“Sire, if they are innocent of guilt,
They need not fear this ordeal.”
Then the good king Athelstone said,
“This judgment is a hard one.
God grant that we all fare well.”

The bishop is invoking trial by ordeal, a legal process by which innocence or guilt would be determined by healing from (or surviving) a painful or dangerous test. Priests were forbidden to participate by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) but trial by ordeal took centuries to be fully replaced by the modern trial system. American economist Peter Leeson asserts that what appears to be a highly questionable legal method could actually be psychologically effective, as innocent parties tended to consent to ordeal, expecting divine protection, and the guilty would confess, fearing mortal punishment. Peter T. Leeson, “Ordeals,” accessed 21 May 2010 at http://www.peterleeson.com/Ordeals.pdf.
They brought forth Sir Egelond—
There was no truer earl—
Before the fire so bright.
From him they took the red scarlet,
Both the hose and shoes fitting for him
Which were permitted for a knight.
The bishop sanctified the path nine times
That his brother would go that day,
To beseech God for justice.
He was unharmed in hand and foot.
This was seen by the lords of the land,
Who thanked God for His might.
They offered him with gentle hands
Unto Saint Paul’s high altar,
Which was of great authority.
He fell down on his knees
And thanked God, who conquered Hell,
And His mother so fair.
But still the bishop continued on,
“Now the children shall go the way”
That the father went.”
From them they took the red scarlet,
And the hose and shoes fit for them,
And all their worldly clothes.
The fire was both hideous and red,
And the children fainted as if they were dead.
The bishop went to them
And looked on them with attentive heart.
He took them up by his hand and said,

Why do the children and the countess need to undergo the ordeal? The three tests form a narrative triplet, but Bellamy also argues that in Anglo-Saxon law “the crime of treason was so horrible that the traitor’s offspring were contaminated by his misdeed and ought to be destroyed with him.” The bishop evidently wishes to clear the entire family from any such stain and believes the children will be unharmed. J. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1970), 4, quoted in Treharne, 15. The punishment of family members also serves as a chilling disincentive to treason and is still done in absolutist regimes such as North Korea.
“Chyldryn, have ye no drede.”

610 Thanne the chyldryn stood and lowgh: “Sere, the fyr is cold inowgh.” Thorwghout they wente apase. They weren unblemeschyd foot and hand: That sawgh the lordys of the land, And thankyd God of His grace. They offeryd hem with mylde chere To Seynt Poulys hyghe awtere This myracle schewyd was there. And yit the bysschop efft gan say:

620 “Now schal the countasse goo the way There that the chyldryn were.” They fetten forth the lady mylde; Sche was ful gret igon with chylde In romaunce as we rede — Before the fyr whan that sche come, To Jesu Cryst he prayde a bone, That leet His woundys blede: “Now, God lat nevere the kyngys foo Quyk out of the fyr goo.” Therof hadde sche no drede.

630 Whenne sche hadde maad here prayer, Sche was brought before the feer, That brennyd bothe fayr and lyght. Sche wente fro the lengthe into the thrydde; Stylle sche stood the fyr amydde, And callyd it merye and bryght. Hard schourys thanne took here stronge Bothe in bak and eke in wombe; “Children, have no fear.”

Then the children stood and laughed, “Sir, the fire is cold enough!” They passed through it quickly And were unharmed in hand and foot. That was seen by the lords of the land, Who thanked God for His grace. They offered them with kind hands To Saint Paul’s high altar Where this miracle was displayed. And yet the bishop again continued, “Now the countess will go the way That the children went there.” They brought forth the gentle lady. She was very much with child, As we read in the romance. When she came before the fire, She prayed a plea to Jesus Christ, Who let His wounds bleed: “Now, may God never let the king’s enemy Walk out of the fire alive.” Because of that she had no dread. When she had made her prayer, She was brought before the fire, Which burned both strong and bright. She went from the start into the third part.30 She stood still in the middle of the fire And called it merry and bright. Then she was taken by the pains of labor, Both in her back as well as in womb.

20 Into the thrydde: Trounce posits that the countess walks over the third of nine burning plowshares, explaining why the bishop sanctifies the path nine times (586). A. Mcintyre Trounce, ed., Athelston: A Middle English Romance, Early English Text Society O.S. 224 (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 17. The scene would also remind the audience of the popular legend of Emma (c. 985-1052), mother of Edward the Confessor, who also walks across nine plowshares to vindicate herself from false charges of adultery.
<table>
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| 640  | And sithen it fell at syght.  
Whenne that here paynys slakyd was,  
And sche hadde passyd that hydous pas,  
Here nose barst on bloode,  
Sche was unblemeschyd foot and hand:  
That sawgh the lordys of the land,  
And thankyd God on Rode.  
They comaundyd men here away to drawe,  
As it was the landys lawe;  
And ladyys thanne tyl here yode.  
She knelyd doun upon the ground  
And there was born Seynt Edemound:  
Iblessed be that foode!  
And whanne this chyld iborn was,  
It was brought into the plas;  
It was bothe hool and sound  
Bothe the kyng and bysschop free  
They crystnyd the chyld, that men myght see,  
And callyd it Edemound.  
“Halff my land,” he sayde, “I thee geve,  
Also longe as I may leve,  
Yngelond to wysse and rede.”  
Now iblessyd be that stounde!  
Thanne sayde the bysschop to the Kyng:  
“Sere, who made this grete lesyng,  
And who wroghte al this bale?”  |
| 650  | Which came to everyone’s notice.  
When her pains had lessened,  
And she had passed that hideous stage,  
Her nose began to bleed.  
She was unharmed in hand and foot.  
That was seen by the lords of the land,  
Who thanked God on the Cross.  
They ordered men to move away  
As it was the custom of the land,  
And then ladies went to her.  
She kneeled down on the ground  
And there was born Saint Edmund.  
Blessed be that child!  
And when the boy was born,  
It was brought into the open.  
It was both whole and sound.  
Both the king and the noble bishop  
Christened the child, so that men might see it,  
And named it Edmund.  
“Half my land,” he said, “I give you,  
As long as I may live,  
With pennis and with pounds,  
And all else after my death,  
To guide and rule England.  
Now blessed be that moment!”  
Then the bishop said to the king,  
“Sire, who made this great lie,  
And who brought about all this evil?” |

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21 *And sithen it fell at syght*: No one seems to have come up with a clear idea of what this line means. Some suggest a scribal error, that the lady *sighed* in pain. TEAMS posits that “the baby has dropped into the birthing position.” I am suggesting simply that ‘it’ is the onset of labor which the crowd notices. Another possibility is that this is a period euphemism for a woman’s water breaking.

22 Likely this is St. Edmund of East Anglia, king of the East Angles (c. 840-869) and famously martyred by the Vikings. However, the historical Edmund had different parents and was born in Nuremburg. Some of the poem’s place names do not exist in the ninth century. Either a different Edmund is meant, or else these are anachronisms which would not have troubled the poet or audience, which did not have Wikipedia.
Thanne sayde the kyng, “So moot I thee, That schalt thou nevere wete for me, In burgh neyther in sale; For I have sworn be Seynt Anne That I schal nevere bewreye that manne, That me gan telle that tale. They arn savyd thorwgh thy red; Now lat al this be ded, And kepe this counseyl hale.” Thenne swoor the bysschop, “So moot I the, Now I have power and dignyté For to asoyle thee as clene For to asoyle thee as clene As thou were hoven off the fount-ston. Trustly trowe thou therupon, And holde it for no wene: I swere bothe be book and belle, But yiff thou me his name telle, The ryght doom schal I deme: Thyselff schalt goo the ryghte way That thy brother wente today, Though it thee evele beseme.” Thenne sayde the kyng, “So moot I the, Be schryffe of mouthe telle I it thee; Therto I am unblyve. Sertaynly, it is non othir But Wymound, oure weddyd brother; He wole nevere thrythe.”

The king answered, “So help me God, You will never learn that from me, Neither in town nor in the hall. For I have sworn by Saint Anne" For I have sworn by Saint Anne Than I will never betray that man Who told me that tale. They are saved through your counsel; Now let all this be finished, And keep such matters private.” The bishop then swore, “As I live and breathe, I have the power and dignity To absolve you as clean As if you were lifted from the baptismal font! Believe in it truly, And do not think of it as a guess. But I swear both by the book and bell, That unless you tell me his name, I will pronounce justice! You yourself will walk the same way That your brother went today, Even if it ill suits you.” Then the king answered, “For better or worse, I will tell you by confession of mouth, Though I am reluctant to do it. For sure, it is no other But Wickmond, our sworn brother. He will never prosper.”

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23 Seynt Anne: Believed to be the mother of the Virgin Mary, and the patron saint of childbirth (TEAMS).

24 Book and belle: Swearing by a book in medieval romance means, of course, the Bible. Here the oath may refer to the Catholic rite of excommunication, where a Bible is closed, bells are rung, and a candle is snuffed. See also Guy of Warwick, 735.

25 There is some speculation on what exactly the king needs absolution for. At worst, he has caused the entire debacle by betraying his brother and has killed his son. At minimum, the bishop is irritated by the king’s flippant speech to let sleeping dogs lie and is offering a face-saving way for him to reveal Wickmond and receive forgiveness for breaking his promise.
“Alas,” sayde the bysschop than,  
I wende he were the treweste man,  
That evere yit leyvd on lyve.  
And he with this ateynt may bee,  
He schal be hongyd on trees three,  
And drawen with hors fyve.”

And whenne that the bysschop the sothe hade  
That that traytour that lesyng made,  
He callyd a messangere,  
Bad hym to Dovere that he scholde founde,  
For to fette that Eerl Wymounde:  
(That traytour has no pere!)  
Sey Egelane and hys sones be slawe,  
Bothe ihangyd and to-drawe.  
(Doo as I thee lere!)

The countasse is in presoun done;  
Schal sche nevere out of presoun c  
ome,  
But yiff it be on bere."

Now with the messanger was no badde;  
He took his hors, as the bysschop radde,  
To Dovere tyl that he come.  
The eerl in hys halle he fand:  
He took hym the lettre in his hand  
On hygh, wolde he nought wone:  
―Sere Egelane and his sones be slawe,  
Bothe ihangyd and to-drawe:  
Thou getyst that eerldome."

The countasse is in presoun done;  
Schal sche nevere more out come,  
Ne see neyther sunne ne mone.”  
Thanne that eerl made hym glade,  
And thankyd God that lesyng was made:  
“He hath gete me this eerldome.”  
He sayde, “Felawe, ryght weel thou bee!  
Have here besauntys good plenté  
For thynd hedyr-come.”

Thanne the messanger made his mon:

―Alas,” said the bishop in return,  
“Tought he was the truest man  
Who has ever yet lived his life.  
If he is guilty of this,  
He will be hanged on three beams  
And dragged with five horses!”

And when the bishop had discovered the truth  
That the traitor had made such lies,  
He called a messenger,  
Ordering him to hasten to Dover  
To seize Earl Wickmond.  
That scoundrel had no equal!  
“Tell him Egelond and his sons are dead,  
Both hanged and drawn.  
Do as I direct you!  
The countess is clapped in prison.  
She will never come out of jail  
Unless it is on a funeral bier.”

Now there was no delay for the messenger.  
He rode his horse, as the bishop ordered,  
Until he had come to Dover.  
He found the earl in his hall.  
He gave him the letter into his hand,  
And swiftly; he did not dally.  
“Sir Egelond and his sons are slain,  
Both hanged and drawn.  
You have received that earldom.  
The countess is shut into prison.  
She will never again come out,  
Nor see either the moon or sun.”

Then the earl was very pleased  
And thanked God that the lie had worked.  
“It has gotten me the earldom!”  
He said, “Fellow, may all be well with you!  
Take a good plenty of coins  
For your travel here.”

Then the messenger made his request:
“Sire, of youre goode hors lende me on: 
Now graunte me my bone; 
For yystyrday deyde my nobyl stede, 
On youre arende as I yede, 
Be the way as I come.”

“My hors be fatte and cornfed, 
And of thy lyff I am adred.”

That eerl sayde to him then, 
“Thanne yiff min hors sholde thee sloo, 
My lord the kyng wolde be ful woo 
To lese swylk a man.”

He brought to the messenger a steed, 
One of the best in such a need 
That ever went on the ground, 
Saddled and bridled in the finest way.

The messenger was ful preste, 
Wyghtly on hym he sprange.

“To lese swylk a man.”

“Sere,” he sayde, “have good day; 
Thou shalt come whan thou may; 
I schal make the kyng at hande.”

With sporys faste he strook the stede; 
To Gravysende he come good spede, 
Is fourty myle to fande.

There the messenger the traytour abood, 
And sethyng bothe insame they rod 
To Westemynstyr wone.

In the palays there thay lyght; 
Into the halle they com ful ryght, 
And mette with Athelstone.

He wolde have kyssyd his lord swete. 
He sayde: “Traytour, nought yit! lete! 
Be God and be Seynt Jhon!”

26 These are presumably Wymonde’s words, who feels that his own horse is too spoiled for hard riding and might throw the messenger, and thus he gives him a steed. The act is inexplicably kind for Wymonde, although the fat, useless horse may echo his own moral slackness and dissolution.
For thy falsnesse and thy lesyng
I slowgh myn heyr, scholde have ben kyng,
When my lyf hadde ben gon."
There he denyd faste the kyng,
That he made nevere that lesyng,
Among hys peres alle.
The bysschop has hym be the hand tan;
Forth insame they are gan
Into the wyde halle.
Myghte he nevere with crafft ne gynne,
Gare hym shryven of hys synne,
For nought that myghte be
falle.
Thenne sayde the goode Kyng Athelstone:
―Lat hym to the fyr gon,
To preve the trewthe with alle.‖
Whenne the kyng hadde sayd soo,
A gret fyr was maad thoo,
In romaunce as we rede.
It was set, that men myghten knawe,
Nyne plowgh-LENGE on rawe,
As red as ony glede.
Nyne sythis the bysschop halewes the way
That that traytour schole goo that day:
The wers him gan to spede.
He wente fro the lengthe into the thrydde,
And doun he fell the fyr amydde:
Hys eyen wolde hym nought lede.
Than the eerlys chyldryn
were war ful smerte,
And wyghtly to the traytour sterte,
And out of the fyr him hade;
And sworn bothe be book and belle:
―Or that thou deye, thou schalt telle
Why thou that lesyng made.‖
―Certayn, I can non other red,
Now I wot I am but ded:
I telle yow nothyng gladde —
Certayn, ther was non other wyte:
For your falseness and your lying
I killed my heir who should have been king
After my life was finished."
He strongly denied to the king
That he ever made such a deception,
In front of all his peers.
The bishop seized him by the hand;
They went forth together
Into the wide hall.
He would never, with any trick or excuse,
Have himself absolved of his sin,
For anything that might happen.
Then the good king Athelstone pronounced,
“Let him go to the fire
To prove the truth before all.”
When the king had spoken so,
A great fire was then raised,
In the romance as we read it.
It was set, as men might know,
As long as nine plow-lengths in a row,
As red as any glowing coal.
The bishop blessed the path nine times
Where the traitor would walk that day.
For him his fortunes would turn for the worse.
He went from the start into the third part,
And down he fell in the middle of the fire.
His eyes could not guide him.
Then the earl’s children were fully aware,
And quickly ran to the traitor,
And pulled him out of the fire.
They swore both by the book and bell,
“Before you die, you will confess
Why you told that lie.”
“For sure, I have no other course.
Now I know I am almost dead.
I tell you no good news—
For certain, there was no other cause:
He loved Egelond too much and me too little, And because of that I had jealousy.”
When the criminal had spoken so, Five strong horses were tied to him,27 Which all men could see with their eyes. They dragged him through each street And after to the Elms, I assure you, And hanged him very high. There was no man so bold Who dared take down his sinful body. This was what he got for his lies! Now may Jesus, who is Heaven’s king, Allow no traitor to have a better ending, But such a sentence to die.

The End.

27 As in Amis and Amiloun, Wickmond’s sentence is to be hanged and drawn, i.e. dragged through unpaved streets behind horses. Here the hanging follows. Bodies might be left hanging for weeks as a public example, and thus the lines that no man dared take him down (808-9).
The Malleable King in *Athelston*

*Athelston*, like *Amis and Amiloun*, begins with a sworn oath of brotherhood. There the similarities end. Loomis believes that *Athelston* has a ballad-based origin and points to the formulaic preference for threes in the story. She notes the three trials by ordeal of Egelond, his children, and the countess, noting that the first two “appear to prove nothing”¹ besides structurally fulfilling the pattern. Similarly, although *Athelston* may have been thematically influenced by the earlier *Amis and Amiloun*, the latter is a didactic tale of the heroes’ progress from a personal and contractual oath to a more spiritually mature Christian brotherhood, whereas *Athelston* concerns itself with “falsnesse, hou it wil ende” (8). The tale is more explicitly about the betrayal of bonds and its tragic consequences rather than about loyalty to them, and it ends not with praise for the heroes but an ominous request that Christ “leve nevere traytour have betere endyng / but swych dome for to dye” (812-3). *Athelston* comprises a rather unorthodox romance, having none of the usual markings of heroic deeds, monsters, Saracens, or a love story. While not as dull as *Sir Thopas’ Popering*, the setting is a rather prosaic Westminster.²

Yet *Athelston* achieves a considerable sophistication for its brief 814 lines. Wymonde, despite his stock villain’s name, has a fairly well-shaded characterization surpassing the usual ‘jealous steward’ trope. The poet includes such realistic domestic touches as the queen munching cherries (256) and the messenger protesting that he needs to eat breakfast (328). Mehl complains that King Athelston is “completely unreasonable

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and has the simple credulity of some fairy-tale character."³ The hero of the story may be Alyric, and critics have asserted that the king and bishop allude to Henry II and Thomas à Becket.⁴ The story exalts clergy over royalty generally, and Pound notes that Westminster was one of many monasteries which kept paid minstrels.⁵ Yet Wymonde and Alyric are static characters, and Egelond barely figures in the story. While he does not function as the final hero, King Athelston does act as structural protagonist, the first character of the story and the person who undergoes the most change. The poem may be a warning against treason, but it has as its didactic subtheme good kingship generally.⁶ Wymonde, the messenger, and Alyric ultimately represent negative, ameliorative, and positive moral examples for the impressionable king.

The poem seemingly leaves little doubt as to what the audience ought to feel about Wymonde, consistently labeling him a traitor and firmly intoning that he deserves his punishment: “this hadde he for hys lye” (810). Nevertheless, the text does allow some subtlety in making Wymonde less than a monster. He has an honest motive in being jealous of Athelston’s affections for Egelond and confesses that “he lovyd him to mekyl and me to lyte” (800). Although the poet does not leave much of a fine moral shading in calling him “a devyl of helle” (156), perhaps Wymonde even has a hint of justification in

³ Mehl, 148.
being a sworn-brother who receives not the king’s sister nor the archbishopric of Canterbury as reward, but little Dover, geographically and emotionally the farthest from Athelston’s court. Upon his arrival for a visit, the king seems more interested in knowing “hou faryth that noble clerk” (100) than about Wymonde’s welfare.

Moreover, Wymonde does not compass usurping the king but merely the removal of his competitors. Thus he functions as the king’s antagonist solely by essentially threatening to corrupt the king into emulating him. The danger is that the king may become like Wymonde, as he does for a period. Upon being lured by Wymonde’s offer of inside information, the king “his hand up raughte” (154) as he enters into a more limited oath of confidence contradicting his wider obligation to his brothers. Upon taking the oath, the king echoes Wymonde’s lie by undertaking a lie of his own, promising to Egelond’s family “that the kyng the eerlys sones wolde / make hem bothe knyght” (194-5). The poison spreads as the king becomes increasingly inclined to arbitrary violence, at first rejecting the queen’s rightful petition for a judicial hearing and then perhaps exemplifying some jealousy over the queen’s love for Egelond himself as he kicks her (283), seemingly to batter her into emotional obedience. Her miscarriage also symbolizes the miscarriage of justice being committed.7 Structurally, Wymonde symbolizes what Athelstone potentially could and nearly does become, making the king’s rejection of his proffered kiss (760) additionally poignant.

The messenger also occupies an interesting position. Dickerson argues that he serves as a minor hero in the poem in the same category as earthy, hard-working

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protagonists such as Gamelyn and Havelock. In displaying the middle-class virtues of self-reliance and strength, the messenger earns considerable respect and attention from the poet, who lavishes some thirty lines on his horse journey to the bishop, ending with the encomium that “for his travayle he hadde no los” (“for all his efforts he got no praise,” 341). Dickerson then asserts that the poetic decision to name the messenger Athelston as well was not random but significant in that he represents “the alter ego of the arrogant King Athelston, who was once a messenger.” Whereas King Athelston purely serves his own interests, the messenger serves others: the king, the queen, and the bishop in turn. Crane believes that the messenger “displays an amoral readiness to transmit false as well as true messages,” but in relaying the ruse that Egelond is dead he obeys the explicit orders of the bishop, who warns “doo as I thee lere!” (708). The poet does not censure him for presumably fulfilling his duties.

As an occupation, the medieval messenger pursued a trade acceptable to both gentry and commoner, as demonstrated by the king’s youthful employment. The messenger is called noble by the poet twice (199, 339) even though he was a foundling (186). Treharne asserts that the fictional Athelston was modeled on the historical King Athelstan (c. 894-939), whom contemporary chroniclers claimed to be illegitimate. The

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9 Dickerson, 124.
11 Dickerson, 117.
12 Treharne (14) cites William of Malmesbury’s De Gestis Regum Anglorum. I follow her lead in calling the historical king Athelstan and the fictional king Athelston.
the odd detail to emphasize that the messenger is not noble but demonstrates the sort of natural gentilesse the Wife of Bath praises. The messenger has a sort of selfless ethic of duty that has died in the king, accompanying Alyric back to Westminster even though his job is technically complete. His grousing about his horse and his insistence on breakfast are comic but also call attention to his normal limitations as a human being. Yet chiefly he serves to show what the king has lost both by his example and by literally and symbolically bringing the bishop back to him.

As the king prays in a moment of hesitation over his actions, “he lokyd up into the qweer / the erchebysschop sawgh he stande” (430-1). The vision of the archbishop shining from on high is not terribly subtle but effectively denotes a narrative shift toward the king’s redemption through Alyric’s holy offices. The poet then intensifies Athelston’s moral dissolution into proud absolutism in order to accentuate Alyric’s virtue. The bishop first appeals to their shared brotherhood pledge: “goode weddyd brother, now turne thy rede / doo nought thyn owne blood to dede” (441-2), only resorting to righteous anger when the king wrathfully compounds the injustice of his summary execution of Egelond by promising the same to the bishop for merely petitioning him (462-3), both an extrajudicial act of royal violence and an outright breach of the vows agreed on by the four brothers long before.

The blood-brotherhood oaths of the four men has a community aspect that the more intimate pledges of Amis and Amiloun lack. The king’s pact with Wymonde

Dickerson 119. Dickerson feels that the messenger compromises his altruism somewhat by accepting money from the queen (308-19), but I do not see such any such meaning in the lines. He seems to refuse it all, saying “Cryst in hevene foryelde it thee” (319).
equally relies on secret confederation and violates this openness. When Alyric is stripped of his office by the king, the bishop’s men readily agree that they will help to secure “thy brothir” (521). The poet immediately follows the private scene of Alyric and the increasingly isolated king with the public spectacle of the bishop and the “lordys of Yngelond” (499) as he announces the interdiction of the nation. Here the king is at his moral nadir, having broken his treuþe, threatened the life of an archbishop, and brought about the excommunication of England. The barons reflect this upsetting of the natural order by threatening open rebellion (522-9). Yet the intercession of the bishop wins over Athelston, who repents and “prayde the bysschop of benysoun” (550).

The trial by ordeal of burning ploughshares forms a problematic scene. Trounce asserts that historically it was not done in England, but a romance audience would have known the popular legend of Emma, mother of Edward the Confessor, who walks across nine burning ploughshares to exonerate herself from false charges of adultery. Yet here the questionable legal means paints the bishop in a poor light. The countess is innocent, just as the Emma chroniclers sympathize with her plight against the vindictive Norman archbishop. Crane objects that Alyric fails justice in ordering a non-parliamentary

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15 A. McIntyre Trounce, ed., Athelston: A Middle English Romance, Early English Text Society O.S. 224 (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 15. The Emma legend may be partly apocryphal as it is not well attested and includes miraculous visitations from St. Swythun, but was well-known enough to possibly form the basis of the scene. Both the countess and Emma walk across nine ploughshares (571).

16 Robert of Jumièges, Archbishop of London in 1043 (though named as Archbishop of Canterbury by Hall) apparently headed a political conspiracy to discredit the dowager queen. When the still influential Emma appealed to other bishops from her confinement in Wherwell Priory, Robert excoriated them for defending “a vile beast and not a woman.” Mrs. Matthew Hall, The Queens Before the Conquest, Vol. II (London: Henry Colburn, 1854), 327. See also Robert of Gloucer’s Chronicle, lines 6880-99.
judgment for Egelond and his family,\textsuperscript{17} and Rowe similarly argues that the ordeals vindicate Athelston by showing that a formal appeal to counsel was unnecessary.\textsuperscript{18} Yet Alyric submits the defendants to an acceptable ecclesiastical process for the time period, and Athelston, most importantly, is shown to be completely wrong in his accusation. Moreover, for the bishop the ordeal is less a trial than a public proof of the family’s innocence. The poet does not impute any condemnatory or purgative attribute to the fire. The faithless king and not the bishop calls the ordeal a “hard doome” (578). Alyric instructs Egelond’s children, “have ye no drede” (609), and as they walk through unharmed they joke that “the fyr is cold inowgh” (611).\textsuperscript{19}

Such miracles are otherwise simply part of the furniture of romance. The ordeal also permits the indelible (or indelicate) image of the countess going into labor in the flames and giving birth to Saint Edmund. Ford suggests that, as Amoraunt embodies Amis and Amiloun’s pledge, here Edmund’s birth symbolizes the renewed love of the brothers.\textsuperscript{20} The king’s murder of his son for selfish motives threatens public stability by leaving him heirless, and in pledging his kingdom to Edmund he newly emulates Alyric’s sense of responsibility for his people. The root source of the king’s evil must still be purged, however, and the bishop must also threaten the king with the fires until he fully renounces his secret alliance with Wymonde. Where Athelston previously requires the

\footnotesize{
\textsuperscript{17} Crane, 73.
\textsuperscript{18} Rowe, 83.
\textsuperscript{19} In an actual purgatorial fire, Virgil also tells Dante to “put down your every fear” (\textit{Purg.} XXVII.31) but Dante reports that “I’d have thrown myself in molten glass to find coolness” (49-51). Dante Alighieri, \textit{The Divine Comedy}, trans. Allen Mandelbaum, \textit{Electronic Literature Foundation}, accessed 24 October 2010 at http://www.divinecomedy.org/divine_comedy.html.
\textsuperscript{20} Ford [8].
}
threat of baronial revolt to submit, the bishop’s spiritual authority now suffices. The disclosure is in more ways than one a confession, and the king himself refers to it as a “schryffte of mouthe” (689). Only then has the bishop fully redeemed Athelston.

Wymonde’s actual death is perfunctory, with the difference that he does receive some form of public trial to underscore the king’s repudiation of his arbitrary ways in favor of following God’s will.

Although the bishop guides and reproves him, the king has displayed the least steadiness of any character in the poem. Both Alyric and the messenger function with more prudence and reason, and even the wives have more common sense. Critics have noticed the unusual agency of the women compared to those of other period romances. The countess’ patient endurance of the fire ordeal forms the highlight of the trial scene. In comparison to the countess’ prominence her husband Egelond appears “curiously passive” in the narrative and seems to take no role in his family’s defense. Similarly, the queen knows her legal procedures, asking to act as security for her brother until a parliament can deliberate. Despite her violent beating and miscarriage, the king is ultimately forced to see that refusing the queen’s advice has proven destructive to his own kingship. Loomis notes the strong ameliorative influence of the church and the

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22 Treharne, 12.
women of Athelston, and in the countess’ miraculous walk through the flames the two forces merge.

Is the king thus good or bad in the poet’s depiction? Treharne argues that the poem is an exemplum of how a good king should not act:

The *Athelston*-poet… demonstrates through his protagonist the human fallibility of the divinely appointed ruler. We see a depiction of an imaginary, hierarchic Anglo-Saxon society in which Church and king are made to co-operate in the provision of temporal and spiritual harmony.

The king is not evil but is too easily swayed and requires strong guidance to avoid the temptations of tyranny. Does the poet mean a particular king? The historical Athelstan was considered deeply religious and a promulgator of law codes and order, and he was for some poets an English Charlemagne, representing a former Golden Age. Yet in later depictions his image deteriorates into one of despotism. In Layamon and William of Malmesbury he progressively becomes an illegitimate and aggressive usurper, though in the stanzaic *Guy of Warwick* he is merely weak and vacillating against the Danes and Colbrand’s threat. Edward the Confessor might also have served as a model. Edward had opposed Emma before and in light of their animosity Hall suggests he was “too easily imposed upon” in hastily believing the charges against her.

Another possibility is a young Richard II, who did slide into absolutism in his last years before his deposition. Richard was equally criticized as mercurial and overly

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24 Loomis, 226.
25 Treharne, 2.
26 Trounce, 29.
27 Treharne, 9.
28 Hall, 324.
influenced by favorites. His unpopular tutor, Simon Burley, was made constable of Dover in 1384, just as Wymonde is created as its earl. Both were men of lower birth (41).

Gower complains that “the king, an ignorant boy, ignores the moral accomplishments by which he would grow from a child to a man.”29 Rowe also relates an actual incident from 1384 where a friar falsely told Richard of a plot against him by John of Gaunt and the king violently ordered a summary execution. In the next year the archbishop of Canterbury complained to Richard about this abrogation of law and custom, and the king had to be restrained from killing him with his sword.30 The extant Athelston manuscript of Gonville and Caius No. 175 dates to the late 1300s and line 546 has “the Brokene-cros of ston,” which Trounce located near St. Paul’s Cathedral.31 The cross was known to exist only between 1370-90. A suggestible and capricious Richard might have been one of the poet’s indirect themes, and Rowe even posits a propagandistic aim of legitimizing Henry IV’s claims to the throne.32

An additionally interesting connection is the unusual lack of respect the characters of Athelston use in their pronouns of address for the king. The countess is the only character in the poem to use formal you for Athelston (246), and only out of fear. Works such as King Horn (c. 1200) use thou prevalently, but Horn is early, at a time when OE


31 Trounce, 123. But see the footnote to line 546. Zupitza claimed that the cross was the Chester Cross delimiting Westminster, about which dates are unknown. J. Zupitza, “Die Romanze von Athelston,” Englische Studien 13 (1883): 331-414.

32 Rowe, 80.
pu has not fully divided into ME you and informal thou. Athelston is much later, and the poet addresses the audience as you (352). As a social inferior the messenger also uses you, albeit inconsistently, for Wymonde (731, 734). In other English romances it is unusual for a king to be addressed with thou. Sir Bevis says you to King Edgar (3501), and even Bevis’ mother says you to the German usurper she marries (3313). Children generally use thou or ye, as does Floris (85), but Sir Degare says you to the king (1072). The identification of Athelston with Richard is supposition, but the pronoun address of the poem does subtly imply a young and unseasoned monarch who has yet to command firm respect from subordinates.

The Athelston poet capably operates on numerous possible levels. Athelston’s signification remains opaque, and the poem may refer abstractly to models of kingship. His failings could be applied to many English kings as well as to Richard. Nevertheless, as Crane asserts, the poem lacks the natural and implicit faith in good governance that the Auchinleck romances tend to assume.33 Structurally and thematically, the poem has a clear and sturdy mechanism. The main characters of the poem, Wymonde, the messenger, and the bishop, grouped with the wives, function respectively as corrupting, guiding, and ideal examples for Athelston to emulate. If Amis and Amiloun do have a typographical meaning in their initial letters as Delaney asserts—A-A-B for their names and Belisaunt’s34—Alyric (A) similarly redeems Athelston (A) back from the moral and alphabetic opposite of Wymonde (W). The poet displays a dexterous ability and would

33 Crane, 73.

not be beyond such linguistic touches, as evinced by his subllest use of narrative symbolism: the messenger, the bishop, and the wives all play a role in attempting to warn and inform Athelston about the ruinous path he follows, a fitting occupation for a poem about messengers.
CHAPTER 3

Bevis of Hampton


Main Characters

Bevis
Guy, Bevis’ father
Saber, Bevis’ uncle
Saber Florentine, bishop of Cologne
King Ermine
Josanne, Ermine’s daughter
Brademonde, Josanne’s suitor
King Yvor, Josanne’s suitor
Miles, Josanne’s suitor
Boniface, Josanne’s servant
Ascopard, Bevis’ servant

Lordinges, herknet to me tale!
Is merier than the nightingale,
That I schel singe;
Of a knight ich wile yow roune,
Beves a highte of Hamtoune,

Lords and ladies, listen to my tale!
What I will rhyme about
Is merier than a nightingale.1
I will tell you about a knight:
Bevis was his name, of Southampton,

1 The first two lines are duplicated almost word for word in Sir Thopas (VII.833-4): “yet listeth, lorde, to my tale / murier than the nightingale.”

129
Withouten lesing.
Ich wile yow tellen al togadre
Of that knight and of is fadre,
Sire Gii.

Of Hamtoun he was sire
And of al that ilche schire,
To wardi.
Lordinges, this, of whan I telle,
Never man of flesch ne felle
Nas so strong.
And so he was in ech strive.
And ever he levede withouten wive,
Al to late and long.

Whan he was fallen in to elde,
That he ne mighte himself welde,
He wolde a wif take;
Sone thar after, ich understonde,
Him hadde be lever than al this londe
Hadde he hire forsake.
An elde a wif he tok an honde,
The kinges doughter of Scotlonde,
So faire and b
right.
Allas, that he hire ever ches!

For hire love his lif a les

With mechel unright.
This maide ichave of ytold,
Faire maide she was and bold
And fre yboren;
Of Almayne that emperur
Hire hadde loved paramur
Wel thar beforen.
Ofte to hire fader a sente
And he him selve theder wente
For hire sake;

Ofte gernede hire to wive;
The king for no thing alive
Nolde hire him take.
Sithe a yaf hire to sire Gii,
A stalword erl and hardi
Of Southhamtoun.
Man, whan he falleth in to elde.
Feble a wexeth and unbelde
Though right resoun.
So longe thai yede togedres to bedde,
A knave child betwene hem thai hedde,
Beves a het.
Faire child he was and bolde,
He nas boute seve winter olde,
When his fader was ded.
The levedi hire misbethoughte
And meche aghen the right she wrougthe
In hire tour:
“Me lord is olde and may nought werche,
Al dai him is lever at cherche,

Without any lie.
I will tell you all together
About that knight and his father,
Sir Guy.

Guy was lord of Southampton
And of all that county
He was guard.

Gentlemen, about this person I tell you of
There was never a man of flesh and blood
Who was so mighty,
And so he prevailed in every battle.
But he lived his days without a wife
For too long and until too late.
When he saw he was falling into old age,
When he might no longer govern himself,
He decided to take a wife
Soon after, as I understand.
It would have been better had he rejected her
Rather than losing all his land.

As an elderly man he took a wife in hand,
The king of Scotland’s daughter,
So fair and bright.
Alas, that he ever chose her!

For her love he lost his life
With great injustice.

This maid I have mentioned
Was a beautiful and strong-willed woman,
And nobly born.
She had been the lover
Of the Emperor of Germany
A long time before then.
The emperor often sent word to her father,
And he himself went to him
For her sake.

He often asked for her hand,
But the king would not let him take her
For anything alive.
And then he gave her to Sir Guy,
A sturdy and hardy earl
From Southampton.
But man, when he falls into old age,
Grows feeble and timid
In his right reasoning.
They laid in bed together
Until they had a child between them,
Who was called Bevis.
He was a fair and bold child,
And he was not yet seven years old
When his father was dead.
The lady had malicious thoughts
And she schemed against goodness
In her tower:
“My lord is old and can’t work,
And he would rather spend all day
Than in me bour.
Hadde ich itaken a yong knight,
That ner nought brused in werre and fight,
Also he is,
A wolde me loven dai and night,
Cleppen and kissen with al is might
And make me blis.
I nel hit lete for no thinge,
That ich nel him to dethe bringe
With sum braide!‖

Anon right that levedi fer
To consaile clepede hir masager
And to him saide:
―Maseger, do me surté,
That thow nelt nought discure me
To no wight!
And yif thow wilt, that it so be,
I schel thee yeve gold and fe
And make the knight.‖

Thanne answerd the masager -
False a was, that pautener,
And wel prut -
―Dame, boute ich do thee nede,
Ich graunte, thow me forbede
The londe thourgh out.‖
The levedi thanne was wel fain:
―Go,‖ she seide, ―in to Almaine
Out of me bour!
Maseger, be yep and snel,
And on min helf thow grete wel
That emperur,
And bid, in the ferste dai,
That cometh in the moneth of May,
For love of me,
That he be to fighte prest
With is ferde in hare forest
Beside the se.
Me lord ich wile theder sende
For his love, for to schende
And for to sle;

Bid him, that hit be nought beleved,
That he ne smite of his heved
And sende hit me!

2 The lustful wife who betrays her husband is a romance standard. Like the seductive Salome, here the wife also receives Guy’s head. An interesting variation is Bertilak’s wife in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, who only tempts Gawain as a test. Another example is Amiloun’s spouse, who banishes Amiloun and then remarries.

3 TEAMS renders the line as a conditional: “I believe that you would banish me.”

4 The lady’s manipulation is to question the both the emperor’s bravery and honesty: the emperor is to kill her husband to prove his intentions, and until then she will not believe his professions of love.
And when he has done so,
He will receive my love
Without delay.”

The messenger then answered,
“Madam, I will soon be there.
Now goodbye!”

Then that messenger was gone.  

He became wicked to the same lord
Who had provided for him!
The messenger took to his ship;
Alas, the wind was all too good
Which brought him over.
When he arrived in Germany,
He met a servant there
And greeted him well.
“Fellow,” he said, “for kindness’ sake,
Where can I find the emperor?
Let me know!”

“I will tell you right away.
He’s spending the night at Erfurt,  
By the neck on my head.”

The messenger thanked him at once
And went in that direction
Without delay.
He found the emperor there
And knelt down to the ground,
As it was fitting,
And said, “The lady of Southampton
Greets you courteously by God’s son,
Who is so bright,
And asks of you that on the first day
Which comes in the month of May,
However it may be,
That you be ready to fight
With your army in her forest
Beside the sea.
She will entice on her lord,
For the sake of your love, to fight
With only a few retainers.
In that place you should be as resolute
As you are in your love,
In your efforts to wed her.”

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5 _Now that masager him goth:_ The poet often switches from past tense to present to lend immediacy to the action, but in translation it sounds slightly confusing and so I have avoided it.

6 _Rifoun:_ I cannot find this place name. There is a Ripon in Yorkshire (but this would not require a ship), a Rifön in Sweden, and a Riphahnstraße in Cologne. Other MSS give _Repayn_ and _Refon_. The French analogue has _Retefor_, and a French book on Roman literature from 1921 claims this is Erfurt. Paul Meyer and Gaston Paris, _Romania: Recueil Trimestriel_ (Paris: Mario Roques, 1921), 142, accessed 28 May 2010 at [http://www.archive.org/stream/romania4748pariuoft#page/n149/mode/2up/search/retefor](http://www.archive.org/stream/romania4748pariuoft#page/n149/mode/2up/search/retefor).

7 _Be me swere:_ ME _swere_ does not mean _swear_ or _oath_, but _neck_.

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132
“Sai,” a seide, “Icham at hire heste:
Yif me lif hit wile leste,
Hit schel be do!
Gladder icham for that sawe,
Than be fouel, whan hit ginneth dawe,
And sai hire so!
And for thow woldes hire erande bede,
An hors icharged with golde rede
Ich schel thee yeve,
And withinne this fourtene night
Me self schel dobbe thee to knight,
Yif that ich live.”
The mesager him thanked yerne;
Hom ayen he gan him terne
To Hamtoun;

150
The leveidi a fond in hire bour,
And he hire clepede doceamur
And gan to roun:
―Da me,‖ a seide, ―I thee tel:
That emperur thee grette wel
With love mest:
Glad he is for that tiding,
A wile be prest at that fighting
In that forest.
Yif thow ert glad the lord to sle,

160
Gladder a is for love of thee
Fele sithe!‖
The mesager hath thus isaid,
The leveidi was right wel apaid
And maked hire blithe.
In Mai, in the formeste dai,
The leveidi in hire bedde lai,
Ase hit wer nede;
Hire lord she clepede out of halle
And seide, that evel was on hire falle,
She wende be ded.
That erl for hire hath sorwe ikaught
And askede, yif she desired aught,
That mighte hire frevre.
―Ye,‖ she seide, “of a wilde bor
I wene, me mineth, boute for
Al of the fevre!”
―Madame,‖ a seide, “for love myn,
Whar mai ich finde that wilde swin?
I wolde, thow it haddel!”

170
And she answerde with tresoun mest,
Be the se in hare forest,
Thar a bradde.
That erl swor, be Godes grace,

“Tell her,” he exclaimed, “I am at her command!
So long as my life will last,
It shall be done.
I am more pleased with that news
Than the birds are when it begins to dawn,
And say that to her!
And for you who has performed her errand,
I will give to you
A horse loaded with red gold,
And within these fourteen nights
I will dub you a knight myself,8
If I live to do it.”
The messenger thanked him earnestly
And turned back home again
To Southampton.
He found the lady in her bower
And he called her sweetly
And began to whisper:
“My lady,” he said, “I tell you,
The emperor greets you fondly
With ardent love.
He is very pleased with the news.
He will be ready to fight
In that forest.
If you are glad for the lord to be slain,
He is glad many times more
For love for you!”
When the messenger had spoken so,
The lady was very satisfied
And made herself cheerful.
In May, on the first day
The lady lay in her bed
As though out of necessity.
She called her lord from the hall
And said that bad fortune had come to her.
She expected to die.
The earl was distraught over her
And asked if she wanted anything
That might give her comfort.
“Yes,” she said, “from a wild boar,
I think, if I remember, there will be
A remedy for all of my fever!”
“My lady,” he answered, “for my love,
Where would I find a wild boar?
I wish you could have one!”
And she answered with calculated treason,
“By the sea in our forest,
There they breed.”
The earl swore, by God’s grace,

8 Fourtene night: The medieval English reckoned time in nights and not days, and being a warrior, the German emperor seems to operate in fortnights.
In that forest he wolde chace,
That bor to take;
And she answerde with tresoun than;
―Blessed be thow of alle man
For mine sake!‖
That erl is hors began to stride,
His scheld he heng upon is side,
Gert with swerd;
Moste non armur on him come,
Himself was boute the ferthe some
Toward that ferd.
Allas, that he nadde be war
Of is fomen, that weren thar,
Him forte schende:
With tresoun worth he ther islawe
And ibrought of is lif-dawe,
Er he hom wende!
Whan he com in to the forest,
Th’emperur a fond al prest;
For envi
A prikede out before is ost,
For pride and for make bost,
And gan to crie:
“Aghilt thee, treitour! thow olde dote!
Thow shelt ben hanged be the throte,
Thin heved thow schelt lese;
The sone schel anhanged be
And the wif, that is so fre,
To me lemman I chese!”
Tho prikede is stede Sire Gii,
A stalword man and hardi,
While he was sounde;
Th’emperur he smot with is spere,
Out of is sadel he gan him here
And threw him to grounde.
“Treitour,” a seide, “thow ert to bolde!
Wenestow, thegh ich bo olde,
To ben afered?
That thow havest no right to me wif,
I schel thee kithe be me lif!”
And trough is swerd.
That erl held is swerd adrawe,
Th’emperur with he hadde slawe,
Nadde be sokour:
Thar come knyghtes mani and fale,
Wel ten thosent tolde be tale,
To chase and capture a boar
In that forest.
And then she answered with treachery,
“May you be blessed of all men
For my sake!”
The earl prepared to mount his horse.
He hung his shield upon his side,
Armed with a sword.
He wore almost no armor
And was himself only the fourth
To make up that group.
Alas, that he was unwary
Of his enemies, who were there
To slaughter him!
With treason he would be slain there
And separated from his life
Before he returned home.
When he came to the forest,
He found the emperor all ready.
In arrogance,
He spurred on before his host,
In pride and to make a boast,
And began to cry out:
“Surrender, villain! You old fool!
You will be hanged by the throat,
And you will lose your head!
Your son will also be hanged,
And your lady, who is so beautiful,
I will choose as my mate!”
The earl answered that speech:
“I believe you speak in defiance of the law,
So help me God!
For my wife and child, who are so royal,
If you think you will take them from me
I will defend them!”
Then Sir Guy spurred his horse.
He was a sturdy and hardy man
While he was healthy.
He struck the emperor with his spear,
Flung him out of his saddle,
And threw him to the ground.
“Traitor!” he said. “You are too rash!
Did you think that because I am old
I would be afraid?
I will show you, by my life,
That you have no right to my wife!”
And he drew out his sword.
The earl held his blade out
And would have slain the emperor
If there had not been help.
Knights came out in vast number,
Well ten thousand in total,
To th’emperur.
Tho Sire Gii him gan defende,
Thre hundred hevedes of a slende
With is brond;

Haddhe he ben armed wel, ywis,
Al the meistré hadde ben his,
Ich understonde.
Thre men were slawe, that he ther hadde,
That he with him out ladde
And moste nede;
To have merci, that was is hope;
Th’emperur after him is lope
Upon a stede.
Th’erl knewlede to th’emperur,
Merci a bad him and sokour
And is lif:
“Merci, sire, ase thou art fre,
Al that ichave, I graunte thee,
Boute me wif!
For thine men, that ichave
Have her me swerd idrawe
And al me fe:
Boute me yonge sone Bef
And me wif, that is me lef,
That let thow me!”
“For Gode,” queth he, “that ich do nelle!”
Th’emperur to him gan telle,
And was agreved.
Anon right is swerd out drough
And the gode knight a slough
And nam is heved.
A knight a tok the heved an honde:
“Have,” a seide, “ber this sonde
Me leve swe!”
The knight to Hamtoun tho gan gon,
The levedi thar a fond anon
And gan hire grete:
“Dame,” a seide, “to me atende:
Th’emperur me hider sende
With is pray!”
And she seide: “Blessed mot he be!
To wif a schel wedde me
To morwe in the dai.
Sai him, me swete wight,
That he come yet to night
In to me bour!”
The mesager is wei hath holde,
To the emperor’s aid.
Sir Guy began to defend himself.9
He struck off three hundred heads
With his broadsword.
Had he been well-armed, in fact,
The victory would have all been his,
I understand.
Three men were slain that he had there,
Whom he had led out with him,
And who he now needed the most.
To have mercy was his hope,
As the emperor rode toward him
Upon a steed.
The earl knelt before the emperor
And asked him for mercy and grace
And his life:
“Sir, if you are noble, have mercy.
All that I have I grant you,
Except for my wife!
For your men that I have slain,
Take my drawn sword here
And all my property.
But for my young son Bevis,
And my wife, who is dear to me,
Leave them to me!”
“By God,” he said, “I will do none of it!”
The emperor looked on him
And was enraged.
At once he pulled out his sword
And killed the good knight,
And took off his head.
Another knight took the head in his hand.
“Take it!” the emperor said. “Carry this token
To my sweet love!”
The knight took off for Hampton.
He soon found the lady
And greeted her.
My lady,” he said, “listen to me.
The emperor has sent me here
With his prey.”
And she replied, “May he be blessed!
He will wed me as his wife
Tomorrow in the daytime.
Tell him, my dear thing,
To come tonight already,
Into my bedchamber!”
The messenger took his way

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9 *Sire Gii him gan defende*: Sometimes the *gan* suggests *began*, but grammatically in ME it normally simply formed an auxiliary to the simple past: *he gan ridden* (he rode). A sense of beginning was indicated by *for*: *he gan for to ridden*. I am attempting to take the sense from the context. “Chaucer’s Grammar,” Harvard University, accessed 22 May 2010 at http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/pronunciation/.
Al a seide, ase she him tolde,
To th’emperur.
Now scholle we of him mone,
Of Beves, that was Guis sone,
How wo him was:
Yerne a wep, is hondes wrong,
For his fader a seide among:
"Alas! Alas!"
He cleped is moder and seide is sawe:
"Vile houre! Thee worst to drawe
And al to-twight!
Me thenketh, ich were ther of ful fawe,
For thow havest me fader slawe
With mechel unright!
Alas, moder, thee faire ble!
Evel becometh thee, houre to be,
To holde bordel,
And alle wif houren for thee sake,
The devel of helle ich hii betake,
Flesch and fel!
Ac o thing, moder, I schel thee swere:
Yif ich ever armes bere
And be of elde,
Al that hath me fader islawe
And ibrought of is lif dawe,
Ich shel hem yilden!"
The moder hire hath understonde,
That child she smot with hire honde
Under is ere.
The child fel doun and that was scathe,
His meister tok him wel rathe,
That higte Saber.
The knight was trewe and of kinde,
Strenger man ne scholde men finde
To ride ne go.
A was ibrought in tene and wrake
Ofte for that childes sake
Ase wel ase tho.
That childe he nam up be the arm,
Wel wo him was for that harm,
That he thar hadde.
Toward is kourt he him kende;
The levedi after Saber sende
And to him radde.
"Saber," she seide, "thow ert me lef,
Let sle me yonge sone Bef,
That is so bold!
And repeated everything as she told him
to the emperor.
Now we shall speak
Of Bevis, who was Guy’s son,
And how sorrowful he was.
He wept earnestly; he wrung his hands.
For his father he continually cried,
“Alas, alas!”
He called to his mother and spoke his mind:
“Vile whore! You deserve to be
Drawn and quartered!
In my opinion, I would be very glad to see it!
You have slain my father
With great injustice!
Alas, mother, your innocent looks!
Evil suits you, to someday be a madam
And to run a brothel,
And to whore out all wives for your sake!
I would send them all to Hell,
Flesh and bones!
And one more thing, mother, I swear to you—
If I ever bear arms
And be of a proper age,
For everyone who attacked my father
And finished the days of his life,
I will pay them back!"
The mother understood him in full,
And she struck the child with her hand
Under his ear.
The child fell down, and that was a pity!
He was taken away quickly by his master,10
Who was called Saber.
The knight was loyal and his kin.
No one might find a stronger man
To ride or to walk.
He would often face pain and hardship
For that child’s sake,
As he did at the moment.
He took the child up by the arm.
He would have sadness for the punishment
Which he had for that.
He escorted him toward the court.
The lady followed Saber
And called to him:
“Saber,” she coaxed, “you are dear to me.
Have my young son Bevis executed,
Who is so insolent!

10 Meister: Bevis’ uncle, teacher, and guardian, and to judge from his mother’s parenting skills, his authority figure. This is not the same Saber as the one introduced in 2926, the bishop of Cologne, Saber Florentine. In Germanic culture and literature there is often a special relationship between nephews and maternal uncles. In Beowulf the hero is also raised by his uncle Hygelac.
Let him anhange swithe highe,  
I ne reche, what deth he dighe,  
Sithe he be cold!”
Saber stod stille and was ful wo;  
Natheles a seide, a wolde do  
After hire sawe;  
The child with him hom he nam,  
A swin he tok, whan he hom cam,  
And dede hit of dawe.  
The childes clothes, that were gode,  
Al a bisprengde with that blode  
In many stede,  
Ase yif the child were to-hewe,  
A thoughte to his moder hem schewe,  
And so a dede.  
At the laste him gan adrede,  
He let clothen in pouer wede  
That hende wight,  
And seide: “Sone, thow most kepe  
Upon the felde mine schepe  
This fourte night!  
And whan the feste is come to th’ende,  
In to another londe I schel thee sende  
Fer be southe,  
To a riche erl, that schel thee gie  
And teche thee of corteisie  
In the youthe.  
And whan thou ert of swich elde,  
That thou might the self wilde,  
And ert of age,  
Thanne scheltow come in te Ingelonde,  
With werre winne in to thin honde  
Thin eritage.  
I schel thee helpe with alle memight,  
With dent of swerd to gete thee right,  
Be thow of elde!”
The child him thanked and sore wep,  
And forth a wente with the schep  
Upon the velde.  
Beves was herde upon the doun  
He lokede homward to the toun  
That scholde ben his;  
He beheld toward the tour,  
Trompes he herde and tabour  
And meche blis.  
“Lord,” a seide, “on me thow mone!  
Ne was ich ones an erles sone  
And now am herde?  
Mighte ich with that emperur speke,  
Wel ich wolde me fader awreke  
For al is ferde!”
He nemeth is bat and forth a goth,  
Swithe sori and wel wroth,  
Toward the tour;
“Porter!” a sede, “Let me in reke! A lite thing ich ave to speke With th’emperor.”

"Go hom, truant!” the porter sede, “Scherewe houre sone, I thee rede, Fro the gate:

Boute thow go hennes also swithe, Hit schel thee rewe fele sithe, Thow come ther-ate!

Sixte the scherewe, “Ho be itte, A loketh, as a wolde smite With is bat:
Speke he ought meche more, I schel him smite sithe sone Upon is hat.”

I nam no truant, be Godes grace!”

With that a lefte up is mace Anon fot hot.
Beves withoute the gate stod.
And smot the porter on the hod, That he gan falle;
His heved he gan al to cleve And forth a wente with that leve In to the halle.

Al aboute he gan beholde, To th’emperur he spak wordes bolde With meche grame:
“Sire,” a sede, “what dostow here? Whi colles thow aboute the swire That ilche dame?
Me moder is that thow havest an honde: What dostow her upon me londe Withouten leve?

Tak me me moder and mi fe, Boute thow the rather hennes te, I schel thee greve!
Nastow, sire, me fader slawe?
Thow schelt ben hanged and to-drawe, Be Godes wille!
Aris! Fle hennes, I thee rede!”
Th’e mperur to him sede:
“Foul, be stille!”
Beves was nigh wod for grame,
For a clepede him “foul” be name, And to him a wond;
For al that weren in the place, Thries a smot him with is mace And with is honde.
Thries a smot him on the kroun; That emperur fel swowe adoun, Thar a sat.
The levedi, is moder, gan to grede:
“The mother, began to shout:
“Seize that traitor!” she cried.
“Be quick about it!”
Bevis could not linger any longer.
The knights on each side,
High and low,
Felt sympathy for the child’s sake.
As none of them would grab him,
They let him pass.
Bevis ran as fast as he could.
He met his master on the way,
Who was called Saber,
And he asked him with a cheerful air,
“Bevis,” he said, “for the sake of the Cross,
What are you doing here?”
“I will tell you at once.
I have beaten my stepfather
With my mace.
Three times I struck him in the head
And have left him for dead
In the palace!”
“Bevis,” replied Saber, “you are to blame!
The lady will now do me harm
For your sake!
Unless you do as I advise you,
You might quickly bring us both
Into great peril!”
Saber took Bevis to his house,11
Greatly dreading that lady.
The woman came from the tower
And she made her way to Saber.
“Saber” she said, “where is Bevis,
That wicked traitor, that foul thief?”
“Madam,” he said, “I put him to death
By your counsel and your orders.
Here are his clothes, as you can see.”
The lady answered, “Saber, you lie!
Unless you bring me to him,
You will pay for his sake!”
Bevis heard his master threatened.
He spoke to her with a fierce heart
And said, “Here I am, by name!
Do not harm my master on my account!
If you are looking for me, then here I am!”
His mother took him by the ear,
Wishing eagerly for him to be dead.
She called four knights at once:
“Go,” she said, “to the shore.
If you see ships from pagan lands,
Sell them this boy here.

11 For unexplained reasons the meter shifts here into couplets for the remainder of the poem.
If there’s no goods or finery,  
Whether you’re offered, more or less,  
Sell him straightaway to the heathens!  

The knights marched forth  
Until they came to the sea.  
They found ships standing there  
From heathen lands and many others.  
They bargained the child for sale,  
Meeting with many merchants.  
They sold the child for a good price  
And handed him over to the Saracens.  
They sailed off with that boy,  
May Christ of Heaven be mild to him!  
The child’s heart was cold with fear  
For he had been sold so far away.  
Nevertheless, whatever grief he felt,  
He had to sail to Armenian lands  
When they had passed from those shores.  

The king of that land was called Ermine.  
His wife was deceased, who was called Marah.  
He had one daughter of young age  
Who was called Josanne.  

Her shoes were gold upon her feet.  
She was as beautiful and bright in spirit  
As snow upon red blood.  
To what could she be compared?  
Men knew no fairer thing alive,  
So graceful or so well brought up.  
But she knew nothing of Christian belief.  
The traders moved in haste  
And presented Bevis to King Ermine.  
The king was glad and pleased  
And thanked them many times.  
“Mohammed!” he said. “You would be proud  
If this child were to incline to you  
If he would be a Saracen,  
As I hope he will prosper to!  
By Mohammed, who sits on high,  
I never saw a fairer child,  
Neither in length or in breadth.
Ne non, so faire limes hade!
Child," a seide, "whar wer thee bore?

What is thee name? telle me fore!
If ich it wiste, hit were me lef.

"For Gode," a seide, "ich hatte Bef;
Iborne ich was in Ingelonde,
At Hamtoun, be the se stronde.
Me fader was erl thar a while,
Me moder him let sle with gile,
And me she solde in to hethenlonde;
Wikked beth fele wimmen to fonde!

Ac, sire, yif it ever so betide,
That ich mowe an horse ride
And armes bere and schef t tobreke,
I will avenge my father's death
in full!

The kinges hertte wex wel cold,
Whan Beves hadde thus itolde,
And seide: "I nave non eir after me dai,
Boute Josian, this faire mai;
And thow wile thee god forsake
And to Apolyn, me lord, take,
Hire I shel th ewe to wive
Along with all my land after my life!

"By God," queth Beves, "That I nolde
For al the selver ne al the golde,
That is under hevene light,
Or for your daughter, who is so bright.
I would not forsake in any way
Jesus, who bought me so dearly.
All those must be deaf and dumb
Who believe in the false gods!"

The king him lovede wel the more,
For him ne stod of no man sore,
And seide: "Beves, while thow ert swain,
Thow schelt be me chamberlain,
And thow schelt, whan thow ert dobbed knight,
I will give her to you to marry
Along with all my land after my life!

Even for a medieval romance, it stretches credulity for Bevis, a purchased slave, to get away with this blasphemous insult intact. The idea may be that the king is impressed with his noble bearing and spirit and is willing to be patient with his conversion.


15 Apolyn: Ermine does not mean the Greek god Apollo, youthful god of music and poetry, but Apollyon, the angel of the bottomless pit of hell: “They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon” (Rev. 9:11). In Lovelich’s History of the Holy Grail (c. 1450) a Saracen explains, “we han foure Goddis… / Mahownd and Termagaunt, goddis so fin / anothir hihte Jubiter and Appolyn” (49:50-52). Henry Lovelich, History of the Holy Grail, ed. Frederick James Furnival (London: Early English Text Society, 1905). Apollyon also battles Christian in Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress.

16 Even for a medieval romance, it stretches credulity for Bevis, a purchased slave, to get away with this blasphemous insult intact. The idea may be that the king is impressed with his noble bearing and spirit and is willing to be patient with his conversion.

“What ye me hoten, don ich wil!”
Bevis was ther yer and other,
The king him lovede also is brother,
And the maide that was so sligh.
So dede every man that him sigh.
Be that he was fiftene yer olde,
Knigh
t ne swain thar nas so bolde,
That him dorste ayenes ride
Ne with wrethe him abide.
His ferste bataile, for soth te say
A dede a Cristes messe day;
Ase Beves scholde to water ride
And fiftene Sarasins be is side,
And Beves rod on Arondel,
That was a stede
gode and lel.
A Sarasin began to say
And askede him, what het that day.
Beves seide: “For soth ywis,
I not never, what dai it is,
For I nas boute seve winter old,
Fro Cristendome ich was isold;
Tharfore I ne can telle nought thee,
What dai that hit mighte be.”
The Sarasin beheld and lough.
―This dai,‖ a saide, ―I knowe wel enough.
This is the ferste dai of Youl,
Thee God was boren withouten doul;
For thi men maken ther mor blisse
Than men do her in hethenesse.
Anoure thee God, so I schel myn,
Bothe Mahoun a
nd Apolyn!”
Beves to that Sarasin said:
―Of Cristendom yit ichave abraid,
Ichave seie on this dai right
Armed mani a gentil knight,
Torneande right in the feld
With helmes bright and mani scheld;
And were ich also stith in plas,
Ase ever Gii, me fader was,
Ich wolde for me Lordes love,
That sit high in hevene above,
Fighte with yow everichon,
Er than ich wolde hennes gon!”
“Whatever you command, I will do!”
Bevis was there a year and another,
And the king loved him as a brother.
So did the maid, who was so discreet,
And every man who might see him.
By the time he was fifteen years old,
There was no knight or servant so bold
Who might ride against him
Or abide with him in hostility.
His first battle, to tell the truth,
He faced one Christmas Day.
As Bevis happened to ride to the water,
With fifteen Saracens by his side,
He rode on Arondel,
Who was a fine and loyal steed.
A Saracen began to provoke him
And asked him what the day was called.
Bevis said, “In truth,
I do not know what day it is,
For I was only seven years old
When I was sold from Christian lands.
Because of that I cannot tell you
What day it might be.”
The Saracen looked and laughed.
“―This day,‖ he said, ―even I know well enough.
This is the first day of Christmas,
When your god was born without pain.
For this men make more joy there
Than they do here in heathen lands.
Honor your God, as I do mine,
Both Mohammad and Apollon!”
Bevis replied to the Saracen,
―I have known Christianity before.
I have seen on this very day
Many a noble knight armed
Tourneying right on the field
With bright helmets and many shields.
And if I were as strong in my time
As Guy, my father, ever was,
I would for the love of my Lord,
Who sits high above in Heaven,
Fight with each one of you
Before I went from here!”

18 *Sligh*: The word here probably does not have the modern nuance of being devious, but rather that Josanne was either prudent or quick-witted. In the Auchinleck *Horn Childe and Maiden Rimmil*d the poet says of Acula, the Irish king’s daughter, that “of woundes was sche sleiʒ” (761). See also *Gamelyn* (556).

19 *Seve winter old*: As with counting days in *nights*, ME also rather pessimistically counts years in winters.

20 *Jousting* and *tourneying* were popular games during Christmas celebrations. Here Bevis feels stung into pious fervor when the Saracens know more about Christianity than he does and make him an object of ridicule. Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript*
The Saracen said to his fellows,
“Well, brothers, do you hear these tales,
How the young Christian dog
Says that he will fell us to the ground?
Will we take him on
And see if we can slay the traitor?”
They began to press him all around
And struck hard on him,
Giving him many a wound
Through the flesh to the bone,
Wounds deep and sore,
So that he might not suffer any longer.
Though his body began to hurt,
He plucked up his courage.
He turned as quickly to a Saracen
And seized the sword from his hand,
And he gave fifty Saracens
Deadly wounds at that time.
With some he struck off their necks
So that the head flew into the river,
And some he cut down in two,
So that they lay under their horse’s feet.
There were none who might escape
As Bevis killed them in his haste.
The steeds ran home to the stable
Without guidance from any man.
Bevis turned to ride home,
His wounds bleeding from each side.
He stabled the horse right away
And went into his bedchamber
And laid himself flat on the ground
To calm his heart in that place.
Word came to King Ermine
That Bevis had slaughtered his men.
The king cursed and gave his ruling
That for them he should be quartered.
The maiden Josanne stood up
And said to her father,
“Sire, I know very well in my mind
That by Mohammad or Tervagaunt,
He did not slay your men
Unless it was in self-defense!
But father,” she said, “by my opinion,
Before you put Bevis to death,
I pray, sire, if you love me,
Have the boy brought before you.
When the youth, who is so daring,
Has explained his own story,
And you know the truth, indeed,

(New York: Routledge, 2005), 56. Josanne is perhaps wrong in calling Bevis’ actions self-defence (660), although for the men to answer his rhetoric with an attack of fifty against one does not seem justified.
Who hath the wrong, who hath right,
Yef him his dom, that he schel have,
Whether thow wilt him slen or save!"

King Ermyn seide: "Me doughter fre,
Ase thow havest seid, so it schel be!"

Josiane tho anon rightes
To Beves now wende ye
And prai him, that he come to me:
Er me fader arise fro his des;
Ful wel ich schel maken is pes!"

Forth the knightes gone gon,
To Beves chaumber thai come anon
And praide, ase thow was gentil man,
Come speke with Josian.

Beves stoutliche in that stounde
Haf up is heved fro the grounde;
With stepe eighen and rowe bren
So lotheliche he gan on hem sen,
The twei knightes, thar thai stode,
Thai were aferde, hii wer nigh wode.

A seide: "Yif ye ner masegers,
Ich wolde yow sle, losengers!
I nele rise o fot fro the grounde,
For speke with a heathen hound
She is as much a dog as you are!
Get out of my chaumber swithe ye fle!

"The knightes wenten out in rape,
Thai were fain so to ascape.
To Josian thai wente as tit
And seide: "Of him is gret despit:
Sertes, a clepede thee hethene hound
Thries in a lite stounde
We nolde for al Ermonie
Eft sones se him with our eie!"

"Hardeliche," she seide, "cometh with me,
And ich wyle your warrant be!"

Forth thai wente al isame,
To Beves chaumber that he came.
"Lemman," she seide, "gent and fre,
For Godes love, spek with me!"

She keste him bothe moth and chin
And yaf him confort gode afin,
So him solaste that mai,
That al is care wente awai,
And seide: "Lemman, thin ore!
Icham iwonded swithe sore!"

"Lemman," she seide, "with gode entent
Ichave brought an oyniment,
Of who was wrong and who was right,
Then give him judgment, what he will have,
Whether you will kill or spare him!"

King Ermine answered, "My noble daughter,
It will be as you have said."

Josanne then immediately
Called to her two knights:
"Go now to Bevis
And implore that he come to me
Before my father rises from his throne.
I will make a full peace!"

The knights went forth
And soon came to Bevis’ chamber
And asked, if he was a gentleman,
To come speak with Josanne.

At that moment Bevis lifted up his head
From the ground with determination.
With shining eyes and fiery brows
He looked so loathsome to them
That the two knights who stood there
Were afraid; they nearly panicked.
He said, "If you were not messengers,
I would slay you, you lying weasels!
I will not rise one foot from the ground
To speak with a heathen hound.
She is as much a dog as you are!
Get out of my chamber right now!"

The knights scurried out in haste,
They were so eager to get away.
They went to Josanne as quickly
And said, "He is very contemptuous.
For sure, he called you a heathen hound
Three times in a short while.
For all of Armenia, we would not
Face him again with our own eyes!"

"Be brave," she said, "and come with me,
And I will be your guarantor."

They went out all together
To Bevis’ bedchamber.
"Dear heart," she said, "noble and generous,
For God’s love, talk to me."

She kissed him on the mouth and chin
And at length comforted him well.
The maid gave him such solace
That all his anxieties went away,
And he said, "Darling, your grace.
I am wounded very badly."

"Dearest," she said, "in good faith,
I have brought a medication

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21 A slightly comic moment if the messengers are so meek that they need a young woman’s ‘protection,’ but it also emphasizes Josanne’s authority in the court and her assertiveness.
For make thee bothe hol and fere;  
Wende we to me fader dere!”
Forth thai wenten an highing
Til Ermyn, the riche king,
And Beves tolde unto him than,
How that stour ended and gan,
And schewed on him in that stounde
Fourti grete, grisli wounde.
Thanne seide King Ermin the hore:
“I nolde, Beves, that thow ded wore
For al the londes, that ichave;
Ich praie, doughter, that thow him save
And prove to hele, ase thow can,
The wondes of that doughti man!”
In to chaumber she gan him take
And riche bathes she let him make,
That withinne a lite stonde
He was bothe hol and sonde.
Thanne was he ase fresch to fight,
So was the faukoun to the flight.
His other prowesse who wile lere,
Hende, herkneth, and ye mai here!
A wilde bor thar was aboute,
Ech man of him hadde gret doute.
Man and houndes, that he tok,
With his toskes he al toschok.
Thei him honted ten knightes tene,
Tharof ne yef he nought a bene,
At is mouth fif toskes stoden out,
Everich was fif enches about,
His sides wer hard and strong,
Himself was fel and kouthe fighte,
No man sle him ne mighte.
Beves lay in is bédde a night
And thoughte, a wolde kethen is might
Upon that swin himself one,
That no man scholde with him gone.
A morwe, whan hit was dai cler,
Ariseth knight and squier;
Beves let sadlen is ronsi,
To make you both whole and sound.
Let’s make our way to my dear father.”
They went forth quickly
To Ermine, the rich king,
And Bevis then explained to him
How the conflict began and ended,
And showed him at that moment
Forty huge, grisly wounds.
Then grey-haired King Ermine said,
“Bevis, I wouldn’t have you dead
For all the lands that I have!
I pray, daughter, that you can save him
And heal the wounds of this sturdy man
If you are able.”
She took him into a chamber
And made him luxurious baths,
So that within a short time
He was both whole and sound.
Then he was as fresh to battle
As the falcon is to flight.
His other feat of prowess, whoever wishes
To know, listen, gentlemen, and you will hear.
A wild boar which was charging about
Put great fear into every man.
Men and hounds, whatever it seized,
With its tusks it shook it apart.
Ten knights hunted it
And it didn’t care a bean about it.
From its mouth five tusks stood out;
Each was five inches wide.
Its sides were hard and strong,
And its bristles were great and long.
It was fierce and knew how to fight.
No man could slay it!
Bevis lay in his bed at night
And resolved that he would prove his might
Alone against that swine,
That no man should go with him.
In the morning, when the day was clear,
The knight and his squire arose.
Bevis had his horse saddled.

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22 The modern belief that the medieval Europeans disliked or prohibited bathing dies hard. While the church was concerned with the temptations of public nudity, frequent bathing itself for cleanliness or socializing was common until the Renaissance. See Jennifer A. Heise, “A Short History of Bathing Before 1601,” accessed 21 May 2010 at http://www.gallowglass.org/jadwiga/herbs/baths.html. The connection between hygiene and infectious wounds may not have been clearly understood, but there is an interesting account in the autobiography (Kitab al i’tibar) of Usmah Ibn Munqidh (1095-1188) where he observes a Frankish doctor treating an infected leg with vinegar. Actual Islamic medical techniques were considerably more advanced than European practices.

23 *Ronsi*: A *rouncey* was a good all-purpose horse, perfectly fitting for a young warrior and less expensive than warhorses such as the *courser*. 

145
That bor a thoughte to honti,
A gerte him with a gode brond
And tok a speere in is hond,
A scheld a heng upon is side,
Toward the wode he gan ride.
Josian, that maide, him beheld,
Al hire love to him she feld;
To hire self she seide, ther she stod:
“Ne kepte I never more gode
Ne namore of al this worldes blisse,
Thanne Beves with love o time te kisse;
In gode time were boren,
That Beves hadde to leman koren!”
Tho Beves in to the wode cam,
His scheld aboute is nekke a nam
And tide his hors to an hei thorn
And blew a blast with is horn;
Thre motes a blew al arowe,
That the bor him scholde knowe.
Tho he com to the bor is den,
A segh ther bones of dede men,
The bor hadde slawe in the wode,
Ieten here flesch and dronke her blode.
“Aris!” queth Beves, “corsede gast,
And yem me bataile wel in hast!”
Sone so the bor him
sigh,
A rerde is brosteles wel an high
And starede on Beves with eien holwe,
Also a wolde him have aswolwe;
And for the bor yenede so wide,
A spere Beves let to him glide;
On the scholder he smot the bor,
His spere barst to pises thore
The bor stod stille ayen the dent,
His hyde was harde ase eni flent.
Now al to-borst is Beves spere,
A drough his swerd, himself to were,
And faught ayen the bor so grim,
A smot the bor and he to him.
Thus the bataile gan leste long
Til the time of evesong,
That Beves was so weri of foughte,
That is lif he ne roughte,
And tho the bor was also,
Awai fro Beves he gan go,
Wile Beves made is praier
To God and Mari, is moder dere,
Whather scholde other slen.
Intending to hunt that boar.
He armed himself with a good sword
And took a spear into his hand.
Hanging a shield upon his side,
He rode toward the woods.
Josanne, the maid, looked on him
And felt all her love for him surge.
She said to herself where she stood,
“I wouldn’t care for any thing,
Or any more of the world’s joys,
More than to kiss Bevis once with love.
She who Bevis chose as his lover
Was born in a happy moment!”
When Bevis came into the woods,
He placed his shield about his neck
And tied his horse to a high tree,
And blew a blast with his horn.
He blew three notes in a row
So that the boar would hear him.
When he found the boar’s den,
He saw the bones of dead men
The swine had slain in the woods,
Eating their flesh and drinking their blood.
“Get up,” shouted Bevis, “cursed spirit,
And give me battle right now!”
As soon as the boar saw him,
It hastily reared up its bristles
And stared at Bevis with hungry eyes,
As if they could swallow him.
And when the boar’s mouth gaped wide,
Bevis let fly a spear toward it.
He struck the boar on the shoulder,
And his spear burst to pieces there.
The boar stood motionless against the blow;
His hide was as hard as any flint.
When Bevis’ spear was shattered,
He drew his sword to protect himself
And fought against the forbidding beast.
He hit the boar and was struck in turn.
Thus the battle lasted a long while
Until the time of sunset,
So that Bevis was so tired from fighting
That he cared nothing for his life.
And when the boar was also weary,
It began to move away from Bevis
While Bevis made his prayer
To God and Mary, His dear mother,
Whether he should slay the other.

24 This rendering is a contextual guess, as the poet has created a rather confusing mélange. Bevis is the most difficult of my texts here, and Kölberg complains that it is the hardest text to establish among medieval romances. He helps clarify lines 766-70 with eight variant MSS readings (Beues, 37).
With that the boar came back
And bent its bristles up, without fail,
To fight on against Bevis.
Out of either side of its mouth
The foam spewed out strangely.
And at that same place,
Through God’s grace and His virtue,
Bevis sliced off two tusks
With his sword at the first stroke.
He had cut off a hand’s length
Of its snout with his blade.
Then the boar cried out loudly,
Out of the forest far and wide,
To the castle where Ermine lay.
Men heard the noise of the swine.
And as it made that hideous cry,
Bevis hastily thrust his sword
Into its mouth
And carved its heart neatly into two.
He brandished the sword again swiftly
And struck off the boar’s head.
And on the handle of his spear
He stuck the head to carry it.
Then he put the horn to his mouth
And blew the well-known signal for victory.
So pleased he was with his hunting,
He decided to bring the head to Josanne.
But before he came to the fair maid,
He was so resolute to defend his head
And save himself from death
That he would endure plenty of sword strokes.
King Ermine had a steward
Who had hoped to slay that swine.
He had great jealousy of Bevis
For having the victory.
He had his stout knights armed,
Twenty four in a row,
And took ten foresters as well,
And went to the woods, so says the book.
Bevis knew nothing of this.
May God, who created all things, help him!
Along his path he rode step by step
And came upon a awful sight
As he passed by in amity and peace.
The steward cried, “Lay on and kill!”
Bevis saw them rush to him.
He would have drawn his sword,
But he had left it back there
Where he had slain the boar.
He had nothing to defend himself
But the handle of a spear.
Though Bevis was sorely dismayed,
He took the head from the handle
And fought with the swine’s head.
And wan a sword of miche maught,  
That Morgelai was cleped, aught.  
Beter sword bar never knight.  
Tho Beves hadde that sword an hond,  
Among the hethene knightes a wond,  
And sum upon the helm a hitte,  
In to the sadel he hem slitte,  
And sum knight Beves so ofraught,  
The heved of at the ferste draughte,  
So harde he gan to lein aboute  
Among the hethene knightes stoute,  
That non ne pasede hom, aught;  
So thurgh the grace of God almight  
The kinges stiward a hitte so,  
That is bodi a clef a to.  
The dede kors a pulte adoun  
And lep himself in to the arsoun.  
That strok him thoughte wel iset  
For he was horsed meche bet.  
He thoughte make pes doun rightes  
Of the forsters ase of the knightes;  
To hem faste he gan ride;  
Thai gonne schete be ech a side,  
So mani arwes to him thai sende,  
Unnethe a mighte himself defende,  
So tho is a lite stounde  
The ten forsters wer feld te grounde,  
And hew hem alle to pices smale:  
So hit is fonde in Frensche tale.  
Josian lai in a castel  
And segh that sconfit everich del.  
“O Mahoun,” she seide, “oure drighte,  
What Beves is man of meche mighte!  
Al this world yif ich it hedde,  
Ich him yeve me to wedde;  
Boute he me love, icham ded.  
Swete Mahoun, what is thee red?  
Lovesielding me hath becought,  
Thar-of wot Beves right nought,”  
Thus that maide made hire mon,  
Where she stood in the tour al on,  
And Beves thar the folk beleved  
And wente hom with the heved;  
That heved of that wilde swin  
He presente to Kin Ermin.  
The king thar-of was glad and blithe  
And thankede him ful mani a sithe,  
Ac he ne wiste ther of nowight,  
How is stiward to dethe was dight.  
Thre yer after that bataile,  
That Beves the bor gan asaile,  
A king ther com in to Ermonie  
And thoughte winne with meistrie  
Josiane, that maide bright,
That loved Bevis with all her might.
Brademond crieth, as he were mad,
To King Ermine, there a stood:
“King!” said he very abruptly,
“Give me your daughter for my wife!
If you refuse me, without fail,
I will win her by battle.
I will attack you on many sides.
I will destroy all your lands.
And slay you, if it so happens,
And lay with you in the night.
And after, I will give your daughter
To some worn-out carter!”
Ermine answered proudly at once,
“By Mohammed, sir, you will be proved a liar!”
He went down from his tower
And sent for all of his knights,
And told them how Brademond had threatened him,
And asked them all what they advised.
Then that bright maiden spoke a word:
“By Mohammed, sire, if Bevis were a knight,
He would defend you well enough.
I saw myself when he defeated your own steward, who set upon him.
Bevis met him alone in the forest.
He left his sword behind in the woods
Where he had struck off the boar’s head.
He had nothing to defend himself with but the handle of his spear.
And your steward had many people;
He led twenty-four knights,
All armed to the teeth
And all sworn to his death,
With ten foresters from the woods
Brought there with him, equally ready.
They planned to slay him there
And take the boar’s head
And give the steward the glory.
When Bevis saw that foul villainy,
He went at them with the boar’s head
Until they were knocked down.
And on that day he took from the steward
His good sword Morgelai.
He destroyed the ten foresters as well.
And came home when he no longer had to fear them.”
King Ermine then swore his oath
That Bevis should be made a knight.

TEAMS notes that Brademond threatens to deflower Josanne and then pass her on to someone in the lower classes, a humiliating disgrace and the first of many threats to her virginity.

931 is an especially long line and begins here at the tail of 930.
His baner to bere in that fight.  
And seide: “Knight ich wile thee make.  
Thow schelt bere in to bataile  
Me baner, Brademond to asaile!”  
Beves anserwe with blithe mod:  
“Blethelich,” a seide, “be the Rod!”  
King Ermin tho anon righte  
Dobbeye Beves unto knighte  
And yaf him a scheld gode and sur  
With thre egen of asur,  
The champe of gold ful wel idight  
With fif lables of selver brig;  
Site the gerte him with Morgelay,  
A gonfanoun wel stout and gay  
Josian him broughte for to bere.  
Sent of the scheld, I yow swere!  
Beves dede on is actoun,  
Hit was worth mani a toun;  
An hauberk him broughte that mai,  
So seiden alle that hit isai:  
Hit was wel iwrought and faire,  
Non egge tol mighte it nought paire.  
After that she yaf him a stede,  
That swithe gode was at nede,  
For hit was swift and ernede wel.  
Me clepede hit Arondel.  
Beves in the sadel lep,  
His ost him folwede al to hep  
With baner bright and scheldes schene,  
The ferste scheld trome Beves nam.  
Brademond aghenes him cam;  
That he ne fel ded to the grounde.  
“Reste thee,” queth Beves, “hethen hundle  
That he hadde beter atom than here!”  
“Lay on faste!” a bad his fere.  
Tho laide thai on with eger mod  
And slowe Sarsins, as hii wer wod,

And to bear his banner in the fight.  
He called Bevis for that reason  
And said, “I will make you a knight.  
You will carry my banner  
Into the battle to attack Brademond!”27  
Bevis answered with high spirits:  
“With joy,” he said, “by the Cross!”  
King Ermine then straightaway  
Dubbed Bevis a knight  
And gave him a shield, firm and sure,  
With three azure eagles,  
With the front finely ornamented with gold,  
With five ribbons of bright silver.  
Then he armed himself with Morgelai,  
And a banner, sturdy and bright  
That Josanne brought for him to wear.  
She was a saint of the shield, I swear to you.  
Bevis put on his jacket;  
It was worth many a town.  
The maiden brought him a mail shirt.  
All who saw it said  
It was well-crafted and handsome.  
No edge would sever it.  
After that she gave him his steed  
That would be so good in times of need,  
For it was swift and ran well.  
Men called it Arondel.  
Bevis leaped into the saddle.  
His host followed him in a group,  
With bright banners and shining shields,  
Thirty thousand and fifteen more.  
Bevis headed the first shield vanguard  
As Brademond came against him.  
His banner bore King Redfoun,  
Who believed in Mohammad.  
He was as rough as a shepherd;  
Bevis took careful note of him  
And struck Arondel with golden spurs.  
The horse knew what it was meant to do.  
Bevis rode out against Redfoun  
And struck him on both sides.  
Neither mailshirt, shield, nor jacket  
Helped him any more than a button,  
So that he fell dead to the ground.  
“Reste yourself,” said Bevis, “heathen hound!  
You were better off at home than here.  
Lay on faste!” he commanded his army.  
They attacked with keen vigor  
And killed Saracens as though they were berserk,

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27 *Me baner*: As in 574, Ermine is not proposing that Sir Bevis be a mere herald, but to carry a standard with his coat of arms; in effect, to be a commander leading his division.
And Sire Beves, the Cristene knight,
Slough ase mani in that fight
With Morgelay himself alone,
Ase thai deden everichon
And ever hii were to fighte prest
Til that the sonne set in the west.
Beves and is ost withinne a stounde
Sixti thosent thai felde to grounde,
That were out of Dameske isent,
That never on homward ne went;
Tho Brademond segh is folk islayn,
A flegh awei
with mighte and mayn.
Ase he com ride be a cost,
Twei knightes a fond of Beves ost;
Of his stede he gan doun lighte
And bond hem bothe anon righte,
And thoughte hem lede to his prisoun
And have for hem gret raunsoun.
Ase he trosede hem on is stede,
Beves
of hem nam gode hede,
And hasteliche in that tide
After Brademond he gan ride
And seide: “Brademond, olde wreche,
Ertow come Josiane to feche?"
Erst thow schelt pase thourgh min hond
And thourgh Morgelay, me gode brond!”
Withouten eni wordes mo
Beves Brademond hitte so
Upon is helm in that stounde,
That a felde him flat to grounde.
“Merci!” queth Bradmond, “ich me yelde,
Recreaunt to thee, in this felde,
So harde thee smitest upon me kroun,
Ich do me all in the bandoun,
Sixti cites with castel tour
Thin owen, Beves, to thin onour,
With that thow lette me ascape!”
Beves answerde tho in rape:
“Nay!” a seide, “be sein Martyn!
Icham iswore to King Ermin.
Al that ich do, it is his dede;
Tharfore, sire, so God me spede,
Thow schelt swere upon the lay,
Thow schelt werre on him night ne day,
And omage eche yer him yelde
And al the londe of him helde!”

And Sir Bevis, the Christian knight,
Slaughtered as many men in that battle,
With Morgelai himself alone,
As did everyone else.
They were continually pressed to the fight
Until the sun set in the west.
Bevis and his host, within that time
Fell sixty thousand to the ground
Who were sent from Damascus
And who never went home again.
When Brademond saw his men dead,
He fled away with his army and followers.
As he went riding by the coast,
He found two knights of Bevis’ host.
He alighted from his horse
And bound them both tightly,
Intending to take them to his prison
And hold them for great ransom.  
As he trussed them on his steed,
Bevis took careful note of them
And hastily began to ride
After Brademond.
He said, “Brademond, you old wretch,
Aren’t you coming to fetch Josanne?
First you will pass through my hand
And through Morgelai, my good sword!”
Without any more words
Bevis bludgeoned Brademond so hard
On his helmet in that moment
That he threw him flat to the ground.
“Mercy!” said Brademond. “I surrender,
Defeated by you on this field!
You have hit me so hard on the head
I yield over to you
Sixty cities with castle towers
To be your own, Bevis, to your honor,
Providing that you let me go.”
Bevis answered immediately,
“No,” he replied, “by Saint Martin.
I am sworn to King Ermine.
All that I do is his accomplishment.
Therefore, sir, so help me God,
You will swear upon the law
To neither by night or day wage war against him,
And to yield homage to him
And all the lands in his dominion each year.”

28 The capturing of prisoners for ransom was common on medieval European warfields, and Chaucer himself was held in 1360 for £16, about US$8500 in modern currency according to the UK National Archives (accessed 24 May 2010 at http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/). A knight would have been worth substantially more. Military leaders began to complain about mercenaries more interested in lining their pockets than fighting, and the poet has a scolding tone here for Brademond’s opportunism.
Brademond answered straightaway,
“I pledge my word to you,
That I will never do him harm
Nor bear arms against you, Bevis.”
And when he had sworn in this way,
Bevis let King Brademond go.
Alas that he did not slay him
And bring a close to his life’s days!
For later, despite all his fair promises,
He made Bevis fast for many a day
In his prison, for seven years,
As you may hear from here on.
Bevis rode home and began to sing
And said to Ermine, the king:
“Sire, Brademond, King of the Saracens,
Has become one of yours.
The man is under your command
While his life lasts.
Lands and people, all that he has,
He says he holds them, my lord, by you.”
Then King Ermine at that time
Was very glad in his heart.
He called his daughter and said,
“Josanne, fair maid.
Unarm Bevis before dinner
And serve him there yourself.”
Then that maid never rested
Until she came to her lodging
Where she bedded down at night.
There she set that noble knight
And herself gave him water to his hands
And set before him all he requested.
When Bevis had eaten his fill
And sat on the maiden’s bed,
That woman who was so radiant in color
Thought she would reveal her heart.
She said, “Bevis, dear, your favor!
I have loved you so ardently that
I surely know no other course.
I am dead unless you love me
And unless you do as you wish with me!”
“By God,” he vowed, “I cannot do that.
You might have someone better.”

29 So bright of hiwe: ME seems to be rich in terms for female beauty related to light reflection, such as bright in bours. Beauty itself is an import (Old French biauté, Latin bellus) and OE used sciene. As late as 1596 Spenser’s Faerie Queene praises Una’s “sunshyny face” (I.12.200). Millward speculates that OE was rich in adjectives for light and weak in ones of hue because of England’s cloudy climate and scarcity of dyes. Celia M. Millward, A Biography of the English Language (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 108.
Brademond the king, who is so rich.
In all this world there is no man,
Prince, king, or sultan
Who wouldn’t want you as a wife
If he gazed on you once.

And I am a knight from an unknown land.
I have no more than what I stand in,
Neither here nor in my keep,
Unless I win it with the edge of my sword."

And I am a knight of uncouth land
I have no more than what I stand in,
Neither here nor in my keep,
Unless I win it with the edge of my sword.

“Mercy!” she said. “For all that,
I would rather have you as my lover,
Your body in your shirt naked,
Than all the gold that God has made,
And you know that you feel the same.”

“By God,” Bevis replied, “I will never do it!”
She fell down and wept bitterly:
“You just told the truth there.
In all this world there is no man,
Prince, king, or sultan
Who wouldn’t have me as wife,
If he looked on me once.
And you, peasant, reject me.
May Mohammed give you pain and suffering!
It would be better for the likes of you
To clean an old ditch
Than to be dubbed a knight
To walk beside sunny maidens!
You can go to another country;
May Mohammed give you trouble and woe!”

“Madam,” he said, “you speak unjustly.
My father was both earl and knight.
How then could I be a peasant
When my father was knight and earl?
I’ll go to another country then.
You will never see me again.
You gave me a horse—well, bring it here!
I want no more of your court games.”
Sir Bevis went out
And took lodging in the town,
Sorely annoyed and ashamed,
For she had so angered him.
When Bevis had gone to town,
Then the maiden’s woes began.

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**Notes:**

30 *Her is, a seide, min unliche*: “There is someone unlike me.” Kölb erg has the variant *Thou maiste have one me on-liche* (875) in a printed copy by Richard Pyson (1520) now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. In Kölb erg, *Beues*, 52.

31 MS of Egerton 2862 and Royal Library, Naples, XIII, B 29. In Kölb erg, *Beues*, 52. The sense of these lines is that Sir Bevis is suspicious of Brademond and argues that Josanne will be fickle because of her beauty and because of his poverty. The addition also helps explain Josanne’s furious reply.
| 1140 | Thanne was hire wo with alle,  
Hire thoughte, the tour wolde on hir falle.  
She clepede hire chaumberlein Bonefas  
And tolde to him al hire cas  
And bad him to Beves wende:  
“And sai him, ich wile amende  
Al togedre of word and dede,  
Of that ichave him misede!”  
Forth wente Bonefas in that stounde  
And Beves in is chaumber a founde  
And seide, she him theder sende,  
And that she wolde alle amende  
Al togedres to is wille,  
Bothe loude and eke stille.  
Thanne answerde Beves the fer:  
―Sai, thow might nought speden her!  
Ac for thow bringest fro hire mesage,  
I schel thee yeve to the wage  
A mantel whit so melk:  
The broider is of Tuli selk,  
Beten abouten with red  
e golde,  
The king to were, thegh a scholde!‖  |
| 1150 | She was so despondent in every way,  
She thought the tower would fall on her.  
She called her chamberlain, Boniface,  
And told him all her troubles  
And asked him to go to Bevis:  
“And tell him, I will make amends,  
In word and deed together,  
All that I spoke falsely about him.”  
Boniface went out at that moment  
And found Bevis in his room;  
He said she had sent him there  
And that she would amend everything  
In harmony with his will,  
Both the loud and the quiet.  
Bevis answered politely,  
“If you have nothing to cheer her.  
But for you, for bringing her message,  
I will give you for your wage  
A cloak as white as milk.  
The embroidery is of Toulouse silk,  
Shaped with red gold,  
Fit for a king to wear if he should.”  |
| 1160 | Thanne answerde Beves the fer:  
“Sai, thow might nought speden her!  
Ac for thow bringest fro hire mesage,  
I schel thee yeve to the wage  
A mantel whit so melk:  
The broider is of Tuli selk,  
Beten abouten with red  
e golde,  
The king to were, thegh a scholde!‖  |
| 1170 | Bonefas him thankede yerne,  
Hom aghen he gan terne;  
A fond that maide in sorwe and care  
And tolde hire his answare,  
That he ne mighte nought spede  
Aboute hire nede,  
And seide: “Thow haddest unright,  
So te misain a noble knight!”  
―Who yaf thee this ilche wede?‖  
―Beves, that hendi knight!‖ a sede.  
―Allas!‖ she seide, “Ich was to blame  
Whan ich seide him swiche schame,  
For hit nas never a cherles dede,  
To yeve a maseger swiche a wede!  
Whan he nel nought to me come,  
The wei to his chaumber I wil neme,  
And, what ever of me befalle,  
Ich wile wende in to is halle!”  
Beves herde that maide ther -oute.  
Ase yif aslep, he gan to route.  
―Awake, lemman!‖ she seide, “Awake!  
Icham icome, me pes to make.  
Lemann, for the cortesie,  
Spek with me a word or tweie!”  
“Daminesele,” queth Beves thanne,  
“Let me ligge and go the wei henne!  
Icham weri of-foughte sore,  
Ich faught for thee, I nel namore.”  
―Merci,” she seide, “lemman, thin ore!”  
She fel adoun and wep wel sore:  
“Men saith,” she seide, “in olde riote,  
That wimmannes bolt is sone schote.  
Men say,” she cried, “in tavern talk,  
That a woman’s arrow is rashly shot.
Forgem me, that ichave misede,  
And ich wile right now to mede  
Min false godes al forsake  
And Cristendom for thee love take!‖

―In that maner,‖ queth the knight,  
―I graunte thee, me swete wight!‖

And kiste hire at that cordement.  
Tharfore he was negh after schent.

The twei knightes, that he unbond,  
That were in Brademondes hond,  
He made that on is chaumberlain.  
Him hadde be beter, he hadde hem slein!

Thei wente to the king and swor othe:  
―No wonder, sire, if you were angry.  
It’s no wonder if you were aggrieved,  
When Bevis, the wicked infidel,  
Has now deflowered your daughter.

It would be good, sire, if he were executed.”  
They lied, those vermin, in betraying him.  
May they be hanged in hell!

He did nothing more than kiss her once;  
Neither man knew of anything more.

So thus it is truly said,  
And in my rhyme it’s well placed:  
Rescue a thief from the gallows,  
And by all the saints, he will hate you.32

―Alas!‖ cried Ermine, the king.  
―How I sorely regret this news.  
See that he comes before me first.  
He has done so much for me  
That I could not have men harm him  
For all the pagan lands.

But I would gladly be avenged  
If I did not have to see it.”

Then a Saracen spoke up;  
May he have Christ’s curse as well as mine.  
―Sire, for our purposes33  
We will have a letter made quickly  
For Brademond, the strong king;  
And have him deliver the letter there.  
And in the letter you will say  
That he has seduced Josianne.”

When the letter was finished to its end,  
The king sent for Bevis  
And said, “Bevis, you must go at once  
To Brademond, your own man,  
In all leisure and enjoyment.
1240  Thow most him bere this ilche scritt!
        Ac yif yow schelt me letter bere,
        Upon the lai thow schelt me swere,
        That thow me schelt with no man mele,
        To scheewe the prente of me sele!"
       “I wile,” queth Beves ase snel,
        “The letcr bere treuliche and wel;
        Have ich Arondel, me stede,
        Ich wile fare in to that thede,
        And Morgelai, me gode bronode,

1250  Ich wile wende in to that londe!
        King Ermin seide in is sawe,
        That ner no mesager is lawe,
        To ride upon an hevi stede,
        That swiftli scholde don is nede.
        “Ac nim a lighter hakenai
        And lef her the swerd Morgelai,
        And thow schelt come to Brademonde
        Sone withinne a lite stounde!”
        Beves an hakenai bestrit
        And in his wei forth a rit
        And bereth with him is owe
        ne deth,
        Boute God him helpe, that alle thing seth!

1260  And in his wei forth a rit
        And bereth with him is owene deth,
        Boute God him helpe, that alle thing seith!
        Terne we aghen, thar we wer er,
        And speke we of is em Saber!
        After that Beves was thus sold,
        For him is hertte was ever cold.
        A clepede to him his sone Terri
        And bad him wenden and aspie
        In to everi londe
        fer and ner,
        Whider him ladde the maroner,
        And seide: “Sone, thoart min owen,
        Wel thow canst the lord knowen!
        Ich hote thee, sone, in alle manere,
        That thow him seche this seve yer.
        Ich wile feche him, mowe thow him fynde,
        Though he be byende Inde!”
        Terri, is sone, is forth ifare,
        Beves a soughte everiwhare;
        In al hethenes nas toun non,

1270  That Cristene man mighte ther in gon,
        That he ne hath Beves in isought,
        Ac he ne kouthe finde him nought.
        So hit be fel upon a cas,
        That Terri com beside Damas;
        And ase he com forth be that stede,
        A sat and dinede in a wede
        Under a faire medle tre,
        That Sire Beves gan of-see.

1280  You must bear this document here.
        But if you are to carry this letter,
        You must swear to me upon the law
        That you will not contrive with any man
        To show the imprint of my seal."
        “I will,” Bevis said just as swiftly.
        “Bear the letter faithfully and well.
        I have Arondel, my steed.
        I will travel to that country,
        And with Morgelai, my good sword,
        I will pass into that land.”
        King Ermine said in his speech
        That it was never customary for a messenger
        To ride upon a heavy charger
        In order to speedily accomplish his needs.
        “But take a lighter riding horse
        And leave the sword Morgelai here,
        And you will come to Brademond
        Soon within a short while.”
        Bevis mounted a hackney horse
        And rode forth on his way
        Bearing with him his own death,
        Unless God helps him, who sees all things.
        Let’s turn again to where we were before,
        And talk about his uncle Saber.
        After the time that Bevis was sold,
        His heart was forever heavy over him.
        He called his son Terry to him
        And asked him to go and search
        In every land, near and far,
        For where the sailors had brought him.
        He said, “Son, you are my own blood.
        You will easily recognize the man.
        I am asking you, son, to search for him
        In every way for seven years.
        I will bring him back if you find him,
        Even if he is beyond India!”
        Terry, his son, set forth
        To search for Bevis everywhere.
        In all the heathen lands there was no town
        Where a Christian man could travel
        In which he did not search for Bevis,
        But he could not find him.
        So it happened by chance
        That Terry arrived near Damascus.
        And as he traveled near that place,
        He sat in his armor and ate
        Under a fair crab-apple tree
        Which Sir Bevis came to notice.

34 The king is asking Bevis, who presumably is not literate, to promise not to have the letter read to him.
Wax seals were typically used until personal signatures became common in the modern period.
“Sire,” queth Terri, “for Sein Juline! Is it thee wille, come nere and dine!”
Beves was of-hongred sore
And kouthe him gret thank therfore,
For twai dawes he hadde ride
Fastande in that ilche wede.
The palmer nas nought withouten store,
Inough a leide him before,
Bred and flesc out of is male
And of his flaketes win and ale
Whan Beves hadde eten gret foisoun
Terri askede at Sire Bevoun,
Yif a herde telle yong or olde
Of a child, that theder was solde.
His name was ihote Bevoun
Ibore a was at South-Hamtoun.
Beves beheld Terri and lough,
And seide, a knew that child wel inough:
―Hit is nought,‖ a seide, ―gon longe,
I segh the Sarsins that child anhonge!‖
Terri fel ther doun and swough,
His her, his clothes he al to-drough.
Whan he awok and speke mighte,
Sore a wep and sore sighte
And seide: ―Allas, that he was boren!
Is me lord Beves forloren!‖
Beves tok him up at that cas
And gan him for to solas:
―Wend hom,‖ a seide, ―to thee contré!
Sai the frendes so ichave thee.
Though thow him seche thes seve yer,
You were never nearer the man!‖
Terri on Beves beheld
And segh the boiste with a scheld.
―Me thenketh, thow ert a masager,
That in this londe walkes her;
Icham a clerk and to scole yede:
Sire, let me the letter rede,
For thow might have gret doute,
Thin owene deth to bere aboute!‖
Beves seide, ich understonde:
―He, that me tok this letter an honde,
He ne wolde love me non other,
Than ich were is owene brother.‖
Beves him thankede and thus hii delde.
Terri wente hom and telde

His father Saber in the Isle of Wight
How he was told by a noble knight,
While he was there, that Saracens
Had killed Bevis and hanged him.
Saber wept and mourned him,
For he was the boy’s uncle.
And each year upon a certain day
He asserted his heritage
Against the emperor of Germany
With a large baronage.
Let us now leave his uncle Saber
And speak of Bevis, the messenger.
Sir Bevis went forth
Until he came to the town of Damascus.
About the time of mid-day
He saw a large crowd of Saracens
Coming out of a mosque
Who had been honoring Mohammad.
Bevis dismounted from his horse
And ran immediately to their temple
And slaughtered their priest, who was inside,
And threw their gods into the ditch
And laughed at them all scornfully.
One escaped and ran away
Passing by the castle gate
As the king was sitting at dinner.
―Sire,‖ the said man urgently,
―A cursed man has come here
Who is throwing our gods in the mud
And slaying all our men.
I hardly escaped from the crowd
To bring you the news!‖
Brademond trembled at the table
And said, ―It is Bevis, my lord!‖
Bevis came in past the castle gate,
Leaving his horse there,
And came forth into the hall.
He greeted them all in this manner:
―God, who made the world all round,
Save you, Sir King Brademond,
As well as your companions
That I see now here.
And if that same blessing
Is not at all to your liking,
May Mohammad, your god,
Termagant and Apollyon,
Bless and preserve you
With all of their might!
Look then, King Ermine
Sends you this letter in parchment
And asks that you should quickly do
As the letter instructs you.‖
Bevis knelt and would not stand
And sealed his death with his own hand.

His fader Saber in the Ilde of Wight,
How him tolde a gentil knight,
That Sarsins hadde Beves forfare
And hangede him, while he was thare.
Saber wep and made drem.
For he was the childes em,
And ech yer on a dai certaine
Upon th’emperur of Almaine
With a wel gret baronage
A cleimed his eritage.
Let we now ben is em Saber
And speke of Beves, the maseger!
Forth him wente Sire Bevoun
Til a com to Dames toun;
Aboute the time of middai
Out of a mameri a sai
Sarasins come gret foisoun,
That hadde anoured here Mahoun,
Beves of is palfrei alighte
And ran to her mameri ful righte
And slough here prest, that ther was in,
And threw here godes in the fen
And lough hem alle ther to scorn.
On ascapede and at-orn
In at the castel ghete,
As the king sat at the mete.
―Sire,‖ seide this man at the frome,
―Her is icome a corsede gome,
That throweth our godes in the fen
And sleth al oure men;
Unnethe I scapede among that thring,
For to bringe thee tidi
Brademond quakede at the bord
And seide: ―That is Bevis, me lord!‖
Beves wente in at the castel ghate,
His hors he lefte ther-
And wente forth in to the halle
And grete hem in this manner alle:
―God, that made this world al ronde,
Thee save, Sire King Brademond,
And ek alle thine fere,
That I se now here,
And yif that ilche blessing
Liketh thee right nothing,
Mahoun, that is god thin,
Tervaunta and Apolin,
Thee blessi and dighte
Be alle here mighte!
Lo her, the King Ermin
The sente this letter in parchemin,
And ase the letter thee telleth to,
A bad, thow scholdest swithe do!‖
Beves kneueled and nolde nought stonde
And yaf up is deth with is owene honde.
Brademond quaked with fear.
He undid the letter and began to read,
And found written on that hide
How he should execute Bevis.
Then Brademond addressed the twenty kings
Who were at his banquet that day:
He spoke with treason and with guile:
“All rise,” he said, “for a moment,
Every one of you from the table,
And welcome your gracious lord!”
All of them stood up.
Brademond took Bevis by the hand
And held him tight so that
He would not be able to draw his sword,
And shouted out as if he were mad
To all of them who stood around him:
“If you love me, at this instant,
Bring this man to the ground at once!”
They began to press around him as quickly
As bees around the hive,
So that within a short moment
Bevis was brought to the ground.
Brademond said to him at once,
“Had you not defeated me in battle,
I would not hesitate for anything
To have you hanged before nightfall,
Or else decree as evil an end.
You will languish in my prison
Twenty fathoms under the earth.
There you will have no comfort.
You will not get, until you are dead,
More than a quarter loaf of bread a day.
If you want a drink, it will not be sweet.
You will drink from under your feet!”
He had Bevis bound to a great millstone
That weighed sixty bushels of wheat,
And had him thrown into the prison,
Which went down twenty fathoms deep.
At the cell door Bevis found
A club, which he took in his hand.
He realized it was there
For the snakes that were in the cell.
Now Bevis is at the pit’s bottom.
God bring him up safe and sound!
Now we will speak of Josanne, the maid,
Who came to her father and said,
―Sire,” she asked, “where is Bevis,
That I might not see him for so long a time?”
―Daughter,” he said, “he has journeyed
Back to his land and is living there,
Into his own inheritance,
And has a wife of high parentage,
The king of England’s daughter,
As men have me understand.”
Thanne was that maide wo ynough,  
In hire chaumber hire she drogh  
And wep and seide ever mo,  
That sum tresoun thar was ydo.  
“That me ne telde ord and ende,  
What dai awai whanne a wolde wende.”  
Of Mombraunt the King Yvor,  
A riche king of gret trespore,  
Whan he owhar to werre wolde,  
Fiftene kinges him sewe sch  
Comen a is Josian to wedde;  
Aghen hire fader so a spedde,  
That he hire graunte de to is wive  
And al is londe after is live.  
Tho Josian wiste, she scholde be quen,  
Hit was nought be hire wille; I wen  
Hire were lever have had lasse  
Natheles, now it is so,  
Hire fader wil she moste do,  
Ac ever she seide: “Bevoun,  
Naddestow me never forsake,  
Yif sum tresoun hit nadde make:  
Ac for the love, that was so gode,  
That I lovede ase min hertte blode,  
Ichave,” she seide, “a ring on,  
When hit to that time spedde,  
That Yvor scholde that maide wedde,  
He let sende withouten enseine  
After the Soudan of Babiloine  
And after the fiftene kinge,  
That him scholde omage bringe,  
And bad hem come lest and meste,  
To onoure that meri feste.  
Of that feste nel ich namor telle,  
For to highe with our spelle.  

Then that maid had despair enough.  
In her chamber, she tore out her hair  
And wept and continually cried out  
That some treachery had been done.  
“He didn’t tell me at the start or end  
The day when he would go away.”  
There was a rich king of lavish wealth,  
King Ivor of Mombraunt.  
When he went anywhere to make war,  
Fifteen kings would follow him.  
He came, hoping to marry Josanne.  
He fared so well with her father  
That he granted her as his wife  
And all his land after his passing.  
When Josanne learned she would be queen,  
It was not by her will, I am sure.  
She would have preferred a lower rank  
And to be Bevis’ countess.  
Nonetheless, now it was so,  
And she had to do her father’s will.  
But she continually cried, “Bevis,  
Noble knight of Southhampton,  
You would never have forsaken me  
If some treason had not happened.  
But for your love, which was so good,  
Which I felt like my heart’s own blood,  
I will put,” she said, “a ring on my hand.  
The stone is of such a quality  
That while I have that ring on,  
No man will have his way with me.  
And Bevis,” she vowed, “by God above,  
I will wear it for your love!”  
When the time pressed near  
That Ivor should wed that maid,  
He sent word, without delay,  
To the sultan of Babylon,  
And to the fifteen kings,  
That they should pay respect to him,  
And called for them to come, high and low,  
To honor that merry feast.  
About that feast I will say no more,  
In order to hasten with our story.


37 Mombraunt: Supposedly this is also in Armenia, but Bevis’ comrade tells him not to go to Armenia but north (2040). Again, I cannot find this place if it exists, although it (and King Ivoryn) turns up in legends. See Alfred J. Church, Stories of Charlemagne (London: Seeley & Co., 1902), 363. There are numerous medieval surnames and placenames in France such as Monbran, Monbrant, and Montbran (near Pléboulle, near Brest). As it is evidently a Saracen kingdom it may be in lands nearing Muslim Spain, and there are two additional variations on the placename near Toulouse.
| 1490 | When all the celebrations had finished,  
When the festivities were over,  
Each knight went to his home,  
Men prepared carts and packhorses,  
Knights went with horses and squires,  
And Josanne, with great ceremony,  
Was brought forth in her chariot.  
King Ermine took Arondel  
And had him saddled splendidly.  
He went to Bevis’ room where he had slept  
And took his sword, Morgelai.  
With Arondel again he went  
To King Ivor, and he said thus:  
“Son,” he said, “take this steed,  
The best foal that a man may feed,  
And this sword of shining steel,  
Which belonged to Bevis of Hampton.  
He would not have parted with it,  
Were it in his hand, for all the pagan lands!”  
“Nor will I,” said King Ivor,  
“For all the gold or the treasure  
That you could guard within the city,”  
“Son,” said Ermine, “may it serve you well.”  
Ivor began to ride homeward  
And led Arondel by his side.  
When he was out of Mombrant,  
He swore an oath by Tervagant  
That he would ride into his own city  
Upon Arondel in front of his bride.  
He mounted on Arondel.  
That horse very soon knew  
That Bevis was not upon its back.  
The king soon paid for it painfully.  
It ran over ditch and thorns,  
Through woods and thick grain fields.  
Not for water, not for land,  
Would that steed stop anywhere.  
Finally it threw Ivor down  
And nearly broke the king’s head,  
So that all of his subjects could barely  
Save it from being put to death there.  
And before they could catch that horse,  
They had to trap it with clever tricks.  
You might now hear a wondrous thing.  
After all that, for seven years  
It stood bound in chains.  
No food or drink was laid before it,  
No hay or oats or clear water,  
Except by a rope from a balcony.  
No man dared come near  
Where that horse stood in fetters.  
Now Josanne was a queen,  
And Bevis sat in prison with great hardship,  
As the romance says; there he lay  
Until the hair on his head grew to his feet. |
| 1500 | When all the celebrations had finished,  
When the festivities were over,  
Each knight went to his home,  
Men prepared carts and packhorses,  
Knights went with horses and squires,  
And Josanne, with great ceremony,  
Was brought forth in her chariot.  
King Ermine took Arondel  
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Where that horse stood in fetters.  
Now Josanne was a queen,  
And Bevis sat in prison with great hardship,  
As the romance says; there he lay  
Until the hair on his head grew to his feet. |
| 1510 | That was Bevis of Hamtoun.  
A nolde hit yeve, wer it in is honde,  
Nought for al painim londe!”  
“No ich,” queth the King Yvor,  
“For al the gold ne the tresor,  
That thow might in the cité belouke!”  
“Son,” queth Ermin, “wel mot thee it brouke!”  
Yver gan homward te ride  
And dede lede Arondel be is side.  
Whan he com withoute Mombraunt,  
A swor is oth be Tervagaunt,  
That he wolde in to his cité ride  
Upon Arondel before is bride.  
Arondel thar he bestrit;  
That hors wel sone underyit,  
That Beves nas nought upon is rigge  
The king wel sore scholde hit abegge.  
He ran  
Over wode and thourgh thekke korn;  
For no water ne for no londe,  
Nowhar nolde that stede astonde;  
At the laste a threw Yvor doun  
And al to-brak the kinges kroun;  
That al is kingdom wel unnethe  
Arerede him ther fro the dethe;  
And er hii mighte that hors winne,  
Thai laughte him with queinte ginne.  
A wonderthing now ye may here.  
After al that seve yere  
To rakenteis a stod iteide,  
Nas mete ne drinke before him leid,  
Hey ne oten ne water clere,  
Boute be a kord of a solere.  
No man dorste  
Come him hende,  
Thar that hors stod in bende.  
Now is Josian a quene;  
Beves in prisoun hath grete tene.  
The romounce telleth, ther a set,  
Til the her on is heved grew to is fet;  
When all the celebrations had finished,  
Each knight went to his home,  
Men prepared carts and packhorses,  
Knights went with horses and squires,  
And Josanne, with great ceremony,  
Was brought forth in her chariot.  
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After all that, for seven years  
It stood bound in chains.  
No food or drink was laid before it,  
No hay or oats or clear water,  
Except by a rope from a balcony.  
No man dared come near  
Where that horse stood in fetters.  
Now Josanne was a queen,  
And Bevis sat in prison with great hardship,  
As the romance says; there he lay  
Until the hair on his head grew to his feet. |
| 1540 | Snakes and euetes and oades fale,  
     | How mani, can I nought telle in tale,  
     | That in the prisoun were with him,  
     | That provede ever with her venim  
 | 1550 | To sle Beves, that gentil knight,  
     | Oc, though the grace of God Almighty,  
     | With the tronsoun, that he to prisoun tok,  
     | A slough hem alle, so saith the bok.  
 | 1560 | A fleande nadder was in an hole,  
     | For elde blak ase eni cole;  
     | Unto Beves she gan flinge  
 | 1570 | And in the forehed thoughte him stinge.  
     | Beves was redi with is tronsoun  
     | And smot hire, that she fel adoun.  
     | Upon aghen the nadder rowe  
 | 1580 | And breide awei his right browe;  
     | Tho was Beves sore agreved  
     | And smot the nadder on the heved;  
     | So harde dent he hire yaf,  
     | The brein clevede on is staf.  
 | 1590 | Down fel the nadder, withouten faile,  
     | And smot so Beves with the taile,  
     | That negh a les ther contenaunse,  
     | Almost is lif was in balaunse.  
 | 1600 | Whan he awakede of that swough,  
     | The tronsoun eft to him a drough  
     | And bet hire al to pises smale,  
     | As hit is fonde in Frensche tale.  
 | 1610 | Tho he hadde slawe the foule feneds,  
     | Be that hadde Beves lein in bendes  
     | Seve yer in peines grete,  
 | 1620 | Lite idronke and lasse iete;  
     | His browe stank for default of yeme,  
     | That it set after ase a seme,  
     | Wharthough that maide ne kneu him nought,  
 | 1630 | Whan hii were eft togedre brought.  
     | On a dai, ase he was mad and feint,  
     | To Jesu Crist he made is pleint  
     | And to his moder, seinte Marie,  
     | Reuliche he gan to hem crie:  
 | 1640 | “Lord,” a seide, “Hevene King,  
     | Schepere of erthe and alle thing:  
     | What have ich so meche misglitt,  
     | That thow sext and tholen wilt,  
     | That Thee wetherwines and Thee fo  
 | 1650 | Schel Thee servaunt do this wo?  
     | There were snakes and lizards and toads,  
     | How many, I cannot count,  
     | That were in the prison with him,  
     | That tried to poison Bevis,  
     | That noble knight, with their venom.  
     | But through the grace of God Almighty,  
     | With the club that he had in the prison  
     | He killed them all, so says the book.  
     | A flying adder was in a crevice,  
     | As black as any coal from age.  
     | Toward Bevis she flung herself,  
     | Thinking to sting him in the forehead.  
     | Bevis was ready with the bat  
     | And struck her so that she fell down.  
     | The adder reared up again  
     | And tore away his right eyebrow.  
     | Then Bevis was sorely angered  
     | And cracked the adder on the head.  
     | He gave her such a hard blow  
     | That the brains stuck to the stick.  
     | Down went the adder, without a doubt,  
     | And struck at Bevis with its tail  
     | So that he nearly lost his wits;  
     | His life was almost in the balance.  
     | When he came to from that swoon,  
     | He drew the club back to him  
     | And beat the adder into little pieces,  
     | As it is told in the French tale.  
     | Though he had killed the foul fiends,  
     | Bevis laid there in bonds  
     | For seven years in great pain,  
     | Drinking little and eating less.  
     | His brow smelled for lack of care,  
     | When it became infected and scarred,  
     | So that the maid did not know him  
     | When they were brought together later.  
     | One day, when he was mad and faint,  
     | He made his plea to Jesus Christ  
     | And to His mother, sainted Mary,  
     | Mournfully crying to them:  
     | “Lord,” he said, “Heaven’s king,  
     | Shaper of Earth and all things,  
     | What great sin have I committed  
     | That You see and allow  
     | Your enemies and Your foes  
     | To do such woe to Your servant?  

38 *She gan flinge*: I have rendered Bevis’ encounter with the swine with *it* to avoid pronoun confusion, but ME often uses gendered pronouns for animals.

39 *Seve yer*: As with Biblical sevens and forties, these are poetic and indeterminate lengths of time. Medieval prisons were simply holding cells until punishment was administered, and long sentences were a nineteenth-century development.
Ich bedde Thee, Lord, for Thee pité,
That Thow have merci on me
And yeve grace, hennes to gange
Or sone be drawen other anchange!
Me roughte never, what deth to me come,
With that ich were hennes nome!
The gailers, that him scholde yeme,
Whan hii herde him thus reme,
―Thef! cherl!‖ seide that on tho:
―Now beth thee lif dawes ydo,
For king ne kaiser ne for no sore
Ne sheltow leve no lenger more.‖
Anon rightes with that word
A laumpe he let doun be a cord,
A swerd a tok be his side,
And be the cord he gan doun glide
And smot him with the other hond,
And Beves to the grounde a wond.
―Allas,‖ que th Beves, ―that ilche stounde!
Wo is the man, that lith ybounde
Medel bothe fet and honde!
Tho ich com ferst in to this londe,
Hadde ich had me swerd Morgelay
And Arondel, me gode palfray,
For Dames, nadde be tresoun,
I nolde have yeve a botoun,
And now the meste wreche of alle
With a strok me doth adoun falle,
Bidde ich never with Jesu speke,
Boute ich ther-of may ben awreke!‖
A smot the gailer with is fest,
That is nekke him to berst.
His felawe above gan to crie:
―Highe hider, felawe,‖ queth Beves, ―high e!‖
―Yif thow most have help,‖ a sede,
―Yis!‖ queth Beves, al for gile,
And knette the rop that while
Ase high ase a mighte reche.
Tho queth Beves with reulf speche:
―For the love of Sein Mahoun,
Be the rop glid blive adoun
And help, that this thief wer ded!‖
When he hadde thus ised,
That other gailer no leng abod,
Boute by the rop adoun he glod.
When the rop failede in is hond,
Beves held up that gode bronde
And felde to gronde that sori wight,
Thourghout is bodi that swerd he pight. 
Now er thai ded, the geilers tweie, 
And Bevis lieth to the rakenteie, 
His lif him thoughte al to long, 
Thre daies after he ne et ne drong, 
Tofoare that, for soth to sai 
A was woned, ech other dai 
Of berelof to have a quarter 
To his mete and to his diner; 
And, for is meisters wer bothe ded, 
Thre daies after he ne et no bred. 
To Jesu Crist he bed a bone, 
And He him graunteede wel sone; 
So yerne he gan to Jesu speke, 
That his vetres gonne breke 
And of his medel the grete ston. 
Jesu Crist he thankede anon; 
A wente quik out of prisoun 
Be the rop the gailer com adoun, 
And wente in to the castel right, 
Ac it was aboute the midnight; 
He lokede aboute fer and ner, 
No man wakande ne segh he ther; 
He beheld forther a lite 
To a chaunber under a garite, 
Thr-inne he segh torges ilight; 
Beves wente theder ful right; 
Twelf knightes a fond ther aslepe, 
That hadde the castel for to kepe; 
The chaumber dore a fond unsteke, 
And priveliche he gan in reke 
And armede him in yrene wede, 
The beste, that he fond at nede, 
And gerte him with a gode bronde 
And tok a gode spere in is honde; 
A scheld aboute is nekke he cast 
And wente out of the chaumber in hast. 
Forther a herde in a stable 
Pages fele, withoute fable, 
Ase thai sete in here raging; 
In at the dore Beves gan spring, 
And for thai scholde him nought wrain, 
Under his hond he made him plai. 
And whan the Sarasins wer islawe, 
The beste stede he let forth drawe 
And sadelede hit and wel adight. 
And wente him forth anon right 
And gan to crie with loude steven 
And the porter he gan nevenen: 
“Awake!” a seide, “proude felawe, 
Thow were worthi ben hanged and drawe! 
Highe, the gates wer unsteke, 
Beves is out of prisoun reke, 
And icham sent now for is sake, 
Putting the sword through his body. 
Now the two jailors were dead, 
And Bevis lay there in fetters. 
His life seemed all too long to him. 
For three days after he did not eat or drink. 
Before then, to tell the truth, 
He was used to having 
A quarter of a barley-loaf 
Each other day for his food and dinner. 
And now, as his masters were both dead, 
For three days after he did not eat bread. 
He prayed a plea to Jesus Christ, 
And He very soon granted it to him. 
So fervently did he call on Jesus 
That his fetters began to crack 
Along with the boulder by his waist. 
He immediately thanked Jesus Christ 
And went quickly out of the prison 
On the rope the jailor came down on, 
And went straight into the castle. 
But it was about midnight. 
He looked around near and far; 
He saw no man awake there. 
Further on, he noticed a light 
From a chamber under a watchtower. 
Inside it he saw torches lit. 
Bevis went directly there 
And found twelve knights asleep 
Who were there to guard the castle. 
He found the chamber door unlocked 
And secretly stole in 
And clothed himself in iron armor, 
The best that he could find in his need, 
And fitted himself with a good sword 
And took a firm spear in his hand. 
He threw a shield around his neck 
And went out of the chamber in haste. 
Further on he heard in a stable 
A group of pages, without a lie, 
As they sat in their noisy debauchery. 
Bevis sprang in through the door, 
And so that they could not betray him, 
With his hand he made them fight. 
And when the Saracens were killed, 
He led forth the best steed 
And saddled it and dressed it well. 
He went forth at once 
And began to cry in a loud voice, 
Calling the porter’s name. 
“Wake up,” he shouted, “proud fellow! 
You ought to be hung and quartered. 
Hurry! The gates are unlocked, 
Bevis has escaped out of prison, 
And I am sent now on his account .
The traitour yif ich mighte of-take!"
The porter was al bewaped:
"Allas!" queth he, "is Beves ascaped?"
Up he caste the gates wide,
And Beves bi him gan out ride
And tok is wei ful hastelie
Toward the londe of Ermonie.
He nadde ride in is wei
Boute seve mile of thatcontrei,
He wex asleped wondersore,
He mighte ride no furthermore;
He reinede his hors to a chesteine
And felle aslepe upon the pleine;
And alse a sleepe, in is swevene
Him thoughte, Brademond and kinges seven
Stod over him with swerdes drawe,
Al slepande him wolde han slawe.
Of that sweven he was of-drad;
He lep to hors ase he wer mad,
Towarde Damas agein, aplight!
Now reste we her a lite wight,
And speke we scholle of Brademond.
Amorwe, whan he it hadde ifonde,
That Beves was ascaped so,
In is hertte him was ful wo.
That time be comin acent
Thar was comin parlement,
Er les, barouns, lasse and more,
And fiftene kinges were samned thore.
To hem Brademond tolde thare,
That Beves was fro him ifare,
And bad help with might and main,
For to feche Beves again.
A king thar was swithe fer,
His nam was hote Grander.
An hors he hadde of gret pris,
That was icleped Trinchefis:
For him a yaf selver wight,
Er he that hors have might.
He armede him in yrene wede,
Seve knightes he gan with him lede
And prikede forth on Trenchefis
And wende wenne meche pris;
And Beves sone he gan se,
Ase he rod toward the cité.
"Ayilt thee," a seide, "thow fox welp,
Thee god schel thee nothing help,
For her thoughe min hondes one,
For sothe, thoughe thee lif forgon!"
To see if I might catch the traitor!"
The porter was all befuddled;
"Alas!" he said, "Has Bevis escaped?"
He threw the gates open wide,
And Bevis rode by him
And took his way in great haste
Toward the land of Armenia.
He had ridden on his way no more
Than seven miles from that country
When he grew exceedingly sleepy.
He could not ride any further.
He tied his horse to a chestnut tree
And fell asleep upon the plain.
And as he slept, in his dream,
It seemed that Brademond and seven kings
Stood over him with swords drawn,
Ready to slay him as he was sleeping.
He woke up in dread from that nightmare.
He leaped on his horse as if he were mad,
Toward Damascus again, in fact.
Now let’s pause here a little while,
And we will speak of Brademond.
In the morning, after he found out
That Bevis had escaped so,
He was very troubled at heart.
At that time, by common assent,
There was to be an open parliament.
Earls, barons, high and low,
And fifteen kings were summoned there.
Brademond told them there
That Bevis had escaped from him
And asked their help, with strength and force,
To fetch Bevis back again.
One king there was very ruthless;
His name was Grander.
He had a horse of great worth
Which was named Trinchefis.
He paid its weight in silver for it
Before he could have that horse.
He clothed himself in iron armor.
He led out seven knights alongside him
And spurred forth on Trenchefis,
And thought to win great honor.
He soon spotted Bevis
As he rode toward the city.
"Yield yourself," he cried, "you fox cub.\(^{41}\)
Your god will give you no help now!
For here with my own hands alone,
In truth, you will lose your life."

\(^{41}\) Fox welp: Being called a fox’s cub does not sound very insulting in PDE, but in ME culture animal comparisons were usually negative, and foxes were constant nuisances for livestock farmers.
“So helpe me God!” queth Beves tho,  
“Hit were no meistri, me to slo,  
For this is the ferthe dai agon,  
Mete ne drinke ne bot i non:  
Ac natheles, God it wot,  
Yif ich alle nedes mot,  
Yit ich wile asaie,  
A lite box thee to paie!”

King Grander was of herte grim  
And rod to Beves and he to him;  
And ase thei bothe togedre mete,  
That hit gonnen al to-drive  
Here swerdes drowe knightes stoute  
And fighteth faste, it is no doute;  
The medwe squaughte of her dentes,  
The fur flegh out, so spark o flintes;  
Thus thai leide on in bothe side  
Betwe ne midmorwe and undertide.  
King Grander was agremed strong,  
That Sire Beves him stod so long,  
And with is swerd a hitte is scheld,  
A quarter fel in to the feld,  
Hauberk, plate and aktoun,  
In to Beves forther arsoun  
Half a fot he karf doun right,  
Tho Beves segh that strok of might,  
A seide: “That dent was wel iset,  
Fasten I wile another bet!”

With that word Beves smot doun  
Grander is scheld with is fachoun,  
And is left honde be the wrest,  
Hit flegh awei thourgh help of Crist.  
Tho Grander hadde his scheld ilore,  
He faught ase he wer wode therfore;  
A yaf Beves strokes that tide,  
Non ne moste other abide.  
Beves ther-of was agreged  
And smot of King Grander is heved,  
The dede kors in that throwe  
Fel out over the sadel bowe.  
Tho King Grander was islawe,  
The seve knightes of hethen lawe  
Beves slough that ilche stounde,  
So hit is in Frensch yfounde.  
For nought Beves nolde belave,  
The better hors a wolde have;  
Beves Trenchefis bestrit,  
And pay you with a strike or two!”"  
King Grander was grim at heart  
And rode toward Bevis, and he to him.  
And as they both crashed together,  
Their lances met  
So that they were overtaxed  
And burst into five pieces.

The sturdy knights drew their swords  
And fought closely, there is no doubt.  
The meadow was torn by their strokes;  
The fire flew out, like sparks from flint.  
In this way they battled on both sides  
Between mid-morning and noon.  
King Grander was fiercely angered  
That Sir Bevis had withstood him so long,  
And with his sword he hit his shield  
So that a quarter fell onto the field.  
Through mail, armor, and jacket,  
Into Bevis’ farthest saddlebow,  
He carved down a good half a foot.  
When Bevis saw that mighty stroke,  
He said, “That blow was well set.  
I will do another one better!”

With those words Bevis struck down  
Grander’s shield with its ornamented blade,  
And his left hand by the wrist  
Flew away through the help of Christ.  
Though Grander had lost his shield,  
He fought as if he were mad because of it.  
At that moment he gave Bevis blows  
That no one else would have endured.  
Bevis was enraged because of it  
And struck off King Grander’s head.  
With that blow the dead corpse  
Fell out over the saddlebow.  
When King Grander was slain,  
Bevis killed the seven knights  
Of heathen lands at that moment;  
So it is found in the French.  
Bevis would not hesitate for anything;  
He wanted to have the better horse.  
Bevis mounted Trenchefis,

"Lite box: Two other MSS have strok or twoo (Egerton 2862 and Royal Library, Naples, XIII, B 29). In Kölberg, Bevis, 89."
And in weie forth a rit,
And Brademond with al is ost
Com after with meche bost;
So longe hii han Beves drive,
That hii come to the clive,
Ther the wilde se was.
Harkneth now a wondercas!
In to the se a moste, iwis,
Other fighte aghenes al hethenes.
To Jesu Crist he bad a bone,
And He him graunteðe wel sone:
―Lord,‖ a sede, ―hevene king
Schepere of erthe and alle thing,
Thow madest fisch use wel also man,
That nothing of senne ne can,
Ne nought of fisches kenne
Never yet ne dede senne,
Ne nought of fisches kenne
Never yet ne dede senne,
Of this hethene hounde,
That beste Thee and bounde
And bete Thee body to the dethe,
Tharfore ich may a
To water fle in this stede,
To fisch, that never senne dede,
Than her daien in londe
In al this Saracenes honde!
Beves smot is hors, that it lep
In to the se, that was wel dep.
Whan he in to the se cam,
Over the se, I wot, a swam;
In a dai and in a night
A bar over that gentil knight.
Whan he com of that wilde brok,
His gode stede him resede and schok,
And Beves, for honger in that stounde
“Alas!” queth Beves, whan he doun cam,
“But I had an earldom
And a horse, fine and swift,
That men clepede Arondel;
Now ich wolde yeve hit kof
For a schiver of a lof!”
A restede him ther a lite tide,
His gode stede he gan bestrede
And rod over dale and doun,
Til he com to a gret toun:
The lady of the castle sat there,
And Bevis soon spotted her
And perceived that she was troubled,
And thought it best to hurry there.
Bevis rode to the castle gate
And spoke to her who sat above him:
“Lady,” he said, “who dwells above,
For the love of the same lord
That your heart is set on,
Yeve me today a meles met!"

The levedi anwerde him tho:

“Boute thow fro the gate go,
Thee wer beter elleswhar than her;
Go, or the tit an evel diner!
Me lord,” she seide, “is a geaunt
And leveth on Mahoun and Tervagaunt
And felleth Cristene men to grounde,
For he hateth hem ase hounde!"

“Our God!” queth Beves, “I swere an othe:
Be him lef and be him lothe,
Her ich wile have the mete
With love or eighe, whather I mai gete!”

The levedi swithe wroth with alle
Wente hire forth in to the halle
And tolde hire lord anon f
More a man hadde iswore,
That he nolde fro the ghete,
Er he hadde ther the mete.

The geaunt was wonderstrong,
Rome thretti fote long;
He tok a levour in is hond,
And forth to the gate he wond.
Of Beves he nam gode hede,
Ful wel a knew Beves is stede:
“Thow ert nome thef, ywis:
Whar stele thow stede Trenchefis,
The steed you ride on here?
It was me brotheres Grandere!”

“Grander,” queth Beves, “I yaf hod
And made him a kroune brod;
Tho he was next under me fest,
Wel I wot, ich made him prest,
Er ich ever fro thee te!”
Thanne seide the geaunt: “Meister sire,
Slough thow me brother Grandere,
For al this castel ful of golde
A live lete thee ich nolde!”

“Ne ich thee,” queth Beves, “I trowe!”

Thus beginneth grim to growe.
The geaunt, that ich spak of er,
The staf, that he to fighte ber,
Was twenti fote in lengthe be tale,
Tharto gret and nothing smale:
To Sire Beves a smot therwith
A sterne strok withouten grith,
Ac a failede of his divis

Grant me today a meal’s portion!”

The lady then answered him,
“Unless you go away from the gate,
You would be better off elsewhere.
Go, before you get a foul dinner!
My lord,” she continued, “is a giant
And he follows Mohammad and Tervagan.
He drops Christian men to the ground,
For he hates them like dogs!”

“By God,” vowed Bevis, “I swear an oath.
Whether he is fair or foul,
I will have some food here
For love or hate, whatever comes to me!”

The lady was very offended with all that
And went down into the hall
And told her lord at once
How a man had sworn
That he would not go from the gate
Before he had some food.
The giant was amazingly strong
And thirty feet long in length.
He took a club into his hand
And made his way forth to the gate.
He took good notice of Bevis,
For he knew his steed very well.
“You are caught, thief, that is a fact.
Where did you steal Trenchefis,
The steed you ride on here?
It was my brother Grander’s!”

“I gave Grander a hood,” said Bevis,
“And gave him a tonsure."
When he was pressed under me,
I know well, I made him a priest,
And I will make you an archdeacon
Before I ever go from you.”
Then the giant said, “Sir,
If you killed my brother Grander,
I would not let you live
For all the gold in this castle!”

“Nor I you,” said Bevis, “I promise!”
And so the hostilities were inflamed.
The giant, whom I spoke of before,
Had a staff which he took to the fight
That was twenty feet in length.
It was massive and in no way light.
He struck Bevis with it,
A harsh blow with no mercy,
But he failed in his aim

43 And made him a kroune brod: Sir Bevis here begins a series of dark jokes on ordaining Grander as a priest by giving his head an extra-close shave, i.e. cutting it off. For more clerical puns and jokes, see Gamelyn 512, 529.
And in the heved smot Trenchefis,  
That ded to grounde fel the stede.  
And hit Trenchefis in the head,  
And the sted fell dead to the ground.

“O,” queth Beves, “so God me spede,  
Thow havest don gret vileine,  
“Oh!” exclaimed Bevis, “so God help me,  
You have done a villainous crime

Whan thou sparde me bodi  
And for me gilt min hors aqueld,  
When you spare my body  
And kill this horse for my actions!

Thow witest him, that mai nought weld.  
Be God, I swere thee an oth:  
You blame it when it has no control.  
By God, I swear you an oath.

Thow schelt nought, when whan we tegoth,  
Laughande me wende fram,  
You will not, when we meet together,  
Walk away from me laughing.

Now thow havest mad me gram!”  
Beves is swerd anon up swapte,  
Now you have made me fierce!”  
Bevis swept up his sword at once,  
As he and the giant rushed together,  
And dealt out strokes, many and fast.

Laughande me wende fram,  
Now thow havest mad me gram!”  
I cannot count the number of them.  
Bevis swept up his sword at once,  
As he and the giant rushed together,  
And dealt out strokes, many and fast.

Thre akres brede and sumdel more.  
That his scheld flegh from him thore  
Three acres away and somewhat more.  
So that his shield was thrown from him,  
Three acres away and somewhat more.  
Then Bevis was in a hot temper

And karf ato the grete levour  
And smot ato his nekke bon:  
And cut the great club in two  
And wounded the giant on his breast,  
Which nearly brought him to the ground.  
The giant thought this battle a hard one.

And of everiche sonde,  
That him com to honde,  
And proved that he was a stout warrior,  
Cutting his neck bone in two.  
The giant fell to the ground at once.  
Bevis went in past the castle gate

A dede hire ete al ther ferst,  
That she ne dede him no berst,  
That came to his hand,  
So that she would do him no injury,  
And drinke ferst of the win.  
And drink of the wine first
That no poisoun was ther-in.  
That no poison would be in it.  
When Beves hadde ete inough,  
When Bevis had eaten enough,  
A keverchef to him a drough  
He drew a handkerchief to him
In that ilche stounde,  
At that same moment
To stope mide is wonde.  
To stop up his wound.

“The dame, dame,” Beves sede,  
“We have done them in their home,”  
“The lady, lady,” Bevis said,  
“Have a good horse saddled for me,  
For I will leave and ride away.

Thow witest him, that mai nought weld.  
Be God, I swere thee an oth:  
I will no longer linger here.”  
The lady said that she would gladly.

And in the heved smot Trenchefis,  
That ded to grounde fel the stede.  
And hit Trenchefis in the head,  
And the sted fell dead to the ground.

“O,” queth Beves, “so God me spede,  
Thow havest don gret vileine,  
“Oh!” exclaimed Bevis, “so God help me,  
You have done a villainous crime

Whan thou sparde me bodi  
And for me gilt min hors aqueld,  
When you spare my body  
And kill this horse for my actions!

Thow witest him, that mai nought weld.  
Be God, I swere thee an oth:  
You blame it when it has no control.  
By God, I swear you an oath.

Thow schelt nought, when whan we tegoth,  
Laughande me wende fram,  
You will not, when we meet together,  
Walk away from me laughing.

Now thow havest mad me gram!”  
Beves is swerd anon up swapte,  
Now you have made me fierce!”  
Bevis swept up his sword at once,  
As he and the giant rushed together,  
And dealt out strokes, many and fast.

Laughande me wende fram,  
Now thow havest mad me gram!”  
I cannot count the number of them.  
Bevis swept up his sword at once,  
As he and the giant rushed together,  
And dealt out strokes, many and fast.

Thre akres brede and sumdel more.  
That his scheld flegh from him thore  
Three acres away and somewhat more.  
So that his shield was thrown from him,  
Three acres away and somewhat more.  
Then Bevis was in a hot temper

And karf ato the grete levour  
And smot ato his nekke bon:  
And cut the great club in two  
And wounded the giant on his breast,  
Which nearly brought him to the ground.  
The giant thought this battle a hard one.

And of everiche sonde,  
That him com to honde,  
And proved that he was a stout warrior,  
Cutting his neck bone in two.  
The giant fell to the ground at once.  
Bevis went in past the castle gate

A dede hire ete al ther ferst,  
That she ne dede him no berst,  
That came to his hand,  
So that she would do him no injury,  
And drinke ferst of the win.  
And drink of the wine first
That no poisoun was ther-in.  
That no poison would be in it.  
When Beves hadde ete inough,  
When Bevis had eaten enough,  
A keverchef to him a drough  
He drew a handkerchief to him
In that ilche stounde,  
At that same moment
To stope mide is wonde.  
To stop up his wound.

“The dame, dame,” Beves sede,  
“We have done them in their home,”  
“The lady, lady,” Bevis said,  
“Have a good horse saddled for me,  
For I will leave and ride away.

Thow witest him, that mai nought weld.  
Be God, I swere thee an oth:  
I will no longer linger here.”  
The lady said that she would gladly.
She had a fine steed brought forth
And had it saddled and well equipped,
And Bevis, that fearless knight,
Leaped into the saddle,
So that he touched no stirrups.
Sir Bevis went forth
Until he came outside the town
Into a green meadow.
“Now, Lord Jesus,” he said,
“If you granted it that King Brademond,
Him and all his offspring,
Were right here upon this green,
I would be be very well avenged
For my pain.
He would never leave or speak with his mouth.
Now that my hunger is eased
I was never more ready to fight!”
He went forth along the stream
Until he came to Jerusalem.
He went straight to the patriarch
And took confession for his past life;
And he told him how it had begun,
Of his successes and his failures. 44
The patriarch had pity
On him and his vows as well,
And forbade him, upon his life,
That he never take a wife
Unless she were a virgin maid.
“I will not, for certain!” Sir Bevis said.
On that day toward evening,
He made his goodbye to the patriarch.
Early in the morning, when it was day,
He went forth on his way.
And as he rode alone by himself: 45
“Lord,” he thought, “what should I do?
Where should I go in England?
No!” he decided. “What would I do there
Unless I had an army to gather
To slay my stepfather?”
He resolved that he would hurry on
Into the land of Armenia—
To Armenia, which had been his curse—
To his darling Josiane.
And as he went straight there,
He met with a noble knight
Who had given him good companionship
In the land of Armenia.

44 A sentimental scene for the audience, as Bevis has not been in a Christian church since at least his childhood.

45 Also a rod himself alone: As with double negatives, ME poetic style sometimes piles on redundant synonyms for being together (possibly influenced by the lost OE dual case) or being alone.
Thai kiste hem anon with that
And ather askede of otheres stat.
Thanne seide Beves and lough:
“Ich ave fare hard inough,
Sofred bothe honger and chele
And other peines mani and fele
Though King Ermines gile:
Yet ich thanke to yelde is while,
For he me sente to Brademond,
To have slawe me that stonde:
God be thanke d, a dede nought so,
Ac in is prisoun with meche wo
Ichave leie this seven yare,
Ac now icham from him ifare
Thourgh Godes grace and min engyn,
Ac al ich wite it King Ermyn,
And, ne wer is doughter Josiane,
Sertes, ich wolde ben is bane!‖

―Josiane,‖ queth the knight, ―is a wif
Aghen hire wille with meche strif.
Seve yer hit is gon and more,
That the riche King Yvore
To Mombraunt hath hire wedde
Bothe to bord and to bedde,
And hath the swerd Morgelai
And Arondel, the gode palfrai:
Ac sithe the time, that I w
As ich hadde that ilche tide,
Whan I segh King Yvor ride
Toward Mombraunt on Arondel;
The hors was nought ipaied wel:
He arnede awai with the king
Thourgh felde and wode, withouten lesing,
And in a mure don him cast,
Almost he hadde deied in hast.
Ac er hii wonne the stede,
Ropes in the contré thai leide;
Ac never sithe, withoute fable,
Ne com the stede out of the stable,
So sore he was aneied that tide;

Sithe dorste no man on him ride!”
For this tiding Beves was blithe,
His joie kouthe he no man kithe.
“Wer Josiane,” a thoughte, “ase lele,
Alse is me stede Arondel,
Yet scholde ich come out of wo!”
And at the knight he askede tho:

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46 *Ich thenke to yelde is while*: TEAMS suggests something close to “I think to yield would be a good idea,” but the context does not suggest it. Some MSS have hope, i.e. intend, for thenke. *Quiten hir while* can also be a ME idiom for “repay one’s efforts.”
“Whiderwardes is Mombraunt?”

“Sere,” a sede, “be Tervagaunt,
Thow might nought thus wende forth,
Beves ternede his stede
And rod north. Gode spede;
Ever a was pausant,
Til a com to Mombraunt.
Mombraunt is a riche cité;
In al the londe of Sarsine
Nis ther non therto iliche
Ne be fele parti so riche.
And whan that hende knight Bevoun
Come withouten the toun,
Tharwith a palmer he mette,
And swithe faire he him grette:
―Palmer,‖ a sede, ―whar is the king?‖
―Sire,‖ a seide, ―an honting
With kinges fiftene.‖
―And whar,‖ a seide, ―is the quene?‖
―Sire,‖ a seide,
―Palmer,‖ a seide, “paramour,
Yem me thine wede
For min and for me stede!‖
―God yeve it,‖ queth the palmare,
―We hadde drive that chefare!‖
Beves of is palfrei alighte
And schrede the palmer as a knighte
And yaf him is hors, that he rod in,
For is bordon and is sklavin.
The palmer rod forth ase a king,
And Beves went alse a bretheling.
Whan he com to the castel gate,
Anon he fond thar
Mani palmer thar stonde
Of fele kene londe,
And he askede hem in that stede,
What hii alle thar dede.
Thanne seide on, that thar stod:
―We beth icome to have gode,
And so thow ert also!‖
―Who,‖ queth Beves, “schel it us do?‖
―The quene, God hire schilde fro care!
Meche she loveth palmare;
Al that she mai finden here,
Everiche dai in the yere,
Faire she wile hem fede
And yeve hem riche wede
For a knyghtes love, Bevoun,
That was iboren at Southamtoun;
To a riche man she wolde him bringe,
That kouthe telle of him tiding!‖
―Whanne,‖ queth Beves, “schel this be don?‖
A sede: “Betwene middai and noun.”
Beves saw full well
That it was still early in the day.
He decided that before then he would
Walk around the tower
In order to look and to find out
How it might best be done
If he could break into the castle,
And where he might best sneak in.
And as he passed by a turret
That was set into the castle wall,
He heard a woman weeping and crying.
He hastened in that direction.
“Oh, alas!” she said, “Bevis,
Handsome knight of Southampton,
Now I have lived to see the day
That I cannot trust in you.
The same god that you spoke of
Is false, and you are also!”
In all those seven years, each day,
Josanne, that fair maid,
Was accustomed to making such grief,
All for Sir Bevis’ sake.
The lady began to go to the gate
To see the pilgrims there.
And Bevis, after a while,
Walked toward the gate.
The pilgrims all pushed in;
Bevis waited and was the last.
And when the maid saw him there,
She had no idea at all it was Bevis.
―You seem,‖ she said, “to be a man of honor.
You will be first this day
And preside at the master’s table. 47
You seem gracious and courteous.”
They had food and drink throughout,
Both beer and mixed wine in plenty. 48
They dined very well.
Then the queen said to each pilgrim,
“Have you ever heard stories
From any people, or any mention,
In any field or in town
Of a knight, Bevis of Southampton?”
“No,‖ replied all that were there.
“What about you, newcomer?” she said.
Then Bevis laughed and said.
“I know that knight well enough!
He is at home,‖ he said, “in his country.

47 Deis: The dais in a medieval hall was a raised platform where the lord and nobility would dine, separate from servants and commoners. The practice survives in wedding receptions.

48 Piment: Pyment is a variety of mead (honey beer) fermented with grape juice. It was often spiced with cinnamon or nutmeg, or served warm with fruit.
Icham an erl and also is he;
At Rome he made me a spel
Of an hors, men clepede Arondel:
Wide whar ichave iwent
And me warisoun ispent
I sought hit bothe fer an
And neide and made miche pride
With gret joie be ech a side.

Allas!‖ tho queth Josiane,
―Wel mani a man is bane
To dai he worth ilaught,
Er than this stede ben icaught!‖
Then Bevis chuckled and said,
―I can catch him well enough.
If you,‖ he said, “give me permission,
No man will be grieved by him.”
“Catch him, then,” she said,
“And lead him into the stable
And tie him where he stood,
And you will have a good reward.”

Bevis to the hors tegh;
Tho the hors him knew and segh.
He ne wawede no fot,
Til Beves hadde the stirop;
Beves in to the sadel him threw,
With that the maid knew him well.

Tharbi that maide him wel knew.
Anon seide Josian with than:
“O Beves, gode lemmman,
Let me with thee reke
In that maner, we han ispeke,
And thenk, thow me to wive tok,
Whan ich me false godes forskok:
Now thow hast thin hors Arondel,
I am an earl and he is too.
He told me a story in Rome
About a horse that men call Arondel.
In all the wide lands I have travelled,
And have spent my possessions,
I looked for it both near and far.
Men tell me that it is here.
If you ever loved that knight well,
Allow me a sight of that horse.”
What good would it do to lie?
She brought Bevis to the stable.
Josanne gazed at him before her;
She saw his scarred brow.
She called for Boniface.
At the stable door she said to him,
“By the mother who bore me,
If this man’s brow were not all torn,
I would think by his manners
That it was Bevis of Southampton!”
When that horse heard the sound
Of his rightful lord’s voice,
He broke away from his fetters
And galloped quickly into the court
And neighed and made a great display
With great joy on each side.
“Alas!” Josanne then said,
“Many a man is fated
To be laughed at today
Before this horse is caught.”
Then Bevis chuckled and said,
“I can catch him well enough.
If you,” he said, “give me permission,
No man will be grieved by him.”
“Catch him, then,” she said,
“And lead him into the stable
And tie him where he stood,
And you will have a good reward.”
Bevis walked to the horse.
When the horse saw him and knew him,
He did not move a foot
Until Bevis had the stirrup on
And threw himself into the saddle.
With that the maid knew him well.
Then Josanne cried out at once,
“Oh, Bevis, dear heart,
Deal with me49
In the way we spoke about long ago!
And remember how you took me as your wife
When I abandoned my false gods.
Now that you have your horse Arondel

49 Reke: Reckon or deal. But ride (away) in the Chetham Library, No. 8009, Manchester MS.
Thee swerd ich thee fette schel,
And let me wende with thee sithe
Hom in to thin owene kithe!‖

Queth Beves: “Be Godes name,
Ichave for thee sofred meche schame,
Lain in prisoun swithe strong:
Yif ich thee lovede, hit were wrong!
The patriark me het upon me lif,
That I ne tok never wif,
Boute she were maide clene;
And thow havest seve year ben a quene,
And everi night a king be thee:
How mightow thanne maide be?‖

―Merci,‖ she seide, ―lemman fre,
Led me hom to thee contré,
And boute thee finde me maide wimman,
Be that eni man saie can,
Send me aghen to me fon
Al naked in me smok alon!‖

Beves seide: ―So I schel,
In that forward I graunte wel!‖

Bonefas to Sire Beves sede:
―Sire, thee is beter do be rede!
The king cometh son e fro honting
And with him mani a riche king,
Fiftene told al in tale,
Dukes and erles mani and fale.
Whan hii fonde us alle agon,
Thai wolde after us everychon
With wondergret chevalrie,
And do us schame and vileinie;
Ac formeste, sire, withouten fable,

Led Arondel in to the stable,
And ate the gate thow him abide,
Til the king cometh bi the ride;
A wile thee asken at the frome,
Whider thow schelt and whannes thow come;
Sai, that thow havest wide iwent,
And thow come be Dubilent,
That is hennes four jurné;
Sai, men wile ther the king sle,
Boute him come help of sum other;

And King Yvor is his brother,
And whan he hereth that tiding,
I will fetch you your sword.
Let me go with you after then,
Home to your own country!‖

Bevis exclaimed, “For God’s sake,
I have suffered great shame for you
And lay in a strong prison.
If I loved you, it was wrong!
The patriark ordered me on my life
That I never take a wife
Unless she were a virgin maid.
If you have been a queen for seven years
With a king beside you every night,
How might you then be a maiden?”
“Have mercy,” she said, “gentle heart.
Take me home to your country.
And if you do not find me a pure woman,
And if any man can say otherwise,
Send me back to my enemie
Alone and naked except for my smock.”
Bevis said, “So I will,
I readily agree to that contract!”

Boniface said to Sir Bevis,
―Sir, it would be best for you to do as I advise.
The king will soon return from hunting,
And with many a rich king with him,
Fifteen in count,
Dukes and earls, many and various.
When they find us all gone,
They will go after us, every one,
With expert horsemanship,
And shame us and do us harm.
But first, sir, without lie,
Lead Arondel into the stable,
And wait at the gate
Until the king comes riding by you.
He will ask you right away
Who you are and where you come from.
Say that you have traveled widely
And you have come from Abilent, 50
Which is a four-day journey from here.
Say that men there will slay the king
Unless someone goes there to help him.
King Yvor is his brother,
And when he hears that news,

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50 Dubilent: This begins another wild goose chase, with some sources suggesting an Abilent tower near Jerusalem, as well as a contention that d’Abilent is a corruption of Babylon. There is a tradition of a lost medieval Abillant in Normandy, and R.P. Haviland, in researching the genealogy of his surname, suggests its location near present-day Valognes. No horse could possibly travel there from southern France, 1000 km away, in four days (2227). Either we have the wrong locations or the placenames are somewhat fanciful. R.P. Haviland, e-mail post, “Haviland-L Archives,” Rootsweb, accessed 29 May 2010 at http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/HAVILAND/2005-10/1128642591
Thede a wile an highting  
With al is power and is ost:  
Thanne mai we with lite bost  
Forth in oure wei go!"  
Beves seide: "It schel be so!"  
And Arondel to stable lad,  
As Bonefas him bad;  
And to the gate Beves yode.

---

Thanne an we with lite bost  
Forth in oure wei go!"  
Beves seide: "It schel be so!"  
And he led Arondel to the stable  
As Boniface told him.  
And Bevis walked to the gate  
With the other beggars that stood there,  
With a staff and purse by his side,  
In a cloak that was rough and loose.  
His beard was yellow and grown to his chest,  
And his hair hung to his waist.  
All of them said that they never saw  
So stately a pilgrim with their own eyes  
Who ever came to that country.  
Thus those who saw him wondered,  
And so Bevis stood in that group,  
Until noon bells began to ring.  
King Yvor returned from hunting  
With fifteen kings before him,  
And dukes and earls and barons;  
How many, I cannot give the right number.  
They all wondered at Bevis.  
Yvor called Bevis to him  
And said, "Pilgrim, you come from far away.  
Where is there peace and where is there war?  
You can give me good information."  
Then Bevis answered in return,  
"Sire, I come from Jerusalem,  
From Nazareth, and from Bethlehem,  
Emmaus’ castle, and Sinai;  
India, Europe, and Asia;  
Egypt, Greece, and Babylon,  
Tarsus, Sicily, and Saxony;  
I was in Friesland, Sidon, and Tyre,  
In Africa and in many empires.  
All is peaceful wherever I went,  
Except in the land of Abilent.  
No man may find peace there;  
There is war, sorrow, and trouble.  

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The king of that land, in truth,  
Must be overthrown by now, I believe.\(^5\)

---

Threes other kings and five dukes  
Have driven down his cavalry,  
And many other people are killed,  
Cities taken and towns burned.  
They have driven him to a castle.

---

That stant be the se upon a clive,  
And al the ost lih him aboute,  
By toda his life must be in doute,"  
King Yvor seide: “Allas, allas,  
Lordinges, this is a sori cas!  
That is me brother, ye witen wel,  
That lith beseged in that castel:  
To hors and armes, lasse and more,  
In haste swithe, that we wer thore!‖  
Thai armede hem anon bedene,  
Yvor and his kinges fiftene,  
And to the Cité of Diablent

Alle samen forth they went.  
But an old king, that hight Garcy,  
At home he lefte to kepe the lady.  
Thoo seid Beves: ―Make yow yare,  
Yif that ye wille with me fare!‖  
Sir Bonefas answered thoo:  
―Yif ye wil by my consaile do:  
Here is an olde king Garcy,  
That muche can of nygremancy;  
He may see in his goldryng,  
What any man dooth in alle thing.  
I know an erbe in the forest.  
Now wille I sende therafter prest  
And let brochen Reynessh wyne  
And do that yerbe anoon therynne,  
And what he be, that ther-of doth drynke,  
He shal lerne for to wynke  
And slepe anon after ryght  
Al a day and al a nyght.‖  
Sir Bonefas dide al this thing;  
They resen up in the dawnyng;  
Inowgh they toke what they wolde,  
Both of silver and of golde,  
And other tresoure they toke also,  
And in hur way they gunne goo.  
And when they were went away,  
Garcy awaked a morow day  
And had wonder swith stronge,  
That he hadde slept so longe.  
His ryng he gan to him tee,  
For to loke and for to see;  
And in his ryng say he thare,  
The queene away with the palmer was fare.  
To his men he grad ryght:  
“As armes, lordinges, for to fyght!”  
And tolde his folke, verament,  
How the queene was awey went.  
They armed hem in ryche wede  
And every knyght lep on his stede,  
And after went al that route  
And besette hem al aboute.  
Thenne seide Beves to Bonefas:
“Kepe wel Josian at this cas,
And I wil wynde to bataile,
Garcy and his ost assaile.
I wil fonde, what I do may,
I have rested me moony a day.
Fyght, I will now m y fylle
And hem overcom by Goddes wille!”
Tho Bonefas to him saide:

2340 “Sir, yow is better do by my reed:
Ye shal be in the lasse dout,
For I know the contré al about;
I can bryng yow in to a cave,
There a sheparde with a stave,
Theyghe men hadden his deth sworn,
He myght him kepe wel therforn!”
Into the cave he hath hem brought;
Garcy, the Kyng, hem couth fynde nought,
Therfore him was swith woo;
He and his ost bethought hem thoo,
Hoom agheyn for to wende
And sende Ascopart hem to shende.

2350 He and his ost bethought hem thoo,
Hoom agheyn for to wende
And sende Ascopart hem to shende.
In the cave they were al nyght
Without mete or dry
nke, aplyght.
Twoo dayes it was goon,
That mete ne drynke had they noon.
Josian was afyngered soore
And told anoon Beves therfore.
Beves seid, “How darst thou of me meete crave?
Wel thou wotest, that noon I have.”
Josian answered sone anoon
And bade Sir Beves to wod goon:
I have herde of savagenes,
Whenne yonge men were in wyldernes,
That they toke hert and hinde
And other bestes, that they myght fynde;
They slowen hem and soden hem in her hide;
Thus doon men that in wood abyde.
Sir, thou myghtest bestes lyghtly take,
For sause good I wyl thee make!”
Beves seide to Bonefas than:
“I pray thee kepe wel Josian,
The while I wynde into the forest,
For to take sum wylde beast!”
Forth went Beves in that forest,
Beestes to sheete he was ful prest.

2370 “Protect Josanne well in this moment,
And I will set out to battle
Andtake on Garcy and his men.
I will attempt to do what I can;
I have rested for many a day.
I will have my fill of fighting now
And will overcome them by God’s will!”
Then Boniface said to him,

“Sir, it would be better for you to do as I advise;
You will be in less danger,
For I know the country all around.
I can bring you into a cave
To be like a shepherd with a staff,
Even if men had sworn your death,
You could hide yourself there forever.”
He brought them into the cave.
Garcy, the king, could not find them
And was very angered because of it.
He and his host decided among themselves
To turn back home again and to send
The giant, Ascopart, to destroy them.
They spent all night in the cave
Without food or drink, in truth.
Two days had passed
Without them having any food or drink.
Josanne was sorely hungry
And told Bevis about it directly.
Bevis said, “How can you nag me for food?
You know very well that I have none.”
Josanne soon after pleaded again
And asked Sir Bevis to go into the woods:
“I have heard about savages,
When young men were in the wilderness,
That they catch stags and does
And other animals that they might find.
They kill them and prepare them in their hides.
This is what men do who live in the woods.
Sir, you can easily catch our dinner,
For I will make you a good sauce.”
Bevis said to Boniface then,
“I ask you to protect Josanne well
While I go into the forest
To catch some wild animal.”
Bevis went forth into the forest;
He was ready to shoot some game.

52 MS University Library, Cambridge Ff. 2.38 has owre instead of his (2345) and ye might be there for evyrmore (2346). In Kölberg, Bevis, 113. The shepherd reference is likely meant as a simile.

53 Giants in ancient and medieval literature are almost always evil or animalistic. As with Goliath and Grendel, they usually descend from Cain. An exception is St. Christopher, a third century martyr who is claimed to have ferried Christ as a child across a river. Ascopard is unusual in being alternatively altruistic and selfish.
Als sone as he wa forth yfare,
Two lyouns ther com yn thare,
Grennand and rampand with her feet.

Sir Bonefas then als skeet
His hors to him tho he drowgh
And armdy him wel ynowgh
And yave the lyouns bataile to fyght;
Al to lytel was his myght.

The twoo lyouns sone had sl
That oon his hors, that other the man.
Josian into the cave gan shete,
And the twoo lyouns at hur feete,
Grennand on hur with muche grame,
But they ne myght do hur no shame,
For the kind of lyouns, ywis,
The maiden was a king’s daughter,
And a princess, queen, and virgin also,
The lyouns myght do hur noo wroth.

Beves com sone fro huntyng
With three hertes, without lesyng,
And fonde an hors gnawe to the boon,
And Josian awey was goon.

He sowned soone for sorow and thought,
Fro cave to cave he her sought,
To wete how that cas myght be,
And in one cave he gan to see,
Where Josain sate in grete doute
And twoo lions hur about.

To Sir Beves gan she speke:
―Sir, thyn help, me to awreke
Of these two liouns, that thy chamberleyn,
Ryght now han him slayn!‖
She seide, she wolde that oon hoolde,
While that he that other quelde.
She grasped the one about the neck,
But Bevis told her to let him go
And said, ―Lady, in truth, without a lie,
I would have little to be proud of
If I killed a lion here
While a woman held the other.
You will never have reason to belittle me
When you come home to my contré.
If you will not let both of them go,
Goodbye and I will go from you!‖
She let them jump up and doun.

As soon as he had set out,
Two lions came inside there,
Snarling and raised up on their hind legs.
Just as quickly Sir Boniface
Took to his horse
And armed himself sufficiently
And offered battle to the lions.
His might was all too little.
Soon the two lions had slain them,
One his horse, the other the man.
Josanne shut herself in the cave,
And the two lions were at her heels,
Snarling at her with great savagery.
But they could not do her any wrong,
For it is the nature of lions, in truth.
The maiden was a king’s daughter,
And a princess, queen, and virgin also,
And so the lions could do her no harm.

Bevis soon returned from hunting
With three deer, without a lie,
And found a horse gnawed to the bone
And Josianne gone away.

He was overcome with sorrow and worry.
He searched for her from cave to cave
To find out what had happened.
And in one cave he saw
Where Josanne cowered in great fear
With two lions about her.
To Sir Bevis she began to cry,
―Sir, help me to have vengeance
On these two lions who have just now
Slain your steward!‖
She said she would hold the one
While he killed the other.
And Beves assailed the lyoun.  
Strenger bataile ne strenger fyght  
Herde ye never of no knyght  
Byfore this in romaunce telle,  
Than Beves had of beestes felle.  
Al that herkeneth word and ende,  
To hevyn mot her sowles wende!  
That oon was a lionesse,  
That Sir Bevis dide grete distresse;  
At the first begynnyng  
To Beves hondes she gan spryng  
And al to peces rent he  
m there,  
Or Beves myght ther  
-of be werre.  
That other lyon, that Josian gan holde,  
To fight with Beves was ful bold;  
He ran to him with grete randon  
And with his pawes he rent adoun  
His armour almost to ground,  
And in his thyghe a wel grete wound.  
Tho was Beves in hert grame,  
For the lioun had do him shame;  
As he were wood, he gan to fyght;  
The lionesse seyghe that sight  
And raught to Beves, without faile,  
Both at oones they gan him assaile.  
Thoo was Beves, in strong tempestes,  
So strong and egre were these  
beestes,  
That nyghe they hadde him there queld;  
Unnethe he kept him with his shelde.  
With Morgelay, that wel wold byte,  
To the lioun he gan smyte;  
His ryght foot he shore asonder,  
Sir Beves shilde the Lyoun ranne under  
And with his teeth with sory happe  
He kitte a pece of his lappe,  
And Beves that ilke stounde  
For anguysse fel to the grounde,  
And hastely Beves than up stert,  
For he was grevyd in his hert;  
He kyd wel tho, he was agrevyd,  
And clef a twoo the lyon is hevyd,  
And to his hert the poynt thrast;  
Thus the lioun died at the last.  
Stoutliche the liounesse than  
Asailed Beves, that doughti man,  
And with hire mouth is scheld tok  
So sterneliche, saith the bok.  
That doun it fel of is left hond.  
Tho Josian gan understonde,  
That hire lord scholde ben slawe;  
Helpe him she wolde fawe.  
Anon she hente that lioun:  
Beves bad hire go sitte adoun,  
And swor be God in Trinité,
Boute she lete that lioun be,
A wolde hire sle in that destresse
Ase fain ase the liounesse.
Tho she ne moste him nought helpe fighte,
His scheld she broughte him anon righte
And yede hire sitte adoun, saun faile,
And let him worthie in that bataile.
The liounesse was stout and sterne,
Aghen to Beves she gan erne
And be the right leg she him grep,
Ase the wolf doth the schep,
That negh she braide out is sparliere;
Tho was Beves in gret yre,
And in that ilche selve veneu

That unless she left that lioness alone,
He would slay her in that crisis
As readily as the lioness!
When she could not help him fight,
Straightaway she brought him his shield
And sat herself down, without fail,
And let him prove himself in that battle.
The lioness was stout and determined.
Again she pounced on Bevis,
And she gripped him by the right leg,
As the wolf does to the sheep,
So that she nearly tore out his calf.
Then Bevis was in a great rage,
And in that very same spot,
Through God’s grace and His virtue,
He struck at the lioness so hard
With Morgelai that it cut bitterly
Evenly down the back in haste,
So that Morgelai flew into the earth.
Then Josanne was jubilant
When the lions were both slain,
And Bevis was pleased and glad.
He could hide his joy from no man,
And he continually thanked the King of Glory
For His grace and his victory.
But he was sorry for Boniface.
And when he saw there was no alternative,
He set Josanne upon a mule
And rode forth a little while.
They met with a giant
Who had a loathsome appearance.
He was amazingly strong
And thirty feet tall in height.
His beard was both great and shaggy.
There was a foot’s space between his brows.
His club, to give a hard blow with,
Was a small trunk of an oak.
Bevis was greatly amazed by him
And asked him what he was called,
And if the men of his country
Were as large as he was.
“My name,” he said, “is Ascopard.
Garcy sent me out here
In order to bring the queen aghen
And to slay you here, Bevis.
I am Garcy’s champion,
And I was driven out of my town
Because I was so little
That every man would hit me.
I was so small and so delicate
That every man called me a dwarf.
And now that I am in this land,
I have grown more, I can see,
And am stronger than ten others.
And that schel on us be sene;
I schel thee sle her, yif I mai!"
"Thourgh Godes help," queth Beves, "nai!"
Beves prikede Arondel a side,
Aghen Ascoard he gan ride
And smot him on the scholder an high,
That his spere al to-fligh,
And Ascoard with a retret
Smot after Beves a dent gret,
And with is o fot a slintte.

And fel with is owene dentte.
Beves of is palfrai alighte
And drough his swerd anon righte
And wolde have smiten of is heved;
Josian besoughte him, it were beleved:
"Sire," she seide, "so God thee save,
Let him liven and ben our knave!"
"Dame, a wile us betrai!"
"Sire, ich wil ben is bourgh, nai!"
Thar a dede Beves omage
And becom is owene page.
Forth thai wenten alle thre,
Til that hii come to the se;
A dromond hii fonde ther stonde,
That wolde in to hethene londe,
With Sarasines stout and fer,
Boute thai nadde no maroner.
Tho hii sighe Ascoard come,
Hii thoughten wel, alle and some,
He wolde hem surliche hem lede,
For he was maroner god at nede.

Whan he in to the schipe cam,
His gode bat an honde he nam,
A drof hem out and dede hem harm,
Arondel a bar to schip in is arm,
And after in a lite while
Josian and hire mule,
And drownen up saile al so snel
And sailede forth faire and wel,
That hii come withouten ensoine

To the haven of Coloine.
Whan he to londe kem,
Men tolde, the bishop was is em,
A noble man wis afin
And highte Saber Florentin.
Beves grete him at that cas
And tolde him what he was.
The beschop was glad afin
And seide: "Wolkome, leve cosin!
And that will be clear to see;
I will slay you here, if I can."
"Through God's help, no!" said Bevis.
Bevis spurred Arondel's flanks;
He charged against Ascoard
And struck him on the shoulder in haste
So that his spear was splintered.
And Ascoard, with a step back,
Struck Bevis with a great blow,
And with his own foot he slipped
And fell from his own force.
Bevis came down from his palfrey
And drew his sword at once
And would have cut off his head.
Josanne begg'd him to desist.
"Sir," she plead'd, "so God save you,
Let him live and be our servant!"
"Lady, he will betray us."
"No, sir, I will be his guarantor."

So Ascoard did Bevis homage there
And became his page. 56
All three of them went forth
Until they came to the sea.
They found a fast galley standing there
That was bound for heathen lands,
With Saracens that were stout and fierce.
But they had no mariner.
When they saw Ascoard coming,
They thought well, all and some,
That he would surely pilot them,
For he was a fine mariner in need.
When he boarded the ship,
He took his good stick into his hand,
And he drove them out and did them harm.
He carried Arondel to the ship in his arm,
And after a little while,
Josanne and her mule.
And he drew up the sail just as fast
And sailed forth expertly and well,
So that they arrived without delay
At the harbor of Cologne.
When they came to the shore
Men told him of his uncle the bishop,
A noble man, wise in every way,
Who was called Saber Florentine.
Bevis greet'd him at that opportunity
And told him who he was.
The bishop was very pleased to hear this
And said, "Welcome, dear nephew!"

56 The scene seems to approve of Josanne's act of mercy, but later Bevis is proven right and her wrong. In a late episode in the story omitted here Ascoard does betray the two and is killed by Saber.
Gladder I nas, sethe ich was bore,
Ich wende, thow haddest be forlore.
Who is this levedi schene?"
"Sire, of hethenesse a quene,
And she wil, for me sake,
Cristendome at thee take."
"Who is this with the grete visage?"
"Sire," a sede, "hit is me page
And wil ben icristnede also,
And ich bidde, that ye hit do!"
The nexste dai after than
The beschop cristnede Josian.
For Ascopard was mad a kove;
Whan the beschop him scholde in schove,
A lep anon upon the benche
And seide: "Prest, wiltow me drenche?
The devel yeve thee helle pine,
Icham to meche te be cristine!"
After Josian is cristing
Beves dede a gret fighting,
Swich bataile dede never non
Cristene man of flesch ne bon,
Of a dragoun ther be side,
That Beves slough ther in that tide,
Save Sire Launcelet de Lake,
He faught with a fur drake
And Wade dede also,
And never knightes boute thai to,
And Gy a Warwik, ich understonde,
Slough a dragoun in NorthHomberlonde.
How that ilche dragoun com ther,
Ich wile yow telle, in what maner
Thar was a king in Poyle land
And another in Calabre, ich understonde;
This twe kinge foughte ifere
More than foure and twenti yere,
That hii never pes nolde,
Naither for selver ne for golde,
And al the contré, saundoute,
That distrueued hit al aboute;
Thai hadde mani mannes kours,
Wharough hii ferden wel the wors;
Tharfore hii deide in dedli sinne
And helle pine thai gan hem winne.
After in a lite while
Thai become dragouns vile,
And so thai foughte dragouns ifere
Mor than foure and thretti yere.
An ermite was in that londe,
I was never so glad, since I was born.
I thought that you had been lost.
And who is this beautiful lady?"
"Sire, a queen from heathen lands,
And she will, for my sake,
Receive baptism from you."
"And who is this with the massive features?"
"Sir," he said, "it is my page,
And he will be christened also,
And I ask that you will do it."
The next day after then,
The bishop christened Josanne.
For Ascopard a baptismal font was made;
But when the bishop tried to immerse him,
He leaped at once upon the bench
And said, "Bishop, you want to drown me?
May the devil give you Hell’s pains!
I am too big to be christened."
After Josanne’s baptism,
Bevis performed a great feat of fighting.
Such battle was never faced
By any Christian man of flesh or blood
Against a dragon beside him, like the one
That Bevis killed there on that day,
Except for Sir Lancelot de Lac.
He faught with a firebreathing dragon,
And Wade did also,
And no knight ever, except those two,
And Guy of Warwick, as I understand,
Killed a dragon in Northumberland.
How that dragon came there,
And in what way, I will tell you.
There was a king in the land of Apulia,57
And another in Calabria, as I am told.
These two kings fought together
More than twenty-four years,
And they never settled for peace,
Neither for silver or for gold.
And as for the country, without a doubt,
They ruined it all around;
They had the curse of many a man,
For causing them to fare the worse.
Therefore they died in deadly sin
And won for themselves Hell’s pains.
After a little while
They became vile dragons,
And so they fought together as dragons
More than thirty-four years.
A hermit was in that land

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57 Apulia: In Southeastern Italy, near Taranto. Calabre is likely Reggio di Calabria, in the southwestern tip near Sicily.
That was feld of Godes sonde;
To Jesu Crist a bed a bone,
That he dilivre the dragouns sone
Out of that ilche stede,
That hii namore harm ne dede.
And Jesu Crist, that sit in hevene,
Wel herde that ermites stevene
And graunteede him is praiere.
Anon the dragouns bothe ifere
Toke here flight and flowe awai,
Thar never eft man hem ne sai.
That on flegh anon with than,
Til a com to Toscan.
That other dragoun is flight nome
To Seinte Peter is brige of Rome;
Thar he schel leggen ay,
Til hit come Domes Dai.
And everi seve yer ones,
When the dragoun moweth is bones,
Than cometh a roke and a stink
Out of the water under the brink,
That men ther-of taketh the fevere,
That never after mai he kevere;
And who that nel nought leve me,
Wite at pilgrimes that ther hath be,
For thai can telle yow, iwis,
Of that dragoun how it is.
That other thanne flegh an highe
Thourgh Toskan and Lombardie,
Thourgh Province, withouten ensoine,
Into the londe of Coloyne;
Thar the dragoun gan arive
At Coloyne under a clive.
His eren were rowe and ek long,
His frount before hard and strong;
Eighte toskes at is mouth stod out,
The lestewa seventene ench about,
The her, the cholle under the chin,
He was bothe leith and grim;
A was imaned ase a stede;
The heved a bar with meche pride,
Betwene the scholder and the taile
Foure and twenti fot, saunfaile.
His taile was of gr
et stringethe;
Sextene fot a was a lingthe;
His bodi ase a wintonne.
Whan hit schon the brighte sonne,
His wingges schon so the glas.
His sides wer hard ase eni bras.
His brest was hard ase eni ston;
A fouler thing nas never non.
Ye, that wile a stounde dwelle,
Of his stringethe I mai yow telle.
Beves yede to bedde a night
With torches and with candlelight.
When he had gone to bed,
All of his thoughts were on Jesus Christ.
He dreamed of a king who was mad
And wounded him where he stood.
He injured him bitterly and painfully;
He thought he would live no longer.
And yet he dreamed that a virgin
Delivered him from all of his suffering.
When he started from his sleep,
He was frightened by his vision.
Then he dreamed he heard a doleful cry
And a plea for Jesus' mercy:
“From the venom thrown on me
I lie here all swollen,
And my flesh rots from the bone.
I have no remedy at han hand at all.”
And in his lament he said, “Alas
That I was ever created!”
Soon when it was daylight,
Bevis awoke and straightway asked
What all those cries might mean.
His men answered him back
And said it was the voice of a knight.
In combat he was held to be manly.
As he went out to do battle
Around there in that country,
Thereabout in that area
He met with a foul dragon,
And he spewed venom on him.
He lies there all swollen.
“Christ the Lord!” Bevis then cried,
“This dragon can slay any man.”
His men answered without a lie,
“There is no emperor or king
Who came near where the dragon was,
A hundred thousand men and more,
That he would not kill every one;
None of them would ever get away.”
“Ascopard,” he called, “where are you?”
“I am here. What would you like?”
“Will we go to the dragon?
Through God's help we will slay him!”
“Yes, sir, as I live and breathe,
I will gladly go with you.”
Bevis armed himself carefully,
Both in iron and in steel,
And equipped himself with a good sword
And took a spear into his hand.
Beyond the gate he rode out,
With Ascopard by his side.
As they went, to pass time,
They talked about many wondrous things.
That dragon lay in his den
And segh come the twei men;  
A made a cri and a wonder,  
Ase hit were a dent of thonder.  
Ascopard was adrad so sore,  
Further dorste he go namore;  
A seide to Beves, that was is fere:  
“A wonderthing ye mai here!”  
Beves saide: “Have thow no doute,  
The dragoun lith her aboute;  
Hadde we the dragoun wonne,  
We hadde the feireste pris under sonne!”  
Ascopard swor, be Sein Jon,  
A fot ne dorste he forther gon.  
Beves answerde and seide tho;  
“Ascopard, whi seistow so?  
Whi schelt thow afered be  
Of thing that thow might nought sen?”  
A swor, alse he moste then,  
He nolde him neither hire ne se  
―Icham weri, ich mot have reste:  
Go now forth and do the beste!‖  
Thanne seide Beves this wordes fre:  
―Schame hit is, to terne aghe.  
A smot his stede be the side,  
Aghen the dragoun he gan ride,  
The dragoun segh, that he cam  
Yenande aghenes him anan,  
Yenande and gapande on him so,  
Ase he wolde him swolwe tho.  
Whan Beves segh that ilche sight,  
The dragoun of so meche might,  
Hadde therthe opnede anon,  
For drede a wolde ther in han gon;  
A spere he let to him glide  
And smot the dragoun on the side;  
The spere sterde aghen anon,  
So the hail upon the ston,  
And to-bart on pices five.  
His sworde he drough alse blive;  
Tho thai foughte, alse I yow sai,  
Til it was high noun of the dai.  
The dragoun was atened stronge,  
That o man him scholde stonde so longe;  
The dragoun harde him gan asaile  
And smot his hors with the taile  
Right amideward the hed,  
That he fel to grounde ded.  
Now is Beves to grounde brought,  
Helpe him God, that alle thing wrought!  
Beves was hardi and of gode hert,  
Aghen the dragoun anon a stert  
And harde him a gan asaile,  
And he aghen with strong bataile;  
So betwene hem lesthe that fight  
And saw the two men coming.  
He made a cry and a show,  
As if it were a clap of thunder.  
Ascopard was so terrified  
That he did not dare go further.  
He said to Bevis, his brother in arms,  
“You can hear an astounding thing!”  
Bevis said, “Have no doubt of it,  
The dragon lies nearby.  
If we defeated the dragon, we would  
Have the fairest prize under the sun!”  
Ascopard swore by Saint John  
That he would not go one foot further.  
Bevis answered and said then,  
“Ascopard, why do you say so?  
Why should you be afraid  
Of something that you have not seen?”  
He swore that he must leave then;  
He could not hear or see the dragon.  
“I am weary, I must have rest.  
Go forth now and do your best!”  
Then Bevis said these noble words,  
“It is shameful to turn back.”  
He spurred his steed on the sides  
And rode against the dragon.  
The dragon saw him so that he came  
Roaring against him at once,  
Yawning and gaping on him  
As if he would swallow him.  
When Bevis saw that sight,  
The dragon of such great might,  
If the earth had immediately opened itself  
He would have jumped into it for fright.  
He sent a spear flying at him  
And struck the dragon on the side.  
The spear recoiled off at once,  
Like the hail off a stone,  
And burst apart into five pieces.  
He drew out his sword as quickly,  
And they fought, as I tell you,  
Until it was high noon in the daytime.  
The dragon was greatly irritated  
That one man should withstand him so long.  
The dragon attacked him savagely  
And lashed his horse with his tail  
Right alongside the head  
So that he fell to the earth dead.  
Now Bevis was brought to the ground.  
May God, who made all things, help him!  
Bevis was hardy and stout-hearted.  
At once he faced the dragon  
And fought him fiercely  
And he responded with strong hostility.  
So between them the fight lasted.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
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| 2790 | Til it was the therke night.  
Beves hadde thanne swich thrust,  
Him thoughte his herte to-brast;  
Thanne segh he a water him beside,  
So hit mighte wel betide,  
Fain a wolde thed er flen,  
He ne dorste fro the dragoun ten;  
The dragoun asailede him fot hot,  
With is taile on his scheld a smot,  
That hit clevede hevene ato,  
Beves was hardi and of gode hert,  
Into the welle anon a stert.  
Lordinges, herkneth to me now:  
The welle was of swich vertu:  
A virgine wonede in that londe,  
Hadde bathede in, ich understonde;  
That water was so holi,  
That the dragoun, sikerli,  
Ne dorste neghe the welle aboute  
Be fourti fote, saundoute.  
Whan Beves parsevede this,  
Wel glad a was in hertte, iwis;  
A dede of is helm of stel  
And colede him ther in fraiche wel,  
And of is helm a drank thore  
A large galon other more.  
A nemenede Sein Gorge, our levedi knight,  
And sete on his helm, that was bright;  
And Beves with eger mode  
Out of the welle sone a yode;  
The dragoun harde him asaile gan,  
He him defendeth a man.  
So betwene hem leste the fight,  
Til hit sprong the dai light,  
When Beves mighte aboute sen,  
Blithe he gan thanne ben;  
Beves on the dragoun hew,  
The dragoun on him venim threw;  
Al ferde Beves bodi there  |
| 2800 | Until it was dark night.  
At the time Bevis had such thirst  
That he thought his heart would burst.  
Then he saw some water nearby,  
As it might well happen.  
He wished to run toward it,  
But he did not dare turn from the dragon.  
The dragon attacked him in a rush;  
With his tail he lashed his shield,  
So that it was cut evenly in two,  
Along with his left shoulder.  
Bevis was hardy and stout-hearted;  
At once he started into the well.  
Lordings, listen to me now:  
The well was of great virtue.  
A virgin who lived in that land  
Had bathed in it, as I understand.  
That water was so holy  
That the dragon, for sure,  
Did not dare to come near the well  
Within forty feet, without a doubt.  
When Bevis realized this,  
He was very relieved at heart, indeed.  
He took off his helmet of steel  
And cooled himself in the fresh water.  
And from his helmet he drank there  
A good gallon or more.  
He called on Saint George, our beloved knight,  
And set his shining helmet on.  
And Bevis, with a renewed spirit,  
Soon rose out of the well.  
The dragon again hit him hard;  
He defended himself as a man.  
So between them the fight lasted  
Until daylight sprang.  
When Bevis could see about him,  
He began to be gladden then.  
As Bevis hacked at the dragon,  
The dragon spewed venom on him.  
Bevis’s body was all transformed  
As if he were the foulest leper.  
Where the venom landed on him,  
His flesh began to fester and swell.  
Where the poison was thrown,  
His arms began to burst apart.  
All his neck armor was destroyed,  
And a thousand links had fallen from his mail.  
Then Bevis in great urgency  
Began to cry loudly to Jesus:  
“Lord, who raised up Lazarus,  
Deliver me from this fiendish dragon!”  
When he saw his chain mail torn,  
“Lord,” he said, “alas that I was ever born!”  
That said, Bevis, where he stood,  

| 2810 | Bevis was hardi and of gode hert,  
Into the welle anon a stert.  
Lordinges, herkneth to me now:  
The welle was of swich vertu:  
A virgine wonede in that londe,  
Hadde bathede in, ich understonde;  
That water was so holi,  
That the dragoun, sikerli,  
Ne dorste neghe the welle aboute  
Be fourti fote, saundoute.  
Whan Beves parsevede this,  
Wel glad a was in hertte, iwis;  
A dede of is helm of stel  
And colede him ther in fraiche wel,  
And of is helm a drank thore  
A large galon other more.  
A nemenede Sein Gorge, our levedi knight,  
And sete on his helm, that was bright;  
And Beves with eger mode  
Out of the welle sone a yode;  
The dragoun harde him asaile gan,  
He him defendeth a man.  
So betwene hem leste the fight,  
Til hit sprong the dai light,  
When Beves mighte aboute sen,  
Blithe he gan thanne ben;  
Beves on the dragoun hew,  
The dragoun on him venim threw;  
Al ferde Beves bodi there  |
| 2820 | The dragoun asailede him fot hot,  
With is taile on his scheld a smot,  
That hit clevede hevene ato,  
His left scholder dede also,  
Beves was hardi and of gode hert,  
Into the welle anon a stert.  
Lordinges, herkneth to me now:  
The welle was of swich vertu:  
A virgine wonede in that londe,  
Hadde bathede in, ich understonde;  
That water was so holi,  
That the dragoun, sikerli,  
Ne dorste neghe the welle aboute  
Be fourti fote, saundoute.  
Whan Beves parsevede this,  
Wel glad a was in hertte, iwis;  
A dede of is helm of stel  
And colede him ther in fraiche wel,  
And of is helm a drank thore  
A large galon other more.  
A nemenede Sein Gorge, our levedi knight,  
And sete on his helm, that was bright;  
And Beves with eger mode  
Out of the welle sone a yode;  
The dragoun harde him asaile gan,  
He him defendeth a man.  
So betwene hem leste the fight,  
Til hit sprong the dai light,  
When Beves mighte aboute sen,  
Blithe he gan thanne ben;  
Beves on the dragoun hew,  
The dragoun on him venim threw;  
Al ferde Beves bodi there  |
| 2830 | A foule mesel alse yif a were;  
Thar the venim on him felle,  
His flesch gan ranclen and tebelle,  
Thar the venim was icast,  
His armes gan al to-brast;  
Al to-brosten is ventaila,  
And of his hauberk a thesend maile.  
Thanne Beves, sone an highe  
Wel loude he gan to Jesu criye:  
“Lord, that rerede the Lazaroun,  
Dilivre me fro this fend dragoun!”  
Tho he segh his hauberk toren,  
“Lord!” a seide, “That I was boren!”  
That seide Beves, thar a stod,  

| 2840 | Until it was dark night.  
At the time Bevis had such thirst  
That he thought his heart would burst.  
Then he saw some water nearby,  
As it might well happen.  
He wished to run toward it,  
But he did not dare turn from the dragon.  
The dragon attacked him in a rush;  
With his tail he lashed his shield,  
So that it was cut evenly in two,  
Along with his left shoulder.  
Bevis was hardy and stout-hearted;  
At once he started into the well.  
Lordings, listen to me now:  
The well was of great virtue.  
A virgin who lived in that land  
Had bathed in it, as I understand.  
That water was so holy  
That the dragon, for sure,  
Did not dare to come near the well  
Within forty feet, without a doubt.  
When Bevis realized this,  
He was very relieved at heart, indeed.  
He took off his helmet of steel  
And cooled himself in the fresh water.  
And from his helmet he drank there  
A good gallon or more.  
He called on Saint George, our beloved knight,  
And set his shining helmet on.  
And Bevis, with a renewed spirit,  
Soon rose out of the well.  
The dragon again hit him hard;  
He defended himself as a man.  
So between them the fight lasted  
Until daylight sprang.  
When Bevis could see about him,  
He began to be gladden then.  
As Bevis hacked at the dragon,  
The dragon spewed venom on him.  
Bevis’s body was all transformed  
As if he were the foulest leper.  
Where the venom landed on him,  
His flesh began to fester and swell.  
Where the poison was thrown,  
His arms began to burst apart.  
All his neck armor was destroyed,  
And a thousand links had fallen from his mail.  
Then Bevis in great urgency  
Began to cry loudly to Jesus:  
“Lord, who raised up Lazarus,  
Deliver me from this fiendish dragon!”  
When he saw his chain mail torn,  
“Lord,” he said, “alas that I was ever born!”  
That said, Bevis, where he stood, |
And leide on, ase he wer wod;
The dragoun harde him gan asaile
And smot on the helm with is taile,
That his helm clevede ato,
And his bacinet dede also.
Tweies a ros and tweis a fel,
The thredde tim overthrew in the wel;
Thar-inne a lai up right;
A neste, whather hit was dai other night.
Whan overgon wa
And rekevred was of is herte,
Beves sette him up anon;
The venim was awei igon;
He was as hol a man
Ase he was whan he theder cam.
On is knes he gan to falle,
To Jesu Crist he gan to calle:
―Help,‖ a seide, ―Godes sone,
That this dragoun wer overcome!
Boute ich mowe the dragoun slon
Er than ich hennes gon,
Schel hit never aslawe be
For no man in Cristenté!‖
To God he made his praiere
And to Marie, his moder dere;
That herde the dragoun, ther a stod,
And fleghe awei, ase he wer wod.
Beves ran after, withouten faile,
And the dragoun he gan asaile;
With is swerd, that he out braide,
On the dragoun wel hard a laide,
And so harde a hew him than,
A karf ato his heved pan,
And hondred dentes a smot that stonde,
Er he mighte kerven a wonder,
A hitte him so on the cholle
And karf ato the throte bolle.
The dragoun lai on is side,
On him a yenede swithe wide.
Beves thanne with strokes smerte
Smot the dragoun to the herte,
An hondred dentes a smot in on,
Er the heved wolde fro the bodi gon,
And the gode knight Bevoun
The tonge karf of the dragoun;
Upon the tronsoun of is spere
The tonge a stikede for to bere.

Laid on as if he were berserk.
The dragon fought him ruthlessly
And struck at his head with his tail,
So that his helmet was split in two,
With his underhelmet as well.
Twice he rose and twice he fell.
The third time he was thrown into the well
He lay inside it facing upward,
Not knowing whether it was day or night.
When the pain had diminished
And his courage was renewed,
Bevis raised himself up at once.
The venom had faded away;
He was as whole a man
As he was when he came there.
He fell on his knees
And began to call on Jesus Christ.
―Help me,‖ he said, ―Son of God,
So that this dragon will be overcome.
Unless I can slay the dragon
Before I go from here,
It will never be slain
By any man in Christendom!‖
He made his prayer to God
And to Mary, His dear mother.
The dragon heard that where he stood
And flew away as if he were in a panic.
Bevis ran after, without fail,
And continued to attack the dragon
With his sword that he drew out.
He laid on the dragon furiously,
And he hacked at him so hard
That he split his skull in two.
He struck a hundred blows in that place.
Before he could cut another wound,
He hit him so hard on the chest
That he carved his throat in two.
The dragon lay on his side,
Gaping its mouth widely at Bevis.
Then Bevis, with painful strokes,
Pierced the dragon in his heart.
He struck a hundred blows
Before he could remove the head from the body,
And the good knight Bevis
Carved the tongue from the dragon.
Upon the handle of his spear,
He stuck the tongue to carry it.

58 Wonder: Kölberg’s transcription of Auchinleck has wonde.
59 TEAMs explains that “The cholle is that part of a dragon’s anatomy which extends from the chin to the throat and from ear to ear” (note to line 2665). Bevis strikes the dragon on his throte bolle, evidently his Adam’s apple.
A wented tho withouten ensoine
Toward the toun of Coloine.
Thanne herde he belles ringe,
Prestes, clerkes loude singe;
A man ther he hath imet,
And swithe faire he hath him gret,
And asked that ilche man tho,
Whi thai ronge and songe so.
“Sire,” a seide, “withouten faile,
Beves is ded in bataile;
Tharfore, for sothe I saie thee:
Hit is Bevis dirige!”
“Nai,” queth Beves, “be Sein Martin!”
And wente to Bishop Florentin.
Theo the bishop hadde of him a sight,
A thankede Jesu ful of might
And broughte Beves in to the toun
With a faire prosesioun;
Thanne al the folk that thar was,
Thankede Jesu of that gras.
On a dai Sire Beves sede:
“Leve em, what is to rede
Of me stifader Devoun
That holdeth me londes at Hamtoun?”
Thebeschop seide anon right:
“Kosin, Saber, thin em, is in Wight,
And everi yer on a dai certaine
Upon th’emperur of Almaine
He ginneth gret bataile take,
Beves, al for thine sake;
He weneth wel, that thow be ded;
Tharfore, kosin, be me red,
An hondred men ich yewe thee wighte,
Aghen th’emperur to fighte,
Stalworde men and fer,
And thow schelt wende te Saber:
Sai, ich grette him wel ilome!
Yif ye han nede, sendeth to me,
Ich wile yow helpe with al me might,
And tho levedi schel with me sojurne,
The lady will stay with me,
And your page, Ascopard,
Schel hire bothe wite and ward.”
Forth wente Beves with than
To his leman Josian:
“Lemman,” a seide, “ich wile go
And avenge me of me fo,
Yif ich mighte with eni ginne
Me kende eritage to winne!”
“Swete lemmman,” Josian sede,
“Who schel me thanne wisse and rede?”
Beves sede “Lemman min,
Min em, the Bischop Florentin,
And Ascopard, me gode page,
Schel thee warde fro damage.”
“Ye, have ich Ascopard,” she sede,
Of no man ne stant me drede;
Ich take thee God and seinte Marie:
Sone so thow might, to me thow highe!”

Beves wente forth anon
With is men everichon,
That the bischop him hadde yeve,
So longe thai hadde here wei idrive,
That hii come upon a done,
A mile out of South Hamtone.
“Lordinges,” to his men a sede,
“Ye scholle do be mine rede!
Have ich eni so hardi on,
That the bishop had given him.
They had driven on for a long while
When they came upon a hill
A mile out of Southampton.
“Lords,” he said to his men,
“You will act by my directions.
Do I have anyone so brave
That dares to go to Southampton,
To the emperor of Germany,
And say that a division has come,
All ready with a hundred knights,
All freshly arrived from France,
Who for my love will fight,
Both with spear and with lance?
But always, in seriousness and play,
Always speak the French language,
And say that I am called Gerard,
And I will fight as a mercenary;
And I am sure of victory
If he will pay my wages.”
One man readily came forth
Who could speak French elegantly.
“Sir,” he said, “I will go
To deliver your message at once.”
He went forth to the castle gate
Where he met the porter.
Who brought him to the emperor.
He said everything as Bevis ordered him.
The emperor and Bevis sat together
That same night at supper.
The emperor asked him what his name was.
“Gerard!” he answered as quickly.
“Gerard!” he mused. “In truth indeed,
My lady had, long before now,
An earl as her lord before I married her.
They had a son between them,
A proud and childish wretch,
And descended from some foul blood.
His son—that was an arrogant boy—
Men called him Bevis.
As soon as he was of age,
He sold me his inheritance
And frittered his money in shame and disgrace,
And later fled out of England.
Now hath he her an em in Wight,
Sir Saber, a well strong knight,
And cometh with gret barnage
And claimeth his eritage,
And oft me doth her gret gile,
And thow might yelde is while,
Him to sle wyth swerd in felde,
Wel ich wolde thin here yelde!"

"Sire," queth Beves anon right,
"Ich ave knihtes of meche might,
That beth unarmed her of wede,
For we ne mighte non out lede
Over the se withouten aneighe;
Tharfore, sire, swithe an highe
Let arme me knihtes echon,
And yef hem gode hors forth enon,
An hondred men sent thow thee self,
As mani ichave be min helf,
Dight me the schip and thin men bothe,
And I schel swere thee an oth,
That I schel yeve swiche asaut
On that ilche Sabaaut,
That withinne a lite while
Thow schelt here of a queinte gile!"
Tho the schip to londe drough,
Saber hit knew wel inough
And thoughte and gan to understonde,
That Beves was come inte Ingelonde.
“Lord,” a sede, “hered Thow be,
That ich mai me kende lord se:
That he wer ded, ich was ofdrad,
Meche sorwe ichave for him had.”
A wente with is knightes blive,
Thar the schipes scholde arive;
Either other gan to kisse,
And made meche joie and blisse,
And Beves tolde him in a while,
He hadde do th’emperur a gile.
Tho seide Beves with than:
“Have ich eni so hardi man,
That dorre to Hamtoun gon
Over the water sone anon,
And sai th’emperur anon right,
That I nam no Frensche knight,
Ne that I ne hatte nought Gerard,
That made with him the forward,
And sai him, ich hatte Bevoun,
And cleymeth the seinori of Hamtoun,
And is icome with thee to speke,
Of his fader deth to ben awreke,
Thee te sle with schame and schonde
And for to winne is owene londe.”
Th’emperur herde of him that word,
His sone stod before the bord;
He thoughte with is longe knif
Bereve that mesageres lif;

When the ship drew to shore,
Saber recognized it well enough
And thought and began to understand
That Bevis had come into England.
“Lord!” he said, “may You be praised,
That I may see my lawful lord.
I was afraid that he was dead;
I have had much sorrow over him.”
He went with his knights excitedly
Where the ship would arrive.
Each began to kiss the other
And made great joy and celebration.
And Bevis told him in a while
He had played a trick on the emperor.
Then with that Bevis said,
“Do I have any man so fearless
That dares to go to Hampton,
Over the water soon from now,
And tell the emperor directly
That I am no French knight,
Nor am I named Gerard,
Who made the pact with him.
And tell him my name is Bevis,
And I claim the lordship of Hampton,
And his wife is my mother.
That will turn them both to rage.
Now, against them both together,
I will endeavor to avenge my father!”
One hardy man started up:
“Sir,” he said, “I will go.
The message condemns them both,
And will make them sorry and wrathful.”
He went forth at once
Over the water in a boat.
He marched on as quickly
Past the castle gate.
At supper as he sat,
He greeted the emperor in this way:
“Sir Emperor, I bring you
A certain reliable report.
You received well that knight
Who dined with you last night.
He says he is not called Gerard,
And he claims the lordship of Hampton,
And is coming to speak with you
To be avenged of his father’s death,
To slay you with shame and disgrace,
And to win back his own land.”
As the emperor heard these words from him,
His son stood before the table.
He thought with his long knife
To take away that messenger’s life.
A threw is knif and kouthe nought redi
And smot his sone thourgh the bodi.
The mesager spak a gainli word
Before th’emperur is bord:
“Thow gropedest the wif anight to lowe,
Thow might nought sen aright to throwe;
Thow havest so swonke on hire to night,
Thow havest negh forlore the sight:
Her thow havest lither haunsel,
A worse thee betide schel!‖
And smot is hors with the spore
And arnde out at halle dore;
Wel and faire he hath him dight
And com aghen to Beves in Wight
And tolde a slough is sone for grame;
Beves lough and hadde gode game.
Lete we with Sire Beves thanne
And speke of Josiane,
That in Coloine was with Beves em,
Til that he aghen theder kem.
In that londe that ilche while
Thar wonede an erl, that highte Mile:
To Josian he hadde his love cast
And gan hire to wowen fast,
Faire a spak to terne hire thought,
And she seide a was aboute nought.
That erl was wroth in is maner,
For Josian him nolde here,
And spak to hire with loude gret:
“For wham,” a seide, ―scholde ich it lete,
Boute ich mai have of thee me wille?
Ich wile,” a seide, ―who that nille!‖
She seide: “While ichave Ascopard,
Of thee nam ich nothing afard,
For thee wretche ne for thin ost,
Ne for thee ne for thine bost!‖
And tho thoughte that Erl Mile
To do Josian a gile:
A leter he let for to write,
In this maner he dede adite,
That Ascopard come scholde
To Beves, that the letter him tolde,
In to a castel in an yle,
The brede of the water thre mile;
To Ascopard thai come snel;
Thai seide, Beves him grette wel
And besoughte, for is love

He threw his knife and could not aim it
And struck his son through his body.
The messenger spoke some fitting words
Before the emperor’s table:
“You’ve fondled your wife too vulgarly at night,
And you can’t see straight to throw.
You have rutted on her at night so much
That you have nearly lost your sight!61
You’ve had a lean reward here;
A worse one will be waiting for you!”
And he struck his horse with his spurs
And sped out of the hall’s doors.
He conducted himself well and expertly
And came back to Bevis in Wight
And reported he killed his son in his temper.
Bevis laughed and had good amusement.
We will pause with Sir Bevis then
And speak about Josanne
Who was in Cologne with Bevis’ uncle
Until he might return again.
In that land at the same time
There lived an earl who was called Miles.
He had his heart set on Josanne
And he began to woo her aggressively.
He spoke amorously to change her thoughts,
And she said it was all for nothing.
The earl was hostile in his manner,
For Josanne would not listen to him,
And he spoke to her with a loud complaint:
“Why should I stop,” he thundered,
Until I have from you what I want!
I will go on, regardless of whoever says no!”
She said, “While I have Ascopard,
I am not afraid of you,
Not of your wrath, not of your host,
Not of you for all your threats!”
And then Earl Miles thought
Of a trick to trap Josanne.
He had a letter written,
And in this manner he had it composed,
That Ascopard should go
To Bevis, where the letter directed him,
Into a castle on an island,
Where the water’s breadth was three miles.
They came quickly to Ascopard
And said that Bevis greeted him well
And pleaded, for his love,

61 Early print versions omit such fun lines, but in the MS we have this supreme insult. It was a medieval belief that sexual excess caused men to lose vigor and have poor vision, and thus the emperor’s feeble aim. Kölberg gives the example of a comic German poem from the fourteenth century, Der Pfarrer vom Kalenberge, where a bishop asks a parson for advice for his bad eyes. In Kölberg, Beuis. 321.
In haste a scholde to him come.  
Forth wente Ascopard ase hot

Over the water in a bot;  
When he was over the water come,  
Hii unlek the ghte at the frome;  
And when he was comen withinne,  
Thai sperede him faste with ginne.  
Aghen to Josiane Miles gan terne:  
“For wham,” a seide, “schel ich it werne?”  
She thoughte for to kepe hire, aplight,

She sente a masager to Wight,  
To Beves, be letter and tolde fore

Al togedre lasse and more.  

On a day the erl to her cam  
And in his armes he her nam

Miles wolde have is wille  
And she bed him holde stille:

“I schel be me weddefere!”

“Nought, thegh I scholde lese me lif,  
Boute ich were thee weddede wif;  
Yif eni man me scholde wedde,  
Thanne mot ich go with him to bedde.  
I trow, he is nought now here,  
That schel be me weddefere!”

“And kiste hire anon right  
And sente after baroun and knight  
And bed hem com lestte and meste,  
To anoure that meri feste.  
The night is gon, that dai comen is,  
The spusaile don hit is  
With merthe in that toun  
And joie of erl and baroun.

And whan hit drough toward the night,  

Here soper was ther redi dight,  
And thegh thai richelich weren ifed,  
That erl wolde ben abed.  
Josian he het lede to bour,  
To have hire under covertour;  
Upon hire bedde ther she sat,  
That erl com to hire with that,  
With knightes gret companie  
With pyment and with spisorie,  
With al the gamen that hii hedde,

For to make hire dronke a bedde;  
Ac al another was hire thought,  
Ne gannede hire that gle right nought.

That he should come in haste to him.  
Ascopard set forth as rapidly,  
Over the water in a boat.  
When he had come over the water,  
He unlocked the gate as soon as he arrived.  
And when he had come inside,  
They imprisoned him by locking him up.  
Again Miles returned to Josanne:

“For who,” he said, “should I be denied?”  
She thought to protect herself, certainly.

She sent a message to the Isle of Wight  
To Bevis in a letter, and she told him

Everything at once, less and more.

One day the earl came to her  
And seized her in his arms.  

Miles wanted to have his will,  
And she begged him to be still.

“I will not, even if I should lose my life,  
Unless I were your wedded wife!”

If any man should marry me,  
Then I must go with him to bed.

I swear, he is not here now,  
The man who will be my husband.”

“And kiste hire anon right  
And sente after baroun and knight  
And bed hem com lestte and meste,  
To anoure that meri feste.

The night passed, so that day came,  
And the marriage was performed  
With festivity in that town  
And joy in earl and baron.

And when it drew near the night,  
Their supper was made ready.

And though they were being richly fed,  
The earl wanted to go to bed.  
He ordered Josanne brought to the bower,  
To have her under the covers.

She sat there upon her bed.  
With that the earl came to her  
With a great procession of knights  
With spiced wine and dainties,  
And with all the tricks that they had  
To make her drunk in her bed.

But her thoughts were elsewhere;  
That gaiety did not amuse her at all.

62 Extra lines in Egerton, Naples, Cambridge, and Chetham, but not in Auchinleck (Kölberg, Beuis, 146).
The missing sense is that Miles intends to ravish Josanne with or without marriage.
“Sire,” she said to that earl's son,
“I ask you to grant me a favor.
And unless you grant me this one,
I will never ask anything again.
I ask you from the start
That neither man nor woman come in here.
Lock them outside for love of me
So that no man invades our privacy.
Women are modest in our deeds
And particularly maidens,” she said.
That earl said he gladly would.
He shoed out both knight and servant,
Ladies, maidens, and young men,
So that no one could come in there,
And he shut the door with the key.
He little suspected to be doomed.
He came back to Josanne.
“Darling,” he said, “I have done it,
I have done your request in good faith.
I will take my own shoes off,
As I have never done before.”
He set himself down in that place.
In front of his bed there was
A bedcurtain on a metal rail,
As many noble knights had,
So that no one might see them in bed.
Josanne thought to herself in haste;
With a towel she made a noose.
She threw it about his neck
And drew it on the crossbeam.
By the neck she choked him tight
And let him hang in this way all the night.
Josanne laid in her bed;
It was no wonder that she was terrified.
Day came in all its glory.
In the morning the barons began to arise,
Some to hunt and some to go to church,
And workmen went to go to work.
The sun shone; it grew late.
The barons were puzzled
That the earl lay so long in bed;
They had great curiosity over it.
Some said, “Let him be!
With Josanne he has all his will.”
Mid-morning came, it drew to noon;
The barons soon after spoke again.
The boldest said, “How can this be?
I will go up and see!”
That baron dared to speak out.

---

Kölberg gives the explanation that the earl would have had a chamberlain to take his shoes off, and Miles is complaining that he must do it himself (*Bevis*, 323).
To the chamber he gan reke
And smot the dore with is honde,
That al wide opun it wonde.
“Awake,” a seide, “Sire Earl Mile,
Thow havest slept so longe while,
Thin heved oweth to ake wel:
Dame, let make him a caudel!”
“Nai,” queth Josian at that sake,
“Never eft ne schel his heved ake!
Ichave so tyled him for that sore,
Schel hit never eft ake more,
Yerstendai he me wedded with wrong
And tonight ichave him honge.
Doth be me al youre wille,
Schel he never eft wimman spille!”

All hii made meche sorwe;
Anon rightes in that morwe
Sum hire demte t
hanne
In a tonne for to branne.
Withoute the toun hii pighte a stake,
Thar the fur was imake,
The tonne thai hadde ther iset,
Ascopard withinne the castel lay,
The tonne and al the folk he say;
Ful wel him thoughte that while,
That him trokede a gret gile,
For he was in the castel beloke,
The castel wal he hath tobroken;
He was maroner wel gode,
A stertte in to the salte flode,
A fischer he segh fot hot,
Ever a swam toward the bot.
The fischer wende, sum fend it were,
Out of is bot he flegh for fere.
Ascopard hente the bot an honde
And rew himself to the londe,
Toward the fur faste a schok,
Beves com and him oftok:
―Treitour,‖ a seide, “whar hastow be?
This dai thow havest betraied me!”
“Nai, sire!” Ascopard seide,
And tolde, Miles him hadde betraide.
Toward the fur thai wente blive:
The prest, that hire scholde schrive,
Godes blessing mote he fonge,
For that he held Josiane so longe!
In hire smok she stod naked,
And he went quickly to the chamber
And struck the door with his hand,
So that it swung wide open.
“Wake up,” he said, “Sir Earl Miles!
You have slept for so long a while
That your head will ache.
Lady, have a cordial made for him!”
“No,” said Josanne to that cause.
“Never again will his head ache.
I have treated him for those pains
So that it will never ache again.
Yesterday he wedded me with injustice
And last night I hanged him.
Do with me as you will!
He will never defile another woman!”
All of them made great sorrow.
Right away on that morning
Some condemned her
To be burned in a barrel later.
Outside the town they set up a stake,
Where the fire was made.
They set the barrel there
And they fetched wood and kindling.
Ascopard lay inside the castle,
Seeing the town and the people.
He realized full well that moment
That he had been tricked with great guile.
Because he was locked in the castle,
He shattered the castle wall.
He was an expert mariner.
He leaped into the salty sea,
And he quickly saw a fisherman.
He swam directly toward the boat.
The fisher thought it was some fiend;
He flew out of his boat for fear.
Ascopard took the boat in hand
And rowed himself to the coast.
Toward the fire he hastened quickly.
Bevis appeared and overtook him.
“Traitor,” he said. “where have you been?
Today you have betrayed me!”
“No, sire!” Ascopard pleaded
And explained that Miles had deceived him.
Reconciled, they went toward the fire.
The priest was there to hear her confession.
May he have God’s blessing
In that he delayed Josanne for so long.
She stood naked in her smock
Where the fire was made.

---

64 Caudel: A sweet alcoholic beverage much like a thin porridge or egg-nog, served hot. The drink had medicinal purposes but seems to have been popular mainly for hangovers or as a nightcap.
As men prepared to burn her,
Bevis came galloping on Arondel
With his sword Morgelai.
Ascopard came by another way,
And in that same place he killed
All that he found about the fire.
And this was what that proud earl,
Sir Miles, had for his guile.
Bevis set Josanne on his palfrey,
And they went forth on their way.
They boarded their ship right after
And sailed forth into Wight.
Then Saber was well pleased
With Ascopard and Josanne.
Bevis and Saber sent their message
Far and wide into many lands,
And they sent in haste
For a great cavalry,
For the strongest knights in all the land
That they might find anywhere.
The emperor nearly died;
His wife comforted him and said,
“Sir,” she said, “do not be afraid!”
I have taken good counsel.
You should send, for sure,
For your army in Germany.
And when your host has come together,
Send word to the King of Scotland, my father.
He will come to you in haste
With a great and fearsome cavalry,
So that you need not be troubled
By that thief, grey-haired Saber,
Nor by Bevis, who is loathsome to me.
You will see both of them hang yet.”
When the letters were ready,
The messengers set forth.
In May, when leaf and grass begin to spring,
And the birds sing merrily,
The King of Scotland came to fight
Alongside thirty thousand strong knights
From the emperor’s barony in Germany,
With an enormously great cavalry.
“Lordinges,” he said when they were
Before him in the hall, “you know all,
How this thief, grey-haired Saber,
Has so often aggravated me sorely.

\[65\] *Doute yow nought:* The queen uses formal address (you) to her husband. Like Jane Austen’s busybody Mrs. Bennet who calls her husband “Mr. Bennet,” the show of submission does not match the queen’s aggressiveness. For a discussion of the Scottish queen’s contrast to Josanne, another foreign queen, see Calkin, 94.
Now is him come help to fighte,  
Beves of Hamtoun, an hardi knyghte,  
To Sarasins was solde gon longe:  
Ich wende he hadde ben anhonge.

He me threteth for to slen  
And for to winne is londe aghen;  
With him he hath a geaunt brought:  
Erthliche man semeth he nought,  
Ne no man of flesch ne felle,
Boute a fend stolen out of helle;  
Ascopart men clepeth him ther oute,  
Of him ichave swithe gret doute.

Ac, lordinges,” a seide, ―arme ye wel,  
We scholle besege hem in here castel;  
The Ascopard be strong and sterk,  
Mani hondes maketh light werk!”  
Forth thai wenten ase snel,
Til thai come to the castel
Thar Saber and Beves weren inne.
Saber stod on is tour an high,  
Al that grete ost a sigh;  
Gret wonder ther of he hade,  
The holi crois before him he made  
And swor be his berde hore,  
That be gode and certaine!  
The ferste ich wile me self out lede,  
And thow that other, Beves!” a sede,  
“And Ascopard the thredde schel have  
With is gode, grete stave,  
Be we thre upon the grene,  
Wel ich wot and nought ne wene:  
Mani man is thar oute kete,  
This dai schel is lif forlete!”
Saber is horn began to blowe,  
That his ost him scholde knowe.  
“Lordinges,” a seide, “ne doute yow nought,  
Ye scholle this dai be holde so dought,  
That hem were better at Rome,  
Thanne hii hadde hider icome.”  
Tho th’emperur herde in castel blowe,  
Tharbi he gan to knowe,

Now Bevis of Hampton, a hardy knight,  
Has come to help him fight.  
He was sold to the Saracens long ago.  
I believed he had been hanged.
He threatens to slay me  
And to win his land back again.  
He has brought a giant with him;  
He seems like no earthly man,  
Nor like any man of flesh or blood,  
But a fiend who has stolen out of Hell!
Men around there call him Ascopart;  
I have such great fear of him.  
But, lordings,” he said, “arm yourselves well.  
We will besiege them in their castle.  
Even if Ascopard is strong and fearsome,  
Many hands make light work.”66
They went forth as swiftly  
Until they came to the castle
Where Saber and Bevis were inside.  
They raised pavilions and field machinery.  
Saber stood in his tower on high  
And he saw all that great army.  
He was greatly amazed by it.
He made the holy Cross before him  
And swore by his grey beard  
That some of them would sorely regret it.  
Saber went down from his tower.  
He sent for all of his knights.  
“To arms, lordings!” he called.  
“The emperor outside wants to besiege us.  
We will make three divisions  
Which will be firm and sure.  
The first I will lead out myself,  
And you the other, Bevis!” he said.  
“And Ascopard will have the third  
With his strong, huge staff.  
If we three are upon the green,  
I know well and have no doubt  
Many a man that we catch out there  
Will lose his life this day!”
Saber began to sound his horn  
So that his host should know him.  
“Lordinges,” he said, “have no fear.  
You will triumph this day so valiantly  
That they would be better off in Rome  
Than to have come here!”
When the emperor heard the sound from  
The castle, he realized by it

66 According to Bartlett Jere Whiting, this is the first recorded usage of this proverb (TEAMS). The source is probably Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly before 1500 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).
That hii armede hem in the castel;
His knightes he het ase snel:
“Has armes, lordinges, to bataile!
Out hii cometh, us to assail.”
Twei ostes thai gonne make,
He of Scotlonde hath on itake,
Th’emperur that other ladde:
His deth that dai ther he hadde.
Out of the castel cam before
Saber with is berde hore,
And in is companie
Thre hondred knightes hardie.
Sire Morice of Mounclare
His stede smot aghenes Sabere;
His spere was sumdel kene,
And Saber rode aghene:
Though is spere wer scharp igrounde,
Saber slough him in that stounde.

Out on Arondel tho com Bevoun
And mette with is stifader Devoun,
And with a dent of gret for
A bar him doun of his hors;
With Morgelay, that wolde wel bite,
He hadde ment is heved of smite;
His ost cam riding him to,
Wel ten thosend other mo;
So stronge were tho hii come.
Th’emperur Beves hii benome
And broughte him an horse tho;
Tharfore was Beves swithe wo.
Thar com in the thredde part
With is batte Ascopard;
Ever alse he com than,
A felde bothe hors and man.
Tharwith was Beves wel apaide,
A clepede Ascopard and to him saide:
“Ascopard, tak right gode hede:
Th’emperur rit on a whit stede;
Thin hure I schel thee yilde wel,
With that thow bringe him to me caste!"’
“Sire,” a seide, “I schel for sothe
In to the castel bringe him to thee!”
Ascopard leide on wel inough,
Bothe man and hors he slough;
Thar nas non armur in that londe,
That mighte the geauntes strok astonde.
The King of Scotlonde, with is bat
A yaf him swiche a sori flat
Upon the helm in that stounde,
That man and hors fel ded to grounde.
Thanne anon, withoute sojur,
A wente to that emperur,
And hasteliciche with might and main
A hente the hors be the rain;
That they were arming themselves inside.
He ordered his knights as quickly:
“To arms, lordings, to battle!
Out they come, to attack us!”
They formed into two divisions.
The King of Scotland took one.
He met his death there that day;
And the emperor led the other.
Saber came out of the castle first
With his grey beard,
And in his company
There were three hundred hardy knights.
Sir Morris of Montclear
Struck against Saber on his steed;
His spear was somewhat pointed,
Yet Saber rode against him.
Though his spear was sharply ground,
Saber killed him in that place.
Then Bevis came out on Arondel
And met with his stepfather Devon;
And with a blow of great force
He threw him down from his horse.
With Morgelai, which could bite well,
He meant to strike off his head.
His host came riding to him,
Well ten thousand or more.
So strong were those that came
That they took the emperor from Bevis
And rescued him and his horse;
Bevis was very angry for it.
Then the third part arrived
With Ascopard with his club.
As he approached, he continually
Felled both horse and man.
Bevis was well pleased with him,
And called Ascopard and said to him,
“Ascopard, pay close attention;
The emperor is riding on a white steed.
Your wage will be well paid
If you will bring him to my castle.”
“Sir,” he said, “I will for sure
Bring him into the castle to you!”
Ascopard laid on well enough;
He killed both man and horse.
There was no armor in the land
That could withstand the giant’s stroke.
He gave the King of Scotland such a harsh stroke
Upon the helmet with his club
That in that moment
Man and horse fell dead to the ground.
After that, without pausing,
He went to the emperor,
And hastily, with power and agility,
He seized his horse by the reins.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3440</td>
<td>He carried horse and man to the castle, Whether they liked it or not, firmly and strongly.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Of all the others, for a certain fact, Who were engaged in that battle,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>From Scotland and from Germany,</td>
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<td>Bevis and Saber, with might and strength, Drove them down with deadly blows</td>
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<td>So that none there escaped alive,</td>
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<td>And thus Sir Bevis won victory</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And avenged himself on his enemies.</td>
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<td>They went to the castle together</td>
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<td>With great relief, joy, and freedom.</td>
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<td>And to ensure that his stepfather was dead,</td>
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<td>At once he had a lead kettle filled</td>
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<td>Full of pitch, burning sulfur,</td>
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<td>And molten lead, which was poured out.</td>
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<td>When all who were in it seethed,</td>
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<td>The emperor met his death there</td>
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<td>Where he lay at his end.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>May his soul go wherever it may!</td>
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<td>His mother lay on the castle top,</td>
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<td>And she saw her lord boiling in the pitch.</td>
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<td>She was so distressed from shock,</td>
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<td>She fell and broke her neck from it.</td>
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<td>Bevis was as satisfied with her,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>His mother, as he was with his stepfather,</td>
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<td>And said, “Mother, forgive me this act; I never gave you any blow or knock!”</td>
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<td>Then all the lords of Hampton shire</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Made Bevis lord and sire</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And performed fealty and homage,</td>
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<td>As was lawful and customary.</td>
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<td>Then Bevis was glad and content</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And thanked God many times</td>
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<td>That he was avenged well enough</td>
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<td>On him who killed his father.</td>
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<td>Very speedily, Josanne sent word</td>
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<td>To Cologne for the gracious bishop</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Who married Bevis and Josanne.</td>
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<td>There was no lack of joy!</td>
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<td>Though I won’t elaborate on the wedding,</td>
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<td>You might well guess that it was royal,</td>
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<td>That there was in every way</td>
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<td>Food and drink and lavish hospitality.</td>
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<td>Now Bevis had all his estate.</td>
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<td>With her he fathered two children</td>
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<td>In their first year</td>
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<td>While they were together.</td>
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<td>And Saber then advised him</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To go to King Edgar.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

67 Possibly Edgar the Aetheling (c. 1051-c. 1126), who was proclaimed king of England in 1066 but never reigned.
Tho with inne a lite stounde
The king a fond at Lounde.
Beves a knees doun him set,
The king hendeliche a gret;
The king askede him, what he were
And what nedes a wolde there.
Thanne answerde Bevoun:
“Ichatte Beves of Hamtoun;
Me fader was ther th’erl Gii;
Th’emperur for is levedi
Out of Almaine com and him slough;
Ichave wreke him wel inough;
Ich bidde before your barnage,
That ye me graunte min eritage!‖
―Bletheliche,‖ a seide, ―sone min,
Ich graunt e thee, be Sein Martin!‖
His marchal he gan beholde:
―Fet me,‖ a seide, ―me yerde of golde!
Gii, is fader, was me marchal,
Also Bevis, is sone, schal.”
His yerd he gan him ther take:
So thai atonede withoute sake.

[Several episodes occur. Arondel kills the king’s son and Bevis and Josanne go to Armenia in exile. Ascopard allies with Yvor and kidnaps Josanne as she gives birth to twins, Guy and Miles. Saber finds and kills Ascopard and reunites Josanne with Bevis. Terry is found and marries a princess. Ermine dies and makes Bevis’ son Guy his heir. Bevis and Guy convert Armenia. Bevis defeats Yvor and returns to England where King Edgar’s jealous steward raises a street battle against him. Bevis defeats the London rebels and reconciles with Edgar, who gives his daughter and kingdom to Miles. Bevis moves with Josanne to Mombrant to rule as king.]

With him wente Josian, is queene,
And levede withoute treie and tene
Twenti yer, so saith the bok.

[Bevis ruled with] Josanne, his queen,
And they lived without trial or sadness
For twenty years, so says the book.

---

| 4590 | Thanne swiche siknesse the levedi tok,  
Out of this world she moste wende;  
Gii, hire sone, she gan ofsende,  
And Terry, the riche king,  
For to ben at here parting.  
And whan thai were alle thare,  
To his stable Beves gan fare;  
Arondel a fond that ded,  
That ever hadde be gode at nede;  
Tharfore him was swithe wo,  
In to his chaumber he gan go  
And segh Josian drawe to dede.  
Him was wo a moste nede,  
And er her body began to colde,  
In is armes he gan hire folde,  
And thar hii deide bothe ifere.  
Here sone ne wolde in non manere,  
That hii in erthe beried were.  
Of Sein Lauarauns he let arere  
A faire chapel of marbel fin,  
That was ikast with queint engin;  
Of gold he made an high cornere  
And leide them thar in bothe ifere.  
An hous he made of religioun,  
For to singe for Sire Bevoun  
And ek for Josian the fre:  
God on here saules have pité!  
And also for Arondel,  
Yif men for eni hors bidde schel,  
Thus endeth Beves of Hamtoun. | Then the lady was taken by such sickness  
That she had to leave this world.  
She sent for Guy, her son,  
And Terry, the rich king,  
To be with her at her passing.  
And when they were all there,  
Bevis walked to his stable  
And found Arondel dead,  
Who had always been there in need.  
For this he had such great sadness.  
He began to go into his chamber  
And saw Josanne also nearing death.  
He could not contain his sorrow;  
And before her body began to chill,  
He embraced her in his arms  
And there the both of them died together.  
Their son wished to by all means  
Have them buried in the earth.  
To honor Saint Lawrence he had  
A majestic chapel of fine marble built,  
Which was finished with skilful artifice.  
He made a high recess with gold  
And laid both of them there together.  
He established a monastic house  
To sing prayers for Sir Bevis  
And also for Josanne the gracious.  
May God have pity on their souls,  
And also for Arondel,  
If men should pray for any horse.  
Thus the end of Bevis of Hampton.  
May God give us all His blessing! |
| 4600 | That was ikast with queint engin;  
Of gold he made an high cornere  
And leide them thar in bothe ifere.  
An hous he made of religioun,  
For to singe for Sire Bevoun  
And ek for Josian the fre:  
God on here saules have pité!  
And also for Arondel,  
Yif men for eni hors bidde schel,  
Thus endeth Beves of Hamtoun. | Amen. |
| 4610 | Then the lady was taken by such sickness  
That she had to leave this world.  
She sent for Guy, her son,  
And Terry, the rich king,  
To be with her at her passing.  
And when they were all there,  
Bevis walked to his stable  
And found Arondel dead,  
Who had always been there in need.  
For this he had such great sadness.  
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And saw Josanne also nearing death.  
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And also for Josanne the gracious.  
May God have pity on their souls,  
And also for Arondel,  
If men should pray for any horse.  
Thus the end of Bevis of Hampton.  
May God give us all His blessing! |
| 4620 | God yeve us alle Is benesoun! | Amen. |

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69 *Sein Lauarauns*: Saint Lawrence of Rome (c. 225-258) was martyred under the Valerian persecution and was widely venerated.
Bad Animals and Faithful Beasts in *Bevis of Hampton*

*Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick* were two similar and very popular romances of the late English medieval period as evinced by their continued printing into the seventeenth century and the fulminations against them by humanists and Puritans.\(^1\) Analogues of the story in different languages were scattered throughout Europe. Yet *Bevis of Hampton* now has few readers and receives minimal scholarly attention, and even for medievalists the text, at 4621 lines, has an eat-your-broccoli feeling about it. The unrepentant, cringeworthy Christian triumphalism of the poem does not age well, and recent criticism has been largely limited to examinations of Bevis’ proto-English nationalism or feminist readings of Josian and her meanings as a Muslim woman. Part of the glamor of the non-European world in texts such as *The Wonders of the East* were the fantastic creatures of the orient, and Bevis equally abounds with boars, snakes, dragons, lions, fish, and references to numerous other beasts. A recent Kalamazoo session dealt with Bevis’ horse,\(^2\) but little attention has been paid otherwise to the poem’s four-footed and crawling denizens and their symbolic functions.

Most medieval Europeans lived close alongside animals in a way modern city-dwellers do not, and unsurprisingly the literature features animals in debate poems and fabliaux. They even receive their own literary subgenre, the bestiary, where different animals are associated with religious meanings. The poet sometimes gives the beasts of *Bevis* natural motivations—lions get hungry—yet also gives them moral agency and

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2 Gary Lim, “‘My horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!’: Valuing Arondel in *Bevis of Hampton*,” conference paper, 44th International Congress on Medieval Studies, May 2009, Kalamazoo, MI.
otherworldly significances, personifying and endowing them with fantastic and deadly powers. Dragons are “real” in the story and live for centuries without aging and fly between countries as a matter of course. Finlayson makes the comment that romance marvels are “a necessary component of the narrative and the character of the ‘historical’ hero.”⁴⁳ Beyond having narrative functions, the animals symbolize the themes of the poem and the spiritual choices and trials which Bevis repeatedly faces. Although Bevis is not presented as historical, the marvelous natures and abilities of the animals do reflect and indicate his character.

Romances such as Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton have the “heathen” world as their setting, and the Christian-Islam binary is a charged one. Whatever jus ad bellum—justification to wage war—the medieval church had in defending Europe from Muslim colonization had been stained by its armies’ jus in bello—conduct during war—let alone by the military failure of the crusades. Wilcox suggests that such texts attempt to work out English anxieties over these unpleasant historical events through an idealized depiction.⁴⁴ Said’s famous statement that “we need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate”⁵ can easily be applied to medieval romance. The genre makes no pretense of historical factuality, instead using an imagined construct of the Muslim world to depict English concerns and

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to set its Christian virtues into greater contrast. This binary of Saracen-bad / Christian-good also underlies *Bevis* and the animals form a corresponding dual characterization. Most of the poem’s creatures fall quite neatly into either moral category based on their symbolic significance.

**Bad Animals**

**Boars**

Boars were hunted but not domesticated, and so the poet’s insistence on saying “wilde bor” (183) is telling; all boars were wild. The adjective emphasizes the dangerous and voracious nature of the boar and functions in the poem as a symbol of betrayal. One of the paired oppositions of *Bevis* is the virtuous wife and the evil wife, comprised by Bevis’ murderous mother and loyal Josian. As “the antithesis of the idealized wife,” the mother’s treason shocks the audience with its callous selfishness. Usually romance stepmothers and stewards and not biological mothers turn on their own children, and this Clytemnestra-figure would fit perfectly into Janekyn’s “book of wicked wives” in the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue.* Functionally, the mother both portrays a type and highlights Josian’s loving fidelity. As a Scottish wife, she may also have reflected contemporary anxieties over the foreign spouses of English kings, such the French Isabella who arranged Edward II’s overthrow in 1327, nearing the time-frame of the Auchinleck

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6 Corinne Saunders, “Gender, Virtue, and Wisdom in *Sir Bevis of Hampton,*” in Fellows and Djordjevic, 164.

7 Saunders, 164.
manuscript’s composition. Edward warred with the Scots and similarly described the people in vilifying terms.

The mother’s untamed desire and temper finds expression in the wild swine that she sends her husband out to find for her as a “boute for al of the fevre” (184). The *boute* is a remedy—or does it feed and encourage her fever, as the MED definition suggests? She then reminds the audience of her sexual lust and connects herself with the boar by referring to their breeding place (192). Rather than a wild boar, Sir Guy meets with a wild boor, the German emperor who disgracefully beheads him. Once Guy is dead, no more is heard about the boar remedy, yet the animal finds a reprise in the swine that Saber kills to spread blood on Bevis’ clothing (350). Bevis, who now realizes he is literally a “houre sone” (410), finds himself stained and dirtied by his mother’s betrayal and her fleshly wantonness.

The second boar which Bevis later faces in Armenia displays the same untamed hunger, and the poet piles on descriptions of the boar’s rapacious hunger for the flesh of the men “the bor hadde slawe in the wode” (779) with such oral imagery as its feral bristles, and the wild foam streaming from its mouth (809). The boar leers at Bevis “with eien holwe / also a wolde him have aswolwe” (785-6), stressing the boar’s gluttony. The swine is animal but more than animal, being a “corsede gast” (781). The scene structurally fulfills the first boar-hunting episode. In destroying the boar, Bevis repudiates and defeats his mother’s selfish desire, accomplishing what his father could not. Signally,

9 Calkin, 95.
Bevis sees the boar as a challenge for him alone, as he plans at night how “a wolde kethen is might / upon that swin himself one” (“how he would prove his might alone against that swine,” 752-3). The boar’s death both demonstrates Bevis’ valor and leads to the steward’s jealous attack, yet another betrayal by fellow retainers in Ermine’s household which Bevis remedies.

Dogs

In my experience in developing nations, dogs have jobs. They guard homes and dispose of food rubbish, and are otherwise considered pests. In medieval England, where living standards were also generally low and food precious, having pet dogs equally had a suggestion of wasteful foolishness as seen in the Prioress’ feeding of her hounds with milk and expensive bread (CT I.147). Scripture has the unpleasant analogy of the dog returning to its vomit (Prov. 26:11), and scavenging dogs have the typical taint of being dirty, debased and possibly wolfish. The Havelock poet repeatedly equates the thieves and outlaws of Ubbe’s realm with “dogges that weren henged” (1922). Bevis’ antagonists call him a “yonge Cristene hounde” (621) at Christmastime, and after routing them, Bevis angrily scorns the messenger knights and Josian, refusing to speak to a “hethene hounde” (692). His outrageous metaphor insults all members of her faith as unclean, and Josian’s inner grace shines when she defends the knights’ deaths to her father as self-defense and wins back Bevis; but she does not question the insult’s presumption that her religious beliefs are impure or inferior.

Later, after another lover’s quarrel Josain wins back Bevis by promising to “min false godes al forsake / and Cristendom for thee love take” (1195-6). Josian’s willingness and ability to discard the creeds of her ancestors seems improbable if not offensive to
modern readers but conforms to the world of the poem. Her submission to Bevis “is both gendered and religious.”\(^\text{10}\) Josian has court refinements but “of Cristene lawe she kouthe naught” (526), suggesting that her Muslim beliefs are merely a disadvantage which education and obedience will rectify.\(^\text{11}\) Some feminist critics stress Josian’s assertiveness and her rhetorical ability to manipulate the males of the poem, suggesting that her Christianity is cleverly performative rather than a transformative spiritual change.\(^\text{12}\) Nevertheless, after her conversion Josian is no longer a part of the Saracen grouping, and Bevis limits his “heathen hounde” epithets to the Muslim warriors he confronts (1006, 1803). The canine comparison suggests spiritual dirtiness, but apparently one which Josian can be cleansed of if she has the inborn will to desire it.

Snakes

No animal in scripture bears the connotations of deceit, temptation, and sin attached to snakes and serpents, which are explicitly linked to Satan in scripture (Rev. 12:9, 20:2) and tradition. When the poet indicates that Bevis has a club “fram wormes, that in prisoun were” (1430), the audience needs little homiletic explanation. Romance snakes are naturally assumed to be hostile in disposition but these reptiles are “foule fendes” (1567) with additionally hellish attributes. Their leader, a female adder who is “for elde blak ase eni cole” (1548), has a particularly diabolical nature like the Edenic snake who is “more crafty than any of the wild animals” (Gen. 3:1). Arondel (1000) is the

\(^\text{10}\) Calkin, 72.


\(^\text{12}\) Calkin, 82.
only other animal that the poet reports as thinking (1550), and Bevis defeats the adder’s feint to sting his forehead (1550) only with a club-stroke to her skull—“he will crush your head” (Gen. 3:15).

Beyond the scriptural significations for the poem’s medieval audience, the snakes also have a wider meaning in symbolizing the temptation into spiritual death which Bevis faces at this point in the story. For the world of the poet and his audience, a simple medieval dichotomy prevails with Christian belief leading to Heaven and pagan belief ending in perdition or damnation. The crusades lend some historical clarification on the nature of Bevis’ temptation. Much European rhetoric held that Islam was not categorically a different faith but a Christian heresy, and a perennial worry for Christendom was crusaders who became too comfortable in the Saracen world and eased into their beliefs. The concern in effect was that the practices of Islam were precariously close to those of Christianity, and regulations were passed to prevent fraternization and sexual relations with Muslims.¹³

Josian’s spiritual identity is not essential to her but mutable by choice or grace, in keeping with medieval Augustinian teachings concerning free will. The dangerous corollary of free will was that people could also choose wrongly. Romance tends to depict Saracens either as black and bestial, “justifying attacks on them”¹⁴ as they are unconvertible, or with a chivalric and courtly culture dangerously parallel to that of Christendom. The giant Amourant in Guy of Warwick is “as blae he is as brodes brend” (742), and Ascopard similarly has a “lotheliche semlaunt” (“loathly appearance,” 2506).

¹³ Calkin, 81.
¹⁴ Calkin, 40.
Conversely, Ermine raises Bevis, treats him well in his court, and protects and knights him. The poet echoes historical worries about Christian crusaders “going Saracen”\(^\text{15}\) by having a key scene in which Bevis meets Terry and seems to desert his English identity and homeland by privileging his loyalty and duty to Ermine, stating “he that me tok this letter an honde / he ne wolde love me non other / han ich were is owene brother” (“He who put this letter into my hand could not have more love for me than if I were his own brother,” 1330-2).

In the scene following his meeting with Terry, Bevis perhaps struggles with these conflicting desires as he savagely attacks worshippers exiting a mosque and then offers to Brademond the blessings of “Mahoun, that is god thin / Tervagaunt and Apolin” (1379-80). Bevis then comes to face his physical and spiritual depths in Brademond’s dungeon, additionally symbolized by the evil serpents. If Bevis needs to rehabilitate his soul, the temptation he needs to subjugate is perhaps both spiritual and feminine in its otherness, as the chief snake is appropriately female (1549). Bevis himself veers toward bestiality himself in his physical appearance as his hair grows to his feet. Even after conquering the adder, his spiritual condition is compromised and tenuous. He prays for God’s mercy but can only exit the prison by imitating the guard’s voice and language. As Fellows notes, “if this act of verbal impersonation is all that is required for a Christian knight to masquerade as a Saracen, then the difference between Bevis and the Saracen Other is narrow and complex indeed.”\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{15}\) Calkin, 55.

\(^{16}\) Robert Allen Rouse, “For King and Country? The Tension between National and Regional Identities in Sir Bevis of Hampton,” in Fellows and Djordjevic, 121.
Dragons

The “great dragon” of Rev. 12:9 is also Satan, indicating a shared scriptural symbolism between serpents and dragons. Literature and folklore also conflated the physical and moral attributes of dragons with that of snakes, and when Chickering comments that “no serpent in Western literature means well,”¹⁷ he is also speaking about the Beowulf dragon. Yet dragons are especially problematic in medieval culture, not least because of the perennial question of whether people believed in them. As sober a document as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that in the year 793 “wær on geseowene fyrene dracan on þam lyfte fleogende” (“fiery dragons were seen flying through the air”) in Northumbria. Chroniclers note that Harold Hardrada killed at least two,¹⁸ and dragon sightings in England are recorded from as late as 1408.¹⁹ The Beowulf manuscript sits in Cotton Vitellius A. xv alongside The Wonders of the East, another text featuring dragons which the author reports having seen in India.²⁰

Although in Beowulf the dragon has symbolic meanings, the poet seemingly stresses in realistic touches that the dragon is not a psychological abstraction but a real, breathing, eating animal. Bevis similarly allows the marvelous and depicts it as mundane. The poet mentions matter-of-factly that two warriors descend to Hell and become immortal dragons who will live “til hit come Domes Dai” (2644). Weiss suggests that the

¹⁹ Finlayson, 384.
dragon represents English post-crusade hostility to Rome, but more probably it carries the same evil signification as other medieval dragons. “Sin is literally written on the dragon” in the form of the hellish warring kings. Beowulf worries that he has “ecean dryhtne / bitre gebulge” (“bitterly offended the eternal ruler,” 2330-1), and the Bevis dragon may similarly be the foul result of Bevis’ sin in failing to serve God. The dragon might also embody the sins of the faithless community, and in legend Saint George follows the dragon’s defeat by converting the local people.

The dragon scene is unique to the English texts, and the poet’s invocation of Saint George, found only in Auchinleck, is particularly interesting. Bevis’ killing of the dragon, again a solitary act with no Wiglaf to aid him, represents his reclamation of his “Englishness” after his drift into Saracen apostasy. This English virtue emphatically contrasts against both the Romans’ inability to quell the dragon and the heathen Ascopard’s spiritually enervated cowardice. The national dimension dovetails into the religious, for in killing the wyrm Bevis undergoes a sort of baptism.

Whan overgon was his smerte And rekevred was of is hertte, Beves sette him up anon; The venim was awei igon; He was ase hol a man Ase he was whan he theder cam. On is knees he gan to falle, To Jesu Crist he gan to calle (2853-60)

When the pain had diminished And his courage was renewed. Bevis raised himself up at once. The venom had faded away; He was as whole a man As he was when he came there. He fell on his knees And began to call on Jesus Christ.

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22 Saunders, 168.
23 Rouse, 115.
In Auchinleck Bevis’ venomous skin is likened to a leper’s (2830) with its suggestion of moral corruption and disease. The comparison “suggests an equation between the healing waters of the well and the purifying water of baptism.”

Auchinleck also uniquely cements the baptismal connection by having the water sanctified by a virgin who bathed in it, frightening away the dragon (2804-9).

Lions

The symbolism of the lions is also difficult to interpret. As in Spenser’s Faerie Queene, they at first want to eat Josian, “grennad on hur with muche grame” (“snarling on her with great savagery,” 2389), and only desist because of her virginal innocence, as she is a “kinges daughter, quene and maide both” (2393), just as the lion who lunges at Una feels “asswagèd with remorse” (I.iii.44). In Spenser the lion symbolizes female chastity, and the English manuscripts of Bevis seem to “emphasize the need for Josian’s Saracen body to conform to Christian-required norms.” Both Chrétien de Troyes’ Yvain and Guy of Warwick feature lions with Christian or nationalist significations such as those attributed to Richard the Lionhearted. Yet in Bevis the lions are less abstract and more animal. They kill Boniface, eat a horse, and feel no qualms about attacking Bevis. The poet may have realized the conflicting need to demonstrate Josian’s purity and have Bevis perform a heroic exploit, to defend her from lions who cannot harm her. Josian


25 Weiss, 72.


27 Calkin, 75.
thus functions more as a spiritual guide and aide to Bevis than a damsel-in-distress, and throughout the poem she defends her chastity with deft skill, diplomacy, and force when necessary. Her willingness to help Bevis is in keeping with her character but cannot be allowed to cheapen his valor.

The poet thus emphasizes the lions’ rapacity to enhance Bevis’ justification in killing them. Narratively, he must slaughter the lions in self-defense, and symbolically, he may be proving himself as fit to take Josian’s virginity by overcoming them. Two signals which suggest such a reading are the lack of evil attributions to the lions and the hints of their identification with Josian. The poet speaks of “beestes felle” (2426) but does not stress their hideousness or impute any sort of diabolical hellishness on the animals as he does with the boar and the serpents. They do what lions do, and Bevis’ task is to overcome them. The lions also have an odd sympathy with Josian. The second is a lioness (2429), and Bevis at one point collapses the two, scolding Josian that “boute she lete that lioun be / a wolde hire sle in that destresse / ase fain ase the liounesse” (“unless she left that lion alone, he would slay her as willingly as the lioness,” 2476-8). The lions may additionally represent a trace of heathen unruliness in Josian which Bevis must purge, and the scene appropriately segues to her baptism.

Good Animals

Fish

The fish are scaly relatives of the serpents, but in Bevis they have the normal scriptural identification with Christians. Christ blesses loaves and fishes and promises to make his disciples “fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). Tertullian writes that “we, being little
fishes, as Jesus Christ is our great Fish, begin our life in the water.” In the medieval Bestiary whales deceive and consume fish, just as the devil misleads weak men. As Bevis reaches the shore he makes a beautiful prayer contrasting the innocence of fish to the perfidy of mankind: “thow madest fisch ase wel alse man / that nothing of senne ne can / ne nought of fisches kenne / never yet ne dede senne” (1709-1802). After Bevis’ physical and spiritual torpidity in Damascus, his sea journey among the fish symbolizes a cleansing separation from its culture and values and a return to Christian lands. Trenchefis, though a “gode stede” (1818), is still a ‘Saracen’ horse and shucks Bevis off as now irretrievably foreign.

Horses

The poem could easily have been titled Bevis and Arondel, as the loyal horse fully completes and supports Bevis’ knightly character. From childhood Bevis expresses the desire that “ich mowe an horse ride” (550) to avenge his father, and Arondel becomes an integral part of Bevis’ identity. Arondel carries Bevis through his first test of honor when mocked by Saracen warriors at Christmas (589), and the two are so faithful that Bevis leaves England in angry exile rather than see his horse unjustly killed. Arondel, like Josian, receives a sort of redemptive conversion through Bevis that makes the horse his own, and Arondel refuses to let the alien Yvor ride him. Both are captured only after a heroic struggle. When Bevis is at his knightly and Christian nadir, he is equally deprived of Arondel as Ermine separates them when sending him to Brademon (1251-5). Later Bevis laments not having “Arondel, me gode palfray” (1608) in the depths of prison, and

Arondel correspondingly suffers seven years of torpidity until their joyful reunion, chained and alone.

Thematically, if Josian functions as a sort of spiritual guide to Bevis as a virtuous wife, like Amoraunt in *Amis and Amiloun*, Arondel connects the two as an incarnation of their love. Bevis’ angry rejection of Josian concludes with him sundering the connection, shouting “Thow yeve me an hors: lo it her!” (1131). Upon his liberation from prison, he has more faith in his horse than in Josian, exclaiming “‘wer Josiane,’ a thoughte, ‘ase lele / alse is me stede Arondel’” (2033-4).²⁹ Arondel reconciles the two by showing proof of Bevis’ identity to Josian in letting Bevis ride him, and then by providing transportation for the couple to leave. The three form a sort of loving trinity at the end of the poem where faithful Arondel, his duty complete, dies at the same moment as Josian (4597-4601). The poet has such high regard for Arondel’s selfless service to the two that after inviting prayers for Bevis and Josian’s souls he hints at the same for Arondel, “yif men for eni hors bidde schel” (“if men should pray for any horse,” 4618).

*Bevis of Hampton* is often compared to its Auchinleck companion *Guy of Warwick*. Yet to sum up this section the poem also shares a correspondence with *Amis and Amiloun* and *Athelston* as stories featuring estrangement and reconciliation aided by a third character who lovingly heals the separation. Oddly, in *Bevis* this role is played by a horse. Yet the poem uses animals with marvelous characteristics to interact with its heroes and to symbolize their problems and choices. The tempting and malevolent serpents and dragons embody Bevis’ imperiled faith and Englishness. Lions play out

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²⁹ Seaman, 63.
obstacles between Bevis and Josian which must be surmounted. The beastly boars point to the selfish gluttony of Bevis’ mother and Josian’s virtue. Dogs suggest the dirtiness of pagan ignorance. Josian ultimately becomes an ideal wife and mother herself, exacerbating the shame of faithless Christian women.\(^{30}\) In answer to the criticism that romances lack psychological shading, Hanna argues that “romance shows interiority allusively.”\(^{31}\) In Bevis as well, the animals do not need to talk to interact and harmonize with what the humans experience.


CHAPTER 4

Floris and Blancheflor

The English *Floris and Blancheflor* survives in four manuscripts: Auchinleck (c. 1330), Cambridge University Library, MS Gg.iv.27.2 (c. 1300), Egerton 2862 (c. 1400), and MS Cotton Vitellius D.iii. (c. 1275). It take as my text source Erik Koope, ed. *Floris and Blancheflor. Sentimental and Humorous Romances*. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006. http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/ekfbfrm.htm.


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| F1 | Oyez, signor, tout li amant,  
|    | Cil qui d’amors se vont penant,  
|    | Li chevalier et les puceles,  
|    | Li damoisel, les demoiselles:  
|    | Se mon conte volez entendre,  
|    | Moult i porrez d’amors apprendre.  
|    | Cou est du roi Floire l’enfant  
|    | Et de Blanceflor la vaillant,  
|    | De qui Berte as-grans-piés fu née;  
| 10 | Puis fu mere Charlemaigne,  
|    | Qui puis tint et France et le Maine;  
| 11 | Listen, lords, and all the lovers\(^1\)  
|    | Whose hearts have felt suffering,  
|    | The knights and the women,  
|    | The young maids, and noble ladies.  
|    | Whoever wishes to hear my tale  
|    | Will be able to learn much about love!  
|    | The story is of the royal child Floris  
|    | And of Blancheflor the brave  
|    | To whom Berta Goosefeet was later born,\(^2\)  
|    | Herself the mother of Charlemagne,  
|    | Who later held France and the Maine.

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\(^1\) No existing English manuscript has the beginning of the story, and so I have used the first 192 lines of *Floire et Blanceflor*.

\(^2\) *Berte as-grans-piés*: Bertrada of Laon (720-783), wife of Pepin the Short and Charlemagne’s mother, whose unfortunate nickname possibly refers to misshapen feet. One of the earliest manuscripts of the poem, Paris BN 1447, also has Adenot le Roi’s *Berte aus Grans Piés* (c. 1270). For a discussion of the French sources, see Patricia E. Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor and the European Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chapter 1.
| Floire, son pere, que vous di,       | Floris, their forefather whom I speak about,       |
|                           | Was fathered by a pagan king,                   |
| Uns rois payens l'engenuî;         | And Blancheflor, who was loved by many,         |
| Et Blanceflor, que tant ama,       | Was fathered by a Christian earl.3             |
| Uns cuens crestïens l'engendra:   | And so Floris was born to heathens,             |
| Floire fut tout nés de payens,     | And Blancheflor to Christians.                 |
| Et Blanceflor de crestïens.        | Floris had himself baptized in his life         |
| Bauptizier se fist en sa vie       | Because of the love he had for Blancheflor,     |
| Floire, por Blanceflor s'amiie:    | For on one joyful day they were born,           |
| Car en un biau jor furent né       | And on the same night conceived.                |
| Et en une nuit engender.           | Because Floris was later a Christian,           |
| Puisque Floire fu crestïens        | He became a king of great honor and riches.     |
| Li avint grans honors et biens.    | Now to continue with our story,                 |
| Or sivrai mon proposement:         | If I might come to speak about it.              |
| Si parlerai avenanment.            | Not long ago on a Friday                        |
| En une chambre entrai l'autr’ier,  | I entered a room after supper                   |
| Un venredi apres mangier,          | To have some conversation with some ladies      |
| Por deporter as demoiseles,        | Who were having a chat there.                   |
| Don’t en la chambre avoir de beles.| There I seated myself                           |
| 3                                 | To listen to what the two women were saying.   |
| Iloec m’assiss por escouter         | They were two sisters;                          |
| Deus puceles qu’oï parler:         | They spoke together about love.                 |
| Elles estoient doi serors;          | The older one told a story                      |
| Ensembl parloient d’amors.         | Which the younger one enjoyed very much,        |
| L’aïnée d’une amor contoit         | And it was about two children                   |
| A sa seror que moult amoit,        | Who were well over two years old.               |
| Qui fa ja entre deus enfans,       | But they had heard it recited by a clerk        |
| 50                                 | Who had written it down.                        |
| Bien avoit passé deus cens ans;    | The story is pleasant,                          |
| Mais a un clerc dire l’oît         | And so now listen to its beginning.             |
| Qui l’avoit lëu en escrit.         | A king came from Spain                          |
| El commenca avenanment:            | With a large company of knights.               |
| Or oyez son commencement.          | He passed over the sea in his ship              |
| Uns rois estoit issus d’Espaigne;  | And arrived in Galicia.                         |
| De chevaliers ot grant campaine:   | Felix had no faith and so he was pagan;        |
| En sa nef ot la mer passée;         | He passed over the sea to Christendom.         |
| En Galisse fu avirée.               | Wherever he went, he ravaged the land           |
| Felis ot non; si fu payens:         | And turned the villages into ashes.             |
| 60                                 | For an entire month and a half                  |
| Mer ot passé sor crestïens,        | The king stayed in that country.                |
| Por ou païs la prai prendre,       | There was no day in that time when the king     |
| Et la viles torner en cendre.      | Did not campaign with his army.                 |
| Un mois entier et quinze dis       | He despoiled villages, preying on them,        |
| Sejorna li rois ou païs.            | And had everyone driven away.                   |
| Ains ne fu jors qu’o sa maisniée    | Within the limit of fifteen miles              |
| Ne fëist li rois chevaucée;        | No cattle or oxen remained;                     |
| Viles reuboit, avoys praotit       | No castle or village was standing.              |
| Et a ses nes tout conduisoit:      | Peasants could find no beef.                    |
| De quinze liues el rivache,        | The countryside was totally destroyed,          |
| 70                                 |                                                   |

3 The ostensibly historical Blanche Fleur de Laon (died c. 720) was the daughter of the Merovingian king Dagobert III (699-715) and a Saxon princess.
Payen en ont joie et deduit.
En la compaigne ot un Francois:
Chevaliers ert, preu et cortois
Qui au baron saint Jaque aloit.
Une soie fille i menoit,
Qui a l’Apostle s’ert vouée
Ains qu’elle issist de sa contrée,
Por son mari qui mors estoit,
De qui remise enceinte estoit.
Li chevaliers se veut defendre;
Ne chaut a aus de lui vif prendre,
Ains l’ocient; s’el laissent mort,
Et sa fille mainent au port.
Au roi Felis l’ont presentée,
Et il l’a formen t esgardée:
Bien apercoit a son visage
Que ele estoit de haut parage,
Et dist, s’il puet, qu’a la roïne
Fera present de la meschine:
Car de tel chose li préa
Quant il por reuber mer passa.
Atant s’en-entrent tout es nes,
Amont traient tres-tout lor tres;
Or ont boin vent et bien portent;
Si repairent lié et joiant.
Il n’orent pas deus jor erré.
Qu’en lor pais sont arrive.
Es-vous le roi en la cite
Son barnage a tres-tout mandé:
Son eschec lor depart li rois,
Bien largement, comme cortois,
Et, por sa part, a la roïne
Donc de gaing la meschine.
La roïne s’en fait moulî liée;
En sa chambre l’a envoyée.
Sa loi li laisse bien garder;
Servir la fait et honorer;
O li sovent jue et parole,
Et françois aurent de s’escole.
La meschine eart cortoise et prous;
Moult se faisot amer a tous:
La roïne moult bien servoit,
Comme cele cui ele estoit.
Le jor de le la Pasque-florie,
Si com le reconte lor vie,
Vint li terme qu’elles devoient
Enfanter cou que pris avoient.
Travail orent et paine grant

While the pagans rejoiced and celebrated.
Among the locals was a Frenchman.
He was a knight, virtuous and courteous,
On pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint James. ⁴
He was escorting a woman
Who had devoted herself to the apostle
And who was from the region.
For her husband had died,
The man whose baby she was pregnant with.
The knight resolved to defend them,
But he was not able to save his life,
And the plunderers left him for dead
And took his lady to the port.
They presented her to King Felix
And he carefully studied her,
Closely perceiving her appearance
And that she was of noble peerage.
He said, if it would please the queen,
He would make her a slave as a present
Since he valued such things
When he crossed the sea from plundering.
Then all of them boarded,
And they traveled upstream expertly.
They were carried well by the wind
So that they returned safely and easily.
They had not sailed two days
When they arrived in their country.
Then the king was in the city
And all of his baronage was summoned.
The king divided up the booty,
Very generously and with courtesy,
And as for the queen,
She was rewarded with the slave.
The queen herself was very happy.
The slave was sent to her chamber.
She obeyed the queen’s rules well,
And served and honored her;
They often amused themselves and talked
And schooled themselves in French.
The slave was courteous and virtuous;
She was loved by all
And was of good service to the queen,
Who was also expecting a child.
On the day of Palm Sunday,
As the story of their life is told,
The term came to a close
Of this child who was so priceless.
Great labor pains came to the mothers

⁴ The French version relates that a group of pilgrims travels to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, northern Spain. The path is called “The Way of Saint James” and Felix, a pagan Spanish king, attacks and robs the pilgrims in his depredations.
Ains que né fussent li enfant:  
Valles fu nés de la payene,  
Et meschine ot la crestïene.  
Li doi enfant, quant furent né,  
De la feste furent nomé:  
La crestïene, por l’honor  
De la feste, ot nom Blancheflor;  
Li rois noma son chier fil Floire;  
A prende le fist a Montoire.  
Li pere ama moult so n enfant;  
Li mere plus ou autretant.  
Livré l’ont a la damoisele,  
Por cou qu’ele estoit sage et bele,  
A norrir et a maistroier.  

Fors seulement de l’alaitier:  
Une payene l’alaitoit,  
Si com lor lois le commandoit.  
Mout moul le norrissoit doucement  
Et gardoit enteïvement  
Plus que sa fille, et ne savoir  
Lequel des deus plus chier avoit:  
Oques ne lor sevra mangier  
Ne boire, fors seul l’alaitier:  
En un lit tout seul les couchoit;  
Andeus passoit et abevroit.  
Quant cinq ans orent li enfant,  
Moulf furent bel et gent et grant;  

Ne thurst men never in londe  
After feirer children fonde.  
The Cristen woman fedde hem thoo;  
Ful wel she loydyd hem both too.  
So longe she fede hem in feere  
That they were of elde of seven yere.  
The king behelde his sone dere,  
And seyde to him on this manere  
That harme it were muche more  
But his son were sette to lore  
On the book, letters to know,  

And later the children were born:  
The pagan gave birth to a boy,  
And the slave had a Christian girl.  
When the two children were born,  
They were named for the festival:  
The Christian, to honor the day,  
Was named Blancheflor;  
The king named his dear son Floris;  
His schooling was taken at Montargis.  
The father had great love for his child;  
The mother loved him equally or more.  
They were entrusted to the slave,  
For she was wise and beautiful,  
To raise and to teach,  
Excepting only their nursing.  
A pagan woman nursed them  
As was commanded by their laws.  
She cared for him with kindness  
And guarded him attentively  
Just as much as her daughter, and no one knew  
Which of the two were dearer to her.  
They never ate or drank separately,  
Only excepting their nursing.  
They slept only in one bed;  
Together they grew and were raised.  
When the children were five years old,  
They were very tall, beautiful, and noble.  

5 The two children are given “flowery” names—Floris (“Belonging to the flower”) and Blancheflor (“White flower”)—as they are both born on Palm Sunday, also called Paske Flourie.

6 Montoire: The French MS has Montoro, Spain, near Cordoba. The English MSS have Montargis, France, near Orleans instead. TEAMS notes that Montargis derives from Odysseus’ faithful dog Argos, and suggests that the choice of place name may symbolize Floris’ loyalty.

7 One Spanish version of the story states that the mother’s milk transferred the spirit of Christianity to Floris, perhaps explaining such a prohibition (Grieve, 162).

8 Passoit: Some MSS seem to have pessoit, which suggests “they drank and ate,” rather than passing time.

9 At line 193 the surviving English text begins. TEAMS uses the London Egerton 2862 MS until 367, where Auchinleck begins.
As men do both hye and lowe.
"Feire sone," he seide, "thow shalt lerne,
Lo, that thow do ful yerne."
Florys answerd with wepyng,
As he stood before the kyng;
Al wepyng seide he:
"Ne shal not Blancheflour lerne with me?"
Ne can y noght to scole goon
Without Blanchefloure," he seide than.
"Ne can y in no scole syng ne rede
Without Blancheflour," he seide.
The king seide to his soon:
"She shal lerne for thy love." To scole they were put.
Both they were good of wytte;
Wonder it was of hur lore,
And of her love wel the more.
The children lovdyd togeder soo,
They myght never parte atwoo.
When they had five yere to scole goon,
So wel they had lerned thoo,
Inowgh they couth of Latyne,
And wel wryte on parchemyn.
The kyng understood the grete amoure
Bytwene his son and Blanchefloure,
And thought, when they were of age,
That her love wolde noght swage;
Nor he myght noght her love withdrawe,
When Floris shuld wyfe after the lawe.
The king to the queene seide thoo,
And tolde hur of his woo,
Of his thought and of his care,
How it wolde of Floreys fare.
"Dame," he seide, "y tel thee my reed:
I wyl that Blanchefloure be do
to deed.
When that maide is yslawe
And brought of her lyf dawe,
As sone as Florys may it underyete,
Rathe he wylle hur forgete.
Than may he wyfe after reed."
The queene answerd then and seid
(And thought with hur reed
Save the mayde fro the deed):
"Sir," she seide, "we aught to fonde
That Florens lyf with menske in lond,
And that he lese not his honour
For the mayden Blancheflour.
Whoso myght take that mayde clene
That she nere brought to deth bydene,
Hit were muche more honour
Than slee that maybe Blancheflour.”
Unnethes the king graunt that it be soo:
“Dame, rede us what is to doo.”
“Sir, we shul oure soon Florys
Sende into the londe of Mountargis.
Blythe wyl my suster be,
That is lady of that contre.
And when she woot for whom
That we have sent him us froom,
She wyl doo al hur myght,
Both by day and by nyght,
To make hur love so undoo
As it had never ben soo.”
“And, sir,” she seide, “y rede eke
That the maydens moder make hur seek.
That may be that other resoun
For that ylk encheson,
That she may not fro hur moder goo.”
Now ben these children swyth woo,
Now they may not goo in fere,
Drewryer thinges never noon were.
Florys wept byfore the kyng,
And seide: “Sir, without lesyng,
For my harme out ye me sende,
Now she ne myght with me wende.
Now we ne mot tog
der goo,
Al my wele is turned to woo.”
The king seide to his soon aplyght:
“Sone, withynne this fourtenyght,
Be her moder quykke or deed,
Sekerly,” he him seide,
“That mayde shal com thee too.”
“Ye, sir,” he seid, “y pray yow it be soo.
Yf that ye me hur sende,
I rekke never wheder y wende.”
That the child graunted, the kyng was fayn
And him betaught his chamburlayn.
With muche honoure they theder coom,
As fel to a rychy kynges soon.
Wel feire him receyyvd the Duke, Orgas,
That king of that castel was,
And his aunt, with muche honour,
But ever he thought on Blancheflour.
Glad and blythe the ben him withe;
But for no joy that he seith
Ne myght him glade, game ne gle,
For he myght not his lyf see.
His aunt set him to lore
There as other children wore,
Both maydons and grom;
To lerne mony theder coom.
Inowgh he sykes, but noght he lernes;
For Blancheflour ever he mornes.

It would be much more respectable
Than to slay that innocent girl.”
Reluctantly, the king granted that it be so.
“Madam, advise me what should be done.”
“Sire, we will send our son Floris
Into the land of Montargis.
My sister, the lady of that country,
Will be pleased.
And when she knows for whom
We have sent him away from us,
She will do all her might,
Both by day and by night,
To make their love so distant
As if it had never been.
And sire,” she continued, “I also advise
That the maiden’s mother feign illness.
That can be another reason
For the same action,
That she may not go from her mother.”
Now these children were in great sorrow,
For they could not go together.
There was never a sadder sight!
Floris wept before the king
And said, “Sire, without lying,
You send me away to my harm
If she may not go with me.
Now that we cannot be together,
All my happiness is turned to despair.”
The king said to his son in earnest,
“Son, within this fortnight,
Whether her mother be alive or dead,
For sure,” he said to him,
“That maid will come to you.”
“Yes, sire,” he answered, “I beg of you
That it be so. If you send her to me,
I don’t mind at all where I go.”
Having the child’s consent, the king was eased
And entrusted him to his chamberlain.
With much honor they traveled forth,
As was fitting for a rich king’s son.
The duke, Orgas, who was king of that castle,
Received him graciously,
As did his aunt, with great honor.
But he forever thought about Blancheflour.
They were glad and merry with him.
But there was no joy that he found
In sports or amusement, nor could they cheer him,
For he could not see his sweetheart.
His aunt set him to study
Where the other children were,
Both maidens and boys.
Many came there to learn.
He sighed often, but learned nothing;
He continually mourned for Blancheflour.
If any man spoke to him,
Only love stuck to his heart.
Love was at his heart’s root,
And nothing was so sweet;
Neither spice nor licorice
Was as sweet as her love was,
Nor anything of any other flower.

He thought so much about Blancheflour
That one day seemed like three,
For he could not see his love.
Thus he waited with great sadness
Until the fourteenth night had passed.
When he saw she had not come,
He was taken by so much grief
That he wanted neither food nor drink,
And neither would go into his body.

The chamberlain sent word to inform the king
Of his son’s state in writing.
The king very quickly broke the wax
In order to know what the letter said.
His mood began to change,
And very soon he understood,
And with anger he called the queen,
And told her all his vexation,
And spoke in wrath and said,
“Have that maiden sent for!
Her head will go from her body!”
The queen was very distressed then.
The queen, that good lady, answered,
“For God’s love, sir, have mercy!
At the nearest harbor
There are rich traders, certainly,
Wealthy merchants from Persia,
Who will gladly buy her.
Then you will have for that lovely girl
A great deal of property and goods.
And so she may be gotten rid of
In such a way that we do not slay her.”
Reluctantly, the king granted this,
But truly, it happened in that way.
The king sent for the agent,
Who was able and courteous,
And knew how to buy and sell well,
And had many languages at his tongue.
Very soon the maiden was given to him.

11 Galyngele: Galingal is an Asian spice related to ginger which would have been very exotic to a medieval English audience. It is commonly used in Thai Tom Yum soup.

An to the haven was she brought.
Ther have they for that maide yolde
Twente mark of reed golde,
And a coupe good and ryche,
In al the world was non it lyche;
Ther was never noon so wel grave,
He that it made was no knave.
Ther was purtrayd on, y weene,
How Paryse led away the queene,
And on the covercle above
Their love for each other was portrayed.
And on the round knob on top
Stood a carbuncle stone.

In the world was not so depe soler
That it nold lyght the botelere,
To fylle both ale and wyne;
Of sylver and gold both good a
And gaf it his lemmen, his amy.
The coupe was stoole fro King Cesar;
A thief out of his tresour hous it bar.
And sethe that ilke same theef
For Blauncheflour he it geef.
For he wyst to wynne suche three,
Myght he hur bryng to his contree.
Now these marchaundes saylen over the see
With this mayde to her contree.
So longe they han undernome
That to Babyloyn they ben coom.
To the Amyral of Babyloyn
They solde that mayde swythe soon;
Rath and soone they were at oon.
The Amyral hur bought anoon,
And gafe for hur, as she stood upryght,
Sevyn sythes of gold her wyght,
For he thought, without weene,
That faire mayde have to queene.
Among his maydons in his bour
He hur dide with muche honour.
Now these marchaundes may that belete,
And ben glad of hur byyte.
Now let we of Blancheffour be
And speke of Florys in his contree.
Now is the burgays to the king coom

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13 Twente mark: A mark was 2/3 of a pound in England, or 13s 4p. According to the UK National Archives website, 20 marks in today’s money would be about US$10,000 (http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/). As with many romances, this may be as fanciful as paying seven times her weight in gold (196).

14 Amy: Lavinia, Aneas’ love and Latinus’ daughter in Virgil’s Aeneid.
With the golde and his garyson,  
And hath take the king to wolde  
The selver and the coupé of golde.  
They lete make in a chirche  
A swithe feire grave wyrche,  
And lete ley ther upon  
A new feire peynted ston,  
With letters al aboute wryte  
With ful muche worshipp.  
Whoso couth the letters rede,  
Thus they spoken and thu  
seide:  
―Here lyth swete Blaunchefloure  
That Florys lovyd par amoure.”  
Now Florys hath undergone,  
And to his fader he is coome.  
In his fader halle he is lyght.  
His fader he grette anoonryght,  
And his moder, the queene, also.  
But unnethes myght he tha  
tt doo  
That he ne asked where his leman bee.  
Nonskyns answere chargeth hee.  
So longe he is forth noom,  
Into chamber he is coom.  
The maydenys moder he asked ryght:  
―Where is Blauncheflour, my swete wyght?‖  
―Sir,‖ seide, ―forsothe, ywys,  
I ne woot where she is.‖  
She bethought hur on that lesyng  
That was ordeyned byfore the king.  
―Thow gabbest me,‖ he seyde thoo,  
―Thy gabbyng doth me muche woo.  
Tel me where my leman be.‖  
Al wepyng seide thenne shee:  
―Sir,‖ seide, ―deed.‖  
―Deed?‖ seide he.  
―Sir,‖ seide, ―forsothe, yee!‖  
―Alas, when died that swete wyght?‖  
―Sir, withynne this fourtenyght  
The erth was leide hur above,  
And deed she was for thy love.‖  
Flores, that was so feire and gent,  
Sownyd there verament.  
The Cristen woman began to crye  
To Jhesu Crist and Seynt Marye.  
The king and the queene herde that crye;  
Into the chamber they ronne on hye,  
And the queene sawe her byforn  
On sowne the childe that she had born.  
The kinges hert was al in care,  
That sawe his son for love so fare.

With the gold and the payment,  
And remitted the silver and cup of gold  
For the king to keep.  
They had a shrine made  
And a very beautiful grave fashioned,  
And placed on there  
A new and finely painted gravestone,  
With letters written all about,  
With a lavish dedication.  
For whoever could read the letters  
They spoke thus and read,  
―Here lies sweet Blancheflour,  
Who loved Floris with passion.‖  
Floris was undertaking the journey,  
And he came to his father.  
He dismounted in his father’s hall.  
He greeted the king right away,  
And his mother, the queen, as well.  
But he had scarcely done so  
When he asked where his beloved was,  
Not even waiting for any kind of answer.  
And so he was brought forth  
Until he arrived in a chamber.  
He asked the maiden’s mother at once,  
―Where is Blancheflour, my sweet lass?‖  
―Sir,‖ she said, ―in truth, in fact,  
I do not know where she is.‖  
She was mindful of the deception  
Which was ordered by the king.  
―You’re teasing me,‖ he replied.  
―Your gabbing does me great hurt.  
Tell me where my sweetheart is!‖  
She then replied, in tears,  
―Sir,‖ she said, ―she is dead.‖  
―Dead?‖ he cried.  
―Sir,‖ she said, ―in truth, yes.‖  
―Alas! When did that sweet creature die?‖  
―Sir, within this fortnight  
The earth was laid above her,  
And she was dead for your love.‖  
Floris, who was so fair and gentle,  
Was overcome there, in truth.  
The Christian woman began to call  
On Jesus Christ and sainted Mary.  
The king and queen heard that cry.  
They ran into the chamber in haste,  
And the queen saw before her  
The child that she had bore in a faint.  
The king’s heart was all distraught  
To see what had happened to his son for love.

\[15 \text{ That Florys lovyd par amoure: TEAMS notes that who loved who is not clear in the ME line, and perhaps the ambiguity intentionally emphasizes that their feelings were mutual.}\]
When he awoke and spoke might,
Sore he wept and sore he sighed,
And said to his mother in earnest,
"Take me to where that maid is."
They brought him there in haste,
And began to read the letters
So that he spoke and said thus,
"Here lies sweet Blancheflour,
Who loved Floris with passion."
Floris swooned three times;
Nor could he speak with his mouth.
As soon as he awoke and could talk,
He wept and sighed bitterly.
"Blancheflour," he said, "Blancheflour!"
There was never so sweet a thing in any bower.
I mourn for Blancheflour,
For she came from a worthy family.

There was no one in the world
Your equal among women!
You were well-learned in faith
And in all courtesy.

High and low loved you
For your goodness and your beauty.
If death were dealt out fairly,
We would both be dead the same night.
We were born on one day;
We will both be dead together.
Death," he cried, "full of envy
And of all treachery!
You have robbed me of my beloved.
Truly," he said, "you are to blame.
She would have lived had you not interfered,
And I would have gladly died had you permitted it.
I will no longer cry for death
But will slay myself right now!"
He drew his knife out of its sheath.

He would have put himself to death
And struck at his own heart
Had his mother not realized it.
Then the queen fell upon him
And seized the knife from him.
She took away his little knife,
And savyd ther the childes lyf.
Forth the queene ranne, al wepyng,
Tyl she com to the kyng.
Than seide the good lady:

300 “For Goddes love, sir, mercy!
Of twelve children have we noon
On lyve now but this oon.
And better it were she were his make
Than he were deed for hur sake.”
“Dame, thou seist soth,” seide he.
“Sen it may noon other be,
Lever me were she were his wyf
Than y lost my sonnes lyf.”
Of this word the quene was fayn,
And to her soon she ran agayn.

310 “Floryes, soon, glad make thee,
Thy lef thow shalt on lyve see.
Florys, son, through engynne
Of thy faders reed and myne,
This grave let we make,
Leve son, for thy sake;
Yif thow that maide forgete woldest,
After oure reed wyf thow sholdest.”
Now every word she hath him tolde
How that they that mayden solde.
“Is this soth, my moder dere?”
―Forsoth,‖ she seide, ―she is not here.‖
The rowgh stoon adoun they leyde,
And sawe that there was not the mayde.

320 “Now, moder, y think that y leve may.
Ne shal y rest nyght ne day,
Nytt ne day ne no stound,
Tyl y have my lemmon found.
Hur to seken y woll wend,
Tho though it were to the worldes ende.”
To the king he goth to take his leve,
And his fader bade him byleve.
“Sir, y wyll let for no wynne,
Me to byddyn it were grete synne.”
Than seid the king: “Seth it is soo,
Seth thow wyll noon other doo,
Al that thee nedeth we shul thee fynde.
Jhesu thee of care unbynde.”
“Leve fader,” he seide, “y telle thee
Al that thow shalt fynde me.
Thow mast me fynde, at my devyse,
Seven horses al of prys:

340 And there she saved the child’s life.
The queen ran away in tears
Until she came to the king.
Then the good lady said,
“For God’s love, sir, have mercy!
From twelve children we have
None alive now but this one!
It would be better if she were his wife
Than for him to be dead for her sake.”
“Madam, you speak the truth,” he sighed.
“Since it cannot not be otherwise,
I would rather she were his wife
Than to lose my son’s life.”
With these words the queen was calmed,
And she ran back to her son.
“Floris, my son, cheer yourself.
You will see your sweetheart alive.
Floris, son, through a deceitful trick
Of your father’s and my design,
We had this grave made,
Dear son, for your sake.
If you had forgotten that girl,
You would marry according to our wishes.”
She told him every word
About how they sold that maiden.
“Is this the truth, my dear mother?”
“In truth,” she answered, “she is not here.”
They laid aside the rough stone
And saw that the maid was not there.
“Now, mother, I think that I can live.
I will not rest night or day,
Night, day, or one hour,
Until I have found my beloved.
I will go to seek her,
Even to the ends of the earth.”
He went to the king to take his leave,
And his father asked him to stay.
“Sire, I won’t desist for any gain.
To demand that of me would be a great sin.”
Then the king answered, “Since it is so,
Since you will not have it any other way,
We will provide you with all you need.
May Christ deliver you from distress!”
“Dear father,” he said, “I will tell you
All that you will supply me with.
You may equip me, at my request,
With seven horses, all of value:

18 Jhesu thee of care unbynde: To have the king entrust his son to Christ is either a scribal mistake or another example of the slipshod depiction of non-Christians. See also the note for Bevis (500). Felix’s faith is ambiguous as the text never explicitly says that he is Muslim and the descriptor ‘pagan’ (F59) could mean any non-Christian or pre-Christian belief. Yet later Floris prays to God (899-900).
And twoo ycharged, uppon the molde,
Both with selver and wyth golde;
And twoo ycharged with moonay
For to spenden by the way;
And three with clothes ryche,
The best of al the kyngryche.
Seven horses and sevyn men,
And thre knaves without hem,
And thyn own chamburlayn,
That is a wel nobel swayn.

His fader was an hynde king,
The coupe of golde he dide him bryng,
That ilke self coupe of golde
That was Blauncheflour foryolde.
―Have this, soon,‖ seide the king,
―Herewith thow may that swete thing
Wynne, so may betyde,
Blancheflour with the white syde,
Blancheflour, that faire may.‖
The king let sadel a palfray,
The oon half white so mylke,
And that other reed so sylk.
I ne kan telle you nowt
Hou richeliche the sadel was wrout.
The Quen was hende and curteis.
She cast her hond to hire fingre,
And drough therof a riche ringe.
―Have nou, sone, here this ring.
While thou hit hast, doute thee nothing,
Ne fir thee brenne, ne drenchen in se,
Ne iren ne stel schal derie thee;
And be hit erli and be hit late,
To thi wille thou schalt have whate.‖
Weeping thai departed nouthe
And kiste hem with softe mouthe.
Thai made for him non other cere
Than thai seye him ligge on bere.
Nou forht thai nime with alle main,
Himself and his chamblerlain.
So longe thai han undernome
To the havene thai beth icome

With two loaded, to the earth,
With both silver and gold,
And two laden with money
To spend along the way,
And three with rich clothes,
The best in all the kingdom.
Seven horses and seven men,
And three servants in addition to them,
And my own chamberlain.
He is a very dedicated servant;
He can both guide and advise us.
We will conduct ourselves as merchants.”
His father was a gracious king.
He gave the cup of gold to him,
The same golden cup itself
That had been given for Blancheflour.
―Take this, son,‖ said the king,
―With it you might win back
That sweet girl, if it may so happen,
Blancheflour with the light complexion,19
Blancheflour, that fair maid.”
The king had a palfrey saddled,
With one side as white as milk,
And the other as red as silk.
I cannot begin to describe
How richly the saddle was made.
The saddlebows were gold, pure and fine,
With stones of quality set inside,
Surrounded about with gold embroidery.
The queen was graceful and considerate.
She put her hand to her finger
And drew off a magnificent ring.
―Take this ring here now, son.
While you have it, fear nothing.
You will not burn in fire, or drown in the sea.
Neither iron nor steel will harm you.
Whether it be early or late,
You will have what is your will.”
Weeping, they parted then,
And kissed each other softly.
They behaved for him no differently
Than if they saw him lying on a funeral bier.
Now he and his chamberlain
Went forth with all might.
They traveled a long time
Until they came to the place

19 White syde: A puzzling line. TEAMS has side, suggesting a light aspect, where Bennett and Smithers render syde as long or flowing, i.e. blonde hair. The medieval sense that light hair or skin complexion was purer or more beautiful is evidently operant here, as Blancheflor is the daughter of a Saxon noble. See also Walter Clyde Curry, The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty (Baltimore: J.H. Furst, 1916), 11-21 and 80-86.
Ther Blauncheflour lai anight.
Richeliche thai were idight.
The loved of the houes was wel hende;
The child he sette next his hende,
In the altherfairest sete.
Gladliche thai dronke and ete,
Al that therinne were.
Al thai made glade chere,
And ete and dronke echon with other.
Ac Florice thoughte al an other.
Ete ne drinke mighte he nought;
On Blauncheflour was al his thought.
The levedi of the hous underyat
Hou this child mourning sat,
And seide here loverd with stille dreme:
―Sire,‖ she saide, ―nimstou no yeme
Hou this child mourning sit?
Mete and drynk he forgit,
Litel he eteth and lasse he drinketh.
He nis no marchaunt, as me t
To Florice than spak she:
―Child, ful of mourning I thee se.
Thous sat herinne this ender dai
Blauncheflour, that faire mai.
Herinne was that maiden bowght,
And over the se she was ibrowght.
Herinne thai boughte that maden swete.
And wille here eft selle to biyete.
To Babiloyne thai wille hire bring,
And selle hire to kaiser other to king.
Thou art ilich here of alle thinge,
Of semblant and of mourning,
But thou art a man and she is a maide.‖
Thous the wif to Florice saide.
Tho Florice herde his lemmman nevene,
So blithe he was of that stevene
That his herte bigan al light.
A coupe of gold he let fulle right.
―Dame,‖ he saide, ―this hail is thin,
Bothe the gold and the win,
Bothe the gold and the win eke,
For thou of mi lemmman speke.
On hir I thought, for here I sight,
And wist ich wher hire finde might,
Ne scholde no weder me assoine
That I ne schal here seche at Babiloine.‖
Florice rest him there al night.
Amorewe, whan hit was daight,
He dide him in the salte flod,
Where Blancheflour slept at night.
They were provided for lavishly.
The lord of the house was very hospitable;
He sat the young man next to him,
In the finest of all chairs.
All those who were in there
Ate and drank happily.
They all made a cheerful mood
And ate and drank with each other.
But Floris’ thoughts were all on another.
He could not eat or drink.
All his thoughts were on Blancheflour.
The lady of the house noticed
How this child sat mourning,
And said to her lord in a low voice,
―Sir,‖ she said, ―haven’t you noticed
How this boy sits gloomily?
He takes no notice of food and drink.
He eats little and drinks less.
It seems to me he is no merchant.‖
She then said to Floris,
―Child, I see you full of mourning,20
The same way that Blancheflour,
That fair maid, sat here the other day.
That girl was delivered here
And was sold from over the sea.
Here they bought that sweet maiden,
And they will trade her again for a profit.
They have sent her to Babylon
And will sell her to an emperor or a king.
You are like her in every way,
In appearance and in mood,
Except that you are a man and she is a maid.‖
This is what the wife spoke to Floris.
When Floris heard his lover’s name,
He was so glad to hear that sound
That his heart was all lit up.
He had the cup of gold filled straightaway.
―Madam,‖ he said, ―this toast is yours,
And both the gold and the wine—
Both the gold and the wine as well,
For you spoke of my beloved.
For her I thought, for her I sighed.
And now I know where I might find her.
No bad weather will hinder me
From seeking her in Babylon!‖
Floris rested there all night.
In the morning, when it was daylight,
He set out on the salty sea.

20 Child may formally denote a knight-in-training, but Floris is an eastern prince and is nowhere mentioned as becoming a knight. The poet is likely sentimentally emphasizing his youth.
Wind and weather he had ful god.
To the mariners he gaf largeliche
That broughten him over bletheliche
To the londe thar he wold lende,
For they founden him so hende.
Some so Florice com to londe,
Wel yerne he thankede Godes sonde
To the lond ther his leman is;
Him thoughte he was in paradis.

As soon as Floris came ashore,
He fervently thanked God for bringing him
To the land where his beloved was.
It seemed to him he was in paradise.

Very soon men told Floris the news
That the emir planned to hold a feast,
And that kings and dukes were to come to him,
All that hold land from him,
To honor his high feast
And also to hear his commands.
When Floris heard this report,
He was cheered in every way,
And in his heart he resolved
That he would be at that feast,
For he was confident he would see
His lover among them all in the hall.
Floris undertook his journey
Until he came to a fair city.
Men lodged him comfortably,
As one should for a king's son,
In a palatial house; there was none like it.
The master of the inn was prosperous,
And gold in plenty came into his hand,
Both by water and by land.
Floris did not spare any expense,
Lest there should not be enough
Of fish, of meat, of fresh bread,
Or of wine, both white and red.
The lord was wise in the world's ways;
He set the youth by his side,
In the best seat of all.
They ate and drank happily.
But Floris ate and drank almost nothing; All of his thoughts were on Blancheflour.
Then the host spoke,
A gracious man, dignified and courteous:
"Young man, it seems clear to me
Your mind is very much on your goods."
"No, not at all on my property.
My thoughts are all on something else.
My mind, in every way,
Is on recovering my merchandise."
"And it will be my greatest sorrow
If I find it and must lose it."
Then the master of that inn mused,

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21 British Library Egerton 2862 MS has For to fynde my marchaundise (464).
“Thous sat this other dai herinne
That faire maide Blancheflour.
Bothe in halde and ek in bour,
Evere she made mourning chere,
And biment Florice, here leve fere.
Joie ne bisse ne hadde she none,
Ac on Florice was al here mone.”
Florice het nime a coppe of silver whight,
And a mantel of scarlet,
Ipaned al with meniver,
And gaf his hoste ther.
“Have this,” he said, “to thine honour,
And thou hit mighte thonke Blancheflour.
Stolen she was out mine countreie;
Here ich here seche bi the waie.
He mighte make min herte glad
That couthe me telle whider she was lad.”
“Child, to Babiloyne she is ibrought,
And Ameral hire hath ibought.
He gaf for hire, ase she stod upright,
Seven sithes of gold here wight.
For hire faired and for hire schere
The Ameral hire boughte so dere,
For he thenketh withouten wene
That faire mai to haven to quene.
Amang other maidenes in his tour
He hath hire ido with mochel honour.”
Nou Florice rest him there al night.
On morewe, whan hit was daili
ght,
He aros up in the moreweninge,
And gaf his hoste an hondred schillinge,
To his hoste and to his hostesse,
And nam his leve and gan hem kesse.
And yerne he hath his oste bisought,
That he him helpe, yf he mought,
Hou he mighte with sum ginne,
The faire maiden to him awinne.
“Child, to one brigge thou schalt come;
A burgeis thou findest ate frome.
His paleis is ate brigges ende,
Curteis man he his and hende.
We beth wed brethren and trewe the iplight.
He thee kan wissen and reden aight.
Thou schalt beren him a ring
Fram miselve to tokning,
That the thee helpe in echel helve
So hit were bifalle miselve.”
Florice tok the ring and nam his leve,
“It is the same way that Blancheflour,
That fair maid, sat here the other day.
Both in the hall and in her chamber,
She always had a look of mourning
And grieved for Floris, her dear companion.
She had no joy or ease,
But all her lamenting was for Floris.”
Floris ordered a cup of white silver brought,
And a cloak of scarlet,
All lined with fur,
And gave it to his host.
“Have this,” he said, “for your honor,
And you may thank Blancheflour for it.
She was stolen from my country.
I seek her here by these roads.
The man would make my heart glad
Who could tell me where she was taken.”
“Boy, she has been brought to Babylon,
And the emir has bought her.
He paid for her, as she stood upright,
Seven times her weight in gold!
For her beauty and her bearing
The emir has paid so dearly for her,
For he thinks, beyond a doubt,
To have that fair maid as queen.
He has placed her with great honor
Among the other maidens in his tower.”
Then Floris rested there all night.
In the morning when it was daylight,
He rose up early
And gave his host a hundred shillings,22
To him and to his hostess,
And took his leave and kissed them.
And he earnestly asked his host
If he would help him, if he could,
How he might with some ruse
Win the fair maiden for himself.
“Young man, you will come to a bridge.
You will meet the toll keeper right away.
His house is at the bridge’s end.
He is a gracious man and gentle.
We are sworn brothers pledged by oath.
He can counsel and advise you rightly.
You will give to him a ring,
From myself as a token,
And he will help you in every way
As if it had happened to me.”
Floris took the ring and made his goodbye,
For there no leng wolde he bileve.
Bi that hit was undren hegh
The brigge he was swithe negh.
When he was to the brigge inome,
The burges he fond ate frome,
Sittende on a marbelston.
Fair man and hende he was on.
The burgeois was ihote Dayre.

Florice him grette swithe faire,
And hath him the ring irawt
And wel faire him bitawt.
Thourgh tokning of that ilke ring
Florice hadde ther god gestning
Of fichss, of flessch, of tendre bred,
Of whit win and of red.

Ac evere Florice sighte ful cold,
And Darys gan him bihold:
“Leve child, what mai the be,
Thous carfoul ase I thee se?
I wene thou nart nowt al fer,
That thou makest thoue doeful cher.
Other thee liketh nowt thin in?”
Nou Florice answered him:
“Yis, sire, bi Godes ore,
So god I ne hadde yore.
God late me bide thilke dai
That ich thee yelde mai.
Ac I thanke in alle wise
Upon min owen marchaundise,
Wherfore ich am hider come,
Lest I ne finde hit nowt ate frome.
And yit is that mi meste wo,
Yf ich hit finde and sschal forgo.”

“Child, woldest thou tel me thi gref?
To helpe thee we were ful lef.”
Nou everich word he hath him told,
Hou the maide was fram him sold,
And hou he was of Speyne a kinges sone,
And for hire love thider icome,
For to fonde with som ginne
That faire maide to biwinne.
Daris now that child bihalt,
And for a fol he him halt:
“Child,” he seith, “I se hou goth:
Iwis, thou erstest thin owen deth.
Th’Ameral hath to his justening
Other half hundred of riche king.

For he would not linger any longer.
By the time it was high noon
He was very near the bridge.
When he came to the bridge,
The first thing he saw was the bridgekeeper,
Sitting on a marble stone.
He was a fair and gracious man.
The townsman was named Dary.
Floris greeted him courteously
And handed him the ring
And entrusted it to him in good faith.
Through the token of that ring
Floris had a good welcome there
Of fish, of meat, of fresh bread,
And wine, both white and red.

But Floris continually sighed distractedly,
And Dary observed him.
“Dear boy, what is the matter with you,
To be as sorrowful as I see you?
I guess that you are not feeling well
So that you have such a doleful look.
Or do you not like your lodging?”
Then Floris answered him,
“No, sir, by God’s mercy,
I never had so good a one before!
May God let me live to see the day
That I may repay you.
But I am thinking in every way
About my own property,
Which is why I have come here,
Lest I not find it at the outset.
And yet it will be my greatest sorrow
If I find it and must lose it.”

“Child, will you not tell me your heart?
I would be very pleased to help you.”
Then he told him every word,
How the maid was sold from him
And how he was a king’s son from Spain,
Who had come here for love of her,
In order to devise some stratagem
To win that fair maid.
Dary observed the boy then
And took him for a fool.
“Boy,” he said, “I know how it will go.
Truly, you desire your own death!
The emir has invited to his tournament
A hundred and fifty rich kings.”

23 Yis, sire: The tendency of PDE with negative questions, so frustrating for many learners of English, is to say ‘no,’ i.e. I disagree with what you said, rather than ‘yes,’ i.e. I do like the lodgings. At least here, ME does the latter.
That altherrichchest kyng
Ne dorste beginne swich a thing;
For mighte th’Ameral hit underyte,
Sone thou were of live quite.
Abouten Babiloine, withouten wene,
Sixti longe milen and tene
And ate walle thar beth ate
Seven sithe twente gate.
Twente toures ther beth inne,
That everich dai cheping is inne;
Nis no dai thourg the yer
That scheping nis therinne plener.
An hondred toures also ther,
Beth in the borewe, and somdel mo.
That alderest feblest tou
Wolde kepe an emperour
To comen al ther withinne,
Noither with strengthe ne with ginne.
And thei alle the men that beth ibore
Adden hit up here deth iswore,
Thai scholde winne the mai so sone
As fram the hevene hegh the sonne and mone.
And in the bourh, amide the right,
Ther stant a riche tour, I thee aplight.
A thousand taisen he his heighe,
Woso it bihalt, wid, fer, and neghe.
And an hondred taises he is wid,
And imaked with mochel prid
Of lim and of marbelston;
In Cristienté nis swich non.
And the mortar is maked so wel,
Ne mai no man hit breke with no stel.
And the pomel above the led
Is iwrout with so moche red,
That men ne dorfen anight berne
Neither torche ne lanterne;
Swich a pomel was never bigonne,
Hit schineth anight so adai doth the sonne.
Nou beth ther inne that riche toure
Four and twenty maidenes boure.
So wel were that ilke man
That mighte woen in that an.
Now thourt him nevere, ful iwis,
Willen after more bliss.
Nou beth ther seriaunts in the stage
To serven the maidenes of parage.

The most powerful king among them
Would not dare attempt such a thing.
For if the emir discovered it,
You would soon lose your life.
Around Babylon, without a doubt,
It’s seventy miles long!
And on the walls there are gates—
Seven times twenty!
There are twenty towers inside
Where there is trading every day.
There isn’t a day throughout the year
That the markets aren’t going strong.
There’s a hundred towers to go with them
In the district, and several more.
The weakest tower of them all
Would keep an emperor
From coming inside there,
Whatever strength or ingenuity they had.
Even if all the men who are born
Swore to fight to their death,
They would as soon win the maid
As win the sun and moon from the heavens!
And in the castle, right in the middle,
There is a splendid tower, I assure you;
Its height is a thousand fathoms tall
To whoever beholds it, near or far.
And it is a hundred fathoms wide,
And built with extravagant pride,
Of lime and marble stone.
There is nothing like it in Christendom.
And the mortar is so well-built
That no man could break it with any steel.
And the globe on top of the roof
Was created with so much skill
That men do not need to burn at night
Either a torch or a lantern.
Such a globe was never made before!
It shines at night like the sun by day.
Inside that rich tower there is
A chamber for twenty-four maidens.
The man would be doing well
Who could live in that place!
He would never need, for sure,
To ask for more bliss.
There are servants on the upper floor
To serve the maidens of high birth.

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24 Other half hondred: Another confusing expression which TEAMS interprets as “half of a second hundred,” 150 in total.
Ne mai no seriaunt be therinne
That in his breech bereth the ginne,
Neither bi dai ne bi night,
But he be ase capoun dight.
And at the gate is a gateward,
He nis no fol ne no coward;
Yif ther cometh ani man
Withinne that ilche barbican,
But hit be bi his leve
He wille him bothe bete and reve.

The porter is proud withalle,
Everich dai he goth in palle.
And the Amerail is so wonder a gome
That everich yer it is his wone
To chesen him a newe wif.

Thanne scholle men fechche doun of the stage
Alle the maidenes of parage,
An brenge hem into on orchard.
It is the fairest on all earth;
There are the songs of birds.

Aboute the orchard goth a wal,
The werste ston is cristal.
Ther man mai sen
Much of this werldes wisdom.

And a welle ther springeth inne
That is wrowt with mochel ginne.
The well is of mochel pris,
The stream com fram Paradis.
The gravel in the grounde of preciouse stone,
Of saphires and of sardoines,
Of oneches and of calsidoines.
Nou is the welle of so mocchel eye,
Yif ther cometh ani maiden that is forleie,
And hi bowe to the ground.

Whiche maiden the water fareth on so,
Hi schal sone be fordo.

No servant may go in there
Who has his manhood in his pants,\(^{25}\)
Neither by day or by night,
Unless he is fixed like a rooster!
And at the entrance is a gatekeeper.
He is no fool or coward.
If any man enters
Within that same fortress
Unless by his permission,
He will both beat and emasculate him.

The porter is proud, to add.
Every day he walks in fine clothes.
And the emir is so incredible a man
That every year it is his practice
To choose himself a new wife.\(^{26}\)
And when he takes a new wife,
He knows how it will be done.
Men will bring down from upstairs
All the maidens of high birth
And bring them into the orchard.
It is the fairest on all earth;
There are the songs of birds.
Men might live long there!
Around the orchard there is a wall,
And the cheapest stone is crystal.
A man might see on the stone
Much of this world’s wisdom.\(^{27}\)
And a well springs in there
Which was crafted with great ingenuity.
The well is of great magnificence;
The stream came from Paradise!
The gravel in the ground is precious stone,
And each one has special virtues—
Sapphires and sardonyx stone,
Onyx and clear quartz.
The well is held in such awe;
For if any maid approaches who is not a virgin,
And she bows to the ground
In order to wash her hands,
The water will cry out as if it were angry
And become on her as red as blood.

Whichever maiden the water reacts so with
Will soon be put to death.

\(^{25}\) That in his breech bereth the ginne: An amusing euphemism: ‘Who has the engine/equipment in his pants.’ A capon (632) is a castrated rooster. Eunuchs were indispensable for guarding harems in fiction.

\(^{26}\) In the French version the emir repudiates and executes his ex-wives annually, making Blancheflor like Scheherezade in One Thousand and One Nights. But the English text does not state this, suggesting that the emir is perhaps polygamous.

\(^{27}\) The observer might see the mason’s craftsmanship and attention, or as TEAMS suggests, the lines are literal: sage texts are inscribed on the stones.
And thilke that beth maidenes clene,
Thai mai hem wassche of the rene.
The water wille erne stille and cler,
Nelle hit hem make no daunger.
At the welle heved ther stant a tre,
The fairest that mai in erthe be.
Hit is icleped the Tre of Love,
For floures and blossmes beth ever above.

680
And thilke that clene maidenes be,
Men schal bringe under that tre.
And wichso falleth on that flour,
Wille be chosen quen with honour.
And yif ther ani maiden is
That th’Amerail halt of mest pris,
The flour schal on here be wen
Thourgh art and thourgh enchantement.
Thous he cheseth thourgh the flour,
And evere we herkneth when hit be
Blancheflour.”

689
Thre sithes Florice swouned nouthe,
Er he mighte speke with mouthe.
Sone he awok and speke might,
Sore he wep, and sore he sight.
“Darie,” he saide, “ich worht ded,
But ich have of thee help and red.”
“Leve child, ful wel I se
That thou wilt to dethe te;
The beste red that I can
(Other red I ne can):
Go tomorrow to the tower
As if you were an expert craftsman
And carry in your hand a square and ruler.
As if you were a stonemason,
Examine the tower up and down.
The porter is a scoundrel and criminal.
Very soon he will come up to you
And ask what kind of craftsman you are,
And accuse you of some offense
And claim you came to spy on the tower.
You will answer him pleasantly
And speak to him amiably,
And say that you are an engineer
And have come to observe that tower
In order to learn and attempt

28 The Cambridge MS.

29 Cambridge has Alle weneg hit schulle beo Blancheflour, “Everyone thinks it will be Blancheflor.” 689 is long and is printed here on two lines.
To make another in thi londe.
Wel sone he wil come thee ner,
And bidde thee plaie at the scheker.
To plaie he wil be wel fous,
And to winnen of thin wel coveitous.

When thou art to the scheker brought,
Withouten pans ne plai thou nowt.
Thou schalt have redi mitte
Thrittii mark under thi slitte.
And yif he winne ought of thin
Al leve thou hit with him.
And yif thou winne ought of his,
Thou lete therof ful litel pris.

To plaien he wil be we
And to winnen of thin wel coveitous.
When thou art to the scheker brought,
Withouten pans ne plai thou nowt.
Thou schalt have redi mitte
Thrittii mark under thi slitte.
And yif he winne ought of thin
Al leve thou hit with him.
And yif thou winne ought of his,
Thou lete therof ful litel pris.

Wel yerne he wille thee bidde and prai
That thou come amorewe and plaie.
Thou schalt sigge thou wilt so,
And nim with thee amorewe swich two.
And ever thou schalt in thin owen wolde
Thi gode cop with thee athold
That ilke self coppe of golde
That was for Blauncheflour iyolde.
The thridde dai bere with thee an hondred pond
And thi coppe al hol and sond.
Gif him markes and pans fale;
Of thi moné tel thou no tale.

Wel yerne he thee wille bidde and prai
That thou legge thi coupe to plaie.
Thou schalt answeren him ate first
No lenger plaie thou ne list.
Wel moche he wil for thi coupe bede,
Yif he mighte the better spede.
Thou schalt bletheliche given hit him,
Thai hit be gold pur and fin,
And sai: ‘Me thinketh hit wel bisemeth te,
Thai hit were worth swiche thre.’

Sai also thee ne faille non,
Gold ne selver ne riche won.
And he wil thanne so mochel love thee,
That thou hit schalt bothe ihere and see
That he wil falle to thi fot
And bicone thi man, yif he mot.
His manred thou schalt afonge,
And the trewthe of his honde.
Yif thou might thous his love winne,
He mai thee help with som ginne.”

Nou also Florice hath iwrowt
To make another in your homeland.
Quite soon he will come near you
And invite you to play at checkers.\(^{30}\)
He will be very keen to play,
And greedily intent on beating you.
When you are brought to the board,
You cannot play without any money.
You will have ready with you
Thirty marks in your pocket.
And if he wins anything from you,
Be sure to give it to him.
And if you win anything from him,
Do not make too much of it.
He will eagerly ask you and insist
That you come back tomorrow and play.
You will say that you will,
And take twice as much with you.
And you will always keep
At hand your fine cup,
That very same cup of gold
Which was given for Blancheflour.
On the third day take a hundred pounds with you,\(^{31}\)
And your cup, safe and sound.
Give him marks and plenty of pennies.
Do not keep count of your money.
He will eagerly ask and insist
That you stake your cup in the game.
You will at first answer him
That you don’t feel like playing longer.
He will make a high offer for your cup,
If he might have more luck for doing so.
You will give it to him cheerfully,
Though it is gold, pure and fine,
And say, “To me it is fitting for you.
Even if it were worth three times as much.”
Say also that you are not short of anything,
Gold or silver or fine goods.
And then he will love you so much,
And you will both hear and see it,
That he will fall to your feet
And become your servant, if he may.
You will receive his homage,
And an oath of loyalty from his hand.
If you might be able to win him over so,
He might help you with some stratagem.”
Then Floris worked things

30 The medieval English played backgammon and other board games but checkers was not commonly known until later centuries. As with the chess match in Guy (668), such games would have had an exotic eastern atmosphere to them.

31 An hondred pond: Enormous stakes, US$75,000 in modern money (UK National Archives), though Floris is ‘gambling’ for Blancheflor.
Also Darie him hath itawt,
That thourgh his gold and his garsome
The porter is his man bicome.
“Nou,” quath Florice, “Thou art mi man,
And al mi trest is thee upan.
Nou thou might wel eth
Ared me fram the dethe.”

And everich word he hath him told
Hou Blauncheflour was fram him sold,
And hou he was of Spaine a kynges sone,
And for hire love thider icome,
To fonde with som ginne
The maiden agen to him winne.

The porter that herde and sore sighte:
―Ich am bitraied thourgh righte;
Thourgh thi catel ich am bitraid,
And of mi lif ich am desmaid.
Nou ich wot, child, hou hit geth:
For thee ich drede to tholie det
h.
And natheles ich ne schal thee nevere faile mo,
The whiles I mai ride or go.
Thi foreward ich wil helden alle,
Whatso wille bitide or falle.
Wende thou hom into thin in
Whiles I think of som ginne.
Btwene this and the thridde dai
Don ich wille that I m
ai.‖
Florice spak and wep among,
That ilche terme him thoughte wel long.
The porter thoughte what to rede.
He let floures gaderen in the mede,
He wiste hit was the maidenes wille.
Two coupen he let of floures fille;
That was the rede that he thought tho:
F lorice in that o coupe do.
Tweie gegges the coupe bere,
So hevi charged that wroth thai were.
Thai bad God yif him evel fin
That so mani floures dede therin.
Thider that thai weren ibede
Ne were thai nowt aight bired,
Acc thai turned in hire left hond,
Blauncheflours bour around.
To Clarice bour the coupe thai bere
With the floures that therinne were.
There the coupe thai sette adoun,
And gaf him here malisoun,
That so fele floures embroughte on honde.
Thai wenten forth and leten the coppe stonde.

Clarice to the coppe com and wolde
The floures handlen and biholde.
Florisse wende hit hadde ben his swet wight;
In the coupe he stod upright,
And the maide, al for drede,
Began to shriek and cry out. When he saw that it was not his beloved, He jumped back into the basket, Thinking himself betrayed in full. He didn’t count his life worth a bean.  
Maidens came rushing to Clarice, By ten and twenty, in one crowd, And asked her what was the matter That made her carry on so.

Thames realized right away that it was meant for Blancheflour, that sweet girl, For their rooms were near each other And it was seldom that they were not together, So that they knew each other’s secrets And had deep trust in each other.

After a moment she told the maidens That they should return to their bowers. “I came to this basket, wanting To handle the flowers and look at them. But before I knew what was happening A butterfly darted out toward me. I was so terribly startled by it That I began to shriek and cry.”

The maidens had a laugh over it And went back out, and left Clarice alone. As soon as the maidens were gone, Clarice went at once to Blancheflour’s room And said laughing to Blancheflour, “Would you like to see a very nice flower? It’s a flower that you will like, After you have seen it a little while.” “Stop it, girl,” said Blancheflour. “There’s little honor in teasing me. She who marries for love and has joy for it Can take pleasure in flowers.”

I’m hearing, Clarice, it’s no idle gab, That the emir will take me as his wife. But that day will never come When men will condemn me For being untrue in love, Nor will I change my heart for someone new, Just as Floris would not in his country.

Now that I will lose sweet Floris, No one else will have joy from me.” Clarice stood and beheld that sorrow.

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C

[Ho that luveth par amur] And hath therof ioye, mai luve flures.]  

848 Ich ihere, Clarice, withoute gabbe, The Ameral wil me to wive habbe. Ich thike dai schal never be That men schal atwite me That I schal ben of love untrewe, Ne chaung I love for non newe, For no love, ne for non eie; So doth Floris in his contreie. Nou I schal swete Florice miss, Schal non other of me have blisse.” Clarice stant and beheld that reuthe,
And the treunesse of this treuthe.
Leighande sche saide to Blauncheflour:
“Com nou se that ilche flour.”
To the coupe thai yeden tho.
Wel blisful was Florisse tho,
For he had iherd al this.
Out of the coupe he stirte iwis.
Blauncheflour chaungede hewe;
Wel sone aither other knewe.
Withouten speche togidere thai lepe,
Thai clepte and keste and eke wepe.
Hire cussing laste a mile,
And that hem thoughte litel while.
Clarice bihalt al this,
Here contenaunce and here bliss,
And leighende saide to Blauncheflour:
―Felawe, knouestou ought this flour?
Litel er noldest thou hit se,
And nou thou ne might hit lete fro thee.
He moste conne wel mochel of art
That thou woldest gif therof ani part.”
Bothe thise swete thinges for blis
Falleth doun, here fet to kis,
And crieth hire merci, al weping,
That she hem biwraie nowt to the king,
To the king that she hem nowt biwre
ie,
Wher thourgh thai were siker to deye.
Tho spak Clarice to Blauncheflour
Wordes ful of fin amour:
―Ne doute thou nammore withalle
Than to miself hit hadde bifalle.
White ye wel, witerli,
That hele ich wille youre bother druri.”
To on bedde she hath hem ibrowt,
That was of silk and sendal wrought.
Thai sette hem there wel softe adoun,
And Clarice drowgh the courtyn roum.
Tho bigan thi to clippe and kisse,
And made joie and mochele blisse.
Florice ferst speke bigan,
And saide: “Louerd that madest man,
Thie I thanke, Godes sone,
Nou al mi care ich have overcome.
And nou ich have mi lef ifounde,
Of al mi kare ich am unbounde.”
Nou hath aither other itold
Of mani a care foul cold,
And of mani pine stronge,

And the faithfulness of her pledge.
Then, laughing, she said to Blauncheflour,
“Come now and see that flower!”
They went to the basket.
Floris was very blisful
For he had heard all this.
He sprang out of the basket, in truth.
Blancheflour changed her color;
At once they recognized each other.
Without words they leaped togethwer.
They embraced and kissed and wept as well.
Their kissing lasted the time to walk a mile,
And it seemed to them too short a while.
Clarice saw all this,
Their emotions and their joy,
And said to Blancheflour laughing,
“Sister, do you know this flower?
A little earlier you would not see it,
And now you cannot let it go from you.
He must know a lot of tricks
For you to give him any part of yourself!”
Both of these sweet things, for their joy,
Fell down to kiss her feet
And to beg for her mercy, in tears,
That she would say nothing to the king,
That she would not betray them to the king,
For which they would be sure to die.
Clarice then spoke to Blancheflower
Words full of kind love:
“Have no more fear about all this
Than if it had happened to me.
You can be certain and be sure
That I will conceal your lovesickness.”34
She brought them to a bed
Which was crafted of fine silk and linen.
They laid themselves down quietly,
And Clarice drew the curtain round.
Then they began to embrace and kiss,
And had joy and great pleasure.
Floris first began to speak
And said, “Lord, who made man,
I thank you, God’s son.
For now I have overcome all my troubles.
And now that I have found my beloved,
I am delivered from all my pains.”
Then each told the other
About many hardships, foul and cold,
And about many strong torments

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34 *Hele ich wille youre bother druri*: TEAMS suggests that *heal* here means, “I will cure your lovesickness,” but also gives a second meaning of *heal* as ME *helen*, hide or conceal, which is what Clarice does.
Because they had been apart so long.
Clarice served them to their liking.
Both discreetly and quietly,
But she could not protect them for long
Without it being discovered.
Now the emir had such a custom
That every day two maidens
Had to come out of their room
To serve him up in the tower,
With water and a cloth and basin
For him to wash his hands in.
The other was to bring a comb and mirror
To serve him with great honor.
Even though he was served ever so courteously,
The next morning another pair had to go.
And the two who went to the tower most often
Were Clarice and Blancheflour.
The rest of the maidens had served them
So that their turn to serve was coming up.
In the morning after Floris came
It fell to Blancheflour and Clarice.
Clarice, the best of fortune to her,
Rose up in the morning
And called for Blancheflour
To go with her into the tower.
Blancheflour said, “I’m coming!”
But her answer was half-asleep.
Clarice took her way,
Thinking that Blancheflour was on her way.
As soon as Clarice arrived in the tower
The Emir asked about Blancheflour.
“Sire,” she answered at once,
“She has been awake all this night.
She knelt, and watched,
And read her book,
And made her prayers to God
That He give His blessing to you
And keep you alive long.
Now she is sleeping so soundly,
That sweet maid, Blancheflour,
That she is not able to come yet.”
“For certain,” said the king,
“She is a sweet thing!
I should very much want to marry her,
When she prays for my life so.”
Another day came and Clarice arose
And asked Blancheflour scoldingly
Why she made such a long delay.
“Get up, and we will go together,”
Blancheflour said, “I’m coming soon.”
But Floris pulled her close
And they fell asleep in this way.
Afterwards it would bring them terror.
Clarice came to the doorway.
The bacyn of gold she nam,
And hath icleped after Blaunchefflour,
To wende with here into the tour.
She ne answerede nai ne yo,
Tho wende Clarice she ware ago.
Sone so Clarice com into the tour,
The Ameral asked after Blaunchefflour,
Whi and wharfore she ne come,
As hi was woned to done.

“Shew was arisen ar ich were,
Ich wende here haven ifonden here.
What, ne is she nowt comen yit?”
“Nou she me douteth al to lit.”

He called his chamberlain forth,
And ordered him to go with all his retinue,
To find out why she did not come
As she was used to doing before.
The chamberlain took his way
And arrived in her bedroom.
He stood before her bed
To find two there, face to face,
Body to body, and mouth to mouth.

Yet was the slep fast in hire eye.
The Ameral het hire clothes keste
A litel binethen here breste.
Then segh he wel sone anon
That on was a man, that ot a womman.
He quok for anguisse ther he stod;
Hem to quelle was his mod.
He him bithoughte, ar he wolde hem quelle,
What thai were thai scholde him telle,
And sithen he thoughte hem of dawe don.
The children awoken under thon.
Thai segh the swerd over hem idrawe;
Adrad thai ben to ben islawe.
Tho bispak the Ameral bold
Words that scholde sone bi told:
“Sai me now, thou bel ami,
Who made thee so hardi
For to come into mi tour,
She took the basin of gold
And called for Blaunchefflour
To go with her into the tower.
She did not answer yes or no,
And so Clarice thought she had already gone.
As soon as Clarice arrived in the tower,
The Emir asked about Blaunchefflour,
And why she did not come
As she was accustomed to doing.
“Shew was up before I was.
I thought that I would find her here.”
“What? She has not come yet!”
Now she fears me all too little!”

He rushed into the tower
And told his lord all that he had seen.
The emir ordered him to bring his sword;
He would find out about this affair!
He came forth with all his staff,
Himself and his chamberlain,
Until they arrived where the two lay.
The sleep was still in their eyes.
The emir had the covers thrown down
A little beneath their chests.
Then he saw very quickly
That one was a man and the other a woman.
He quaked with anguish where he stood.
It was his urge to execute them.
He thought to himself that before he killed them,
They should tell him who they were,
And later he would put them to death.
The couple awoke in the meantime.
They saw the sword drawn over them,
And they were in terror of being slain.
Then the bold emir thundered
Words that demanded a prompt answer:
“Tell me now, my pretty lover,
Who made you so brave
To come into my tower

35 I am giving line 972 to the Emir, which makes more sense. No ME romance MS has quotation punctuation, but in British Library Egerton 2862 (880) Clarice does not speak and the line is clearly the Emir’s.
To ligge ther bi Blancheflour?
You were born for ill fortune,
Ye schollen thol die therfore.”
And you will suffer death for it.”
Thanne saide Floris to Blancheflour:
Then Floris said to Blancheflour,
“Of oure lif nis non socour.”
“There is no help for our lives.”
And mercy thai cride on him so swithe,
They cried to him for mercy so intently
That he gaf hem respit of here live
That he gave their lives postponement
Til he hadde after his baronage sent,
Until he could send for his barons
To awreken him thourgh jugement.
To avenge himself through judgment.
Up he bad hem sitte bo
He ordered them both to sit up
And don on other clothe,
And put on their clothes,
And siththe he let hem binde fast,
And cast into prison
And into prisoun hem he cast,
Until he had sent for his baronage
Til he had after his barenage sent
To send for his barons
To wreken him thourgh jugement.
To take punishment through a verdict.
What helpeth hit longe tale to sschewe?
What good is it to tell a long tale?
Ich wille you telle at wordes fewe.
I will tell you in a few words.
Nou al his baronage hath undernome,
No all his barons had arrived,
And to the Amerail they beth icome.
And came to the emir.
His halle, that was heighe ibult,
His hall, which was built high,
Of kynges and dukes was ifult.
Was filled with kings and dukes.
He stod up among hem alle,
He stood up among them all,
Bi semblaunt swithe wroth withalle.
With his expression one of great anger.
He said: “Lordingees, of mochel honour
He said, “Lords, of great honor,
Ye han herd spoken of Blancheflour,
You have heard Blancheflour spoken abou
Hou ich hire bought dere aplight
How I bought her dearly and rightfully
For seven sithes of gold hire wight.
For seven times her weight in gold.
For hire faired and hire chere
For her fairness and her beauty,
Ich hire boughte allinge so dere,
I bought her in full at such expense.
For ich thoughte, withouten wene,
For I thought, without a doubt,
Hire have ihad to mi quene.
To have her as my queen.
Bifore hire bed miself I com,
I came myself to her bed
And fond bi hire an naked grom.
And found with her a naked boy.
Tho thai were me so lothe
At the time they were so detestable to me
I thought to han iqueld hem bothe,
That I thought to kill them both,
Ich was so wroth and so wod;
I was so enraged and so crazed.
And yit ich withdroug mi mod.
And yet I held back my emotions.
Fort ich have after you isent,
On that basis I have sent for you,
To awreke me though jugement.
To avenge me through your decision.
Nou ye witen hou hit is agon,
Now that you know how it happened,
Awreke me swithei of mi fon.”
Avenge me swiftly on my foes!”
Tho spak a kyng of on lond:
Then a king of one land spoke up:
“We han iherd this schame and schonde
“We have heard this shame and disgrace.
Ac, er we hem to dethe wreke,
But, before we condemn them to death,
We scholle heren tho children speke,
We will hear the children speak
What thai wil speke and sigge,
Whatever they wish to say, to see
Yif thai ought agein wil allege.
If they have anything as a defense.
Hit ner nowt right jugement
It would not be a just deliberation
Withouten answere to acouplement.”
Without an answer to the accusation.”
After the children nou men sendeth
Men now sent for the children,
Hem to brenne fur men tendeth.
Intending for them to burn in fire.
Twaie Sarazins forth hem bringe
Two Saracens brought them forth
Toward here deth, sore wepinge.
Toward their death, as they wept bitterly.
Dreri were this schildren two;
The two lovers were inconsolable;
Nou aither biwepeth otheres wo.
Florice saide to Blauncheflour:
"Of oure lif nis non socour.
Yif manken hit tholi might
Twies I scholde die with right:
One for miself, another for thee,
For this deth thou hast for me."
Blauncheflour saide a gen tho:
"The gelt is min of oure bother wo."
Florice drow forth the ring
That his moder him gaf at his parting.
"Have nou this ring, lemmman min,
Thou ne schalt nowt die whiles hit is thin."
Blauncheflour saide tho:
"So ne schal hit never go,
That this ring schal aresd me;
Ne mai ihc no deth on thee se."
Florice the ring here araught,
And hi him agein hit bitaught.
On hire he hath the ring ithrast,
And hi hit haveth awai ikast.
A duk hit segh and begh to grounde,
An was glad that ring he founde.
On this maner the children come
Weping to the fur and to hire dome.
Bifor al that folk thai ware ibrowt,
Drier was hire bother thought.
Ther nas non so sterne man
That thise children loked upan,
That thai ne wolde alle ful fawe
Here jugement have withdrawe,
And with grete garisoun hem begge -
Yif thai dorste speke other sigge -
For Florice was so fair a yongling,
And Blauncheflour so swete a thing.
Of men and wimmen that beth nouthe,
That gon and riden and speketh with mouthe,
Als thai ware in hire gladnesse,
No man ne knewe hem that hem was wo
Bi semblaunt that thai made tho,
But bi the teres that thai schadde,
And fillen adoun bi here nebbe.
The Ameral was so wroth and wod
That he ne might withdraw his mod.
He bad binde the children faste,
Into the fir he hem caste.
Thilke duk that the gold ryng hadde
Nou to speke rewthe he hadde.
Fain he wolde hem helpe to live
And tolde hou thai for the ring strive.
The Ameral het hem agen clepe,
For he wolde tho schildren speke.
He askede Florice what he hete,
Each wept for the other’s grief.
Floris said to Blauncheflour,
“For our lives there is no help.
If it were possible for a human being,
I would rightfully die twice,
Once for myself, a second time for you,
For your death is because of me!”
Blauncheflour then answered,
“The guilt is mine for both our woe.”
Floris drew off the ring
That his mother gave him at their parting.
“Take this ring, my beloved.
You will not die while it is yours.”
Blauncheflour replied,
“It will never happen so
That this ring will save me.
I will not see you put to death.”
Floris handed the ring to her,
And she passed it back to him.
He thrust the ring on her,
And she flung it away.
A duke saw it and bent to the ground,
And was glad to find that ring.
In this manner the children came weeping,
To the fire and to their doom.
They were brought before all the people,
And both of them seemed so pitiable.
There was no man so stern
Who looked upon these children
That he did not wish fervently
To have their judgment withdrawn,
And to buy them with a great ransom,
If they only dared to speak out or protest.
For Floris was so fair a young man,
And Blauncheflour was so sweet a thing.
Of men and women who live now,
That walk and ride and speak with their mouths,
There are none so fair in their happiness
As they were in their sorrow.
No man could see that they were full of grief
By the bearing that they had
Except by the tears that they shed
Which fell down their faces.
The emir was so furious and livid
That he could not control his temper.
He ordered the couple bound fast
And thrown into the fire.
The same duke who received the gold ring
Was now moved by compassion to speak.
He was eager to help them to live
And explained how they argued over the ring.
The emir had them called back,
For he wanted the two to speak.
He asked Floris what his name was,
And he him told swithe skete.
“Sire,” he saide, “If hit were thi wille,
Thou ne aughtest nowt thi maiden spille.

1120
Ac, sire, lat aquelle me,
And lat that maiden alive be.”
Blauncheffour saide tho:
“The gilt is min of oure bother wo.”
And the Ameral saide tho:
“Iwis ye sculle die bo.
With wreche ich wille me awreke,
Ye ne scholle neveere go ne speke.”
His sword he braid out of his schethe,
The children for to do to dethe.

1130
And Blauncheffour pult forth hire swire,
And Florice gan hire agein fulle.
“Ich am a man, ich schal go bifore.
Thou ne aughtest nought mi deth acore.”
Florice forht his swire pulte
And Blauncheflour agein hit brutte.
Al that iseyen this
Therfore sori weren iwis,
And saide: “Dreri mai we be
Bi swiche children swich rewthe se.”

1140
Th’Ameral, wroth thai he were,
Bothe him chaungede mod and chere
For aither for other wolde die,
And he segh so ma ni a weping eye.
And for he hadde so mochel loved the mai,
Weping he turned his heved awai,
And his sword hit fil to grounde;
He ne mighte hit holde in that stounde.
Thilke duk that the ring found
With th’Ameral spak and round,
And ful wel therwith he spedde;
The children therwith fram dethe he reddre.
“Sire,” he saide, “hit is litel pris
Thise children to slen, iwis.
Hit is the wel more worschipe
Florice conseile that thou wite,
Who him taughte thilke gin
For to come thi tour within,
And who that him broughte thar,
The bet of other thou mighte be war.”

1160
Than saide th’Ameraile to Florice tho:
“Tel me who thee taughte herto.”
“That,” quath Florice, “ne schal I neverde do,
But yf hit ben forgiven also
That the gin me taughte therto;
Arst ne schal hit never bi do.”
Alle thai praied therfore iwis;
The Ameral graunted this.
Nou everi word Florice hath him told,
Hou the made was fram him sold,

1170
And hou he was of Speyne a kyngges sone,
For hire love thider icome,  
To fonden with som gin  
That faire maiden for to win.  
And hou though his gold and his garisoun  
The porter was his man bicom,  
And hou he was in the coupe ibore;  
And alle this other lowen therfore.  
Now the Amerail - wel him mote bitide -  
Florice he sette next his side,  
Who had come for her love  
To try with some plan  
To win that fair maiden;  
And how, through his gold and treasures,  
The porter had become his man,  
And how he was carried in the basket.  
All the others laughed over this.  
Now the emir – may he fare well –  
Set Floris by his side  
And made him stand there upright,  
And dubbed him a knight,  
And asked if he would stay with him  
With the leaders of his retinue.  
Floris fell to his feet  
And implored him to give him his love so sweet.  
The emir granted him his beloved.  
All the others thanked the emir.  
He had them ushered to a church,  
And they were wedded there with their own ring.  
Now both of these children, all for bliss,  
Fell at the emir’s feet to kiss them.  
And through the encouragement of Blancheflour,  
Clarice was fetched down from the tower,  
And the emir wedded her as his queen.  
There was a feast so sumptuous  
That I cannot describe all the courses,  
But it was the richest feast in the land.  
It was not long after then  
That the news came to Floris  
That his father the king was dead.  
All of the baronage gave him advice  
That he should go home  
And take charge of his kingdom.  
He took his leave of the emir,  
Who asked him to stay with him.  
Then the emir said,  
“Floris, if you will follow my advice  
And stay here, and not go home,  
I will give you a kingdom  
As long and broad as well  
As anything your father offered.”  
“I will not stay for any pleasures.  
To order me to would be a sin.”  
They commended the emir to our Lord,  
And they came home at their leisure,  
And Floris was crowned king,  
And she as queen, that sweet creature,  
And he received baptism by priests’ hands,  
And thanked God for all His works.
| 1220 | Nou ben thai bothe ded;  
     Crist of Hevene houre soules led.  
     Nou is this tale browt to th’ende,  
     Of Florice and of his lemmen hende,  
     Hou after bale hem com bote;  
     So wil oure Louerd that ous mote.  
     Amen siggeth also,  
     And ich schal helpe you therto. | Now they are both dead,  
Their souls led by Christ to Heaven.  
Now this tale is brought to the end,  
Of Floris and his fair sweetheart,  
How after their troubles came relief.  
So may our Lord do also for us.  
Say ‘Amen’ as well,  
And I will join you in it. |
| 1228 | Explicit | The End |
Growing Up in *Floris and Blancheflor*

The Middle English *Floris and Blancheflor* tests the argument that medieval romances are worth reading as literary texts. As Gertrude Stein said of Oakland, it has little “there” there. The story lacks any distinct didactic message in religious or courtly values. The characters are not particularly saintly—both histrionically threaten suicide over lost love—and Floris’ perfunctory conversion at the close receives one line. The poem has little interest in Saracen-Christian issues, and *heathen* and *pagan* never appear in the text.¹ No character is English, precluding any possible nationalistic agenda. Floris does not engage in any heroic acts of martial prowess. Everyone he meets helps him and his enemies act honorably, even the emir’s porter after being tricked.² Blancheflor’s role is so nominal that she does not suggest any feminine ideal. Despite the exotic locales, the characters and plot border on banal, as neither hero really grows through adversity and no believable conflict or danger ever threatens in this “springtime idyll.”³ In *Guy of Warwick* the hero constantly swoons, but over graver matters and not in the style of Floris’ boyish infatuation. Many romances have heroes who are children, but modern editions of *Floris* have been especially styled as sentimental juvenilia.⁴


⁴ For a particularly cloying example see Alice Leighton, *The Sweet and Touching Tale of Fleur & Blanchefleur* (London: D. O’Connor, 1922).
Romance texts often telegraph their endings, but *Floris and Blancheflor* cuts off any possible tension by giving away the denouement at the text’s introduction. The poet’s design “admits only minor complications, never any serious doubts about the lovers’ destiny.”

Lacy calls the poem a ‘roman rose,’ a conflict-less piece of entertainment rather than drama, which conveys “not event but the presentation of event.” Yet a narrative with no conflict, suspense, climax, or resolution is not much of a narrative. Unless *Floris and Blancheflor* simply comprises an image poem or dream vision, we are missing something. A reading which may have better utility sees the poem’s didactic content as neither religious nor courtly but organically more similar to that of folktale. The poem has several connections to such genres: it has the stock motifs of the fickle step-parent (Felix) and the exotic “wonders of the east” setting; it has an opaque ancestry.

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5 Lacy, 21.
6 Lacy, 22.
in popular legend; and its sentimental story has simple and stereotypical features. I do not intend a psychoanalytical reading of the sort that Bruno Bettelheim did for fairy tales, but the poem might be interpreted as exploring deeper themes of emotional, moral, and sexual development which might have appealed to a younger audience.

Segol suggests that Floris’ pursuit of Blancheflor constitutes a “metaphorical pilgrimage” which fulfills the journey of Blancheflor’s mother to the shrine of Saint James of Compostela. But the poem lacks any transcendent symbolism in Floris’ efforts to reclaim Blancheflor. He simply wants his girl back, and the poem is billed purely as a love story (F6) with few spiritual significations; the children’s Palm Sunday / Pasque-florie birthdate has little more religious meaning in the story than supplying their matching names. Calling Floris’ actions a quest may even be too strong. For much of the poem he acts rather passively, relying on his father’s money and the goodwill of others: “their pity achieves for him everything which he is incapable of doing for himself.” If Floris’ conversion comprises the climactic fulfillment of the pilgrimage, the token report that Floris “underfeng Cristendom of prestes honde” (1218) seems bizarrely understated for the son of a pagan/Muslim warrior.

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7 The likely French exemplar for the English poem dates to around 1200, and a Spanish analog from the ninth century has been put forth. Loomis lists a number of Arabic and Latinate legends and tales which may have influenced the poem, but none are definitive. Laura A. Hibbard Loomis, *Medieval Romance in England* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1963), 184-94. The identification with Charlemagne is not in most versions and probably has no historical basis. See also Patricia E. Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor and the European Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

8 Marla Segol, “Floire and Blancheflor: Courtly Hagiography or Radical Romance?” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 23 (2003): 245. Segol also describes the French analog and not the English.

9 I use F to indicate the French lines which replace the lost English beginning to the poem.

Yet each host that Floris encounters teaches him something and guides him toward a more mature and self-reliant character. The progress of the stopovers which Floris makes during his search for Blancheflor indicates increasing emotional independence. In his first stay at a lord’s house Floris offers a gold cup in thanks for the lady’s information on Blancheflor’s whereabouts (427-9) but displays no further agency. The next day Floris’s world grows to include Babylon, where he shows more assertiveness in communicating his wishes to the palace lord, first through gnomic statements about recovering “mi marchaundise” (484) and then by stating outright his intention to overcome the emir “with sum ginne” (523). His subsequent lodging with Dary results in concrete action as Floris now needs to operate alone without any paternal direction to navigate the hostile world of the emir’s palace. As Floris nears Blancheflor, his horizons have geographically and psychologically expanded into greater empowerment. However automatic they are, the risks which Floris overcomes progressively swell. Floris’ hosts can conceivably inform on him, and the porter can “bothe bete and reve” (638) him if his nerve fails.

Floris’ alliance with Dary also demonstrates an emerging cognitive maturity, for Floris now plans out careful subterfuge to rescue Blancheflor to compensate for the military prowess he lacks. Barnes reads the poem as a series of dupings and tricks reminiscent of Greek New Comedy,11 and Floris progresses from being a naïve victim of such ruses to having the ability to perform them and understand their psychology. Upon reaching the emir’s palace, Floris manipulates the porter like another one of his chess

pieces into his service. Each one of these encounters involves larger scope for intelligent action. Floris’ reunion with Blancheflor in the harem rooms seems somewhat of a regression to childishness, and Floris must be carried into the tower passively as one more flower in a basket. The comic scene where Floris is deposited in the wrong room allows him to lament that his life is worth “nowt a bene” (819), but the audience knows this “stylistic detour” will not prevent the preordained happy ending. It functions more as a minor backfire of the porter and Floris’ ploy and leads to another entertaining trick in Clarice’s quick thinking.

Yet Floris’ act requires an increasingly nuanced moral awareness, as he now must incriminate and endanger Blancheflor in his artifice. The emir orders both beheaded and not the intruder alone. While the poet does overdo the pathos, the French is even more maudlin, whereas the English version has the court motivated by concern about how Floris entered. Subsequently, Floris accepts full responsibility for his actions. He pleads to the emir to “lat aquelle me / and lat that maiden alive be” (“have me killed and let the maiden go alive,” (1120-1). Romance conventionally presumes that its ethics are “so compelling that anyone who confronts the court inevitably becomes a part of it,” and the emir partly melts because amor vincit omnia. But he chiefly relents after seeing that each will die for the other (1142). The emir may gauge that killing Blancheflor has the appearance of a jealousy undignified to his position but may also be impressed by Floris’

13 Barnes, 20.
audacity and moral precocity, as his readiness to undergo death for his actions gives him a depth beyond his years.

Roger Ascham complained that reading romances led to “baudrye,” but the English texts seldom depict any real smut, despite the desires of modern critics to make romance seem more ‘dangerous.’ Much of Floris and Blancheflor feels especially puerile, and the pregnancy of the mothers supplies the only evidence of sex in the first half. The heroes have mirroring names and similar features, suggesting to a medieval audience that they are soulmates. But their babyish courtship goes no further than reading stories of Ovid’s lovers together, and only in the French; the English merely has them learning Latin together (33), hardly an activity evincing romantic passion. Floris’ later whine to his father that “ne can y noght to scole goon / without Blanchemefloure” (19-20) has more the tone of a child pleading for his playmate than eros. Gilbert argues that effeminacy is “a common characteristic of boyhood in medieval literature,” perhaps to accentuate the hero’s later masculinity. In this poem the two children are barely differentiated by gender and do everything together but their nursing (F188).

Yet Floris undergoes a certain sexual maturing through the text. The first lord’s wife notes that Floris is identical to Blancheflor, except that “thou art a man and she is a maide” (421). The next lord in Babylon states only a similarity in their emotions (488),

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16 Gilbert, 44-5. In her note Gilbert lists other tales of identical and thus predestined pairs, such as Piramus et Tisbé, Chretien de Troyes’s Erec et Enide, and Amis and Amiloun, albeit homosocially.

17 Segol, 252.

18 Gilbert, 43.
and no further comparisons occur as Floris’ mentors switch from exclusively females to males. Clarice invites Blancheflor to “sen a ful fair flour” (843), but means a joke on the flower basket rather than on Floris’s masculinity; the audience understands the irony of Floris/flower, but Clarice does not yet know his name. In the bedroom discovery scene the French manuscript has a moment of humor where the emir’s chamberlain thinks that Floris is Clarice,19 but the English has the emir throw down the covers and see “wel sone anon / that on was a man, that other a womman” (994-5). At least physically, the two children have become differentiated in gender.

Are Floris and Blancheflor having sex? I do not want to commit the same offense I criticized by torturing the text for dirty meanings it does not have. Yet no one in the story claims that Blancheflor has remained a virgin. The narrator states that “bigan thai to clippe and kisse / and made joie and mochele blisse” (896-7) in a private bed. In the mornings Floris “here klippe bigan” (“pulled her close,” 957), and the chamberlain finds them “neb to neb, an mouth to mouth” (“body to body, and mouth to mouth,” 982). After all this the narrator nowhere reassures the reader that the two were only practicing their Latin declensions, in comparison to the Bevis of Hampton poet’s protest that “he dede nothing boutes hire kiste!” (1213). The term maiden can simply refer to an unmarried woman in Middle English without reference to sexual experience. Neither Floris nor Blancheflor tries to protest innocence to the emir or to his barons, as presumably Blancheflor’s lost virginity can be physically verified. Although Floris’ journey has not

realistically been a long one in time passed, he has progressed towards a growing sexual maturity, or at least the awareness of such dynamics.

Psychological readings can be dangerous, but the poem’s background characters suggest additional sexual meanings. Gilbert suggests that the story is about Floris’ attempts to be taken seriously as an adult with sexual agency,20 and such a poem might have appealed to gentle sons and daughters who historically did not usually marry as they wished.21 Floris’ precocious sexuality threatens parental authority, and Felix’s primal male anger in attempting to eliminate Blancheflor perhaps enacts a denial of Floris’ sexual autonomy, as the queen must consistently come to the pair’s defense. Much as Felix earlier adds the Christian slave to his proto-harem, the emir possesses an outright sexual monopoly on his women. Segol calls the emir’s garden a corrupted version of the heavenly paradise, but beyond its religious symbolism the garden is also “centered on male desire, erected around a giant phallus of a tower, imprisoning young and desirable women within it.”22 The garden is only paradise for him. Floris carries a cup depicting Helen being led away by Paris, and Blancheflor’s sexual favors are similarly a zero-sum game. Either the emir will enjoy them or Floris will. Floris thwarts the intentions of both dominant males to deny adult sexual activity to him, and upon abandoning his claims the emir’s sword falls to the ground impotently (1146).

Kelly argues that *Floris and Blancheflor* is a much darker text than the usual “charming,” “sentimental,” and “exotic far-east” adjectives applied to the poem mean,

20 Gilbert, 45.
21 Taylor, 11.
22 Segol, 256.
pointing out Blancheflor’s reality as a powerless slave born to a mother taken in violence. Like Helen and the cup, she is a commodified and voiceless object of trade. Yet the story seems too thin and naïve to support such grave themes. The fanciful plot and the lack of real suffering or loss rules out any such serious gloom, and Blancheflor functions more like a placeholder than a living character. She receives almost no lines, functioning more for Floris’ purposes than her own. The poet interestingly lavishes a great deal of description on such physical props of the story as the tomb, the cup, and the palace, cultivating “an ‘illusion of reality’ only in regard to art objects created by the unlifelike characters.” Lacy suggests that the text emphasizes its fictionality in order to fully enable its playful stratagems and humor, noting that the narrator takes several lines to state how he heard it from two sisters who heard it from a cleric. The poet does not use present-tense interjections (“Damn him who cares!”) or present the story as true history. The poem comprises “a literary work in the purest sense.”

Few romances attempt hyper-realism, but if the Floris and Blancheflor narrator appears especially bent on stressing the fictiveness of his story, its purposes—if any exist outside simple amusement—likely lie outside creating a sustained depicted world. At the narrative level, Floris wins back Blancheflor, and the poem’s ending is hasty and automatic as the two are “hastily bundled into the structures of normative adult life—knighthood, marriage, inheritance, and Christianity.” At a richer symbolic level, Floris

24 Lacy, 22.
25 Lacy, 25.
26 Gilbert, 48.
and Blancheflor plays out a boy’s progression toward manhood as Floris learns, in idea-time if not realistic time, to take responsibility for himself in order to obtain love and an adult identity. In the medieval era the boundaries between childhood and adulthood were less marked, making the romance child more like “un petit homme.”27 The teenager as a developmental stage would not arrive until the twentieth century. A very wide audience might have seen their ideal selves reflected in Floris’ passage into noble amor and kingship but also mature self-actualization. Although not a typical romance in its lack of monsters, armor, and battles, at the poem’s close Floris does achieve, with the blessings of church and court, “a Lady and a fief.”28

28 Haidu, 134.
CHAPTER 5

Gamelyn

Fitt 1

Lithes and listneth and harkeneth aright,
And ye shul here of a doughty knyght;
Sire John of Boundes was his name,
He coude of norture and of mochel game.
Thre sones the knyght had and with his body he wan,
The eldest was a moche schrewe and sone bygan.
His brether loved wel her fader and of hym were agast,
The eldest deserved his faders curs and had it atte last.
The good knyght his fadere lyved so yore,
That deth was comen hym to and handled hy ful sore.
The good knyght cared sore sik ther he lay,
How his children shuld lyven after his day.
He had bene wide where but non husbonde he was,
Al the londe that he had it was purchas.
Fayn he wold it were dressed amonge hem alle,
That eche of hem had his parte as it myght falle.
The good knyght cared sore sik ther he lay,
How his children shuld lyven after his day.
He had bene wide where but non husbonde he was,
Al the londe that he had it was purchas.
Fayn he wold it were dressed amonge hem alle,
That eche of hem had his parte as it myght falle.
Thoo sente he in to contrey after wise knyghtes
To helpen delen his londes and dressen hem to-rightes.
He sent hem word by letters thei shul hie blyve,
If thei wolle speke with hym whilst he was alyve.
When the knyghtes heard that he lay sick,
They did no rest by night or day
Until they had come to where he lay still
On his death’s bed to abide God’s will.
Then the good knyght, as he lay sick, said:
“Lordes, I you warne for soth, without nay,
Chapter 1

Pay attention, hear me, and listen closely,
And you will hear about a sturdy knight.
His name was Sir John of Boundes,1
And he knew much about refinement and leisure.
The knight had three sons and fathered them all.
The eldest was a wicked rogue and soon showed it;
His brothers loved their father well and were appalled by him.
The eldest deserved his father’s curse and ultimately had it.
His father, the good knight, lived long,
Until death neared and tormented him sorely.
The good knight worried himself sick where he lay
About how his children would fare after his day.
He had traveled far and wide but was no farmer;
All the land he held was purchased.2
He was anxious to have it divided among them
So that each would have his part as it might fall.
He sent out to the countryside for wise knights
To help portion out his lands and divide them justly.
He sent them word by letter that they should come quickly
If they wanted to speak with him while he was alive.
When the knights heard that he lay sick,
They did not rest by night or day
Until they had come to where he lay still
On his death’s bed to abide God’s will.
Then the good knight, as he lay sick, said:
“Lordings, I tell you in truth, with no denial,

1 Boundes: This likely means no more than the ‘boundaries’ of some border, although Skeat asserts that the word is straight from Old French bonne, limit. The setting of the story is not specified, although there is a Gamlingay near Cambridge. Walter W. Skeat, The Tale of Gamelyn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), viii, ix. The pejorative term ‘bounder,’ referring to an ill-bred opportunist such as Dickens’ Josiah Bounderby, is Victorian.

2 Sir John’s land was bought fee simple as a freehold and thus he is entitled to distribute it as he wishes. Although his executors insist on awarding it to the eldest son under the contemporary practice of primogeniture, John’s countermand has legal validity. See Edgar F. Shannon Jr., “Mediaeval Law in the Tale of Gamelyn,” Speculum 26:3 (1951): 458-9.
I may no longer live here in this place.
For through God’s will, death draws me to the earth.”
There were none of them who heard him
Who did not have pity for that knight.
They said, “Sir, for God’s love, do not despair.
God may bring good out of ill fortune that has befallen.”
The good knight, sick where he lay, replied:
“God may bring good from adversity; I know it can’t be denied.
But I beg of you knights, for the sake of my love,
To go and divide my lands among my three sons.
And for the love of God do not deal wrongly,
And do not overlook Gamelyn, who is my young son.³
Take heed of that one as well as the others.
You seldom see any heir help his own brother.”⁴
They left the knight lying there in his poor health,
And went into counsel to deal out his lands.
Their intentions were to deal them all to one,
And for Gamelyn, the youngest, to have nothing.
They parceled out in two all the land that was there
And let young Gamelyn go without land,
And each of them said to the other plainly
That his brothers might give him land when they were best able.
And when they had dealt out the land by their will,
They returned to the knight where he lay still
And immediately told him what they had done.
The knight, where he lay, was not pleased at all.
The knight cried, “By Saint Martin,⁵
For all that you have done, it is still my land!
For God’s love, neighbors, stop all actions,

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³ Gamelyn is young at the story’s beginning, as he spends sixteen years under his brother (356). He was evidently born when Sir John was older. Skeat etymologizes the name as gamel-ing, “son of the old man” (viii).
⁴ Proverbial. Compare the Old French proverb “A landmark is well-placed between the lands of two brothers.”
⁵ St. Martin divided his cloak between himself and a beggar. See note for Amis and Amiloun, 2014.
And I will deal out my land according to my own will.
John, my eldest son, will have five plows.  
That was my father’s heritage when he was alive.
And my middle son five plows of land
Which I helped to get with my right hand.
And all my other holdings of lands and tenants
I bequeath to Gamelyn with all my good horses.
And I beseech you, good men who know the laws of the land,
That my will should stand for love of Gamelyn.”
Thus did the knight divide his land in his day,
Right on his deathbed where he lay sick.
And soon afterward he lay as still as a stone
And died when the time came, as it was Christ’s will.
As soon as he was dead and under the grave’s grass,
The elder brother swindled the young boy.
He took in hand Gamelyn’s land and tenants,
And Gamelyn himself to clothe and feed.
He clothed and fed him poorly and grudgingly,
And let his lands and houses go to ruin,
Along with his parks and woods, and did nothing well.
Later he would pay for it with his own hide.
Gamelyn was in his brother’s hall so long that
Even the strongest were attentively cautious of him.  
There was no one in there, young or old,
Who would anger Gamelyn, however bold he was.
Gamelyn stood one day in his brother’s yard
And began to stroke his beard with his hand.
He thought about his lands that lay fallow
And his fair oaks that were cut down.
His parks were broken into and his deer stolen.

6 Plowes fyve: A plow was a legal unit of land in the Danelaw, and was said to be the amount of land a team of oxen could cultivate in a year. About 120 acres, it was similar to the English hide or carucate.

7 Of good will: Not the modern sense of goodwill or fair play, but ‘of their own accord,’ i.e. with strong feeling or resolution. Skeat gives an example from the romance Octovian Imperator where sailors unsurprisingly run from a lioness “with good wyle” (37).
Of alle his good stedes noon was hym byleved;
His hous were unhilled and ful evell dight;
The thought Gamelyne it went not aright.
Afterward come his brother walking thare,
And seide to Gamelyne, “Is our mete yare?”
Tho wrathed him Gamelyne and swore by Godys boke,
―Thow schalt go bake thi self I wil not be thi coke!‖
―What? brother Gamelyne howe anwerst thou nowe?
Thou spekest nevere such a worde as thou dost nowe.‖
“By feithe,” seide Gamelyne “now me thenketh nede;
Of al the harmses that I have I toke never yit hede.
My parkes bene broken and my dere reve
Of myn armes ne my stedes nought is byleved;
Alle that my fader me byquathe al goth to shame,
And therfor have thou Goddes curs brother be thi name!‖
Than spake his brother that rape was and rees,
“Stond stille, gadlynge and holde thi pees;
Thou shalt be fayn to have thi mete and thi wede;
What spekest thow, gadelinge of londe or of lede?‖
Then Gamelyn the child so yinge,
―Cristes curs mote he have that me clepeth gadelinge!
I am no wors gadeling ne no wors wight,
But born of a lady and gete of a knyght.‖
Ne dorst he not to Gamelyn never a foot goo,
But cleped to hym his men and seide to hem thoo,
“Goth and beteth this boye and reveth hym his witte,
And lat him lerne another tyme to answere me bette.”
Than seide the childe yonge Gamelyne,
“Cristes curs mote thou have brother art thou myne!
And if I shal algate be beten anoon,
Out of all his fine horses, none were left for him.
His house was unroofed and in disrepair.
Gamelyn resolved then that it was not right.
Afterward his brother came walking there,
And said to Gamelyn, “Is supper ready?”
This infuriated Gamelyn, who swore by the Bible,
“You can bake it yourself! I won’t be your cook!”
“What? Brother Gamelyn, what did you say to me?
You never spoke such words as you do now.”
“In faith,” said Gamelyn, “it now seems justified!
Of all the injuries to me, I never took offense yet.
My parks have been broken into and my deer stolen.
Nothing is left of my arms and my horses.
All that my father left to me has gone to shame.
And so may your name be cursed by God for it!”
His brother, who was quick to anger, spoke:
“Stand still, you little beggar, and shut your mouth!
You’ll be content to have your food and clothes.
What can you tell me, you bastard, about land or tenants?”
Then Gamelyn, the child so young, answered:
“Christ’s curse on him who calls me ‘bastard’!
I am no low beggar nor a common criminal,
But born of a lady and fathered by a knight.”
His brother did not dare step a foot toward Gamelyn,
But called to his men and then said to them,
“Go and beat this boy out of his wits,
And teach him to answer me better next time.”
Then the young man Gamelyn said,
“Christ’s curse on you, brother of mine!
And if I must be beaten today anyway,

8 This Cinderella-type order to “get busy with those pots and pans” is answered with common address (thou) rather than polite address (you), a clear act of defiance on Gamelyn’s part to his elder brother (TEAMS). Skeat notes that John evidently uses the royal we (is our mete yare?) in the previous line (37). In Thomas Lodge’s Euphues’ Golden Legacy (1592), which Skeat claims is partly based on Gamelyn, the villain here uses the condescending title sirha, sirrah (Skeat, xviii).
Cristes curs mote thou have but thou be that oon!"
And anon his brother in that grete hete
Made his men to fette staves Gamelyn to bete.
Whan every of hem had a staf ynome,
120 Gamelyn was werre whan he segh hem comen;
Whan Gamelyne segh hem comen he loked overall,
And was ware of a pestel stode under the wall;
Gamelyn was light and thider gan he lepe,
And droof alle his brotheres men right sone on an hepe
And loked as a wilde lyon and leide on good wone;
Gamelyn was light and leapt toward it,
And very soon drove all his brother’s men onto a pile
And looked as a wild lion as he laid into a good number.
And when his brother saw that he began to run.
He flew up into a loft and shut the door fast.
Thus Gamelyn with his pestel made hem al agast.
Some for Gamelyns love and some for eye,
Alle they droughen hem to halves whan he gan to pleye.
“What now!” seyde Gamelyne “evel mot ye the!
Wyl ye bygynne contecte and so sone flee?”
Gamelyn sought his brother whider he was flowe,
And seghe where he loked out a wyndowe.
“Brother,” sayde Gamelyne “com a litel nere,
And I wil teche thee a play at the bokelere.”
His brother him answerde and seide by Seint Richere,
“The while that pestel is in thine honde I wil come no nere;
 Brother, I will make thi pees I swer by Cristes oore;
130 Cast away the pestel and wretche the no more.”
“I most nede,” seide Gamelyn, “wretche me at onys,
To Hell with you unless you are the one to do it!"9
Straightaway his brother, in his hot fury,
Made his men fetch staves to beat Gamelyn.
When every one of them had taken a staff,
Gamelyn was aware when he saw them coming.
When Gamelyn saw them nearing, he looked around
And noticed a large pestle under the wall.10
Gamelyn was light and leapt toward it,
And very soon drove all his brother’s men onto a pile
And looked as a wild lion as he laid into a good number.
And when his brother saw that he began to run.
He flew up into a loft and shut the door fast.
Thus Gamelyn terrified them all with his club.
Some loved Gamelyn and some feared him,
And all of them took sides when he began to fight.
“What now?” said Gamelyn. “Foul fortune to you!11
Will you confront me and so soon run away?”
Gamelyn looked to find where his brother had flown
And saw where he peeped out a window.
“Brother,” said Gamelyn, “come a little nearer.
And I will teach you a lesson with my shield.”12
His brother answered and said, “By Saint Richard,13
While that club is in your hand I will come no closer.
Brother, I swear by Christ’s grace I will make peace with you.
Cast away the pestle and trouble yourself no more.”
“I am justified in being angry now,” said Gamelyn,
For thou wold make thi men to breke my bonys,  
Ne had I hadde mayn and myght in myn armes,  
To han hem fro me thei wold have done me harms.”
“Gamelyn,” seide his brother, “be thou not wroth,  
For to sene the han harme we were right loth;  
I ne did it not, brother, but for a fondinge,  
For to loken wher thou art stronge and art so yenge.”
“Come adoune than to me and graunt me my bone  
Of oon thing I wil the axe and we shal saught sone.”
Doune than come his brother that fikel was and felle,  
And was swith sore afeerd of the pestelle.
He seide, “Brother Gamelyn axe me thi bone,  
And loke thou me blame but I it graunte sone.”  
Than seide Gamelyn “Brother, iwys,  
And we shul be at one thou most graunte me  
Alle that my fader me byquath whilst he was alyve,  
Thow most do me it have if we shul not strive.”
“That shalt thou have, Gamelyn I swere be Cristes oore!
Al thi fadere the byquathe, though thou wolde have more;  
Thy londe that lith ley wel it shal be sawe,  
And thine houses reised up that bene leide ful lawe.”
Thus seide the knyght to Gamelyn with mouthe,  
And thought on falsnes as he wel couthe.
The knyght thought on tresoun and Gamelyn on noon,  
And wente and kissed his brother and whan thei were at oon  
Alas, yonge Gamelyne no thinge he ne wist  
With such false tresoun his brother him kist!

Fitt 2
Lytheneth, and listeneth, and holdeth your tonge,  
And ye shul here talking of Gamelyn the yonge.

“For you would have had your men break my bones.  
If I did not have power and strength in my arms  
To keep them away, they would have done me harm.”
“Gamelyn,” replied his brother, “don’t be upset,  
For it would be hateful for me to see you hurt.  
I did not mean it, brother, as more than a test,  
To find out if you are strong while still so young.”
“Come down to me, then, and grant my wish.  
I will ask one thing of you and we will be reconciled.”
Down came his brother, who was fickle and cruel,  
And sorely afraid of the club.
He said, “Brother Gamelyn, ask me your request,  
And see that you blame me if I do not grant it soon.”
Then Gamelyn said, “Brother, indeed,  
For us to be at one you must grant me this:  
You must turn over to me, if we are not to quarrel,  
All that my father left to me while he was alive.”
“You will have it, Gamelyn, I swear by God’s mercy!  
All that your father bequeathed you, even more if you wanted.  
Your land that lies untilled will be sown,  
And your houses that lie fallen will be raised up.”
The knight said these things to Gamelyn with his mouth,  
But thought of treachery, which his mind knew well.
The knight planned treason though Gamelyn intended none,  
And he went and kissed his brother when they were reconciled.  
Alas, young Gamelyn suspected nothing  
When his brother kissed him with such false deceit.

Part 2
Pay attention, and listen, and hold your tongue,  
And you will hear a story about Gamelyn the young.
Ther was there bisiden cride a wrestelinge,
And therothere ther was sette a ramme and a ringe;
And Gamelyn was in wille to wende thereto,
Forte preven his myght what he coude doo.
“Brothere,” seide Gamelyn, “by Seint Richere,
Thow most lene me tonight a litel coursere
That is fresshe for the spore on forto ride;
I moste on an erande a litel here beside.”

“By god!” seide his brothere “of stedes in my stalle
Goo and chese the the best spare noon of hem alle
Of stedes and of coursers that stoden hem byside;
And telle me, good brother, whider thou wilt ride.”
“Here beside, brother is cried a wrestelinge,
And therothere shal be sette a ram and a ringe;
Moch worschip it were brother to us alle,
Might I the ram and the ringe bringe home to this halle.”

A stede ther was sadeled smertly and skete;
Gamelyn did a peire spores fast on his fete.
He sette his foote in the stirop the stede he bistrode,
And towardes the wrestelinge the yonge childe rode.

When Gamelyn the yonge was riden out atte gate,
The fals knyght his brother loked yit after thate,
And bysought Jesu Crist that is hevene kinge,
He myghte breke his necke in the wrestelinge.

As sone as Gamelyn come ther the place was,
He lighte doune of his stede and stood on the grasse,
And ther he herde a frankeleyn “weiloway” singe,

A wrestling match was announced nearby,
And a ram and a ring were set for it.\(^\text{14}\)
Gamelyn wanted to go there
To prove his prowess of what he could do.
“Brother,” said Gamelyn, “by Saint Richard,
Tonight you must lend me a fast horse
That is keen to ride under the spur,
I must go on an errand for a little while near here.”

“By God,” said his brother, “from the steeds in my stall,
Go and choose the best; spare none of them
Out of the coursers and horses that stand by.\(^\text{15}\)
And tell me, good brother, where will you ride?”
“A wrestling match has been called nearby,
And a ram and a ring have been set as prizes.
It would bring great honor to us all, brother,
If I brought the ram and ring home to this hall.”
A stede was saddled handsomely and quickly.
Gamelyn put a pair of spurs tightly on his feet.
He set his foot in the stirrup and mounted the horse,
And the youngster rode toward the wrestling match.
When Gamelyn the youth had ridden past the gate,
His brother the false knight continued to stare out at it
And implored Jesus Christ, who is Heaven’s king,
That he might break his neck in the wrestling.
As soon as Gamelyn arrived where the match was,
He dismounted his horse and stood on the grass.
And there he heard a landowner wail “Woe is me!”\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{14}\)Wrestling matches were a popular pastime in the countryside enjoyed by peasant and nobility, and a ram and ring would have been standard prizes. Chaucer’s Miller “wolde have alwey the ram” (I.548). Some scholars claim that actually participating would have been undignified for the genteel, making Sir Thopas’ unlikely plaudit that “of wrastlyng was ther noon his peer” (VII.740) additionally humorous.

\(^{15}\)Coursers: coursers were very fast and light horses often used in battle.

\(^{16}\)Frankeleyn: A franklin was a rural freeman who owned his own land but was not noble. Together with the urban merchant bourgeoisie they formed a nascent middle class, and thus the proverbial hard-working yeoman.
And bygone bitterly his hondes forto wringe.
“Good man,” seide Gamelyn, “whi mast thou this fare?
Is ther no man that may you helpen out of care?”
“Allas!” seide this frankeleyn, “that ever was I bore!
For twey stalworth sones I wene that I have lore;
A champion is in the place that hath wrought me sorowe,
For he hath sclayn my two sones but if God hem borowe.
I will yeve ten pound by Jesu Christ! and more,
With the nones I fonde a man wolde handel hym sore.”
“Good man,” seide Gamelyn, “wilt thou wele doon,
Holde my hors the whiles my man drowe of my shoon,
And helpe my man to kepe my clothes and my stede,
And I wil to place gon to loke if I may spede.”
“By God!” seide the franklyn, “it shal be doon;
I wil myself be thi man to drowe of thi shoon,
And wende thou into place, Jesu Crist the spede,
And drede not of thi clothes ne of thi good stede.”
Barefoot and ungirt Gamelyn inne came,
Alle that were in the place hede of him nam,
Howe he durst aventure him to doon his myght
That was so doghty a champion in wrasteling and in fight.
Up stert the champioun rapely anon,
“And toward yonge Gamelyn byganne to gon,
And seide, “Who is thi fadere and who is thi sire?
For sothe thou art a grete fool that thou come hire!”
Gamelyn answerde the champioun tho,
“Thowe knewe wel my fadere while he myght goo,
The whiles he was alyve, by seynt Martyn!
Sir John of Boundes was his name, and I am Gamelyne.”
“Felawe,” sayde the champion, “so mot I thrive,
I knewe wel thi fadere the whiles he was alyve;
And thi slf, Gamelyn, I wit that thou it here,
While thou were a yonge boy a moche shrewe thou were.”
As he started to bitterly wring his hands.
“Good man,” said Gamelyn, “why are you making this fuss?
Is there no man who can help you out of your troubles?”
“Alas,” said the franklin, “that I was ever born!
For I believe that I have lost two sturdy sons.
There is a champion here who has brought me sorrow,
For he will slay my two sons unless God will rescue them.
I would give ten pounds, by Jesus Christ, and more
On the spot if I found a man who would handle him roughly.”
“Good man,” said Gamelyn, “if you will be so kind,
Hold my horse while my man takes off my shoes,
And help my man to keep my clothes and my steed,
And I will go there to see if I might be successful!”
“By God,” said the franklin, “It will be done!
I will myself be the man to take off your shoes
And lead you to the place. Jesus Christ help you,
And don’t worry about your clothes or your fine steed!”
Gamelyn came in barefoot and unarmed.
All that were in the place took notice of him,
Howe he dared to risk himself to show his might,
Against so rugged a champion in wrestling and in fighting.
At once the champion started up in haste
And came toward young Gamelyn,
And said, “Who is your father and who is your lord?
For certainly, you are a great fool to come here!”
Gamelyn answered the challenger,
“You knew my father well while he was still about,
While he was alive, by Saint Martin!
Sir John of Boundes was his name, and I am Gamelyn.”
“Fellow,” said the champion, “as I live and breathe,
I knew your father well while he was alive!
And as for you, Gamelyn, I’d like you to hear it;
When you were a young boy you were a little rogue.”

\textsuperscript{17} Ten pound: About US$5500 in modern money, a large sum for the non-aristocratic franklin (UK National Archives).
Than seide Gamelyn and swore by Cristes ore,
“Now I am older wexe thou shalt finde me a more!”
“By God!” seide the champion “welcome mote thou be!
Come thow onys in myn honde thou shalt nevère the.”
It was wel within the nyght and the mone shone,
Whan Gamelyn and the champioun togider gon gone.
The champion cast turnes to Gamelyne that was prest,
And Gamelyn stode and bad hym doon his best.
Than seide Gamelyn to the champioun,
“Thowe art fast aboute to bringe me adoun;
Now I have proved mony tornes of thine,
Thow most,” he seide, “oon or two of myne.”
Gamelyn to the champioun yede smertely anoon,
Of all the turnes that he couthe he shewed him but oon,
And cast him on the lift side that thre ribbes to-brake,
And therto his owne arme that yaf a grete crake.
Than seide Gamelyn smertly anon,
“Shal it bi hold for a cast or ellis for non?”
―By God!‖ seide the champion, ―whedere it be,
He that cometh ones in thi honde shal he neve
r the!‖
Than seide the frankeleyn that had the sones there,
―Blessed be thou, Gamelyn, that ever thou bore were!‖
The frankleyn seide to the champioun on hym stode hym noon eye,
―This is yonge Gamelyne that taught the this pleye.”
Agin anserd the champioun that liketh no thing wel,
“He is alther maister and his pley is right felle;
Sithen I wrasteled first it is goon yore,
But I was nevere in my lif handeled so sore.”
Gamelyn stode in the place anon without serk,
And seide, “Yif ther be moo lat hem come to werk;
The champion that pyned him to worch sore,
It semeth by his countenance that he wil no more.”

18 On hym stode hym noon eye: Eye does not refer to vision here but to awe: “he no longer stood in awe of him.”

Then Gamelyn said, and swore by Christ’s grace,
“Now that I have grown older you will find me a bigger one.”
“By God,” said the champion, “you’re welcome to try.
Fall into my hands once and you will never last.”
It was well into the night and the moon shone
When Gamelyn and the champion fell together.
The fighter tried feints on Gamelyn, who was ready,
And Gamelyn stood and told him to give it his best.
Then Gamelyn said to the champion,
“You are eager to bring me down.
Now that I’ve withstood many of your turns,
You must,” he concluded, “stand one or two of mine!”
At once Gamelyn rushed smartly up to the champion.
Of all the plays he knew, he showed him only one
And threw him on his left side so that three ribs broke,
And his arm gave out a great crack.
Straightway, Gamelyn jibbed sharply,
“Shall it be counted as a throw, or else for nothing?”
“By God!” said the champion. “Whoever it is,
He who falls once into your hands will never last!”
Then the franklin, who had his sons there, said
“Blessed be you, Gamelyn, that you were ever born!”
The franklin said to the champion, no longer with fear,
“This is young Gamelyn who taught you these moves.”
The champion, who was very displeased, answered again:
“He is the master in every way and his play is very harsh.
It has been a long time since I first wrestled,
But never in my life have I been handled so roughly.”
Gamelyn stood in that place without a shirt
And said, “If there are more, let them come to play!
The champion was so anxious to work me over—
It seems by his appearance that he doesn’t want any more.”
Gamelyn stood in the place as still as a stone
For to abide wrastelinge but ther come none;
Ther was noon with Gamelyn that wold wrestel more,
For he handeled the champioun so wonderly sore.
Two gentile men that yemed the place,
Come to Gamelyn -- God yeve him goode grace! --
And seide to him, “Do on thi hosen and thi shoon,
For soth at this tyme this fare is doon.”
And than seide Gamelyn, “So mot I wel fare,
I have not yet e halvendele sold my ware.”
Thoo seide the champioun, “So broke I my swere,
He is a fool that therof bieth thou selleth it so dere.”
Tho seide the frankeyne that was in moche care,
“Felawe,” he saide “whi lackest thou this ware?
By seynt Jame of Gales that mony man hath sought,
Yit is it to good chepe that thou hast bought.”
Thoo that wardeynes were of that wrastelinge
Come and brought Gamelyn the ramme and the rynge,
And Gamelyn bithought him it was a faire thinge,
And wente with moche joye home in the mornynge.
His brother see wher he came with the grete route,
And bad shitt the gate and holde hym withoute.
The porter of his lord was soor agaast,
And stert anoon to the gate and lokked it fast.

Fitt 3
Now lithenes and listneth both yonge and olde,
And ye schul here gamen of Gamelyn the bolde.

To bear more wrestling, but none came up.
There was no one who would wrestle with Gamelyn,
For he handled the champion with such amazing ferocity.
Two gentlemen who ran the place
Approached Gamelyn. God give them good grace!
They said to him, “Put on your hose and shoes,
For truly, at this moment the games are finished.”
Then Gamelyn said, “As I live and breathe,
I have not yet sold off half my wares!”
The champion answered, “By the hairs on my head, he is a fool who buys what you sell at such a high price!”
The franklin, who had faced such troubles, answered,
“Fellow,” he said, “why are you finding fault with the sale?
By Saint James of Spain, whom many men have sought, What you have bought has been too good a deal!”
Then the umpires of the wrestling match
Came and awarded Gamelyn the ram and the ring,
And Gamelyn thought it was a fair sight
And went home in the morning with great joy.
His brother saw him coming with a large company
And ordered the gate shut to hold him out.
The porter was sorely afraid of his lord
And ran at once to the gate and locked it fast.

Part 3
Now pay attention and listen, both young and old,
And you will hear the adventures of Gamelyn the bold.

19 Reminiscent of a medieval flyting (or possibly American rap music competitions), Gamelyn has many scenes of witty, stylized insults. The analogy is that Gamelyn is a merchant who is selling his goods (wrestling moves). The challenger gripes that he has paid too much for the ‘merchandise.’

20 So broke I my swere: ‘As I have use of my neck.’ A mild expletive with the sense of “As I live and breathe,” or “While there’s a head on my shoulders.”

21 The shrine of Saint James is at Santiago di Compostella in Galicia, the destination of the pilgrims at the beginning of Floris and Blancheflor. The exact same line appears in “Þe Simonie” (475) in Auchinleck. Line 760 is also a repeat. Skeat, xii–iii.
Gamelyn come to the gate forto have come inne,
And it was shette faste with a stronge pynne;
Than seide Gamelyn, “Porter, undo the yate,
For good menys sones stonden ther ate.”
Than answerd the porter and swore by Goddys berd,
“Thow ne shalt, Gamelyne, come into this yerde.”
“Thow lixt,” seide Gamelyne “so broke I my chyne!”
He smote the wikett with his foote and breke awaie the pyne.
The porter seie thoo it myght
no better be,
He sette foote on erth and bygan to flee.
“By my feye,” seide Gamelyn “that travaile is ylore,
For I am of fote as light as thou if thou haddest it swore.”
Gamelyn overtoke the porter and his tene wrake,
And girt him in the nek that the bone broke,
And toke hym by that oon arme and threwe hym in a welle,
Seven fadme it was depe as I have herde telle.
Whan Gamelyn the yonge thus had plaied his playe,
Alle that in the yerde were drowen hem awaye;
Thei dredden him ful sore for werk t
hat he wrought,
And for the faire company that he thider brought.
Gamelyn yede to the gate and lete it up wide;
He lete inne alle that gone wolde or ride,
And seide, “Ye be welcome without eny greve,
For we wil be maisters here and axe no man leve.
Yestarday I lefte,” seide yonge Gamelyn,
“In my brothers seler fyve tonne of wyne;
I wil not this company partyn atwynne,
And ye wil done after me while sope is therinne;
And if my brother gruche or make foule chere,
Either for spence of mete and drink that we spende here,
I am oure catour and bere oure alther purs,
He shal have for his gruchinge Seint Maries curs.
My brother is a nigon, I swere by Cristes oore,
And we wil spende largely that he hath spared yore;
And who that make gruchinge that we here dwelle,
He shal to the porter into the drowe-
welle.”
Gamelyn helde his feest for seven days and seven nights.
With moche solace was ther noon cheest;
In a litel torret his brother lay steke,
And see hem waast his good and dorst no worde speke.
Erly on a mornynge on the eight day,
The gestes come to Gamelyn and wolde gone her way.
“Lordes,” seide Gamelyn, “wil ye so hie?
Al the wyne is not yit dronke so brouke I myn ye.”
Gamelyn in his herte was ful woo,
Whan his gestes toke her leve fro hym
for to go;
He wolde thei had dwelled lenger and thei seide nay,
But bytaught Gamelyn, “God and good day.”
Thus made Gamelyn his feest and brought wel to ende,
And after his gestes toke leve to wende.

Fitt 4

Lithen and listen and holde your tunge,
And ye shal here game of Gamelyn the yonge;
Harkeneth, lordingges and listeneth aright,
Whan alle gestis were goon how Gamelyn was dight.
Alle the while that Gamelyn heeld his mangerye,
His brothere thought on hym be wroke with his trecherye.
Whan Gamyl
yns gestes were riden and goon,
Gamelyn stood anon allone frend had he noon;
Tho aftere felle sone within a litel stounde,
Gamelyn was taken and ful hard ybounde.
Forth come the fals knyght out of the solere,
To Gamelyn his brother he yede ful nere,
And saide to Gamelyn, “Who made the so bold
For to stroien the stoor of myn household?”
“Brother,” seide Gamelyn, “wreth the right nought,
For it is many day gon sith it was bought;

No quarrelng troubled the great merriment.
His brotere hid lying in a little turret
And watched them squander his goods and dared not speak out.
Early in the morning on the eighth day,
The guests came to Gamelyn and wished to leave.
“Gentlemens,” said Gamelyn, “must you rush off so?
If my eyes can still see, all the wine isn’t drunk yet.”
Gamelyn was heavy at heart
When his guests took their leave to go home.
He wished they would stay longer but they said no,
Only telling Gamelyn, “Goodbye and God be with you!”
Thus Gamelyn had his feast and brought it to a good end
After his guests made their goodbyes and left.

Part 4

Pay attention and listen, and hold your tongue,
And you will hear the adventures of Gamelyn the youngster.
Hear me, lordings, and listen closely
To hear how Gamelyn was treated when his guests were gone.
All the while that Gamelyn held his festivities,
His brother schemed treacherously how to be avenged.
When Gamelyn’s guests had left and ridden away,
He suddenly stood alone, without one friend.
In one cruel moment within a short time,
Gamelyn was seized and bound up tightly.
The false knight came forth out of the study
And went up close to his brother Gamelyn
And said, “Who made you so bold
To waste the supplies of my household?”
“Brother,” said Gamelyn, “you have no right to be angry,
For it is many days since it was paid for.

22 Solere: A medieval solar often had sunshine for reading but etymologizes to French seule, alone. It was a separate room for privacy which would become in Victorian times a drawing room or parlor. Here it is evidently separate from the main house, in a turret (327).
For, brother, thou hast had by Seint Richere, 
Of fiftene plowes of londe this sixtene yere, 
And of alle the beestes thou hast forth bredde, 
That my fader me byquath on his dethes bedde; 
Of al this sixtene yere I yeve the the prowe,

360 For the mete and the drink that we han spended nowe.”
Than seide the fals knyght (evel mot ehe thee!)
“Harken, brother Gamelyn what I wil yeve the;
For of my body, brother here geten have I none,
I wil make the myn here I swere by Seint John.”
“Par fay!” seide Gamelyn “and if it so be, 
And thou thenk as thou seist God yeelde it the!”
Nothinge wiste Gamelyn of his brother gile; 
Therfore he hym bygiled in a litel while.

370 Thoo thou threwe my porter in the drowe-welle, 
I swore in that wretsee and in that grete moote, 
That thou shuldest be bounde bothe honde and fote; 
This most be fulfilled my men to dote, 
For to holden myn avowe as I the bihote.”
“Brother,” seide Gamelyn, “as mote I thee! 
Thou shalt not be forswore for the love of me.”
The maden thei Gamelyn to sitte and not stonde, 
To thei had hym bounde both fote and honde.

380 The fals knyght his brother of Gamelyn was agast, 
And sente efter fetters to fetter hym fast. 
His brother made lesingges on him ther he stode, 
And tolde hem that commen inne that Gamelyn was wode. 
Gamelyn stode to a post bounden in the halle, 
Thoo that commen inne loked on hym alle. 
Ever stode Gamelyn even upright!’

For brother, by Saint Richard, you have had 
Fifteen plows of land these sixteen years, 
And you have bred all the animals 
That my father left me on his deathbed. 
For the food and drink that we have spent now, 
In all these sixteen years I have given you the profit.”
Then the false knight answered—may he have foul fortune—
“Pay attention, brother Gamelyn, to what I will give you. 
Because I have no children of my own body, Gamelyn, 
I will make you my heir, I swear by Saint John. 
“By my faith!” said Gamelyn. “If it be so, 
And you do as you say, God reward you for it!”
Gamelyn knew nothing of his brother’s guile; 
Therefore he tricked him in a short while. 
“Gamelyn,” he said, “one thing I must tell you. 
When you threw my porter in the well, 
I swore in my rage and among those assembled, 
That you should be tied both hand and foot. 
This must be done in form to satisfy my men, 
In order to hold my vow as I promised you."23
“Brother,” said Gamelyn, “as I live and die, 
You will not be made a liar for my sake.”
Then they made Gamelyn to lie down and not stand, 
Until they had him bound both hand and foot. 
His brother the false knight was afraid of Gamelyn 
And sent for fetters to shackle him fast. 
His brother made up lies about him where he stood 
And told those who came in that Gamelyn was mad. 
Gamelyn stood chained to a post in the hall. 
All those who came in looked at him. 
Gamelyn stood upright without end!

23 John is claiming that he promised to bind Gamelyn in front of his men and must now do so perfunctorily to avoid appearing a liar. Although Gamelyn’s naivety seems ridiculous, Skeat comments that it was not unusual for the terms of an oath to be literally fulfilled, using the example of the ‘pound of flesh’ codicil in Shylock’s contract to Antonio in The Merchant of Venice. In novelized versions of Gamelyn the brother simply ambushes him in his sleep (Skeat, 42).
But mete and drink had he noon neither day ne nyght. 
Than seide Gamelyn, “Brother, be myn hals, 
Now have I aspied thou art a party fals; 
Had I wist the tresoun that thou hast yfounde, 
I wold have yeve strokes or I had be bounde!”

Gamelyn stode bounde stille as eny stone; 
Two daies and two nyghtes mete had he none. 
Than seide Gamelyn that stood ybounde stronge, 
“Adam Spencere me thinketh I faste to longe; 
Adam Spencere now I biseche the, 
For the moche love my fadere loved the, 
If thou may come to the keys lese me out of bonde, 
And I wil part with the of my free londe.”

Than seide Adam that was the spencere, 
“I have served thi brother this sixtene yere, 
Yif I lete the gone out of his boure, 
He wold saye afterwardes I were a traitour.”

“Adam,” seide Gamelyn, “so brouke I myn hals! 
Thow schalt finde my brother at the last fals; 
Therfore brother Adam lose me out of bonde, 
And I wil parte with the of my free londes.”

“Up such forward,” seide Adam, “ywis, 
I wil do therto al that in me is.”

“Adam,” seide Gamelyn “as mote I the, 
I wil holde the covenaunt and thou wil me.”

Anoon as Adams lord to bed was goon, 
Adam toke the kayes and lete Gamelyn out anoon; 
He unlocked Gamelyn both hondes and fete, 
In hope of avauncement that he hym byhete. 
Than seide Gamelyn, “Thonked be Goddis sonde! 
Nowe I am lose both fote and honde; 
Had I nowe eten and dronken aright,

But he had no food or drink neither by day nor night. 
Then Gamelyn said, “Brother, by my own neck, 
Now I see that you are a false dealer, 
If I had known about the treason you planned, 
I would have beaten you before I was bound!”

Gamelyn stood tied as still as any stone. 
For two days and two nights he had no food. 
Then Gamelyn, who stood tightly bound, said, “Adam Spencer, I think I’ve fasted long enough! Adam Spencer, now I beg of you, 
For the great love my father showed you, 
If you go to the keys and release me from my bonds, 
I will divide up my free land with you.”

Adam, who was the master of provisions, answered, “I have served your brother these sixteen years. 
If I let you go out of his chamber, 
He would say afterward that I am a traitor.”

“Adam,” said Gamelyn, “by the nose on my face, 
You will find my brother false in the end. 
And so, brother Adam, free me from my chains, 
And I will share with you from my free lands.”

“On those terms,” Adam answered, “certainly, 
I will do all that is in my power.”

“Adam,” said Gamelyn, “as I have breath in my body, 
I will hold the agreement if you do the same with me.”

As soon as Adam’s lord was gone to bed, 
Adam took the keys and immediately freed Gamelyn. 
He unlocked both Gamelyn’s hands and feet 
In hope of the advancement he was promised. 
Then Gamelyn said, “Thanks be to God’s providence! 
Now I am free in both hand and foot. 
If I could eat and drink my fill now,

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24 Adam Spencere: Spencer is here both a name and occupation; a spence was a room where provisions and wine were kept (Skeat, 42). There may also be a connection to another literary outlaw of the period, Adam Bell.
There is noon in this house shuld bynde me this nyght."
Adam toke Gamelyn as stille as eny stone,
And ladde him into the spence raply anon,
And sette him to sopere right in a privye styde,
He bad him do gladly and so he dide.

Anoon as Gamelyn had eten wel and fyne,
And therto y-dronken wel of the rede wyne,
"Adam," seide Gamelyn, "what is nowe thi rede?
Or I go to my brother and gerd of his heed?"
"Gamelyn," seide Adam, "it shal not be so.
I can teche the a rede that is worth the twoo.
I wote wel for soth that this is no nay,
We shul have a mangerye right on Sonday;
Abbotes and priours mony here shul be,
And other men of holy chirch as I telle the;
Thou shal stonde up by the post as thou were bounde fast,
And I shal leve hem unloke that away thou may hem cast.
Whan that thei han eten and wasshen her handes,
Thow shalt biseche hem alle to bringe the oute of bondes;
And if thei willen borowe the that were good game,
Than were thou out of prisoun and out of blame;
And if ecche of hem saye to us nay,
I shal do another I swere by this day!
Thow shalt have a good staf and I wil have another,
And Cristes curs haf hat on that failleth that other!"
"Ye for God," seide Gamelyn "I say it for me,
If I faille on my side evel mot I thee!
If we shul algate assoile hem of her synne,
Warne me, brother Adam, whan we shul bygynne."
"Gamelyn," seid Adam, "by Seinte Charité,
There is no one in this house who could bind me this night!"
Adam took Gamelyn as quietly as any stone
And hurriedly led him into the pantry,
And gave him his supper in a private place.
He gladly encouraged him to eat and so he did.
After Gamelyn had eaten finely and fully,
And had drunk the red wine deeply,
"Adam," he said, "what is your advice now?
Shall I go to my brother and hack off his head?"
"Gamelyn," replied Adam, "it will not do.
I can show you a plan that’s worth two of yours.
I know for a fact that this is no lie,
We will have a banquet on this Sunday.
There will be many abbots and priors here,
And other high men of the holy church, I tell you.
You will stand up on the post as if you were chained fast,
And I will leave them unlocked so that you can cast them off.
When they have eaten and washed their hands,
You will plead with them all to bring you out of bondage.
And if they pledged your release that would be best.25
Then you would be out of prison and free of blame.
And if each of them says ‘no’ to us,
I’ll take another course, I swear by this day.
You will have a good staff and I will have another
And Christ’s curse fall on him who fails the other!"
"Yes, by God!" said Gamelyn. "I say for myself,
If I fail on my part, foul fortune to me.
If we are to absolve them of their sins,
Warn me, brother Adam, when we are to begin."
"Gamelyn," said Adam, "by Saint Charity,26

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25 *Borrowe*: As with *Amis and Amiloun* (870), a friend or interest could secure a prisoner’s release, either by literally taking the risk of punishment on themselves if they abscond (as Gamelyn’s brother Otis does later), or by being in a position of authority or trust to vouch for them. The practice later evolved into the modern bail system. Here Adam is hoping that the clerics will simply feel sorry for Gamelyn and clamor for his release.
I will warn you when it shall be.
When I wink at you, be ready to move
And cast off your fetters and come to me at once.”
“Adam,” said Gamelyn, “bless your bones!
That is good advice you’ve given for this occasion.
If they forbade you to release me from bondage,
I will give them a good beating on their sides.”
When Sunday arrived and people came to the feast,
Both high and low were welcomed graciously.
And as they all came through the hall door,
They cast their eyes on young Gamelyn.
His brother, the false knight, full of treachery,
Told all the guests who were there at the banquet
About his brother Gamelyn, making a show of telling them
About all the harm and the shame that he could speak of.
When they had been served two or three courses,
Then Gamelyn cried, “How am I taken care of?
It is not good service to God, who made all,
That I sit fasting while other men make merriment.”
As he stood there, his brother the false knight
Told all the guests that Gamelyn was mad,
And Gamelyn stood still and did not answer.
But he held Adam’s words in his thoughts.
Then Gamelyn made a mournful address
To all the great lords that sat in the hall.
“Lords,” he said, “for Christ’s passion,
Help to bring Gamelyn out of prison.”
An abbot said, with a dour face,
“He will have Christ’s curse and Saint Mary’s also
Who pleads or pledges to have you out of prison,
And good fortune to him who does you more correction.”
After that abbot another spoke:

26 Seinte Charité: This may be the Charity martyred as a girl along with her sisters Faith and Hope under Hadrian in AD 137. Sometimes the choice of saint is meaningful and at other times is likely only there to form the rhyme. See the note to Amis and Amiloun, 785.
“I wold thine hede were of though thou were my brother! Alle that the borowe foule mot hem falle!”
Thus thei seiden alle that were in the halle.
Than seide a priour, evel mote he threve!
“It is grete sorwe and care boy that thou art alyve.”
“Oh!” seide Gamelyn, “so brouke I my bone!
Now have I spied that frendes have I none
Cursed mote he worth both flesshe and blood,
That ever doth priour or abbot eny good!”
Adam the spencere took up the clothe,
And loked on Gamelyn and segh that he was wrothe;
Adam on the pantry litel h e thought,
And two good staves to the halle door he brought,
Adam loked on Gamelyn and he was warre anoon,
And cast away the fetters and bygan to goon;
Whan he come to Adam he took that on staf,
And got down to work and gave strong blows.
Gamelyn come into the halle and the spencer bothe,
And loked hem aboute as thei hadden be wrothe;
Gamelyn spreeth holy watere with an oken spire,
That some that stode upright felle in the fire.
Ther was no lewe man that in the halle stode,
That wolde do Gamelyn enything but goode,
But stoden bisides and lete hem both wirche,
For thei had no rewe of men of holy chirche;
Abbot or priour, monk or chanoun,
That Gamelyn overtoke anoon they yeden doun
Ther was noon of alle that with his staf mette,
That he ne made hem overthrowe to quyte hem his dette.
“Gamelyn,” seide Adam, “for Seinte Charité,
“I wish your head were off even if you were my brother.
May evil befall all who secure your release!”
So said all who were in the hall.
Then a prior spoke—may he fare fouly!—
“It is great sorrow and pity, boy, that you are still alive.”
“Oh!” said Gamelyn, “So much for my plea!
Now I have seen that I have no friends.
May the man be cursed, in both flesh and blood,
Who ever does a prior or abbot any good!”
Adam the spencer lifted up the curtain,
And looked at Gamelyn and saw that he was angry.
Adam thought little of the kitchen
And brought two firm poles to the hall door.
Adam winked at Gamelyn, and he was aware at once
And cast away the fetters and began to move.
When he came to Adam, he took one staff
And got down to work and gave strong blows.
Gamelyn came into the hall and the spencer as well
And they looked about in their fury.
Gamelyn sprinkled holy water with an oak rod
So that some standing upright fell into the fire.
There was no low man who stood in the hall
Who wanted to do Gamelyn anything but good.
They stood aside and let both of them work,
For they had no sympathy for men of the holy church.
Abbot or prior, monk or canon,
All that Gamelyn overtook he knocked down at once.
There were none of them who met with his staff
That he did not throw down to repay them their reward.
“Gamelyn,” said Adam, “For Saint Charity.

27 A series of blasphemous jokes follows which would have been enjoyed by the audience, where Gamelyn ‘ordains’ and ‘absolves’ the clerics with physical violence, making fun of the original church rituals. Here he ‘blesses’ the clerics with holy water by striking them with his staff. The churchmen here are mostly high-ranking and not Chaucer’s humble parsons. Skeat points out that much anticlerical sentiment in medieval literature was caused by the Normans stacking the church leadership with their own men (43–4).
Pay good lyveré for the love of me,
And I wil kepe the door so ever here I masse!
Er they bene assolled ther shal non passe."
"Doute the not," seide Gamelyn "whil we ben ifere,
Kepe thow wel the door and I wil wirche here;
Bystere the, good Adam, and lete none fle,
And we shul telle largely how mony that ther be."
"Gamelyn," seide Adam, "do hem but goode;
Thei bene men of holy churche drowe of hem no blode
Save wel the crownes and do hem no harmes,
Bystere the, good Adam, and lete none fle,
And we shul telle largely how mony that ther be."
"Gamelyn," seide Adam, "Do hem but goode;
Thei bene men of holy churche drowe of hem no blode
Save wel the crownes and do hem no harmes,
Bystere the, good Adam, and lete none fle,
And we shul telle largely how mony that ther be.

Thus Gamelyn and Adam wroughte ryght faste,
And pleide with the monkes and made hem agaste.
Thidere thei come ridinge joly with swaynes,
And homeward they were laid in cartes and waynes.
Tho thei hadden al ydo than seide a grey frere,
"Alas! sire abbot what did we nowe here?
Whan that we comen hidere it was a colde rede,
Us had be bet at home with water and breed."
While Gamelyn made orders of monke and frere,
Evere stood his brother and made foule chere;
Gamelyn up with his staf that he wel knewe,
And girt him in the nek that he overthrewe;
A litel above the girdel the rigge
- boon he barst;
And sette him in the fetters theras he sat arst.
"Sitte ther, brother," seide Gamelyn,
"For to colen thi body as I did myn."
As swhit as thei had wroken hem on her foon,
Thei asked water and wasshen anon,
What some for her love and some for her awe,
Alle the servantes served hem on the beste lawe.
The sherreve was thennes but fyve myle,
And alle was tolde him in a lytel while,
Show no mercy for my sake,
And I will guard the door, as sure as I hear mass!
Until they have been 'absolved,' none shall pass."
"Fear not!" said Gamelyn, "While we're together.
Guard the door well and I will work here.
Brace yourself, good Adam, and let no one flee,
And we will count in full how many there are."
"Gamelyn," said Adam, "Do them only good.
As they are men of the holy church, draw no blood.
Spare their tonsured heads and do them no harm,
But break both their legs and then their arms."
Thus Gamelyn and Adam worked together tightly,
And played with the monks and made them terrified.
They had come to the feast riding merrily with servants,
And homeward they were laid in carts and wagons.
When they were done, a Franciscan said to a fellow,28
"Alas, sir abbot! What are we doing here?
It was cold advice for us to come here.
We would have been better off at home with bread and water."
While Gamelyn ordained new orders of monks and friars,
His brother continually stood by and made a sour face.
Gamelyn took his staff, which his hand knew well,
And stuck him in the neck, throwing him down,
Breaking his backbone a little above the waist.
He set him in the fetters where he himself sat earlier.
"Have a seat there, brother," said Gamelyn,
"To cool down your body as I did mine."
As soon as they had avenged themselves on their foes,
They straightaway asked for water and washed.
All the servants waited on them in the best manner,
Some out of love for them and some out of fear.
The sheriff was only five miles away,
And in a little while he was told everything.

28 Grey frere: The poet may simply mean an aged friar but probably refers to the Franciscans, who were known in England for wearing grey habits.
Howe Gamelyn and Adam had ydo a sorye rees,
Boundon and wounded men ayeinst the kingges pees;
Tho bygan sone strif for to wake,
And the shereff about Gamelyn forto take.

**Part 5**

Now pay attention and listen so God will give you a good end!
And you will hear the adventures of young Gamelyn.
Twenty-four young men, who considered themselves bold,
Came to the sheriff and said that they would
Seize Gamelyn and Adam, by their faith.
To tell the truth, the sheriff gave them permission.
They hastened quickly and did not delay
Until they came to the gate where Gamelyn was inside.
As they knocked on the wood the porter was near,
And being a cautious man he peered out of a hole.\(^\text{29}\)
The porter looked at them for a little while.
Gamelyn was dear to him and he was fearful of foul play,
And so he left the small window fastened
And asked those outside what they wanted.
Only one spoke for all the great company,
“Undo the gate, porter, and let us go in!”
The porter answered, “By the hair on my chin,
You will state your business before you come in.”
“Tell Gamelyn and Adam, if they please,
We will speak a few words with them!”
“Fellow,” answered the porter, “stand there still,
And I will go to Gamelyn to know his will.”
The porter went in to Gamelyn at once
And said, “Sir, I caution you that your foes have come.
The sheriff’s men are at the gate.

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\(^{29}\) *Scleghe*: *sly* did not always have a negative meaning in ME and could mean discreet or skillful. Here this second porter is simply cautious in his duties. See also *Bevis of Hampton* (579).
Forto take you both ye shul not scape."
"Porter," seide Gamelyn, "so mote I the!
I wil alowe thi wordes when I my tyme se.
Go ageyn to the gate and dwelle with hem a while,
And thou shalt se right sone porter, a gile."
"Adam," seide Gamelyn, "hast the to goon;
We han foo men mony and frendes never oon;
It bine the shireves men that hider bene comen,
Thi ben swore togidere that we shal be nomen."

"Adam," seide Gamelyn, "hye the right blyve,
And if I faile the this day evel mot I thrive!
And we shul so welcome the shyreves men,
That some of hem shal make her beddes in the fenne."

At a postern gate Gamelyn out went,
And a good cartstaf in his hondes hen;
Adam hent sone another grete staff
For to helpen Gamelyne and good strokes yaf.

Adam felled tweyn and Gamelyn thre,
The other sette fete on erthe and bygan to flee.
"What" seide Adam, "so evere here I masse!
I have right good wyne drynk er ye passe!"
"Nay, by God!" seide thei, "thi drink is not goode,
It wolde make a mannys brayn to lyen on his hode."
Gamelyn stode stille and loked hym aboute,
And seide "The shyref cometh with a grete route."
"Adam," seyde Gamelyn "what bene now thi redes?
Here cometh the sheref and wil have our hedes."
Adam seide to Gamelyn "My rede is now this,
Abide we no lenger lest we fare amys:
I rede we to wode gon er we be founde,
Better is ther louse than in the toune bounde."
And every of hem dronk a draught of wyn,
And after token her cours and wenten her way;
Tho fonde the scherreve nyst but non aye.
The shirrive light doune and went into halle,
And fonde the lord fetred faste withalle.

The shirreve unetred hym right sone anoon,
And sente atere a leche to hele his rigge boon.
Lat we now the fals knyght lye in hys care,
And talke we of Gamelyn and of his fare.

Gamelyn into the wode stalked stille,
And Adam Spensere liked right ille;
Adam swore to Gamelyn, "By Seint Richere,
Now I see it is mery to be a spencere,
Yit lever me were kayes to bere,
Than walken in this wilde wode and tere."

"Adam," seide Gamelyn, "dismay the right nought;
Mony good mannys child in care is brought."

As thei stode talkinge bot hen in fere,
Adam herd talking of men and right nyghe hem thei were.
The Gamelyn under wode loked aright,
Sevene score of yonge men he seye wel ydight;
Alle satte at the mete compass aboute.

"Adam," seide Gamelyn, "now have I no doute,
Aftere bale cometh bote thorgh Goddis myght;
Me think of mete and drynk I have a sight."

Adam loked thoo under wode bough,
And when he seghe mete was glad ynoth;
For he hoped to God to have his dele,
And he was sore alonged after a mele.

As he seide that worde the mayster outlawe
Saugh Adam and Gamelyn under the wode shawe.

And each of them drank a draft of wine,
And then planned their course and went their way.
The sheriff found the nest but no eggs.
He dismounted and went into the hall,
And found the lord bound up tightly in fetters.
The sheriff unchained him immediately
And sent for a doctor to treat his backbone.
For now we will let the false knight lie in his troubles,
And talk about Gamelyn and how he fared.

Gamelyn paced cautiously into the woods
And Adam Spencer did not like it at all.
Adam swore to Gamelyn, "By Saint Richard,
Now I see it is a merry life to be a provisioner!
I would rather carry keys
Than walk in these wild woods and tear my clothes."

"Adam," said Gamelyn, "don't be discouraged at all.
Many a good man's child is reduced to sorrow."
As the both of them stood talking together,
Adam heard the talking of men who were close nearby.
When Gamelyn looked closely about the forest,
He saw seven score of well-armed young men.
All sat in a circle around their dinnere.

"Adam," said Gamelyn, "now I have no doubt.
Help comes after trouble through God's might.
I think I have a sight of food and drink."

Adam peered under a tree bough,
And when he saw food he was glad enough,
For he hoped to God to have a share
As he was sorely longing for a meal.
As Gamelyn said those words, the master outlaw
Saw Adam and him under the forest cover.

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31 *Mayster outlawe*: The 'master outlaw' is not named, although the obvious conclusion has been Robin Hood. In the seventeenth century ballad "Robin Hood and Will Scarlet" Robin Hood is Gamelyn's lost uncle. The popularity of Robin Hood folktales was attested by the early fifteenth century, but he is first named in literature only in *Piers Plowman* (B.V. 408). In early portrayals he is not noble (as in line 659) but a yeoman like the franklin.
“Yonge men,” seide the maistere “by the good Rode, 
I am ware of gestes God send us goode;
Yond ben twoo yonge men wel ydight,
And parenture ther ben mo whoso loked right.
Ariseth up, yonge men and fette hem to me;
It is good that we weten what men thei be.”

Up ther sterten sevene from the dynere,
And metten with Gamelyn and Adam Spencere.
When thei were nyghe hem than seide that oon,
―Yeeldeth up, yonge men your bowes and your floon.‖
Than seide Gamelyn that yong was of elde,
―Moche sorwe mote thei have that to you hem yelde!
I curs noon other but right mysilve;
Thoo ye fette to you fyve than be ye twelve!”

Whan they harde by his word that myght was in his arme,
Ther was noon of hem that wolde do hym
harme,
But seide to Gamelyn myldely and stille,
―Cometh afore our maister and seith to hym your wille.‖

―Yong men,‖ seide Gamelyn, ―be your lewté,
What man is youre maister that ye with be?‖
Alle thei answerd without lesing,
―Our maister is crowned of ou
tlawe king.‖
“Adam,” seide Gamelyn, “go we in Cristes name;
He may neither mete ne drink warne us for shame.
If that he be hende and come of gentil blood,
He wil yeve us mete and drink and do us som gode.”

“By Seint Jame!” seide Adam, “what harme that I gete,
I wil aventure me that I had mete.”
Gamelyn and Adam went forth in fere,
And thei grette the maister that thei fond there.
Than seide the maister king of outlawes,
“What seche ye, yonge men, under the wode shawes?”
Gamelyn anserwde the king with his croune,
“He most nedes walk in feeld that may not in toune.
Sire, we walk not here no harme to doo,
But yif we mete a deer to shete therto,
As men that bene hungry and mow no mete fynde,
“Fellows,” said the master, “by the holy Cross,
I am aware of guests; may God send us good ones.
Over there are two young men, well-armed,
And perhaps whoever looked closer might see more.
Rise up, lads, and bring them to me.
It would be best to know what men they are.”
Seven of them got up from their dinner
And confronted Gamelyn and Adam Spencer.
When they were close to them one said,
“Turn over your bows and arrows, lads.”
Gamelyn answered, who was young in years,
“Great shame to anyone who yields them to you!
I’d curse no one else but myself
Even if you brought five more to make you twelve!”
When they knew from his words that strength was in his arms,
There were none of them who would do him harm,
But they said to Gamelyn mildly and quietly,
“Come to our master and tell him your will.”
“Young man,” replied Gamelyn, “by your loyalty,
Who is your master that you are with?”
All of them answered without deceit,
“Our master is crowned king of the outlaws.”
“Adam,” said Gamelyn, “let’s go in Christ’s name.
He won’t deny us food or drink out of shame.
If he is gracious and comes from noble blood,
He will give us meat and drink and do us some good.”
“By Saint James!” said Adam. “whatever harm I get,
I will risk it to have food.”
Gamelyn and Adam went forth together,
And they greeted the master that they met there.
Then the master, the king of outlaws, spoke:
“What are you searching for, lads, under the forest cover?”
Gamelyn answered the king with his crown,
“He must walk in the woods who can’t do so in town!
Sir, we are out here not to do any harm
But to shoot a deer if we meet up with one,
Being men who are hungry and find no food,
And bene harde bystick under wode lynde.”
Of Gamelyns wordes the maister had reuthe,
And seide, “Ye shul have ynow have God my trouth!”
He bad hem sitte doun for to take rest;
And bad hem ete and drink and that of the best.
As they eten and dronken wel and fynge,
Than seide on to another, “This is Gamelyne.”
Tho was the maistere outlaw into counseile nome,
And tolde howe it was Gamelyn that thider was come.
Anon as he herd how it was byfalle,
He made him maister under hym over hem alle.
Withinne the thridde weke hym come tydinge,
To the maistere outlawe that was her kinge,
That he shuld come home his pees was made;
And of that good tydinge he was ful glade.
Thoo seide he to his yonge men soth forto telle,
―Me bene comen tydinges I may no lenger dwelle.‖
Tho was Gamelyn anoon withoute taryinge,
Made maister outlawe and crowned her kinde.
When Gamelyn was crowned king of outlawes,
And walked a while under the wode shawes,
The fals knyght his brother was sherif and sire,
And lete his brother endite for hate and for ire.
Thoo were his boond men sory and no thing glade,
When a bounty was placed on Gamelyn, their lord.
Some of his men were sent to where they might find him,
To seek out Gamelyn in the cover of the woods,
To tell him news of how the winds had changed
And how his goods were robbed and his men mistreated.
When they had found him, they set themselves on their knees
And pulled down their hoods and greeted their lord:

32 Wolfeshede: This is not actually a bounty but meant that an outlaw’s head was worth no more than a wolf’s, and anyone could hunt him unless he surrendered. The modern equivalent would be ‘Wanted dead or alive.’ The pronouncement also means that Gamelyn’s lands are forfeit, a highly convenient situation for his brother. See Shannon, 460.
“Sire, wretth you not for the good Rode,  
For we han brought you tyddyngges but thei be not gode.  
Now is thi brother sherreve and hath the bayly,  
And hath endited the and wolfsheed doth the crye.”  
“Allas!” seide Gamelyn, “that ever I was so sclak  
That I ne had broke his nek when I his rigge brak!  
Goth, greteth wel myn husbondes and wif,  
I wil be at the nexte shyre have God my lif!”

Gamelyn come redy to the nexte shire,  
And ther was his brother, both lord and sire.  
Gamelyn boldely come into the mote halle,  
And putte adoun his hode amonge tho lordes alle;  
“God save you, lordinggs that here be!  
But broke bak sherreve evel mote thou thee!  
Whi hast thou don me that shame and vilenye,  
For to lat endite me and wolfeshede do me crye?”

Thoo thoghte the fals knyght forto bene awreke,  
And lette Gamelyn most he no thinge speke;  
Might ther be no grace but Gamelyn atte last  
Was cast in prison and fetred faste.  
Gamelyn hath a brothere that highte Sir Ote,  
Als good an knyght and hende as might gon on foote.  
Anoon yede a massager to that good knyght  
And toldhe him altogidere how Gamelyn was dight.  
As soon as Sir Otis herd howe Gamelyn was dight,  
He was right sory and nyo thing light,  
And lete sadel a stede and the way name,  
And to his tweyne bretheren right sone he came.  
“Sire,” seide Sir Ote to the sherreve tho,  
“We bene but three bretheren shul we never be mo;  
And thou hast prisoned the best of us alle;  
Such another brother evel mote hym byfalle!”  
“Sire Ote,” seide the fals knyght, “lat be thi cors;  
By God, for thi wordes he shal fare the wors;  
To the kingges prisoun he is ynome,  
And ther he shal abide to the justice come.”  
“Par de!” seide Sir Ote, “better it shal be;  
“Sir, for the holy Cross, do not be wrathful,  
For we have brought news but it is not good.  
Your brother is now sheriff and rules the county,  
And has indicted you and placed a bounty on your head.”  
“Allas!” cried Gamelyn, “That I was so slack  
To spare his neck when I broke his back!  
Go, greteth wel myn husbondes and wif.  
I will be at the next shire meeting, God have my life!”

Gamelyn come ready to the next gathering,  
And there was his brother, both lord and sire.  
Gamelyn boldly came into the meeting hall,  
And put down his hood among all the lords:  
“God save you, lordings who are here!  
But may you fare evilly, hunch-backed sheriff!  
Why have you done me that shame and villainy  
To indict me and put a bounty on me?”

Then the false knight thought he would be avenged,  
And prevented Gamelyn from saying anything.  
There would be no grace, and in the end Gamelyn  
Was thrown into prison and chained tightly.  
Gamelyn had a brother who was named Sir Otis,  
As good a knight and courteous as anyone on foot.  
A messenger soon went to that noble knight  
And told him in full how Gamelyn was treated.  
As soon as Sir Otis heard how Gamelyn had fared,  
He was very sorry and in no way light-hearted.  
He had a steed saddled and took his way,  
And came right away to his two brothers.  
“Sire,” said Sir Otis to the sheriff,  
“We are but three brothers, and we will never be more.  
And you have imprisoned the best one of us.  
For such a brother as you, may evil befall him!”  
“Sir Otis,” said the false knight, “set aside your curse.  
By God, for your words he will fare all the worse.  
He has been taken to the king’s prison,  
And there he will wait until justice is done.”  
“By God!” said Sir Otis. “it will be amended.
I bid hym to maynprise that thou graunte me
To the next sitting of delyveraunce,
And lat than Gamelyn stonde to his chaunce."
"Brother, in such a forward I take him to the;
And by thine fader soule that the bigate and me,
But he be redy whan the justice sitte,
Thou shalt bere the juggement for al thi grete witte."
"I graunte wel," seide Sir Ote, "that it so be.
Lat delyver him anoon and take hym to me."
Tho was Gamelyn delyvered to Sire Ote, his brother;
And that nyght dwellèd the oon with the other.
On the morowe seide Gamelyn to Sire Ote the hende,
"Brother," he seide, "I mote forsoth from you wende
To loke howe my yonge men leden her liff,
Whedere thei lyven in joie or ellis in striff."
"By God" seyde Sire Ote, "that is a colde rede,
Nowe I se that alle the carke schal fal on my hede;
For whan the justice sitte and thou be not yfounde,
I shal anoon be take and in thi stede ibounde."
"Brother," seide Gamelyn, "dismay you nought,
For by saint Jame in Gales that mony men hath socht,
Yif that God almyghty holde my lif and witte,
I wil be redy whan the justice sitte."
Than seide Sir Ote to Gamelyn, "God shilde the fro shame;
Come whan thou sees tyme and bringe us out of blame."

I demand his bail, that you secure him to me
For the next sitting of the court,
And then let Gamelyn stand the consequences."
"Brother, by such an agreement I commit him to you.
But by your fathers soul that begot you and me,
If he is not ready when the justices sit,
You will bear the judgment, for all your great wit."
"I agree in full," said Sir Otis, "that it be so.
Have him released at once and bring him to me."
Then Gamelyn was released to Sir Otis, his brother,
And that night the one stayed with the other.
In the morning Gamelyn said to Sir Otis the gracious,
"Brother," he said, "I must leave you, in truth,
To see how my young men are leading their lives,
Whether they live in joy or else in strife."
"By God," said Sir Otis, "that is cold advice.
Now I see that all the sentence will fall on my head.
For when the justices sit and you are not found,
I will be taken at once and bound in your place."
"Brother," said Gamelyn, "do not be disheartened,
For by Saint James in Spain, who many men have sought,
So long as God Almighty holds my life and wits,
I will be ready when the justices sit."
Sir Otis replied to Gamelyn, "God shield you from shame.
Come when you see the time and bring us out of blame."

Part 6

Pay attention, and listen, and hold yourself still,
And you will hear how Gamelyn had al his will.
Gamelyn went under the wode-ris,
And fonde ther pleying yenge men of pris.
Tho was yonge Gamelyn right glad ynewe,
Whan he fonde his men under wode boughe.
Gamelyn and his men talkeden in fere,
And thei hadde good game her maister to here;
His men tolde him of aventures that they had founde,
And Gamelyn tolde hem agein howe he was fast bounde.
While Gamelyn was outlawe he had no cors;
There was no man that for him ferde the wors,
But abbots and priours, monk and chanoun;
On hem left he nought whan he myghte hem nome.
While Gamelyn and his men made merthes ryve,
The fals knyght his brother eveol mot he thryve!
For he was fast aboute both day and other,
For to hiren the quest to hongen his brother.
Gamelyn stode on a day and byheeld
The wodes and the shawes and the wild feeld,
He thoughte on his brother how he hym byhette
That he wolde be redy whan the justice sette;
He thought wel he wold without delay,
Come tofore the justice to kepen hi[s] day,
And saide to his yonge men, “Dighteth you yare,
For whan the justice sitte we most be thare,
For I am under borowe til that I come,
And my brother for me to prison shal be nome.”
“By Seint Jame!” seide his yonge men, “and thou rede therto,
Ordey[n] how it shal be and it shal be do.”
While Gamelyn was comyng ther the justice satte,
The fals knyght his brother forgate he not that,
To hire the men of the quest to hangen his brother;
Thoughe thei had not that oon thei wolde have that other
Tho com Gamelyn from under the wode-
And brought with hym yonge men of pris
“I see wel,” seide Gamelyn, “the justice is sette;
Go aforn, Adam, and loke how it spette.”
Adam went into the halle and loked al aboute,
He seh[r] th[e]e stonde lorde[s] grete and stout[e],
And Sir Otis his brother fetred ful fast;
Thoo went Adam out of halle as he were agast.
Adam seide to Gamelyn and to his felawes alle,
“Sir Otis stont fetered in the mote halle.”
“Yonge men,” seide Gamelyn, “this ye heeren alle:
Sir Otis stont fetered in the mote halle.
If God gave us grace well forto doo,
He shal it abigge that it broughte therto.”
Than seide Adam that lockes had hore,
“Cristes curs mote he have that hym bonde so sore!
And thou wilt, Gamelyn, do after my rede,
Ther is noon in the halle shal bere awey his hede.”
“Adam,” seide Gamelyn, “we wil not do soo,
We wil slee the giltif and lat the other go.
I wil into the halle and with the justice speke;
Of hem that bene giltif I wil ben awreke.
Lat no skape at the door take, yonge
men, yeme;
For I wil be justice this day domes to deme.
God spede me this day at my newe werk!
Adam, com with me for thou shalt be my clerk.”
His men answereden hym and bad don his best,
―And if thou to us have nede thou shalt finde us prest;
We wil stonde with the while that we may dure;
And but we worchen manly pay us none hure.”
―Yonge men,” seid Gamelyn, “so mot I wel the!
A trusty maister ye shal fynde me.”
Right there the justice satte in the halle,
Inne went Gamelyn amonges hem alle.
Gamelyn lete unfetter his brother out of bende.
Than seide Sire Ote his brother that was hende,
“Thow haddest almost, Gamelyn, dwelled to longe,
For the quest is out on me that I shulde honge.”
“Brother,” seide Gamelyn, “so God yeve me good rest!
This day shul thei be honged that ben on the quest;
And the justice both that is the juge man,
And the sherreve also thorg hym it bigan.
Than seide Gamelyn to the justise,
“Now is thi power don, the most nedes rise;
If God gives us grace to do our best,
He who brought things to this will pay for it.”
Then Adam, with his locks of grey, said,33
“Christ’s curse on him who bound him so sorely!
If you will, Gamelyn, do according to my plan,
There is no one in the hall who will bear away his head.”
“Adam,” said Gamelyn, “we will not do so.
We will slay the guilty and let the others go.
I will march into the hall and speak with the justices.
I will be avenged on those who are guilty.
Let no one escape by the door, men, take heed!
For I will be the judge this day to hand down verdicts.
God give me success today in my new work!
Adam, come with me, for you will be my clerk.”
His men answered and encouraged him to do his best:
“If you are in need of us, you will find us ready.
We will stand with you while we can go on.
If we don’t work like men, pay us no wages!”
“Lads,” said Gamelyn, “as I live or die,
You will find me a trustworthy master.”
Right where the justices sat in the hall,
In went Gamelyn among them all.
Gamelyn had his brother released from his bonds.
Then Sir Otis his brother graciously said,
“Gamelyn, you had almost waited too long,
For the verdict is out on me that I should hang.”
“Brother,” said Gamelyn, “God rest my soul,
This day those who are on the jury will be hanged,
As well as the justices, both the judge
And the sheriff, as this all began through him.”
Then Gamelyn said to the judge,
“Now your duties are finished and you must rise.

33 Lockes had hore: This is the first indication of Adam’s age, and the suggestion of grey-haired wisdom explains Gamelyn’s usual willingness to follow his advice, excepting this situation.
Thow hast yeven domes that bene evel dight,
I will sitten in thi sete and dressen hem aright.”
The justice satte stille and roos not anon;
And Gamelyn cleved his chekebon;
Gamelyn toke him in his armes and no more spake,
But threwe hym over the barre and his arme brake.
Dorst noon to Gamelyn s
Forfeerd of the company that without stoode.
Gamelyn sette him doun in the justise sete,
And Sire Ote his brother by him and Adam at his fete.
Whan Gamelyn was sette in the justise stede,
Herken of a bourde that Gamelyn dede.
He lete fetter the justise and his fals brother,
And did hem com to the barre that on with that other.
When Gamelyn had thus ydon had he no rest,
Til he had enquered who was on his quest
Forto demen his brother Sir Ote for to honge;
Er he wist what thei were hy
“By my feith!” seide the justise, “the sherrive is a shrewe!”
Than seide Gamelyn to the justise,
―Thou hast yove domes of the worst assise;
And the twelve sesoures that weren on the quest,
Thei shul be honged this day so have I good rest!”
―Lord, I cry thee mercie brother art thou myn.‖
―Therfor,” seide Gamelyn, “have thou Cristes curs,
For and thow were maister I shuld have wors.‖
For to make shorte tale and not to longe,
He ordeyned hym a quest of his men stronge;
You have given verdicts that were made in evil.
I will sit in your chair and redress things rightly.”
The justice sat still and would not rise,
And Gamelyn split his cheekbone.
Gamelyn took him in his arms and said no more,
But threw him over the rail and broke his arm.
No one dared say anything but good to Gamelyn,
For dread of the company that stood outside.
Gamelyn sat himself down in the judge’s seat,
With Sir Otis his brother by him and Adam at his feet.
When Gamelyn was set in the judge’s place,
Listen to a jest that Gamelyn did!
He chained up the judge and his false brother,
And had them come to the bar, the one with the other.
When Gamelyn had done this, he had no rest
Until he had found out who was on the jury
That had ordered his brother, Sir Otis, to hang.
Until he knew who they were he deliberated a long time.
But as soon as Gamelyn discovered where they were,
He had each of them fettered together
And brought them to the bar and set in a row.34
“By my faith!” pleaded the judge, “the sheriff is a crook!”
Then Gamelyn said to the judge,
“You have given judgments from the foulest court.
And as for the twelve jurors that were on the inquest,
They will be hanged this day, before I can rest easily.”
Then the sheriff pleaded to young Gamelyn,
“Lord, I cry for mercy, for you are my brother.”
“For that,” answered Gamelyn, “may you have Christ’s curse,
For if you were my master I would have all the worse.”
To make the story short and not prolong it,
He appointed a jury from his strong men.

34 Chaining men together in a row seems to be a special form of medieval humiliation. Gamelyn’s parody of the court is reminiscent of the Summoner’s Tale, where the squire proposes that twelve friars be forced to line up with their noses in cartwheel spokes to equally share a burst of flatulence.
The justice and the shirreve both honged hie,
To weyven with the ropes and the winde drye;
And the twelve sisours (sorwe have that rekke!)
Alle thei were honged fast by the nekke.
Thus endeth the fals knyght with his trecherye,
That ever had lad his lif in falsenesse and folye.
He was honged by the nek and not by the purs,
That was the mede that he had for his faders curs.
Sire Ote was eldest and Gamelyn was yenge,
Wenten to her frendes and passed to the kinge;
Thei maden pees with the king of the best sise.
The king loved wel Sir Ote and made hym justise.
And after, the king made Gamelyn in est and in west,
The cheef justice of his free forest;
Alle his wight yonge men the king foryaf her gilt,
And sithen in good office the king hath hem pilt,
Thus wane Gamelyn his land and his lede,
And wreke him on his enemys and quyte hem her mede;
And Sire Ote his brother made him his heire,
And sithen wedded Gamelyn a wif good and faire;
They lyved togidere the while that Crist wolde,
And sithen was Gamelyn graven under molde.
And so shall we alle may ther no man fle:
God bring us to that joye that ever shal be!

The judge and the sheriff were both hanged high,
To wave with the ropes and the dry wind.
And as for the twelve jurors—curse anyone who cares!
All of them were hung by the neck.
Thus ended the false knight with his treachery,
Who had led his entire life in deceit and perversity.
He was hanged by the neck and not with a purse.
That was the payment he had for his father’s curse!
Sir Otis was now oldest and Gamelyn was young.
They went to their friends and met with the king.
They made peace with the king of the truest court.
The king loved Sir Otis warmly and made him a justice.
And afterward, the king appointed Gamelyn
The chief justice of his free forest, from east to west.
The king forgave the misdeeds of all his rugged young men,
And later put them in good offices.
In this way Gamelyn won back his land and his people,
And had revenge on his enemies and gave them their reward.
Sir Otis his brother made him his heir,
And then Gamelyn married a wife who was good and fair.\(^{35}\)
They lived together for the time that Christ permitted them,
And then Gamelyn was buried under the earth.
And so we all shall go there; no man can flee it.
May God bring us to the joy that will forever be!

\(^{35}\) Skeat notes that, apart from saints, this is the only woman in the poem (xxxvii). Although there are romantic elements this is not a conventional love story but one of adventure. Rosalind is added as a love interest in the story’s later analogue in Thomas Lodge’s *Euphues’ Golden Legacy* (1558), which would in turn form the basis of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. 
Gamelyn and Chaucer’s Yeoman’s Tale?

The Tale of Gamelyn defies easy categorization. It does not seem very ‘romantic’ in that it has no love story beyond an obligatory marriage at the end, and thus the tale has variously been categorized as ballad, as “popular epic,”¹ as a “Lady Meed” satire,² or as a sort of proto-outlaw romance. Skeat suggested that the story was Anglo-French in origin,³ but no clear sources or originals have been identified. The text survives in twenty-five early manuscripts, all ones of The Canterbury Tales.⁴ Scholars have generally surmised that Chaucer perhaps intended to rework the romance into one of his tales, and the text almost invariably follows the Cook’s abortive segment. Skeat also notes that the line “by seynt Jame of Gales that mony man hath sought,” repeated in Gamelyn twice (277 and 764), is identical to one in “Þe Simonie” (475) in the Auchinleck manuscript, along with numerous other textual matches.⁵ If Chaucer did consult Auchinleck for The Canterbury Tales, one of its lost texts might well have been Gamelyn, although critics have generally placed the poem’s composition as slightly later, around 1350.

Gamelyn survives in the early manuscripts of Corpus Christi 198, Petworth MS 7, and Harley MS 7334. Although not in Hengwyrt or Ellesmere, both manuscripts have blank pages for its possible inclusion, and the scribe seems to have inserted the poem in

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⁵ Skeat, xii-xiii.
Harley with uncertainty, perhaps also believing it noncanonical. What business Gamelyn has in Chaucer’s manuscripts has provoked disagreement. Since the early conclusion that it was not Chaucerian the poem has been tarred as “spurious” and its study has largely been confined to situating its relation to the manuscripts and the Cook’s Tale. The Cook’s Tale’s brevity and abrupt ending have produced two broad conjectures apart from the simple one that Chaucer considered it finished. The first is that the tale was cut out by others because of its ‘scurrilous’ content, or that quires were lost. Yet Scattergood notes that the Miller’s Tale is hardly more uplifting but survives. The second sees the fragment as an authorial decision to abandon the tale and replace it with Gamelyn. The poem was perhaps found among Chaucer’s papers, leading to such editorial uncertainty, although a few scholars posit that Hengwyrt was written in his lifetime and that Chaucer possibly wavered over its inclusion, explaining the blank pages. Harley has “icy comencera le fable de Gamelyn” before the text. Might the future tense of the note imply the poem was not yet located or even written by its ailing author?

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10 Blake, 89. Mooney asserts that Hengwyrt and Ellesmere were written by Adam Pinkhurst, who might have done so under authorial supervision. Linne R. Mooney, “Chaucer’s Scribe,” Speculum 81 (2006): 97-138. Stanley believes that Chaucer had other works “which reached the scriveners before they were complete.” E.G. Stanley, “Of This Cokes Tale Maked Chaucer Na Moore,” Poetica 5 (1976): 36.
In several manuscripts *Gamelyn* ends with such scribal notes as “Here endeþ the tale of the Coke,” and the poem has been read as the Cook’s continuation of or replacement for his tale. Chaucer lived in a litigious time and abrupt endings needed to be accounted for lest a confused buyer believe the book was incomplete.\(^{11}\) BL Lansdowne 851 has a counterfeit link where “for schame of the harlotrie” (7) the Cook halts and segues into *Gamelyn*,\(^ {12}\) much as Chaucer the Pilgrim stops *Sir Thopas* when the Host protests and substitutes *Melibee*. Yet Skeat objects that rubricators and scribes were usually different people, and he laments “the stupidity of the botcher”\(^ {13}\) who adds the title “The Cokes Tale of Gamelyn” in Harley 7334. Giving the precedent of Urry’s edition in 1721,\(^ {14}\) Skeat argues that *Gamelyn* would better fit the Knight’s Yeoman, who otherwise receives no tale. Crawford claims that Skeat’s view prevails but follows precedent in giving the story to the Cook.\(^ {15}\)

A few critics such as Shippey do favor the Yeoman,\(^ {16}\) but little more has been said beyond pointing out fairly surface correspondences. The assignment of *Gamelyn* in *The Canterbury Tales*, if Chaucer intended to use it at all, must necessarily be speculative.

Yet I see its analysis as important in establishing Chaucer’s interest in and respect for the

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\(^{13}\) Skeat, xiv.


poem and for English romance generally. Rather than seeing the issue as one of manuscript paleology, I would like to focus on the text of *Gamelyn* and its correlations to the Yeoman’s portrait in the *General Prologue*. In doing so, *Gamelyn*’s themes of rural life, legal conservatism, and bourgeois values seem more appropriate for the Yeoman rather than the Cook.

The *Cook’s Tale* is set “in our citee” (I.4365), and “Roger of Ware” sets the story in a clearly urban milieu with its realistic references to shops, streets, and London placenames such as Cheapside and Newgate. Conversely, *Gamelyn* occupies a wholly rural setting with a corresponding lexicon; the sheriff finds “nyst but non aye” (“the nest but no eggs,” 606). The poem’s actors are country gentry and yeomen, men who might be minor knights or landowners “but whose horizons are essentially local.” The countryside in the poem does not suggest a pastoral idyll but rather a violently masculine world of wrestling for rams, oaken staves, and broken bones. Yet the poet praises the values of its folk. The supposedly unrefined wrestling match with its commoner’s prizes is a model of genteel speech, and even the insults obey the etiquette of a *flyting*. The Champion plays by the rules and concedes defeat by calling Gamelyn the “alther maister” (256) before “two gentile men” (267) award Gamelyn his prize.

Hoffman reads the poem as having a structural symmetry, and one of *Gamelyn*’s binaries consists of its urban/rural opposition. A medieval *forest* was not hostile

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17 Kaeuper, 53.
wilderness but the trees, pasture, and hamlets which lay outside urban limits and the reach of common law. The poet’s sympathies clearly rest with the farmers and outlaws of the countryside, who help those in need in contrast to the callous abbots and priors who hail from important places. The duality is emphasized in John’s identification with the civic world. The manor functions more like an urban space with its gates and guards “on the model of a castle or walled city.” In contrast, the forest in which Gamelyn takes refuge, “although ostensibly lawless, is marked by allegiance and generosity, whereas the supposedly civilized manor is acquired and maintained through duplicity and brutality.”

Though initially Adam and Gamelyn are reluctant to “walken in this wilde wode my clothes to tere” (618), they eventually find the non-civic space a self-actualizing zone of liberty and community rather than exile.

Crawford reads the *Cook’s Tale* as a possible contest between a youthful protagonist and a dour elder and assigns *Gamelyn* to the Cook on the basis of *Gamelyn*’s parallel theme of young rebellion. Interestingly, in his first skirmish Gamelyn tells his brother that “I wil not be thi coke!” (92). Yet the motives of Gamelyn and Perkyn are too dissimilar for such a thematic comparison. Gamelyn has been cheated out of his legacy and Perkyn, however lovable a rascal the fabliaux might intend him to be, robs his employer (I.4390). Far from being grudging and devious, the kindly master treats Perkyn

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21 Hoffman, 166.
22 Hoffman, 163.
23 Crawford, 34.
with extraordinary indulgence. Perkyn’s time in Newgate prison is whimsical but deserved, whereas Gamelyn suffers from his brother’s malice and the perversion of justice. Chiefly, Perkyn’s progress is toward an evasion of the law. After his master presents a properly legal *papir* of release from his apprenticeship (I.4404), he enters a final downward spiral into criminality. The wooden and moralizing false end attached to the *Cook’s Tale* in late manuscripts, evidently composed by scribes who overlook the Cook’s usual inebriation, entirely deflates the fun of Perkyn’s carnival vulgarity but does conform to his disdain for laws and authority.

In comparison, *Gamelyn* critics have noted the legal conservatism of the poem. While Gamelyn doles out extrajudicial acts of violence and not law to his brother and the stacked inquest, he does so in court. Fundamentally, he seeks not a ducking of the law but its rehabilitation in order to obtain his legitimate inheritance. Gamelyn revolts against the court because of its fraudulent pose of justice, telling the judge “thou hast yove domes of the worst assise” (866), but does not question the necessity for such institutions. Although some defiant parody of the inquest is surely intended, Gamelyn affirms its legitimacy in principle when he forms “a quest of his men stronge” (874) to replace the bribed one. Similarly, Gamelyn’s humorous and violent re-ordination of new “orders of

24 Bowers notes that historically a thieving apprentice was more likely to be flogged and expelled (“Politically Corrected” 31).


26 Donnelly, 343.
monke and frere” (529) has a blasphemous tinge but also suggests a sort of cleansing of the temple. While the servants have no sympathy for the proud, compromised clerics (504), the text is not antireligious. Gamelyn tells Adam to “do hem but goode / thei bene men of holy churche” (517-8). Much as Robin Hood reveres the Virgin, Gamelyn has a broad religious reverence underlying his righteous anger at men who will not give “to one of these little ones a cup of cold water” (Matt. 10:42).

Romance often offers a marginalized audience such a revenge fantasy, and possible frustration over perverted justice by wealthy insiders or brigands has historical justification. The writers of both popular tales and legal petitions in the fourteenth century evidently saw royal justice as having failed, and court records abound with complaints of juries either bought or threatened. Sheriffs were known for graft and abusing their offices to harass personal enemies, and Langland depicts Lady Meed riding a newly-shod sheriff to Westminster (B II.166). Earlier centuries may have been no more circumspect, and Stephen’s reign is chronicled as a notoriously lawless era, but the fourteenth saw an expanding application of royal law into the countryside which was apparently both welcomed and deplored for its scope for abuse. The sheriff’s office preceded the conquest but seems to have deteriorated into a cash cow for powerful local families. Edwardian and Ricardian England was a litigious and dangerous time, and Chaucer’s Canterbury pilgrims carry weapons not only for adornment but for personal protection. The prevalence of violence and banditry implies that “far from despairing of

27 Kaueper, 55.
28 Kaeuper, 59.
the King’s justice, men wanted more of it”30 while they also regretted the venality of those sent to bring order.

Chaucer himself was attacked by highwaymen in 1390, lending weight to the argument that he had reservations about writing a virtuous outlaw into the *Canterbury Tales*. Nothing indicates that Chaucer had any sympathy for the rebels of 1381 who terrorized London. Yet Gamelyn does not molest his countrymen or tenants. The poet forestalls such a conclusion by stating that “there was no man that for him ferde the wors
/ but abbots and priours, monk and chanoun” (776-7), who presumably deserve it. Gamelyn’s actions validate rule by law. He dutifully shows up for his summons and trial, hoping for legitimate proceedings. The forest band which he joins conforms to feudal concepts of order and hierarchy with its lord and loyal retainers.31 After moving to “slee the giltif” (818), he reconciles with the king, the ruler “of the best sise” (895). Gamelyn himself becomes a justice, and “order is reestablished within the social hierarchy; the aristocracy has simply been forced to clean house.”32 Thus even calling Gamelyn an outlaw contradicts his basic objective, which is not brigandage but redressal of the infractions against his tenants and his father’s bequest. The poem resounds with principles of legal procedure such as inquests, surety, and *wolfshede*. The poet knows his law in a way a city cook is highly unlikely to.

Gamelyn’s “outlaw” identification has also been problematized by reading it from within modern national narratives. The American outlaw usually stresses his everyman

30 Kaeuper, 60.
31 Donnelly, 341.
32 Donnelly, 343.
breeding and disdain for established elites, but Simeone’s statement that “sooner or later most outlaws, historical or legendary, are highborn”33 applies well to medieval English romance. Although Robin Hood’s social rank in early iterations was ambiguous, making him genteel validates him as a corresponding lord of his outlaw domain and makes his fall from grace additionally dramatic and sympathetic.34 *Gamelyn’s* earthy humor has marked it as low-class minstrelsy, and Gamelyn is nowhere identified as explicitly noble. Sir John’s purchased holdings argue that the family belongs to the gentry but not the peerage.35 Yet Gamelyn holds enough land and tenants to offer a liveable and attractive share to Adam, and in asserting his social dignity he protests to brother John that he was “born of a lady and gete of a knyght” (108). Shippey posits that Gamelyn is literally a bastard as John may have enjoyed too “mochel game” (4) with other women, resulting in *Game + lyn*,36 but more likely the text plays out contemporary problems with primogeniture among the noble landed.

Yet one of the critical themes for the poet is Gamelyn’s natural refinement as opposed to the debased breeding of his brother John and the high-ranking clerics. The verbal bonds of *treuþe* which were so fundamental to the chivalric code are upheld among the wrestlers, who keep their word, in comparison to brother John’s cynical lies and perhaps the sanctimonious men of God who defile their oaths of service in stuffing

34 Simeone, 31.
36 Shippey, 87.
themselves with multiple courses (463) while denying food to the famished Gamelyn. In holding to his word Gamelyn gains Adam’s faithful service while brother John’s craven falsehoods result in unreliable and corrupt supporters. The master outlaw similarly has a loyal retinue drawn to his noble generosity and fidelity, and his band correspondingly addresses Gamelyn “myldely and stille” (651) with courtly deportment. The master vows that Gamelyn will “have ynow” (674) to eat without knowing his name, and when amnesty is made, he returns home peaceably and makes provision for a new leader for his men by promoting Gamelyn.

The rural/urban opposition consequently forms a moral distinction between the empty social rank of brother John’s “civilized” manor and the authentic chivalry of Gamelyn’s sphere in the forest. At one point Gamelyn breaks the divide, literally, by crashing the gate of the manor and holding a feast. What could be an occasion for slapstick and earthy humor is instead a scene of wrestlers and friends acting in a conspicuously refined manner. The poet stresses that “with moche solace was ther noon cheest” (326)—“no quarreling troubled the great merriment.” Much like a royal wedding, the guests stay an appropriate time and politely take their leave (330-6). The episode is an advance and not a victory as brother John soon takes revenge, but during the feast the mood is less carnivalesque and more a performance of courtly generosity juxtaposed against John’s ill-mannered parsimony.

The sentiment that true gentility comes from conduct and not merely rank is of course a very bourgeois one which reflects its author’s and audience’s aspirations. The

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37 Donnelly, 340.
hardening of class divisions in Ricardian England was a rearguard action against their actual muddying after the dislocations and innovations following the plagues and war with France. Chaucer and his peers enjoyed unprecedented opportunities for advancement in royal service as landless esquires, and Chaucer himself was recorded as a valet, a term etymologically equivalent to yeoman as a person providing royal service. The Black Prince’s records list stewards, attorneys, and bureaucrats as yeomen and valets, and as participants in the “Bastard Feudalism” of their era they attained quasi-rank for their performance in war and peace.

   Richard II surrounded himself with a bodyguard of Cheshire yeomen who were deplored as common thugs and “unruly men.” If Chaucer’s position at court was endangered by such hotheads, he may have had reason to scorn them, as evinced in his odious Symkyn who marries to preserve his “yomanrye” (I.3949). Yet the title of yeoman seems to have indicated function more than class, and Chaucer was nominally a part of their broad ranks. Chaucer also gives a moral tale to the Canon’s Yeoman. More inescapably, Gamelyn’s depiction is positive, as he transcends his class as a courtly protagonist. His show of knightly generosity and valor to the Franklin parallels that of Guy of Warwick to Earl Jonas, with the Champion not much less perilous than dragons and Saracens.

39 McColly, 17.
42 Shippey, 81. See also Bowers, “Politically Corrected,” 17-18.
All this may serve to illuminate Chaucer’s portrait of the Knight’s Yeoman in the General Prologue. Pearsall claims that he is merely a token peasant for Chaucer, but the Yeoman has enough status for the Knight to ride out with “servantz namo” (I.101). The Yeoman may simply be another useful bodyguard-attendant as no weapons are mentioned for the Knight whereas the Yeoman is armed to the teeth. Yet among his arms he has a sword, a rather lavish accessory for a commoner, and a certain sartorial affluence in appearing “gay” (I.111, 113) whereas the Knight is notably “nat gay” (I.74) in his military austerity. The Yeoman wears green and carries a bow and peacock arrows. He knows “wodecraft” (I.110) and bears a horn. The Yeoman so perfectly fits the role of forester that the narrator’s “I gesse” (I.117) seems an ironic understatement of the fact. Foresters at times arranged hunts for their lords but were primarily enforcement officers guarding against illegal loggers and poachers who might be warned or halted with a horn blast. The Knight’s custody of enough land and wealth to retain a forester marks him as almost aristocratic.

Put together, Gamelyn seems an ideal avatar for the Yeoman’s values, interests, and aspirations. Like Gamelyn, the Yeoman identifies with rural life, and his “broun visage” (I.109) suggests he prefers the outdoors. The two share the same occupation as justices of the forest under aristocratic appointment (888), an office which requires both


44 Thompson, 392.

45 Thompson, 401.

46 McColly suggests the Knight belongs to the peerage or the baronage (25).
physical strength for dealing with violent offenders and familiarity of legal practice and enforcement. Most importantly, the poem’s ethos in which true gentility lies in holding to one’s word, aiding the weak, and remediating injustice rather than birth rank dovetails into the Yeoman’s social aspirations. Gamelyn performs an ideal for the Yeoman, unless Chaucer intended some serious editorial shifts in changing the story to a fabliaux—which is improbable as Chaucer himself was deputy forester for Somerset in royal service. In the extant text the story of a virtuous outlaw’s exile and return after a familial struggle has little resonance with a tale of thieves and prostitutes. The sense of humor both share is of a different nature.

All this presumes that Chaucer might have intended his Yeoman to represent a desideratum of himself. Some of the pilgrims are primarily concerned with requiting other tellers without any lofty agendas, and a cook-innkeeper rivalry might have suited the progress of the tales. Yet the Wife of Bath’s loathly lady nicely shores up her own program as a fading flower, and the Franklin has a social-climbing agenda much like Gamelyn in depicting the natural gentility of his characters. Even the Prioress’ “litel clergeon” has a sentimental, safe nature agreeable to the teller’s ideals. The Knight praises courtly love and knightly refinement, and for the Yeoman to qualify the message by stressing its applicability to all who choose to be fre would be a fitting response.

As long as we are so troubled by the order of the fragments in The Canterbury Tales, these arguments are as conjectural as the assumption that Chaucer had any plans for Gamelyn at all. But a hypothetical Yeoman’s Tale of Gamelyn both complements and answers the Knight and thematically conforms to Kittredge’s “marriage group.” Chaucer the son of a wine merchant, the Wife of Bath’s loathly lady, and Gamelyn the young (and
possibly the bastard) would all likely assent to the sentiment that “am I gentil, whan that I bigynne / to lyven vertuously and weyve synne” (III.1175-6). Gamelyn acts rather unknightly in disrobing to wrestle over a ram, but in doing so to give help to a stranger the poet illustrates “that such trappings are no measure or proof of a knight’s true character.”\(^47\) In Chaucer’s literary period, one with less rigid expectations of conformity of style, the mixing of serious matters and slapstick humor adds to rather than detracts from Gamelyn’s earnestness.

\(^{47}\) Donnelly, 338.
CHAPTER 6
Guy of Warwick (Stanzaic)


Main characters
Guy
Felicia, Guy’s wife
Earl Jonas, Guy’s friend
Earl Terry, Guy’s friend
Herhaud, Guy’s friend
King Athelstan
Reinbroun, Guy’s son

1  God graunt hem heven-blis to mede
    That herken to mi romaunce rede
    Al of a gentil knight;
    The best bodi he was at nede
    That ever might bistriden stede
    And freest founde in fight.
    The word of him ful wide it ran
    Over al this warld the priis he wan,
    As man most of might.

10 Balder bern was non in bi,
    His name was hoten Sir Gii
    Of Warwike wise and wight.
    Wight he was for sothe to say
    And holden for priis in every play
    As knight of gret boundé.
    Out of this lond he went his way
    Thurth mani divers cuntray

May God grant Heaven’s bliss to reward
Those who listen to me read my romance,
All about a noble knight.
He was the best person in need
That might ever ride a steed,
And the bravest to be found in a fight.
Word of him spread wide;
All over this world he won a reputation
As a man greatest in might.
There was no bolder man around.
His name was called Sir Guy
Of Warwick, wise and fearless.
He was manly, to say the truth,
And respected highly in every contest
As a knight of great valor.
He traveled out of this land,
Through many different countries.
That was beyond the sea.
Sethen he com into Inglond
That was both hende and fre.
For his love ich understond
He slough a dragoun in Northumberlond
Ful fer in the north cuntré.
He and Herhaud for sothe to say
To Wallingforth toke the way
That was his faders toun.
Than was his fader sothe to say
Ded and birid in the clay;
Hende and fre:
This formula often reoccurs in the text, reflecting the oral nature of romance recitation. Hende can mean various attributes of courtly refinement or graciousness. Free can have the sentimental nuance of ‘adventurous’ but more properly meant ‘generous’ or noble in rank, i.e. ‘free-born.’ Chaucer’s Franklin likely has this meaning in mind when he asks, “which was the mooste fre?” (V.1622).

2 An episode from the couplet Guy of Warwick, which precedes this story. Guy’s slaying of the dragon is also mentioned in Bevis of Hampton (2607-8).

3 Wallingforth: This is perhaps Wallingford, south of Oxford. Warwick is further north, near Coventry.

4 Sir Gioun: Why the Auchinleck scribe distinctly uses a different spelling here is a mystery, but it this is not a different person. In the following Reinbroun, also in Auchinleck, the hero refers to his father both as Guy and Gioun (751-4). See also line 232.

5 Th’erl Rohaud: Millward notes that “by ME, titles used with a proper name usually preceded the name; titles of foreign personages often were preceded by a definite article.” Thus kyng Richard but pe king Alexander. Evidently practices were in flux during the time of Guy’s writing, as Rohaud is ostensibly English. Celia M. Millward, A Biography of the English Language (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 157.
“Ichave,” he seyd, “thurth Godes sond
Won the priis in mani lond
Of knightes strong and stithe
And me is boden gret anour,
Kinges douhter and emperour,
To have to mi wive.
Ac swete Felice,” he seyd than,
“Y no schal never spouse wiman
Whiles thou art olive.”

“Leman,” he seyd, “gramerici.” With joie and with melodi
He kist that swete wight.
Than was he bothe glad and blithe,
His joie couthe he no man kithe.
For that bird so bright.
He no was never therbiforn
Half so blithe sethe he was born
For nought that man him hight.
On a day th’erl gan fond
And fair Felice he tok bi hond
And hir moder biside.
“Doughter,” he seyd, “now understond
Why wiltow have non husbond”

“Fader,” quath hye, “ichil thee sain
With wordes fre and hende.

Li quons apele par grant amur

With tender affection he asked
Felice sa fille qui tant ert sage:
“Fille, di mei tun corage.”

Fader,” quath sche, “ichil ful fayn
Tel thee at wordes tuain
Bi Him that schop mankende.
Opon Sir Gii that gentil knight,
Ywis, mi love is alle alight
In wworld where that he wende
And bot he spouse me, at o word,
Y no kepe never take lord,
Day withouten ende.”

Than seyd th’erl with wordes fre,
“Doughter, yblisced mot thou be
Of Godes mouthe to mede.
Ich hadde wele lever than al mi fe
With than he wald spousy thee,
That douhti man of dede.
He hath ben desired of mani woman
And he hath forsaken hem everilcan,
That worthly were in wede.
Ac natheles ichil to him fare
For to witen of his answere,
That douhti man of dede.”

On a day withouten lesing
Th’erl him rode on dere hunting
And Sir Gii the conquerour,
Als thai riden on her talking
Thai spoken togider of mani thing,
Of levedis bright in bour.
Th’erl seyd to Sir Gii hende and fre,
“Tel me the sothe par charité
Y pray thee, par amoure.

Hastow ment ever in thi live
Spouse ani wiman to wive
That falleth to thine anour?”
Sir Gii answerd and seyd than
“Bi Him,” he seyd, “that thi wold wan
To saven al mankende,
Bi nought that Y tel can
Y nil never spouse wiman
Save on is fre and hende.”

“So,” quath th’erl, “listen nou to me:
Y have a douhter bright on ble,
Y pray thee leve frende,
To wive wile hir understand
Y schal thee sese in al mi lond
To hold withouten ende.”

“Gramerci,” seyd Gii anon,
Felicia his daughter, who was so wise,
“Daughter, tell me your heart.”

“Father,” she said, “I will gladly
Tell you in two words,
By He who created mankind.
In truth, all my love is set
On Sir Guy, that noble knight,
Wherever he may go in the world.
And unless he weds me, in a word,
I will never accept or obey a lord,
For days without end.

Then the earl spoke with generous words,
“Daughter, may you be blessed
From God’s hand as a reward.
I would rather have him marry you
Than all of my possessions,
That valiant man of deeds!
But he has been sought by many women
And he has declined each one of them,
Who were so noble in their attire.
But nonetheless, I will go to him
To find out the answer from
That rugged man of deeds.”

One day, without lying,
The earl rode out deer hunting
With Sir Guy the conqueror.
As they rode out, in their talking
They spoke together of many things,
Of beautiful ladies in their bowers.
The earl said to Sir Guy, gracious and free,
“Tell me the truth, for charity’s sake.
I am asking you, for the sake of love,
Do you ever intend during your life
To take any woman to be your wife
Who reaches to your high rank?”
Sir Guy then answered and said,
“By He,” he said, “Who won this world
To redeem all mankind,
I can say no more than that
I will never marry a woman
Except one who is noble and courteous.”
“Sir,” confided the earl, “listen now to me.
I have a daughter with a pretty face.
I hope that you, dear friend,
Will accept her as your wife.
I will endow you with all my land
To hold without end.”

“My richest thanks,” said Guy at once.
“So help me Crist and Seyn Jon
And Y schuld spouse a wife
Ich hadde lever hir bodi alon
Than winnen al this warldes won
With ani woman o live.”
Than seyd th’erl, “Gramerci,”
And in his armes he kist Sir Gii
And thonked him mani a sithe.
“Sir Gii,” he seyd, “thou art mi frende,
Now thou wilt spouse mi dohter hende
Was Y never are so blithe.”
“Ac certes,” seyd th’erl so fre,
“He schuld spouse his douhter hende
He teld Herhaud that tide.
Th’erl Rouhaud as swithe dede sende
After lordinges fer and hende
That pris wel told in tour,
When the time was comen to th’ende
To chirche wel feir gun thai wende
With mirthe and michel anour.
Miche semly folk was gadred thare
Of erls, barouns, lasse and mare,
And levedis bright in bour.
Then spoused Sir Gii that day
Fair Felice that miri may
With joie and gret vigour.
When he hadde spoused that swete wight
The fest lasted a fourtennight
That frely folk in fere
With erl, baroun, and mani a knight
And mani a levedy fair and bright
The best in lond that were.
Ther wer giftes for the nones,
Gold and silver and precious stones
And duries riche and dure.
Ther was mirthe and melody
And al maner menstracie
As ye may fortheward here,
Ther was trumpe and tabour,
Fithel, croud, and harpour

7 Croud: A croud (Welsh crwth) is a sort of early violin derived from the lyre which was popular with folk musicians. Organisters (196) might have played small handheld pipe organs closer to a panflute.
Her craftes for to kithe;
Organisters and gode stivours,
Minstrels of mouthe and mani dysour
To glade tho bernes blithe.
Ther nis no tong may telle in tale
The joie that was at that bridale
With menske and mirthe to mithe,
For ther was al maner of gle
That hert might thinke other eyghe se
As ye may list and lithe.
Herls, barouns, hende and fre
That ther war gadred of mani cuntré
That worthli che were in wede,
Thai goven glewemen for her gle
Robes riche, gold and fe,
On the fiftenday ful yare
Thai toke her leve for to fare
And thonked hem her gode dede.
Than hadde Gii that gentil knight
Feliis to his wil day and night
In gest also we rede.
When Gii hadde spoused that hendy flour,
Fair Feliis so bright in bour
That was him leve and dere,
Ywis, in Warwike in that tour
Fifthendays with honour
With joie togider thai were.
So it bifel that first night
That he neyghed that swete wight
A child thai geten yfere
And sethen with sorwe and sikeing sare
Her joie turned hem into care
As ye may forward here.
Than was Sir Gii of gret renoun
And holden lord of mani a toun
As prince proude in pride.
That Erl Rohaut and Sir Gyoun
In fretthe to fel the dere adoun
On hunting thai gun ride.
It bifel opon a somers day
That Sir Gii at Warwike lay -
In herd is nought to hide -
At night in tale as it is told
To bedde went tho bernes bold
Bi time to rest that tide.
To a turet Sir Gii is went
And biheld that firmament
That thicke with steres stode,
On Jhesu omnipotent
That alle his honour hadde him lent
He thought with dreri mode,
Hou he hadde ever ben strong werrour,
For Jhesu love, our Saveour,
Never no dede he gode.

Mani man he hadde slayn with wrong;
“Alas, alas!” it was his song,
For sorwe he yede ner wode.
“Alas,” he seyd, “that Y was born,
Bodi and soule icham forlorn,
Of blis icham al bare
For never in al mi liif biforn
For Him that bar the croun of thorn
Gode
dede dede Y nare.
Bot wer and wo ichave don wrought
And mani a man to grounde ybrought,
That rewes me ful sare.
To bote min sinnes ichil wende
Barfot to mi lives ende
To bid mi mete with care.”
As Gii stode thus in tour alon
In hert him was ful wo bi
gon,
―Alas!‖ it was his song.
Than com Feliis sone anon
And herd him make rewely mon
With sorwe and care among.
―Leman,‖ sche seyd, ―what is thi thought?
Whi artow thus in sorwe brought?
Me thenke thi pain wel strong.
Hastow ought herd of me bot gode
That thou makes thus dreri mode?
Ywis, thou hast gret wrong.”
“Leman,” seyd Gii ogain,
―Ichil thee telle the sothe ful fain
Whi icham brought to grounde.
Sethen Y thee seyghe first with ayn -
Allas the while Y may sayn -
Thi love me hath so ybounde
That never sethen no dede Y gode
Bot in wer schadde mannnes blode
With mani a griseli wounde.
Now may me rewe al mi live
That ever was Y born o wive
Wayleway that stounde!”
“Ac yif ich hadde don half the dede
For Him that on Rode gan blede
With grimly woundses sare,
In Hevene He wald have quit mi mede
In joie to won with angels wede
Evermore withouten care.
Ac for thi love ich have al wrought,
For His love dede Y never nought;
Jhesu amende mi fare.

He thought with a downcast mood
of Christ the omnipotent,
Who had lent him all his glory,
And how he had always been a strong warrior.
But for Jesus’ love, our savior,
He had never done any good works.
He had slain many men with injustice.
“Alas, alas!” was his refrain,
For he was nearly crazed with regret.
“Alas,” he cried, “that I was ever born!
I am lost in body and soul.
I am stripped of all joys,
For never in all my life before
Have I done any good deed
For Him who wore a crown of thorns.
I have left nothing but war and woe
And have brought many a man to the earth,
Which grieves me sorely!
To atone for my sins I will go
Barefoot to my life’s end,
To beg for my food with toil.”
As Guy stood so, alone in the tower,
He was overcome in his heart by grief.
“Alas!” was his continual song.
Soon Felicia came
And heard him make his pitiful cries
With constant sorrow and pain.
“Lover,” she said, “what is your trouble?
Why are you brought into such sorrow?
It seems to me the grief is severe.
Have you heard anything of me besides good
That has put you in such a gloomy mood?
Truly, someone has done you a great injustice!”
“Dear heart,” said Guy in return,
“I will tell you the truth willingly
Why I am brought to the earth.
Since I first saw you with my eyes—
Alas, that time, I may say—
Your love has so bewitched me
That I have never after done any good
But to shed men’s blood in war
With many a grisly wound.
Now I might regret all my life
That I was ever born of a woman.
Alas for that moment!
But if I had done half my best
For Him who bled on the Cross
With grim and painful wounds,
He would have rewarded me in Heaven
To live in joy with angels’ clothes,
Forevermore without worry.
But I have done all for your love,
And for His love I never did anything.
Jesus, put right my ways!
Therefore ich wot that icham lorn.
Allas the time that Y was born,
300
Of blis icham al bare.
“Bot God is curteys and hende
And so dere he hath bought mankende
For no thing wil hem letel.
For His love ichil now wende
Barfot to mi lives ende
Mine sinnes forto bete
That whoreso Y lye anight
Y schal never be seyn
with sight
Bi way no bi strete.

310
Of alle the dedes Y may do wel,
God graunt thee, lef, that halvendel
And Marie His moder swete.”
Than stode that hende levedi stille
And in hir hert hir liked ille
And gan to wepe anon.
“Leman,” sche seyd, “what is thi wi
lle?
Ywis, thi speche wil me spille.
Y not what Y may don.
Y wot thou hast in sum cuntré
Spoused another woman than me
That thou wilt to hir gon
And now thou wilt fro me fare.
Allas, allas, now cometh mi care!
For sorwe ichil me slon.
“For wer and wo thatow hast wrought
God that al mankende hath bought,
So curteys He is and hende,
Schrive thee wele in word and thought
And than thee tharf dout right nought
Ogaines the foule fende.
Chirches and abbays thou might make
That schal pray for thi sake
To Him that schope mankende.
Hastow no nede to go me fro;
Save thou might thi soule fram wo
In joie withouten ende.”
“Leve leman,” than seyd Sir Gii,
“Lete ben alle this reweful cri;
It is nought worth thi tale.

320
For mani a bern and knight hardi
Ich have ysleyn sikerly
And strued cites fale
And for ich have destrued makin
Y schal walk for mi sinne
Barfot bi douen and dale.
That ich have with mi bodi wrought,
With mi bodi it schal be bought
To bote me of that bale.
“Leman,” he seyd, “par charité,
Astor art bothe hende and fre
O thing Y thee pray:
For this I know that I am lost.
Alas the time that I was born!
My life is barren of joy.
But God is gracious and kind
And has redeemed mankind so dearly
That He will not abandon it for anything.
For His love I will now go
Barefoot to my life’s end,
To atone for my sins,
So that wherever I lie at night
I will not be recognized by sight,
Not along any path or street.
Of all the deeds that I may do well,
God grant you, dear, the benefit of half,
And Mary, His sweet mother as well.”
Then that gentle lady stood still
And was distraught at heart
And immediately began to weep.
“What is your will?” she said, “what is your will?
Truly, your words are killing me!
I do not know what I will do.
I think that you have, in some country,
Married another woman beside me;
That you will go to her,
And you will abandon me now.
Alas, alas, now my sorrows have come!
I will slay myself for grief.
For the war and woe that you have caused,
God, who has redeemed all mankind,
And is so gracious and kind,
Will forgive you in full in word and thought.
And then you need not have any fears
In the presence of the foul fiend.
You could founded churches and abbeys
That would pray for your sake
To Him that created mankind.
You have no need to go from me.
You may save your soul from suffering,
In joy without end.”
“Dear heart,” said Sir Guy,
“Let go all this pitiful crying!
It is not worth your concern.
For I have slain, certainly,
Countless men and hardy knights,
And have destroyed many cities,
And because I have plagued mankind,
I will walk for my sin.
Barefoot on hill and valley.
What I have caused with my body,
I will pay for with my body,
To relieve me of that foulness.
Darling,” he said, “for charity’s sake,
If you are both noble and gracious,
I ask one thing of you.
Loke thou make no sorwe for me
But keep yourself as silent as you can
Til tomorrow at daylight.
Greet your father well, who is so gracious,
And your mother and all your friends.
Be sound, as I ask you to do.
Greet Herhaud kindly, I implore you.
My love, I entrust you to God;
I will go forth on my way.
Dear heart, I caution you in advance
That you will be favored with a baby boy
Who will be valiant in deeds.  
For Him who bore the crown of thorns,
Therefore, as soon as he is born,
Ask Herhaud, so manly in his ways,
To teach my son as well as he can
All the customs of a refined man
And to help him in times of need.
For he is both good and gracious
And has always been faithful and kind;
God give him his reward.
My dear,” he said, “take my sword here,
And if you are no ble and good,
Give it into his hand as soon as it is time.
With it he will, I know,
Win victory in every land,
For there can be none better.
Darling,” he said, “now farewell.
I will go forth on my way
And set off on my journey.”
They kissed each other with weeping eyes.
She grasped him by the hand
And said, “Darling, take this ring here;
For Jesus’ love, Heaven’s king,
I beg a word with you:
When you are in a faraway country,
Look upon it and think of me,
And God be with you.”
With those words he went from her,
Weeping with both eyes,
Without any more speech.
Guy then departed from Warwick
And went straightaway to the sea
And passed over the ocean.

9 The boy Sir Guy refers to will be Reinbroun, who also receives his own romance in Auchinleck. The adventures of Reinbroun are also included in the French Gui de Warewic, which is much longer than the English version at nearly 13,000 lines, and in other redactions of the story.
Gui

En Jerusalem puis aler voldra

Thus he intended to travel to Jerusalem.

Desore d’errer ne finera,

Thus he would not cease from wandering

En Jerusalem si vendra

Until he had reached Jerusalem,

E en meinte estrange terre

After crossing many strange lands,

U les sainz Deu purra require.

Where he could see God’s holy relics.

400

The levedy bileft at hom in care

He intended to travel to Jerusalem.

With sorwe and wo and sikeing sare;

Thus he would not cease from wandering

Wel delry was hir mode.

Until he had reached Jerusalem,

―Alas, alas,‖ it was hir song,

After crossing many strange lands,

Hir here sche drouch, hir hond sche wrong,

Where he could see God’s holy relics.

Hir fingres brast o blode.

10

Al that night til it was day

10 Lines from the French Gui de Warewic, 7732-36. Excerpted in TEAMS.

Hir song it was, ―wayleway,‖

The lady was left at home in grief,

For sorwe sche yede ner wode.

With sorrow and woe and bitter sighs;

Hir lordes swerd sche drouch biforn

Her mood was dark and dreary.

And that night until it was day

She tore her hair, she wrung her hands,

Hir loretys sword sche drouch biforn

Her fingers ran with blood.

Biforn yles.

All that night until it was day

And thought to sly herself out of grief

Therfore sche dede his swerd ogain

Without any more delay.

Elles for sorwe sche hadde hir slain

But in killing herself before the child was born

In gest as Y you say.

She nearly went mad from sorrow.

Arliche amorwe when it was day

She drew her lord’s sword before her

To chaumber ther hir fader lay.

And thought to sly herself out of grief

Sche com wringand hir hond.

Without any more delay.

―Fader,” sche seyd, ―ichil thee say

For fear that she slay herself in sorrow,

Mi lord is went fro me his way

In the story as I tell you.

In piligrimage to fond.

Early in the morning when it was daylight,

He wil passe over the se,

She came wringing her hands

Schal he never com to me

To the chamber where her father lay.

He wil never com to me

―Father,” she said, ―I must tell you

Schal he never com to me

My lord has gone from me

On Judgment Day,

To undertake a pilgrimage.

Again in Inglond.”

He will pass over the sea;

He will never come back to me

Again in England.”

He will never come back to me

For the anguish she had at that moment

Against Inglond;

She swooned down to the ground;

For the anguish she had at that moment

She could not stand on foot.

―Doughter,” said her father, ―let this go.

―Daughter,” said her father, ―let this go.

I do not think that gracious Sir Guy

I do not think that gracious Sir Guy

Has traveled far from you.

Has traveled far from you.

Truly, he has not passed the sea.

Truly, he has not passed the sea.

He is doing no more than testing you.

He is doing no more than testing you.

To see how true your heart is.”

To see how true your heart is.”

―No, sir,” she said, ―so help me God,

―No, sir,” she said, ―so help me God,

He is walking in tattered clothing

He is walking in tattered clothing

To beg for his food in toil.

To beg for his food in toil.

And for this I can sing
Allas the time and wayleway
That mi moder me bare."
Th’erl ros up with sikeing sare
For Sir Gii was fram him fare,
In hert him was ful wo
And alle his frendes, lesse and mare,
For Sir Gii thai hadde gret care
For he was went hem fro.
Thai sought him than al about
Within the cité and without
Ther he was won to go.
And when thai founde him nought that day
Ther was mani a ‘woe is us!’
Wringand her hondes tuo.
And when Gii was fram hem gon
Herhaud and his frendes ichon
And other barouns him by
To th’erl Rohaut thai seyden anon,
―The best rede that we can don
Smertliche and hastily,
Messangers we schul now sende
Over alle this lond fer and hende
To seche mi lord Sir Gii
And yif he be nought in this lond
He is in Loreyn ich understond
With his brither Tirry,‖
Menssangers anon thai sende
Over al this lond fer and hende
Fram Lunden into Louthe
Over al biyonde Humber and Trent
And est and west thurthout al Kent
To the haven of Portesmouthe.
Thai sought him over al up and doun
Over alle the lond in everich toun
Bi costes that wer couthe
And sethen to Warwike thai gan wende
And seyd thai might him nowhar fende
Bi north no bi southe.
Herhaud was wele understond
That Gii was fer in uncouthe lond.
Ful hende he was and fre,
Palmers wede he tok on hond
To seche his lord he wald fond
Unto the Grekis See.
To th’erl Rohaut he seyd anon
To seche his lord he most gon

‘Alas the day’ and ‘woe is me’
That my mother gave birth to me.”
The earl rose up, sighing bitterly,
For Sir Guy had departed from him.
He was greatly saddened at heart,
Along with all his friends, low and high.
They had great concern for Sir Guy,
For he had gone from them.
They looked for him all about,
Within the city and outside,
Where he was accustomed to go.
And when they did not find him that day
There was many a ‘woe is us’,
Wringing both of their hands.
And when Guy was gone from them,
Herhaud and each of his friends,
And other barons near him,
Said straightaway to Earl Rohaud,
―The best plan that we can act on,
Swiftly and hastily,
Is that we will send messengers now
Over all this land, near and far,
To seek out my lord, Sir Guy.
And if he is not in this land,
We will conclude he is in Lorraine
With his brother Thierry.”
At once they sent messengers
Over all this land, near and far,
From London into Louth,
Over all beyond the Humber and Trent,
And east and west, throughout all Kent,
To the harbor of Portsmouth.
They searched for him everywhere, up and down,
Over all the land in every town,
Along coasts that were known to them.
And then they turned back to Warwick
And said they could find him nowhere,
Not by north or by south.
Herhaud clearly surmised
That Guy was far away in unknown lands.
He was gentlemanly and noble.
He took on himself pilgrims’ clothing;
He would attempt to find his lord
As far as the Aegean Sea.
He said without delay to Earl Rohaud
That he must go to seek his lord

11 Brother Tirry: As with Sirs Amis and Amiloun, Guy and Thierry have sworn an oath of brotherhood in the preceding narrative and are not literal siblings. Actual brothers seem rare in medieval romance, with Havelock’s step-brothers only a partial exception.
12 TEAMS notes that there is no list of places here in the French source. They are perhaps meant to add local flavor.
Thurth alle Cristianté.
When th'erl seye him thus ydight
―Thou art,‖ he seyd, ―a trewe knight,
Yblisced mot thou be.‖
Tho went Herhaud so trewe in tale
To seche his lord in londes fale,
For nothing he nold abide;
He yede over alle bi doun and dale
To everi court and kinges sale
Bi mani a lond side.
Thurth Normondye and alle Speyne
Into Fraunce and thurth Breteyne
He yede bothe fer and wi
der.
Thurth Lorain and thurth Lombardye
And never no herd he telle of Gii
For nought that might bitide.
When Herhaud had sought him fer and hende
And he no might him nowhar fende,
Noither bi se no sond,
Into Inglond he gan wende
And th'erl Rohaut and al his frende
At Warwike he hem fond,
And teld he hadde his lord sought
And that he no might finde him nought
In nonskinnes lond.
Mani a moder child that day
Wepe and gan say, ―waileway,‖
Wel sore wringand her hond.
Now herken and ye may here
In gest yi
f ye wil listen and lere
Hou Gii as pilgrim yede.
He welke about with glad chere
Thurth mani londes fer and nere
Ther God him wald spede.
First he went to Jerusalem
And sethen he went to Bedlem
Thurth mani an uncouthe thede.
Yete he bithought him sethen tho
Forto sechen halwen mo
To winne him heven-mede.
Tho he went his pilgrimage
Toward the court of Antiage,
Bi this half that cité
He mett a man of fair parage,
Ycomen he was of heyghe linage
And of kin fair and fre.
Michel he was of bodi ypight,
A man he semed of michel might
And of gret bounté
With white hore heved and berd yblowe
As white as ani driven snowe;
Gret sorwe than made he,
So gret sorwe ther he made
Sir Gii of him rewthe hade
Throughout all Christendom.
When the earl saw him dressed so,
―You are,‖ he said, ―a true knight.
May you be blessed!‖
Then Herhaud, so faithful in speech,
Went to seek his lord in many lands
And would delay for nothing.
He went all over, by hill and valley,
To every court and king’s hall
Across many a country’s border.
Through Normandy and all Spain,
Into France and through Brittany,
He traveled both far and wide,
Through Lorraine and through Lombardy.
But he never heard any mention of Guy
For anything that might happen.
When Herhaud had searched far and wide,
And could not find him anywhere,
Neither by the sea nor on the sand,
He turned back for England
And Earl Rohaud and all his friends.
He found them in Warwick,
And said how he had searched for his lord
And that he could not find him
In any kind of land.
Many a mother’s child that day
Wept and cried out, “woe is us!”
They wrung their hands bitterly.
Now take note and you will hear
In the story, if you listen and learn,
How Guy traveled as a pilgrim.
He walked about with cheerful spirits
Through many lands, near and far,
Wherever God might guide him.
First he went to Jerusalem
And then he went to Bethlehem,
Through many a foreign soil.
And still he decided then
To seek out more holy places
To win for himself Heaven’s joys.
He continued his pilgrimage then
Toward the court of Antioch.
On the near side of that city
He met a man of high peerage,
Who was born from noble ancestry
And of a fair and free family.
He was well-built in body;
He seemed a man of immense might
And of great prowess.
With grayish-white hair and flowing beard
As white as the driven snow.
He was in great sorrow.
He made such great mourning there
That Sir Guy had pity on him.
He gan to wepe so sare.
His cloth he rent, his here totorn,
And cursed the time that he was born
Wel dolful was his fare;
More sorwe made never man.
Gii stode and looked on him than
And hadde of him gret care.

550
He seyd, "Alas and walewo,
Al mi joie it is ago,
Of blis icham al bare."
"Gode man, what artow," sayd Gii,
"That makest thus this reweful cri
And thus sorweful mone?"
Me thanke for thee icham sori
For that thine hert is thus drery,
Thi joie is fro thee gon.
Telle me the sothe Y pray thee
For Godes love in Trinité
That this world hath in won.
For Jhesu is of so michel might
He may make thine hert light
And thou not never hou son."

560
"Gode man," seyd the pilgrim,
"Thou hast me frained bi God thin
To telle thee of mi fare
And alle the soth withouten les
Ichil thee telle hou it wes
Of blis hou icham bare.
So michel sorwe is on me steke
That min hert it wil tobreke
With sorwe and sikeing sare.
Forlorn ich have al mi blis
Y no schal never have joie, ywis,
In erthe Y wald Y ware.
"A man Y was of state sum stounde
And holden a lord of gret mounde
And erl of al Durras.
Fair sones ich hadde fiftene
And alle were knightes stout and kene;
Men cleped me th’erl Jonas.
Y trowe in this wurld is man non,
Ywis, that is so wo bigon
Sethen the world made was,
For alle min sones ich have forlorn -
Better berns were non born -
Therfore Y sing ‘allas.’
"For blithe worth Y never more:
Alle mi sones ich have forlore
Thurh a batayl unride,
Thurh Sarrayins that fel wore

590
He began to cry so bitterly
That he ripped his clothes and tore his hair
And cursed the time that he was born.
His manner was full of anguish;
No man ever made such a lament.
Guy stood and looked on him
And had great concern for him.
He said, “Alas! Woe is me!
All my joy is gone.
I am bereft of all bliss.”
“Good man, who are you,” said Guy,
“That you make this pitiful cry
And moan so sorrowfully?
I feel sorry for your sake,
For your heart is so downcast;
Your joy is gone from you.
Tell me the truth, I ask you,
For Jesus is of such great might
He may make your heart light
At a time you do not expect it.”
“Young man,” replied the pilgrim,
“You have asked me by your God
To tell you about my troubles
And all the truth without lying.
I will tell you how it happened,
How I am barren of joys.
So much grief has afflicted me
That my heart will break from it
With sorrow and tearful sighs.
All of my happiness is lost!
I will never have joy, truly.
I wish I were in my grave!
I was once a man of stately rank
And respected as a lord of great authority
And as earl of all Durrës.¹³
I had fifteen fair sons
And all were knights, strong and keen.
Men called me Earl Jonas.
I am sure there is no man in this world,
Indeed, who is so burdened by woe
Since the earth was made,
For I have lost all my sons.
Better men were never born!
For this my song is ‘alas!’
For I will never again be happy;
I have lost all of my sons
Through a hideous battle,
Because of Saracens that were fierce.

¹³ Durras: Probably modern Durrës in coastal Albania.
To Jerusalem they came eagerly
To rob and plunder with arrogance.
And we took our army out at once,
Going forth against them.
To face them in battle.
Their attack was so strong
That many among us died there.
Before we could rest that night.
Through my fifteen sons
The monsters were overcome.
And driven down to the ground!
Fifteen emirs were taken there.
Their king began to flee with his troops
For dread of us at that moment.
My sons and I, without a lie,
We drove the king out of that land
And gave his men deadly wounds.
Their king was called Triamour;
He was a lord of great honor
And a man of immense prowess.
Then we committed a great folly.
We pursued him in force
Into his own lands.
They flew away into Alexandria;
The country rose up with a cry
To give hands to their king in help.
Three hundred Saracens, well-armed,
Were in hiding in a field of bushes,
All with helmets and lethal blades.
Out of the bushes they leaped at once
And surrounded every one of us
And drove us all to shameful defeat.
They struck at us with blazing fury,
And we landed great blows on them
And killed many of their troops.
And before we were all taken
Many of them were overcome,
Fatally wounded in their armor.
But they were too many and we too few.
All of our armor they cut to pieces
And slaughtered our horses under us.
Yet we fought on foot a long time until
Our swords, which were so strong, broke
And then we surrendered out of necessity.
We yielded ourselves to the king, all and some,
That we might be taken for ransom
To save each of our lives.
He led us then to Alexandria
And put us into his prison.
Which was made of solid limestone.
Our drink was little and our food less.
We thought we would lose our lives from hunger.
We were overcome with grief.
We were there all that year in this way.
With michel sorwe bothe yfere
That socour com ous non.
“So it bifel that riche Soudan
Made a fest of mani a man
Of thritti kinges bi tale.
King Triamour com to court tho
And Fabour his sone dede also
With knightes mani and fale
The thridde day of that fest
That was so riche and so honest
So derlich dight in sale.
After that fest that riche was
Ther bifel a wonder cas
Wherthurth ros michel bale.
“That riche Soudan hadde a sone
That was yhold a douhti gome,
Sadok was his name.
The kinges sone Fabour he cleped him to,
Into his chaumber thai gun go,
Tho knightes bothe ysame.
Sadok gan to Fabour sayn
Yif he wald ate ches playn
And held ogain him game,
And he answerd in gode maner
He wald play with him yfere
Withouten ani blame.
“Ate ches thai sett hem to playn,
Tho hendy knightes bothe tuayn
That egre were of sight.
Er thai hadde don half a game
With strong wretthe thai gan to grame,
Tho gomes michel of might.
Thurth a chek Fabour seyd for soth
Sadok in hert wex wroth
And missayd him anonright
And clepd him fiz a putayn
And smot him with might and main
Wherthurth ros michel fight.
“Weth a roke he brac his heved than
That the blod biforn out span
In that ich place.
‘Sadok,’ seyd than Fabour,
‘Thou dost me gret deshonour
All together in great suffering,
For no help came to us.
So it happened that a rich sultan
Made a feast for many a man,
For thirty kings in count.
King Triamour came to the court
And Fabor, his son, did as well
With knights, many and plentiful,
On the third day of that feast,
Which was so rich and stately,
And so lavishly prepared in the hall.
After that feast which was so grand,
A wondrous event happened
That would lead to great evil.
That rich sultan had a son
Who was held to be a rugged man;
Sadok was his name.
The king’s son, Fabor, called to him.
They went into his chamber,
Both of the two knights together.
Sadok asked Fabor
If he would play chess
And challenged him to a game,
And he answered in good faith
That he would play together with him
Without any poor sportsmanship.
They set themselves at the chessboard to play,
Both of those noble knights,
Who were so competitive in manner.
Before they had finished half the game
They began to seethe with strong rage,
Those men of great might.
It was with a check Fabor called, in truth,
That Sadok became enraged in heart
And at once became abusive with him,
Calling him ‘son of a whore!’
He struck him with force and fury,
Through which a great fight arose.
He smashed Sadok’s head with a rook
So that the blood spurted out
All over the place.
Then Fabor shouted, ‘Sadok,
You have done me great dishonor

Chess was at the time thought to be helpful in teaching war strategies. As the game apparently began in India and spread through Muslim lands it would have still had an exotic connotation to an English audience. See also Floris, line 717, where the hero plays checkers.

Fiz a putayn: The phrase ‘pardon my French’ is centuries later, but here there is a similar attribution of vulgar language to French. Compare Bevis of Hampton, line 302, where Bevis swears in English. Romance characters invariably speak and understand English no matter their geography. Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale has a rare touch of realism when Custance washes up in Northumberland and the locals have difficulty comprehending her “Latyn corrupt” (CT II.519), presumably Italian.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
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| 690  | That thou me manace.  
Nar thou mi lorde's sone were  
Thou schuldest dye right now here.  
Schustow never nennes passe.'  
Sadok stirr up to Fabour  
And cleped him anon, 'Vile traitour!'  
And smot him in the face.  
‘With his fest he smot him thore  
That Fabour was agreved sore  
And stirr up in that stounde. |
| 700  | The cheker he hent up fot-hot  
And Sadok in the heved he smot  
That he fel ded to grounde.  
His fader sone he hath yteld  
That he hath the Soudan sone aqueld  
And goven him dethes wounde,  
On hors thai lopen than bilive  
Out of the lond thai gun drive  
For ferd thai were yfounde.  
“When it was the Soudan teld  
That his sone was aqueld  
And brought of his liif dawe  
On al maner he him bithought  
Hou that he him wreke mought  
Thurth jugement of lawe.  
After the king he sent an heyghe  
To defende him of that felonie  
That he his sone hath yslawe  
And bot he wald com anon  
With strengthe he schuld on him gon,  
With wilde hors don him drawe.  
“King Triamour com to court tho  
And Fabour his sone dede also  
To the Soudans parlement.  
When thai biforn him comen behth  
Thai were adouted of her deth  
Her lives thai wende have spent  
For the Soudan cleped hem fot-hot  
And his sones deth hem atwot  
And seyd thai were alle schent; |
| 710  | Bot thai hem therof were might  
In strong peril he schuld hem dight  
And to her judgement.  
“Than dede he com forth a Sarayine -  
Have he Cristes curs and mine  
With boke and eke with belle -  
Out of Egypt he was ycome,  
Michel and griselich was that gome  
To threaten me like this!  
If you were not my lord’s son,  
You would die here right now.  
You would never walk out of here!’  
Sadok charged Fabor  
And swiftly called him, ‘Vile traitor!’  
And struck him in the face.  
With his fist he punched him there  
So that Fabor was infuriated  
And leaped up from his place.  
He flung up the chessboard in a rush  
And smashed it on Sadok’s head  
So that he fell dead to the ground.  
He had soon told his father  
That he had killed the sultan’s son  
By giving him a deadly wound.  
Without delay they leaped on horses;  
They galloped away out of the land  
For fear that they would be found.  
When the sultan was told  
That his son was dead  
And deprived of his life’s days,  
He considered every way  
That he might wreak vengeance  
Through the judgment of law.  
He had a messenger rush to the king  
To warn the man who had slain his son  
To defend himself against that felony;  
And unless he would come at once  
He would come to him in force  
And have him drawn with wild horses.  
King Triamour then came to court  
And Fabor, his son, did as well  
To the sultan’s assembly.  
When they were there before him,  
They were in fear of their lives;  
They believed their days to be finished.  
For the sultan called them in haste  
And charged them with his son’s death  
And said they were all condemned.  
Unless they had a strong defense  
He would place them in great peril  
And to their judgment.  
Then the sultan had a Saracen come forward.  
May he have Christ’s curse, and mine,  
With the book and bell as well!  
He had come out of Egypt.  
The man was huge and bloodthirsty |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>740</td>
<td>With any good man to duelle. He is so michel and unrede Of his sight a man may drede With tong as Y thee telle; As blac he is as brodes brend, He semes as it were a fende That comen were out of helle. “For he is so michel of bodi ypight Ogains him twelve men have no might Ben thai never so strong, For he is four fot sikerly More than ani man stont him bi, So wonderliche he is long. Yif King Triamour that ther was Might fenden him in playn place Of that michel wrong Than is that vile glotoun Made the Soudans champioun Batayl of him to fong. “King Triamour answerd than To that riche Soudan In that ich stounde</td>
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<tr>
<td>750</td>
<td>That he walde defende him wele ynough That he never his sone slough No gaf him dedli wounde. When he seye Amoraunt so grim - Ther durst no man fight with him So grille he was on grounde - Than asked he respite til a day To finde another yif he may Ogaines him durst founde. “Than hadde he respite al that yere And fortyi days so was the maner Thurth lawe was than in lond; Yif himselfen durst nought fight Finde another yif he might Ogaines him durst stond. The king as swithe hom is went, Over alle his lond anon he sent After erl, baroun, and bond And asked yif ani wer so bold - Thriddel his lond have he schold - The batayl durst take an hond. “Ac for nought that he hot might Ther was non durst take the fight With the geaunt for his sake. Than was ich out of prisoun nome, Biforn he him dede me come Conseyl of me to take And asked me at worde fewe Yif Y wist other Y knewe A man so mighti of strake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>760</td>
<td>That for him durst take the fight; Were he burjays other knight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Riche prince he wald him make.
“He wald make me riche and al mi kende
And gif me gret honour
And wold sese into min hond
To helden thridendel his lond
With cite, toun, and tour.
Ac ic ichim answerd than
800 In alle this warld was ther no man
To fight with that traitour
Bot yif it Gii of Warwike were
Or Herhaud of Arden his fere
In warld thai bere the flour.
“When the king herd tho
That Y spac of tho knightes to
Ful blithe he was of chere,
He kist me so glad he was.
‘Merci,’ he seyd, ‘Erl Jonas;
Thou art me leve and dere.
Yif ich hadde here Sir Gii
Or Herhaud that is so hardi
Of the maistri siker Y were.
And thou mightest bring me her on
Thee and thine sones Y schal lete gon
Fram prisoun quite and skere.’
“Bi mi lay he dede me swere
That Y schuld trewelich bode bere
To tho knightes so hende
And seyd to me as swithe anon
With michel sorwe he schuld me slon
Bot ichem might fende
And al mine sones do todrawe;
And ichim graunt in that thrawe
To bring hem out of hende.
820 Out of this lond Y went tho
With michel care and michel wo;
Y nist wider to wende.
‘Y sought hem into the lond of Coyne,
Into Calaber and into Sessoyne,
And fro thennes into Almayne,
In Tuskan and in Lombardy,
In Fraunce and in Normondye,
Into the lond of Speyne,
In Braban, in Poil and in Bars,
And into kinges lond of Tars
And thurth al Aquitayne,
In Cisil, in Hungri and in Ragoun,
In Romayne, Borgoine, and Gastoine
The king would make him a rich prince.
And if I might find someone
He would make me and all my kin rich
And give me great honor,
And would place into my hand
A third of his land to hold,
With city, town, and tower.
But I answered then
That there was no man in all this world
To fight with that villain
Unless it were Guy of Warwick
Or Herhaud of Arden, his companion.
In the world they bear the prize.
When the king heard
What I said about those two knights,
He was very pleased in his appearance.
He kissed me, he was so glad.
‘Thank you, Earl Jonas,’ he said.18
‘You are dear and precious to me.
If I had here Sir Guy,
Or Herhaud, who is so hardy,
I would be certain of victory.
If you can bring me one of them here,
I will release you and your sons
From prison, fully and blameless.’
On my faith he made me swear
That I would faithfully carry word
To those knights who were so valiant,
And he said to me just as quickly that
With great sorrow he would slay me
Unless I could find them,
And have all my sons torn apart.
And I have been granted that interval
To bring them out of bondage.
Out of this land I went
With great hardship and great woe.
I did not know which way to go.
I searched for them in the land of Konya,
Into Calabria and into Saxony,
And from there into Germany,
In Tuscany and in Lombardy,
In France and in Normandy,
Into the land of Spain,
In Brabant, Apulia, and Barcelona,
And into the king’s land of Tarsia19
And through all Aquitaine,
In Sicily, in Hungary, and in Ragusa,
In Romania, Burgundy, and Gascony,
And throughout all Brittany.
And I made my way to England
And asked many a man there,
Both young and old,
And in the city of Warwick,
Where he was lord of that country
And held it in rule.
But I found nobody at all
Who could tell me with certainty
About those two bold knights,
Where I could find Guy or Herhaud
In any land, near or far.
Therefore my heart is cold,
For I have sworn the king my pledge
That I will bring Guy right away
If he is alive.
And if I do not bring him at once,
I know well that he will kill me.
Because of this I am in great anguish.
He will have my sons hanged
And drawn apart with great injustice,
Those knights, gracious and noble.
And if they die it is a great sadness.
For them I have such sorrow, to be sure,
My heart will be broken into three."

"Good man," said Guy, "listen to me now.
You have great sorrow for your sons,
And it is no wonder,
When you have looked for Guy and Herhaud
And you cannot find them.
Your grief is great, certainly.
Through them your hope was to go free,
With all your sons forth with you,
Through God’s help and theirs.
There was a time in the old days
When they were counted as sturdy men
And held in high esteem.
Through God’s help, our Lord,
Who is my support and gives me strength,
And grants me success,
And for Guy’s love and Herhaud also,
Who were fearless in deeds,
Who you have searched for with great trouble,
I will take up the battle now for you
Against the giant who is so strong.
Who you say is so hideous.
And even if he is the devil himself,
I will take the fight for you
And help you in your time of need.”
When the earl heard him speak so,
That he would undergo battle for him,
He eyed him from foot to head.
He was built powerfully in body;
He seemed a man of great might,
Ac pouerliche he was biweved.  
With a long berd his neb was growe,  
Miche wo him thought he hadde ydrowe.  
He wende his wit were reved  
For he seyd he wald as yern  
Fight with that geaunt stern  
Bot yif he hadde him preved.  
“God man,” than seyd he,  
“God almighty foryeld it thee  
That is so michel of mght  
Thatow wost batayl for me fong  
Ogain the geaunt that is so strong;  
Thou knowest him nought, Y plight,  
For yif he loked on thee with wrake,  
Sternliche with his eyghen blake,  
So grim he is of sight  
Wastow never so bold in al thi teime  
Thatow durst batayl of him nim  
No hold ogaines him fight.”
  
―Gode man,‖ seyd Gii, ―lat be that thought  
For swiche wordes help ous nought  
Ogain that schrewe qued.  
Mani hath loked me opon  
With wicked wil, mani on  
That wald han had min hed,  
And thei no fled Y never yete  
No never for ferd batayl lete,  
For no man that brac bred.  
And thei he be the devels rote  
Y schal nought fle him afot,  
Bi Him that suffred ded.”
  
“Leve sir,” than seyd he,  
“God of heven foryeld it te.  
Thine wordes er ful swete.”
  
For joie he hadde in hert that stounde;  
On knes he fel adoun to grounde  
And kist Sir Gyes fet.  
Gii tok him up in armes to,  
Into Alisaunder thai gun go  
With the king to mete.  
And when thai com into the tour  
Bifor the king Sir Triamour  
Wel fair thai gun him grete.  
And when he seye th‘erl Jonas  
Unnethe he knewe him in the fas  
So chaunged was his blie.  
―Erل Jonas,‖ seyd the king,  
―Telle me now withouten lesing  
Gii and Herhaud where ben he?‖  
Th‘erl answerd and siked sore,  
“Gii no Herhaud sestow no more  
For sothe Y telle thee.  
For hem ich have in Ingeldon ben  
And Y no might hem nowhar sen,  
But he was poorly clothed.  
His face was overgrown with a long beard.  
He looked as if he had suffered many hardships.  
He assumed the man had lost his wits,  
For he said without hesitation that he would  
Fight with that forbidding giant,  
Unless it was denied to him.  
“Good man,” he said then,  
“God Almighty reward you  
For being so great in strength  
That you would undertake battle for me  
Against the giant, who is so strong.  
But I swear, you know nothing about him!  
For if he looked on you with rage,  
Sternly, with his black eyes,  
He is so terrifying to see.  
You were never so bold in all your days  
That you would dare face him in battle  
Or withstand the fight against him.”
  
“My good man,” said Guy, “let that thought go.  
For such words give us no help  
Against that wicked devil!  
Many have looked upon me  
With malicious intent, many a man  
Has wanted to have my head,  
And I have never yet fled from them,  
Nor ever left a battle out of fear,  
For any man who ever ate bread!  
And even if he is the devil’s spawn,  
I will not back one foot away,  
In the name of Him who suffered death.”
  
“Dear sir,” he then said,  
“God in Heaven reward you for it!  
Your words are very sweet.”
  
He had joy in his heart that moment.  
He fell to his knees to the ground  
And kissed Sir Guy’s feet.  
Guy took him up in his two arms  
And they went into Alexandria  
To meet with the king.  
And when they came into the tower  
Before the king, Sir Triamour,  
They greeted him courteously.  
And when the king saw Earl Jonas,  
He barely recognized his face,  
So much had his features changed.  
“Earل Jonas,” said the king,  
“Tell me now without any lying,  
Guy and Herhaud—where are they?”
  
The earl answered and sighed sadly,  
“I tell you the truth,  
You will see Guy or Herhaud no more.  
For them I have been in England  
And I could not see them anywhere;
Therefore woe is me. But the people
Of that land told me in conversation
That Guy had gone to seek out holy places,
Far away in unfamiliar lands,
And Herhaud had gone after him
To seek him out, in truth.
I found neither one of them.
But I have brought this man to you
Who is a warrior of great skill
And will take in hand the challenge
Against the giant who is so fierce,
All to defend you in full.
He will not quaver in fear.”
“Earl Jonas,” said the king,
“See that there is no cowardice in him
So that I am not deceived.
And if there is, you will at once
Be hanged along with each of your sons.”
“I give my word, sir,” he then replied.
The king called Sir Guy to him
And asked him curtly,
“What is your name, tell me?”
Sir Guy answered the king,
“You,” he said, “without lying,
Men clepeth me in mi cunder.”
“What cunder arto?” the king asked.
“Of Ingland, so God me rede;
Therin ich was yborn.”
“O we,” seyed the king, “arto Inglish knight?
Than schuld Y thurth skil and right
Hate thee ever more.
Knewe thou nought the gode Gii
Or Herhau that was so hardi?
Tel me the sothe bifo;
Wele ought ich be Gyes fo man;
He slough mi brother Helmadan,
Thurth him icham forlore.
“Min em he slough, the riche Soudan,
Ate mete among ous everielsen.
Seyghe Y never man so bigin.
Y seyghe hou he his heved of smot
And bar it oway with him fot-hot
Maugré that was therinne.
After him we driven tho -
The devel halp him thennes to go,
Y trowe he is of his kinne.
Mahoun gaf that thou wer he,
Ful siker might Y than be
The maistri forto winne.”
Sir Gii anwered to the king,
“Wele wele Y knowe withouten lesing
Herhaud so God me rede
And yif thou haddest her on here
Of the maistri siker thou were
Therefore woe is me. But the people
Of that land told me in conversation
That Guy had gone to seek out holy places,
Far away in unfamiliar lands,
And Herhaud had gone after him
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Y seyghe hou he his heved of smot
And bar it oway with him fot-hot
Maugré that was therinne.
After him we driven tho -
The devel halp him thennes to go,
Y trowe he is of his kinne.
Mahoun gaf that thou wer he,
Ful siker might Y than be
The maistri forto winne.”
Sir Gii anwered to the king,
“Wele wele Y knowe withouten lesing
Herhaud so God me rede
And yif thou haddest her on here
Of the maistri siker thou were
The bateyl forto bede."
The king asked him anonright,
"Whi artow thus ivel ydight
And in thus pouer wede?
A feble lord thou servest, so thynketh me,
Or oway he hath driven thee
For sum ivel dede."
"Nay, sir, for God," quath Gii,
"A wel gode Lord than serve Y.
With Him was no blame.
Wel michel honour He me dede
And gret worthschipe in everi stede
And sore ich have Him gra
And therfore icham thus ydight
To cri Him merci day and night
Til we ben frendes same.
And mi Lord and Y frende be
Ichil wende hom to mi cuntré
And live with joie and game."
"Frende Youn," seyd the king,
"Wiltow fight for mi thing
Other Y schal another purvay?"
"Therfor com ich hider," quath Gii,
"Thurth Godes help and our Levedi
As wele as Y may.
Bot first th'erl Jonas and his sones
Schal be deliverd out of prisones
This ich selve day."
The king answerd, "Y graunt thee.
Mahoun he mot thine help be
That is mi lord verray."
"Nay," seyd Gii, "bot Marie sone
He mot to help come
For Mahoun is worth nought."
"Frende Youn," seyd the king,
"Understond now mi teling,
Al what ich have ythought
Yf that thou may overcom the fight
And defende me with right
The wrong is on me sought,
So michel Y schal for thee do
That men schal speke thereof evermo
As wide as this world is wrought.
"Alle the men that in my prisoun be
Thai schul be deliverd for love of thee
That Cristen men be told.
Fram henne to Ynde that ci
Quite-claym thai schul go fre
To command the battle."
The king rounded on him at once,
"Then why are you so shabbily equipped
And in these ragged clothes?
You serve a feeble lord, it seems to me,
Or he has driven you away
For some evil deed."
"No, sir, by God," replied Guy,
"I serve the highest Lord of all.
I have no grievance with Him.
He gave me great honor
And lavish blessings in every place,
And I have troubled Him sorely.
And therefore I am dressed
To cry to Him for mercy day and night
Until we are at peace together.
And when my Lord and I are friends
I will go home to my country
And live with joy and pleasure."20
"Youn, my friend," said the king,
"Will you fight for my cause
Or should I hire another man?"
"For this I have come," said Guy.
"Through God’s help and our Lady,
I will do as well as I can.
But first the earl and his sons
Will be released out of prison
This same day."
The king answered, "I grant it.
May Mohammad, who is
My true lord, be your support."
"No," said Guy, "only Mary’s son
May be of any help,
For Mohammad is worth nothing."
"My friend Youn," said the king,
"Understand now what I tell you
And all that I have planned.
If you can prevail in the fight
And defend me with justice
Against the wrong put on me,
I will do so much for you
That men will speak of it forevermore
As far as this world is created.
All the men who are in my prison
Who are counted as Christians,
From here to India,
Will be released for love of you.
They will go free by pardon,

20 Like Sir Amiloun’s trick of impersonating Amis, or Odysseus’ ruse of calling himself ‘Nobody’ to the
Cyclops, Guy indulges in a clever speech with a double meaning. Yet here the secondary meaning of
‘Lord’ piously describes his heavenly reconciliation with God.
Bothe yong and old.
And so gode pes Y schal festen anon
That Cristen men schul comen and gon
To her owen wille in wold.
“Gramerci,” than seyd Sir Gii,
“That is a fair gift sikerly,
God leve thee it wele to hold.”
The king dede make a bathe anonright
For to bathe Gii and better dight;
In silk he wald him schrede.
“Nay, sir,” than seyd Sir Gii,
“Swiche clothes non kepe Y
Also God me rede
To were clothes gold bigo
For Y was never wont therto
No non so worthliche wede.
Mete and drink anough give me
And riche clothes lat thou be,
Y kepe non swiche prede.”
And when the time com to th’ende
That thai schuld to court wende
Ther sembled a fair ferred.
King Triamour maked him yare tho
And Fabour his sone dede also
With knightes stithe on stede.
To courtward than went he
To Espire that riche cité
With joie and michel prede.
To the Soudan thai went on heye
With wel gret chevalrie
Bateyle forto bede.
Gii was ful wele in armes dight
With helme and plate and brini bright
The best that ever ware.
The hauberk he hadde was Renis
That was King Clarels, ywis,
In Jerusalem when he was thare.
A thef stale it in that stede
And oway therwith him dede,
To hethenesse he it bare,
King Triamours elders it bought
And in her hord-
To hold it ever mare.
Sir Gii thai toke it in that plas;
Thritti winter afrayd it nas;
Ful clere it was of mayle
As bright as ani silver it was,
The halle schon therof as sonne of glas
For sothe withouten fayle.

Both young and old.
And I will establish such a firm peace
That Christian men can come and go
By their own will in the world.”
“My gracious thanks,” said Sir Guy.
“That is a fair gift, certainly.
May God grant that you hold to it.”
The king had a bath drawn at once
For Guy to be bathed and better dressed.
He wanted him robed in silk.
“No, sir,” Sir Guy said,
“So help me God, I have no use
For such clothes,
To wear gold-embroidered finery.
For it was never my desire
To have such rich garments.
Give me enough food and drink,
And put aside fine clothes;
I don’t care for such flamboyance.”
And when the time came
That they should go to the court
Where there was a grand assembly,
King Triamour made himself ready,
And his son Fabor did as well,
With knights strong on their steeds.
They set off for the court
Of Speyer, that rich city,21
With joy and great ceremony.
They went in haste to the sultan
With a large group of knights
To offer battle.
Guy was well-prepared in arms
With helmet, armor, and shining mail,
The best that ever was.
The linked tunic he had was Rhenish;
It was King Clarel’s, in fact,
From Jerusalem when he was there.
A thief stole into that place
And took it away with him,
Smuggling it into heathen lands.
King Triamour’s forebears bought it
And hoped to keep it forevermore
In their treasure house.
Their they gave it to Sir Guy;
It had been undisturbed for thirty years.
The tunic was of gleaming mail;
It was as bright as any silver.
It shone in the hall like the sun on glass,
To speak the truth, without doubt.

21 Espire: This is likely Speyer in southern Germany, near Stuttgart, and not simply ‘spires’ generically.
The city is still called Espira in Spanish. See also line 1702.
His helme was of so michel might
Was never man overcomen in fight
That hadde it on his ventayle.
It was Alisaunders the gret lording
When he fought with Poreus the king
That hard him gan aseyle.
A gode swerd he hadde withouten faile
That was Ectors in Troye batayle,
In gest as-so men fint.
Ar he that swerd dede forgon
Of Grece he slough ther mani on
That died thurth that dint.
Hose and gambisoun so gode knight schold,
A targe listed with gold
About his swere he hint.
Nas never wepen that ever was make
That o schel might therof take
Namore than of the flint.
For King Triamours elders it laught,
King Darri sum time it aught,
That Gii was under pight.
Ich man axe other bigan
Whennes and who was that man
That with the geaunt durst fight.
King Triamour seyd with wordes fre
―Sir Soudan, herken now to me
Astow art hendy knight.
To thi court icham now come
To defende me of that ich gome
That is so stern of sight.
―This litel knight that stont me by
Schal fende me of that felonie
And make me quite and skere.‖
―Be stille,‖ seyd the Soudan tho,
―That batai l schal wel sone be go
Also brouke Y mi swere!‖
He dede clepe Amorant so grim
And Gii stode and loked on him
Hou foule he was of chere.
―It is,‖ seyd Gii, ―no mannes sone,
It is a devel fram helle is come,
Who might his dintes dreye
That he no schuld dye an heye
So strong he is of dede?‖
Than speken thai alle of the batayle,
Where it schuld be withouten fayle
Thai token hem to rede.
Than loked thai it schuld be

His helmet was so powerfully built
That no man was ever overcome in combat
Who had it on his faceplate.
It was Alexander the Great’s
When he fought with king Porus,²²
Who had battled him hard.
He had a good sword, beyond a doubt;
It was Hector’s from the Trojan battles,
As men can find in legends.
Before he gave up that sword,
He slaughtered many a Greek
Who died through its blows.
He had leg-guards and jacket,
As a good knight should, and around his neck
He bore a shield edged with gold.
There was never a weapon made
That could cut through that shield
Anymore than it might a piece of flint.
What King Triamour’s forefathers obtained,
And King Darius owned for a time,
Protected Sir Guy underneath.
Every man began to ask the other
Who that man was, and from where,
Who dared to fight with the giant.
King Triamour said with noble words,
―Sir Sultan, hear me now,
If you are a gracious knight.
I have now come to your court
To defend myself from that creature
Who is so dreadful to see.
This little knight who stands by me
Will defend me from that felony
And make me free and clear!‖
―Be quiet,‖ replied the sultan then.
―The battle will start at once,
As sure as I have head and neck!‖
He called for Amorant, so grim,
And Guy stood and looked at him,
Seeing how foul he was in appearance.
―It is,‖ Guy said, ―no son of a man.
It is a devil come from Hell.
What wonders does he intend here?
He is so strong in deeds,
Who could endure his blows
Without having to die hastily?‖
Then they all conferred on the battle,
Where it should be beyond a doubt,
They took themselves into counsel,
And then decided that it should be

²² Alexander battled the Indian leader Porus at the Hydaspes river, in modern Pakistan, in 326 B.C.
Alexander prevailed but lost his beloved horse Bucephalus.
In a launde under the cité;
Thider thai gun hem lede.

1150 With a river it ern al about,
Therin schuld fight tho knightes stout;
Over the water thai went in a bot,
On hors thai lopen fot-hot
Tho knightes egre of mode.
Thai priked the stedes that thai on sete
And smiten togider with dentes grete
And ferd as thai wer wode
Til her schaftes in that tide
Gun to schiver bi ich a side
About hem ther thai stode.

1170 In hethenesse no in Fraunce.
It was Sir Ercules the strong
That mani he slough therwith with wrong
In batayle and in destaunce.
Ther was never man that it bere
Overcomen in batayle no in were
Bot it were thurth meschaunce.
It was bathed in the flom of Helle,
Agnes gaf it him to wille
He schuld the better spede.

1180 Who that bar that sword of might
Was never man overcomen in fight
Bot it were thurth unlede.
Ther worth Sir Gii to deth ybrought
Bot yif God have of him thought,
His best help at nede.
Togider thai wer yern heweiende
With her brondes wele kerveinde
And maden her sides blede.
Sir Amoraunt was agrieved in hert

1190 And smot to Gii a dint ful smert
With alle the might he gan welde
And hitt him on the helme so bright
That alle the stones of michel might
Fleyghe doun in the feld.

On a plain below the city.
They began to lead themselves there.
A river ran all around it.
There the sturdy knights would fight;
They could not flee for any need.
Over the water they went in a boat.
The knights, so keen in spirit,
Galloped impatiently on horses.
They spurred the steeds that they sat on
And clashed together with great blows
And warred as if they were berserk
Until the moment that their lances
Began to splinter on each side
About them where they stood.
Then they drew their sharpened swords
And hacked at each other with grisly wounds
Until they were covered with blood.
When he had lost his lance,
Sir Amoran drew his best blade
That easily carved all that it found.
No armor that was ever made
From a smith’s hand might withstand it,
In heathen lands or in France.
It was owned by Hercules the strong,
Who killed many with it in wickedness
In battle and in armed combat.
There was never a man who bore it
Who was overcome in battle or in war
Unless it was through treachery.
It was bathed in the streams of Hell
Where a goddess gave it to him to wield\(^{23}\)
So that he would have better fortune.
Whoever bore that sword of command
Was never defeated in a fight by man
Unless it was through deceitfulness.
Sir Guy would have been brought to death there
Had God not thought of him,
His best help in time of need.
They were briskly clashing together
With their blades sharpened well,
And they made their sides bleed.
Sir Amorant was distressed at heart
And struck a stinging blow on Guy
With all the might he could muster,
And hit him on the shining helmet
So that all the stones of great value
Fell down onto the field.

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\(^{23}\) *Agnes gaf it him*: The identity of *Agnes* is unknown. TEAMS posits that the English scribe heard line 8467 of *Gui de Warewic*, “Une deuesse la li dona” (“a goddess gave it to him”), and misheard *une deuesse*, ‘a goddess,’ as ‘Agnes.’ Hercules was not unconditionally good and was also known for cheating and murder. The scribe might also have heard *gress*. 

326
The sword struck down all of the helmet,
And that same blow sheared away
A foot and a half of the shield,
Which had never been conquered before
By knight or by any other man,
No matter how bold he was.
He split the saddle pommel in two;
He broke the steed’s neck as well
With his fearsome blade.
Without any injury or damage,
The sharp sword plunged down
Well more than half a foot into the earth.
Sir Guy was brought to the ground.
He jumped up at once, in truth,
And looked and stood firmly.
Immediately at that moment
He made his prayer to God Almighty
And held up both his hands.
Sir Guy rose up at once
Like a man enraged in heart.
He did not lie down for long.
“Lord,” said Guy, “God Almighty,
Who made the darkness into night,
So help me today!
Shield me from this strong giant
So that I do not suffer death from him,
For you are truly the Lord.”
He then said to Amorant, “That blow
Was foully struck. I will repay you well,
If I may live to do it.”
Guy raised his keen sword
And with a furious heart he struck Amorant
With a blow that fell sorely.
So that he made a quarter of his shield
Fly to the ground
With his deadly blade.
He struck the steed’s neck in two,
And Amorant was thrown to the ground.
He was in distress over it.
Then those bold knights were on foot,
And would fight on their feet if they could,
Now that they had lost their horses.
Amorant, with a savage heart,
Struck at Guy, and Guy at him,
With strokes that were harsh and stiff.
They hacked so fiercely with shining blades.
Their helmets and swords which were so strong
Were broken into pieces.
The champions fought so hard
That both their armor and mailcoats
Began to split and crack.
They fought on with merciless blows.
Both of them beat on the other
So that it was torment to remain alive.
Sir Amoraunt was strongly vexed
That one man had withstood him so long.
He reached a blow toward Guy
And hit him on the shining helmet
With a thundering stroke
So that all the jeweled flowers fell right off.
He carved in two the band of gold
And yet continued forward with his stroke
And did not hold back there.
The sword came down on the shield
And cleaved it into halves,
Almost bringing him to the ground.
But in drawing out the sword,
And with his hotly disengaging it,
There was a wondrous happening.
Sir Guy fell on his knees to the ground
And got up in the same moment
And said, “Lord, full of grace,
Never before has the blow of any knight
Made me kneel down
In any place where I was!”
Sir Guy flung up his sword in haste
And struck Amorant on the hood
So that he stumbled in his tracks.
He hit him on the helmet in a rush
And with that blow the sword passed on;
Along the nose-guard it moved down
And did the same at the face-guard,
And carved them in two, beyond doubt,
And cut a wound into his flesh.
His shield with its golden rim
Was cut into two through the help of Christ.
He cleaved it in the same instant.
So violently did he draw the blade out
That Amorant at once
Fell on his knees to the ground.
There was such a furious fight between them
That those who could observe it
Said they had never seen one like it.
There were never two knights
Born of women as they were
Who fought together with such rage
On the day before the nativity
Of Saint John the righteous martyr,
To whom holy men appeal. 24
Both of the warriors fought together,
Who were so wrathful in heart.
There were no words of affection!

24 *Seyn Jon the martir fre*: There is a John the Martyr (d. about 362), but TEAMS believes John the Baptist is more likely here, a highly popular saint who was, significantly, also martyred by beheading. His nativity is traditionally celebrated on June 24.
Sir Amoraunt withdrew himself
With a glowering face, angry and grim.
For his blood was flowing:
He had to drink or else lose his life.
Thirst ravaged him strongly,
For he was badly overheated.
“I have prevailed in forty battles,
But I never before met any mother’s son
Who beat on me so sorely.
Tell me,” he said, “who are you?
I never felt any man before now
Who gave such hard blows.
Tell me,” he said, “where are you from?
For you are strong, as I live and die,
And of great might.”

Sir Guy answered without boasting,
“I am a Christian, you know well,
Born in England, I assure you.
King Triamour brought me here
To defend him if I might
From that great injustice
That you charge on him wrongly.
For Fabor never murdered Sadok,
Neither by day or night.”

“Ah, are you English?” said Amorant.
“Now if my lord Termagant would grant
That you were Guy the strong!
Mohammad grant that you were him!
I would be happy then
To face him in battle.
For he has fought against our religion.
I would very gladly have his head
Or see it hung high on the gallows.
We will never again recover
What he has caused us to lose
With shameful wickedness!
With injustice and with great woe
He slaughtered forty thousand of us
In Constantinople on one day.
He and his comrade Herhaud
Have done great damage to our faith,
Which I could lament for ever more!
If he were slain with a blade of steel,
Then I would be fully avenged on him
Who has injured our religion.”

Sir Guy answered, “Why do you say so?

25 Fabor certainly does murder Sadok, though he is provoked. Either the poet errs or wants Sir Guy to be innocent of that fact to heighten his altruism. Otherwise Guy knowingly champions a guilty man, Triamour, even if for the purposes of aiding Jonas.

26 Amorant is referring to an episode in the Couplet Guy of Warwick, 2869-4096, where Guy defends Constantinople from a Saracen invasion. The Muslims do ‘recover’ Constantinople in 1453.
Hath Gii ani thing thee misdo?"
Amoraunt seyd, “Nay,
“Ac it wer gret worthschip, ywis,
To alle the folk of hethenisse
That Y hadde so wroken mi kende.
Cristen,” he seyd, “listen to me,
The weder is hot astow may se,
Y pray thee, leve frende,
Leve to drink thou lat me gon
For the lordes l
27ove thou levest on,
Astoar gode and hende.
For thrist mi hert wil tospring
And for hete withouten lesing
Mi live wil fro me wende.
“And yif Y schal be thus aqueld
Thurth strong hete in the feld
It were ogain thee skille.
Unworthschipe it war to thee-
It were thee gret vileté
In wat lond thou com tille.
Ac lete me drink a litel wight
For thi lordes love ful of might
That thou love with all thy will;
And Y thee hot bi mi lay
Thou shalt drink al thi fille.”
Sir Gii answerd, “Y graunt thee
And yete today thou yeld it me
Withouten ani fayle.”
And when he hadde leve of Sir Gii
He was ful glad sikerli,
No lenger nold he dayle.
To the river ful swithe he ran,
His helme of his heved he nam
And unlaced his ventayle.
When he hadde dronken alle his fille
He stirt up with hert grille
And Sir Gii he gan to asaile.
“Knight,” he seyd, “yeld thee bilive
For thou art giled, so mot Y thrive.
Now ichave a drink
Icham as fresche as ich was amorwe.
Thou schalt dye with michel sorwe
For sothe withouten lesing.”

Has Guy done you any wrong?”
Amorant said, “No,
But it would bring great honor, indeed,
To alle the folk of the kalifate
For me to avenge my brothers.
Christian,” he said, “listen to me.
As you can see, the weather is hot.
I ask of you, good friend,
That you give me time to go drink,
For the love of the gods you believe in,
If you are good and noble.
For my heart will burst from thirst,
And because of heat, without a lie,
My life will depart from me.
And if I am killed in this way,
Overcome by heat on the field,
It would demean your battle skills.
It would not be praiseworthy to you.
It would stain you with great villainy
In whatever land you come to.27
But let me drink a little bit
For your lord’s love, full of might,
That you love with all your will;
And I promise you by my faith,
If you have any thirst today
You will drink your fill.”
Sir Guy answered, “I grant it to you
If you yield it back to me today
Without failure.”
And when he had consent from Sir Guy,
He was very glad, for certain.
He did not delay any longer.
He ran quickly to the river.
He took off his helmet from his head
And unlaced his face-piece.
When he had drunk all his fill,
He started up with a savage heart
And began to attack Sir Guy.
“Knight,” he said, “surrender yourself fast,
For as I live and die, you are tricked.
Now that I have a drink
I am as fresh as I was in the morning.
You will die in great sorrow
In truth, without a lie.”

This battle sequence is the longest and most detailed of these romance texts. Armor was heavy and built for mounted charges, not day-long combat in a Mediterranean summer. The danger of becoming overheated would be a very real one, and is used here to increase Guy’s nobility when his sense of fair play is deceived. The line between genteel chivalry and naivety could be a delicate one in literature. In The Battle of Maldon, Byrthnoth permits the invading Vikings time to regroup on shore when the tide comes in, and the English are defeated. The nuance of the poet’s word-choice, oftermode—pride, recklessness, or sporting courtesy—is still debated.
Then they drew their long swords,
Those knights who were stern and strong,
Without more delay,
And each assaulted the other.
And there was again a ferocious battle
With furious fighting.
Amorant was keen in spirit
And struck at Guy as if he were mad.
He was so eager to fight
That he made a quarter of his shield
Fly onto the field.
And on Guy’s gleaming coat of mail
The sword streaked down his shoulder
So that he carved both armor and mail
Into two, I swear,
Almost to the naked skin.
But no flesh was pierced
Through the grace of God Almighty.
The sharp sword glided down
Close along Sir Guy’s side,
Coming very near his knee
So that it split in two
Both his jacket and leg-armor together.
The sword was thrust into the earth
Half a foot into the ground
Without any damage or injury;
That was seen by many men.
And when Sir Guy saw that fair blessing
So that he had no wounds,
He thanked Jesus on high.
And when Guy felt himself hit so,
He was angered, you might be sure;
He charged on Amorant.
He grasped his blade with firm will
And struck at him with raging heart,
Shattering his shield.
Guy hit him in such frenzy
That the good sword ran
Half a foot into the shoulder.
With that stroke Guy withdrew.
He was weary enough of fighting
And began to address Amorant.
“Sir Amorant,” said Guy,
“For God’s love, have mercy now
If it be your will.
I have such thirst where I stand
I can hardly lift my hand;
Therefore woe is me!
Grant me now that same favor;
I gave you leave to drink in your need.
If you are courteous and noble,
Give me space to go drink
As it was agreed between us.
For God’s love, I beseech you.”
“Hold thi pes,” seyd Amoraunt,
“For bi mi lord Sir Ternagaunt
Levo no hastow non.
Ac now that Y the sothe se
That thou ginnes to feyn thee
Thine heved thou schalt forgon.”
“Amoraunt,” seyd Gii, “do aright,
Lete me drink a litel wight
As Y dede thee anon;”

1450
And togider fight we;
Who thi schal be maister we schal se
Wiche of ous may other slon.”
“Hold thi pays,” seyd Amoraunt,
“Y nil nought held thee covenaunt
For ful this toun of gold,
For when ichave thee sleyn now right
The Soudan trewelih hath me hight
His lond gif me he schold
Ever more to have and hold fre
And give me his douhter bright o ble,
The miriest may on mold.
When ichave thee sleyn this day
He schal give me that fair may
With alle his lond to hold.
“Ac do now wele and unarme thee
And trewelich yeld thou thee to me
Olive Y lat thee gon.
And yif thou wilt nought do bi mi red
Thou schalt dye on ivel ded
Right now Y schal thee slon.”

1460
“Nay,” seyd Gii, “that war no lawe.
Ich hadde lever to ben todrawe
Than swiche a dede to don.
Ar ich wald creaunt yeld me
Ich hadde lever anhanged be
And brent bothe flesche and bon.”
Than seyd Amoraunt at a word
“Bi the treuthe thou owe thi lord
That thou lovest so dere
Tell me what thi name it be
And leve to drink give Y thee
Thi fille of this river.
Thou seyd thi name is Sir Youn;
It is nought so bi Seyn Mahoun,
It is a lesing fere.
Yif thi name were Youn right
Thou nere nought of so miche might
No thus unbiknownen here.”
“Frende,” seyd Gii, “Y schal telle thee;

1470
Astorw art hendi man and fre
Thou wraye me to no wight.
Gii of Warwike mi name it is,
In Inglond Y was born, ywis.
Lete me now drink with right.”

1480
“Shut your mouth,” said Amorant.
“By my lord Sir Ternagant,
I will give you no relief.
But now that I see the truth,
That you are becoming faint,
You will soon be without your head.”
Let me drink a little bit
As I did for you before
And we will fight together.
We will see who will be master,
And which of us will slay the other.”
“Hold your tongue,” said Amorant.
“I won’t hold my agreement with you
For a town full of gold.
For after I have slain you soon,
The sultan has faithfully promised me
That he will give me his land
Evermore to have and hold free,
And give me his daughter with the fair face,
The merriest maid on earth.
When I have killed you this day,
He will give me that beautiful girl
With all his land to hold.
But now it would be best to unarm yourself
And yield yourself to me faithfully
And I will let you go alive.
And if you will not do as I advise,
You will die a foul death.
I will slay you right now.”
“No,” said Guy, “That would not be right.
I would rather be dismembered
Than do such a deed.
Before I would grant myself defeated,
I would rather be hanged
And have both flesh and bone burned.”
Then Amorant said, in few words,
“By the loyalty you owe your lord
That you love so dear,
Tell me what your name is
And I will give you leave to drink
Your fill of this river!
You said your name is Sir Youn;
It is not so, by Saint Mohammad!
It is a lying trick.
If your name was in fact Youn,
You would not be of so much might
And still be unknown here!”
“Friend,” said Guy, “I will tell you.
If you are a noble and free-born man,
Betray me to no one.
My name is Guy of Warwick.
I was indeed born in England.
Now let me rightly drink.”
When Amoraunt seye sikerly
That it was the gode Gii
That ogaines him was dight
He loked on him with michel wrake,
Sternliche with his eyghen blake
With an unsemli sight.
―Sir Gii,‖ he seyd, ―welcom to me.
Mahoun, mi lord, Y thank thee
That ich have thee herinne.
Michel schame thou hast me don,
Thi liif thou schalt as tite forgon,
Thi bodi scha
And thine heved, bi Ternagant,
Mi leman schal have to presaunt
That comly is of kinne.
Hennes forward siker thou be
Leve no tit thee non of me
For al this warld to winne.‖
―Allas,‖ seyd Gii, ―what schal Y don?
Now Y no may have drink non
Mine he
Ato.‖
Anon he bithought him thenne
Right to the river he most renne;
He turned him and gan to go.
Amoraunt with swerd on hond
He thought have driven Gii to schond
With sorwe he wald him slo.
Gii ran to the water right,
Bot on him thenke God Al
might
Up cometh he never mo.
Tho was Sir Gii in gret drede.
In the water he stode to his girdel stede
And that thought him ful gode.
In the water he dept his heved anon
Over the schulders he dede it gon
That keled wele his blod.
And when Gii hadde dronken anough
Hetelich his heved up he drough
Out of that ich flo
And Amoraunt stode opon the lond
With a drawen swerd in hond
And smot Gii ther he stode.
Hetelich he smot Gyoun,
Into that water he fel adoun
With that dint unride
That the water arm him about.
Sir Gii stirt up in grete dout,
For nothing he nold abide,
And schoke his heved as knight bold.
―In this water icham ful cold
Wombe, rigge, and side
And no leve, sir, ich hadde of thee
And theryfore have thou miche maugré
And ivel thee mot bitide.‖
Sir Guy jumped up, without fail,
And began to attack Amorant.
He was very keen to fight.
They again fought fiercely together.
There were no words of affection, I guarantee,
But hacking with shining swords.
“Amorant,” Guy said then,
“You are completely false, for sure,
And filled full of treason.
I will not trust you anymore
With any promise you make me.
You are a two-faced beast.”

They battled together ferociously
From the morning to the night
All that long summer’s day.
Both of them fought so long
That no one could choose
Which was the better of them.
But as Amorant thrust one stroke
Sir Guy met with him in haste
And taught him a painful lesson.
He slashed off his right arm with his sword,
At the shoulder in a sudden stroke.
It flew away to the ground.
When Amorant felt himself struck so,
With great ferocity he hastily
Grabbed the sword in his left hand.
He then fought like a lion.
He made thirty charges and three more
With a sword that could bite well.
But because of the blood that ran from him,
Amorant’s strength began to fade.
When Guy realized the fact,
That Amorant was faltering,
Sir Guy followed him without delay
And struck off his other hand.
When Amorant had lost both hands
He considered himself finished;
His wits were all lost.
He leaped with all his might on Sir Guy
So that he almost brought him down.
But Sir Guy was alert
And jumped aside quickly,
And he slashed Amorant in the neck.
He had deprived him of his force;
He fell to the ground without question.
Sir Guy unlaced his face-shield
And he struck off his head.

28 *Gloutoun*: Cohen explains that giants are often called *glutons* in medieval romance to emphasize their “gross, ingestive corporeality” in contrast to the hero’s “Christian self-control.” Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University Press, 1997), 105.
He went over the water in a boat
And quickly presented the head
To the king, Sir Triamour.
King Triamour then went
To that rich sultan
And also his son Fabor.
Then the sultan was in great sorrow;
He pardoned him and let them go
With great and stately honor.
They went into the city of Alexandria
And brought with them Sir Guy the brave
Who had been their champion.
The king then took Earl Jonas
And embraced him in his two arms
And kissed him warmly, I believe,
A hundred times and more,
And he pardoned and released him
With his fifteen sons.
―Earl Jonas,‖ said the king,
―Listen now to my speech
And to what I intend.
Because you have saved my life,
I will grant you half my land
With this knight, strong and keen.
Agree to me, sir knight,
Who Mohammad filled with might,
That you will stay with me.
I will give you a third part of my land;
I will do you great honor
And make you a rich prince.
I will not make you forsake your God!
You are a devout and true believer;
There can be no one better.‖
Sir Guy answered him gently:
―Sir, I tell you the truth,
I want none of your land.‖
The earl at once set off for Jerusalem,
And Guy of Warwick went with him,
And all his sons together.
The earl wanted to, if he could,
Learn the name of that knight
For if he ever saw him again.
―In confidence, sir knight,‖ he said,
―Though you call yourself Youn,
I do not believe that is your name.
For the love of Jesus, Who died
On the wooden Cross, I ask you
To reveal your real name.‖
Sir Guy said, ―You will now hear it,
Since you have asked me in this manner.
I will tell you my name.
My real name is Sir Guy of Warwick.
If you are a gracious and noble knight,
You will not betray me to anyone.
For your love I faced battle and overcame the giant; 
For that I am very glad."
When the earl saw he was Sir Guy, 
He fell down by him on his knees and wept with both eyes.
“For God’s love,” he said, “thank you. 
Why are you so penniless, Sir Guy, 
When you are of such great valor? 
I will give you here in this place 
All the earldom of Durrës, 
The city and the castle tower. 
I will become your man and serve you, 
And all my sons along with me 
Will come to your support.
For you have won victory in heathen lands 
Through your bravery in arms 
And great vigor.”
“Earl Jonas,” Sir Guy then answered, 
“My dear friend, kind thanks 
For your good will.
You would repay me far too dearly 
To give me your lands in such a way. 
I will have none of them.
Make your way home to your country; 
May God be with each one of you.
I will fulfill my pilgrimage.”
Every man went up and kissed him.
The earl began to weep so bitterly 
That no man was able to calm him.
The earl went at once to Durrës 
With each one of his sons, 
Who had escaped out of danger.
Guy then took his way.
He was full of joy there, 
For the giant had been overcome. 
He went into Greece 
And looked for the holy places of that land, 
The best that there were.
After that he made his way 
Throughout many foreign places, 
Traveling to Constantinople.²⁹
After Guy had gone to Constantinople, 
He then went out of that land, 
Walking on the roadway 
On his journey of pilgrimage, 
Reciting his prayers night and day.

²⁹ *Costentine*: The poet could mean Cotentin, now the Cherbourg peninsula in Normandy. *King Richard* in Auchinleck has the king traveling “Bi Brandis & bi Costentine” (78), modern Brandis, near Leipzig, on the way to Marseilles. TEAMS feels that Constantinople is meant, which makes the most sense and explains why Guy travels there from Greece (1687-92) and calls it “beyond the Grekis Se” (2049).
His sinnes forto bete.
In Almaine than went he, ywis,
Ther he was sumtime holden of gret pris.
He com to a four way lete
Biyonde Espire, that riche cité,
Under a croice was maked of tre,
A pilgrim he gan mete,
That wrong his hon
den and wepe sore
And curssed the time that he was bore,
―Alas!‖ it was his song.
―Wayleway,‖ he seyd, ―that stounde!
Wickedliche icham brought to grounde
With wel michel wrong.‖
Sir Gii went to him tho,
―Man,‖ he seys, ―whi farstow so?
So God geve thee joie to fong,
Tel me what thi name it be
And whi thou makest thus gret pité,
Me thenke thi paynes strong.‖
―Gode man,‖ seyd the pilgrim tho,
―What hastow to frein me so?
Swiche sorwe icham in sought
That thei Y told thee alle mi care,
For thee might Y ne ver the better fare;
To grounde ich am so brought.‖
―Yis,‖ seyd Gii, ―bi the gode Rode,
Conseyl Y can give thee gode
And tow telle me thi thought,
For oft it falleth uncouthe man
That gode conseyle give can,
Therfore hele it nought.‖
―For God,‖ he seyd,
―thou seyst ful wel.
Sumtime ich was, bi Seyn Mighel,
An erl of gret pousté.
Thurth al Cristendom, ywis,
Ich was teld a man of gret pris
And of gret bounté;
And now icham a wroche beggar.
No wonder thei icham ful of care
Allas, wel wo is me.‖
For sorwe he might speke namore;
He gan to wepe swithe sare
That Gii hadde of him pité.
Than seyd the pilgrim, ―Thou hast gret wrong
To frain me of mi sorwe strong
And might nought bete mi nedé.
To begge mi brede Y mot gon,
Sethen yistay at none ete Y non
Also God me rede.‖
―Yis, felawe,‖ quath Gii, ―hele it naught.
Telle me whi thou art in sorwe braught,
The better thou shalt spede
And sethen we schul go seche our mete.
Ichave a pani of old biyete,
Thou schalt have half to mede.”  “Gramerci, sir,” than seyd he, “And alle the soth Y schal telle thee. Erl Tirri is mi name, Of Gormoys th’erls sone Aubri. Ich hadde a felawe that hight Gii, A baroun of gode fame. For the douk of Pavi Sir Otoun Haddes don him oft gret tresoun He slough him with gret grame. Now is his nev The emperour steward, His soster sone that hat Berard; He has me don alle this schame. “Th’emperour he hath served long For he is wonderliche strong And of michel might. He no cometh in non batayle That he no hath the maistri saunfayl, So egre he is to fight. In this warld is man non That ogaines him durst gon, Herl, baroun, no knight, And he loked on him with wrake That his hert no might quake So stern he is of sight. “And for his scherewdhed Sir Berard Th’emperour hath made him his steward To wardi his lond about. Ther nis no douk in al this lond That his hest dar withstonde So michel he is dout. Yif a man be loved with him Be he never so pouer of kin And he wil to him lout He maketh hem riche anonright, Douk, erl, baroun, or knight, To held with him gret rout. “And yif a man with him hated be Be he never so riche of fe He flemeth him out of lond. Anon he schal ben todrawe Als tite he schal ben yslawe And driven him al to schond. So it bifel our emperour Held a parlement of gret honour, And you will have half as your reward.” 30 “Kind thanks, sir,” he said then, “And I will tell you all the truth. Earl Thierry is my name, The son of Earl Aubrey of Worms. I had a friend named Guy, A baron of wide renown. When the duke of Pavia, Sir Otoun, Committed a great treason against him, He killed the duke in hot anger. Now his nephew is the emperor’s steward— His sister’s son, who is called Berard— 31 And he has done me all this shame. He has served the emperor for long, As he is fearfully strong And of great might. He is so eager to fight That there’s no battle he enters Where he doesn’t have victory, without fail. In this world there is no man Who dares face against him, Earl, baron, or knight; He is so forbidding in appearance That if he looked on anyone with wrath His heart would quake. And for Sir Berard’s craftiness The emperor has made him his steward To keep order about his land. There is no duke in all this country Who might withstand his orders, So greatly is he feared. If a man is loved by him, No matter how poor a family he is from, If he grovels to the steward He will soon makes him rich— Duke, earl, baron, or knight— With a great retinue to stand with him! And if a man is hated by him, No matter how wealthy in holdings he is, He banishes him out of the land. He is so forbidding in appearance That if he looked on anyone with wrath His heart would shake. And for Sir Berard’s craftiness The emperor has made him his steward To keep order about his land. There is no duke in all this country Who might withstand his orders, So greatly is he feared. If a man is loved by him, No matter how poor a family he is from, If he grovels to the steward He will soon makes him rich— Duke, earl, baron, or knight— With a great retinue to stand with him! And if a man is hated by him, No matter how wealthy in holdings he is, He banishes him out of the land. He risks being dismembered As quickly as he might be slain, Or driven entirely to ruin. So it happened that our emperor Held an assembly of stately honor.

30 Paní: A medieval penny was not a trivial coin but enough for a peasant’s dinner. It could be divided into halfpence (½d) and farthings (¼d). See also the note for Amis and Amiloun, 1821.

31 As with Sir Bevis and Saber (see note to line 323), there is often a special closeness between nephews and maternal uncles in medieval literature. Some academics have posited that primitive Germanic culture was more matrilineal. See also Stephen O. Glosecki, “Beowulf and the Wills: Traces of Totemism?” Philological Quarterly 78:1/2 (1999): 15-47.
For his erls he sent his sond.
Y'come thider with michel prede
With an hundred knightes bi mi side
At nede with me to stonde.

“And when Y come unto the court
The steward with wicked pount
To me he gan to reke.
He bicleped me of his emes ded
And seyd he was sleyrn thurth mi red;
On me he wald be wreke.
And when ich herd that chesoun
Of the doukes deth Otoun
Mine hert wald tobreke.

To th’emperour Y layd mi wedde an heighe
To defende me of that felonie
That he to me gan speke.
“No wonder thei Y war fordrugde;
Th’emperour tok bothe our wedde
As Y thee telle may
For in alle the court was ther no wight,
Douk, erl, baroun, no knight,
That durst me borwe that day.
Th’emperour comand anon
Into his prisoun Y schuld be don
Withouten more delay.
Berard went and sesed mi lond,
Mine wiif he wald have driven to schond,
With sorwe sche fled oway.
“Than was ich with sorwe and care
Among min fomen nomen thare
And don in strong prisoun.
Min frendes token hem to rede,
To th’emperour comand anon

To pay for me ransoun
Th’emperour and Sir Berard
Delivered me bi a forward
And bi this enchesoun;
Y schuld seche mi felawe Gii
To defende ous of that felonie
Of the doukes deth Otoun.
“Out of this lond went Y me
And passed over the salty se,
In Inglond Y gan rive;

At Warwike ichim sought,
When Y com thider Y fond him nought
Wo was me olive.
No Sir Herhaud fond Y nought tare;

And sent his summons to his earls.
I came forth with proud dignity
With a hundred knights by my side
To stand with me in time of need.
And when I came into the court,
The steward, with wicked insolence,
Hurried up to me.
He accused me of his uncle’s death
And said he was killed through my urging.
And that he would be avenged on me.32
And when I heard that charge
Of Duke Otoun’s death,
My heart felt like it would break!
I hastened to give my word to the emperor
To defend myself against the felony
Of which he had accused me.
It is no wonder that I was terrified.
Though the emperor took both our pledges,
As I can tell you,
In all the court there was no one,
Duke, earl, baron, or knight,
Who dared act as guarantor for me that day.
The emperor commanded at once
That I should be put into his prison
Without any more delay.
Berard went and seized my lands,
And would have brought my wife to shame
Had she not fled away in tears.
There I was in misery and anguish,
Standing among my enemies,
And then put in the strong prison.
My friends took counsel together.
They sought out and pleaded
With the emperor to pay ransom for me.
The emperor and Sir Berard
Released me on agreement
And by this condition:
I should look for my brother Guy
To defend us from the felony
Of Duke Otoun’s death.
I went out of these lands
And passed over the salty sea,
And disembarked in England.
I looked for him at Warwick.
When I arrived there I did not find him.
It was woe to be alive!
Nor did I find Sir Herhaud there.

32 While Berard acts wrongly and maliciously in blaming Sir Thierry, the right for close kin to avenge a death (the original sense of the word vendetta) was acceptable and only gradually superseded by modern practices of state monopoly on force. The Holy Roman Empire’s reichstag at Worms still found it necessary to abolish blood feuds by edict (Ewiger Landfriede) in 1495.
To seche Gyes sone he is fare  
That was stollen with strive.  
Therfore Y wot that Gii is ded,  
For sorwe can Y me no red -  
Mine hert wil breke o five.”  
Sir Gii biheld Tirri ful right

1850
That whilom was so noble a knight  
And lord of michel mounde.  
His bodi was sumtim wele yschredde,  
Almost naked it was bihede  
With sorwe and care ful bounde.  
His legges that wer sumtime hosed wel  
Tobrosten he seighe hem everidel.  
“Allas,” seyd Gii, “that stonde!”  
For sorwe that he hadde tho  
Word might he speke no mo

1860
Bot fel aswon to grounde.  
Sir Tirri anon com to him than  
And in his armes up him nam  
And cleped opon him thare.  
―Man,‖ he said, ―what aileth thee?  
Thou art ivel at aise so t
henketh me,  
Hard it is thi fare.‖  
Sir Gii answerd therafter long,  
―This ivel greveth me so strong  
In erthe Y wold Y ware,  
For sethen that Y was first man  
Nas never sorwe on me cam  
That greved me so sare.”  
“Than,” seyd Tirri, “felawe, ywis,  
Today a yer gon it is  
Out of this lond Y went  
To seche Gii mi gode frende.  
Y no finde nought fer no hende,  
Therfore icham al schent.  
For now it is teld me our emperer

1870
Hath taken a parlament of this maner  
For mi love verrament  
That douk no erl in his lond be  
That he no schal be at that semblé  
For to here mi jugement.  
“And now no lenge abide Y no may  
That ne me bihoveth hom this day  
Other forto lese min heved.  
Th‘emperour ichave mi treuthe uylight  
Y schal bring Sir Gii tonight

1880
To fight again that qued  
To fende ous of that felonie

1890
To seche Gyes sone he is fare  
That was stollen with strive.  
Therfore Y wot that Gii is ded,  
For sorwe can Y me no red -  
Mine hert wil breke o five.”  
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Almost naked it was bihede  
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In erthe Y wold Y ware,  
For sethen that Y was first man  
Nas never sorwe on me cam  
That greved me so sare.”  
―Than,‖ seyd Tirri, ―felawe, ywis,  
Today a yer go
n it is  
Out of this lond Y went  
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n it is  
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Y no finde nought fer no hende,  
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That ne me bihoveth hom this day  
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Y schal bring Sir Gii tonight

1880
To fight again that qued  
To fende ous of that felonie

33 Guy’s son Reinbroun is kidnapped by merchants and found by Herhaud in other versions of the story.

34 For mi love verrament: A curious line which is perhaps sarcasm, unless something more like ‘concern’ or ‘attention’ is intended by love.
| 1900 | “Alas,” thought Gii, “that ich stounde
That Tirri is thus brought to grounded;
So gode felawe we were.”
He thought, “Might Y mete that douke
His heved Y schul smite fro the bouke
Or hong him bi the swere.
Y no lete for al this warldes won
That Y no schul the traitour slon
To wreke Tirri mi fere.”
“Tirri,” seyd Gii, “lat be thi thought.
In truth, they do not help you at all.
They will ruin you for sorrow.
We will go together to the court
And we will hear good news there;
God may send such grace to us.
They made their way to the court.
And as those noble knights
Went to the court in their journey,
They were brave and devoted.
“Alas,” said Sir Thierry,
“I must rest before I continue on,
Or my life’s breath will leap away from me.”
“By God, brother,” said Sir Guy,
“Lie down and I will sit by you
And support your fair head.”
And after he said this,
Thierry laid his head on Guy’s lap
And he soon fell asleep.
And when Sir Thierry had fallen asleep,
Sir Guy beheld him and began to weep
And made great mourning.
Then he saw an ermine appear from his mouth,
As swift as the wind that blows on clouds,
As white as a lily on the lake. | 1910 | Ywis, it helpeth thee right nought,
For sorwe it wil thee schende.
To court go we bothe yfere,
Gode tidinges we schul ther here
Swiche grace God may sende.
Have gode hert, drede thee no del
For God schal help thee ful wel
So curteys He is and hende.”
Ywis, it helpeth thee right nought,
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Gode tidinges we schul ther here
Swiche grace God may sende.
Have gode hert, drede thee no del
For God schal help thee ful wel
So curteys He is and hende.” |

35 An ermine com of his mouthe: This bizarre scene would have been highly meaningful and symbolic. TEAMS notes that this is the only romance where an ermine emerges out of someone’s mouth. The ermine was seen as embodying chastity and purity, and Queen Elizabeth I, the virgin queen, was painted holding an ermine by William Segar in 1585. Although Thierry is married, he is innocent of the murder.
To an hille he ran withouten obade,
At the hole of the roche in he glade;
Gii wonderd for that sake.
And when he out of that roche cam
Into Tirries mouthe he nam,
Anon Tirri gan wake.
Sir Gii was wonderd of that sight
And Tirri sat up anonright
And biheld Gii opon.
Than seyd Tirri, “Fader of Heven,
Sir pilgrim, swiche a wonder sweven
Such a wondrous dream,
That on that hill which rises above,
Which you can see with your eye,
I dreamed that I was moving
And I went into a hole,
And I found treasure richer than
Any in the world, I believe.
Beside that treasure lay a dragon,
And on it was a burnished sword
With the scabbard ornately carved.
In the hilt were many precious stones,
Shining as bright as any sun;
No need to swear on it!
And I dreamed Guy sat by my head
And he wrapped his coat over me
As you did for me earlier.
May the Lord be merciful! If it were so,
I would have more riches
Than ever yet since I was born.”
“Now, brother,” said Guy, “By my honor,
That dream will bring great joy to you
And I will interpret it fully.
Through God you will recover your lands.
Trust well in God, though you are poor,
And you will fare all the better.
Now we will make our way to the hill
Where you dreamed the treasure lay,
And you will lead me inside.
Now may God, who shaped all mankind,
Permit that we might find that fortune.
It would help us in our need.”
The two knights rose up
And made their way to the hill,
And they went straight in
And found the cache and the dragon
And the sword of gleaming steel,
Just as Thierry saw in his dream.
Sir Guy drew out the sword at once,

Lappe: Here Sir Guy’s upper legs are not meant, but the older sense of the folds of his coat or skirt, which he wraps around Thierry as he sleeps.
And alle the pleynes therof it schon
As it were light of leven.

1990
“Lord,” seyd Gii, “Y thanke Thi sond
Y seighe never are swiche a brond;
Y wot it com fram Heven.”
Sir Gii gan the hilt bihold
That richeliche was graven with gold,
Of charbukel the pomel.
Into the sckaweberk ogain he it dede
And seyd to Tirri in that s
sted,
―Bi God and Seyn Mighel,
Of alle this riche tresore
Y no kepe therof no more
Bot this brond of stiel.”

37 The rhyme scheme (aabccbddbeeb) is broken here, suggesting three missing lines, although there is no break or visual damage in Auchinleck at this point.

2000
Y no kepe therof no more
Bot this brond of stiel.”

2005
To courtward tho knightes went
To aspie after the parlement;
For drede wald thai nought lete.
Ac Tirri was aferd ful sare
Of his fomen be knowen thare
In the cité yif he sete.
Therfore thai toke her ostel gode
At an hous withouten the toun stode
Al bi a dern strete.
Of al night Gii slepe nought,
So michel his hert was ever in thought
With Douk Berard to mete.
Erlich amorwe than ros Gii
And bisought God and our Levedi
He schuld scheld him fro blame

2010
And seyd to Sir Tirri the hende,
“Kepe me wele this sward, leve frende,
Til Y sende therfore bi name,
And Y schal go to court this day
And yif Y the douke mete may
Y schal gret him with grame;
And yif he say ought bot gode,
Bi Him that schadde for ous His blod
Hit tit a warld schame.”
Gii goth to toun with michel hete,
Th’eavour fram chirche he gan mete
And gret him with anour.
“Lord,” seyd Gii, “that with hond
Made wode, water, and lond,
Save thee, sir emperour.
Icham a man of fer cuntré
And of thi gode, par charité,
Ich axse to mi socour.”
Th’eavour seyd, “To court come

And all of its surfaces shone
As if it were sparks of lightning.
I never before saw such a blade.
I know it comes from Heaven.”
Sir Guy inspected the hilt
Which was richly engraved with gold,
With a pommel of carbuncle-stone.
He put it back into the scabbard
And said to Thierry in that moment,
“By God and Saint Michael,
Of all this rich treasure,
I will keep no more of it
Than this sword of steel.”

The two knights continued toward the court
To seek out the parliament.
They would not turn away out of dread.
But Thierry was sorely afraid
Of being recognized by his foes
If he set foot in the city,
Therefore they took their lodgings
In an inn on the edge of the town
Along a secluded street.
All night long Guy did not sleep,
So much was his heart always in thought
On meeting Duke Berard.
Guy rose early in the morning,
And prayed to God and our Lady
That they would shield him from sin,
And said to Sir Thierry the gracious,
“Keep this sword well for me, dear friend,
Until I send for it by name,
And I will go to court today.
And if I might encounter the duke,
I will greet him with hostility.
And if he says anything lacking respect,
By He who shed His blood for us,
He will be shamed in public for it.”
Guy went to town with great haste.
He met the emperor returning from church
And greeted him with honor.
“Lord,” said Guy, “Who with His hand
Made the woods, water, and land,
Save you, Sir Emperor.
I am a man from distant lands.
And from your bounty, for charity’s sake,
I ask for your assistance.”
The emperor said, “Come to the court,
And of mi gode thou schalt have some
For love of Seyn Savour.”
To court thai went al and some,
Th’emperour dede Gii biforn him come,
“Pilgrim,” than seyd he,
“Thou art wel weri me thenketh now.
Fram wiche londes comestow?
For thi fader soule telle me.”
“Sir,” seyd Gii, “ich understond
Ichave ben in mani lond
Biyond the Grekis Se:
In Jerusalem and in Surry,
In Costentin and in Perce
A gode while have ich be.”
“Sir pilgrim,” seyd th’emperour fre,
“What speketh man in that lond of me
When thou com thennesward?”
Sir Gii answerd, “Bi the gode Rode
Men speketh thee ther ful litel gode
Bot tidinges schrewed and hard;
For thou hast schent so th’erl Tirri
And other barouns that ben hendy
For love of thi steward.
Gret sinne it is to thee
To stroye so thi barouns fre
Al for a fals schreward.”
“The douk herd him speke so
As a wilde bore he
lepe him to
His costes for to schawe,
With his fest he wald have smiten Gii
Bot barouns held him owy,
He seyd to Gii, “Vile traitour,
If you weren’t before the emperor,
Even if I would be beheaded for it,
I would shake you by your beard
So that all your teeth would be rocked,
For you are an utter criminal!
By your looks men can see
That you have been a traitor for many a day.
God give you shame and disgrace!
If I can get a hold of you,
You will be put to a miserable death,
As a traitor to lie in shackles.
You will be in such a place
That for seven years you will not see
Either your feet or hands!
This is how men should punish foul wretches
For slandering good barons
Who are lordings in their land.”
“Ow sir,” seyd Gii, “ertow has?
Y nist no nar hou it was
Bi the gode Rode.
And now Y wot that thou art he,
Thou art uncurteys so thenketh me.
Thou farst astow wer wode,
And art a man of fair parage
Ycom thou art of heighe linage
And of gentil blod.
It is thee litel curteysie
To do me swiche vilanie
Bisfor th’emperour ther Y stode.
“And for thee wil Y wond no thing,
Y schal telle thee the sothe withouten lesing
Bisfor his barouns ichon,
That with gret wrong and sinne, ywis,
Th’erl Tirri deshirrite is
And other gode mani on.
A thousand men ichave herd teld
Bothe in toun and in feld
As wide as icache gon
That he is giltles of that dede
Thou berst on him with falshede,
Thin eme he schuld slon.”

The douk Berrard was wroth,
Bi Jhesu Crist he swore his oth.
―Y wald that thou were Guy
Or that thou so douhti were
Thou durst fight for him here!
God gaf it and our Levedi!‖
Sir Gii answerd, ―Bi Seyn Savour,
Drede thee nothing, vile traitour,
Therto icham redy.
Bi thou wroth, be thou gladde,
To th’emperour Y gif mi wedde
To fight for th’erl Tirri.”
The douk Berard ther he stode
Stared on Gii as he wer wode
And egrelich seyd his thought.
―Pilgrim,” he seyd, ―Thou art ful stout,
Ywis, thi wordes that er so prout
Schal be ful dere abought.
Y warn thee wele,” he seyd tho,
―That thine heved thou schalt forgo
Whereos thou may be sought.”
Sir Gii seyd, “Than thou it hast
Than make therof thi bast;
For yete no getes thou it nought.”
Bisfor th’emperour than come Gii
And seyd, “Sir Berard of Pavi
Is a man of mighi dede,
It seems to me you lack all manners.
You carry on as if you were mad,
Though you are a man of good parentage
And come from high lineage
And of noble blood.
You show little grace
To do me such villainy
Before the emperor where I stand.
And for you I will hold nothing back.
I will tell you the truth without lying
Before each of these barons,
That Earl Thierry has been dispossessed
With great injustice and sin indeed,
Along with many other good men.
I have heard a thousand men say,
Both in town and in the fields,
As far and wide as I have gone,
That he is guiltless of that deed
Which you lay on him with deceit,
That he had killed your uncle.”
Duke Berard was enraged:
He swore his oath by Jesus Christ:
“I wish that you were Guy
Or that you were so fearless
To dare to fight for him here!
May God and our Lady grant it!”
Sir Guy retorted, “By our Holy Savior,
Have no doubt, foul traitor,
I am ready to do it.
Whether you like it or not,
I pledge my oath to the emperor
To fight for Earl Thierry.”
Duke Berard, where he stood,
Glared at Guy as if he were a madman
And gushed his thoughts impatiently:
“Pilgrim,” he said, “you are very brazen.
Indeed, your words that are so proud
Will be paid for dearly.
I warn you well,” he continued,
“You will lose your head
Wherever you might be found.”
Sir Guy snipped, “When you have done it,
Then you can boast about it.
As of yet you have got nothing.”
Guy then came before the emperor
And said, “Sir Berard of Pavia
Is a man of mighty deeds,
38 Berard likely has the customary right to set the terms of the vendetta and to demand Thierry face him, and thus Guy’s gambit of goading him into accepting Guy as a substitute. This flying scene seemingly does not square with Guy’s purported goals of penitence and humility, but the fun of his needling Berard was perhaps too much temptation for the poet to pass up.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2140</td>
<td>And fram fer cuntres comen icham And am a sely pouer man; Y no have here no sibbered No Y no have wepen no armour bright; For the love of God Almighty Finde me armour and stede.” Th’emperour answerd, “Bi Jhesu, Pilgrim, thou schalt have anow Of al that thee is nede.” The douk Berard thennes he went;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2150</td>
<td>His hert was in strong turment He no wist what he do might. Th’emperour cleped his douther a mayde, “Leve douther,” to hir he seyd, “Kepe this pilgrim tonight.” Sche him underfenge ful mildeliche And dede bathe him ful softliche, In silke sche wald him dight. Ac therof was nothing his thought; Bot of gode armour he hir bisought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2160</td>
<td>With the douke Berard to fight. Amorwe aros that emperour Erls, barouns of gret honour, To chirche with him thai yede. And when the barouns assembled was Than might men sen in that plas Togider a fair ferred. Thider com the douk Berard, Prout and stern as a lipard, Wele yarmed on stede</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2170</td>
<td>And priked right as he wer wode Among the barouns ther thai stode Batayle forto bede. The maiden forgat never a del The pilgrim was armed ful wel With a gode glaive in honde And a swift-ernand stede; Al wrin sche dede him lede The best of that lond. Than Sir Gii him bithought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2180</td>
<td>The gode swerd forgat he nought That he in tresour fond. He sent therafter priveliche - No man wist litel no miche - And Thiir sent him the brond. When that mayden hadde graithed Gii Wele ydight and ful richely Men gan on him biheld. Sché ledde him forth swithe stille, To th’emperour with gode wille</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2190</td>
<td>Sché taught him forto weald. Than seyd th’emperour hende and fre, “Lordinges, listen now to me Bothe yong and eld:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This knight that ye se now here
Hath taken batail in strong maner
To forto fight in feld.
“This knight,” he seyd, “tho stount me bi
Wil fight for th’erl Sir Tirri -
For nothing wil he wond -
And defende him of that felonie
Ogain t’he douk Berard of Pavi
That he berth him an hond;
For Tirri is out of lond went
To seche Gii verrament
That for him might stond.
This day is sett bituen hem tuo
Or be deshirrite forevermo
And flemed out of lond.
“Bot now is comen here this knight,
Ogain Berard hath taken the fight
For noth
ing wil he flen.
Ac, lordinges,” he seyd, “everichon
Where the batayl schal be don
Loke where it may best ben.”
Than loked thai it schuld be
In a launde under the cité.
Thider in thai went biden.
Mani man bad God that day
Help the pilgrim as He wele may
Tho douk Berard to slen.
On hors lopen tho knightes prest
And lopen togider til schaftes brest
That strong weren and trewe;
And her gerthes brusten that strong were
Out of her sadels threwe.
After thai drough her swerdes gode
And leyd on as thai were wode
That were gode and newe.
And astow sest the fir on flint,
The stem out of her helmes stint
So hetelich thai gun hewe.
Wele wer armed tho knightes stout
Bot he had more yren him about,
That fals Berardin.
Tuay hauberkes he was in weved
And tuay helmes opon his heved
Was wrought in Sarayine.
Opon his schulder henge a duble scheld
Beter might non be born in feld,
A gode swerd of stiel fine.
Mani man therwith his liif had lorn;
It was sumtim therbiform
The kings Costentine.
Strong batayl held tho knightes bold
That alle that ever gan hem bihold
Thai seyden hem among
The pilgrim was no earthly man;  
It was an angel come from Heaven  
To stand for Thierry in battle!  
For Berard had brought down  
Many a good earl and many a baron  
With great injustice.  
Therefore God had sent, surely,  
An angel out of Heaven’s bliss  
To slay that wicked traitor.  
All of the people in that city,  
Small and great, high and low,  
Had come there to see the battle.  
But Thierry hid in a church  
And continually beseeched God, in truth,  
That He would help and support him.  
When he heard the news that the pilgrim  
Was fighting against Duke Berard  
To help him in his need,  
He earnestly wished to go there;  
But the thought of recognition  
By his enemies filled him with terror.  
But nonetheless he rose up then,  
And with great anxiousness and distress  
He went there very quickly.  
When he came to the place  
Where the battle was decreed  
He began to walk among the spectators.  
And when he saw the duke so strong  
And his weapons repeatedly smashed,  
In his heart he was full of joy.  
And when he saw his blood spill out  
He thanked God with firm will:  
........................................  
“Lord, have mercy!” Thierry exclaimed,  
“This is not the pilgrim I met yesterday  
Who is so valiantly dressed.  
He was a feeble, poor fellow,  
Simple, downtrodden, and hungry,  
And this man is of great strength.  
I know it is no mortal man!  
I am reminded of Guy when I see him,  
He was so formidable in combat.  
If my friend Guy were not dead now,  
I would swear that it was him,  
They are so alike in appearance.”  
He went back into the church  
And fell on his knees in that place,  
And he called on Jesus Christ,  
That He would help the pilgrim  
Who was fighting against Duke Berard,  

| The pilgrim was non erthely man; For Tirri batayle to fong. For mani gode erl and mani baroun Berard hath ybrought adoun With wel michel wrong. Therfore hath God sent, ywis, An angel out of heven - blis - To sle that traitour strong. Al the folk in that cité was, Litel and michel, more and las, To se the batayl thai yede. Bot Tirri in a chirche liis And ever he bisought God, ywis, He schuld him help and spede. When he herd telle that the pilgrim Faught ogain the douke Berardin To help him at his nede. Wel fain he wald thider gon Bot for knoweing of his fon Wel sore he gan him drede. Ac natheles he ros up tho And michel care and michel wo And thider he went wel swithe. When he com to the plas Ther the bataile loked was Amonges hem he gan lithe And when he seyghe the douk so strong And his armes tohewe among, In his hert he was ful blithe. And tho he seyghe his blod spille, God he thonked wi gode wille ........................................ “Lord, merci,” Tirri gan say, “This is nought the pilgrim Y met yisterday That is so richeliche dight. He was a feble pouer body Sely, messays, and hungrri, And he is of michel might. Y trow non erthelich man it be, On Giî Y thenke when ichim se So douhti he was in fight. Yif Giî mi felawe now ded nere Ich wald sigge that he it were So liche thai ben of sight.” Into chirche ogain he yede And fel on knees in that stede And Jhesus Crist he bisought He schuld help the pilgrim That faught ogain Douk Berardin | That the pilgrim was no earthly man; It was an angel from Heven cam For Tirri batayle to fong. For mani gode erl and mani baroun Berard hath ybrought adoun With wel michel wrong. Therfore God sent, ywis, An angel out of heven’s bliss To sle that traitour strong. Al the folk in that cité was, Litel and michel, more and las, To se the batayl thai yede. Bot Tirri in a chirche liis And ever he bisought God, ywis, He schuld him help and spede. When he herd telle that the pilgrim Faught ogain the douke Berardin To help him at his nede. Wel fain he wald thider gon Bot for knoweing of his fon Wel sore he gan him drede. Ac natheles he ros up tho And michel care and michel wo And thider he went wel swithe. When he com to the plas Ther the bataile loked was Amonges hem he gan lithe And when he seyghe the douk so strong And his armes tohewe among, In his hert he was ful blithe. And tho he seyghe his blod spille, God he thonked wi gode wille ........................................ “Lord, have mercy!” Thierry exclaimed, “This is not the pilgrim I met yesterday Who is so valiantly dressed. He was a feeble, poor fellow, Simple, downtrodden, and hungry, And this man is of great strength. I know it is no mortal man! I am reminded of Guy when I see him, He was so formidable in combat. If my friend Guy were not dead now, I would swear that it was him, They are so alike in appearance.” He went back into the church And fell on his knees in that place, And he called on Jesus Christ, That He would help the pilgrim Who was fighting against Duke Berard, |

39 Again there is no lacuna in the manuscript, but a line is missing from the rhyme scheme.

348
That miche wo hath him wrought.
Hard togider gun thai fight
From the morwe to the night
That thai rest hem nought.
And when hem failed light of day
To th’emperour thai hem brought.
“SIR emperour,” thai sayd anon,
“What schul we with this knightes don?"
At thi wille schal it be.”
Th’emperour clept to him tho
Four barouns that his trust was to.
“Lordinges,” than sayd he,
“Kepe me wele the Douk Berard,
And bring him tomorwe bi a forward,
Open al your fe;
And Y schal kepe the pilgrim tonight;
Til tomorwe that it is day light
He schal bileve with me.”
Than departed this batayle,
Tho four barouns withouten fail
Understode Berard to kepe
And th’emperour toke the pil
In a chaumber to loken him
With serjaunce wise and yepe.
The douke Berard forgot him nought;
Of a foule tresoun he him bithought:
Four knightes he gan clepe.
“For mi love,” he sayd, “goth tonight
Ther the pilgrim lith ful right
And sleth him in his sellep.”
Thai armed hem swithe wel
Bothe in iren and in stiel
And went hem forth in hast,
Into the chaumber thai went anon.
The pilgrims kepers everichon
Lay and slepe ful fast.
To the pilgrim thai went ful right
And left up the bedde with her might
Tho four traitours unwrast.
To the se thai beren him
And bothe bed and the pilgrim
Into the see thai cast.
To Sir Berard thai went anon
And teld him hou thai hadden don,
Therof he was ful fawe.
“Sir,” thai sayd, “be nought adred.
Bothe the pilgrim and the bed
Into the se we han ythrawe.”
The pilgrim waked and loked an heyge,
Who had brought him so much misery.
They fought together fiercely
From the morning to the night
And they gave themselves no rest.
And when the light of day failed the crowd,
They could not decide what to do.
They brought the warriors to the emperor.
“SIR Emperor,” they said at once,
“What should we do with these knights?
It will be as you will.”
The emperor then summoned
Four barons that he had trust in.
“Lordinges,” he said,
“Keep Duke Berard well for me,
And bring him tomorrow by your agreement,
Upon forfeit of all your goods,
And I will keep the pilgrim tonight.
Until tomorrow when it is daylight,
He will stay with me.”
They departed from the battleground.
The four barons, without fail,
Agreed to keep Berard,
And the emperor took the pilgrim
To lock him in a chamber,
With sergeants who were wise and alert.
Duke Berard did not forget him;
He devised a foul act of treachery.
He called four knights to himself.
“For my love,” he said, “go tonight,
Straight to where the pilgrim lies,
And kill him in his sleep.”
They armed themselves well,
Both in iron and in steel,
And went forth in haste.
They immediately went into the chamber,
Where each of the pilgrim’s keepers
Lay sleeping soundly.
They went straight to the pilgrim
And lifted the bed with all their might,
Those four evile wretches.
They carried him to the sea,
And both bed and pilgrim
Were cast into the ocean.
They soon returned to Sir Berard
And told him how they had made out;
He was very pleased to hear it.
“Sir,” they said, “have no fear.
We have thrown both the pilgrim
And the bed into the sea.”
The pilgrim woke up and gazed on high;
The sterres on the heven he seighe,  
The water about him drawe.  

| 2350 | Thei he was ferd no wonder it nis;  
|      | Non other thing he no seygh, ywis,  
|      | Bot winde and wateres wawe.  
|      | “Lord,” seyd Gii, “God Almighty  
|      | That winde and water and al thing dight  
|      | On me have now pité.  
|      | Whi is me fallen thus strong cumbring?  
|      | And Y no fight forto win nothing -  
|      | Noither gold no fe,  
|      | For no cité no no castel -  

| 2360 | Bot for mi felawe Y loved so wel  
|      | That was of gret bounté,  
|      | For he was sumtyim so douhti  
|      | And now he is so pouer a bodi.  
|      | Certes it reweth me.”  
|      | Now herkeneth a litel striif  
|      | Hou He saved the pilgrims liif,  
|      | Jhesu that sitt in trone,  
|      | With a fischer that was comand  
|      | In the se fische takeand  

| 2370 | Bi himself alon.  
|      | He seth that bed floter him by  
|      | “On Godes halil!” he gan to cri,  
|      | “What artow? Say me son.”  
|      | The pilgrim his heved upplight  
|      | And crip to him anonright  
|      | And made wel reweli mon.  
|      | “Gode man,” than seyd he,  
|      | “Y leve on God in Trinité  
|      | The sothe thou schalt now sen.  

| 2380 | Understode thou ought of the batayl hard  
|      | Bituen the pilgrim and Sir Berard  
|      | Hou thai foughten bituen?"  
|      | The fischer seyd, “Y seighe the fight  
|      | Fro the morwe to the night,  
|      | For nothing wald thai flen.  
|      | Th’emperour comand tho  
|      | Thai schuld be kept bothe tuo  
|      | Tomorwe bring hem oghen.”  
|      | “Icham,” he seyd, “the pilgrim  

| 2390 | That faught with the douke Berardin  
|      | For Tirri the hendi knight.  
|      | Yistreven we wer deled ato,  
|      | In a chaumber Y was do  
|      | With serjaunce wise and wight.  
|      | Hou Ich com her no wot Y nought;  

40 As TEAMS notes, this scene forms “the structural mid-point of the narrative,” as Guy contemplates the stars just as he does at the beginning of the story. The thematic difference is that Guy now lies in God’s hands as opposed to acting entirely by his own volition.
For His love, who shaped this world,
Save me if you are able.”
The fisherman quickly took him into his boat
And brought him home to his house
And saved his life that night.
The emperor rose in the morning, in fact,
And heard his mass at the church
In the first hours of the day.
And he went into his hall
And straightaway asked for the steward
And the pilgrim, without delay.
The four barons did not forget their duty;
They brought Duke Berard forth,
Ready and armed for the play of battle.
And the pilgrim’s keepers came, every one,
And said to the emperor, by Saint John,
The pilgrim was gone.
The emperor was very angry.
He swore his oath, that by his father’s soul,
They should be hanged and quartered.
“For God’s love,” they pleaded, “have mercy.
This Duke Berard of Pavia
Has put him to death.”
The emperor said, “By Saint Martin, 41
Have you done this, cheating Berard,
To have the pilgrim killed?
Present him to me, dead or alive,
Or you will stand condemned in my court
Through the judgment of law.”
Duke Berard grew furious and upset;
He answered the emperor then
With burning rage,
“I have long served you, Sir Emperor,
And kept your lands with great honor,
And now you devise threats.
I don’t give a cherry-stone for it!
I will go home to Lombardy
With all the army I can raise.
I will return to Germany to hurt you.
For all your land, you can be sure
That I will not leave you with one foot!”
When the emperor heard that
And took in his threats,
He ordered with bold words
That he should get out of his court.
And Berard answered right away
That he would certainly not.
The fisherman discreetly came in
And gently nudged the emperor;

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41 Seyn Martin: Saint Martin of Tours (316-397), who is perhaps a symbolic choice as he ended his life as a voluntary beggar himself when he retired from the bishopric to monastic life.
His tale to him he told.
“Sir emperor,” he seyd, “listen to me.
Of the pilgrim ichil telle thee
Yif thou me herken wold.”
“Fischer,” seyd th’emperour fre,
“Of the pilgrim telle thou me
Yif thou the sothe can sayn.”
“For sothe,” he seyd, “Y can ful wel
Y schal thee leyghen never a del;
Therof icham ful fain.
Yistreven withouten lesing
Y went to the se of fisheing
Mine nettes forto layn.
A bedde Y fond ther floterand
And theron a knight liggeand,
A man of michel mayn.
“And ich him axed what he were.
He told me the sothe there
With worde
s fre and hende.
‗Icham,’ he seyd, ‗the pilgrim
That faught with the douke Berardin
Yisterday to the nende.’
Y tok him into mi bot anon
And to min hous Y lad him hom
And kept him as mi frende.
Yif thou levest nought he is thare
Do sum serjaunt thider fare
And ther ye may him fende.”
Th’emperour sent after him tho
With the fischer and other mo
And brought him saunfayle.
Thai were don togider blive
With hard strokes forto drive
Thai gun hem to asayle.
Wel hard togider gun thi fight.
With her brondes that wer bright
Thai hewe hauberck of mayle.
Thus togider gun thi play
Til it was the heyghen midday
With wel strong batyle.
The douk Berard was egre of mode,
He smot to Gi as he wer wode
His liif he wende to winne.
He hit him on the helm on hight
That alle the flores feir and bright
He dede hem fleyghen atuinne.
The nasel he carf atuo
And the venteyle he dede also
Right to his bare chinne.

He told his tale to him.
“Sir Emperor,” he said, “listen to me.
I will tell you about the pilgrim
If you will give ear to me.”
“Fisherman,” said the noble emperor,
“Tell me about the pilgrim,
If you can speak the truth.”
“For sure,” he answered, “I can full well.
I will not lie to you about any detail;
About that I am very eager.
Last night, without a lie,
I went to the sea for fishing
And to put out my nets.
I found a bed floating there
And a knight lying there on it,
A man of great might.
And I asked him who he was;
He told me the truth there
With words that were noble and dignified.
‘I am,’ he said, ‘The pilgrim
That fought with Duke Berard
Yesterday to the ninth hour.’
I took him into my boat at once
And brought him home to my house
And kept him as I would a friend.
If you do not believe he is there,
Have some officer sent forth
And there you will find him.”
The emperor sent for him then.
The fisherman and others with him
Went and brought him back, without fail.
The two knights were immediately set together.
They began to assault each other,
Charging with hard strokes.
They fought together ferociously
With blades that were bright,
Hacking at coats of mail.
In this way they battled together
With fierce combat
Until it was high noon.
Duke Berard was in furious spirits;
He struck at Guy as if he were berserk,
Hoping to take his life.
He hit him on the helmet in a rush
So that all the flowers, fair and bright,
Were made to scatter apart.
He carved the nose-guard in two
And cut the face-guard as well
Right down to his bare chin.

42 For a third time the rhyme scheme is broken, but the manuscript has no defect.
Sir Guy was instantly infuriated, and he slammed Berard on the helmet. He had no space to withstand it, for he carved both helmets in two and split his head as well in the middle of the face. Through all his body the sword ran down into the earth a good half a foot; the men in that place saw that. The soul went out from the body there. The people of the city were overjoyed; they gave thanks for our Lord’s grace.

Then Sir Guy came before the emperor: “I have avenged Earl Thierry you can now see the fact of that—and and defended him from that crime against Duke Berard of Pavia, who was so determined and keen. Therefore I ask the truth from you, whether Thierry will be acquitted and have his land again, and whoever stands against this will be shamed by my own hand, he may be certain of that.” The emperor said, “For certain, you have vindicated Earl Thierry. You have done him great honor. Therefore, when he has come, he will have his lands, all and some, every bit of them.” Then Guy was glad and joyful and cast off his armor as quickly, intending to go after him. The emperor wished to clothe him in gold but he earnestly said he did not want it; he asked at once for his cloak. He went on his way to town to find Thierry if he could, who was in sorrow and burdened by cares. He took himself into a church and found him in a secluded place, lying on his knees on the ground. “Rise up, Thierry,” he said. “Now that I have found you, you will go to the court with me.” Thierry lifted up his head in alarm and said, “Pilgrim, have you betrayed me? alas, that very moment! alas, alas!” he then said, “What man can one have trust in

43 There is legitimate page damage here in the Auchinleck, and some letters have been reconstructed.
To choose as his comrade?
You, who seemed so steadfast,
Have betrayed me to the emperor,
And have decided to kill me.
It was an evil moment for me
When I told you my name.
Alas that I gave myself away!”
For the grief that he had then,
He could not speak one more word,
But stood and began to quake.
“Thierry,” said Guy, “have no fear.
You will hear some good news today,
Through the grace of God’s command.
The evil Duke Berard is dead;
He is buried under the city.
I killed him with my own hand.”
Then Thierry was overjoyed and glad.
Just as quickly they went to the court;
They would not delay for anything.
“Sir Emperor,” said Guy straightaway,
“Now Thierry has come home
To receive his lands.”

The emperor began to look upon him
And said to him with frank words,
“Are you Earl Thierry?
Where is your bold manner now,
You who used to be so courageous
And considered so hardy?”
“Yes, sir,” he said, “I am here.
I was once of great ability
And respected for my manliness.
And now I have lost everything
To look for my friend Sir Guy,
In great sorrow by evenings and mornings.
I have looked for him in many lands
But have never yet found anyone
Who could tell any news of him.
I know very well he is dead.
May God Almighty and Saint Michael
Carry his soul to bliss.
But now I am told that this pilgrim
Has killed Duke Berard.
I am very pleased for it.
Sir Emperor, I ask your mercy.
For the love of God and our Lady,
Grant me my lands under law.”
Thirty earls, all courteous,
And all the nobility in the palace
And many barons together
Cried for clemency to the brave emperor.
The emperor looked on him
And said, “Thierry, my friend,
I hereby endow you with all your lands
To hold with honor in your hand.

| 2550 | To chese to his make? | To choose as his comrade? |
| 2560 | To th’emperour me wraied hast, | You, who seemed so steadfast, |
| 2570 | To sele me thou hast take. | Have betrayed me to the emperor, |
| 2580 | In ivel time was it to me That Y mi name told to thee; | And have decided to kill me. |
| 2590 | For sorwe that he hadde tho | It was an evil moment for me |
| 2600 | Bot stode and gan to quake. | When I told you my name. |
| 2550 | “Tirri,” seyd Gii, “drede thee nothing, Thou schalt today here gode tiding Thurth grace of Godes sond. | Alas that I gave myself away!”
| 2560 | “Sir emperour,” seyd Gii anon, | For the grief that he had then, |
| 2570 | “Th’emperour on him gan bihold And seyd to him with wordes bold, | He could not speak one more word, |
| 2580 | “Ich have him sought in mani lond Ac never man yete ich fond Can telle of him no sawe. | But stood and began to quake. |
| 2600 | “Ich have him sought in mani lond Ac never man yete ich fond Can telle of him no sawe. | You will hear some good news today, |
| 2550 | “Sir emperour,” seyd Gii anon, | Through the grace of God’s command. |
| 2560 | “Th’emperour on him gan bihold And seyd to him with wordes bold, | The evil Duke Berard is dead;
| 2570 | “Ich have him sought in mani lond Ac never man yete ich fond Can telle of him no sawe. | He is buried under the city. |
| 2580 | “Ich have him sought in mani lond Ac never man yete ich fond Can telle of him no sawe. | I killed him with my own hand.”
| 2590 | “Ich have him sought in mani lond Ac never man yete ich fond Can telle of him no sawe. | Then Thierry was overjoyed and glad. |
| 2600 | “Ich have him sought in mani lond Ac never man yete ich fond Can telle of him no sawe. | Just as quickly they went to the court; |
| 2550 | “Sir emperour,” seyd Gii anon, | They would not delay for anything. |
| 2560 | “Th’emperour on him gan bihold And seyd to him with wordes bold, | “Sir Emperor,” said Guy straightaway, |
| 2570 | “Ich have him sought in mani lond Ac never man yete ich fond Can telle of him no sawe. | “Now Thierry has come home
To receive his lands.”
| 2580 | “Ich have him sought in mani lond Ac never man yete ich fond Can telle of him no sawe. | The emperor began to look upon him
And said to him with frank words, |
| 2590 | “Ich have him sought in mani lond Ac never man yete ich fond Can telle of him no sawe. | “Are you Earl Thierry?
Where is your bold manner now,
You who used to be so courageous
And considered so hardy?”
I was once of great ability
And respected for my manliness.
And now I have lost everything
To look for my friend Sir Guy,
In great sorrow by evenings and mornings.
I have looked for him in many lands
But have never yet found anyone
Who could tell any news of him.
I know very well he is dead.
May God Almighty and Saint Michael
Carry his soul to bliss.
But now I am told that this pilgrim
Has killed Duke Berard.
I am very pleased for it.
Sir Emperor, I ask your mercy.
For the love of God and our Lady,
Grant me my lands under law.”
Thirty earls, all courteous,
And all the nobility in the palace
And many barons together
Cried for clemency to the brave emperor.
The emperor looked on him
And said, “Thierry, my friend,
I hereby endow you with all your lands
To hold with honor in your hand,
Bi God and Seyn Martine.
Bifor mi barouns Y graunt thee
Steward of mi lond thou schalt be
As was the douke Berardine.”
Th’emperour kist him ful swete,
Forgaf him his wrethe and his hete
Bifor hem al there.
When th’emperour and th’erl were at on
The lordinges everichon

2610
Wele blithe of hertes were.
“Sir Tirri,” seyd th’emperour fre,
“Fo thi fader soule tel thou me
Astow art me leve and dere,
Whennes is this pilgrim?
Is he thin em or thi cosyin
That faught for thee here?‖
―Sir Emperour,‖ seyd Sir Tirri,
―So God me help and our Levedi
For sothe withouten fayle
Y no seighe never ere this
Bot this other day Y met with him
And told him mi conseyl.
He swore as tite bi Seyn Jon
To thi court he wald gon
The douk Berard to asayle.
Ich wend wel litel than, Y plight,
He hadde ben of michel might
To hold with him batayle.”
Th’emperour ded
Wele as a gode man
And Tirri into his chaumber he nam
And richeliche gan him schrede.
He fond him wepen and armour bright
And al that schuld falle to knight
And feffed him with prede
And fond him hors and stedes gode
Of al his lond the best stode
Hom with hi
m to lede.
Th’emperour wald the pilgrim ahold
Ac sikerliche he seyd he nold,
With Tirri hom he yede.
When Tirri was comen hom
The pilgrim he wald anon
Sesen in al his lond.
And he forske it al outright
For riches loved he no wight
For to hold in hond.
Th’erl as swithe his sond he sent
Over al his lond verrament
Til that his wif he fond.

2650
Tho was sche founder in an ile
In a nunri that while
For doute of Berardes bond.
Tho was Tirri a noble man
In al that lond better nas nan

By God and by Saint Martin.
And in front of my barons I proclaim
That you will be steward of my land
As Duke Berard was.”
The emperor kissed him in friendship
And let go his wrath and his anger
Before all of them there.
When the emperor and earl were at one,
Every one of the lordings
Was very pleased at heart.
“Sir Thierry,” said the noble emperor,
“If you are beloved and dear to me,
On your father’s soul tell me,
Where is this pilgrim from?
Is he your uncle or your cousin
Who fought for you here?”
“Sir Emperour,” said Sir Thierry,
“So help me God and our Lady,
In truth without fail,
I never saw this pilgrim before
Except the other day when I met him
And told him my troubles.
He swore as quickly that by Saint John,
He would go to your court
To confront Duke Berard.
I had little idea then, I swear,
He would be of such great strength
To prevail against him in battle.”
The emperor did as a good man does
And took Thierry into his chamber
And had him dressed richly.
He gave him weapons and shining armor
And all that befits a knight,
And furnished him with pride.
And he gave him a horse and fine steeds,
The best stock from all his lands,
For him to lead home with him.
The emperor wished to keep the pilgrim also,
But he earnestly said he would not stay;
He went home with Thierry.
When Thierry had arrived home,
He immediately wished to give
All his lands to the pilgrim.
But Sir Guy refused it all outright,
For he had no love at all for riches
To hold in his hand.
Just as swiftly, the earl sent his word
Over all of his lands, in truth,
Until his wife should be found.
Soon she was found on an island,
In a nunnery all that while,
For fear of Berard’s rule.
Then Thierry was a noble man!
In all that land there were none better,
As Y you tel may.
Destrud we al his enemis,
He liveth in michel joie and blis
Also a prince in play.
Anon Sir Gii him bithought
That lenger wald he duelle nought;
To Sir Thierry on a day
He seyd to him in that tide,
―Here nil Y no lenger abide,
Ich mot wende in mi way.‖
―O thing,‖ he seyd, ―Y pray thee,
Out of the cité go with me
Astow art hendi knight.
Alon we shul go bothe yfere
And swich tidinges thou schalt here
Thou schalt have wonder, aplight.‖
The earl him graunt with hert fre
And went with him out of that cité
In his way ful right.
And when thai wer thennes half a mile
Ther thai duelled a litel while
Tho gomes of michel might.
―Thierry,‖ seyd Gii, ―understond thou the,
Thou art unkinde so thenketh me
For Gii thi gode fere;
Whi wiltow him knowe nought?
Ywis, thou art ivel bithought,
No was he thee leve and dere?
Thenke he slough the douk Otoun
And brought thee out of his prisoun
And made thee quite and skere
And hou he fond thee ded almast
As he rode thurth a forest
With a rewely chere.
―And hou he socourd thi leman schene
And al the fifteen outlawes ken
He slough hem al on rawe
And slough the four knights radde
And thi bodi to toun ladde
To leche thi woundes ful fawe;
And he socourd thi fader in wer
And halp thee bothe nere and fer
Tho thou was fallen ful lawe.
And now Y slough Berard the strong.
Icham Gii, thou hast wrong.
When th'erl herd him speke so
Wepen he gan with eyghen to
And fel aswon to grounde.
―For Godes love,‖ he seyd, ―merci.
Ivel at ese now am Y
In sorwe and care ful bounde.
Ful wele might Y knowe thee ar now,
In al this world was man bot thou
As I can tell you.
His enemies were all destroyed.
He lived in great joy and peace,
Like a prince at his leisure.
Soon Sir Guy resolved to himself
That he would not dwell longer.
One day with Sir Thierry
He said to him at that time,
―I will no longer stay here.
I must go on my way.‖
―But one thing,‖ he said, ―I ask of you.
If you are a gracious knight,
Go out of the city with me.
We will go alone, the two of us,
And you will hear such news
That you will be amazed, in truth.‖
The earl agreed with a willing heart
And went with him out of the city,
Straight along his way.
And when they were out half a mile,
Those men of great might
Paused there for a little while.
―Thierry,‖ said Guy, ―Hear my words.
It seems to me that you are fickle
Towards Guy, your loyal friend.
Why have you not recognized him?
In truth, your memory serves you badly.
Was he not beloved and dear to you?
Think of how he killed Duke Otoun
And delivered you out of prison
And made you free and clear,
And how he found you nearly dead,
With a pitiable appearance,
As he rode through the forest.
And how he aided your shining lady,
And of the fifteen savage outlaws,
And how he slayed them in a row,
And swiftly killed the four knights.
And how he anxiously brought you to town
To have your wounds treated.
And he assisted your father in battle
And helped you both near and far,
Though you had fallen so low.
And now I have killed Berard the strong.
I am Guy. You do me wrong.
Why do you not know me?‖
When the earl heard him speak so
He began to weep with both eyes
And fell faint to the ground.
―For God’s love,‖ he said, ―forgive me.
I am sick at heart now,
In sorrow and overcome by guilt.
I might have known you full well before.
In all this world there is no man but you
Ogain Berard durst founde.
Merci, sir, par charité;
That ich have misknownen thee
Allas, allas, that stounde!
“Merci!” he crid on his knee,
Bothe for sorwe and for pité
Wepen he bigan.
He seygh e his legges brosten ich del
That whilom wer yhosed ful wel
More sorwe made never man.
Sir Gii went to him tho -
In his hert him was wo -
And in his armes up him nam.
Atuix hem was gret diol in that stounde,
Bothe thai fel aswon to grounde
For sorwe thai wex al wan.
―Merci,‖ seyd Sir Gii tho,
―You schalt bileve and Y schal go;
I entrust you to Heaven’s king.
But Ich have a sone, ywis
Y not whether he knight is
For he is only a youngster.
If he ever has need of you,
For my love, help him,
I ask you in every way.
I hope that he will be a good knight.
I pray to Jesus, full of might
That He will grant him His blessing.”
―For Gods love leve her stil with me
Y pray thee in al thing.
Ich hope he schal be a gode knight,
For he is bot a yongling
Yif he have ani nede to thee
Help him for the love of me
Y pray thee par amour;
Mi treuthe Y plight in thine hond
Y schal thee sese in al mi lond
Bothe in toun and tour.
Thi man Y wil be and serve thee ay
THER while mi liif lest may
To hold up thin honour.
And yif thou no wilt, ichil with thee go;
Ywis, ichave wele lever so
Than bileve with th’emperour.”
―Do oway, Sir Tirri, therof speke nought,
Your speech is all foolish thoughts!
Go straight back home again.
Do not be too proud, is my advice to you
To serve your lord in all his needs.
Show this with all your might!
Deprive no man of his land.
If you do, you will fall into shame.
You will assuredly be miserable.
For if you rob a man of his goods,
You will never see God’s face
Nor come into Heaven’s light.
Consider well Duke Berard,
How proud he was because he was steward,
And flemed thee out of lond
And he now desirite is,
With michel sorwe slayn, ywis,
And schamelich driven to schond.
Y schal gon and thou bileve schalt,
Y biteche thee God that al thing walt
And maked with His hond.”

Tha kisten hem togider tho;
Olive tha seyghen hem never eft mo
As the gest doth ous understond.
Gret sorwe thai made at her parting
And kist hem w

Thierry took himself home.
For three days he ate no food,
For he was inconsolable at heart.
And when the countess heard it said
With certainty that it was Sir Guy
Who had then gone from them,
She reproached her lord day and night
For not forcefully insisting he stay
And letting let him leave from there.
Now Sir Guy went forth on his way
Toward the sea, as swiftly as he could.
For Thierry he sighed bitterly.
He soon boarded a ship
And sailed over the sea
And traveled into England.
At once he asked among the people
About King Athelston
And which land he was in.
“He’s at Winchester, in truth,”
And he has sent for his barons,
Both small and great.
Earls, barons, and bishops,
Knights, priors, and abbots,
Each one of them is at Winchester

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44 And he now desirite is: Duke Berard is of course more than disinherited, being dead. Presumably not only were his lands confiscated for high treason after threatening war against the emperor, but his descendents are permanently cut off from royal privilege. For a contemporary legal code concerning confiscation, see Nicole Clifton, trans., Livre de Ro (c. 1200), in Crusader Institutions, ed. Joshua Prawer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 433-4.

45 2783 is an especially long line, which is wrapped here into the next space. The line is a strange one as it suggests that Thierry’s wife is advocating using force to detain and reward Guy.

46 Winchester: Winchester was the capitol of England in the late Anglo-Saxon period, and for long after was only second in importance to London. In Havelock, Athelwold also rules from Winchester (158). Winchester tradition places the contest between Guy and Colbrand on a field near Hyde Abbey, of which only a gatehouse remains. For more historical clues, see also the TEAMS note and Velma Bourgeois Richmond, “The Legend of Guy of Warwick,” in Garland Studies in Medieval Literature 14 (New York: Garland, 1996).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And han purvayd withouten lesing</td>
<td>And has arranged, without a lie,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thre days to ben in fasting</td>
<td>To spend three days in fasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To biseke God in tron</td>
<td>To call on the throne of God,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He sende hem thurth His swet sond</td>
<td>That through His sweet grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man that were douhti of hond</td>
<td>He will send a man hardy in arms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogain Colbrond to gon.</td>
<td>To face against Colbrand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ther is the king and the barnage, ywis,</td>
<td>The king is there with the baronage, truly,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For doute of her enemis</td>
<td>Because of fear of their enemies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That wayt hem forto slon.</td>
<td>Who lie in wait to slaughter them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“For Sir Anlaf the king of Danmark</td>
<td>For Sir Anlaf, the king of Denmark,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Into Ingland is come</td>
<td>Has come into England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a nost store and stark</td>
<td>With an army, fierce and strong,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alle this lond thai stroyen, ywis,</td>
<td>And fifteen thousand picked knights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And mani a toun han nome</td>
<td>They are ravaging all the land, indeed,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A geaunt he hath brought with him</td>
<td>And have taken many a town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of Aurike stout andgrim,</td>
<td>He has brought with him a giant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colbrond hat that gome.</td>
<td>Out of Africa, strong and grim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For him is al Ingland forlore</td>
<td>Colbrond is the name of that creature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bot Godes help be bifore</td>
<td>Because of him all England is lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That socour sende hem some.</td>
<td>Unless God’s favor is before them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“To the king he hath sent his sond</td>
<td>To send them some help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forto yeld him al Ingland</td>
<td>Anlaf has sent word to the king</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And gif him trowage outright</td>
<td>To yield all of England to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yif he no wil nought finde a baroun,</td>
<td>And to give him outright tribute(^\text{47})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A geaunt other a champioun,</td>
<td>If he does not produce a baron,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogain Colbrond to fight,</td>
<td>A giant, or a champion,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And therof thai han taken a day.</td>
<td>To fight against Colbrand,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ac our king non finde may</td>
<td>And for this they have set a day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erl, baroun, no knight,</td>
<td>But our king cannot find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No squier, no serjaunt non</td>
<td>Any earl, baron, or knight,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogain the geaunt dar gorn</td>
<td>No squire or any officer,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So grim he is of sight.”</td>
<td>Who dares fight against the giant,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Than seyd Sir Gii, “Whare is Herhaud?</td>
<td>So fearsome is he to look upon.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That in his time was so bald?”(^\text{47})</td>
<td>Then Sir Guy said, “Where is Herhaud,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And thai answerd ful swithe,</td>
<td>Who was so bold in his time?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“To seeche Gyes sone he is fare</td>
<td>And they answered promptly,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That marchaunce hadde stollen thare,</td>
<td>“He has set out to look for Guy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For him he was unblithe.”</td>
<td>Who was stolen away by traders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“And where is th’erl Rohaut of pris?”</td>
<td>For him he was inconsolable.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And thai answerd, “Dede he is -</td>
<td>“And where is the renowned Earl Rohaud?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A gode while is go sithe -</td>
<td>And they answered, “He is dead—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And Felici his douther is his air,</td>
<td>It has been a good while since—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So gode a levedi no so fair,</td>
<td>And Felicia, his daughter, is his heir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ywis, nis non olive.”</td>
<td>There’s no lady so good or fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gii went to Winchester a ful gode pas</td>
<td>Indeed, none alive.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ther the king that time was</td>
<td>Guy went to Winchester in great haste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To held his parlement;</td>
<td>Where the king was at that time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The barouns weren in the halle.</td>
<td>To hold his parliament.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{47}\) *Trowage outright*: Tribute could be an extremely burdensome protection racket. In 1012, following a sack of Canterbury, King Athelred paid the Danes off with 17,900 kg of silver.
The king said, “Lordings, all, 
You are my men, truly. 
Therefore I ask you, without fail, 
About these Danes who are attacking us. 
I ask you, in good faith, 
And for God’s love I beseech of you 
That you will give me good counsel, 
Or else we will all be finished. 
For the king of Denmark, 
Along with his giant who is so strong, 
Will unjustly destroy us all. 
Therefore I ask each one of you, 
What course is the best to follow 
To take against them? 
If they overcome us in battle 
They will slay us all, without doubt, 
And destroy all our people. 
Then England will forevermore 
Live in servitude and in woe 
Until the end of the world. 
Therefore I ask you right now 
If you know any knight of ours 
Who is so stout and bold 
To dare to take in hand the battle 
To fight against Colbrand. 
He would have half my land, 
With all the cities that lie in it, 
For him and his heirs forevermore, 
To have if he wanted.” 
The earls and barons sat silyent, 
Like monks who had shaved their heads. 
No one would give an answer. 
“Alas that I was ever born!” said the king. 
“All my joy is lost: 
It is woe to be alive! 
Is there no knight in all my land 
Who will fight against the giant? 
My heart will break into five! 
Alas, Sir Guy of Warwick! 
If I had given you half my land freely, 
To hold without grievance, 
Then all would be well. 
But for sure now the Danish men 
Will drive me to sorrow, all of them.” 
When it was night they went to bed. 
The king, for sorrow and for fear, 
Wet his face with tears. 
All night long he had no sleep at all 
But continually prayed to Jesus Christ, 
Who was beloved and dear to him, 
That he would send through His grace 
A man to fight with Colbrand 
If it were His will. 
And Jesus Christ, full of might,
He sent him a noble knight
As ye may forward here.
Ther com an angel fram heven-light
And seyd to the king ful right
Thurth grace of Godes sond.
He seyd, “King Athelston, slepestow?
Hider me sent thee King Jhesu
To comfort thee to fond.
Tomorwe go to the north gate ful swithe,
A pilgrim thou schalt se com bilive
When thou hast a while stond.
Bid him for Seynt Charité
That he take the batayl for thee
And he it wil nim on hond.”
Than was the king glad and blithe,
Amorwe he ros up ful swithe
And went to the gate ful righ.
Tuay erls went with him tho
And tuay bischopes dede also.
The weder was fair and bright.
Opon the day about prime
The king seighe cum the pilgrim
Bi the sclavayn he him plight.
―Pilgrim,‖ he seyd, ―Y pray thee
To court wende thou hom with me
And ostel ther al night.‖
―Be stille, sir,‖ seyd the pilgrim,
―It is nought yete time to take min in,
Also God me rede.‖
The king him bisought tho
And the lordinges dede also,
To court with hem he yede.
―Pilgrim,‖ quath the king, ―par charité,
Yif it be thi wil und erstond to me,
Y schal schewe thee al our nede:
The king of Danmark with gret wrong
Thurth a geaunt that is so strong
Will strou al our thede.
―And whe han taken of him batayle
On what maner, saunfayle,
Y schal scheewe thee al our nede:
The king fel on knes to grounde
And crid him merci in that stonde
If it his wille ware,
And the barouns dede also,
And the barons did the same.
O kneu thai fellen alle tho
With sorwe and sikeing sare.
Sir Gi biheld the lordinges alle
Sir Guy looked upon all the lords,
And whiche sorwe hem was bifalle,
And the woe that had befallen them,
Sir Gi hadde of hem care.
And had compassion for them.
Sir Gi tok up the king anon
Sir Guy brought the king to his feet
And seyd, “For God in Trinite
And told the lordings, each of them,
And forto make Ingland fre
That they should stand up,
And forto make Ingland fre,
And said, “For God in Trinity,
The batayle Y nim on hond.”
I will take the battle into my hand.”
Than was the king ful glad and blithe
Then the king was glad and at peace
And thonked Gii a thousand sithe
And thanked Guy a thousand times
And Jhesu Cristes sond.
And Jesus Christ’s providence.
To the king of Danmark he sent than
He then sent word to the king of Denmark
And seyd he hadde founden a man
And said he had found a man
To fight for Ingland.
To stand for England.
The Danismen busked hem yare
The Danish quickly readied themselves
Into batayle forto fare.
To go forward into battle.
To fight thai warwel fawe.
They were very eager to fight.
And Gii was armed swithe wel
And Guy was armed to the full
In a gode hauberck of stiel
In a sturdy mail coat of steel,
Wrought of the best lawe.
Fashioned in the finest manner.
An helme he hadde of michel might
He had a helmet of great strength,
With a cercle of gold that schon bright
With a circle of gold that shone bright
With precious stones on rawe.
With precious stones in a row.
In the frunt stode a charbukel ston
In the front stood a carbuncle stone,
As bright as ani sonne it schon
Which shone as bright as any sun
That glemes under schawe.
That gleams under shadows.
On that helme stode a flour
On that helmet stood a flower
Which was crafted of various colors.
It was beautiful to behold.
Mirie it was to bihold.
His face-guard was firm and strong,
Trust and trewe was his ventayle
With gloves and jacket and mail-hose,
Gloves and gambisoun and hosen of mayle
As a good knight should have.
As gode knight have scholde;
Girt he was with a gode brond
He was fitted with a good blade
Wele kerveand biforn his hond;
Which would edge sharp before his hand,
A targe listed with gold
And with a shield bordered with gold,
Portreyd with thre kinges corn
Portrayed with three carved magi
That present God when He was born,
Who brought gifts to God when He was born.
Who brought gifts to God when He was born.
Mirier was non on mold.
There were none more beautiful on earth!
And a swift-ernand stede
And they led a fast-galloping steed,
Al wrin thai dede him lede,
All outfitted, to him.
His tire it was ful gay.
His attire was very handsome.
Sir Gi opon that stede wond
Sir Guy mounted upon that steed
With a gode glaive in hond
With a firm spear in hand
And priked him forth his way.
And spurred forth on his way.
And when he com to the plas
And when he came to the place
Ther the batayl loked was
Where the battle was agreed,
Gii light withouten delay
Guy dismounted without delay
And fel on knees doun in that stede
And fell down on his knees in that place
And to God he bad his bede  
He schuld ben his help that day.  
“Lord,” seyd 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.  
Astor 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.”  
When the folk was samned bi bothe side  
The to kinges with michel pride  
After the relikes thai sende,  
The corporas and the Messe gere.  
On the halidom thai gun swere  
With wordes fre and hende.  
The king of Danmarke swore furst, ywis,  
Yif that his geant slayn is  
To Danmarke he schal wende  
And never more Inglond cum withinne  
No non after him of his kinne  
Unto the warldes ende.  
Sethen swore the king Athelston  
And seyd among hem everichon  
Bi God that al may weld,  
Yif his man ther slayn be  
Or overcomen that men may se  
Recreaunt in the feld,  
His man he wil bicom an hond  
And alle the reme of Inglond  
Of him forto helde  
And hold him for lord and king  
With gold and silver and other thing  
Gret trowage him forto yelde.

And made his prayer to God  
That He would be his help that day.  
“Lord,” said Guy, “who raised Lazarus,  
And suffered death for man,  
And bled on the Cross,  
Who saved Susanna from the lying men,\(^\text{48}\)  
And protected Daniel from the lion,  
Guide me and aid me today.  
As You are the mighty king of Heaven,\(^\text{49}\)  
Grant me Your blessing today  
And help me in my need.  
And Lady Mary, full of might,  
Save England today  
And grant me grace to succeed.”  
When the people were gathered on both sides  
The two kings, with regal pride  
Sent for the holy relics,\(^\text{50}\)  
The altar cloth, and the implements of mass.  
On the sacred relics they swore  
With words that were noble and devout.  
The king of Denmark swore first, in truth,  
That if his giant were slain  
He would return to Denmark  
And never again come into England,  
Nor any of his kin after him,  
Until the end of the world.  
Then King Athelston swore  
And said before every one of them  
That by God, who rules all,  
If his man were slain there  
Or overcome so that men might see him  
Defeated on the field,  
He would become Anlaf’s man  
And all the realm of England  
Would be for him to hold,  
And he would obey him as lord and king.  
He would yield great tribute to him  
With gold and silver and other goods.

\(^{48}\) That saved Sussan from the feloun: The reference is to an extra-biblical (but canonical for Catholics) addition to Daniel where two voyeurs watch a Hebrew wife, Susanna, bathing. The two threaten a false charge of adultery unless she has sex with them, without success. The young Daniel cleverly cross-examines the two in court, and when their stories conflict they are exposed and put to death. All three people—Lazarus, Susanna, and Daniel—are examples Guy appeals to of God aiding those facing extreme odds.

\(^{49}\) Astow art mighti heven-king: The Guy poet seems to often use astow with the sense of ‘if,’ but here and in line 1221 where Guy is addressing God he is unlikely to be asking God to prove Himself, even rhetorically. Deut. 6:16: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

\(^{50}\) If Anlaf was historically the Danish king Olaf Tryggvason, as scholars have suggested, having a Viking peaceably swear on holy relics would not have been far-fetched, as Tryggvason was a Christian. Colbrand, perhaps a slave or mercenary, swears by Apollyon (3187). See note.
When thai had sworn and ostage founde
Colbrond stirt up in that stounde,
To fight he was ful felle.
He was so michel and so unrede
That non hors might him lede
In gest as Y you telle.
So mani he hadde of armes gere
Unnethe a cart might hem bere
The Inglisse forto quelle.
Swiche armour as he hadde opon,
Ywis, no herd ye never non
Bot as it ware a fende of Helle.
Of mailes was nought his hauberk,
It was al of another werk
That mervail is to here.
Alle it were thicke splent
es of stiel,
Thicke yjoined strong and wel,
To kepe that fendes fere.
Hossen he hadde also wele ywrought
Other than splentes was it nought
Fram his fot to his swere.
He was so michel and so strong
And therto wonderliche long
In the world was non his pere.
An helme he hadde on his heved sett
And therunder a thicke bacinet;
Unsemly was his wede.
A targe he had wrought ful wel
- Other metel was ther non on bot stiel
- A michel and unrede.
Al his armour was blac as piche
Wel foule he was and lothliche,
A grisly gom to fede.
The heighe king that sitteth on heighe
That welt this warld fer and neighe
Made him wel ivel to spede.
A dart he bar in his hond kerveand
And his wepen about him stondand
Bothe bihinde and biforn
Axes andgisarmes scharp ygrounde
And glai ves forto give with wounde
To hundred and mo ther worn.
The Inglis biheld him fast.
King Athelston was sore agast
Inglond he schuld have lorn
For when Gii seighe that wicked hert
He nas never so sore aferd
When they had sworn and exchanged hostages
Colbrand started up at that moment;
He was fierce and keen to fight.
He was so monstrous and so ugly
That no horse might carry him,
As it is in the story as I tell you.
He had so much weaponry
To kill the English
That his cart could barely hold it.
You never heard of anyone
Who had such armor upon him, indeed,
Unless it were a fiend from Hell.
His coat was not of chain mail;
It was of another kind of workmanship
That is astonishing to hear.
It was all thick plates of steel,
Tightly joined, strongly and firmly,
To protect that devil’s comrade.
He had finely crafted leg hose as well;
It was nothing but steel plates,
From his foot to his neck.
He was so enormous and so strong
And so incredibly tall;
There was no one in the world his peer.
He had a helmet set on his head,
And underneath a thick subhelmet. 51
His appearance was hideous!
He had a shield that was skillfully wrought;
It was huge and menacing.
He had no other metal on except steel.
All his armor was as black as pitch;
He was foul and loathsome,
A grisly creature to nourish.
The high king who sits on high
Who rules this world, near and far,
Made him a fearsome opponent to defeat.
He bore a cutting spear in his hand,
And his weapons stood about him,
Both behind and before him:
Axes and halberds, sharply ground,
And spears to give wounds with.
There were two hundred and more!
The English beheld him intently.
King Athelston was sorely afraid
That he would lose England,
For when Guy saw his wicked heart
He was never so sorely afraid

51 Bacinet: A bascinet was an open-faced subhelmet, which became popular in the fourteenth century as full helmets could be unwieldy in hand-to-hand combat. Many of the military details in Guy are cheerfully anachronistic. Chain mail was in use, but Colbrand wearing plate armor in the eleventh century would have been impossible.
Sethen that he was born.
Sir Gii leape on his stede fot-hot
And with a speere that wele bot
To him he gan to ride.

3100
And he schet to Gii darters thre,
Of the tuay than failed he,
The thridde he lete to him glide,
Thurth Gyes scheld it gled
And thurth his armoure withouten abod
Bituene his arme and side
And quitelich into the feld it yede
The mountaunce of an acre brede
Er that it wald abide.
Sir Gii to him gan to drive

3110
That his spere brast afive
On his scheld that was so bounde;
And Colbrond with michel hete
On Gyes helme he wald have smite,
And failed of him that stounde;
Bituix the sadel and the arsoun
The strok of that feloun glod adoun
Withouten wem or wounde.
That sadel and hors atuo he smot,
Into the erthe wele half a fot
And Gii fel doun to grounde.
Sir Gii as tite up stirt
As man that was agremed in hert,
His stede he hadde forlore.
On his helme he wald hit him tho
Ac he no might nought reche therto
Bi to fot and yete more,
Bot on his schulder the swerd fel doun
And carf bothe plates and hauberjoun
With his grimli gore.
Thurth al his armoure stern a and strong
He made him a wounde a spanne long
That greved him ful sore.
Colbrond was sore aschame
And smot Gii with michel grame.
On his helm he hit him tho
That his floures everichon
And his gode charbukel ston
Wel even he carf atuo.
Even ato he smot his scheld

3120
That it flegh into the feld.
When Gii seyghe it was so
That he hadde his scheld forlorn,
Half bihinde and half biforn,
In hert him was wel wo.
And Gii hent his swerd an hond
And helelijke smot to Colbrond -
As a child he stode him under.
Open the scheld he yave him swiche a dent
Bifor the stroke the fiir out went

In all the time since he was born.
Sir Guy leaped on his steed in haste
And with a spear that cut strong
He began to ride to him.
The giant shot three spears at Guy.
With the first two they failed him;
The third that he let fly
Pierced through Guy’s shield
And through his armor without stopping,
Between his arm and side,
And it went completely across the field,
The distance of an acre across,
Before it would drop.
He charged on Sir Guy
So that his spear burst into five pieces
Against his shield which was so firm.
And Colbrand would have struck
On Guy’s helmet with great fury,
But he missed in that moment.
The murderer’s stroke cut down
Between the saddle and the pommel,
Without injury or wound to Guy.
But he cut the saddle and horse into two,
Slicing into the earth a good half a foot,
And Guy fell down to the ground.
Sir Guy started up just as quickly,
As a man who was enraged in heart,
For he had lost his steed.
He wanted to hit the giant on the helmet,
But he could not reach it
By two feet and even more.
Yet the sword came down on his shoulder
And carved both armor and mail coat
With his deadly weapon.
Through all his armor, grim and strong,
He made a wound a hand-width’s long;
That grieved the giant sorely.
Colbrand was greatly ashamed
And struck at Guy with hot rage.
He hit him on his helmet
So that each one of his flowers
And his good carbuncle stone
Were split evenly in two.
He cut his shield squarely in two
So that it flew onto the field.
When Guy saw what had happened,
That he had lost his shield,
With a half behind and half before him,
He was full of woe at heart.
But Guy gripped his sword in hand
And ferociously struck at Colbrand,
Standing under him like a child.
Upon the shield he gave him such a blow
That the sparks flew from the stroke
As it were light of thunder.
The bondes of stiel he carf ichon
And into the scheld a fot and half on
With his swerd he smot asunder,
And with the out-braiding his swerd brast.
Thei Gii were than sore agast
It was litel wonder.
Tho was Gii sore desmayd
And in his hert wel ivel ypayed
For the chaunce him was bifalle,
And for he hadde lorn his gode brond
And his stede opon the sond
To our Levedi he gan calle.
Than gun the Danis ost
Ich puken othar and make bost
And seyd among hem alle,
―Now schal the Inglis be slain in feld;
Gret trouage Inglond schal ous yeld
And evermore ben our thral.‖
―Now, sir knight,‖ seyd Colbrond,
―Thou hast lorn thi swerd in thine hond,
Thi scheld and eke thi stede.
Do now wele, yeld thee to me
And smertlich unarme thee;
Cri merci Y thee rede.
And for thou art so douhti knight
Thou durst ogain me held fight
To mi lord Y schal thee lede
And with him thou schalt acorded be,
In his court he wil hold thee
And finde that thee is nede."  
―Do way,‖ seyd Gii, ―therof speke nought.
Bi Him that al this world hath wrought
Ich hadde lever thou were anhong.
Ac thou hast armes gret plenté,
Ywis, thou most lene me
On of thine axes strong.‖
Colbrond swore bi Apolin,
―Of al the wepen that is min
Her schaltow non afong.
As if it was lightning from thunder.
He cut each one of the steel bonds,
And with his sword he parted the shield,
Carving a foot and a half on into it.
But on drawing it out his sword broke.
If Guy was sorely terrified then,
It would be little wonder.
Guy was badly dispirited then
And in his heart felt displeased
With the fortune that had befallen him.
For he had lost his good blade
And his steed was upon the ground.
To our Lady he began to call.
Then the Danish host
Began to jostle each other and boast,
And talked among each other,
―Now the English will be slain on the field!
England will yield to us great tribute
And will be our servant for evermore.‖
―Now, sir knight,‖ said Colbrond,
―You have lost the sword from your hand,
Your shield, and also your horse.
Take the best course and yield to me
And unarm yourself sharply.
I advise you to cry for mercy.
And because you are so worthy a knight
That you dare to fight against me,
I will take you to my lord
And you will be reconciled to him.
He will hold you in his court
And supply you with your needs.‖
―Enough,‖ said Guy, ―Speak no more of that.
By Him who created all this world,
I would prefer that you were hanged!
But you have weapons in great plenty.
Truly, you must lend me
One of your strong axes.‖
Colbrond swore by Apollyon,\(^{52}\)
―Of all the weapons that are mine,
You will get nothing here.
If you will not do as I now advise,
You will die an unpleasant death
Before very long.‖
When Guy heard him speak so,
At once he turned on his feet
And went for the giant’s weapons
Where his axes stood by themselves.
He seized one with a fine, strong handle.

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\(^{52}\)Apollon: Apollyon, the angel of the bottomless pit of Hell. See also Bevis, 558. As usual, the poet groups together all non-Christians as having the same polytheistic deities. Colbrand may also be an African Saracen, as the Vikings traded in the Mediterranean.
The best him thought he seth,  
To Colbrond again he ran  
And seyd, “Traitor,” to him than,  
“Thou schalt han ivel deth.  
Now ich have of thi wepen plenté  
Wherewith that Y may were me  
Right maugré al thin teth.”  
Colbrond than with michel hete  
On Gyes helme he wald have smite  
With wel gret hert tene  
Ac he failed of his dint  
And the sword into the erthe went  
A fot and more, Y wene.  
And with Colbrondes out-draught  
Sir Gi with ax a strok him raught  
A wounde that was wele sene.  
So smertliche he smot to Colbrond  
That his right arme with alle the hond  
He strok of quite and clene.  
When Colbrond feld him so smite  
He was wel wroth ye may wel wite,  
He gan his swerd up fond  
And in the nek a strok him gaf  
As he gan stoupe for the brond  
That his heved fro the bodi he smot  
And into the erthe half a fot  
Thurth grace of Godes sond.  
Ded he feld the glotoun thare.  
The Denis with sorwe and care  
Thai dight hem out of lond.  
Blithe were the Inglis men ichon.  
Erls, barouns, and King Athelston  
Thai toke Sir Gi that tide  
And ladde him to Winchester toun  
With wel fair processioun  
Over al bi ich a side.  
For joie belles thai gun ring  
Te Deum laudamus thai gun sing  
And play and michel pride.  
Sir Gi unarmed him and was ful blithe;  
His sclavain he axed also swithe,  
No lenger he nold abide.  
“Sir pilgrim,” than seyd the king,  
“Whennes thou art withouten lesing?  
Thou art douhti of dede,  
For thurth douhtines of thin hond  
Thou hast saved al Ingland.  
God quite thee thi mede;

The best that he thought he saw.  
He ran back to Colbrand  
And then said to him, “Traitor!  
You will have a shameful death!  
From your weapons in plenty,  
I have what I need to defend myself,  
Despite all your blustering!”  
Colbrand then, in great rage,  
Would have struck on Guy’s helmet  
With furious anger at heart.  
But he missed in his blow  
And the sword went into the dirt  
A foot and more, I believe.  
And with Colbrand’s reach overextended,  
Sir Guy caught him with a stroke of his axe  
With a wound that was clear to see.  
So sharply did he slash at Colbrand  
That his right arm with all the hand  
Was cut off fully and cleanly.  
When Colbrand felt himself injured so,  
He was incensed, you might well understand.  
He picked up his sword  
And with his left hand he heaved it up.  
But Guy gave him a stroke in the neck  
As he was stooping for his blade  
So that he hacked his head from the body  
And cut into the earth half a foot  
Through the grace of God’s favor.  
He felled the rogue dead there.  
The Danish, with sadness and regret,  
Took themselves out of the land.  
Each one of the Englishmen were glad.  
Earls, barons, and King Athelston  
 Took Sir Guy on that day  
And brought him to Winchester town  
With a stately procession  
At every place on each side.  
They rang bells for joy  
They sang Te Deum LAudamus53  
And rejoiced with great pride.  
Sir Guy unarmed himself and was happy.  
Just as quickly, he asked for his cloak.  
He would not stay any longer.  
“Sir pilgrim,” the king said then,  
“Where are you from, without lying?  
You are courageous in deeds,  
For through the might of your hand  
You have saved all England.  
May God give you your reward!

53 Te Deum laudamus: “Thee God We Praise,” an early Christian hymn used either in liturgy or in celebration.
And mi treithe Y schal plight thee,
So wele Y schal feffe thee
Bothe in lond and lede
3250 That of riches in toun and tour
Thou schalt be man of mest honour
That woneth in al mi thede.”
“Sir King,” seyd the pilgrim,
“Of alle the lond that is tin
Y no kepe therof na mare
Bot now ichave the geant slain,
Therof, ywis, icham ful fain,
Mi way ichil forth fare.”
“Merci, sir,” the king seyd than,
“For nothing thou ne spare
Tel me what thi name it be,
Whennes thou art and of what cuntré
Or Y schal dye for care.”
“Sir King,” he seyd, “Y schal tel it thee.
What mi right name it be
Thou schalt witen anon;
Ac thou schalt go with me yfere
That no man of our conseyl here
Bot thou and Y alon.”
The king him graunted and was blithe,
He comand his folk als o swithe
No wight with him to gon.
Out of the toun than went he
Wele half a mile fram that cité
And ther made Gii his mon.
―Sir King,‖ seyd, “O thing Y schal now pray thee
Astow art curteys and hende:
Yif Y mi name schal thee sayn
That to no man thou no schalt me wrayn
To this yere com to th’ende.
3270 Gii of Warwike mi nam is right,
Whilom Y was thine owhen knight
And held me for thi frende;
And now icham swiche astow may see.
God of Heven biteche Y thee,
Mi way Y wil forth wende.”
When the king seighe sikerly
That it was the gode Gii
That frō him wald his way
On knes he fel adoun to grounde,
“Leve Sir Gii,” in that stounde,
“Merci,” he gan to say.
“For Godes love bileeve with me
And mi treithe Y schal plight thee
That Y schal this day
Sese and give into thine hond
Half the reme of Inglond;
3280 For Godes love say nought nay.”
And I will pledge you my oath
That I will endow you so well
Both in land and people,
That in riches in town and tower,
You will be the man of highest honor
Who lives in all my realm.”
“Sir King,” said the pilgrim,
“Of all the land that is yours,
I do not want any of it.
But now that I have slain the giant,
For that, in truth, I am content.
I will go forth on my way.”
“Mercy, sir,” the king then replied,
“For He who made man, tell me,
And do not hold back for anything.
Tell me what your name is,
Where you come from and what land,
Or I will die for distress.”
“Sir King,” he said, “I will tell you.
You will soon know
What my rightful name is.
But the two of us will go together
So that no man will hear our conversation
Except for you and I alone.”
The king granted him that and was pleased.
He commanded his people as promptly
That no one was to go with him.
Out of the town they then went,
A full half a mile from the city,
And there Guy made his request.
―Sir King,‖ said Guy, “understond to me.
I will ask one thing of you now,
If you are courteous and faithful.
If I tell you my name,
You must not reveal me to any man
Until this year has come to the end.
Guy of Warwick is my name, truly.
I was once your own knight
And you held me as your friend.
And now I am such as you can see.
I entrust you to God in Heaven,
And I will go forth on my way.”
When the king saw clearly
That it was the good Guy
Who was departing from him,
He fell down on his knees to the ground.
He cried out in that moment,
“Dear Sir Guy, mercy!
For God’s love, stay with me
And I give you my promise
That on this day I will
Endow and give into your hand
Half the realm of England!
For God’s love, do not say no.”
“Sir King,” said Guy, “I will not have it. Have your land forevermore, And I commend you to God. But if Herhaud comes to this land And brings with him my son Reinbroun, I ask that you help him. For they are both gracious and noble. You may place your trust in Herhaud To take revenge on your foes.”

They then kissed together, And with weeping they separated Without any more speech. The king wept bitterly for regret And went home to his household With a grieving demeanor. His people came to him And asked the king soon after What man the pilgrim was. They said, “He is a valiant knight. If only Jesus, full of might, would grant That he would live here with us.”

Sir Guy went straight on his way, Constantly thanking God Almighty That the giant was defeated. He went to the city of Warwick, Where he was lord of that country, To hold rightfully. He was recognized there by no one When he came to the castle gates, For which he was very happy. He mixed among the poor men Who were there in one place And seated in a row. And the countess, Felicia, was there. In this world there was no better woman, In the story as we read.

ICH day sche gan fede: The act is not a dainty extravagance like Chaucer’s Prioress feeding her dog with white bread (I.147). Woolgar notes that “Alms from the table were a major element in charity associated with the great household.” C.M. Woolgar, The Great Household in Late Medieval England (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 154, quoted in TEAMS.

54 Here begins another “returning hero in humble disguise” narrative. As TEAMS notes, the motif was popular in ancient literature from Odysseus’ return to Ithaca to similar scenes in King Horn and Bevis of Hampton. Yet unlike the normal sequence where the hero secretly does reconnaissance and builds dramatic suspense, here Guy faces no danger and never reveals himself.

55 Ich day sche gan fede: The act is not a dainty extravagance like Chaucer’s Prioress feeding her dog with white bread (I.147). Woolgar notes that “Alms from the table were a major element in charity associated with the great household.” C.M. Woolgar, The Great Household in Late Medieval England (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 154, quoted in TEAMS.

369
Schuld save hir lord Sir Gii
And help him at his nede.
Sche no stint neither day no night,
For him sche bisought God Almighty
With bedes and almos dede.
On a day the levedi went to mete
And bad men schuld biforn hir fete
Hir pouer men al biden.
And men brought hem everichon
And Gii of Warwike was that on
Of tho ich thritten.
In his hert he hadde gret care
That he schuld be knawen thare
Of hem that hadde him sen;
Ac ther was non so wise of sight
That him ther knowe might
So misais he was and lene.
The levedi biheld him inliche
Hou mesays he was sikerliche.
Curteys sche was and hende,
Of everich mete of everich dring
That sche ete of herself withouten
Sche was him ful mende;
Of hire bere and of hir wine
In hir gold coupe afine
Oft sche gan him sende
And bad him ich day com he schold,
Mete and drink sche finde him wold
Unto his lives ende.
Sir Gii thonked that levedi oft
Bot alle another was his thought
Than he wald to hir say.
When the grace were yseyd
And the bordes adoun layd
Out of toun he went his way.
Into a forest wenden he gan
To an hermite he knewe er than
To speke him yif he may.
And when he thider comen was
The gode hermite thurth Gods grace
Was dede and loken in clay.
Than thought Sir Gii anon
That wald he never thennes gon
Therwhiles he war olive.
With a prest he spac of that cuntry
That dede him Servise ich day
And of his sinnes gan schrive.
With him he hadde ther a page

Would protect her lord, Sir Guy,
And help him in his need.
She did not cease either day or night.
For him she looked to God Almighty
With prayers and charitable deeds.
One day the lady went to dinner
And asked her men to bring
Her poor men all together before her.
And men brought each one of them,
And Guy of Warwick was one
Of those thirteen.
In his heart he had great anxiety
That he would be recognized there
By those who had seen him.
But he was so thin and wretched
That there were none so discerning in sight
Who might know him there.
The lady examined him carefully,
Observing how desolate he truly was.
She was courteous and generous.
With every dish, with every drink,
That she ate herself, without a lie,
She was mindful of him.
She often sent him servings
Of her beer and of her wine,
In her fine gold cup,
And invited him to come each day.
She would provide him with food and drink
Until his life’s end.
Sir Guy thanked that lady often,
But his thoughts were all different
From what he said to her.
When the grace was said
And the table laid down, The bordes adoun layd
He had made his way out of town.
He traveled into a forest
To find a hermit he had known before
To speak with him if he might.
But when he had arrived there,
The good hermit, through God’s grace,
Was dead and buried in the earth’s clay.
Then Sir Guy decided at once
That he would never go from there
While he was still alive.
He spoke with a priest of that country
Who performed Mass for him each day
And absolved him of his sins.
With him there he had a page

56 *The bordes adoun layd*: Medieval tables were not permanent fixtures, but could be quickly stored and assembled for meals. Chaucer’s hungry Franklin is unusual in that his table “stood redy covered al the longe day” (I.354).
That served him in that hermitage
Withouten chest and strive.
No lenger was he lives there
But nighen monethes of a yere
As ye may listen and lithe.
In slepe as Gii lay anight
God sent an angel bright
Fram Heven to him thare.

“Gii,” seyd the angel, “slepestow?
Hi der me sent thee King Jhesu
To bid thee make thee yare,
For bi the eightenday at morwe
He schal deliver thee out of thi sorwe
Out of this warld to fare.
To Heven thou schalt com Him to
And live with ous evermo
In joie withouten care.”

When Gii was waked of that drem
Of an angel he seighe a glem.
―What artow?‖ than seyd he.
The angel answerd, ―Fram Heven Y cam,
Mighel is mi right nam.
God sent me to thee
To bid thee make thee redi way,
Bi the eightenday thou schalt day
Wel siker maughtow be.
And Y schal fe che thi soule ful even
And bere it to the blis of Heven
With grete solempneté.”

The angel departed and left Guy in stillness.
He made his prayers with good wille
To Jesus, Heaven’s king.
And when his term was nere gon
His knave he cleped to him anon
And seyd witho uten lesing,
―Sone," he seyd, "Y pray now thee
Go to Warwike that cité
Withouten more duelling;
Gret wele the countas with thi speche
And take hir this gold ring.
“And say the pilgrim hat hir biform
That hir mete was to born
On the pouer mannes rawe,
Gret hir wele in al thing
And sende to hir this gold ring
Yif that sche wil it krawe.
Als son as sche hath therof a sight
Scze wil it krawe anonright
And be therof ful fawe.
Than wil sche ax ware Y be.
Leve sone, for love of me,
The sothe to hir thow schawe.
“And say icham for Godes love
Who served him in that hermitage
Without disagreement or strife.
He lived there no longer
Than nine months of a year,
As you may listen and hear,
When, as Guy lay at night in sleep,
God sent a shining angel
From Heaven to him there.
“Guy,” said the angel, “Are you sleeping?
I am sent here by King Jesus
To tell you to make yourself ready,
For by eight days from tomorrow
He will deliver you out of your sorrows
To travel out of this world.
You will come to Him in Heaven
And live with us forevermore
In joy without worry.”

When Gii was waked from that dream
He saw the gleam of an angel.
―Who are you?‖ he said then.
The angel answered, “I come from Heaven.
Michael is my right name.
God sent me to you
To tell you to be ready to go directly.
By the eighth day you will pass from here,
You can be very certain.
And I will fetch your soul just so
And bear it to the bliss of Heaven
With great ceremony.”

The angel departed and left Gii in stillness.
He made his prayers with good will
To Jesus, Heaven’s king.
And when his term was nearly gone,
He called his servant to him at once
And said to him without lying,
“Son,” he said, “I ask you now,
Go to the city of Warwick
Without any more delay,
And when you get there I implore you,
Greet the countess well in your speech
And give her this gold ring.
And tell her the pilgrim who ate before her,
Who was invited to her dinner
In the company of the poor men,
Greet her courteously in every way
And sends her this gold ring,
If she will recognize it.
As soon as she has sight of it,
She will know it instantly
And be joyful for it.
Then she will ask where I am.
Dear son, for my love,
Show her the truth.
And say I have, for God’s love,
In the forest hermit become
Mine sinnes forto bete;
And bid hir for the love of me
That sche com hider with thee
For nothing sche no lete.
And when ye com ye finde me dede
Do me never hennes lede
Bot grave me here in grete.
And after sche schal dye, ywis,
And com to me into Heven's blis
THER JOIES HER FUL SWEETE.

The knave went forth anon,
Into Warwike he gan gon
BIFOR THAT LAVEDI FRE.

The levedi tok that ring an hond
And loked theron and gan withstond
The letters forto rede.
"OW, CERTES," quath the levedi,
"THIS RING Y GAF MI LORD SIR GII
WHEN HE FRO ME YEDE."
For sorwe sche fel aswon, ywis,
And when that sche arisen is
TO THE KNAVE SCHE GAN SPEDE.
"LEVE SONE," SCHE SEYD, "Y PRAY THEE
WHER IS THAT PILGRIM TELLE THOU ME"
And gold schal be thi mede."
"MADAME," SEYD THE KNAVE FUL SKETE,
"IN THE FOREST ICHIM LETE,
RIGHT NOW Y COM HIM FRO.
HE IS NER DED IN THE HERMITAGE,
ON HIS HALVE Y MAKE THE MESSAGE;
YWIS, HE BAD ME SO
AND THOU SCHUST TO HIM COME,
FOR THAT ICH TREWE LOVE
THAT WAS BITUENE YOU TEO

Do him never lede oway
Bot biri him right ther in clay,
Olive septow him no mo."
The levedi was glad of that tiding
And thonked Jhesu Heven-king
And was in hert ful blithe
That sche schuld sen hir lord Sir Gii;
Ac for o thing sche was sori
THAT HE SCHULD DYE SWO SWITHE.
Thai made hem redi forto wende

Become a forest hermit
To atone for my sins.
And ask her, for her love of me,
That she come here with you,
And that she delay for nothing.
And if you come and find me dead,
Do not ever carry me away,
But bury me here in the earth.
After then she will die, certainly,
And come into Heaven’s bliss
To hear sweet joys with me there."
The servant boy went forth at once.
He went into Warwick
To appear before that noble lady.
And when he had found the lady,
He fell to his knees on the ground
And said, “Listen to me.
The pilgrim that ate before you,
Who was given your food,
Is now a hermit.
He greets you well in every way
And sends you this gold ring
As a token of him.”
The lady took the ring into her hand
And looked at it and paused
To read the letters.
“Oh, for certain!” exclaimed the lady,
“This is the ring I gave my lord Sir Guy
When he went from me!”
She was overcome with grief, in truth,
And when she arose
She rushed up to the servant.
“Dear son,” she said, “I beg of you,
Where is that pilgrim? Tell me
And gold will be your reward.”
“My lady,” said the servant quickly,
“I left him in the forest.
Just now I came from him in the hermitage
Where he is nearly dead.
On his behalf I brought the message.
In truth, he told me to do so
And asked that you come to him,
For the same true love
That was between you two.
Never have him taken away
But bury him right there in the earth’s clay.
You will see him alive no more.”
The lady was glad for that news
And thanked Jesus, Heaven’s king,
And was overjoyed at heart
That she would see her lord, Sir Guy.
But she was in anguish for one thing,
That he should die so soon.
They made ready to go
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3500 With knightes and with levedis hende.</td>
<td>With knights and with lovely ladies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With al the best of that cité</td>
<td>They set her on a mule,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To th’ermitage went sche</td>
<td>And with all the finest of the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As ye may listen and lithe.</td>
<td>She went to the hermitage,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To th’ermitage when thai come</td>
<td>As you may listen and learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ther thai light al and some</td>
<td>When they had come to the hermitage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And in sche went wel even.</td>
<td>They dismounted, all and some,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When that sche seighe hir lord Sir Gii</td>
<td>And she went straight inside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sche wept and made doleful cri</td>
<td>When she saw her lord, Sir Guy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Gii loked on hir thare,</td>
<td>She wept and made a doleful cry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His soule fram the bodi gan fare.</td>
<td>With a mournful voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A thousand angels and seven</td>
<td>As Sir Guy looked on her there,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underfenge the soule of Gii</td>
<td>His soul began to pass from his body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And bar it with gret molodi</td>
<td>A thousand angels and seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Into the blis of Heven.</td>
<td>Received the soul of Guy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Than was that levedi ful of care</td>
<td>And bore it with great melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For hir lord was fram hir fare,</td>
<td>Into the bliss of Heaven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Alas!” it was hir song.</td>
<td>Then the lady was full of grief,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sche kist his mouthe, his chin also,</td>
<td>For her lord had gone from her,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And wepe wi</td>
<td>And “Alas!” was her refrain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And hir hondes sche wrong.</td>
<td>She kissed his mouth, and his chin as well,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gret honour dede our Lord for Gii:</td>
<td>And wept with both her eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A swete brathe com fram his bodi</td>
<td>And wrung her hands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That last that day so long</td>
<td>Our Lord performed a great honor for Guy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That in this world spices alle</td>
<td>A sweet scent came from his body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No might cast a swetter smalle</td>
<td>That lasted all that day,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As then was hem among.</td>
<td>So that of all the spices in this world,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The levedy as tite dede send hir sond</td>
<td>None could have cast a sweeter fragrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Warwike thai wald him lede</td>
<td>Than was among them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As lord of michel mounde.</td>
<td>The lady swiftly sent her summons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bot al the folk that ther was</td>
<td>To the bishops and abbots of the land,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No might him stir of that plas</td>
<td>The best that might be found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ther he lay on the grounde.</td>
<td>And when that fair company had arrived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An hundred men about him were</td>
<td>To Warwick, they wished to honor him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No might him nought thennes bere</td>
<td>As a lord of great authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For hevihed that stounde.</td>
<td>But all the people who were there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Than seyd the levedi, “Lete him be stille;</td>
<td>Could not move him from that place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never more remoun him Y lille</td>
<td>Where he lay on the ground.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No do him hennes lede.</td>
<td>A hundred men were around him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He sent me bode with his page</td>
<td>But could not bear him away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To biri him in this hermitage</td>
<td>From there for his heaviness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpliche withouten prede.”</td>
<td>Then the lady said, “Let him be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thay tok a through of marbel ston</td>
<td>I will never have him moved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And leyd his bodi therin anon</td>
<td>Or allow him to be taken away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atird in knightes wede.</td>
<td>He sent me his decree with his page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair servise than was thare</td>
<td>To bury him in this hermitage,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of bischopes, abbotes that ther ware,</td>
<td>Simply, without showiness.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And clerkes to sing and rede.</td>
<td>They took a box of marble stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When thai hadde birid his bodi anon,</td>
<td>And laid his body inside,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attired in knight’s clothes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There was a stately funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With the bishops and abbots who were there,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And clerks to sing and read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When they had buried his body,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The gret lordinges everichon
Hom thai gun wende,
Ac the levedi left stille thare;
Sche nold never thennes fare,
Sche kidde that sche was kende.
Sche lived no lenger sothe to say
But right on the fiftenday
Sche dyed that levedi hende
And was birid hir lord by
And now thai er togider in compeynie
In joie that never schal ende.
When Sir Tirri herd telle this
That Gii his fere ded is
And birid in the clay,
He com to this lond withouten lesing
Into Lorain with him gan fare
Into his owhen cuntray.
An abbay he lete make tho
Forto sing for hem to
Ever more til Domesday.
Now have ye herd lordinges of Gii
That in his time was so hardi
And holden hende and fre,
And ever he loved treuthe and right
And served God with al his might
That sit in Trinité.
And therfore at his ending-day
He went to the joie that lasteth ay
And evermore schal be.
Now God leve ous to live so
That we may that joie com to.

Every one of the great lords
Left to go home.
But the lady still remained
And would never leave from there.
She showed that she was faithful.
She lived little longer, truth be told,
But right on the fifteenth day
That gracious lady died
And was buried beside her lord.
And now they are united together
In joy that will never end.
When Sir Thierry heard it said
That Guy, his friend, was dead
And buried in the earth,
He came to this land, without a lie,
And implored Athelston the king
For his body to transport away.
He willingly granted it to Thierry.
He traveled with the body into Lorraine,
Into his own country.
He had an abbey founded there
To sing prayers for Guy and his lady
Evermore until Judgment Day.
Now you have heard, sirs, about Guy,
Who during his days was so valiant
And admired as gracious and noble.
He forever loved truth and justice
And with all his might he served God,
Who sits in Trinity.
And thus on his last day
He went to the joy that lasts forever
And evermore shall be.
Now may God help us to live
So that we may come to that bliss!
For the sake of God’s love, amen.

57 Felicia lives another fifteen days, the same length of time that she and Guy were together in marriage (221).

58 The last scene is somewhat puzzling, as both Guy and Felicia gave orders not to be moved, but it fits the conventional romance ending of being sung over in prayer by clerics, in the same way that Amis and Amiloun and Bevis of Hampton close.
Numerological and Structural Symbolism in the Stanzaic Guy of Warwick

Lévi-Strauss argued that binaries are a natural means of structuring experience, and medieval romance often employs them as useful narrative apparatuses. Amis and Amiloun has corresponding names and subplots, and Havelock has two parallel kings and usurping stewards. Broadly, medieval romance commonly builds itself on dual halves dealing with the hero’s exile and return. The use of matching narrative patterns also has meaning in the Auchinleck stanzaic Guy of Warwick. Burton argues that the poem can be interpreted as corresponding halves in which Guy first seeks out and achieves marital bliss in Felice and then attains heavenly bliss in God.\(^1\) The scene in the stanzaic Guy where the hero gazes prayerfully at the stars while marooned at sea on his bed (2347-64) similarly forms “the structural mid-point of the narrative,”\(^2\) matching Guy’s soul-searching contemplation of the heavens at the beginning of the story. Christians and pagans form an additional good/evil binary throughout romance, and in Bevis of Hampton confusing the binary’s limits brings particular dangers to the hero.

Such binaries may serve no purpose beyond apposition in rhetoric or contrast or completion in narrative, and triple sequences might also simply fulfill the seemingly basic human need to derive a sense of series or predictability from disconnected events. Triplets are used in music, jokes, and stories to form familiar groupings and fairy tales often employ sets of three whether the tale features pigs, bears, or blind mice. Within romance, repetition has narrative functions of emphasis and perhaps political submeanings. Wittig suggests that “within the repeated patterns of formulaic language

\(^2\) Alison Wiggins, Stanzaic Guy of Warwick (TEAMS), note to line 2347-48.
there is a kind of psychological comfort, an assurance that the social institutions in which
the audience has invested itself are stable and secure,“ and Crane cites King Horn as a
narratively repetitive poem endorsing a conservative view of kingship. Yet the stanzaic
Guy seems to call special attention to triple sequences and numbers in themselves as
signifiers. In key places the poet wants us to see that he uses a number purposefully for
levels of interpretation above the narrative. Thus I would like to examine how Guy uses
numerological symbolism to overlay additional meaning in the text.

In the stanzaic Guy the protagonist undergoes three armed battles. Earl Jonas
laments to Guy that his heart will break into three pieces (864) after relating that he
fought three hundred Saracens (619) and was taken prisoner. Colbrand throws three
spears at Guy (3100). At what point do such numbers cease being meaningful and
become random or metrical decisions? Finding numerical symbolism risks overanalysis
by reading in significances that the poet may not have intended or contemplated. Such
critical decisions must remain somewhat speculative, but one approach which may be
helpful is to point out those places in the texts where the poet seems to emphasize a
numerical grouping of subplots for thematic purposes or where a number reference goes
suspiciously beyond metrical fit or capriciousness and implies a secondary meaning
supported by the text as a whole.

Numerous precedents exist for numerological significations in medieval literature
based on the central importance of numbers to medieval aesthetics and thought.

3 Susan Wittig, Stylistic and Narrative Structures in the Middle English Romances (Austin: University of
Texas Press, 1978), 44, quoted in Susan Crane, Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-
Norman and Middle English Literature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 30.
4 Crane, 30.
Mathematics encompassed more than its modern utilitarian functions and described
eternal correspondences in nature, such as that between seven spheres, seven days of the
week, and seven musical notes. The early church fathers Christianized the pagan
numerology of Pythagoras and its Babylonian practitioners, situating numbers as a means
of comprehending the intelligent plan of God’s creation. Augustine equated numbers with
wisdom, Boethius established the quadrivium based on four fields of mathematical
pursuit, and Macrobius called numbers “the first example of perfect abstraction.”
Arithmetic crossed what would now be rigid disciplinary divides between the sciences
and humanities until eventually shedding its theological dimensions in later centuries, but
in the medieval period literary allegory was read as multiple levels of meaning forming a
sophisticated numerical structure, giving what Peck calls delight through “proportion and
symmetrical conjunction.”

The eternal beauty of numbers informs the higher levels of meaning of numerous
medieval poems as a controlling structural device. Dante’s tripartite division in The
Divine Comedy suggests the Christian Trinity and threes abound as perfect numbers. The
comedy has three sections, Hell has three stages, and the meter is terza rima, first known
in use from the work. Dante has three escorts who also imply identification with the
Trinity. Pearl employs twelves rather than threes and dates much later than Auchinleck

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5 Russell A. Peck, “Number as Cosmic Language,” in Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval
6 Macrobius, Somnium Scipionus, quoted in Peck, 15. Peck has extended discussions of Augustine’s
writings about numbers (especially pages 17, 30) and Boethius (21).
7 Peck, 48.
8 T. K. Seung, “The Epic Character of the Divina Commedia and the Function of Dante’s Three Guides,”

377
Guy, but displays an unparalleled technical precision in its numerical religious significations:

…the New Jerusalem has twelve tiers in its foundation and is also twelve furlongs long; the poem itself, 1212 lines long, is a composite of twelves. Concepts of perfection and blemish parlayed through the image of the pearl are also graphed through number. Comprising twenty sets of five, the stanzas are grouped to add up to 100, a number of perfection.

In turning from Pearl to Guy the reader sees a crossing of genres, as Guy is neither extended religious allegory nor a dream vision. The hero evolves as a character throughout the story to such an extent that Mehl classifies the work as a sort of proto-novel. Yet the stanzaic Guy plainly borrows from hagiographic forms in the hero’s representation as a penitential miles Christi, and the poem has a denouement very different from the usual romance frame of marriage and land. The story itself has apparent origins in eastern legends of St. Alexis rather than secular history or folktale. A close examination of the poem reveals that its narrative structure evokes numerological meanings supporting its homiletic purposes which lack the craftsmanship of the Pearl poet but are no less present or significant.

Much as The Divine Comedy has a triple division, reading the stanzaic Guy as a three-battle sequence evoking the perfection of the Trinity is consistent with Guy’s exemplary service as a saintly knight-pilgrim. The claimed repetition of romance has

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10 Sarah Stanbury, ed., introduction to Pearl (TEAMS).

been adduced as evidence of its childishness or the poverty of the writer’s ability or materials. However, when scenes are so close as to form clear groupings, something else is happening. Baugh catalogs thirty-five recurring actions in the three battle scenes of stanzaic Guy.\(^\text{12}\) Although the following list alters sequence, using a few selected elements from Baugh’s list suggests deliberate patterns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Line Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They crash together</td>
<td>Sir Gii to him gan to drive / that his spere brast afive (3109-10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and smitten togider with dentes grete (1157)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some armor jewels fly off</td>
<td>alle the floures feir and bright / his floures everichon / and his gode charbukel ston / wel even he carf atuo (3136-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alle the stones of michel might / fleyghe doun in the feld (1193-4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spear breaks, horse is killed</td>
<td>that sadel and hors atuo he smot (3118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the stedes nek he dede also (1202)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both fight as if crazed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and ferd as thai wer wode (1158)</td>
<td>leyd on as thai were wode (2228)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Lord,” sayd Gii, “God Almighty” (1216)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Lord, merci,” Tirri gan say</td>
<td>to our Levedi he gan calle (3162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponent taunts hero</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trewelich yeld thou thee to me (1466)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponent’s limb chopped off</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the right arme with the swerd fot-hot (1570)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enemy decapitated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he strok of his heved (1596)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Baugh argues that such parallels indicate the formulaic phrasings of the minstrel.

Ellis dismisses the complete Guy of Warwick as “one of the dullest and most tedious of

our early romances,”13 equally implying a lack of significance in the poem’s triple battles. Yet again an incompetent poet might depict repeated narrative tropes with unimaginative blandness, but to have segments match so closely implies more intelligence. In each third of stanzaic Guy the hero encounters a helpless victim who makes an equivalent “woe is me” lament (550, 1737, 2883) and saves his life through defeat of an evil, deceitful foe in combat. Guy performs a Christlike descent into death to redeem Jonas from a “devel fram helle” (1139), as well as in saving Thierry and then all of England from enemies with equally Satanic attributes. In all three scenes Guy freely chooses to take on the battle for others, and in interceding for Thierry, Guy needs to goad and manipulate the hotheaded steward into letting him enter a dispute which is essentially not his business.

Moreover, each victim has to some extent sinned into their difficulties. Jonas acts pridefully against Triamour, displaying a certain hubris—“we suwed him with maistrie / into his owhen lond” (614-15). Thierry does not deserve the steward’s malice but also betrays a slight “michel prede” (1798). Athelston’s barons are cowards who shirk their duty and sit silently “as men hadde schaven her crounes” (2879) while the kingdom is threatened, much as Beowulf shames Unferth in stating that Grendel only prevails because “he hafað onfunden þæt he þa fæhðe ne þearf / atole ecgþræce eower leode / swiðe onsittan” (“he has found out that he need not fear much fight or any fierce storm of swords from your people!” 595-7). Guy undertakes the “punishment” of each sin, and his doing so three times has suggestive meaning. As Guy prepares to face Colbrand he

carries “a targe listed with gold / portreyd with thre kinges corn / that present God when He was born” (2997-9).

Numerous romances have some form of triple sequence, yet they usually lack either the hagiographic intent of Guy or close narrative equivalence in their groupings. In King Horn the hero fights three battles with Saracens, but the scenes do not match in sequence, length, or intensity. The first and third struggles are routine and brief compared to the heightened dramatic tension of the second battle in Ireland when Horn “bivo him sa gh he stonde / that driven him of lond / and that his fader slogh” (“saw standing before him those who drove him out of his land and murdered his father,” 877-9). The hero of Floris and Blancheflor similarly stays with three hosts but Floris is a Muslim and has little interest in the poem beyond recovering his girlfriend. Only in the stanzaic Guy do the three parallel battles connect to the hero’s saintly signification.

A second aspect of the poem’s numerical meaning derives from its manuscript arrangement. The stanzaic Guy has dialectal as well as metrical differences from the couplet Guy. Mills argues that the poem derives from a different continental version of Gui de Warewic and had a separate existence apart from the couplet section.¹⁴ Yet the two portions of Guy and Reinbroun are clearly intended in a three-part continuum by their linear foliation while still being neatly parsable into separate tales, which is what Auchinleck intends in its formatting. Folio 146b of Guy of Warwick has a richly decorated G for “God graunt hem heven-blis” (1) and has the abrupt change from couplet to stanza form to indicate a transition into the second part of the tale. 167r has a decorated

image and a title with explicit to indicate the beginning of Reinbroun. Moving Reinbroun to a separate poem in the codex additionally makes this linear configuration clearer by allowing the poet’s focus to remain uncluttered on Guy’s parallel search for Felice/grace. Yet the unique three-part division of the poem in Auchinleck might also suggest a numerical representation of the Trinity in miniature just as Dante ostensibly intends in his three comedies.

Single and recurring numbers within Guy are additionally invested with numerological meanings which support the poem’s hagiographic themes. Christian scripture uses forty as an indefinite number but often employs it to denote times of trial: the ark floats forty days, Christ is tempted forty days, and the Hebrews wander the desert forty years. Similarly, Jonas has a year and forty days to find a challenger (770), Amoraunt has killed men in forty battles (1303), and Guy defeats forty thousand Saracens in battle (1334), all situations requiring fortitude. Guy appears in Felice’s court as a beggar in a group of thirteen (3353) and his meekness unsubtly suggests Christ and his disciples. Seven has biblical associations with perfection and totality, being the number of the days of creation and the seven seals of Revelation. In the text “a thousand angels and seven” (3513) carry away Guy’s soul. The poet might simply use the number conventionally. Mirroring Bevis’ seven-year captivity, the steward threatens Guy with “seven winter” (2084) of imprisonment in his histrionic fury. Yet these sevens all seem


17 See Peck, 61 for a list of theological and traditional associations with seven. Peck calls seven “a uniquely strong number because it is indivisible.” The seven deadly sins are perilous but also suggest a sort of perfective trial.

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thematically linked by the tempering and testing each hero undergoes through these trials, much as Jacob must work for Rachel for the same period (Gen. 29:20).

The ten incidences of the number fifteen in the poem remain puzzling. Earl Jonas has fifteen sons (580), they defeat fifteen emirs (604), Guy kills fifteen outlaws (2690), and Guy forces the expulsion of Anlaf’s fifteen thousand knights (2812) in defeating Colbrand. Couplet Guy also has six fifteens. Signally, Guy and Felice’s wedding feast, their time spent together as husband and wife, and the period of time which Guy predeceases Felice are all fifteen day spaces (211, 221, 3560). The poet twice uses the formula “on the fiftenday” to stress the ends of these periods. The matching numbers underscore the closure effected by paralleling the couple’s marital happiness with their sanctified reunion at the moment of Guy’s death. Yet the repeated use of fifteen as a determiner lacks a clear theological signification. A clue might be found in scholastic traditions involving five, which had special meaning as a “golden number” for Pythagorus and for Macrobius. One of its significations was the Pentateuch but also flesh and marriage,¹⁸ and Fleissner posits that Chaucer gives the Wife of Bath five husbands for such a reason.¹⁹ Now our argument becomes rather strained. But could Guy’s numerical symbolism of the Trinity come into play if we notice 3 x 5 = 15? Such a conclusion might help to explain the poet’s use of fifteen in exactly such moments where the poet stresses the perfection and completion of the action or time period.

Felice, Guy, and Reinbroun recall but ultimately do not stand for the elements of the Trinity any more than St. Bernard, Virgil, and Beatrice “are” Father, Son, and Holy

¹⁸ Peck, 24.
¹⁹ Fleissner, 129.
Ghost, and the poet might have thought the idea blasphemous. Doob gives the name _situational allegory_ to the medieval device of giving characters temporary significations within narrative scenes. Thus “it is action and plot that matters in this type of allegory” which “adds richness to people or events without rigidly defining them.”

Felice moves Guy to selfless acts and reunites with him as his soul passes from his body (3512), but her allegorical connection to the Holy Trinity is otherwise limited. She has the nurturing, feminine presence of Beatrice but lacks understanding of Guy’s mission, questioning why he cannot seek grace while remaining with her and proposing that “chirches and abbays thou might make” (331) instead. Guy also suggests a Christ-like example but does not represent Christ. Although his cause is righteous Guy shows little saintly humility in nastily taunting the stupid steward into challenging him to combat, and he kills without regret where he needs to. The poet’s strength is Guy’s human touches which give his piety a personal intimacy.

Romance may have hagiographic influences but is not hagiography, a distinction medieval churchmen did not fail to point out strenuously. Rather, much of Guy’s popularity owed to the hero’s identity as a national hero. For much of the medieval period the fight between Guy and Colbrand was treated as actual history. The poem’s continued popularity into later centuries partly derived from its perceived historical roots in the real Warwickshire, where Guy’s alleged weapons were displayed to visitors.

Wilcox reads the poem as a means of working through the moral and military failures of

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the crusades by re-enacting them in an idealized past where Guy turns down booty instead of disgracefully fighting for it.22 Yet the stanzaic Guy clearly has a homiletic tone in Guy’s search for penitence, and setting the story in a partly historical England might have made its didactic resonance even stronger.23

This rather risky speculation on the stanzaic Guy of Warwick attempts to find meaning and value in one of the more dispensable romances in this collection, a poem reflecting the reality that medieval interests are not modern ones. As Dr. Johnson might say, few ever wished it longer. Numerological meanings in literature, so vital then, now “seem irksome to a modern sensibility.”24 Yet the poem was popular and has numerous rhetorical echoes in Sir Thopas, resulting in thorny but necessary questions of how Chaucer and his audience might have perceived Guy. We know that Chaucer was fond enough of numbers to write his Treatise on the Astrolabe for their calculation, and he would have developed a knowledge of numerology both from his translation of Boethius and through his interests in alchemy and astrology.25 He exhibits a masterful familiarity with such models in his Parson who begins his prologue with a complex mathematical metaphor linking the sun’s position at “degreës nyne and twenty” (X.4) to his pilgrims and he has protagonists such as Nicholas (I.3209) and the Man of Law (II.7-14) who also share his interest in mathematics.

24 Peck, 50.
In a pre-printing era when manuscripts were produced as unique artifacts rather than being “published” in the modern sense, scribes were less anxious to produce a standard text, particularly a romance, freeing themselves to innovate based on their own interpretation of the poem’s themes. The Auchinleck Guy of Warwick displays a unique structuring of content in its triple division and meaningful use of numerology. Guy of Warwick will never be accused of the sophistication of Pearl, but Chaucer might have noticed and appreciated the intelligent use of numbers in Guy. As a final and very tentative conjecture, although Sir Thopas’ fit headings themselves are editorial, Chaucer in turn gives the poem three sections, perhaps humorously placing the hero within his own trivial Divine Comedy.

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CHAPTER 7

Havelock the Dane


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Original Text</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Herkneth to me, gode men -</td>
<td>Pay attention to me, good men,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wives, maydnes, and alle men -</td>
<td>Wives, maidens, and everyone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of a tale that ich you wile telle,</td>
<td>To a tale that I will tell you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wo so it wile here and therto dwelle.</td>
<td>For whoever wants to stay and hear it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The tale is of Havelok imaked:</td>
<td>The story is about Havelock,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Whil he was litel, he yede ful naked.</td>
<td>Who when he was little went half-naked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Havelok was a ful god gome -</td>
<td>Havelock was a good man,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He was ful god in everi trome;</td>
<td>The best in every company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He was the wicteste man at nede</td>
<td>He was the bravest man in need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That thurte ridden on ani stede.</td>
<td>Who might ride on any steed!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That ye mowen now yhere,</td>
<td>So that you may hear me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And the tale you mowen ylere,</td>
<td>And so that you might know the tale,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the biginnig of ure tale,</td>
<td>At the beginning of our story,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fil me a cuppe of ful god ale;</td>
<td>Fill me a cup of your best ale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And wile drinken, her I spelle,</td>
<td>And while drinking, while I tell it,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That Crist us shilde alle fro helle.</td>
<td>May Christ shield us all from Hell!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Krist late us hevere so for to do</td>
<td>May Christ protect us forever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That we moten comen Him to;</td>
<td>So that we might come to Him,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And, witthat it mote ben so,</td>
<td>And, so that it may be so,¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Benedicamus Domino!</td>
<td>Let us praise the Lord!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Here I schal biginnen a rym;</td>
<td>Here I'll begin the rhyme,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ And, witthat it mote ben so: TEAMS connects line 19 to 20, whereas Skeat feels that 19 continues 18. Skeat gives the word division as and wit that it mote ben so, “and see that it may be so.” Walter W. Skeat, ed., The Lay of Havelock the Dane (London: Early English Text Society, 1868).
Krist us yeve wel god fyn!
The rym is maked of Havelok -
A stalworthi man in a flok.
He was the stalwortheste man at nede
That may riden on ani stede.
It was a king bi are dawes,
That in his time were gode lawes
He dede maken and ful wel holden;

30

Hym lovde yung, him lovede holde -
Erl and barun, dreng and thayn,
Knict, bondeman, and swain,
Wydues, maydnes, prestes and clerkes,
And al for hise gode werkes.
He lovde God with al his micth,
And Holy Kirke, and soth ant ricth.
Ricthwise men he lovede alle,
And overal made hem for to calle.
Wreieres and wrobberes made he falle
And hated hem so man doth galle;
Utlawes and theves were bound,
Any that he might find,
And hung high on the gallows tree.

40

He took neither gold nor any bribe
from them.
In that time a man that bore
Upwards of fifty pounds, I guess, or more,
Of red gold on his bac,
In a male with or blac,
Ne funde he non that him misseyde,
Ne with ivele on hond leyde.
Thanne micthe chapmen fare
Thuruth Englund wit here ware,
And baldelike beye and sellen,
Overal ther he wil en dwellen -
In gode burwes and therfram
Ne funden he non that dede hem sham,
That he ne weren sone to sorwe broth,
And pouere maked and brought to nouth.
Thanne was Engelond at hayse -

60

Michel was swich a king to preysye
That held so Englund in grith!
Krist of hevene was him with -
He was Engelondes blome.
Was non so bold louerd to Rome
That durste upon his bringhe
Hunger ne here - wicke thinghe.
Hwan he felled e hise foos,
He made hem lurken and crepen in wros -
And may Christ give us a good end!
The ryme is about Havelock,
A steady man to have in a group.
He was the hardiest man in need
Who might ride on any steed.
There was a king in days of old,
Who in his time made good laws
And observed them well.
He was loved by young, loved by old,
By earl and baron, vassal and retainer;2
Knight, bondsman, and servant,
Widows, maidens, priests, and clerks,
And all for his good works.
He loved God with all his might,
And the holy church, and truth and justice.
He loved all righteous men,
And everywhere had them at his call.
He made traitors and robbers fail,
And hated them like men hate bitter drink.
Outlaws and thieves were bound,
Any that he might find,
And hung high on the gallows tree.
He took neither gold nor any bribe from them.
In that time a man who bore
Upwards of fifty pounds, I guess, or more,
Of red gold on his back,
In a pouch, white or black,
Would not meet anyone who would mistreat him,
Or lay hands on him with evil intent.
Back then merchants could travel
Throughout England with their wares,
And boldly buy and sell,
Anywhere they wanted to stay.
In fine towns and in the countryside
They would not meet anyone to cause them harm
Who would not soon be brought to ruin,
Made poor, and reduced to nothing for it.
England was at ease then.
There was much to praise about such a king
Who held England in such peace.
Christ in Heaven was with him;
He was England’s bloom!
There was no lord as far as Rome
Who dared to bring to his people
Hunger, invasion, or wicked causes.
When the king defeated his enemies,
He made them lurk and creep in corners.

2 Dreng and thayn: The list seems to be in decreasing level of social rank from nobility (earl and baron), to non-noble landholders, down to non-free peasants (bondsmen). The food chain is complicated and evolves between Anglo-Saxon and Norman England, but Skeat states that a dreng held land in exchange for military service and a thane provided lesser services (note for line 31, page 88).
They all hid themselves and kept quiet,  
And did all his heart’s will.  
But he loved justice above all things.  
No man could corrupt him into wrong,  
Not for silver or for gold,  
So faithful was he to his soul.  
To the orphaned he was their protector;  
Whoever did them wrong or harm,  
No matter if they were a cleric or knight,  
Was soon brought to justice by him.  
And as for anyone who did widows wrong,  
There was no knight so strong  
That he wouldn’t soon have him thrown  
Into fetters and fasten them tightly.  
And as for whoever shamed a maiden  
By her body, or brought her into blame,  
Unless it was by her consent,  
He made him lose some of his limbs.  
The king was the best knight in need  
Who might ever ride on a steed,  
Or hold a weapon, or lead out an army.  
He was never so afraid of any knights  
That he would not spring forth like sparks from fire 
And let them know by the deeds of his hand  
How he could be victorious with a weapon.  
With others he took their horses or fine clothes,  
Or made them quickly spread their hands,  
And cry loudly, “Mercy, Lord!”  
He was generous and by no means stingy.  
He never had bread so good  
On his table or a morsel so fine  
That he would not give it to feed  
The poor who went on foot,  
In order to receive from Him the reward  
That He bled on the Cross for us to have—  
Christ, who can guide and protect all  
Who ever live in any land.  
The king was called Athelwold.  
With speech and weapons he was bold.  
In England there was never a knight  
Who better held the land in justice.  
But he had fathered no heir  
Except for a very fair maiden

3 Although the Wife of Bath’s knight is initially condemned to death for rape, sexual assault in Anglo-Saxon England was seen more as a property crime against the woman’s family and would usually have resulted in a stiff fine. Here Athelwold’s untypical strictness is lauded by the poet. See also the Sir Degare & Orfeo essay.

4 Other he refte him hors or wede: A victorious army despoiled the defeated. French and Hale note, “The practice was deplored by moralists as unchristian, but is a matter of course in the romances” (TEAMS). Here Athelwold receives no censure. Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, eds., Middle English Metrical Romances (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1930), 78.
That was so yung that she ne couthue
Gon on fote ne speke wit mouthe.
Than him tok an ivel strong.
That he wel wiste and underfong
That his deth was comen him on
And saide, “Crist, wat shal I don?
Louerd, wat shal me to rede?
I wot ful wel ich have mi mede.
Hw shal now my douhter fare?
Of hire have ich michel kare;
Sho is mikel in my thouth -
Of meself is me rith nowt.
No selcouth is thou me be wo:
Sho ne can speke ne sho kan go.
Yif scho couthe on horse ride,
And a thousande men bi hire syde,
And sho were comen intil helde
And Engelond sho couthe welde,
And don hem of thar hire were queme,
And hire bodi couthe yeme,
Ne wolde me neveere ivele like,
Ne though ich were in heveneriche.”
Quanne he havede this pleinte maked,
Therafter stronglike quaked.
He sende writes sone onon
After his erles evereichon;
And after hise baruns, riche and poure,
Fro Rokesburw al into Dovere,
That he shulden comen swithe
Til him, that was ful unblithe,
To that stede ther he lay
In harde bondes nicth and day.
He was so faste wit yvel fest
That he ne mouthe haven no rest,
He ne mouthe no mete het,
Ne he ne mouchte no lythe gete,
Ne non of his ivel that couthe red -
Of him ne was nouth buten ded.
Alle that the writes herden
Who was so young that she could not
Walk or speake with her mouth.
Then he was taken by a violent illness,
So that he knew well and understood
That his death was coming.
And he said, “Crist, what should I do?
Lord, how should I be advised?
I know full well I will have my reward,
But how will my daughter fare?
I have great concerns about her
And she is much in my thoughts;
I have no worries about myself.
It is no wonder for You that I am anxious.
She cannot speak, nor can she walk.
If she knew how to ride a horse,
With a thousand men by her side,
And she came to age,
She could rule England
And do to others as she pleased
And would know how to rule her body.
I would otherwise never be at ease,
Even if I were in Heaven’s realm.”
When he had made this plea,
He shivered strongly after.
At once he sent out writs
To his earls, each one of them,
And to his barons, riche and poure,
From Rokesburw through to Dover,
That they should come quickly
To him, as he was very ill,
To the place where he lay
In hard bonds, night and day.
He was so trapped in death’s grip
That he could have no rest.
He could take no food,
Nor might he have any comfort.
No one could advise him in his gloom,
For he was little more than dead.
All who obeyed the writs

---

5 Him tok an ivel strong: ME romance seems to regularly use such poetic formulas for illness. See also Bevis of Hampton, 179 where the queen fakes her oncoming death. Yet in Amis and Amiloun, 503 Amis suffers from a malady.

6 The poet’s predilection for extended negative constructions, combined with ME’s tendency to pile on multiple negatives, sometimes results in confusing lines such as this. The poet may intend the yif in 126 to be more like unless, which would make the entire clause from 126 to 131 a conditional: “Unless she could rule England I would be unhappy even if I were in Heaven.”

7 French and Hale also note that the poet tends to omit pronouns (TEAMS). Again, combined with early ME’s weak distinction between single and plural pronouns, at times referents are less than clear.

8 Rokesburw: Roxburgh, about 70 km south of Edinburgh, was an often-disputed fort on the Scottish border. The expression suggests totality: “from sea to shining sea.”
Sorful and sori til him ferden;
He wrungen hondes and wepen sore
And yrne preyden Cristes hore -
That He wolde turnen him
Ut of that yvel that was so grim.
Thanne he weren comen alle
Bifor the king into the halle,
At Winchestre ther he lay,
“Welcome,” he sayde, “be ye ay!
Ful michel thank kan I you
That ye aren comen to me now.”
When they were all seated
And the king aveden igret,
He greten and go
uleden and gouven hem ille,
And he bad hem alle been stille
And seyde that greting helpeth nouth,
―For al to dede am ich brouth.
Bute now ye sen that I shal deye,
Now ich wille you alle preye
Of mi douther, that shal be
Yure levedi after me,
Wo may yemen hire so longe,
Bothen hire and Engelonde,
Til that she be wman of helde
And that she move hir yemen and welde?”
He answereden and seyden anon,
Bi Crist and bi Seint Jon,
That th erl Godrigh of Cornwayle
Was trewe man wituten faile,
Wis man of red, wis man of dede,
And men haveden of him mikel drede -
“He may hire altherbest yeme,
Til that she move wel ben quene.”
The king was payed of that rede.
A wol fair cloth bringen he dede,
And thereon leyde the mesebok,
The caliz, and the pateyn ok,
The corporaus, the messe-gere.
Theron he garte the erl swere
That he sholde yemen hire wel,
Withuten lac, wituten tel,
Til that she were twelf winter hold
And of speche were bold,
And that she couthe of curtesye,
Gon and spoken of lovedrurye,
And til that she loven muthe
Traveled to him in sorrow and grief.
They wrung their hands and wept bitterly,
And earnestly prayed for Christ’s grace,
That He would release him
From his illness which was so grim.
When they had all come
Before the king in the hall
Where he lay at Winchester,
“You are forever welcome!” he said.
“I give you great thanks
That you have come to me now.”
When they were all seated
And the king had greeted them,
They wept and wailed and mourned,
Until the king asked that they all be quiet,
And said, “Crying does nothing to help,
For I am brought to death.
But now that you see that I am dying,
I will ask you all now
About my daughter, who will be
Your sovereign lady after me.
Who will guard her for a time,
Both her and England,
Until she is a woman of age,
And can take care of and guide herself?”
They answered and said at once,
By Christ and by Saint John,
That Earl Godrigh of Cornwall
Was a faithful man, without doubt,
A wise man in counsel, a wise man in deed,
And men had great deference for him.
“He can best take care of her,
Until she may be queen in full.”
The king was pleased with that advice.
He had a beautiful woolen cloth brought,
And laid the mass-book on it,
The chalice, and the Eucharist plate as well,
And the communion cloth and vestments.
Then he made the earl swear
That he would protect her well,
Without fail, without reproach,
Until she was twelve years old
And she was confident in speech
And could understand court etiquette
And the manners and speech of courtship,
And until she might love

---

9 Wman: The MED has no other text with this spelling of *woman*, and it is used again in 281. The scribe tends to omit letters. Alternatively, Skeat has *winan*.

10 Twelf winter hold: A noble woman might have been eligible for marriage after first menstruation, between 12 and 15, although non-noble women would have married later. Shakespeare’s Juliet is similarly fourteen. But note line 259 where Godrich cynically delays her advancement until age 20.
Wom so hire to gode thoucte;  
And that he shulde hire yeve  
The beste man that michte live -  
The beste, fayreste, the strangest ok;  
That dede he him sweren on the bok,  
And thanne shulde he Engelond  
Al bitechen into hire hond.  
Quanne that was sworn on his wise,  
The king dede the mayden arise,  
And the erl hire bitaucte  
And al the lond he evere awcte -  
Engelonde, everi del -  
And preide he shulde yeme hire wel.  
The king ne moucte don no more,  
But yerne preyede Godes ore,  
And dede him hoslen wel and  
shrive,  
I wot fif hundred sithes and five,  
And ofte dede him sore swinge  
And wit hondes smerte dinge  
So that the blod ran of his fleys,  
That tendre was and swithe neys.  
He made his quiste swithe wel  
And sone gaf it everil del.  
Wan it was goven, ne miete men finde  
So mikel men miete him in winde,  
Of his in arke ne in chiste,  
That anyone knew of in England.  
For al was yoven, faire and wel,  
So that no possessions were left to him.  
Thanne he havede been ofte swngen,  
Ofte shriven and ofte dungen,  
―In manus tuas, Louerde,‖ he seyde,  
Her that he the speche leyde,  
To Jesu Crist bigan to calle  
And deyede biforn his heymen alle.  
Than he was ded, there michte men se  
The meste sorwe that michte be:  
Ther was sobbing, siking, and sor,  
Handes wringing and drawing bi hor.  
Alle greten swithe sore,  
Riche and poure that there wore,  
And mikel sorwe haveden alle -  
Levedyes in boure, knictes in halle.  
Quan that sorwe was somdel laten  
And he haveden longe graten,  
Whoever she felt seemed best to her;  
And that he would give to her  
The highest man who might live,  
The best, fairest, and the strongest as well.  
All this the king had him swear on the book.  
And then he would bestow  
All of England into her hand.  
When that was sworn in this way,  
The king had the maiden rise,  
And committed her to the earl  
Along with all the land he ever owned,  
Every part of England,  
And prayed that he would keep her well.  
The king could do no more,  
But earnestly prayed for God’s grace  
And took communion and confession,  
Five hundred and five times, I know,  
And repeatedly scourged himself severely,  
And beat himself painfully with his own hands  
So that the blood ran from his flesh,  
Which had been so tender and soft.  
He made his will out carefully,  
And soon after had every part affirmed.  
When it was executed, no man could find  
So much as a burial sheet to wrap him in  
Of his in any coffer or chest  
That anyone knew of in England.  
For everything was disposed of, fair and clear,  
So that no possessions were left to him.  
When he had been continually scourged,  
Confessed, and beaten,  
He said, “Into your hands, Lord,”  
And set aside his words then.  
He began to call on Jesus Christ,  
And died before all of his noblemen.  
When he was dead, men could see  
The greatest sorrow that might be.  
There was sobbing, sighing, and grief,  
Hands wringing, and clutching of hair.  
Everyone there wept bitterly,  
All the rich and poor that were there,  
And all had great sorrow,  
Ladies in chambers, and knights in the hall.  
When the mourning had subsided somewhat,  
And they had wept a long time.

11 In manus tuas, Louerde: Christ’s last words before death, in Luke 23:46: “Into your hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit.” The poet emphasizes Athelwold’s Christian saintliness with the reference and with his final acts of charity, although unlike Christ, Athelwold’s penitential scourging is voluntary. Self-flagellation for mortification of the flesh was practiced in some austere monasteries until it grew into extremes such as the Flagellants lay movement of the fourteenth century. The church largely suppressed the practice afterward.
Belles deden he sone ringen,  
Monkes and prestes messe singen;  
And saturenes deden he manie reden,  
That God self shulde his soule leden  
Into hevene biforn his Sone,  
And ther wituten hende wonne. 

Than he was to the erthe brought,  
The riche erl ne forgat nought  
That he ne dede al Engelond  
Sone sayse intil his hond,  
And in the castells leth he do  
The knicthes he mighte tristen to,  
And alle the Englis dede he swere  
That he shulden him ghod fey beren:  
He yaf alle men that god thoucte,  
Liven and deyen til that him moucte,  
Til that the kings dowter wore  
Twenti winter hold and more. 

Thanne he havede taken this oath  
Of erles, baruns, lef and loth,  
Of knicthes, cherles, fre and thewe,  
Justises dede he maken newe  
Al Engelond to faren thorw  
Fro Dovere into Rokesborw. 

So he ne dede al Engelond  
Sone sayse intil his hond,  
And in the castels leth he do  
The knicthes he mighte tristen to,  
And alle the Englis dede he swere  
That he shulden him ghod fey beren:  
He yaf alle men that god thoucte,  
Liven and deyen til that him moucte,  
Til that the kings dowter wore  
Twenti winter hold and more. 

Than the king was delivered to the earth,  
The powerful earl overlooked nothing  
Until he soon had all of England  
Seized into his hand.  
He placed in the castles  
The knights which he could trust,  
And he forced all the English to swear  
That they would act in good faith to him.  
He gave men what seemed right to him,  
To live and die as he saw fit  
Until the king’s daughter was  
Twenty years old or more.  
When the earl had received this oath  
From earls and barons, fair and foul,  
From knights and laborers, free and bound,  
He had new justices appointed  
To travel through all England  
From Dover into Roxburgh.  
He ordained sheriffs, church officers, and reeves,  
And peace sergeants with long lances,  
To guard the wild woods and paths  
From wicked men who would commit harm,  
And to have all at his beck and call,  
At his will, and at his mercy,  
So that no one would dare be against him,  
Not earl, baron, knight, or peasant.  
To be sure, in truth, he had an abundance  
Of people, weapons, and possessions.  
Truly, in a short while,  
All of England stood in awe of him;  
All of England was afraid of him,  
Like the cattle fears the prod.  
The king’s daughter began to flower  
And grew into the fairest woman alive.  
She was wise in all manners  
That were good and were cherished.  
The maiden was called Goldeboro,  
And for her many a tear would be wept.  
When Earl Godrich heard about the maiden,  
How well she was faring,  
How wise she was, how chaste, how fair,  
And how she was the rightful heir

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12 The Havelock poet writes before the expansion of justices in the fourteenth century, but throughout the medieval period the English citizenry had mixed feelings about such appointments as they brought both order and oppression. For a more extensive discussion see the essay on Gamelyn.
Of Engelond, of al the rike;
Tho bigan Godrich to sike,
And sayde, “Wethe r she sholde be
Quen and levedi over me?
Hwether sho sholde al Engelond
And me and mine haven in hire hond?
Datheit hwo it hire thave!
Shal sho it nevere more have.
Sholde ic yeve a fol, a therne,
Engelond, thou sho it yerne?
Datheit hwo it hire yeve
Ev er more hwil I live!
She is waxen al to prud,
For gode metes and noble shrud,
That hic have yoven hire to ofte;
Hic have yemed hire to softe.
Ich have a sone, a ful fayr knave;
He sha l Engelond al have!
He shal king, he shal ben sire,
So brouke I evere mi blake swire!”
Hwan this trayson was al thouth,
Of his oth ne was him nouth.
He let his oth al overga.
Therof he yaf he nouth a stra,
Bute sone dede hire fete,
Er he wolde heten ani mete,
Fro Winchestre ther sho was,
Also a wicke traytur Judas,
And dede leden hire to Dovre,
That standeth on the seis oure,
And therhinne dede hire fede
Pourelike in feble wede.
The castel dede he yemen so
That non ne micte comen hire to
Of hire frend, with to speken,
That hevere micte hire bale wreken.
Of Goldeboru shul we now laten,
That nouth ne blinneth forto granten
Ther sho liggeth in prisoun.
Jesu Crist, that Lazarun
To live broucte fro dede bondes,
He lese hire wit Hise hondes!
And leve sho mote him yse
Of England, of all the kingdom,
Then Godrich began to complain,
And gripped, “Why should she be
Queen and lady over me?
Why should she have all England,
And me and what’s mine, in her hand?
Damn whoever lets her have it!
She will never see it happen.
Should I give a fool, a serving wench,
England, just because she wants it?
Damn whoever hands it to her
While I’m alive!
She has grown too proud
With the good food and royal clothes
That I have too often given her.
I have pampered her too well!
It is not going to end as she thinks.
Hope often makes a foolish man blind.
I have a son, a handsome boy;
He shall have all England!
He shall be king! He will be sire,
So long as I have a head on these shoulders!”
When this treason was all thought out,
His oath no longer meant anything to him.
He let his promise go entirely,
And after then did not care a straw for it.
But before he would eat another thing,
He ordered for her to be fetched
From where she was at Winchester,
And just like a wicked traitor Judas,
He had her sent to Dover,
Which stands on the seashore,
And had her kept there
In poverty and in wretched clothes.
He had the castle guarded
So that none of her friends
Might come to speak with her.
Anyone who might ever avenge her wrong.
We will now leave Goldboro for a while,
Who laments without ceasing,
Where she lies in prison.
May Jesus Christ, who brought Lazarus
To life from the bonds of death,
Release her with His hands!
And grant that she might see him

Heye hangen on galwe tre
That hire haved in sorwe brooth,
So as sho ne misdeede nouth.
Say we now forth in hure spelle!
In that time, so it bifelle,
Was in the lond of Denemark
A riche king and swythe stark.
The name of him was Birkabeyn;
He haved mani knict and sweyn;
He was fayr man and wict,
Of bodi he was the beste knich
That evere micte leden uth here,
Or stede on ride or handle sper.
Thre children he havede bi his wif
- He hem lovede so his lif.
He havede a sone, douhtres two,
Swithe fayre, as fel it so.
He that wile non forbere,
Riche ne poure, king ne kaysere,
Deth him tok than he best wolde
Liven, but hyse dayes were fulde,
That he ne moucte no more live,
For gold ne silver ne for no gyve.
Hwan he that wiste, rathe he sende
Aft er prestes, fer an hende -
Chanounes gode and monkes bothe,
Him for to wisse and to rede,
Him for to hoslen an for to shrive,
Hwil his bodi were on live.
Hwan he was hosled and shriven,
His quiste maked and for him gyven,
Hise knictes dede he alle site,
For thoru hem he wolde wite
Hwo micte yeme his children yunge
Til that he kouthen speken wit tunge,
Spoken and gangen, on horse riden,
Knictes and sweynes by here siden.
He spoken theroffe and chosen sone
A riche man that under mone,
Was the trewest, that he wende -
Godard, the kinges owne frende -
And seyden he moucthe hem best loke
Yif that he hem undertoke,
Til hise sone mouthe bere
Helm on heved and leden ut here,
In his hand a spere stark,
Hanging high on the gallows tree,
The man who brought her into sorrow,
Even though she had done no wrong.
Let us continue forth in our story.
In that time, as it so happened,
In the land of Denmark there was
A rich and very powerful king.
His name was Birkabeyn.
He had many knights and attendants;
He was a handsome and valiant man.
He was the best knight in body
Who ever might command an army,
Or ride a horse, or handle a speare.
He had three children by his wife,
And he loved them as much as his life.
He had a son and two daughters
Who were, as it happened, very beautiful.
But death, who spares no one,
Neither rich nor poor, king nor emperor,
Took him when he would rather live;
But his dayes were complete,
So that he could no longer remain,
Not for gold, silver, or any gift.
When the king realized this he quickly sent
For priests from near and far,
Canon priests and monks as well, 14
To counsel and advise him,
And to confess and absolve him
While his body was still alive.
When he was given the sacraments,
With his will made and given for him,
He had all his knights seated,
For through them he would know
Who might take care of his young children
Until they could speak with their tongues,
Walk and talk, and rise horses
With knights and attendants by their sides.
He spoke of this matter and soon chose
A powerful man who was the truest
Under the moon that he knew—
Godard, the king’s own friend—
And said he might care for them best 15
If he committed himself to them,
Until his son could bear
A helmet on his head and lead an army,
With a strong spear in his hand,

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14 *Chanounes gode*: A canon was “a priest of a cathedral church or a member of a particular religious community” (TEAMS). Here they are regular clergy of enough authority to give confession to the king.

15 *He moucthe hem best loke*: Who is speaking here is not clear, as the pronouns do not indicate. Likely the king is addressing Godard, referring back to the clause beginning on 372. But in 382, “He [the king] believed what he said,” although this may refer to Godard’s implied response.
And king been maked of Denemark.  
He wel trowede that he seyd,  
And on Godard handes leyde;  
And seyd, "Here biteche I thee  
Mine children alle thre,  
Al Denemark and al mi fe,  
Til that mi sone of helde be,  
But that ich wille that thou swere  
On auter and on messe gere,  
On the belles that men ringes,  
And o
n mens bok the prest on singes,  
That thou mine children shalt wel yeme,  
That hire kin be ful wel queme,  
Til mi sone mowe ben knicth.  
Thanne biteche him tho his ricth:  
Denemark and that ther til longes -  
Casteles and tunes, wodes and wonges."

Godard stirt up and s
wor al that  
The king him bad, and sithen sat  
Bi the knictes that ther ware,  
That wepen alle swithe sare  
For the king that deide sone.  
Jesu Crist, that makede mone  
On the mirke nith to shine,  
Wite his soule fro helle pine;  
And leve that it mote wone  
In heveneriche with Godes Sone!  
Hwan Birkabeyn was leyd in grave,  
The erl dede sone take the knave,  
Havelok, that was the eir,  
Swanborow, his sister, Helfled, the tother,  
And in the castel dede he hem do,  
Ther non ne micte hem comen to  
Of here kyn, ther thei s
perd were.  
Ther he greten ofte sore  
Bothe for hunger and for kold,  
Or he weren thre winter hold.  
Feblelike he gaf hem clothes;  
He ne yaf a note of hise othes -  
He hem clothede rith ne fedde,  
Ne hem ne dede richelike bebedde.  
Thanne Godard was sikerlike  
Under God the moste swike  
That eve in erthe shaped was.  
Withutcn on, the wike Judas.  
Have he the malisun today  
Of alle that eve speken may -  
Of patriark and of pope,  
And of prest with loken kope,  
Of monekes and hermites bothe,  
And of the leve Holi Rode  
That God himsef ran on blode!  
Crist warie him with His mouth!  
Waried wrthe he of north and suth,  
And be made king of Denmark.  
The king believed what Godard said  
And laid hands on him  
And said, "I here entrust to you  
Each of my three children,  
All Denemark, and all my properties,  
Until my son is of age.  
But I want you to swear  
On the altar and the church vestments,  
On the bells that men ring,  
And on the hymnal from which the priests sing,  
That you will protect my children well,  
So that their family will be satisfied,  
Until my son can be a knight.  
Then endow him with his right:  
Denmark and all that belongs to it,  
Castles, towns, woods, and fields."  
Godard rose and swore everything  
That the king asked him, and afterward sat  
With the knights who were there,  
Who were all weeping very bitterly  
For the king, who so soon died.  
May Jesus Christ, who makes the moon  
Shine on the darkest night,  
Protect his soul from Hell’s pains,  
And grant that it may dwell  
In Heaven with God’s Son!  
When Birkabeyn was laid in his grave,  
The earl immediately took the boy,  
Havelock, who was the heir,  
Swanborow, his sister, and Hefled, the other,  
And he had them put in the castle,  
Where none might come to them  
From their relatives; there they were kept.  
They cried there miserably,  
Both from hunger and the cold,  
Before they were even three years old.  
He gave them clothes grudgingly;  
He didn’t care a nut about his oaths!  
He didn’t clothe or feed them properly,  
Or provide them with a royal bedroom.  
In that time Godard was surely  
The worst traitor under God  
Who was ever created on earth,  
Except for one, the wicked Judas.  
May he have the curse today  
Of all who might ever pronounce them,  
Of patriarchs and popes,  
And of priests with buttoned cloaks,  
Of both monks and hermits,  
And by the beloved Holy Cross  
That God Himself bled upon.  
May Christ condemn him with His mouth!  
May he be reviled from north to south,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Verse 1</th>
<th>Verse 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>440</td>
<td>Offe alle men that spoken kunne,</td>
<td>By all men who can speak,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Of Crist that made mone and sunne!</td>
<td>By Christ, who made the moon and sun.</td>
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<td>Thanne he havede of al the lond</td>
<td>For after then he had all the land,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Al the folk tilled intil his hond,</td>
<td>And all the folk, tilled into his hand,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And alle haveden sworn him oth,</td>
<td>And all had to swear him oaths,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Riche and poure, lef and loth,</td>
<td>Rich and poor, fair and foul,</td>
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<td>That he sholden hise wille freme</td>
<td>That they would perform his will,</td>
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<td>And that he shulde him nouth greme,</td>
<td>And that they would not oppose him.</td>
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<td>He thouthe a ful strong trechery,</td>
<td>He worked up a villainous treachery,</td>
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<td>A trayson and a felony,</td>
<td>A treason and a felony,</td>
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<td>Of the children for to make -</td>
<td>To carry out on the children.</td>
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<td>The devel of helle him sone take!</td>
<td>May the devil soon take him to Hell!</td>
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<td>Hwan that was thouth, onon he ferde</td>
<td>When that was planned, he went on</td>
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<td>To the tour ther he woren sperde,</td>
<td>To the tower where they were kept,</td>
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<td>Ther he greten for hunger and cold.</td>
<td>Where they wept for hunger and cold.</td>
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<td>450</td>
<td>The knave, that was sumdel bold,</td>
<td>The boy, who had more courage,</td>
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<td>Kam him ageyn, on knes him sette,</td>
<td>Came to him and set himself on his knees,</td>
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<td>And Godard ful feyre he ther grette.</td>
<td>And greeted Godard courteously.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And Godard seyde, “Wat is yw?</td>
<td>Godard said, “What’s the matter with you?</td>
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<td>Hwi grete ye and goulen now?”</td>
<td>Why are you all bawling and yowling?”</td>
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<td>“For us hunreth swithe sore” -</td>
<td>“Because we are bitterly hungry,” he said.</td>
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<td>Seyden he, “we wolden more:</td>
<td>“We need more to eat.</td>
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<td>We ne have to hethe, ne we ne have</td>
<td>We have no heat, nor do we have</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Her inne nethrey knith ne knave</td>
<td>Either a knight or a servant in here</td>
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<td>That yeveth us drinke ne no mete,</td>
<td>Who gives us half the amount of food</td>
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<td>Halvendel that we moun ete -</td>
<td>Or drink that we could eat.</td>
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<td>Wo is us that we were born!</td>
<td>Woe is us that we were born!</td>
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<td>Weilawe! nis it no korn</td>
<td>Alas! Is there not even grain</td>
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<td>That men micte maken of bred?</td>
<td>That someone could make bread from?</td>
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<td>Us hunreth - we aren ney deel!”</td>
<td>We are hungry and we are nearly dead!”</td>
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<td>Godard herde here wa,</td>
<td>Godard heard their plea,</td>
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<td>Ther-offe yaf he nonth a stra,</td>
<td>And did not care a straw about it,</td>
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<td>But tok the maydnes bothe samen,</td>
<td>But lifted up both of the girls together,</td>
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<td>Al so it were up on his gamen,</td>
<td>Who were green and pale from hunger,</td>
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<td>Al so he wolde with hem leyke</td>
<td>As if it were a game,</td>
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<td>That weren for hunger grene and bleike.</td>
<td>As if he were playing with them.</td>
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<td>Of bothen he karf on tvene throtes,</td>
<td>He slashed both of their throats in two,</td>
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<td>And sithen hem al to grotes.</td>
<td>And then cut them to pieces.</td>
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<td>Ther was sore, wo-so it sawe,</td>
<td>There was sorrow in whoever saw it</td>
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<td>Hwan the children by the wawe</td>
<td>When the children lay by the wall,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Leyen and sprawleden in the blod.</td>
<td>Sprawled in the blood.</td>
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<td>Havelok it saw and therbi stod -</td>
<td>Havelock saw it and stood there.</td>
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<td>Ful sori was that sely knave.</td>
<td>The innocent boy was full of grief.</td>
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<td>Mikel dred he mouthe have,</td>
<td>He must have been frozen in terror,</td>
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<td>For at his herte he saw a knif</td>
<td>For he saw a knife pointed at his heart</td>
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<td>For to reven him hisy lyf.</td>
<td>To rob him of his life.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>But the knave, that litel was,</td>
<td>But the boy, who was so small,</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>He kneelede bifoer that Judas,</td>
<td>Kneeled before that Judas,</td>
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<td>And seyde, “Louerd, mercy now!</td>
<td>And said, “Lord, have mercy now!</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Manrede, louerd, biddi you:</td>
<td>Lord, I offer you homage.</td>
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<td>Al Denemark I wile you yeve,</td>
<td>I will give you all of Denmark,</td>
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<td>To that forward thu late me live.</td>
<td>On the promise that you let me live.</td>
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<td>Here hi wile on boke swere</td>
<td>I will swear on the Bible right here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That nevremore ne shal I bere</td>
<td>That I will never bear against you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ayen thee, louerd, sheld ne spere,
Ne other wepne that may you dere.
Louverd, have merci of me!
Today I wile fro Denemark fle,
Ne neveremore come agheyn!
Sweren I wole that Bircabein
Nevere yete me ne gat.
Hwan the devel herde that,
Sundel bigan him for to rewe;
Withdrow the knif, that was lewe
Of the seli children blod.

Ther was miracle fair and god
That he the knave nthou ne slou,
But for rewnesse him witdrow -
Of Avelok rewede him ful sore,
And thoucte he wolde that he ded wore,
Thoucte he als he him bi stod,
Sturinde als he were wod,
“Yif I late him lives go,
He micte me wirchen michel wo -
Grith ne get I neveremo;
He may me waiten for to slo.
And if he were brouct of live,
And mine children wolden thrive,
Louverdinges after me
Of al Denemark micten he be.
God it wite, he shal ben ded
Wile I taken non other red!
I shal do casten him in the she,
Ther anon he dede sende
After a fisheere that he wende
That wolde al his wille do,
And sone anon he seyde him to:
“Grim, thou wost thu art my thral;
Wille don my wille al
That I wile bidden thee?

Ther I wile that he drench be,
Abouten his hals an anker god,
Thad he ne flete in the flod.”
Ther anon he dede sende
After a fisheere that he wende
That wolde al his wille do,
And sone anon he seyde him to:
“Grim, thou wost thu art my thral;
Wille don my wille al
That I wile bidden thee?

Tomorrow shal maken thee fre,
And aucte thee yeven and riche make,
Withtan thu wilt this child take
And leden him with thee tonicht,

Shield or spear, Lord,
Nor any other weapon that might harm you.
Lord, have mercy on me!
Today I will flee from Denmark
And never come back again.
I will swear that Birkabeyn
Never fathered me.”
When the devil Godard heard that,
He felt a slight twinge of guilt.
He drew back the knife, which was warm
From the innocent children’s blood.
It was a miracle, fair and bright,
That he did not slay the boy,
But out of pity he held back.
He felt strong regret for Havelock,
And though he wished that he were dead,16
Godard not could bring himself
To kill him with his own hand, the foul fiend!
Godard thought as he stood by him,
Staring out as if he were crazy,
“If I let him go alive,
He might cause me great trouble.
I will never have peace,
For he may hide his time to kill me.
And if his life were taken away,
And my children were to thrive,
After my time they might be
Lords of all Denmark!
God knows, he shall be killed.
I will take no other course!
I will have him thrown into the sea,
And there I’ll have him drowned,
With a solid anchor about his neck,
So that he can’t float in the water.”17
From there he immediately sent for
A fisherman that he believed
Would do all his will,
And he said to him at once,
“Grim, you know you are my servant;
Will you do all my will
That I order you to?
Tomorrow I will free you
And give you property, and make you rich,
Provided that you take this child
And bring him with you tonight.

16 And thoucte he wolde that he ded wore: A difficult line. Thoucte is ‘thought’ (see 507) and probably not ‘though’ (ME thagh, though). Yet translating the entire sentence is difficult otherwise, unless Godard is so tormented at the moment that he wishes he were dead himself.

17 Garbaty notes that Godard, like the pirates in King Horn, rationalizes that putting Havelock in the water removes his moral responsibility, as fate will be to blame if he dies. Godard still wants to give fate “a heavy helping hand” with an anchor (Garbaty, note to 519-22).
Than thou sest the monelith,
Into the se and don him therinne.
Al wile I taken on me the sinne.”
Grim tok the child and bond him faste,
Hwil the bondes mict laste,
That weren of ful strong line.
540
Tho was Havelok in ful strong pine -
Wiste he ne vere her wat was wo!
Jhesu Crist, that makede go
The halte and the doumbe speken,
Havelok, thee of Godard wreke!
Hwan Grim him havede faste bounden,
And sithen in an eld cloth wden,
He thriste in his muth wel faste
A kevel of clutes ful unwraste,
That he mouthe speke ne fnaste,
Hwere he wolde him bere or lede.
550
Hwan he havede don that dede,
Hwat the swike him havede he yede
That he shulde him forth lede
And him drinc
hen in the se -
That forwarde makeden he -
In a poke, ful and blac,
Sone he caste him on his bac,
Ant bar him hom to hise cleve,
And bitaucte him Dame Leve
And seyde, “Wite thou this knave,
19
As if you were saving my life!
I will drown him in the sea.
Because of him we will be made free,
And have plenty of gold and other goods;
My lord has promised me this,”
When Dame Leve heard this,
She did not sit but jumped up,
And dropped the boy down so hard
That he banged his head
Against a great rock laying there.20
Then Havelock might have been heard saying
“Alas that I was ever a king’s son!
If only he had fathered a vulture or eagle,
A lion or wolf, a she-wolf or bear,
Or some other beast to harm Godard back!”21

18 Significantly, the poet does not condemn Grim, who is ostensibly “only acting under orders.” For an alternative interpretation of Grim which sees him as too enthusiastic in seeking advancement, see Maldwyn Mills, “Havelok and the Brutal Fisherman,” Medium Aevum 36 (1967): 219-30.
19 Knave: In early ME this simply meant ‘boy.’ Although the word had servile connotations, there was no pejorative nuance yet as there is later when Grim calls himself and Leve cherles in remorseful panic (621).
20 Ageyn a gret ston: Among other uses, rocks were heated in ovens and used to keep beds warm at night. Alison scolds Absolon from her bedside window, “Go forth thy wye, or I wol caste a ston” (CT.I.3712), perhaps reflecting the same practice.
So lay that child to middel nicth,  
That Grim bad Leve bringen lict,  
For to don on his clothes:  

"Ne thenkestu nowt of mine othes  
That ich have mi louerd sworen?  
I will not be forloren."

So the child lay there until midnight,  
When Grim asked Leve to bring a light  
In order to put on his clothes:  

"Don’t you think anything of my oaths  
That I have sworn to my lord?  
I will not be ruined!"

580  
That ich have mi louerd sworen?  
Ne thenkestu nowt of mine othes  
Thou wost that hoves me  
And I shal drenchen him therinne;  
Ris up swithe an go thu binne,  
And blow the fir and lith a kandel."

Als she shulde hise clothes handel  
On for to don and blawe the fir,  
She saw therinne a lith ful shir,  
Al so brith so it were day,  
Around the boy where he lay.  
Of hise mouth it stod a stem  
Als it were a sunnebem;  
It was as light inside the hut  
As bright as if it were day,  
As it were a sunbeam.

Als the child lay there until midnight,  
When Grim asked Leve to bring a light  
In order to put on his clothes:  

"Don’t you think anything of my oaths  
That I have sworn to my lord?  
I will not be ruined!"

590  
That ich have mi louerd sworen?  
Ne thenkestu nowt of mine othes  
Thou wost that hoves me  
And I shal drenchen him therinne;  
Ris up swithe an go thu binne,  
And blow the fir and lith a kandel."

Als she shulde hise clothes handel  
On for to don and blawe the fir,  
She saw therinne a lith ful shir,  
Al so brith so it were day,  
Around the boy where he lay.  
Of hise mouth it stod a stem  
Als it were a sunnebem;  
It was as light inside the hut  
As bright as if it were day,  
As it were a sunbeam.

A swithe brith, a swithe fair.  
"Goddot!" quath Grim, "this ure eir,  
That shal louerd of Denemark!  
He shal be king, strong and stark;  
He shal have in his hand  
All Denemark and Engeland.  
He shal do Godard ful wo;  
He shal him hangen or quik flo,  
Or he shal him al quic grave.  
Of him shal he no merci have."

Thus seide Grim and sore gret,  
And sone fel him to the fet,  
And seide, "Louerd, have mercy  
Of me and Leve, that is me bi!  
Louerd, we aren bothe thine -  
Thine cherles, thine hine.  
Louerd, we sholen thee wel fede

600  
He stirten bothe up to the knave  
For man shal god wille have,  
Ungagged him, and quickly untied him,  
And then immediately found on him,  
As if it were a sunbeam.  
A royal birthmark on his right shoulder,  
A mark so bright and so fair.  
Grim said, “God knows, this is our heir  
Who will be lord of Denmark!  
He will be king, strong and mighty,  
And he will have in his hand  
All of Denmark and England!  
He will bring Godard great grief;  
He will have him hanged or flayed alive,  
Or he will have him buried alive.  
He will get no mercy from him."  
Grim said this and cried bitterly,  
And then fell at Havelock’s feet  
And said, “My lord, have mercy  
On me and Leve, who is beside me!  
Lord, we are both yours—  
Your peasants, your servants.  
Lord, we will raise you well

21 This is again a surmisal taken from context, as the pronouns in early ME do not make it clear who Havelock is talking about.

22 Presumably Leve’s conscience bothers her and Grim needs to argue with her to justify his actions. The sentiment dovetails with line 601 and helps humanize the couple.
Til that thu cone riden on stede,  
Til that thu cone ful wel bere  
Helm on heved, sheld and spere.  
He ne shall nevere wite, sikerlike,  
Godard, that fule swike.  
Thoru other man, louerd, than thoru thee  
Shal I nevere freman be.‖

Then Havelock was a blithe knave!  
He sat him up and cravede bred,  
And seide, ―Ich am ney ded,  
Hwat for unger, wat for bondes  
That thu leidest on min hondes,  
And for kevel at the laste,  
That in my mouth was thrist faste.  
I was ther with so harde prangled  
That I was ther with ney strangled!‖

―Wel is me that thou mayth hete!  
Goddoth!‖ quath Leve, ―I shal thee  
Bred an chese, butere and milk,  
Pastees and flaunes  
Shole we sone thee wel fede,  
Louerd, in this mikel nede.  
Soth it is that men seyt and swereth:  
‗Ther God wile helpen, nouth ne dereth.'‖

When she had brought some food,  
At once Havelock began to ete  
Grundlike, and was ful blithe.  
Couthe he nouth his hunger mithe.  
A lof he het, I woth, and more,  
For him hungrede swithe sore.  
Thre dayes ther biforn, I wene,  
Et he no mete - that was wel sene!  
Hwan he havede eten and was fed,  
Grim dede maken a ful fayr bed,  
Unclothede him and dede him therinne,  
And seyde, ―Slep, sone, with muchel winne!  
Slep wel faste and dred thee mouth -  
Pro sorwe to joie art thu brouth."  
Sone so it was lith of day,  
Grim it undertok the wey  
To the wicke traitour Godard  
That was of Denemark a stiward  
And saide, ―Louerd, don ich have  
That thou me bede of the knave:  
He is drenched in the flod,  
Abouten his hals an anker god -

23 Ther God wile helpen, nouth ne dereth: Apparently proverbial. Compare Thomas A. Kempis’ Imitation of Christ (c. 1418), Book 2, Humility: “The malice of man cannot harm one whom God wishes to help.”
He is witerlike ded.
Eteth he nevremore bred:
He lith drenched in the se.
Yif me gold and other fe,
That I mowe riche be,
And with thi chartre make fre;
For thu ful wel bihetet me
Thanne I last spak with thee.”

Goddard stod and lokede on him
Thoruthlike, with eyne grim,
And seyde, “Wiltu ben erl?
Go hom swithe, fule drit-
Go hethen and be evermore
Thral and cherl als thou er wore-
Shaltu have non other mede;
For litel I do thee lede
To the galwes, so God me rede!
For thou haves don a wicke dede.
Thou mait stonden her to longe,
Bute thou swithe hethen gonge!”

Grim thought to late that he ran
Fro that traytour, that wicke man,
And thorou, “Wat shal me to rede?
Wite he him on live he wile bethe
Heye hangen on galwe tre.
Betere us is of londe to fle,
And berwen bothen ure lives,
And mine children and mine wives.”

Soon after Grim solde sone al his corn,
Shep with wolle, neth with horn,
Hors and swin, geet with berd,
The gees, the hennes of the yerd-
Al he solde that outh douthe,
That he evre selle moucte;
And al he to the peni drou.
Hise ship he greythed wel inow;
He dede it tere an ful wel pike
That it ne doutede sond ne krike;

Therinne dide a ful god mast,
Stronge kables and ful fast,
Ores gode an ful god seyl-
Therinne wantede nouth a nayl,
That evere he sholde therinne do.
Hwan he havedet greythed so,
Havelok the yunge he dede therinne,
Him and his wif, hise sones therinne,
And hise two doutres that faire wore.
And sone dede he leyn in an ore,

And drou him to the heye see,
There he mith altherbeste fle.
Fro londe wornen he bote a mile,
Ne were it nevere but ane hwile
That it ne bigan a wind to rise
Out of the north men calleth “bise,”
And drof hem intil Engelond,
That al was sithen in his hond,
His, that Havelok was the name;
But or he havede michel shame,
Michel sorwe and michel tene,
And yete he gat it al bidene;
Als ye shulen now forthward le
re,
Yf that ye wilen therto here.

When a breeze which men call
The North Wind began to rise\(^{24}\)
And drove them on to England,
Which would later all be in one hand,
And that man’s name would be Havelock.
But before then he would endure
Much shame, sorrow, and hardship.
And yet he got it all completely,
As you will all soon learn
If you wish to hear about it.

In Humber Grim began to lende,
In Lindeseye, rith at the north ende.
Ther sat his ship upon the sond;
But Grim it drou up to the lond;
And there he made a litel cote
To him and to hise flote.

Grim was fishere swithe god,
And mikel couthe on the flod-
Mani god fish therinne he tok,
Bothe with neth and with hok.
He tok the sturgiun and the qual,
And the turbut and lax withal;
He tok the sele and the hwel-
He spedde oft e swithe wel.
Keling he tok and tumberel,
Hering and the makerel.

The butte, the schulle, the thornebake.

---

\(^{24}\) *Bise*: TEAMS notes that this Old French loanword for ‘North Wind’ is common in French literature but does not appear in any other English romance.

\(^{25}\) The poet knows his geography. The Humber River moves into an inlet northwest of Grimsby. Present-day East Lindsey is slightly further south, near Louth. This would have been a trip southwest from Denmark of upwards of 6-700 km, a long voyage for a peasant fishing boat. A fast Viking longship traveling at 14 knots might have completed the trip in two days. Similarly, Grimsby to Lincoln (774) is a good day’s walk at 55 km.

\(^{26}\) “Grim’s By,” reflecting the Old Danish word for village, still traditionally claims its origins from the story of Grim. Grimsby’s medieval seal had images of Grim, Havelock, and Goldeboru, though findings suggest that a small number of Romans occupied the area near Cartergate centuries earlier.

\(^{27}\) Like lists of royalty in medieval romance, the fish here also seem to be ranked from highest to lowest. Sturgeon were a delicacy (as well as whales, curiously) whereas flounder and plaice were a staple now usually found in fish and chip dishes. Also see Skeat’s note on fish as well as TEAMS’ note referencing.
Gode paniers dede he make,  
On til him and other thrinne  
Til hise sones to beren fishe inne,  
Up o londe to selle and fonge - 
Forbar he neyther tun ne gronge  
That he ne to yede with his were. 
Kam he nevere hom hand -
That he ne broucte bred and sowel  
In his shirte or in his cowel, 

770  
In his poke benes and korn -  
Hise swink he havede he nowt forlorn.  
And hwan he took the grete lamprey,  
Ful wel he couthe the rithe wei 
To Lincolnle, the gode boru;  
Ofte he yede it thoru and thoru,  
Til he havede wol wel sold  
And therfore the penies told.  
Thanne he com thenne he were blithe,  
For hom he brouthe fele sithe 
Wastels, simenels with the horn,  
His pokes fulle of mele and korn,  
Netes flesh, shipes and swines;  
And hemp to maken of gode lines,  
In the se weren he ofte setes.  
Thusgate Grim him fayre ledde:  
Him and his genge wel he fedde  
Wel twelf winter other more.  

Havelok was war that Grim swank sore  
For his mete, and he lay at hom -  
Thouthe, “Ich am now no grom!  
Ich am wel waxen and wel may eten  
More than evere Grim may geten.  
Ich ete more, bi God on live,  
Than Grim an hise children five!  
It ne may nouth ben thus longe.  
Goddot! I wilhe with hem gange  
For to leren sum god to gete.  
Swinken ich wolde for my mete -  
It is no shame for to swinken!  
The man that may wel eten and drinken  
Thar nouth ne have but on swink long -

He made fine bread baskets,  
One for him and another three  
For his sons to carry fish in  
To sell and collect money for upland.  
He missed neither town nor farm  
Wherever he went with his wares.  
He never came home empty-handed  
Without bringing bread and sauce  
In his shirt or in his hood,  
And beans and grain in his bag.  
He never wasted his efforts.  
And when he caught a great lamprey,  
He knew the road very well  
To Lincoln, the fine town.  
He often crossed it through and through,  
Until he sold everything as he wished  
And had counted his pennies for it.  
When he returned from there he was glad,  
For many times he brought home  
Cakes and horn-shaped breads,  
With his bags full of grain and flour,  
Ox-meat, lamb, and pork,  
And hemp to make fishing lines,  
And strong rope for his nets  
Where he set them in the sea.  
Thus Grim lived comfortably,  
And he fed himself and his household well  
For a good twelve winters or more.  
Havelock knew that Grim worked hard  
For his dinner while he lay at home.  
He thought, “I am no longer a boy.  
I am fully grown and can eat  
More than Grim could ever get.  
I eat more, by the living God,  
Than Grim and his five children.  
God knows, it can’t go on like this.  
I will go with them  
To learn some useful skill,  
And I will labor for my dinner.  
It is no shame to work!  
It is a foul thing for a man who eats  
And drinks his fill who has not

---


28 Lampreys are parasitic eels and are now seen as pests, but in the ancient and medieval world they were expensive dainties. Henry I is recorded by contemporary historians as dying from eating too many lampreys in rich sauces.

29 *Til he havede wol wel sold:* The MS suggests that Grim is selling wool (*wol*), which is never mentioned. Other editors read *ful* or *al* instead of *wol*, which makes more contextual sense.
To liggen at hom it is ful strong.
God yelde him, ther I ne may,
That haveth me fed to this day!
Gladlike I wile the paniers bere
Al so hevi als a neth.

Shal ich nevere lengere dwelle -
Tomorwen shal ich forth pelle.”
On the morwen, hwan it was day,
He stirt up sone and nouth ne lay,
And cast a paniere on his bac,
With fish gieled als a stac.
Al so michel he bar him one,
So he foure, bi mine mone!
Wel he it bar and solde it wel;
The silver he brouthe hom ilk del,
Al that he therfore tok -
Withheld he nouth a ferthinges nok.
So yede he forth ilke day
That he nevere at home lay -
So wolde he his mester lere.
Bifel it so a strong dere
Bigan to rise of korn of bred,
That Grim ne couthe no god red,
Of Havelok have he michel drede,
Of his children was him nouth;
Of me ne is me nouth a slo.

30 A ferthinges nok: A farthing was a quarter of a penny and the smallest coin. TEAMS explains that the idiom both meant ‘to the last penny’ and referred to the illegal practice of clipping the edges of coins to sell the silver as bullion. For this reason most modern coins have raised edges.
Betere is that thu thider go,
For ther is mani god man inne;
Ther thou mayt thi mete winne.
But wo is me thou art so naked,
Of mi seyl I wolde thee were maked
A cloth thou mithest inne gongen,
Sone, no cold that thu ne fonge.”
He tok the sheres of the nayl
And made him a covel of the sayl,
And Havelok dide it sone on.
Havede he neyther hosen ne shon,
Ne none kines other wede:
To Lincolne barfot he yede.
Hwan he cam ther, he was ful wil
Ne havede he no frend to gangen til.
Two dayes ther fastinde he yede,
That non for his werk wolde him fede.
The thridde day herde he calle:
―Bermen, bermen, hider forth alle!‖
Poure that on fote yede
Sprongen forth so sparke on glede,
Havelok shof dun nyne or ten
Rith amidewarde the fen,
And stirte forth to the kok,
That the erles mete he tok
That he bouthe at the brigge:
The bermen let he alle ligge,
And bar the mete to the castel,
And gat him there a ferthing wastel.
Thet other day kepte he ok
Swithe yerne the erles kok,
Til that he say him on the brigge,
And bi him many fishes ligge.
The herles mete havede he bouth
Of Cornwalie and kalde oft:
“Bermen, bermen, hider swithe!”
Havelok it herde and was ful blithe
That he herde “bermen” calle.
Alle made he hem dun falle
That in his gate yeden and stode -
Wel sixtene laddes gode.
Als he lep the kok til,
He shof hem alle upon an hyl -
Astirte til him with his rippe
And bigan the fish to kippe.
He bar up wel a carte lode
Of segges, laxes, of playces brode,
Of grete laumprees and of eles.
Sparede he neyther tos ne heles

It’s better that you go there,
For there are many good men in town
And you might be able to earn your dinner there.
But woe is me! You are so poorly dressed,
I would rather take my sail and make
Some clothing you can go in, son,
So that you need not face the cold.”
He took the scissors off the nail,
And made him a cloak from the sail,
And then put it on Havelock.
He had neither hose nor shoes,
Nor any other kind of clothing.
He walked barefoot to Lincoln.
When he arrived there, he was at a loss.
He had no friend to go to.
For two days he wandered there fasting,
For no one would feed him for his work.
The third day he heard a call,
“Porters, porters, come here, all!!”
The poor who went on foot
Sprang forth like sparks from coals.
Havelock shoved aside nine or ten,
Right into the muddy swamp,
And started forward to the cook.
There he took charge of the earl’s food
Which he was given at the bridge.
He left the other porters lying
And delivered the food to the castle,
Where he was given a penny cake.\(^31\)
The next day again he eagerly kept
A lookout for the earl’s cook,
Until he saw him on the bridge
Where many fish lay beside him.
He had bought the earl’s provisions
From Cornwall, and continually called,
“Porters, porters, come quickly!”
Havelock heard it and was glad
That he heard ‘porters’ called.
He made everyone fall down
Who walked or stood in his way,
A good sixteen strong lads.
As he leaped up to the cook,
He shoved them down the hillside,
Hurrying to him with his basket,
And began to scoop up the fish.
He bore up a good cartload
Of squid, salmon, and broad flatfish,
Of great lampreys, and of eels.
He did not spare heel or toe

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\(^31\) *Ferthing wastel*: A loaf of bread baked from the finest white flour, the same that Chaucer’s prioress extravagantly feeds her dogs with. During a food shortage it is a considerable treat.
Til that he to the castel cam,  
That men fro him his birthene nam.  
Than men haveden holpen him doun  
With the bithene of his croun,  
The kok stod and on him low,  
And thoute him stalworthie man ynow,  
And seyde, “Wiltu ben wit me?”  
Gladlike wile ich feden thee:  
Wel is set the mete thu etes,  
And the hire that thu getes!”  

“Goddot!” quoth he, “leve sire,  
Bidde ic h you non other hire,  
But yeveth me inow to ete -  
Fir and water I wile you fete,  
The fir blowe and ful wele maken;  
Stickes kan ich breken and kraken,  
And kindlen ful wel a fyr,  
And maken it to brennen shir.  
Ful wel kan ich cleven shides,  
Eles to turven of here hides;  
Ful wel kan ich dishes swilen,  
And don al that ye evere wilen.”  
Quoth the kok, “Wile I no more!  
Go thu yunder and sit thore,  
And I shal yeve the ful fair bred,  
And made the broys in the led.  
Sit now doun and et ful yerne -  
Datheit hwo the mete werne!”  

Havelok sette him dun anon  
Al so stille als a ston,  
Til he havede ful wel eten;  
Tho havede Havelok fayre geten.  
Hwan he havede eten inow,  
He kam to the wele, water up drow,  
And filde ther a michel so -  
Bad he non ageyn him go,  
But bitwen his hondes he bar it in,  
Al him one, to the kichin.  
Bad he non him water to fett,  
Ne fro brigge to bere the mete.  

He bar the turves, he bar the star,  
The wode fro the brigge he bar,  
Al that evere shulden he nytte,  
Al he drow and al he citte -  
Wolde he nevere haven rest  
More than he were a best.  
Of alle men was he mest meke,  
Lauhwinde ay and blithe of speke;  
Evere he was glad and blithe -  

Until he came to the castle,  
Where men took his burden from him.  
When men had helped take down  
The load off his shoulders,  
The cook stood and smiled on him  
And decided he was a sturdy enough man  
And said, “Will you stay with me?”  
I will be glad to keep you,  
The food you eat is well earned,  
As well as the wages you get!”  
Havelock said, “God knows, dear sir,  
I will ask you for no other pay  
But that you give me enough to eat.  
I will fetch you firewood and water,  
Raise the fire, and make it blaze.  
I can break and crack sticks,  
And kindle a fire expertly,  
And make it burn brightly,  
I know well how to split kindling  
And how to skin eels from their hides.  
I can wash dishes well,  
And do all that you ever want.”  
The cook said, “I can’t ask for more!  
Go over there and sit,  
And I will bring you some good bread,  
And make you soup in the kettle.  
Sit down now and eat your fill.  
Damn whoever begrudges you food!”  
Havelock sat down at once,  
As still as a stone,  
Until he had fully eaten.  
Havelock had done well then!  
When he had eaten enough,  
He came to the well, drew up the water,  
And filled a large tub there.  
He asked no one to go with him,  
But he carried it in between his hands,  
All by himself, to the kitchen.  
He asked no one to fetch water for him,  
Nor to bring provisions from the bridge.  
He bore turf for fuel, and grass for kindling.  
He carried wood from the bridge;  
All that they might ever need,  
He hauled and he cut.  
He would never have any more rest  
Than if he were a beast.  
Of all men he was the most modest,  
Always laughing and friendly in speech.  
He was forever glad and pleasant;  

---

32 He bar the turves, he bar the star: TEAMS explains that turves were cuts of turf or peat moss which were dried and then burned for fuel. Star was wild grass (possibly genus hypoxis or aletris), used for kindling.
His sorwe he couthe ful wel mithe.  
It ne was non so litel knave  
For to leyken ne for to plawe,  
That he ne wolde with him plye.  
The children that yeden in the weie  
Of him he deden al here wille,  
And with him leykeden here fille.  
Him loveden alle, stille and bolde,  
Knictes, children, yunge and holde -  
Alle him loveden that him sowen,  
Bothen heye men and lowe.

Of him ful wide the word sprong,  
Hw he was mikel, hw he was strong,  
Hw fayr man God him havede maked,  
But on that he was almost naked:  
For he ne havede nouth to shride  
But a kovel ful unride,  
That was ful and swithe wicke;  
Was it nouth worth a fir-sticke.  
The cok bigan of him to rewe  
And bouthe him clothes al spannewe:  
He bouthe him bothe hosen and shon,  
And sone dide him done on.  
Hwan he was clothed, osed, and shod,  
Was non so fayr under God,  
That evere yete in erthe were,  
No one that any mother ever bore.  
There was never a man who ruled  
A kingdom who looked so much  
Like a king or emperor  
As he appeared when he was clothed.  
For when they were all together  
In Lincoln at the games,  
And the earl’s men were all there,  
Havelock was taller by a head  
Than the greatest who were there.  
In wrestling no man grappled him  
Whom he didn’t soon throw down.  
Havelock stood over them like a mast.  
As high as he was, as long as he was,  
He was just as hardy and strong.  
In England he had no equal in strength  
Among whoever came near him.  
As much as he was strong, he was gentle.  
Though other men often mistreated him,  
He never insulted them  
Or laid a hand on them in malice.  
His body was pure of maidens;

---

33 *His sorwe he couthe ful wel mithe*: Medieval England was not yet the time of the “stiff upper lip,” and so the comment that “he could hide his feelings well” is odd. Presumably the poet is both praising Havelock for not burdening others with his tragic past and reminding the audience that he knows his true heritage.
Nevere yete in game, ne in grene,  
With hire ne wolde he leyke ne lye,  
No more than it were a strie.

1000  
In that time al Hengelond  
Th’erl Godrich havede in his hond,  
And he gart komen into the tun  
Mani erl and mani barun,  
And alle that lives were  
In Englond thanne wer there,  
That they haveden after sent  
To ben ther at the parlement.

1010  
And fel it so that yungemen,  
Wel abouten nine or ten,  
Bigunnen the for to layke.

1020  
For it ne was non horse-knave,  
Tho thei sholden in honde have,  
That he ne kam thider, the leyk to se.

1030  
Was ther neyther cler ne prest,  
That mithe liften it to his brest.  

34 With hire ne wolde he leyke ne lye: The hire is not clear and may simply be the mayden (996). TEAMS suggests that the hire is a ‘woman for hire,’ or at least a promiscuous woman who would frequent men’s summer games. Some editors read ‘whore,’ but there is no consensus that hire had this meaning or pronunciation in early ME.

35 Skeat remarks that a parliament was held in Lincoln in 1300 (note to 1006). Skeat’s line numbering slightly differs from that of TEAMS. The poet mentions a summoned assembly in 1002-7 and the barouns (1033) whom the athletes accompany, but otherwise ignores any political deliberations. The point is surely that Godrich’s cynical ‘parliament’ is also no more than a display of games.

36 Blac and brown: “Every type of ordinary person.” See the note to Amis and Amiloun (2474) and Athelston (291).
He was for a kempe told.
Al so the stoden and ofte stareden,
The chaumpiouns and ek the ladden,
And he maden mikel strout
Abouten the altherbeste but,
Havelok stod and lokede thertil,
And of puttingge he was ful wil,
For nevere yete ne saw he or
Putten the stone or thanne thor.
Hise mayster bad him gon therto
Als he couthe therwith do.
Tho hise mayster it him bad,
He was of him sore adrad.
Therto he stirte sone anon,
And kipte up that hevi ston
That he sholde putten withe;
He putte at the firste sithe,
Over alle that ther wore
Twelve fote and sumdel more.
The chaumpiouns that put sowen;
Shuldreden he ilc other and lowen.
Wolden he nomore to putting gange,
But seyde, ―Thee dwellen her to longe!‖
This selkouth mithe nouth ben hyd:
Ful sone it was ful loude kid
Of Havelok, hw he warp the ston
Over the laddes everilkon,
Hw he was fayr, hw he was long,
Hw he was with, hw he was strong;
Thoruth England yede the speche,
Hw he wa
So that Godrich it herde wel:
The spoken of Havelok, everi del -
Hw he was strong man and hey,
Hw he was strong, and ek fri,
And thouhte Godrich, ―Thoru this knave
Shal ich Engelond al have,
And mi sone after me;
For so I wile that it be.
The King Athelwald me dide swere
Upon al the messe gere
That I shude his douthy yeve
The hexte that mithe live,
The beste, the fairest, the strangest ok -
That gart he me sweren on the bok.
Hwere mithe I finden ani so hey,
So Havelok is, or so sley?
Thou I southe hethen into Inde,
Was considered a hero.
And so they stood and watched intently,
The athletes and the lads as well,
And they made a heated argument
About who had made the greatest shot.
Havelock stood and looked at it
But he knew nothing about putting,
For he had never seen
Or thrown the stone before then.
His master told him to go try
As he was best able to do.
Though his master asked him,
He was sorely doubtful of himself.
With that, he got up quickly
And plucked up that heavy stone
Which he was supposed to put.
On the first try he threw it
Farther than anyone who was there,
Twelve feet and somewhat more.
When the champions saw that shot,
They jostled each other and laughed.
They would not put any more, only saying
“We’v hung around here too long!”
This marvel could not be hidden for long.
Very soon the news was loudly told
About Havelock, how he threw the stone
Farther than each of the lads;
How he was handsome, how he was tall,
How he was manly, how he was strong.
Throughout England the news spread,
How he was mighty and gentle as well.
In the castle, up in the hall,
The knights talked about it all
So that Godrich heard it well.
They spoke of Havelock, every detail—
How he was a strong man, and high,
How he was strong and generous too,
And Godrich thought, “Through this peasant
I will have all England
For myself and for my son after,
For it’s my wish to have it happen.
King Athelwald made me swear
Upon all the mass finery
That I would give his daughter
The highest that might live,
The best, the fairest, and the strongest as well.
He made me swear that on the Bible.
Where could I find anyone so ‘high’
As Havelock is, or so able?
If I searched from here to India,

37 Thee: Some editors read we in the manuscript here, as there is some textual confusion between þe and þe.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1090</td>
<td>So fayr, so strong, ne mithe I finde. Havelok is that ilke knave</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That shal Goldeborou have!&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>1099</td>
<td>This thouthe with trechery,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>With traysoun, and wit felony;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>For he wende that Havelok wore</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sum cherles sone and no more;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ne shulde he haven of Engellond</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Onlepi foru in his hond</td>
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<td></td>
<td>With hire that was therof eyr,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>That bothe was god and swithe fair.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>He wende that Havelok wer a thral,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Therthoru he wende haven al</td>
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<tr>
<td>1100</td>
<td>In Engelond, that hire rith was.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>He was worse than Sathanas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That Jhesu Crist in erthe stoc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hanged worthe he on an hok!</td>
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<td></td>
<td>After Goldeborou sone he sende,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>That was bothe fayr and hende,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And dide hire to Lincolne bringe.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Belles dede he ageyn hire ringen,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And joie he made hire svinthe mikel;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>But netheless he was ful swikel.</td>
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<td>He saide that he sholde hire yeve</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The fayreste man that mithe live.</td>
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<td>She answerede and saide anon,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>By Crist and bi Seint Johan,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>That hire sholde noman wedde</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ne noman bringen hire to bedde</td>
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<td></td>
<td>But he were king or kinges eyr,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Were he nevere man so fayr.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Godrich the erl was swithe wroth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>That she swor swilk an oth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1110</td>
<td>And saide, “Whether thou wilt be</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Quen and levedi over me?</td>
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<td>Thou shalt haven a gadeling -</td>
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<td>Ne shalt thou haven non other king!</td>
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<td>Thee shal spusen mi cokes knave -</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ne shalt thou non other lourered have.</td>
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<td>Datheit that thee other yeve</td>
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<td>Everemore hwil I live!</td>
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<td>Tomorwe ye sholen ben weddeth,</td>
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<td>And maugre thin togidere beddeth.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Goldeboru gret and yaf hire ille;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>She wolde ben ded bi hire willie.</td>
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<td>On the morwen hwan day was sprungen</td>
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<td>And day-belle at kirke rungen,</td>
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<td>After Havelok sente that Judas</td>
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<td>That wearse was thanne Sathanas,</td>
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<td>And saide, “Maister, wilte wif?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Nay,” quoth Havelok, “bi my lif!</td>
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<td>Hwat sholde ich with wif do?</td>
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<td>I ne may hire fede ne clothe ne sho.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1140</td>
<td>Wider sholde ich wimman bringe?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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I would not find someone so fair, so mighty. Havelock is the very boy That Goldeboro will have!" He schemed this out with treachery, With treason, and with felony, For he surmised that Havelock was Some peasant’s son and no more. Nor would he get one furrow Of England into his hand With Godboro, who was the rightful heir, Who was both good and fair, For he assumed that Havelock was a serf. For this reason he planned to keep all Of England, which was her right. He was worse than Satan, Who Jesus Christ locked in the earth. He deserves to be hanged on an oak! Soon after he sent for Goldeboro, Who was both beautiful and courteous, And had her brought to Lincoln. He had bells for her rung alongside, And made great celebration over her, But nonetheless he was full of deceit. He said that he would give her The fairest man that might live. She answered at once and said, By Christ and by Saint John, That she would wed no man, Nor would any man bring her to bed Unless he were a king or king’s heir, No matter how fair he was. Godrich the earl was furious That she had sworn such an vow And said, “Do you think you will be Queen and lady over me? You will have a beggar. You will not have any other king! You will marry my cook’s servant. You will not have any other lord! Damn whoever who gives you someone else While I am alive! Tomorrow you will be married And bedded together, in spite of you!” Goldeboro cried and was in distress. She would have died if she had her will. In the morning, when day had sprung And the early bells at the church were rung, That Judas, who was worse than Satan, Sent for Havelock and said. “Mister, would you like a wife?” “No,” cried Havelock, “not by my life! What could I do with a wife? I cannot give her food, clothes, or shoes. Where would I bring a woman?
I have nothing for a home.  
I have no house, I have no cottage,  
I have no sticks, I have no twigs for a fire,  
I have neither bread nor sauce.  
No clothing except an old white cloak.  
These clothes that I have on  
Are the cook’s, and I am his servant.”  
Godrich jumped up and struck him  
With hard and strong blows  
And said, “Unless you take  
Who I give you as a mate,  
I will hang you very high,  
Or I will gouge out your eyes!”  
Havelock was alone and was afraid,  
And agreed to all that he ordered.  
Then Godrich sent for Goldebor at once,  
The fairest woman under the moon,  
And said to her, false and slick,  
That wicked oaf, that foul traitor:  
“Unless you accept this man,  
I will banish you from the land,  
Or you will be rushed to the gallows,  
And there you will burn in a fire.”  
She was terrified, for he threatened her so,  
And she dared not obstruct the marriage.  
Though she was very unhappy,  
She thought it was God’s will,  
God, who makes the grain grow  
And who created her to be born a woman.  
When he had compelled them by fear  
That he should marry and keep her,  
And that she should hold to him,  
There were thick piles of pennies counted,  
A great plenty, upon the mass book.  
He gave her tokens and she accepted his.  
They were wedded fair and clear.  
The mass was performed, every part  
Related to marriage, by a good cleric—  
The archbishop of York,  
Who came to the assembly  
As God had sent him there.

38 *Bred ne sowel:* Literally, bread and sauce or anything eaten with bread, but the pairing could have the sense of ‘bread and butter,’ meaning that Havelock has no goods to make a household with.

39 *He ys hire yaf and she is tok:* This opaque line has numerous explanations. Skeat posits that he is Godard, who has given Goldeboru the ‘thick pile of pennies’ to ship her off (note to 1174). Garbaty suggests it is a holdover of the Anglo-Saxon *morgengifu,* a present made by the husband to the bride the next morning, which could be made early as a sign of trust, as in the OE *Apollonius of Tyre* (Garbaty’s note to 1173–4). TEAMS gives French & Hale’s explanation that the money is partly the clerk’s payment and partly the bride’s dowry (118). The *ys* may simply be Havelock’s public vows of promise. The Wife of Bath is married at the “chirche dore” (*CT* III.6), and medieval weddings were community events, normally appended to the church service (see line 1183).
Hwan he weren togidere in Godes lawe,
That the folc ful wel it sawe,
He ne wisten what he mouthen,
Ne he ne wisten what hem douthe,
Ther to dwellen, or thenne to gonge.
Ther ne wolden he dwellen longe,
For he wisten and ful wel sawe
That Godrich hem hatede - the devel him hawe!

And if he dwelleden ther outh -
That fel Havelok ful wel on thouth -
Men sholde don his leman shame,
Or elles bringen in wicke blame,
That were him levere to ben ded.

Forthi he token another red:
That thei sholden thenne fle
Til Grim and til hise sone thre -
Ther wenden he altherbest to spede,
Hem forto clothe and for to fede.

The lond he token under fote -
Ne wisten he non other bote -
And helden ay the rith sti
Til he komen to Grimesby.

Thanne he komen there thanne was Grim ded -
Of him ne haveden he no red.
But hise children alle fyve,
Alle weren yet on live,
That ful fayre ayen hem neme
Hwan he wisten that he keme,

When they were joined under God’s law,
So that the people saw it fully,
Havelock did not know what to do,
Nor did he know where to turn for help,
Where to live, or where to go.
They could not stay there long.
For he understood and saw clearly
That Godrich hated them – the Devil take him!

And if they stayed there unprotected,
Havelock worried about foul play.
Men might shame his beloved,
Or else disgrace her reputation.
To him it would be better to be dead.

For this reason he took another course,
That they should flee from there
To Grim and his three sons.
He thought it best to hurry there
In order to clothe and feed themselves.
They took to the land on foot,
For he knew no other solution,
And they kept the right route
Until they came to Grimsby.

When they arrived Grim was dead.
Havelock had had no word about him.
But of his five children,
All were still alive
And took them in very courteously
When they learned that he had come,
And they made a great celebration.
They were never fickle to them!
They set themselves on their knees
And greeted Havelock elegantly,
And said, “Welcome, dear lord!”
And welcome to your fair companion!
Blessed be that very moment
When you took her in God’s law!
It is good for us to see you alive.
We are yours to sell or give away.
You may both give us or trade us,
So long as you will stay here.
We have, lord, every good thing:
Horses and oxen, and a ship on the sea,
Gold and silver, and many things
That Grim our father left to us.

Garbaty explains that Havelock is perhaps worried about Godrich exercising the *jus primae noctis*, the lord’s legal right to spend the first night with a vassal’s bride (note to 1192). Despite little historical evidence that the practice ever actually existed in Europe, it is a recurringly attractive theme in literature from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to *The Marriage of Figaro*.
Bileve her, louerd, and al be thin!
Tho shalt ben louerd, thou shalt ben syre,
And hur serven thee and hire;
And hure sistres sholen do
Al that evere biddes sho:
He sholen hire clothes washen and wringen,
And to hondes water bringen;
He sholen bedden hire and thee,
For levedi wile we that she be.”
Hwan he this joie haveden maked,
Sithen stikes broken and kraked,
And the fir brouth on brenne;
Ne was ther spa
red gos ne henne,
Ne the hende ne the drake:
Mete he deden plenté make;
Ne wantede there no god mete,
Wyn and ale deden he fete,
And hem made glade and blithe;
Wesseyl ledden he fele sithe.
On the nith als Goldeboru lay,
Sory and sorwful was she ay,
For she wende she were biswike,
That she were yeven unkyndelike.
O nith saw she therinne a lith,
A swithe fayr, a swithe bryth
- Al so brith, all so shir
So it were a blase of fir.
She lokede noth and ek south,
And saw it comen ut of his mouth
That lay bi hir e in the bed.
No ferlike thou she were adred!
Thouthe she, “What may this bimene?
He beth heyman yet, als I wene:
He beth heyman er he be ded!”
On hise shuldre, of gold red
She saw a swithe noble croiz;
Of an angel she herde a voyz:
“Goldeboru, lat thi sorwe be!
For Havelok, that haveth spuset thee,
He, kinges sone and kinges eyr,
That bikenneth that croiz so fayr
It bikenneth more - that he shall
Denemark haven and Englond al.
He shal ben king strong and stark,
Of Englond and Denemark -
That shal thu wit thin eyne seen,
And tho shalt quen and levedi ben!”
Thanne she havede herd the stevene

Remain here, lord, and all will be yours.
You will be lord, you will be sire,
And we will serve you and her.
And our sisters will do
All that she ever bids.
They will wash and dry her clothes,
And bring water to her hands.
They will make a bed for you and her,
If that is our lady’s will.”
When they had begun the celebration,
Kindling was cracked and split,
And the fire was stoked into flames.
There was no goose or hen spared,
Neither duck nor drake.
They prepared plenty of meat
And did not lack for any good food.
They fetched wine and ale,
And made the couple glad and at ease,
And drank to their health many times.41
Yet during the night as Goldeboro lay in bed,
She continually felt sorry and sad,
For she thought she had been mistreated,
That she was married out of her kind.
But one night she saw in there a light,
So fair, and so clear—
As bright, as shining,
As if it were a blaze of fire.
She looked north and south as well
And saw it coming out of his mouth
As he lay by her in the bed.
It is no wonder that she was afraid!
She thought, “What does this mean?
He will be a nobleman yet, I believe.
He will be a nobleman before he is dead!”
On his shoulder, in red gold,
She saw a majestic cross.
From an angel she heard a voice:
“Goldeboro, let your sorrows pass!
For Havelock, who has married you,
Is a king’s son and a king’s heir.
That is the meaning of his fair cross.
It means more: that he shall
Have Denmark and all England.
He will be a king, strong and bold,
Of England and Denmark.
You will see this with your eyes,
And you will be a queen and lady!”
When she had heard the voice

41 Wessey: ‘Wassail’ derives from Old Norse ves heill and perhaps OE wes þu hal, both meaning ‘Be healthy.’ Although the Romans placed bits of toast into wine to flavor it or mellow the acidity of cheap wines, ‘toast’ was not used in this sense until early Modern English.
Of the angel uth of hevene,  
She was so fele sithes blithe  
That she ne mithe hire joie mythe,  
But Havelok sone anon she kiste,  
And he slep and nouth ne wiste  
Hwat that angueld havede seyd.  
Of his slep anon he brayd,  
And seide, “Lemman, slepes thou?  
A selkuth drem dremede me now -  
Herkne now what me haveth met.  
Me thouthe I was in Denemark set,  
But on on the moste hil  
That evere yete cam I til.  
It was so hey that I vel mouthe  
Al the werd se, als me thouthe.  
Als I sat upon that lowe  
I bigan Denemark for to awe,  
The borwes and the castles stronge;  
And mine armes weren so longe  
That I fadmede al at ones,  
Denemark with mine longe bones;  
And thanne I wolde mine armes drawe  
Til me and hom for to have,  
Al that evere in Denemark liveden  
On mine armes faste clyveden;  
And the stronge castles alle  
On knees bigunnen for to falle -  
The keyes fellen at mine fet.  
Another drem dremede me ek:  
That ich flye over the salte se  
Til Engelan, and al with me  
That evere was in Denemark lyves  
But bondemen and here wives;  
And that ich com til Engelond -  
Al closede it intil min hond,  
And, Goldeborw, I gaf thee.  
Deus! lemman, what may this be?‖  
She answerede and seyde sone:  
―Jesu Crist, that made mone,  
Thine dremes turne to joye  
That wite thu that sittes in trone!  
Ne non strong, king ne caysere  
So thou shalt be, fo thou shalt bere  
In Engelond corune yet.  
Denemark shall knele to thi fet;  
Alle the castles that aren therinne  
Shaltou, lemmaw, ful wel winne.  
I woth so wel so ich it sowe,
To thee shole comen heye and lowe,  
And alle that in Denemark wone -  
Em and brother, fader and sone,  
Erl and baroun, dreng and thayn,  
Knightes and burgeys and sweyn -  
And mad king heyelike and wel.  
Denemark shal be thin evere ilc del  
- Have thou nouth theroffe douthe,  
Nouth the worth of one nouthe;  
Theroffe withinne the firste yer  
Shalt thou ben king of evere il del.  
But do now als I wile rathe:  
Nim in wit lithe to Dene  
mark bathe,  
And do thou nouth on frest this fare  
- Lith and selthe felawes are.  
For shal ich nevere blithe be  
Til I with eyen Denemark se,  
For ich woth that al the lond  
Shalt thou haven in thin hond.  
Prey Grimes sones alle thre,  
That he wenden forth with  
the;  
I wot he wilen the nouth werne  
- With the wende shulen he yerne,  
For he loven thee hertelike.  
Thou maght til he aren quike,  
Hwore-so he o worde aren;  
There ship thou do hem swithe yaren,  
And loke that thou dwelle nouth -  
Dwelling haveth ofte scath e wrouth.”  
Hwan Havelok herde that she radde,  
Sone it was day, sone he him cladde,  
And sithen wolde me mi lyf  
Have reft, for in the se  
Bad he Grim have drenched me.  
He hath mi lond with mikel unrith,  
With michel wrong, with mikel plith,  
For I ne misdede him nevere nouth,
And haved me to sorwe brouth.
He haveth me do mi mete to thigge,
And ofte in sorwe and pine ligge.
Louerd, have merci of me,
And late me wel passe the se -
Though ich have theroffe douthe and kare,
Withuten stormes overfare,
That I ne drenched therine
Ne forfaren for no sinne,
And bringe me wel to the lond
That Godard haldes in his hond,
That is mi rith, every del -
Jesu Crist, thou wost it wel!‖
Thanne he havede his bede seyd,
His offrende on the auter leyd,
His leve at Jhesu Crist he tok,
And at his swete moder ok,
And seyde, ―Lithes now alle to me;
Louerdinges, ich wil e you shewe
A thing of me that ye wel knewe.
Mi fader was king of Denshe lond -
Denemark was al in his hond
The day that he was quik and ded.
But thanne havede he wicke red,
That he me and Denemark al
And mine sistres bitawte a thral;
A develes lime he hus bitawhte,
And al his land and al his euthre,
For I saw that fule fend
Mine sistres slo with his hend:
First he shar a two here throtes,
And sithen hem al to grotes,
And sithen bad in the se
Grim, youre fader, drenchen me.
Deplike dede he him swere
On bok that he sholde me bere
Unto the se and drenchen ine,
And wolde taken on him the sinne.
But Grim was wis and swithe hende -
Wolde he nouth his soule shende;
Levere was him to be forsworen
Than drenchen me and ben forlorn.
But sone bigan he forto fle
Fro Denemark for to berthen me.  
For yif ich havede ther ben funden,  
Havede he ben slayn or harde bunden,  
And heye ben hanged on a tre -  
Havede go for him gold ne fe.  
Forthi fro Denemark hider he fledde,  
And me ful fayre and ful wel fedde,  
So that unto this day  
Have ich ben fed and fostred ay.  
But now ich am up to that helde  
Cumen that ich may wepne welde,  
And I may grete dintes yeve,  
Shal I nevere hwil ich lyve  
Ben glad til that ich Denemark se!  
I preie you that ye wende with me,  
And ich may mak you riche men;  
Ilk of you shal have castles ten,  
And the lond that thor til longes -  
Borwes, tunes, wodes, and wonges.

From Denmark in order to protect me,  
For if I had been found there,  
He would have been slain or tightly bound,  
And hanged high on a tree!  
Neither gold nor money would have helped him.  
For this he fled away from Denmark  
And he kept me well and kindly,  
So that unto this day  
I have always felt protected and fathered.  
But now I have come to the age  
Where I may wield weapons,  
And I may give great strokes.  
I will never be glad  
While I am alive until I see Denmark!  
I ask you that you will go with me  
And I will make you rich men.  
Each of you will have ten castles,  
And the land that belongs to it,  
Boroughs, towns, fields, and villages!”

[...]

Havelock and his stepbrothers sell their possessions and fit out their fishing boat to sail to Denmark. There they buy horses and carts and disguise themselves as merchants. Havelock meets a Danish earl, Ubbe, a friend of the late king who opposes Godard’s tyranny. Havelock offers him an expensive gold ring as a gift to gain permission to trade there.  

Havelock said, “I will trade such things as this,  
And so I ask your permission now.  
I will deal with no lower official  
But you, as you are a justice,  
So that I might search for my wares  
In good boroughs up and down,  
As I travel from town to town.”  
He then drew out a gold ring—  
The stone was worth a hundred pounds—

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44 One entire leaf is missing from the MS here of probably 180 lines. As earlier versions of the narrative are substantially different, only a speculative summary of the action is possible.

45 *I mithe seken mi ware*: Havelock perhaps intends a double meaning here, for merchants usually sell wares and he is really ‘seeking’ his lost heritage (Garbaty, note to 1450).

46 *An hundred pund*: Like the gold cups Amis and Amiloun exchange, this extravagance for a fisherman’s family is outlandish. According to the UK National Archives website, £100 in 1300 is roughly US$77,000 in modern money. Hodges gives a laborer’s yearly wage as £2 in 1300. Kenneth Hodges, “Medieval Sourcebook: Medieval Prices,” Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies, accessed 20 June 2010 at [http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/medievalprices.html#WAGES](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/medievalprices.html#WAGES)
And yaf it Ubbe for to spede.
He was ful wis that first yaf mede;
And so was Havelok ful wis here:
He solde his gold ring ful dere -
Was nevere non so dere sold
Fro chapmen, neyther yung ne old.
That sholen ye forthward ful wel heren,
Yif that ye wile the storie heren.
Hwan Ubbe havede the gold ring,
Havede he yovenet for no thing,
Nouth for the borw evere ilk del.
Havelok bihel he swithe wel,
Hw he was wel of bones maked,
Brod in the sholdres, ful wel schaped,
Thicke in the brest, of bodi long -
He semed e wel to ben wel strong.
―Deus!‖ hwat Ubbe, ―Qui ne were he knith?
I woth that he is swithe with!
Betere semede him to bere
Helm on heved, sheld and spere,
Thanne to beye and selle ware -
Allas, that he shal therwith fare!
Goddot! Wile he trowe me,
Chaffare shal he late be.‖
Netheles he seyde sone:
―Havelok, have thi bone!
And I ful wel rede thee
That thou come and ete with me
Today, thou and thi fayre wif
That thou lovest al so thi lif.
And have thou of hire no drede -
Shal hire no man shame bede.
Bi the fey that I owe to thee,
Ther of shal I me self borw be.‖
Havelock herde that he bad,
Tough he was sorely drad
To eat with him because of his wife,
For he would have rather had his life
Taken away than see her name ruined
Or have her experience any shame.
When Havelock had given his consent,
Ubbe urged the steed that he sat on
With taut spurs and he departed.
But at the last moment,
Or he fro him ferde,
Seyde he, that his folk herde:

“Loke that ye comen bethe,
For ich it wile and ich it rede.”

Havelok ne durste, the he were ad,
Nouth withsitten that Ubbe bad.

His wif he dide with him lede -
Unto the heye curt he yede.

Roberd hire ledde, that was red,
That havede tholed for hire the ded
Or ani havede hire misseyd,
Or hand with ivele onne leyd.

1690 Willam Wendut was that other
That hire ledde, Roberdes brother,
That was with at alle nedes.

Wel is him that god man fedes!
Than he weren comen to the halle,
Biforen Ubbe and hise men alle,
Ubbe stirte hem ageyn,
And mani a knith and mani a sweyn,
Hem for to se and for to shewe.

Tho stod Havelok als a lowe
Aboven that ther inne wore,
Rith al bi the heved more
Thanne ani that ther inne stod.
Tho was Ubbe blithe of mod
That he saw him so fayr and hende;
Fro him ne mithe his herte wende,
Ne fro him, ne fro his wif -
He lovede hem sone so his lif.

Weren non in Denemark that him thouthe
That he so mikel love mouthe.

1700 More he lovede Havelok one
Than al Denemark, bi mine wone.
Loke now, hw God helpen kan
O mani wise wif and man!

Hwan it was comen time to ete,
Hise wif dede Ubbe sone in fete,
And til hire seyde al on gamen,
“Dame, thou and Havelok shulen ete samen,
And Goldeboru shal ete wit me,
That is so fayr so flour on tre.

1720 In al Denemark is winman non
So fayr so sche, by Seint Johan.”
Thanne were set and bord leyd,
And the beneyesun was sayd,
Biforn hem com the beste mete
That king or cayser wolde ete:
Kranes, swannes, veneyesun,
Lax, lampreys, and god sturgeon,
Pyment to drinke and god claré,
Win whit and red, ful god plenté -
Was ther inne no page so lite
That evere wolde ale bite.
Of the mete forto telle
Ne of the win bidde I nout dwelle;
That is the storie for to lenge -
It wolde anuye this fayre genge.
But hwan he haveden the kilthing deyled
And fele sithe haveden wosseyled,
With gode drinkes seten longe,
And it was time for to gon
telk. -
Ilk man to ther he cam fro,
Thouthe Ubbe, ―If I late hem go,
Thus one foure, withuten mo,
So mote ich brouke finger or to,
For this wimman bes mikel wo!
For hire shal men hire louerd slo.‖
He tok sone knithes ten,
And wel sixti other men
With gode bowes and with gleives,
And sende hem unto the greyves,
The beste man of al the toun,
That was named Bernard Brun -
And bad him als he lovede his lif,
Havelok wel yemen and his wif,
And wel do wayten al the nith
Til the other day that it were lith.
Bernard was trewe and swithe with,
In al the borw ne was no knith
That betere couthe on stede riden,
Helm on heved ne swerd bi side.
Havelok he gladlike understod
With mikel love and herte god,
And dide greythe a super riche
Al so he was no with chinche
To his bhove everil del,
That he mithe supe swithe wel.
Al so he seten and sholde soupe,
So comes a ladde in a joupe,
And with him sixi other stronge
Salmon, lamprey, and fine sturgeon,
Spiced wine, and wine with honey,
And white and red wine in plenty.
There was no page there so low
That he had to bite down ale once.
But as for the food served,
Or the wine offered, I won’t dwell on it;
That will make the story far too long
And it would annoy this fine gathering.
But when they had shared every thing,
And had made toasts many times,
Sitting a long time with fine drinks,
It was time for each man
To go back where he came from.
Ubbe thought, “If I let these four go
On their own, with no more,
As sure as I have fingers and toes
This woman will cause great trouble!
For her, men will slay her lords.”
At once he gathered ten knights,
And a good sixty other men
With strong bows and with spears,
And sent them to the watchman’s place
With the best man of all the town,
Who was named Bernard Brown.
And he ordered him, as he loved his life,
To guard Havelock and his wife well,
And to keep watch all the night
Until the next day when it was light.
Bernard was loyal and powerfully strong.
In all the area there was no knight
Who could better ride a steed.
Helmet on head, with a sword by his side.
He gladly took charge of Havelock
With great love and kind heart,
And prepared a lavish supper,
As he was in no way stingy
In taking care of Havelock’s every need
So that they might dine finely.
As they were sitting and eating,
Along came a youth in an outlaw’s jacket,
And with him sixty others strong.  

49 Pyment: See the note to Bevis of Hampton, 2126. TEAMS explains that medieval claré, spiced wine with honey, is not modern claret, red wine.

50 Swanton comments that Havelock’s rise in status matches his diet. Curiously, ale is here treated as unworthy of the earl’s court, whereas the narrator begins by asking for a cup of it (14). Michael Swanton, English Literature Before Chaucer (New York: Longman Group, 1987), 202.

51 Kilthing: TEAMS defines this word as ‘tippling,’ but it is not in the MED and even Skeat gives up on a definition. Some editors have ilk þing, ‘each thing,’ which makes more sense as the next line deals with drinking toasts.
With swords drawn and long knives,
Each one with a firm lance in hand.
And he said, “Open up, watchman Bernard!
Open up quick and let us in,
Or by Saint Augustine, you’re dead!”
Bernard, who was very big, started up
And threw a coat of mail on his back
And grabbed a good, strong ax.
He leaped to the door as if he were mad,
And shouted, “Who are you
Who are out there making such a noise?
Get out of here fast, dirty thieves!
By the Lord who men believe in,
If I have to throw the door open,
Some of you I will drop dead,
And the rest I will throw
In fetters and bind up tightly!”
“What did you say?” said one lad.
“Do you think that we’re afraid?
We will go through this door
Before long, you oaf, in spite of you!”
At once he gripped a giant stone
And let it fly with great force
Against the door, breaking it apart.
Havelock saw that, and ran up
And drew out his sword in his hand,
Thinking to slay him there.
And with him came two others
Who would have ended his life.
Havelock lifted up the door bar,
And with one blow he killed all three.
There were none of them whose brains
Did not lie there under the stars.
The fourth one that he met next
He greeted with the bar against his head,
So that he made the right eye

52 The number of attackers in the English version is pumped up considerably from six to sixty to emphasize Havelock’s valor. Additionally, in the French Lai d’Aueloc Havelock’s assailants are motivated by lust for his wife, but here they are murderous thieves. The scene has puzzled scholars as evidently they are the same sixty men that Ubbe sends to protect Havelock (1747), though the poet gives no suggestion that Ubbe is complicit. They may also simply be different people, as sixty was often used to mean an indefinite number. Susie I. Tucker, “ ‘Sixty’ as an Indefinite Number in Middle English,” Review of English Studies 25:98 (1949): 152-153. See also the notes to lines 1929 and 2045.
Ut of the hole made he fleye,
And sithe clapte him on the crune
So that he stan ded fel thor dune.
The fifte that he overtok
Gaf he a ful sor dint ok,
Bitween the sholdres ther he stod,
That he spen his herte blod.

The sixth was ready to flee,
And he slapped him with the bar
Right on the full shoulder,
So that he broke his neck in two.
When the sixth was brought down,
The seventh whipped out his sword,
Wanting to strike Havelock right in the eye,
And Havelock sent the bar flying
And hit him at once against the chest.
He had no time for a priest’s rites,
For he was dead in less time
Than men might run a mile.

All the others were very determined.
They made a plan among themselves
That they would surround him
And batter him, so that no salve
Of a doctor’s would heal him.
They drew out swords, a large number,
And rushed on him just like dogs
That intend to tear apart a bear
When men watch bear-baiting.53
The thugs were keen and quick,
And each one surrounded him.
Some struck with branches and some with stones.
Some put knives in his back and sides
And inflicted wounds long and wide
In twenty places and many more,
From the head to the toe.

When Havelock saw that, he was made mad,
And it was a miracle how he stood!

For the blood ran on his sides
So water that fro the welle glides.
But thanne bigan he for to mowe
With the barre, and let hem shewe
HW he couthe sore smite;
For was ther non, long ne lite,
That he mouthe overtake,
That he ne garte his croune krake,
So that on a litel stund,

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53 Bere beyte: Bear baiting was a savagely violent ‘sport’ in which a bear would be chained to a stake and trained dogs would be set on. Bets would be taken and dogs would be replaced as they were mauled until the bear succumbed (Garbaty, note to 1659-61). Henry VIII was not surprisingly a fan and the games were popular until their prohibition in 1835. Cockfighting, a similar blood-sport, still enjoys popularity in parts of the world. See also line 2330.
Felde he twenti to the grund.
Tho bigan gret dine to rise,
For the laddes on ilke wise
Him asayleden with gret dintes,
Fro fer he sto[n]den him with flintes,
And gleyves schoten him fro ferne,
For drepen him he wolden yerne;
But dursten he newhen him nomore
Thanne he bor or leun wore.
Huwe Raven that dine herde,
And thowthe wel that men misferde
With his louerd for his wif
And grop an ore and a long knif,
And thider drof al so an hert,
And cham ther on a litel stert
And saw how the laddes wode
Havelok his louerd umbistode,
And beten on him so do
th the smith
With the hamer on the stith.
―Allas!‖ hwat Hwe, ―that I was boren!
That evere et ich bred of koren!
To see this sorrow here!
Robert, William, where are you?
Both of you, grab a good club
And we will not let these dogs escape
Until our lord is avenged!
Come quickly, and follow me.
I have a good strong oar in my hand;
Damn anyone who isn’t hit hard!‖
―Ya! leve, ya!‖ quod Roberd sone,
―We haven ful god lith of the mone.‖
Robert seiz ed a staff, strong and huge,
Which might well have carried a cow,
And William Wendut grabbed a club
Much thicker than his own thigh,
And Bernard held his ax firmly.
I say he wasn’t the last out!
And they leaped forth, as if they were berserk,
Toward the attackers where they stood,
And gave them harsh wounds.
There one could see the thieves beaten,
And the ribs in their sides broken,
And Havelock avenged on them well.
They broke arms, they broke knees,
They broke legs, they broke thighs;
They made the blood run down
Right from their foreheads to their feet,
For not one head was spared.
They laid on a great number of men,
And made skulls break and crack
On every kind of fighter.
They beat their backs as soft
As their insides and made them roar
Like they were babies in cradles,
So dos the child that moder tharnes.
Datheit the recke! For he it servede.
Hwat dide he thore? Weren he werewed.
So longe haveden he but and bet
With neves under hernes set
That of tho sixti men and on
Ne wente ther awey lives non.

On the morwen, hwan it was day,
Ilc on other wirwed lay
Als it were dogges that weren henged;
And summe leye in dikes slenget,
And summe in gripes bi the her
drawn ware and laten ther.
Sket cam tiding intil Ubbe
That Havelok havede with a clubbe
Of hise slawen sixti and on
Sergaunz, the beste that mihten gon.

“Deus,” quoth Ubbe, “Hwat may this be?
Betere is I nime miself and se
That th
is baret on hwat is wold
Thanne I sende yunge or old;
For yif I sende him unto,
I wene men sholde him shame do,
And that ne wolde ich for no thing.
I love him wel, bi Heveneking-
Me wore levere I wore lame
Thanne men dide him ani shame
Or tok or onne handes leyde
Unornelike or shame seyde.”
He lep up on a stede lith,
And with him mani a noble knith,
And ferde forth unto the tun,
And dide calle Bernard Brun
Ut of his hus wan he ther cam;
And Bernard sone ageyn nam,
Al to-tused and al to-torn,
Ner al so naked so he was born
And al to-brised, bac and the.
Quoth Ubbe, “Bernard, hwat is thee?
Hwo haves thee thus ille maked,
Thus to-riven and al mad naked?”
“Louerd, merci,” quot he sone,
“Tonicht, al so ros the mone,
Comen her mo than sixti theves
With lokene copes and wide sleves,
Me for to robben and to pine,
And for to drepe me and mine.

Like the child that loses its mother.
Damn whoever cares! They deserved it!
What business had they there? They were mauled!
They battered and beat them,
With fists set on their brains,
For so long that of the sixty-one men,
None went their way alive.
In the morning, when it was day
Each lay mangled on the other
As if they were dogs that were hanged.
And some lay slung in ditches,
And some in trenches,
Dragged by their hair and left there.
The news came fast to Ubbe
That Havelock had, with a club,
Slain sixty-one of his retinue—
Sergeants, the best that might serve.54
“My God,” said Ubbe, “what is this about?
It would be better to go myself, and see
What this trouble is about,
Than to send someone, young or old.
For if I send him to Havelock,
I expect men would take revenge,
And I would not have that for anything.
I love him well, by Heven’ks king!
I would rather be crippled
Than have men do him any shame,
Or seize or lay hands on him rudely,
Or speak abuse to him.”
He leaped upon a nimble horse,
Along with many a noble knight,
And journeyed forth into the town.
He called Bernard Brown
Out of his house when he came there,
And Bernard soon appeared.
He was all cut up and torn to pieces,
Nearly as naked as when he was born,
And all bruised on the back and thighs.
Ubbe said, “Bernard, what’s wrong with you?
Who has hurt you so foully,
To be ripped apart and almost naked?”
“My lord!” he answered at once.
“Last night, as the moon rose,
More than sixty thieves showed up here,
With fastened cloaks and wide sleeves,
To rob and torment me,
And to slay me and my family!
They broke apart my door in a rush,

54 Sergaunz: In medieval usage a sergeant was any armed attendant or officer with a protective or guarding function. The line again suggests that the outlaws who attack Bernard Brun and Ubbe’s retinue are the same men.
And wolde me binden hond and fet.  
Wan the godemen that sawe,  
Havelok and he that bi the wowe  
Leye, he stirten up some onon  
And summe grop tre and sum grop ston  
And drive hem ut, thei he weren crus,  
So dogges ut of milne-hous.  
Havelok grop the dore-tre,  
And a dint he slow hem thre.  
He is the beste man at nede  
That everemar shal ride stede  
Als helpe God, bi mine wone  
A thousend men his he w  
Worth one!  
Yif he ne were, ich were now ded  
So have ich don mi soule red!  
But it is of him mikel sinne:  
He maden him swilke woundes thrinne  
That of the altherleste wounde  
Were a stede brouht to grunde.  
He haves a wunde in the side  
With a gleyve ful unride;  
And he haves on thoru his arum  
Ther of is full mikel harum;  
The unrideste that men may se.  
And othe wundes haves he stronge,  
Mo than twenti, swithe longe.  
But sithen he havede lauth the sor  
Of the wundes, was nevere bor  
That so fauth, so he fauth thanne!  
Was non that havede the hernepanne  
So hard that he ne dede al to-cruhsse  
And al to-shivere and al to-frusshe.  
He folwede hem so hund dos hare -  
Datheyt on he wolde spare,  
That ne made hem everilkon  
Ligge stille so doth the ston,  
And ther nis he nouth to frie  
For other sholde he make hem lye  
Ded, or thei him havede slawen,  
Or al to-hewen or al to-drawen.  
“Louerd, havi nomore plith  
Of that ich was grethed tonith.  
Thus wolde thethes we have reft;  
But, God thank, he havenet sure keft!  
But it is of him mikel scate -  
I woth that he bes ded ful rathe.”  
Quoth Ubbe, “Bernard, seyst thou soth?”  
“Ya, sire, that I ne leye o tooth!

And would have bound me hand and foot.  
When those gentlemen saw that,  
Havelock, and those lying by the wall,  
They got up right away,  
And some grabbed trees, and some took stones,  
And though they were fierce, they drove them out  
Like dogs out of a mill-house.  
Havelock gripped the door bar,  
And with one blow he killed three of them.  
He is the best man in need  
Who will ever ride a steed!  
So help me God, by my word,  
He is worth a thousand men!  
If not for him I would be dead now,  
As sure as I trust my own soul.  
But as for him, it is a great sin.  
They gave him three wounds so harsh  
That the very least of them  
Would bring a horse to the ground.  
He has an ugly gash in his side  
From a lance,  
And he has a wound through the arm  
Which has caused him great harm,  
And he has one through his thigh,  
The most horrible that men might see.  
And he has other serious injuries,  
More than twenty, just as severe.  
But after he felt the pain of the wounds,  
There was never a wild boar  
That fought as he fought then!  
There was none who heaved on skulls  
So hard as he completely crushed,  
Shattered, and smashed them.  
To Hell with anyone he might spare!  
He chased them like a hound does a hare,  
So that he made each one of them  
Lie still like a stone.  
And there is nothing to blame him for,  
For they either had to lie dead by his hand  
Or they would have slain him,  
Or totally hacked or ripped him apart!  
My lord, I have no more trouble  
From what threatened me last night.  
The thieves would have robbed me,  
But, thank God, they surely paid for it!  
But it is a great pity about Havelock.  
I believe that he will soon be dead.”  
Ubbe said, “Bernard, is this the truth?”  
“Yes, sire, I do not make false oaths!"

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55 That I ne leye o tooth: Word division in the MS is unclear. TEAMS suggests the idiom ‘I do not lie through my teeth,’ but this spelling of tooth is not in the MED. Skeat has that ine lepe oth but the phrase makes no sense. Some give leye othe, ‘lie’ + ‘oath,’ which seems to work here.
If I lie one word, my lord, Tomorrow have me hanged high!"
The townspeople who stood nearby, Low and great, young and old, swore great and solemn oaths That it was true what Bernard said. It was true that they wanted to tie him up And carry off all they might find of his In coffers or in chests That they would jam into sacks. “My lord, they would have taken All he had, with himself torn apart, But God Himself has preserved him well So that he has not lost any goods. Who could stand against so many men In the night-time, knight or peasant? They were seventy in count, Strong men, rugged men, And one was the master of them all, Who had the name Griffin Galle. Who could stand against so many, Except this man from faraway lands, Who has killed them with a door bar? May he have great joy! May God give him wealth to wield, Both in town and in the fields as well. The food he eats is well spent!” Ubbe said, “Have him brought quickly, So that I may see his wounds, If he may be healed. For if he might still recover, And walk firm on his feet, I myself will dub him a knight Because of his bravery. And if any are alive, those foul thieves Who come from Cain and Eve’s kin, They will hang by the neck! Curse whoever cares about their death, Since they ran about at night To tie up both townsmen and knights. I have no love for outlaws; I don’t give a berry about them!” Havelock was brought before Ubbe, Who had great concern for him And much sorrow in his heart For his wounds, which were so painful. But when his injuries were examined

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The descendants of Cain were considered evil, just as Grendel is in Beowulf (108). Eve was viewed with similar opprobrium, as she was seen as responsible for the fall of man into sin. The antifeminist literature that Janekyn reads and which vexes the Wife of Bath has a typical excoriation of Eve: “that for hir wikkednesse / was al mankynde broght to wrecchednesse” (CT III.715-16).
And a leche havede knawed
That he hem mouthe ful wel hele,
Wel make him gange and ful wel mele,
And wel a palefrey bistride,
And wel upon a stede ride,
Tho let Ubbe al his care
And al his sorwe over fare,
And seyde, “Cum now forth with me,
And Goldeboru, thi wif, with thee,
And thine serjaunz alle thre,
For now wile I youre warant be:
Wile I non of here frend
That thu slo
we with thin hend
Moucte wayte thee to slo
Also thou gange to and fro.
I shal lene thee a bowr
That is up in the heye tour,
Til thou mowe ful wel go
And wel ben hol of al thi wo.
It ne shal nothing ben bitwene
Thi bowr and min, al so I wene,
But a fayr firrene wowe
-Speke I loude or spek I lowe,
Thou shalt ful wel heren me,
And than thu wilt thu shalt me se.
A rof shal hile us bothe o nith,
That none of mine, clerk ne knith,
No sholen thi wif no shame bede
No more than min, so God me rede!”
He dide unto the borw bringe
Sone anon, al with joiinge,
His wif and his sergaunz thre,
The beste men that mouthe be.
The first nith he lay ther inne,
Hise wif and his serganz thrinne,
Aboute the middel of the nith
Wok Ubbe and saw a mikel lith
In the bowr thar Havelok lay
Al so brith so it were day.
“Deus!” quoth I Ubbe, “Hwat may this be?
Betere is I go miself and se
Hwether he sitten now and wesseylen,
Or ani sotshipe to deyle,
This tid nithes also foles;
Than birthe men casten hem in poles
Or in a grip, or in the fen -
Now ne sitten none but wicke men,
Glutuns, revres, or wicke theves,
Bi Crist that alle folk onne leves!”
He stod and totede in at a bord
Her he spak anilepi word
And saw hem slepen faste ilkon
And lye stille so the ston;
And saw al that mikel lith
And a doctor had determined
That he would be able to heal them,
To make him walk and talk with vigor,
And sit on a saddle-horse
And then ride a steed confidently,
Then Ubbe let his worries go
And his sorrow passed away.
He said, “Come back with me now,
With Goldeboro, your wife,
And your men-at-arms, all three.
For I will be your guarantor now.
I want none of the friends
Of those you killed with your hand
To be able to wait for you in ambush
As you go to and fro.
I will lend you a chamber
Which is up in the high tower
Until you can get around
And be fully healed from all your woes.
There will be nothing between
Your room and mine, I know,
But a fine fir-wood wall.
If I speak loudly or speak quietly,
You will hear me well.
And whenever you want, you will see me.
A roof will cover us both at night,
So that none of mine, priest or knight,
Will try to cause shame to your wife
Any more than mine, so God help me!”
He had Havelock brought into the chamber
Soon after, with his wife and his
Three officers, the best men
That might be, all rejoicing.
The first night that he lay in there,
With his wife and three brothers in arms,
About the middle of the night
Ubbe woke up and saw a great light
From the room where Havelock lay,
As bright as if it were day.
“Good lord!” said Ubbe, “What is this?
I had better go myself and see
Whether he is up now and drinking toasts,
Or taking part in some debauchery
Like fools do this time of night.
Men ought to throw them in pools,
Or in a ditch, or in the muddy swamp.
No one is up now but wicked men,
Gluttons, criminals, or foul thieves,
By Christ who all people believe in!”
He stood up and peered through a board
Before he spoke another word,
And saw each one of them fast asleep
And lying as still as a stone.
He saw all that great light
Coming from Havelock, which was so bright.
Every bit of it came out of his mouth;
He could see that clearly.
“My God,” he said, “what can this mean?”
He called for men, both timid and bold,
His wisest knights and officers,
More than a hundred, without a lie,
And he ordered them all to come and see
What that marvel might be.
As the knights were all arriving,
There Havelock lay outside the hall.
Out of his mouth streamed a gleam,
Exactly like a sunbeam.
The light there, by Heaven,
Was as if seven tapers were burning
And a hundred more candles with it.
I would dare to swear it on a Bible!
They were fast asleep, all five,
As if they had departed from life,
And Havelock lay on his left side,
With his shining bride in his arms.
He lay naked down to the chest;\(^{57}\)
So fair a two were never created
To lie together in a bed.
The knights thought it was good fun
To look at them and examine them.
But just as they all stood there
And his back shifted toward them,
They were aware of a majestic cross
On his right shoulder, so clear,
Brighter than gold against the light,
That they realized, high and low,
It was a royal mark that they saw.
It sparkled and shone brightly
Just as a good carbuncle stone does,
So that men can pick out a penny
By its light, it was so brilliant.
Then they beheld him closely,
So that they finally understood
That he was the son of Birkabeyn,
The man who was their king, who used
To govern and protect them well
Against foreign armies:
“For there has never been a brother
In all Denmark so like another
As this man, who is so noble,

\(^{57}\) Skeat cites George Ellis’ *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances* (1811), who asserts that the medieval custom was to sleep naked. The emir in *Floris & Blancheflor* describes Floris as a naked boy in Blancheflor’s bed (1411). However, it is unlikely that the poet’s statement that Havelock went *ful naked* (6, 854) means total nudity. More likely, in the heat of summer Havelock and Goldeboru are wearing minimal bedclothing.
Als Birkabeyn; he is hise eyr.”
He fellen sone at hise fet.
Was non of hem that he ne gret -
Of joye he weren alle so fawen
So he him haveden of erthe drawen.
Hise fet he kisten an hundred sythes -
The tos, the nayles, and the lithes -
So that he bigan to wakne
And wit hem ful sore to blakne,
For he wende he wolden him slo,
Or elles binde him and do wo.
Quoth Ubbe, “Louerd, ne dred thee nowth,
Me thinkes that I se thi thouth.
Dere sone, wel is me
That I thee with eyn se.
Manred, louerd, bede I thee -
Thi man auht I ful wel to be;
For thu art born from Birkabeyn,
That havede mani knith and sweyn,
And so shaltu be King of al Denemark -
Was ther inne never non so stark.
Tomorwen shaltu manrede take
Of the brune and of the blake,
Of alle that aren in this tun,
Bothe of erl and of barun,
And of dreng and of thayn
And of knith and of sweyn.
And so shalt be King of al Denemark -
Was ther inne never non so stark.
On the morwen, wan it was lith,
And gon was thisternesse of the nith,
Ubbe dide upon a stede
A ladde lepe, and thider bede
Erles, barouns, drenges, theynes,
Klerkes, knithes, burgeys, sweynes,
That he sholden komen anon
Biforen him sone everikon,
Al so he loven here lives
And here children and here wives.
His bode ne durste he non asitis
That he ne neme for to wite,
Sone hwat wolde the justise;
And bigan anon to rise
And seyde sone, “Lithes me,
Alle samen, theu and fire,
A thing ich wile you here shauwe
That ye alle ful wel knawe.
Ye witen wel that al this lond
Was in Birkabeynes hond
The day that he was quic and ded,
Is like Birkabeyn. He is his heir.”
At once they fell at his feet;
There were none who did not hail him.
They were all as full of joy
As if he had risen from the grave.
They kissed his feet a hundred times,
The toes, the nails, and the tips,
So that he began to wake up.
On seeing them he blanched painfully,
For he thought they would slay him,
Or else tie him up and do woe.
Ubbe said, “My lord, have no fear!
I think that I know your thoughts.
Dear son, how fortunate I am
To see you with my own eyes.
Lord, I offer you homage;
I fully ought to be your man.
For you are born from Birkabeyn,
Who had many knights and servants,
And you, lord, shall have the same.
Though you are still a young man,
You will be king of all Denmark.
There was never anyone so strong here.
Tomorrow you will receive pledges
From every type of man,
From all who are in this town,
Both from earl and from baron,
And from vassal and retainer,
And from knight and bondsman.
And so you will be made a knight
With gladness, for you are so valiant.”
Then Havelock was very pleased,
And thanked God many times.
In the morning, when it was light,
And the gloom of the night was gone,
Ubbe had a young messenger
Leap on a steed, and go to summon
Earls, barons, retainers, vassals,
Priests, knights, townspeople, and peasants,
That they should come quickly
Before him soon, each of them,
As much as they loved their lives
And their children and their wives.
No one dared ignore his command,
So that all came at once
To find out what the justice wanted.
Ubbe soon rose
And said, “Listen to me,
All together, bound and free!
I will relate to you a matter here
That you all know clearly.
You know well that all this land
Was in Birkabeyn’s hand
The day that he was alive and dead,
And how that he, by your counsel,
Entrusted his three children, and all
His property, to Godard to steward.
He committed his son Havelock to him,
And his two daughters and his holdings.
All of you heard him swear
On the Bible and on the mass garments
That he would protect them well,
Without fault, without reproach.
He forget all about his oath!
He deserves evil and woe forever!
For he deprived both of the maidens
Of their lives with a knife,
And he would have killed the boy also.
The knife was drawn at his heart,
But God wished to save him.
Godard felt regret for the boy
So that he could not kill him
With his own hand, that miserable fiend!
But he soon after forced a fisherman
To swear solemn oaths
That he would drown him
In the sea that was so wild.
When Grim saw that he was so fair,
And realized he was the rightful heir,
They quickly fled from Denmark
Into England and kept him there.
Many years until this day
He has been fed and brought up well.
Look where he stands here!
In all this world he has no peer,
None so handsome, none so tall,
Nor any so great, nor none so strong.
On this earth there is no knight
Half so mighty, nor half so valiant.
Be joyful and glad because of him,
And come forward quickly
To pledge loyalty to your lord,
Every rank of person.
I shall first do the honors myself,
And you will all follow together after.”
Ubbe set himself courteously
0n his knees;
Nothing might prevent him from it.
And he became Havelock’s man right there,
So that all who were there saw it. 58
After him ten lads started up
And became his men,

| 2220 | He let his oth all overgo -
Evere wurthe him yvel and wo!
For the maydnes here lif
Refte he bothen with a knif,
And him shulde ok have slawen -
The knif was at his herte drawen.
But God him wolde wel have save:
He havede rewnesse of the knave
So that he with his hend
Ne drop him nouth, that sori fend!
|
| 2230 | But sone dide he a fishere
Swithe grete othes swere,
That he sholde drenchen him
In the se, that was ful brim.
Hwan Grim saw that he was so fayr,
And wiste he was the rith eir,
Fro Denemark ful sone he fleede
Intil Englood and ther him fedde
Mani winter that til this day
Haves he ben fed and fostred ay.
|
| 2240 | Lokes hware he stondes her!
In al this werd ne haves he per -
Non so fayr, ne non so long.
Ne non so mikel, ne non so strong.
In this middelerd nis no knith
Half so strong ne half so with.
Bes of him ful glad and blithe,
And cometh alle hider swithe,
Manrede youre louerd for to make,
Bothe brune and the blake -
|
| 2250 | I shal miself do first the gamen
And ye sithen alle samen.”
O knees ful fayre he him sette -
Mouthe nothing him ther fro lette,
And bicam is man rith thare,
That alle sawen that there ware.
After him stirt up laddes ten
And bicomen hise men,

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58 Strohm notes that the swearing of fealty between vassal and lord, *manrede*, was becoming an increasingly practical and contractual matter by the fourteenth century, but in romance there is still the older Germanic ideal of a sacred and emotional bond of loyalty expressed in a public rite. Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1989), 14.
And sithen everilk a baroun
That evere weren in al that toun,
So that, or that day was gon,
In al the tun ne was nouth on
That it ne was his man bicomen -
Manrede of alle havede he nomen.
Hwan he havede of hem alle
Manrede taken in the halle,
Grundlike dide he hem swere
That he sholden him god feyth bere
Ageynes alle that wornen on live;
Ther-yen ne wolde never on strive,
That he ne maden sone that oth -
Riche an poure, lef and loth.
Hwan that was maked, sone he sende
Ubbe writes fer and hende,
After alle that castel yemede,
Burwes, tunes, sibbe an fremde
That thider sholden comen swithe
Til him and heren tithandes blithe
Of hem ne wolde nevere on dwelle,
That he ne come sone plattinde;
Hwo hors ne havede, com gangande.
So that withinne a fourtenith
In al Denemark ne was no knith,
Ne conestable, ne shireve,
That com of Adam and of Eve,
That he ne com biforn sire Ubbe
He dredden him so thef doth clubbe.
Hwan he haveden alle the king gret
And he weren alle dun-set,
Tho seydte Ubbe, „Lokes here
Ure louerd swithe dere,
That shal ben king of al the lond
And have us alle under hond,
For he is Birkabeynes sone,
The king that was umbe stonde won
Us for to yemen and wel were
With sharp swerd and longe spere.
Lokes now, hw he is fayr:
Sikerlike he is hise eyr.
Falles alle to his fet -
Bicomes hise men ful sket.‖
He weren for Ubbe swithe adrad
And dide sone al that he bad.

And after then each baron
Who was ever in that town,
And then servants, and then vassals,
And then knights, and then peasants,
So that before the day was gone,
In all the town there was no one
Who had not become his man.
They had all taken oaths of loyalty.
When he had accepted homage
From all of them in the hall,
He had them solemnly swear
That they would act in good faith
Toward all who were alive for him.
No one would ever strive against him
Who made that oath,
Rich or poor, fair or foul.
When that was done, at once he sent
Ubbe’s summons far and wide
To all who ruled a castle,
City, or town, friend or stranger,
That they should come to him quickly
And hear the good news.
That he would tell them.
Of them, not a one delayed
So that he did not come hurrying.
Whoever had no horse came on foot,
So that within a fortnight
In all of Denmark, there was no knight,
Constable, or sheriff[^59]
Who came from Adam and Eve
Who did not appear before Sir Ubbe;
They feared him as the thief does the club.
When they had all greeted the king
And they were all seated,
Then Ubbe said, „Behold
Our lord so dear,
Who will be king of all the land
And have us all in his hand!
For he is Birkabeyn’s son,
The king who once used
To rule and protect us well
With a sharp sword and long spear.
Look now, how noble he is;
Surely he is his heir!
Everyone fall to his feet in haste
And become his man.‖
They were so in awe of Ubbe
That they did all he ordered at once,

[^59]: Like sergeant, these are terms predating modern police forces. A constable or marshall (mareschal) was an officer of the stables. A sheriff was a shire-reeve, the lord’s representative in maintaining order in the countryside, such as Gamelyn’s brother.
And yet he dede sumdel more:
O bok ful grundlike he swore
That he sholde with him halde,
Bothe ageynes stille and bolde
That evere wolde his bodi dere.
That dide he hem o boke swere.
Hwan he havede manrede and oth
Taken of lef and of loth,
Ubbe dubbede him to knith
With a swerd ful swithe brith,
And the folk of al the lond
Bitauhte him al in his hond,
The cunnriche everil del
And made him king heylike and wel.
Hwan he was king, ther mouthe men se
The moste joye that mouhte be
- Buttinge with sharpe speres,
Skirming wi thalevaces that men beres,
Wrestling with laddes, putting of ston,
Harping and piping, ful god won,
Leyk of mine, of hasard ok,
Romanz reding on the bok.
Ther mouthe men here the gestes singe,
The glewmen on the tabour dinge.
Ther moutthe men se the boles beyte,
And the bores, with hundes teyte.
Tho mouthe men se everil glew -
Ther mouthe men se hw grim grew -
Was nevere yete joye more
In al this werd than tho was thore.
Ther was so mik el yeft of clothes
That, thou I swore you grete othes,
I ne wore noth ther of trod.
That may I ful wel swere, bi God!
There was swithe gode metes
And of wyn that men fer fetes,
Rith al so mik and gret plenté
So it were water of the se.
The feste fourti dawes sat -
So riche was nevere non so that.
The king made Roberd there knith,
That was ful strong and ful with,
And Willam Wendut hec, his brother,
And Huwe Raven, that was that other,
And made hem barouns alle thre.

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60 Ther mouthe men se hw grim grew: Skeat asserts in his note to 2320 that this is early evidence of secular theatre, as the celebrants are reenacting the life of Havelock’s stepfather, Grim. More likely the poet means ME grim, in this context ‘excitement or action.’

61 So mikel yeft of clothes: Lavish presents of clothing were common in wealthy households during holidays and celebrations. Chaucer and Philippa received many such gifts as recorded in royal account books of the period (Garbaty, note to 2157-59).
And yaf hem lond and other fe,
So mikel that ilker twenti knihtes
Havede of genge, dayes and nithes.
Hwan that feste was al don,
A thousand knihtes ful wel o bon
Withheld the king with him to lede,
That ilkan havede ful god stede,
Helm and sheld, and brinie brith,
And al the wepne that fel to knith.
With hem ek five thusand gode
Sergauz that weren to fyht
Wode
Withheld he al of his genge -
Wile I namore the storie lenge.
Yet hwan he havede of al the lond
The casteles alle in his hond,
And conestables don therinne,
He swor he ne sholde never blinne
Til that he were of Godard wreken,
That ich have of ofte s
peken.
Half hundred knihtes dede he calle,
And hise fif thusand sergaunz alle,
And dide sweren on the bok
Sone, and on the auter ok,
That he ne sholde nevere blinne,
Ne for love ne for sinne,
Til that he haveden Godard funde
And brouth biforn him faste bun
de.
Thanne he haveden swor this oth,
Ne leten he nouth, for lef ne loth,
That he foren swithe rathe
Ther he was, unto the pathe
Ther he yet on hunting for,
With mikel genge and swithe stor.
Robert, that was of all the ferd
Mayster, girt was wit a swer
d,
And sat upon a ful god stede,
That under him rith wolde wede.
He was the firste that with Godard
Spak, and sayde, "Hede, cavenard!
Wat dos thu here at this pathe?
Cum to the king swithe and rathe!
That sendes he thee word and bedes,
That thu thenke what thou him dedes
Whan thu reftes with a knif
Hise sistres here lif
And sithen bede thu in the se
Drenchen him - that herde he!
He is to thee swithe grim;
Cum nu swithe unto him
That king is of this kunerike,
Thou fule man, thou wicke swike!
And he shal yelde thee thy mede,
Bi Crist that wolde on Rode blede!"
Hwan Godard herde that he ther thrette,
And gave them land and other properties,
So much that each had in his retinue
Twenty knights by day and night.
When the feast was all over,
A thousand knights, fully equipped,
Escorted the king with him leading them.
Each had a strong steed.
Helmet and shield, and bright mailcoat,
And all the weapons fitting for knights.
With them were also five thousand
Good men, raring to fight,
Who filled out his company.
I will not make the story any longer.
And yet when he had, from all the land,
All the castles in his command,
And had placed officers in them,
He swore he would never rest
Until he had revenge on Godard,
Whom I have spoken often enough about.
He summoned half a hundred knights,
And all his five thousand strongmen,
And had them swear at once
On the Bible and on the altar as well,
That they would never give up,
Neither for love nor for sin,
Until they had found Godard
And brought him before him bound fast.
When they had sworn this oath,
They would not be delayed for love or hate,
So that they went forth in a rush
To where Godard was, on the path
Where he went hunting,
With a retinue that was large and proud.
Robert, who was master of the militia,
Was equipped with a sword
And sat upon a mighty steed
That would gallop mightily under him.
He was the first to speak to Godard,
And shouted, "Stop right there, rogue!
What are you doing on this path?
Come to the king quickly in haste!
He sends you word and commands
You to think on what you did to him
When you took the lives of
His sisters with a knife
And then ordered him to be drowned
In the sea—he heard all about that!
He is very displeased with you.
Now come to him immediately,
The sovereign of this kingdom,
You foul man, you wicked traitor!
And he will give you your reward,
By Christ who bled on the Cross!"
When Godard heard what he threatened,
With the neve he Robert sette
Biforn the teth a dint ful strong.
And Robert kipt ut a knife long
And smot him thoru the rith arum -
Ther of was ful litel harum!

Hwan his folk that saw and herde,
Hwou Robert with here louerd ferde,
He haveden him wel ner browt of live,
Ne weren his two brethren and othre five
Sloven of here laddes ten,
Of Godardes altherbeste men.

Hwan the othre sawen that, he fledden,
And Godard swithe loude gredde:
―Mine knithes, hwat do ye?
Sule ye thusgate fro me fle?
Ich have you fed and yet shal fede
Help me nw in this nede
And late ye nouth mi bodi spille,
Or Havelok don of me hise wille!
If you it do, you shame
And bringeth yysel in mikel blame!‖

Hwan he that herden, he wenten ageyn,
And slowen a knit and a sweyn
Of the kinges oune men,
And woundeden abuten ten.

The kinges men, hwan he that sawe,
Scuten on hem, heye and lowe,
And everilk fot of hem he slowe,
But Godard one, that he flowe,
So the thef men dos henge,
Or hund men shole in dike slenge.
He bunden him ful swithe faste,
Hwil the bondes wolden laste,
That he rorede als a bole
That wore parred in an hole
With his fist he struck Robert
In the teeth with a good strong blow,
And Robert pulled out a long knife
And stuck him through the right arm.
There was little harm done in that!
When his company saw and heard
How Robert had acted with their lord,
They nearly would have taken his life
If not for his two brothers and five others
Who killed ten men
Of Godard’s very best troops.
When the others saw that, they fled,
And Godard shouted loudly,
“My knights, what are you doing?
Will you abandon me this way?
I have kept you and will still keep you!
Help me now in this need
And do not let my blood be spilled,
Or let Havelock do his will with me!
If you do so, you shame yourselves
And bring yourselves into dishonor!”
When they heard that, they came back,
And killed a knight and a servant
Of the king’s own men,
And wounded about ten others.
The king’s men, when they saw this,
Rushed on them, high and low,
And slaughtered every foot of them
Except for Godard alone, whom they would flay
Like the thief that men hang,
Or a dog that men hurl into a ditch.
They tied him up tightly
While the bonds would last,
So that he roared like a bull
That was trapped in a pit
With dogs biting and goading.
The bonds were not light in weight.
They held him so painfully tight
That he began to cry for God’s mercy,
That they would cut off his hands.
They did not stop for that,
Until he was bound hand and foot.
Cursed be the man who would prevent it!
They beat him like men do a bear
And threw him on a mangy mare
With his nose turned back into its behind. 62
They led that foul traitor in this way

62  Hise nese went unto the crice: It was a special humiliation to have a knight ride on a mare or ass, usually facing backwards (Garbaty, note to 2298-99). Here the punishment is especially degrading with the criminal’s nose pressed near the animal’s anus. In the bawdy fabliau Dame Sirith the lady similarly fears this penalty if she is exposed as a procurer of prostitutes (247). See also Havelock, 2823.
Til he biforn Havelok was brouth,
That he havede ful wo wrowht,
Bothe with hungre and with cold
Or he were twel winter old,
And with mani hevi swink,
With poure mete and feble drink,
And swithe wikke clothes,
For al hise manie grete othes.

Now beyes he his holde blame:
Old sinne makes newe shame!

Wan he was so shamelike
Brouth biforn the king, the fule swike!
The king dede Ubbe swithe calle
Hise erles and hise barouns alle,
Dreng and thein, burgeis and knith,
And bad he sholden demen him rith,
For he knew the swike dam;
Everil del God was him gram!

He setten hem dun bi the wawe,
Riche and pouere, heye and lowe,
The helde men and ek the grom,
And made ther the rithe dom
And seyden unto th e king anon,
That stille sat so the ston:
‖We deme that he be al quic flawen
And sithen to the galwes drawe
At this foule mere tayl,
Thoru his fet a ful strong nayl,
And thare be writen thise leteres:
‗This is the swi ke that wende wel
The king have reft the lond ilk del,
And hise sistres with a knif
Bothe refte here lif.‘
This writ shal henge bi him thare.

Hwan the dom was demd and give,
And he was wit the prestes shrive,
And it ne mouthe ben non other,
Ne for fader ne for brother,
But that he sholde tharne lif,
Sket cam a ladde with a knif
And bigan rith at the to
For to ritte and for to flo;
And he bigan tho for to rore

Garbaty notes that because hanged criminals were left exposed as a public example, chains were preferred to rope as they would not deteriorate in bad weather (note to 2301).

So it were grim or gore: Garbaty has so it were goun or gore, ‘gown or dress’ i.e. tailored by the knife. Though the executioners drive the mare over a rough field, presumably to inflict further agony, Godard is probably dead long before his ride to the gallows. Levine criticizes the poet for his rather prurient glee over
So it were grim or gore,
That men mithe thethen a mile
Here him rore, that fule file!
With knif mad of grunden stel.
The ladde ne let nowith forthi
They he criede, ―Merci! Merci!‖
That ne flow him everil del
With a rope of an old seyl
And drowen him unto the galwes,
Nouth bi the gate but over the falwes,
Datheit hwo recke: he was fals!
Thanne he was ded, that Sathanas,
Sket was seysed al that his was
In the kinges hand ilk del
Lon
d and lith and other catel
And the king ful sone it yaf
Ubbe in the hond, wit a fayr staf,
And seyde, ―Her ich sayse thee
In al the lond, in al the fe.‖

Havelock was a mighty king then,66
And he reigned more than four years
And amassed marvelous treasures.
But Goldebor urged him
To journey back to England
To conquer her heritage,
For which her uncle had exiled
And very unjustly disinherited her.
The king told her he would do
As she had asked him.
He had his fleet prepared
And sent for his men and his host.
After praying, he put to sea
And took the queen with him.
Havelock had four hundred
And eighty ships, full of men.
They sailed and steered
Until they arrived at Saltfleet.67


65 Wit a fayr staf: Havelock likely gives Ubbe a staff of wood to symbolize his authority, as King Edgar gives Bevis (3509), although the poet might more prosaically mean a “staff” of retainers and supporters.

66 Editors feel about twenty lines are missing from the English story explaining Havelock’s return to England, although it is not a MS defect. Skeat provides an extract from the Lai d’Auveloc of the likely omission (Skeat’s note to line 2530). In the French version Goldeboru’s name is Argentille.
They anchored near the harbor
And looked for provisions on land.

Then Havelock swore that
He would establish a priory for Grim
Of Benedictine monks to serve
Jesus Christ forever, until Judgment Day,
For the kindness he had shown him
When he was poor and weak,
And he would keep his promise in full,
For he had it built, God knows,
In the town where Grim was buried,
Which still has his name. 68
I have no more to say about Grim.
But when Godrich,
Who was earl of Cornwall—
That foul traitor, that filthy slave—
Heard that Havelock was king of Denmark,
And that an army, strong and bold,
Had come into England,
To win all of England,
And that the beautiful Goldeboro,
Who was England’s rightful heir,
Had arrived at Grimsby,
He was distraught and miserable
And said, “What shall I do?
God knows, I will have them both executed!
I will have them hanged high,
As sure as I see with my right eye,
Unless they flee my land!
What, do they think they will disinherit me?”
At once he ordered his army out,
All who could ever ride a horse
Or bear a helmet on their head,
A mailcoat on their back, shield and spear,
Or carry any other weapon,
Battle-ax, scythe, halberd, or spear,
Or dagger or a good long knife,
So that if they loved life or limb,
They should report to him,
Bearing their finest weapons,
To Lincoln, where he waited,
On the seventeenth day of March,
So that he might thank them properly.
And if any were so headstrong
That they did not come speedily,
He swor bi Crist and by Seint Johan,  
That he sholde maken him thral,  
And al his ofspring forth withal.  
The Englishe that herde that,  
Was non that evere his bode sat;  
For he him drede swithe sore,  
So runcy spore, and mickle more.

At the day he come sone  
That he hem sette, ful wel o bone,  
To Lincolne with gode stedes,  
And al the wepne that knith ledes.  
Hwan he wore come, sket was the erl yare  
Ageynes Denshe men to fare,  
And seyde, ―Lythes nw alle samen!  
Have ich gadred you for no gamen,  
But ich wile seyen you forthi.  
Lokes hware here at Grimesbi  
Hise uten laddes here comen,  
And haves nu the priorie numen  
-  
Al that evere mithen he finde,  
He brenne kirkes and prestes bind  
He strangleth monkes and nunnes bothe  
Wat wile ye, frend, her offe rede?  
Yif he regne thusgate longe,  
He moun us alle overgange,  
He moun us alle quic henge or slo,  
Or thral maken and do ful wo  
Or elles reve us ure lives  
And ure children and ure wives.  
But dos nw als ich wile you lere,  
Als ye wile be with me dere.  
Nimes nu swithe forth and rathe  
And helps me and yuself bathe,  
And slo supo the dogges swithe.  
Forshal I nevere more be blithe,  
Ne hoseled ben ne of prest shrenien  
Til that he ben of londe driven.

He swore by Christ and by Saint John,  
That he would make him a slave,  
And all his offspring after the same.  
Of the English who heard that,  
There were none who refused his orders,  
For they dreaded him so sorely  
Like the nag fears the spur, and much more.  
On the day that Godard set for them,  
They promptly came, fully equipped,  
To Lincoln with good warhorses  
And all the weapons that knights carry.  
When they had arrived, the earl was eager  
To face against Danish men,  
And he said, “Listen now, all together!  
I have not gathered you for fun and games,  
But for what I will tell you now:  
Look where, there at Grimsby,  
These foreigners have come,  
And have now seized the priory  
And all that they can find.  
They burn churches and tie up priests;  
They strangle both monks and nuns!  
What do you, friends, advise to be done?  
If they run free in this way for long,  
They may overcome us all.  
They may hang or slay us all alive,  
Or make us slaves and do us great woe,  
Or else rob us of our lives,  
Along with our children and our wives!  
But now do as I will instruct you,  
If you wish to be faithful to me  
Let us go forth now, and in haste,  
And save both me and yourselves  
And strike at the dogs quickly!  
For I will never be at peace,  
Nor be confessed or absolved by a priest,  
Until they are driven from our land.  
Let’s get going and make them flee,  
And everyone follow me closely!  
For in all the army, it is me  
Who will first kill with his sword drawn,  
Damn anyone who doesn’t stand fast  
By me while his arms last!”  
“Yes, my dear lord, yes!” said Earl Gunter.  
“Yes!” said the earl of Chester, Reyner.  
And who stood there said the same.

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69 Godard threatens to disinherit any knight if he will not fight, a “flagrant and unheard-of violation of custom and law” (68). Sheila Delaney, *Medieval Literary Politics* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 68. Similarly, in lines 2585 Godard asks for advice rhetorically, ignoring any answer, and then lies about the Danes to stir up anger. The poet intends to highlight Havelock’s good rule, as he defers to the counsel of others and thus needs no coercion to inspire loyalty.
And stirte forth so he were wode.
Tho mouthe men se the brinies brihte
On backes keste and lace rithe,
The helmes heye on heved sette.
To armes al so swithe plette
That thei wore on a litel stunde
Grethet als men mithe telle a pund,
And lopen on stedes sone anon;
And toward Grimesbi, ful god won,
He foren softe bi the sti
Til he come ney at Grimesbi.

Havelok, that havede spired wel
Of here fare, everil del,
With all his ferd cam hem ageyn.
Forbar he nother kni
th ne sweyn:
The firste knith that he ther mette
He charged so hard with his sword
That he sheared off his head.
He did not hesitate to inflict harm.
When Robert saw that skillful blow,
He would not turn away
Until he had slain another
With the sword he had drawn out.

Quoth Ubbe, “Nu dwelle ich to longe!”
And let his stede sone gonge
To Godrich, with a god sperre,
That he saw another bere;
And smot Godrich and Godrich him,
Hotly with fierce hearts,
So that they both fell headfirst
Down to the earth.
When they were both fallen,
They drew out their swords violently,
Which were so sharp and hard,
And fought like they were berserk,
To the fet right there adune. Ther mouthe men se to knihtes bete Ayther on other dintes grete, So that with the altherleste dint Were al to-shivered a flint. So was bitwennen hem a fiht Fro the morwen ner to the niht, So that thei nouth ne blunne Tho yaf Godrich thorw the side Ubbe a wunde ful unride, So that thorw that ilke wounde Havede ben brouth to grunde And his heved al of slawen, Yif God ne were and Huwe Raven, That drow him fro Godrich awey And barw him so that ilke day. Tho tarst bigan Godrich to go Upon the Danshe and faste to slo And forthrith, also leun fares Who spares no kind of prey And then is gone, for he made all The Danish men fall before him. He felle browne, he felle blake, That he mouthe overtake. Was nevere non that mouhte thave Hise dintes, noyther knith ne knave, That he felle so dos the gres Biforn the sythe that ful sharp es. Hwan Havelok saw his folk so brittene And his ferd so swithe litene, He cam drivende upon a stede, And bigan til him to grede, And seyde, “Godrich, wat is thee, That thou fare thus with me And mine gode knihtes slos? Sikerlike, thou misgos! Thou wost ful wel, yif thu wilt wite, That Athelwold thee dide site From their heads down to their feet. There men could see two knights Beat on each other with great blows So that the least strike Would have shattered a stone to pieces. There was a fight between them From the morning nearly to night, So that they did not let up Until the sun began to set. Godrich had given Ubbe An ugly wound through the side, So that with that same injury He would have been brought to the earth And his head hacked off If God and Hugh Raven were not there, Who drew him away from Godrich And saved him that very day. But before he was taken from Godrich There were a thousand knights killed And more enough on both sides. Where the armies clashed together There was such slaughter of the warriors That on the field there was no puddle That was not so full of blood That the stream didn’t run downhill. Then Godrich began to strike quickly Upon the Danish again, killing swiftly And relentlessly, as a lion pounces And then is gone, for he made all The Danish men fall before him. He dropped every type of warrior, Any that he might overtake. There was no one who might survive His blows, neither knight nor serf, That he cut down like the grass Before a sharpened scythe. When Havelock saw his men so shaken And his forces so reduced, He came driving up on a steed And began to parley with him, And said, “Godrich, why do you do this That you act this way with me And slay my good knights? Surely, you do evil! You know full well, if you recall, That Athelwold had you swear On your knees and on the missal, On chalice and sacramental cloth as well,
That thou hise douhter sholdest yelde,
Than she were wimman of elde,
Engelond everil del.
Godrich the erl, thou wost it wel!
Do nu wel withuten fiht
Yeld hire the lond, for that is rith.
Wile ich forgive thee the lathe,
Al mi dede and al mi wrathe,
Al mi dede and al mi wrathe.

2720
For I se thu art so with
And of thi bodi so god knith.”
“That ne wile ich neveremo,”
Quoth erl Godrich, “for ich shal slo
Thee, and hire forhenge heye.
I shal thrist ut thy rith eye
That thou lokes with on me,
But thu swithe hethen fle!”
He grop the swerd ut sone anon,
And hew o
Havelok ful god won,
So that he clef his sheld on two.

2730
So that he clef his sheld on two.
Hwan Havelok saw that shame do
His bodi ther biforn his ferd,
He drow ut sone his gode swerd,
And smote him so upon the crune
That Godrich fel to the erthe adune.
But Godrich stirt up swithe sket
-Lay ne nowth longe at hise fet-
And smot him on the sholdre so
That he dide thare undo
Of his brinie ringes mo
Than that ich kan tellen fro,
And woundede him rith in the fles,
That tendre was and swithe nesh,
So that the blod ran til his to.
Tho was Havelok swithe wo,
That he havede of him drawen
Blod and so sore him slawen.
Hertelike til him he wente
And Godrich ther fulike shente,

2740
For his swerd he hof up heye,
And the hand he dide of fleye
That he smot him with so sore -
Hw mithe he don him shame more?
Hwan he havede him so shamed,
His hand of plat and ivele lamed,
He tok him sone bi the necke
Als a traitour, datheith who recke!
And dide him binde and fetere wel
With gode feteres al of stel,
And to the quen he sende him,
That birde wel to him ben grim,
And bad she sholde don him gete
And that non ne sholde him bete,
Ne shame do, for he was knith,
Til knithes haveden demd him rith.
That you would yield to his daughter,
When she was a woman of age,
Every bit of England.
Earl Godrich, you know it well!
Do it now without struggle.
Give her the land, for it is her right.
I will forgive you for your hate,
For all my dead, and all my wrath,
For I see you are valiant
And in body a good knight.”
“That I will never do,”
Answered Earl Godrich, “for I will
Slay you, and hang her high!
I will thrust out your right eye
That you look at me with,
Unless you flee from here quickly!”
He straightway gripped his sword out,
And cut down on Havelock forcefully,
So that he split his shield in two.
When Havelock saw that shame done
To his own body in front of his host,
At once he drew out his best sword
And smashed him so hard upon the head
That Godrich fell to the earth.
But Godrich got up very quickly.
He did not lay long at his feet,
And struck Havelock on the shoulder
So that he took off more
Of his mailcoat rings
Than I can count,
And wounded him right in the flesh,
Which was so tender and soft,
So that the blood ran down to his toe.
Havelock was distressed then
That Godrich had drawn blood
From him and wounded him so sorely.
With furious heart he went at him
And brought great shame to Godrich there,
For he heaved his sword up high
And struck him so harshly
That he made Godrich’s hand fly off.
How could he dishonor him more?
When Havelock had disgraced him,
His hand cut off, and badly lame,
He immediately seized him by the neck
As a traitor—damn whoever cares!—
And had him bound and fettered fast
With strong chains, all of steel,
And he sent him to the queen.
That lady had cause to be stern with him,
And she ordered that he be guarded,
But that no one should beat him
Or abuse him, for he was a knight,
Until other knights had rightfully judged him.
Than the Englishe men that sawe,
That thei wisten, heye and lawe,
That Goldeboru that was so fayr
Was of Engelond rith eyr,

And that the king hire havede wedded,
And haveden been samen bedded,
He comen alle to crie “Merci,”
Unto the king at one cri,
And beden him sone manrede and oth
That he ne sholden, for lef ne loth,
Neveremore ageyn him go,
Ne ride, for wel ne for wo.
The king ne wolde nouth forsake
That he ne shulde of hem take
Manrede that he beden and ok
Hold othes sweren on the bok.

Manrede that he beden and ok
Hold othes sweren on the bok.
But or bad he that thider were brouth
The quen for hem swilk was his thouth
To se and forto shawe,
Yif that he hire wolde knawe
- Thoruth hem witen wolde he
Yif that she aucte quen to be.
Sixe erles weren sone yare
After hire for to fare.

He nomen onon and comen sone,
And brouthen hire, that under mone
In al the werd ne havede per
Of hendeleik, fer ne ner.
Hwan she was come thider,
allo
The Englishe men bigunne falle
O knes, and greten swithe sore,
And seyden, “Levedi, Kristes ore
And youres! We haven misdo mikel
That we ayen you have be fikel,

For England auhte for to ben
Youres and we youre men.
Is non of us, yung ne old,
That he ne wot that Athelwold
Was king of this kunerike
And ye his eyr, and that the swike
Haves it halden with mikle wronge -
God leve him sone to honge!”
Quot Havelok, “Hwan that ye it wite,
Nu wile ich that ye doun site;

And after Godrich haves wrouth,
That haves in sorwe himself brouth,
Lokes that ye demen him rith,
For dom ne spereth clerk ne knith,
And sithen shal ich understonde
Of you, after lawe of londe,
Manrede and holde othes bothe,
Yif ye it wilne and ek rothe.”
Anon ther dune he hem sette,
For non the dom ne durste lette

When the English men saw that,
When they realized, high and low,
That Goldeboro, who was so fair,
Was the rightful heir of England,
And that the king had married her,
And they had bedded together,
They all came to cry, “Mercy!”
Unto the king with one voice.
At once they offered him homage and vows
That they would never,
For love or hate, oppose him again,
Or rebel, for better or for worse.
The king did not reject them
So that he should not accept
The homage that they offered, as well as
Other oaths of loyalty sworn on the Bible.
But before doing so he ordered the queen
To be brought, for such were his thoughts
To watch and to see
If they would recognize her.
Through them he would know
If she ought to be queen.
Six earls were soon ready
To set out after her.
They went at once and soon returned
Bringing her, she who had no peer
Under the moon in all the world
In gentility, near or far.
When she was coming near,
All the English men began to fall
On their knees and cried out bitterly
And said, “Our lady, Christ’s mercy
And yours! We have done great evil
To be disloyal to you,
For England ought to be yours,
And we your men.
There is none of us, young or old,
Who does not know that Athelwold
Was sovereign of this kingdom
And you his heir, and that the traitor
Has held it with great injustice.
May God soon grant for him to hang!”
Havelock said, “Since you understand,
I would like you now to all sit down.
And in regard to what Godrich has caused,
Who has brought himself to calamity,
See that you judge him rightly,
For justice spares neither priest nor knight.
And after then I will accept from you,
Under the law of the land,
Both your homage and oaths of loyalty,
If you want it and recommend it as well.”
They seated themselves at once,
For no one dared obstruct the verdict,
And demden him to binden faste
Upon an asse swithe unwraste,
Andelong, nouht overthwert,
His nose went unto the stert
And so to Lincolne lede,
Shamelike in wicke wede,
And, whan he come unto the borw,
Shamelike ben led ther thoru,
Bi southe the borw unto a grene,
That thare is yet, als I wene,
And there be bunden til a stake,
Abouten him ful gret fir make,
And al to dust be brend rith there.
And yet demden he ther more,
Other swikes for to warne:
That hise children sulde tharne
Evermore that eritage
That his was, for hise utrage.
Hwan the dom was demd and seyd,
Sket was the swike on the asse leyd,
And led him til that ilke grene
And brend til asken al bidene.
Tho was Goldeboru ful blithe
She thanked God fele sythe
That the fule swike was brend
That wende wel hire bodi have shend;
And seyde, “Nu is time to take
Manrede of brune and of blake,
That ich se ride and go,
Nu ich am wreke of mi fo.”

And they ordered the traitor bound tight
Upon a filthy donkey,
End to end, not across,
His nose set toward the tail,
And led to Lincoln in this manner,
Shamefully in wretched rags;
And, when he arrived in the borough,
To be dishonorably paraded through,
To south of the town onto a green field—
Which is still there, as far as I know—
And to be tied to a stake
With a great fire set around him,
And all to be burned to dust right there.
And yet they ordered more,
In order to warn other traitors:
That his children should forever lose
Their heritage of what was his
For his outrageous crime.
When the verdict was given and approved,
The traitor was quickly laid on the donkey
And he was led to that same green
And burned to ashes right away.
Then Goldeboro was at ease.
She thanked God many times
That the foul traitor who had intended
To disgrace her body was burned,
And she said, “Now is the time to take
Homage from all kinds of people
That I see riding and walking,
Now that I am avenged on my foe.”
Havelock had soon received pledges
On the Bible from all the English,
And had them swear solemn oaths
That they would hold him in good faith
Toward all who were alive
And who were born of women.
When he had taken guarantees
From the great and the lesser,
With all at his will, he summoned
The earl of Chester with all his men,
Who was a young knight without a wife,
And said, “Sir Earl, by my life,
If you will trust my counsel,
I will deal with you fairly.

71 And that sholde ben born of wives: i.e. everyone. The expression seems to have been common, for the apparitions in Macbeth trick him by saying “none of woman born / shall harm Macbeth” (Macbeth IV.1.89-90), leading him into false confidence when Macduff turns out to be born by Caesarian. See also Guy of Warwick, 1288.

72 This seems to be the same Earl of Chester, Reyner, as the one who allies with Godrich earlier (2607), and apparently he has been rehabilitated. The reference might be meaningful, although there was no earl of Chester named Reyner, and Gunter is a generic name in the time period.
| For ich shal yeve thee to wive        | For I will give you as a wife          |
| The fairest thing that is o live.    | The fairest thing that is alive,       |
| That is Gunnild of Grimesby,         | Gunnild of Grimsby,                     |
| Grimes doughter, bi Seint Davy,      | The daughter of Grim, by Saint David,  |
| That me forth broute and wel fedde,  | Who brought me up and kept me well,    |
| And ut of Denemark with me fedde    | And fled with me out of Denmark        |
| Me for to burwe fro mi ded.          | To rescue me from death.               |
| Sikerlike, thoru his red,            | Surely, through his good judgment      |
| Have ich lived into this day -       | I have lived to this day.              |
| Blissed worthe his soule ay!         | May his soul be blessed forever!       |
| I rede that thu hire take            | I advise that you take her             |
| And spuse and curteyse make,         | And wed her, and do her courtesy,      |
| For she is fayr and she is fre,      | For she is beautiful and she is noble, |
| And al so hende so she may be.       | And as gracious as she could be.       |
| Ther tekene, she is wel with me;     | I will prove it to you in full that    |
| That shal ich ful wel shewe thee.    | I am well pleased with her by a token, |
| For ich wile give thee a give        | For I will give you a promise          |
| That everemore, hwil ich live,       | That forevormore, while I live,        |
| For hire shaltu be with me dere,     | For her sake you shall be dear to me,  |
| That wile icht that this folc al here,” | I would like all these people to witness that,” |
| The erl ne wolde mouth ageyn         | The earl did not refuse the king,      |
| The king be, for knith ne swyn       | And neither knight nor servant         |
| Ne of the spusing seyen nay,        | Said anything against the match,       |
| But spusede that like day,           | But they were wedded that same day.    |
| That spusinge was in god time maked, | That marriage was made in a blessed moment,  |
| For it ne were nevere, clad ne naked, | For there were never in any land       |
| In a thede samened two               | Two who came together, clothed or naked, |
| That cam togidere, livede so         | Who lived in the way                    |
| So they diden al here live:          | That they did their whole lives.       |
| He geten samen sones five,           | They had five sons together,           |
| That were the beste men at nede      | All the best men in times of need      |
| That mounte riden on ani stede.      | Who might ride on any steed.           |
| Hwan Gunnild was to Cestre brouth,   | When Gunnild was brought to Chester,   |
| Havelok the gode ne forgat nouth     | Havelock, the good man, did not forget |
| Bertram, that was the erles kok,     | Bertram, who was the earl’s cook.      |
| That he ne dide callen ok,           | He called him as well                  |
| And sayde, “Frend, so God me rede,   | And said, “Friend, so God help me,     |
| Nu shaltu have riche mede,            | You will have a rich reward            |
| For wissing and thi gode dede         | For your guidance and your kind deeds  |
| That tu me dides in ful gret nede.   | That you did for me in my great need.  |
| For thanne I yede in mi cuvel        | For then I walked in my cloak           |
| And ich ne havede bred ne sowel.     | And had neither bread nor sauce,       |
| Ne I ne havede no catel,             | Nor did I have any possessions.        |
| Thou feddes and claddes me ful wel.  | You fed and clothed me well.           |
| Have nu forshi of Cornwayle          | Take now the earldom of Cornwall,      |
| The erldom ilk del, withuten fayle,  | Every acre, without any doubt,         |
| And al the lond that Godrich held,   | And all the land that Godrich held,    |
| Bothe in town and ek in feld;        | Both in town and field as well.        |
| And ther-to wile ich that thu spuse,  | And with that I want you to marry      |

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73 Seint Davy: Not King David of Israel, but David (c. 500-89) the patron saint of Wales. Associated with vegetarians and poets, he is possibly here only to fit the rhyme. Gunhildr is Old Norse in etymology.
And fayre bring hire until huse,
Grimes douther, Le Vive the hende,
For thider shal she with thee wende.
Hire semes curteys for to be,
For she is fayr so flour on tre;
The hew is swilk in hire ler
So the rose in roser,
Hwan it is fayre sprad ut newe,
Ageyn the sunne brith and lewe."
And girde him sone with the swerd
Of the erldom, biforn his ferd,
And with his hond he made him knith,
And yaf him armes, for that was rith,
And dide him there sone wedde
Hire that was ful swete in bedde.
After that he spused wore,
Wolde the Erl nouth dwelle thore,
But sone nam until his lond
And seyed it al in his hond
And livede ther inne, he and his wif,
An hundred winter in god lif,
And gaten mani children samen
And livened ay in blisse and gamen.
Hwan the maidens were spused bothe,
Havelok anon bigan ful rathe
His Denshe men to feste wel
Wit riche landes and catel,
So that he weren alle riche,
For he was larg e and nouth chiche.
Ther after sone, with his here,
For he to Lundone for to bere
Corune, so that it sawe
Henglishe ant Denshe, heye and lowe,
Hwou he it bar with mikel pride,
For his barnage that was unride.
The feste of his coruning
Lastede with gret joying
Fourti dawes and sumdel mo.
Tho bigunnen the Denshe to go
Unto the king to aske leve;
And he ne wolde hem nouthe greve,
For he saw that he woren yare
Into Denemark for to fare;
But gaf hem leve sone anon
And bitauhte hem Seint Johan,
And bad Ubbe, his justise,
That he sholde on ilke wise
Denemark yeme and gete so
That no pleynte come him to.
Hwan he wore parted alle samen,
Havelok bilefte wit joye and gamen
In Engelond and was ther-inne
Sixti winter king with winne,
And Goldeboru Quen, that I wene
Grim’s daughter, Levi the gracious,
And bring her honorably to your house
For she shall go with you there.
It is her nature to be courteous,
For she is as fair as the flower on the tree.
The color in her face
Is like the rose in a rosebush
When it has newly blossomed out
Toward the sun, bright and fresh.”
And at once he fit him with the sword
Of the earldom, in front of his army,
And with his hand he made him a knight
And gave him arms, for that was proper,
And straightaway had him married
To Levi, who was so sweet in bed.
After they were married,
The earl did not wish to dwell there,
But soon made his way to his land
And received it all into his hand,
And lived there, him and his wife,
For a hundred seasons in good health.
They had many children together,
And lived forever in ease and pleasure.
When both of the maidens were married,
Havelock immediately began
To endow his Danish men well
With rich lands and properties,
So that they were all prosperous,
For he was generous and not grudging.
Soon after, he traveled with his army
To London to wear the crown,
So that all would see,
English and Danish, high and low,
How he wore it with regal pride
Before his great baronage.
The festival of his coronation
Lasted with great rejoicing
For forty days and somewhat more.
Then the Danes began to go
To the king to ask permission to leave.
He did not want to aggrieve them,
For he saw that they were anxious
To journey home to Denmark,
But gave them permission soon after
And entrusted them to Saint John,
And ordered Ubbe, his magistrate,
That he should govern and guard
Denmark in the same way,
So that no complaint would come to him.
When they had all departed together,
Havelock stayed with joy and pleasure
In England and was king there
In peace for sixty years.
And as for Queen Goldeboro, I know that
So much love was between them
That all the world spoke of the two.
He loved her and she loved him
So that neither one could be separated
From the other, nor have any happiness
Unless they were together.
They were never angry with each other,
For their love was always new.
Harsh words never grew between them
That might lead to any hostility
Or any wrath.
They had many children together,
Sons and daughters, fifteen in all,
Of whom the sons were all kings
If God should have it happen,
And the daughters all queens.
He stands well who has good children!
Now you have heard the adventure through
Of Havelock and Goldeboro,
How they were born and how they fared,
And how they were treated wrongly
In their youth with treachery,
With treason, and with felony;
And how the traitors intended
To rob them of what was their right,
And how they were well avenged.
I have told you every bit.
For that, I now ask of all of you
Who have heard the story now
That each of you, in good faith,
Will say the Lord’s Prayer quietly
For him who made this story
And stayed awake many nights for it,
That Jesus Christ would bring his soul
Before His Father at his end.

Amen.
Class and the Anglo-Saxon World of *Havelock the Dane*

Chaucer’s pilgrims are defined by their livelihoods,¹ and many are not even given names. The sort of work one did and its associated social class seems inseparable from personal identity during the English medieval period and in its literature. Charlemagne ordered that every subject “serve God faithfully in that order in which he is placed,”² and expectations of conduct based on rank seem axiomatic throughout middle and late medieval texts. Class still seems to be the normative concern for modern critics of literature. For the romance *Havelock the Dane*, dated to approximately 1285, much commentary deals with the social identity of the assumed audience of the story, and how Havelock acts as an exemplar for its agendas. Halverson sees the sentimentality of the poem as distinctly lower-class. Swanton reads the poem as a series of “improbable social advancements” forming a bourgeois fantasy in which hard work counts but “breeding will out.”³ Crane sees a desire for legitimacy among the upper-middle class barony and a nostalgia for the more secure era of their Anglo-Norman forebears.⁴ Alternatively, Stuart posits royal patronage of the poem, suggesting that perhaps an unpopular Edward I wished to portray himself via Havelock as an ideal model of kingship.⁵

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All of these critical lenses assume that the poem may be neatly fitted into a
discrete class bracket, with at most the common sense concession that more than one
group might have enjoyed reading or hearing such a work. Yet a narrow focus on class in
_Havelock_ results in locking it within a timeframe it does not belong to, all the more
curious as early scholarship of the poem dealt largely with sources rather than actual
textual criticism. I would like to offer an alternative interpretation of _Havelock_ which
sidesteps the issue of class by suggesting that the fictive ethos of the poem predates these
late-medieval distinctions. The social values in the poem, the idealized virtues of the
warrior-knight, and the nature of kingly authority all reflect a culturally Anglo-Saxon and
Germanic rather than late medieval and Anglo-Norman world. This identification
provides a new praxis of reading the poem that goes beyond the obsessive question of “is
there a class in this text?”

Part of this academic fixation with audience rank may be due to the relative
lateness of English medieval romances, with most appearing less than a century before
Chaucer. But _Havelock_ is earlier and analogues of the story date back to Geoffrey
Gaimer’s _Estorie des Engles_ (1140) and the twelfth- century _Lai d’Havelok_, among
numerous briefer citations. The story’s folktale roots may be considerably older.
Grimsby’s town seal of 1201 depicts Havelock and Goldeboru on it. Skeat lists several
Anglo-Danish kings as possible sources and even speculates a link to Hamlet, and
another scholar notes that, just as Grim flees to England secretly, in the Old Norse sagas

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6 Roy Michael Liuzza, “Representation and Readership in the ME _Havelok_,” _Journal of English and

7 Walter Skeat, ed., _The Lay of Havelock the Dane_ (Early English Text Society, Extra Series 4, 1868;
the name *Grímnir* can mean *disguise*.\(^8\) Similarly, Odin keeps a raven named Huginn, echoed in Grim’s son Hugh Raven. Critics have noticed similarities in style between *Havelock* and *Beowulf*: both are narrated by a minstrel, with the call to attention “herkneth to me” (1) sounding much like “Hwaet!” Bradbury argues that the English *Havelock* was written independently of Gaimar and the *Lai* based on common oral tradition. Robert Mannying, around 1300, reports his puzzlement over the popularity of the story in the Lincoln area, for “I fynd no man, þat has writen in story, how Hauelok þis lond wan.”\(^9\) The minstrel narrator of the poem may be a fiction. But if so, “where did this convention come from?”\(^10\)

Anglo-Saxon England, of course, had class divisions, with noblemen, freemen, and slaves. Ælfric’s plowman complains that his work is hard “for þæm þe ic neom freo” (“because I am not free,” 21).\(^11\) Nevertheless, the class system of *Havelock* differs from late feudalism, for there is a curious absence of the middle barony in the poem and the courtly virtues they pretended to, or the urban world with which they were increasingly interacting. The physical stage of the knight is absent. Castles have functional purposes or exist as forlorn places of punishment, such as to imprison Goldeboru or Havelock and

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\(^10\) Bradbury, 127.

his sisters. Feasts take place outdoors. Jewelry and swords have no magical properties to summon fairy-queens, but military or ordinary utility, such as when Havelock bribes Ubbe with an expensive ring in order to receive permission to trade in Denmark. Halverson believes that “bourgeois inevitably suggests an urban background,”12 which assumes a simple binary of civic versus rural life. Even so, little takes place in cities in Havelock. Lincoln is barely a square kilometer in size in pre-Norman England,13 and most of the poem’s action there takes place outdoors, and often in mud. Havelock takes royal residence in London only at the story’s close, and the poet is otherwise unconcerned with city life.

Havelock explores universal concerns crossing class boundaries, and a primary one is food. The poem has a cook, but at times sounds like a cookbook. The types of fish that Grim and Havelock catch are listed in detail, as well as the “wastels, simenels with þe horn / hise pokes fulle of mele an korn / netes flesh, shopes, and swines” (“cakes, horn-shaped loaves, his bags full of flour, and beef, mutton, and pork,” 780-2). Hunger touched all ranks even if unequally. One Marxist critic objects that Havelock’s wage request for only enough to eat from the cook marks the poem as bourgeois, as it is admirable “only from the point of view of an employer.”14 But Lincoln is experiencing a near-famine, and receiving regular meals is good fortune for any class. It is not a time for Havelock to negotiate his retirement benefits. Much like the Odyssey, trials are

interspersed with feasting in the poem, and Havelock’s rise in prosperity is indexed by
his diet.\(^{15}\) He progresses from hunger to “bred an chese, butere and milk / pastees and
flaunes” (644), to the cook’s soup, up to cranes, swans, and venison: “þe beste mete / þat
king or cayser wolde ete” (1545-6). Significantly, Havelock drinks the beverages of a
Heorot and not a French court. With Ubbe he drinks pyment (1549), a mix of mead and
grape juice, and the minstrel narrator is also evidently a man of the people who requests
“ful god ale” (14) rather than wine.

Nicola Masciandaro, in *The Voice of the Hammer*, examines the origins of several
Middle English words for *work*. The use of such words in *Havelock* similarly suggests an
attitude to labor which has little commonality with later French or feudal values.
Masciandaro points out that all of the French loanwords for *work* in Middle English have
negative connotations: *travail* has an etymological link to an instrument of torture,\(^{16}\) and
*labor* similarly suggests fatigue or pain, with the modern submeaning of childbirth still
retaining such a connection. Although St. Augustine writes that man was meant to work,
there is clearly a medieval aristocratic contempt for labor, and even prohibitions against
knights engaging in manual toil. At best there is regard for the creative artisan or
craftsman, just as the speaker in *The Ruin* praises the *waldendwyrhtan*, or master-
mason.\(^{17}\) In *Floris and Blancheflor* Dary sends Floris to the emir’s tower to pose as a
“god ginour” (701), a master craftsman and stonemason, with no suggestion that the
occupation is a low or demeaning one for him.

\(^{16}\) Masciandaro, 14.
\(^{17}\) Masciandaro, 83.
In the French analogue to *Havelock*, Grim sends out Havelock not from need but to give him a “prince’s education.” The English poet will have none of this and places a near-famine in the story, underscoring the family’s desperate straits by having Grim dress Havelock in a ship’s sail (859). In the English text Havelock knows of his royalty, made unambiguous by the poet when Havelock offers *manrede* to Godard as a child, unlike the French versions where Grim’s daughter Kelloc later tells him. He nevertheless sets out proclaiming, “It is no shame forto swinken” (800). For Ælfric’s plowman, to *swince* is grunt labor of the lowest type, but Havelock knowingly shares in it. Everyone in the poem works in some way, through the cook to Ubbe to even Athelwold and Birkabeyn, who have some kingly employment dispensing justice. Godard, noticeably, is hunting when apprehended (2203), a form of leisure highly approved of for the medieval aristocrat but here an idle activity.

The sensibilities of Anglo-Norman England seems thinnest in the portrayal of women in *Havelock*, which is considerably more Germanic than Latinate in flavor. There is a hint of the courtly romance style in Goldeboru’s coerced marriage to what will turn out to be a “frog-prince,” but unlike the over-elaborate recognition plot of *Floris and Blancheflour* with its blushing lovers, here the marriage is made out of necessity. Goldeboru’s utility for Godrich is closer to an Anglo-Saxon *fríþwebba*, peace-weaver. Love, when it later flowers, takes place within “the secure and fruitful relationship of

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21 *Four Romances of England*, 76.
marriage” rather than covert adultery or a dramatic separation with its theatrical pining and sighing. Romances may obliquely indicate the hero’s vulnerability by projecting it onto the heroine. Yet, despite Ubbe and Havelock’s fear for her safety, the would-be rapists in the French text are thieves in the English version, largely unconcerned with Goldeboru. Goldeboru is otherwise actualized and constantly beside Havelock to offer sound advice, receiving the angelic visitor and directing her husband to return to Denmark to claim the throne. Havelock’s obedience to her radde (1354) is not chivalrous service but practical conduct. After winning England, as the country “rightly belongs to his wife, Havelock refuses to pass sentence on Godrich; he surrenders his victim to his wife for sentencing.”

The relatively egalitarian treatment of women extends beyond Havelock’s marital relationship. Anglo-Saxon women had standing in legal transactions, and Goldeboru is respected as the daughter of the legitimate king. The English soldiers who realize their error in fighting Havelock’s army plead to her “levedi, Kristes ore” (“Lady, Christ’s mercy,” 2798) before recognizing Havelock. The poet’s and the characters’ regard for Goldeboru is not based purely on her royalty, for other women in the story also play rather practical domestic roles as opposed to period themes of courtly seclusion behind curtains. Ubbe teases his wife while the table is being set that he wants to sit with Goldeboru at dinner because she is better looking (1716). In another realistic touch, Grim

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22 Swanton, *English Literature*, 195
25 Staines, 610.
seems to be at the tail-end of an argument with his wife over drowning Havelock when he rises at night, protesting, “ne thenkestu nowt of mine othes / that ich have mi louerd sworn?” (579-80). Havelock describes his stepsister Levi’s face to Bertram the cook as “so a rose in roser” (“like a rose in a rosebush,” 2919), but then we have the surprisingly earthy comment that Levi was a wife “ful swete in bedde” (2927).

The poet equally seems more interested in Havelock’s physical preeminence than his lineage. Havelock is “boðe stark and strong / in Engelond was non hise per / of strengþe þat euere kam him ner” (989-91). His rock-throwing prowess amazes the commoners as well as the gentry: “þe knithes speken þerof alle” (“the knights all spoke of him,” 1069). Godrich himself is either sarcastic or momentarily intimidated by Havelock’s size, addressing him as “maister” (1136) upon their meeting, whereas he previously calls Havelock a knave (1088). Later on, Havelock distinguishes himself for might in battle, healing from an impossible number of wounds inflicted by Ubbe’s outlaws, and then leading the charge in England and heaving a sword on to Godrich’s head (2555). Havelock earns his *lof* through physical combat and not solely through family titles, in the same way that Beowulf gains an audience with Hrothgar through his father Ecgtheow, but must still prove himself as a warrior, having previously been dismissed as an “æðeling unfrom,” a feeble prince (2188).

The choice of weaponry in the poem also echoes the Anglo-Saxon emphasis on individual strength. Havelock tends to use the weapons of a peasant. In a fight with the thieving rebels of Ubbe’s lawless realm, Havelock grabs only a “dore-tre” (1627), his brother Robert takes a staff, and William a tree (1713). These are the weapons of a *Tournament of Tottenham* combatant. Halverson notes that the French poet feels the
weapon is necessary but unsuitable for Havelock, but the English text intimates no sense of inadequacy. Bernard takes the most sophisticated weapon, an axe. A recurring theme in Beowulf is swords breaking or being charmed into uselessness, requiring bare-handed fighting, and Havelock suggests an equally dismissive attitude toward the weapons of the knight. The attackers throw spears at Havelock “fro ferne” (“from a distance,” 1685), and there is the odor that such tactics are cowardly. To underscore their craveness and Havelock’s heroism, far more rebels die in the English analogue than in the French. Noticeably, the only time the poet describes the military preparation of knights, with “brinies brihte / on backes keste, and late rithe / þe helmes heye on heued sette” (“coats of mail cast on backs and fitted straight, high helmets set on heads,” 2431-33), it is for Godrich’s losing side.

The vocabulary of the warrior also indicates flux in the period of Havelock’s writing. Few of the Old English terms which relate to military rank or organization survive into Middle English. The dugud and the fyrd disappear, and new terms appear which previously had servile significations: cniht becomes knight, and vassal—Celtic for boy or servant—improves, as does constable, previously indicating someone who shoveled out the stable. The semantic shifts precipitate from the Norman takeover and partly from differences between the courtly ideals of knighthood and the older Germanic model of the loyal warrior. Havelock uses a sword in battle with Godrich, but here an interesting irony appears: his Danes use a Germanic ferd formation (2443) fought on foot,

26 Halverson, 149.
27 Halverson, 149.
28 Herlihy, in Rotberg, 32.
and the English under Godrich use Norman cavalry tactics.\textsuperscript{29} Hugh Raven splits the head of an English earl mounted “noblelike upon a stede” (2461). This is odd considering that the poet repeatedly praises Havelock’s ability with horses (10, 1971). Gaimar does not mention cavalry in his version, but to have battle on foot in the English text seems anachronistic to the time of the poem’s composition, especially to \textit{win} after the defeat of Harold’s foot soldiers at Hastings.

The general culture of \textit{Havelock} seems suspiciously \textit{Beowulfian} in its Germanic conception of warrior etiquette. In the scene where rebels attack the guardhouse in Denmark, Havelock’s brothers sleep on benches by the wall, like Beowulf’s men in Heorot. The formal exchange of insults between Bernard Brown and the thieves, “summe of you shal ich drepen / and the othre shal ich kesten / in feteres and ful faste festen” (1783-5), sounds like an Anglo-Saxon \textit{flyting}. The rebels are themselves Grendel-like in being described by Ubbe as belonging to “Kaym kin and Eves” (“Cain and Eve’s kin,” 2046). Many of the dialogues in the poem are performative speech acts rather than conversation,\textsuperscript{30} and the recurrence of declamatory openings such as “lithes now alle to me” (1401) suggest the heightened and monologic \textit{mapelode}-speeches of the Anglo-Saxon epic heroes.

Ker says that the Germanic hero “sails his own ship.”\textsuperscript{31} The Anglo-Saxons use \textit{earl} to refer to nearly any warrior displaying leadership,\textsuperscript{32} and \textit{Havelock} seems equally

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} Garbaty, 244.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Anne Scott, “Language as Convention, Language as Sociolect in \textit{Havelok the Dane},” \textit{Studies in Philology} 89:2 (1992): 150.
\item \textsuperscript{31} W.P. Ker, \textit{Epic and Romance} (1908) (New York: Dover Publications, 1957), 168.
\end{itemize}
distant from the courtly ethos which saw breeding and nobility as naturally identical. Adalbero, bishop of Laon, writes around 1000 that the perfect Christian community can be divided into laborers, fighters, and prayers, but these are fluid occupations less described by birth and more by function. Such classifications partake in what Strohm calls “classical ideas of the body politic and the ‘corporate’ state.” The roles form interdependent and horizontal parts of a functioning Christian body rather than a hierarchy of blood. The status of most peasants declined under the Normans and became more socially fixed. Strohm asserts that the aristocratic prestige of knights was in decline by the fourteenth century, yet both the culture and the increasingly prohibitive costs of armor and cavalry tended to exacerbate lower divisions, and by 1300 there is an increasing rigidifying of class and access to parliament. Rank becomes increasingly a matter of birth, whereas before 1337 the only heritable title is earl. One reason for the prohibition of clerical marriage during the Cluniac reforms was to prevent clerical dynasties, and as church positions were non-hereditary it had become one of the few avenues open to advancement.

Havelock’s aristocracy is not in question as he is of royal blood. However, his adoptive family is not. Havelock refers to his brothers as “louerdinges” (1402) and

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33 In Herlihy, in Rotberg, 19.
34 Strohm, 3.
37 Given-Wilson, 29.
38 Herlihy, in Rotberg, 20.
promises them advancement. Ubbe explicitly tells the Danish assembly that Grim was a fisherman (2051), hence a commoner, and yet neither the Danes nor the English question Hugh, Robert and William fighting at the head of the line or their being knighted later, making them “barouns alle þre” (2171). In Shakespeare’s Henry V the king makes a patriotic speech promising that by fighting for England the lowest of his soldiers will “gentle their condition” (IV.iii.67), and here it also seems sufficient that Havelock’s brothers were “ful strong and ful with” (2168). Their peasant-class origins seem to have been dismissed, both because of their association with Havelock and because of their performance in battle. As with Henry V the appeal is to Germanic ideals of the warrior hero as having loyalty and strength rather than noble breeding.

The interpretation of Grim has been controversial. The Lai attempts to explain away his sons’ social elevation by making Grim a baron as well as a fisherman, but in the English version Godard taunts him as a “fule drit-cherl” (683), making his status unambiguous. Grim has been compared to Saint Peter, another fisherman who weeps in repentance (Mark 14:72). He has also been read as suspiciously enthusiastic to carry out Godard’s orders. The inference in either interpretation is that Havelock’s royalty and goodness redeem Grim, just as Ubbe is later reformed from his corrupt tendencies. Beowulf similarly rehabilitates Unferth’s character with his own overflowing heroic dignity. Yet the poet, so liberal in heaping damnation on Godard and Godrich, has no

40 Delaney, 65.
42 Shepherd, 318.
such words of censure for either Grim or Ubbe. Grim apparently only follows orders, and Ubbe’s gift seems business as usual, just as Beowulf gives the Danish coast guard who guides him to Heorot a sword (1899). Grim ostensibly occupies a cultural setting where class is simply less vital of a concern. It does not seem objectionable to anyone that the village of Grimsby is named after a runaway slave.

The class identity of the narrator has also occasioned comment. Throughout the text the storyteller assumes an easy affiliation and intimacy with his audience as he adds personal comments to the action. Halverson points out that the French-version narrator “is not really talking to anyone,”43 but the English voice is more like a tavern entertainer talking to fellow “godemen, wiues, maydnes, and alle men” (1-2) rather than the courtly audience of a private room. Critics have argued that ale-drinking does not necessarily entail a bar or a public space, but the effect is to suggest a shared activity bonding the speaker to his audience,44 just as the cup has associations with holy communion. The poem was likely not composed by an actual minstrel, but such is its fictional frame which the poet attempts to depict, and for a reason.

Other characters also participate in the blithely flattened social hierarchy of the poem’s world. At the end of the poem Havelock’s brothers become landholding knights, Havelock’s stepsister, Gunnild, marries the Earl of Chester, and even the cook is made an earl and marries another sister, Levi. These are considerable promotions. Another critic posits that being a cook could actually be a prestigious position and that Bertram might

43 Halverson, 144.
have been a “tenant-knight with merely supervisory duties.” This seems unlikely. Bertram clearly knows his craft, and he has Havelock sit and rest while he stirs “þe broys in þe led” (924). The English poet gives a wealth of “concrete details of the life of the kitchen” missing in the French. In the poem’s denouement, Havelock knights Bertram (2924), indicating he is not one previously. Nor would real-life knighthood guarantee acceptance among peers. After Richard II made a favorite steward, John de Beauchamp, a baron in 1387 the Merciless Parliament convicted the court of treason and the steward was executed. He was not entitled to a trial, the Magna Carta having been amended in 1217 to exclude legal rights for commoners.

A better explanation for these improbable events is that the poem, like much romance, does not reflect its contemporary reality but rather nostalgically looks back to a time of easier social mobility and universal desires. The poet praises Levi not for royal lineage, of which she has none, but for her physical comforts. The poem ends with all being blessed with long life and large families. Halverson dismisses this sentimentality as “a peasant fantasy,” but as with Levi’s attractiveness, these are traditional aspirations for every class. No less than Beowulf mourns not having a son as he dies, and in the Clerk’s Tale Walter’s subjects worry about their bachelor lord. The coda that Havelock and Goldeboru were inseparable and did not quarrel—“nevere yete no weren he wrothe”

45 Delaney, 72.
46 Halverson, 148.
48 Halverson, 149.
(2973)—is a conventional closure in romance for all classes, so much so that the Wife of Bath can poke fun at the formula with her knight.

The time setting of the Havelock versions is additionally significant. Whereas the *Lai d’Havelock* places the action in a magical Arthurian time where all good French romances go, the English poet has a generic past accessible to his audience. Occasionally he even uses present-tense interjections, such as “pe devil of hell him sone take” (446) for Godard. The argument has been made that the English Havelock is meant to suggest Edward I, also a popular king with a reputation for combating crime and supporting parliamentary rule. The poet stresses Havelock’s height and at the games he towers over the lads “als a mast” (987). Edward was equally tall at 6’2”, which gave him the nickname ‘Longshanks.’ Stuart suggests the poem may have had a propagandistic purpose as an idealization of Edward in later years when his admiration had declined. Similarly, God-rich and God-ard have been identified with a historical Rich-ard (1209-72), Edward’s uncle and also Earl of Cornwall. Richard was an agitator who periodically organized to undermine the king, and his switching of allegiances for calculated personal benefit “earned him disrespect from all sides.” Nevertheless, even if the poet intends such a linkage, the focus remains on Havelock as a past ideal which Edward might have or was subtly identified with.

49 Halverson, 144.
50 Swanton, *English Literature*, 196.
52 Shepherd, 13. See also Prestwich, 89.
Havelock has been described as “a walking metaphor for kingship, literally marked with a sign of royalty.”\(^{53}\) The source of Havelock’s legitimacy as a ruler is ambiguously dual, perhaps intentionally, for he both is entitled by regal birth to be king and is seen to deserve it by being strong and good. A blending of both a Latinate sense of primogeniture and a Germanic work ethic seems operant in the text. Significantly, Havelock’s understanding of his identity is clear, but his destiny is opaque until revealed to him by Goldeboru through the angel. Unlike Prince Hal who associates with the rabble but remains apart, or Floris and Blancheflour’s hero who transparently affects working-class credentials, Havelock does not masquerade as a beggar; he is one.\(^{54}\) As a sort of male-Cinderella, he is born to rule, but through his trials, courage, and good nature he also earns the right to reign, and the poet seems to suggest the good king has both characteristics. The Danish are convinced by Havelock’s glowing light that he is their legitimate heir, but even in their first meeting Ubbe marvels to himself, “qui ne were he knith” (“why is he not a knight!” 1471).

Nevertheless, the ideals of kingship in *Havelock* reflect more traditional Germanic values than Latinate or late-feudal concepts. Like Hrothgar, Havelock as king is praised for his sharing: “he was large and nouth chiche” (“he was generous and not stingy,” 2941). The medieval period saw a gradual shift from the *cyning* as merely one of the kin, serving at the pleasure of the *witan* with the tenuous support of warriors, to the Latinate concept of an emperor serving as God’s representative. Alcuin, steeped in the new

\(^{53}\) *Four Romances of England*, 75. The theme of kingly behavior was an issue I also explored in a paper read at the 44\(^{th}\) International Congress on Medieval Studies, 7-10 May 2009 in Kalamazoo, forming the basis of this chapter. My thanks to participants for ideas I have incorporated.

\(^{54}\) Swanton, *English Literature*, 200.
system, advises Charlemagne that “the people are to be led, not followed.” The medieval expansion of parliamentary power after Edward I undermined the Germanic ideal of authority originating upward from the *folc*, for by the fourteenth century parliaments were increasingly hereditary, even while actual economic power in England became increasingly diversified.

Crane argues that the barony’s likely audience for romances lay in just such a nostalgic yearning for a world less pre-empted by royal and urban encroachments on their class’ privileges. Yet she also sees *Havelock* as “a romance of the law,” a story set in a world regulated by constitutional justice. The two claims are contradictory, especially when the earls in the poem fare the worst, ending up on donkeys because of judicial decisions. Yet the principles come closer to resolution if the rule of law is set in a utopian past of “are dawes” (27), as it is here. The late medieval English saw the Anglo-Saxon period as a lost golden age where laws applied to all. Numerous open assemblies occur in the poem to deliberate Athelwold’s and Birkabeyn’s succession, Havelock’s claim to the throne, and even the fate of Godrich and Godard, which he defers to the people’s verdict. Absent in the French versions, such assemblies include “riche and pouere, heye

56 Given-Wilson, 57.
57 Crane, 8.
58 Crane, 48.
and lowe‖ (2292) as summoned to judge Godard. The poet has been called “a virtuoso of violence”\textsuperscript{60} for taking a rather pornographic glee in the executions, but Havelock decides that even royal traitors deserve a trial. The ideal ruler is no sun king relying on imperial grandeur, but justifies his rule “in strictly practical terms: the good king brings justice, peace, and loyalty to his people.”\textsuperscript{61} Most importantly, the three kings share that most leveling of emotions with their subjects: love.

Godard and Godrich both pervert and subvert the ideal of legitimacy through popular consent as expressed by Athelwold and Birkabeyn. Godrich calls a “parlement” (1007), but it is a bread-and-circuses affair more than meaningful political deliberation, for the poet mentions only athletic games. The competitors cheerfully play by the rules and are good losers, in juxtaposition to Godrich’s cheating intrigues. He stacks state institutions with his own cronies, all at “his wille, at hise merci” (271), and without admitting any as partners in government.\textsuperscript{62} Godard similarly coerces his subjects into obedience (441). Swanton believes that Godrich has some redemption in wanting his son to be king,\textsuperscript{63} but his actions debase primogeniture into a cynical power-grab rather than fatherly concern or desire for stability of succession. Godrich never considers marrying Goldeboru to his son, and even the Archbishop of York is forced to dignify the hoax of wedding Goldeboru to the $hexte$ man. Whereas Athelwold genuinely asks for rede from

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[60]{Levine, 96. But Godard’s sentence is in keeping with actual punishments meted out to individuals guilty of high treason. In 1283 Edward I similarly summoned a parliament which sentenced the rebel Prince of Wales’ brother to be drawn by horses, hanged, and quartered (Staines, 620).}
\footnotetext[61]{A.C. Spearing, \textit{Readings in Medieval Poetry} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 44.}
\footnotetext[62]{Delaney, 67.}
\footnotetext[63]{Swanton, 197.}
\end{footnotes}

465
his advisors, Godrich makes only a perfunctory show of consultation: “wat wile ye, frend, her-offe rede?” (2585). That Godrich has already vowed to kill Havelock and does not wait for a reply before giving orders demonstrates the appeal’s emptiness.

The absence of a just king ruling by popular consent in turn corrupts the body politic, and Godrich and Godard’s unlawful rule results in public disorder. Both usurpers’ subjects sink into tyrannical rule based on animal fear rather than popular consent. Godrich’s army fears him “so runic spore” (“as an old horse does the spur,” 2390), and Godrich has to threaten his soldiers with slavery in order to coerce their support (2385), a “flagrant and unheard-of violation of custom and law.” Lacking the personal bonds of loyalty of the comitatus, Godard’s men put up only a token defense (2237). The poet’s praise for the public order during Athelwold’s reign is telling. The repetition of phrases such as “in that time” (25) emphasize how under Godrich’s tenure England is no longer a place where traders can safely carry gold. Ubbe’s rebel sergeants who harass Havelock at the guardhouse demonstrate his heroism but also indicate how Denmark’s violence reflects that of Godard.

The opposing views on power that distinguish Germanic kingship from Latinate authority are also seen in the differing religious practices depicted in the poem. Critics have noted the “complete secularity” of Havelock’s succession, which has no cathedrals or bishops in either Denmark or England. Instead of a religious ceremony, there is a

64 Scott, 155.
65 Delaney, 68. Simon de Montfort, who led a baron’s revolt against Henry III, did threaten those who failed to muster with disinheritence but was killed a month later at Evesham. Michael Prestwich, Plantagenet England 1225-1360 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 118.
66 Delaney, 71.
forty-day feast (2771). One explanation is that the historical Edward also ruled for years before ecclesiastical confirmation.\textsuperscript{67} Such an omission would be consistent in the more secular French version,\textsuperscript{68} but Havelock is elsewhere presented as an ideal of Christian piety. There is a long scene of tearful contrition in a church where Havelock “bifor þe rode bigan falle / croiz and Crist bigan to kalle” (1358-9). Neither Havelock nor Goldeboru defy what they believe to be “Godes wille” (1167) in a forced marriage. Similarly, both Athelwold and Birkabeyn meticulously undergo last rites, with Athelwold scourging himself and giving away his possessions, leaving not even clothing (220) in order not to risk entering heaven as a rich man. The poet requests the audience’s prayers at the end of his labors (2818), for death spares none, “riche ne poure” (353). Couch even suggests a hagiographic reading of \textit{Havelock}, as it appears in MS Laud Misc. 108 next to several pietistic texts such as the \textit{South English Legendary.}\textsuperscript{69}

The kings have been criticized for narcissistically obsessing over their own souls instead of being concerned with their political succession. Yet all of these religious observances of the dying monarchs and of Havelock form a consistent pattern: they are all essentially personal acts of devotion rather than state rituals of power. Neither Athelwold nor Birkabeyn uses Christian ritual in order to buttress his kingship, for they are on their deathbeds; they do it for their own souls. Similarly, Havelock’s wedding vows do not have a publicly kingly purpose (yet), and Havelock’s night-long penitence

\textsuperscript{67} Delaney, 72.

\textsuperscript{68} Staines, 609.

before his journey to Denmark is done alone. Only Godrich and Godard publicly swear on altars and missals while receiving political authority (186-9) in an attempt to sugarcoat their power seizure through the church. The implicit assertion is that the just king is legitimized by the people, not by Roman ecclesiastical authority. Only Havelock’s inner piety is used by the poet to indicate moral character; both Havelock and Edward I endow a Cistercian house in thanks for protection from storms.\textsuperscript{70}

At times the poet tries to have things both ways by having an angel appear to Goldeboru to explain Havelock’s kingly heritage, and by putting a gold cross birthmark on his shoulder. A balance must still be drawn between kingship legitimized either wholly by the folc or ordered by God. Were it absolutely the former, Birkabeyn would not have the right in a primitive Germanic tribe to designate his son as king. Nevertheless, the angel’s visitation forms a private scene in the pair’s bedroom and not the basis of Havelock’s claim to Denmark. The angel does not proclaim, he informs. Similarly, when Ubbe and his nobles puzzle over the light emanating from Havelock’s mouth and his cross-mark, they do not shout, “Deus vult!” The response is rather secular. The men seem more focused on Havelock’s position as Birkabeyn’s lawful heir rather than the idea of divine selection. As with Grim and his wife, the purpose of the Heavenly light seems more to draw attention. In the Robin Hood folktales the rich abbot is abused, but the friar is viewed warmly for being on the side of the people.\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Havelock} is not an anti-clerical poem, but genuine faith is consistently portrayed in personal rather than institutional terms.

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\textsuperscript{70} Staines, 619.

\textsuperscript{71} Swanton, \textit{English Literature}, 23.
Certainly, a contemporary understanding of class and authority would have been necessary for the poem if it were to survive or be relevant to an audience, in the same way that Chaucer cheerily makes his Troilus and Palamon ancient pagans with Ricardian courtly values. A hostile chronicler, Jean Froissart writes around 1400 that the English peasants are “cruel, perfidious, proud and disloyal,” and are so haughty that the nobles cannot even have an egg without paying for it.72 While unlikely, such demonizations echoed many aristocratic and literary attitudes toward the peasant class. Justice, previously everyone’s concern and right to secure through revenge or wergild, had become a selective prerogative of ‘the king’s peace.’ Godard’s dismissive slur to Grim, “be eueremore / þral and cherl, als þou er wore” (684-5) would not seem extreme in Chaucer’s time: Richard II betrays the peasant rebels of 1381 with almost identical words.73 Even the cook’s purchase of new clothes, hose, and shoes for Havelock (970) might have been complicated in later centuries by sumptuary laws prescribing permitted attire for each class. Strohm concludes that such niggling laws were futile attempts to arrest the creeping obsolescence of feudalism and the stirrings of capitalism. Yet they typified attempts to secure ostensible class boundaries.

Nevertheless, a critical fixation on class divisions in Havelock oversimplifies a complex time period. Class does not seem to be a primary issue for the poet, or for the narrator who ostensibly tells the tale in an ale-house. His concern is rather depicting the moral example of a “ful god gome” (7) who overcomes difficulty and injustice through


his own virtues as well as his birthright. While there were likely homiletic intentions to the story—an endorsement of working with a blipe spirit and of trusting in God—the sort of audience imagined to be sitting in a tavern would have wanted an entertaining story then just as now. If Havelock’s audience was expected to see parallels between contemporary events and the values of their ancestors under pre-Norman or Danelaw England, it was an affirming comparison, and a general one rather than the desideratum of one particular social class.

That ideal was overall more Germanic than Latinate. The characters who populate Havelock value food, family, strong drink, and horseplay more than chivalry or ceremony. They have a greater expectation of social mobility which emphasizes strength and fortitude in legitimizing status. A man may be born to be king but must earn respect. These assumptions were not automatic in England or its literature, but they are the water in which the poem swims. The poet asks that God bless us (20). The peasant might have heard Havelock and thought this a uniting concept, and the gentility might have read it and thought it a pleasant even if naïve sentiment. Northrop Frye describes the audience of the quest-romance as desiring a fulfillment that will escape reality while still containing that reality.74 The audience of Havelock might have enjoyed such a tale, set in an antique England still consisting of the best aspects of an older Germanic heritage that had partly ceased to exist.

74 In Delaney, 61.
CHAPTER 8

King Horn


1 Alle beon he blithe
That to my song lythe!
A sang ich schal you singe
Of Murry the Kinge.
King he was biweste
So longe so hit laste.
Godhild het his quen;
Faire ne mighte non ben.
He hadde a sone that het Horn;
Fairer ne mighte non beo born,
Ne no rein upon birine,
Ne sunne upon bischine.
Fairer nis non thane he was:
He was bright so the glas;
He was whit so the flur;
Rose red was his colur.

May all be happy
Who listen to my song!
I will sing you a melody
About Murray the King.
He was a king in the far west
As long as his life lasted.
His queen was named Godhild;
No one could be more beautiful.
He had a son called Horn.¹
No one could be born more handsome,
No one who had rain fall on them
Or the sun shine on them.
There was no fairer child than he was.
He was as bright as glass;
He was as white as a flower;
His features were red like a rose.²

¹ Garbaty points out that, unlike many medieval romances, Murray, Godhild, Horn, and others in the text do not seem to refer to or represent any known historical figures. Thomas J. Garbaty, King Horn, Medieval English Literature (Long Grove, Il: Waveland, 1984), note to line 4.

² The poet connects Horn’s features to his mother’s. TEAMS cites Hall, who comments that such language is usually reserved for women, and he has “not found anything quite like it used for a hero of romance.” Joseph Hall, King Horn: A Middle English Romance (Oxford: Clarendon, 1901), 93.
He was fayr and eke bold,
And of fiftene winter hold.
In none kinge riche

Nas non his iliche.
Twelf feren he hadde
That he alle with him ladde,
Alle riche mannes sones,
And alle hi were faire gomes,
With him for to pleie,
And mest he luvede tweie;
That on him het Hathulf child,
And that other Fikenild.

Athulf was the beste,
And Fickenylde the werste.

It was upon a someres day,
As I can tell you as well,
When Murray, the good king,
Rode for leisure
By the seaside,
As he was accustomed to do.
There were only two riding with him;
They were all too few!
He noticed the shore

Fifteen ships
That had arrived on his land
With zealous Saracens.
He asked what they were looking for
Or what they brought to the land.
A pagan heard him
And answered him brusquely,
“We will kill your land’s people
And all who have love for Christ,
And yourself right away.
You will not leave here today.”

The king alighte of his stede,
For tho he havede nede,
And his gode knightes two;
Al to fewe he hadde tho.
Swerd hi gunne gripe
And togadere smite.
Hy smyten under schelde
That sume hit yfelde.
The king hadde al to fewe
Togenes so fele schrewe;
So wele mighten ythe
Bringe hem thre to dithe.
The pains come to londe

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3 Hathulf child: ME child as a post-positive adjective usually indicates not childhood but the role of apprentice knight, similar to the titles page and squire, though it can also be initial (Childe Roland). Normally boys began as pages very young and became squires around age fourteen. See also Guy of Warwick, line 1625.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>473</th>
<th>And neme hit in here honde</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>That folc hi gunne quelle,</td>
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<td>And churchen for to felle.</td>
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<td>Ther ne moste libbe</td>
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<td>The fremde ne the sibbe.</td>
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<td>Bute hi here laye asoke,</td>
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<td>And to here toke.</td>
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<td>Of alle wymmanne</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wurst was Godhild thanne.</td>
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<td>For Murri heo weop sore</td>
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<td>And for Horn yute more.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>He wente ut of halle</td>
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<td>Fram hire maidenes alle</td>
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<td>Under a roche of stone</td>
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<td>Ther heo livede alone.</td>
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<td>Ther heo servede Gode</td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>Aghenes the paynes forbode.</td>
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<td>Ther he servede Criste</td>
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<td>That no payn hit ne wiste.</td>
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<td>Evre heo bad for Horn child</td>
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<td>That Jesu Crist him beo myld.</td>
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<td>Horn was in paynes honde</td>
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<td>With his feren of the londe</td>
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<td>Muchel was his fairhede,</td>
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<td>For Jhesu Crist him makede.</td>
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<td>Payns him wolde slen,</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>Other al quic flen,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yef his fairnessse nere:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The children alle aslaye were.</td>
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<td>Thanne spak on admirad -</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Of wordes he was bald,   -</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Horn, thu art well kene,</td>
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<td>And that is wel isene.</td>
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<td>Thu art gret and strong,</td>
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<td>Fair and eveene long;</td>
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<td>Thu schalt waxe more</td>
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<td>Bi fulle seve yere.</td>
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<td>Yef thu mote to live go</td>
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<td>And thine feren also,</td>
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<td>Yef hit so bi falle,</td>
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<td>Ye scholde slen us alle:</td>
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<td>Thavore thu most to stere,</td>
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<td>Thu and thine ifere;</td>
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<td>To schupe schulle ye funde,</td>
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<td>And sinke to the grunde.</td>
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<td>The se you schal adrenche,</td>
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<td>110</td>
<td>Ne schal hit us noght ofthinche.</td>
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<td>For if thu were alive,</td>
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<td>With swerd other with knife,</td>
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<td>We scholden alle deie,</td>
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<td>And thi fader deth abeie.”</td>
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<td>The children hi brughte to stronde,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wringinde here honde,</td>
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<td>Into schupes borde</td>
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And took it into their hand.
They began to kill the people
And to destroy churches.
No one might live,
Whether friend or family,
Unless they renounced their faith
And took theirs.
Of all women,
The most miserable was Godhild.
She wept bitterly for Murray
And for Horn even more.
She went out of the hall,
Away from all her maidens,
Into a cave of stone
Where she lived alone.
There she served God
Against the pagans' injunction.
There she served Christ,
So that no pagan knew of it.
She continually prayed for Child Horn,
That Jesus Christ might be kind to him.
Horn was in pagan hands
With his companions from the land.
His noble grace stood out,
For Jesus Christ had made him so.
The pagans would have killed him
Or flayed him alive,
If not for his beauty;
The children would all be slain.
Then one admiral spoke
Who was bold in words:
“Horn, you are strong-willed,
That is clear to see.
You are great and strong,
Handsome and tall.
You will grow bigger
Before seven years more.
If you were to leave alive,
And your company as well,
It might so happen that
You would kill us all.
Therefore you are headed for sea,
You and your companions.
You will hustle onto the ship,
And sink to the bottom.
The sea will drown you,
And we will have no regrets.
For if you were alive,
We would all die,
And you would avenge your father,
With sword or with knife.”
The youths were brought to the shore,
Wringing their hands,
And boarded the boat
At the furste worde.
Ofte hadde Horn beo wo,
Ac nevre wurs than him was tho.
The se began to flowe,
And Horn child to rowe;
The se that schup so fasste drof
The children dradde therof.
Hi wenden towisse
Of here lif to misse,
Al the day and al the night
Til hit sprang dailight,
Til Horn sagh on the stronde
Men gon in the londe.
―Feren,‖ quath he, ―yonge,
Ich telle you tithinge:
Ich here foyeles singe
And that gras him springe.
Blithe beo we on lyve;
Ure schup is on ryve.‖
Of s
chup hi gunne funde,
And setten fout to grunde.
Bi the se side
Hi leten that schup ride.
Thanne spak him child Horn,
In Suddene he was iborn:
―Schup bi the se flode,
Daies have thu gode.
Bi the se brinke,
No water the nadrinke.
Yef thu cume to Suddene,
Gret thu wel of myne kenne,
Gret thu wel my moder,
Jesu Cristes withering,
That ich am hol and fer
On this lond arived her;
And seie that hei schal fonde
The dent of myne honde.‖
The children yede to tune,

At the first command.⁴
Often Horn had been sorrowful,
But never worse than he was then.
The sea began to rise,
And Child Horn began to sail.⁵
The sea drove that ship so fast
That the children were terrified.
They expected for certain
To lose their lives,
Through all the day and all the night
Until daylight had sprung,
Until Horn saw on the shore
Men walking about the land.
 ―Fellows,‖ he said, ―lads,
I will tell you some good news:
I hear birds singing
And see the grass growing.
Let us be happy to be alive!
Our boat is on the shore.‖
They hurried off the boat
And set their feet on the ground
By the seaside,
Letting the boat drift.
Then Child Horn, born in
The Southlands, addressed it:⁶
 ―Boat on the ocean tide,
May you have good days
On the brink of the sea.
May you drink no water!
If you return to the Southlands,
Greet my family well.
Greet my mother well,
Godhild, the good queen,
And tell the heathen king,
Jesus Christ’s enemy,
That I am safe and sound
And have arrived here on this land.
And say that they will feel
The strike of my hand!‖
The children went to the town,

⁴ The children are set adrift and expected to drown. Tradition held that the sinful would die but the innocent would receive providential aid, as Bevis does (TEAMS). As with Godard and Havelock (519-36), the Saracens perhaps believe they will avoid sinning, as the water will be responsible for the children’s deaths. In the Man of Law’s Tale Custance’s heathen mothers-in-law set her adrift twice for similar reasons (CT II.439-41 and 799-802).

⁵ Rowe: TEAMS renders this as rue, i.e. Horn began to regret the sea waves, but several manuscripts have rowen and for Horn to take charge makes more sense within the poem’s sentiments.

⁶ Suddene: Scholars do not agree where this is and have posited areas in southern England as well as Sweden and Suðdene, i.e. southern Denmark. Like the character names, the locations may be as fanciful as Riverdale in an Archie comic. See also the notes to line 161 and 689.
Bi dales and bi dune.
Hy metten with Almair King,
Crist yeven him His blessing
King of Westernesse
Crist yive him muchel blisse!
He him spac to Horn child
Words that were mild:
“Whannes beo ye, faire gumes,
That her to londe beoth icume,
Alle throttene,
Of bodie swithe kene?
Bi God that me makede,

A swich fair verade
Ne saugh ich in none stunde,
Bi westene londe:
Seie me wat ye seche.
―Whannes beo ye, faire gumes,
That her to londe beoth icume,
Alle throttene,
Of bodie swithe kene?
Bi God that me makede,

Icome of gode kenne,
Of Cristene blode.
So Crist me mote rede,
Us hi dude lede
Into a galeie,
Dai hit is igon and other,
Withute sail and rother:
Ure schip bigan to swymme
To this londes brymme
Nu thu might us slen and binde
Ore honde bihynde.
Bute yef hit beo thi wille,
Helpe that we ne spille.”
Thanne spak the gode kyng

Iwis he nas no nithing
“Seie me, child, what is thi name?
Ne schaltu have bute game.”
The child him answerde,
Sone so he hit herde:

Over hills and over valleys.
They met with King Almair.
May Christ give him His blessing!
He was king of Westlands.
May Christ give him great peace!
He spoke to Child Horn
With words that were kind:
“Where are you from, fair lads,
That you have come here,
All thirteen of you,
With such hardy bodies?
By God who made me,
I never saw such a noble group
In any time
In western lands.
Tell me what you are looking for.”
Horn made a speech there.
He spoke for them all,
For it was most fitting
As he was the fairest
And quickest of wits.
“We are from the Southlands.
I come from a good family,
Of Christian blood,
And a highly honorable king.
Pagans have arrived there
And taken his life.
They have slain and torn apart
Enough Christian men.
So may Christ help me,
They had us led
Onto a galley
To sport on the sea.
One day passed, and another,
Without sail or rudder.
Our boat began to drift
Toward the shore of this land.
You might slay us now or bind
Our hands behind us.
But if it is your will,
Help us so that we do not die.”
The good king then spoke.
I know he was no villain.
“Tell me, child, what is your name?
You will have nothing but leisure.”
The boy answered him
As soon as he heard the king:

7 Westernesse: Like Suddene, this seems to ambiguously mean western England. Schofield suggests the Isle of Man based on the French manuscript where the queen flees to Ardenne, a Manx word and now The Ard (18-19). William Henry Schofield, The Story of Horn and Rimenhild (Baltimore: Modern Language Association of America, 1903). But see the note to line 689 for different clues.
“Horn ich am ihote, 
Iconen ut of the bote, 
Fram the se side. 
Kyn, wel mote thee tide.”
Thanne hym spak the gode king, 

210 “Well bruc thu thin evening. 
Horn, thu go wel schulle 
Bi dales and bi hulle; 
Horn, thu lude sune, 
Bi dales and bi dune; 
So schal thi name springe 
Fram kynge to kynge, 
And thi fairnesse 
Abute Westernesse, 
The strengthe of thine honde 
Into evrech londe. 

220 Into evrech londe. 
Horn, thu art so swete, 
Ne may ich the forlet e.‖
Hom rod Aylmar the Kyng 
And Horn mid him, his fundling, 
And alle his ifere, 
That were him so dere. 
The kyng com into halle 
Among his knightes alle; 
Forth he clupede Athelbrus, 
That was stiward of his hus. 
“Stiward, tak nu here 
My fundlyng for to lere 
Of thine mestere, 
Of wude and of rivere, 
And tech him to harpe 
With his nayles scharpe, 
Bivore me to kerve, 
And of the cupe serve. 
Thu tech him of alle the liste 
That thu evre of wiste, 
And his feiren thou wise 
In to othere servise. 
Horn thu undervonge 
And tech him of harpe and songe.”
Ailbrus gan lere 
Horn and his yfer. 
Horn in herte laghte 
Al that he him taghte. 
In the curt and ute, 

230 And elles al abute 
Luvede men Horn child, 

240 And elles al abute 
Luvede men Horn child, 

250 And elles al abute 
Luvede men Horn child, 

“I am called Horn. 
I came out of the boat 
From the sea side. 
Sire, may you have good fortune.”
Then the good king spoke to him, 
“May your name carry well‖
Horn, you will travel well 
By valley and by hill. 
Horn, you will loudly sound 
By plain and by dune. 
Your name will resound 
From king to king, 
And your nobility 
Around the Westlands. 
The strength of your hand 
Will be known in every land. 
Horn, you are so sweet, 
I cannot abandon you.”
Almair the king rode home with 
Horn alongside him, his foundling, 
And all his companions 
Who were so dear to him. 
The king came into the hall 
Among all of his knights. 
He called forth Athelbruce, 
Who was steward of his house. 
“Steward, now take here 
My foundling, to teach him 
Your trade, 
Of hunting and hawking, 
And teach him to harp 
With his fingernails sharp; 
And to carve meat before me 
And to serve from the cup.”
Tutor him in all the skills 
That you ever learned, 
And guide his companions 
Into other services. 
Take charge of Horn 
And train him in harp and song.”
Athelbruce began to teach 
Horn and his company. 
Horn took to heart 
All that he taught him 
In the court and outside it. 
And every man around 
Loved Child Horn,

8 Well bruc thu thin evening: Garbaty has well bruc thu thi neuening, “may you long enjoy your name.” The king is making a series of puns on Horn’s name, that his ‘sound’ or reputation will travel widely.

9 These are traditional duties of the squire, and Chaucer’s squire similarly serves by cutting meat “biforn his fader at the table” (CT I.100).
And mest him luvede Rymenhild,
The kynges owene doghter.
He was mest in thoghte;
Heo luvede so Horn child
That negh heo gan wexe wild:
For heo ne mighte at borde
With him speke no worde,
Ne noght in the halle
Among the knightes alle,
Ne nowhar in non othere stede.
Of folk heo hadde drede:
Bi daie ne bi nighte
With him speke ne mighte.
Hire soreghe ne hire pine
Ne mighte nevre fine.
In heorte heo hadde wo,
And thus hire bithoghte tho:
Heo sende hire sonde
Athelbrus to honde,
That he come hire to,
And also scholde Horn do,
Al in to bure,
For heo gan to lure;
And the sonde seide
That sik lai that maide,
And bad him come swithe
For heo nas nothing blithe.
The stward was in herte wo,
For he nuste what to do.
Wat Rymenhild hure thoghte
Gret wunder him thughte,
Abute Horn the yonge
To bure for to bringe.
He thoghte upon his mode
Hit nas for non
e gode:
He tok him another,
Athulf, Hornes brother.
“Athulf,” he sede, “right anon
Thu schalt with me to bure gon
To speke with Rymenhild stille
And witen hure wille.
In Hornes ilike
Thu schalt hure biswike:
Sore ich me ofdredre
Heo wolde Horn misrede.”
Athelbrus gan Athulf lede,
And into bure with him yede:
Anon upon Athulf child
Rymenhild gan were wild:
Heo wende that Horn hit were
That heo havede there;
Heo sette him on bedde;
With Athulf child he wedde;
On hire armes tweie
And Rimenhild loved him the most,
The king’s own daughter.
He was first in her thoughts.
She loved Child Horn so much
That she nearly grew mad.
For she could not speak a word
With him at the table
Or in the hall
Among all the knights,
Or anywhere in another place.
She was afraid of being seen.
By day and by night,
She could not speak with him.
Neither her sorrow nor her pain
Might ever have an end.
She had sadness in her heart,
And so she decided then
She would send her word
To Athelbrube’s hand,
That he come to her,
And Horn as well,
Together into her bedroom,
For she had begun to look pale.
And the message said
That the maiden lay sick,
And asked him to come quickly
For she was not well at all.
The steward was distressed at heart,
For he did not know what to do.
What Rimenheld’s intentions were
Seemed very mysterious to him,
To bring the young Horn
Into her chamber.
He turned it over in his mind
But it was for no good.
He took someone else with him,
Athulf, Horn’s brother in arms.
“Athulf,” he said, “you will go
With me right away to the chamber
To speak with Rymenhild privately
And find out her will.
In Horn’s likeness
You will fool her.
I am sorely afraid
She would lead Horn astray.”
Athelbruce escorted Athulf
And went with him into the bower.
Upon that, Rimenheld began
To grow unrestrained with Athulf.
She thought it was Horn
That she had there.
She set him on the bed
And began to woo Athulf.
She embraced him
Athulf heo gan leie.  
“Horn,” quath heo, “wel longe  
Ich habbe thee luved stronge.  
Thu schalt thi trewthe plighte  
On myn hond her righte,  
Me to spuse holde,  
And ich thee lord to wolde.”  
Athulf sede on hire ire  
So stille so hit were,  
“Thi tale nu thu lynne,  
For Horn nis noght her inne.  
Ne beo we noght iliche:  
Horn is fairer and riche,  
Fairer bi one ribbe  
Thane eni man that libbe:  
Thegh Horn were under molde  
Other elles wher he wolde  
Other henne a thousand mile,  
Ich nolde him ne thee bigile.”  
Rymenhild hire biwente,  
And Athelbrus fule heo sch  
ten.  
“Hennes thu go, thu fule theof,  
Ne wurstu me nevre more leof;  
Went ut of my bur,  
Went ut of my bur,  
As gently as possible,  
“Stop your talking now,  
For Horn is not in here.  
We are not alike;  
Horn is more handsome and strong,  
Fainer by a rib  
Than any man that lives!  
Even if Horn were under the earth  
Or wherever else he was,  
Or a thousand miles from here,  
I cannot deceive him or you!”  
Rimenhild changed her mood,  
And reviled Athelbruce fouilly.  
“Get out of here, you foul thief!  
You will never again be dear to me.  
Leave my bower,  
With cursed luck!  
May shame undo you  
And hang you high on the gallows!  
I have not spoken to Horn.  
He is not so plain!  
Horn is fairer than this man is.  
May you die in great disgrace!”  
In a moment, Athelbruce  
Fell to the ground.  
“My dear lady,  
Listen to me for a moment!  
Hear why I hesitated  
To bring Horn to your hand.  
For Horn is fair and rich,  
And there is no one his equal anywhere.  
Almair, the good king,  
Placed him in my care.  
If Horn were about here,  
I would be sorely worried  
That you would go too far\textsuperscript{10}  
With the two of you alone.  
Then, beyond question,  
The king would make us sorry.

\textsuperscript{10} Ye wolden pleie: Play in ME covers a variety of meanings, from innocent merriment to battle to sexual intercourse. Athelbruce is delicately suggesting that young passion would get the better of both of them. His concern is that the king would view the seduction of his daughter as treason, as also happens in Amis and Amiloun.
Rymenhild, forgive me your anger,
Lady, my queen,
And I will bring you Horn,
No matter who cares about it.
Rymenhild, as much as she could,
Kept her mouth quiet.
She made herself cheerful and
Things were well with her then.
“Go now,” she said, “at once,
And send him after noon
In a squire’s disguise.
When the king rises
To sport in the woods,
There is no one who will betray him.
He will stay with me
Until it is nearly night,
So that I have my will with him.
I don’t care what is said about me after.”
Athelbruce departed from her.
He found Horn in the hall,
On a bench before the king
To pour him wine.
“Horn,” he said, “so noble,
Go to the chamber
After the meal, quietly,
To stay with Rymenhild.
If you have strong words,
Hold them in your heart.
Horn, be true to my counsel
And you will never regret it.”
Horn took to heart
All that he said to him.
He went right away
To Rymenhild the beautiful.
He set himself on his knees
And greeted her sweetly.
From his fair appearance
All the room began to glow.
He spoke a pleasing speech;
He needed no man to teach him.
“You sit graciously and softly,
Shining Rymenhild,
With your six maidens
That you sit next to.
Our king’s steward
Sent me to your room.
I am to speak with you.
Tell me what you wish
To say, and I shall hear
What your will is.”

11 MS Harleian 2253, *Shal pe nout arewe*, gives a better sense of Athelbruce’s warning to Horn.
Rymenhild stood up
And took him by the hand.
She set him on a fur cover
And gave him wine to drink his fill.
She showed him good cheer
And took him about the neck.
She continually kissed him,
As much as she pleased.12

“Welcome, Horn!”,
The maid then whispered.
“By day and night,
For you I am in sorrow.
For you I have no rest,
Nor can I find a way to sleep.”

“Horn,” she said, “without doubt,
You must have me for your wife.
Horn, have pity on me,
And pledge me your promise.”
Horn thought to himself
What he might say.
“May Christ guide you,” he said,
And give you Heaven’s joy
In your husband,
Wherever he is in the land.
I was born too low
To have such a woman.
I come from a serf’s home
And ended up a foundling.
It would not be proper for you
To wed me as a spouse.
It would not be a fair wedding
Between a peasant and a king.”
Rymenhild was distaught then
And began to sigh bitterly.
Her arms began to bow
And she fell down in a swoon.
Horn was grieved in his heart
And took her in his two arms.
He began to kiss her repeatedly
With growing confidence.
“Darling,” he said, “dear one,
Take charge of your heart now.
Help me to become a knight,
With all your might,
By my lord the king
So that he will give me dubbing.”13
Thanne is mi thralthod
I went in to knighthod
And I schal wexe more,
And do, lemmun, thi lore.”

Rymenhild, that swete thing,
Wakede of hire swoghning.
“Horn,” quath heo, “wel sone
That schal beon idone.
Thu schalt beo dubbed knight
Are come s eve night.
Have her this cuppe
And this ryng ther uppe
To Aylbrus the stuard,
And se he holde foreward.
Seie ich him biseche,
With loveliche speche,
That he adun falle
Bifore the king in halle,
And bidde the king arighte
Dubbe thee to knighte.
With selver
and with golde
Hit wurth him wel iyolde.
Crist him lene spede
Thin erende to bede.”

Horn took his leve,
For hit was negh eve.
Athelbrus he soghte
And yaf him that he broghte,
And tolde him ful yare
Hu he hadde ifare,
And sede him his nede,
And bihet him his mede.
Athelbrus also swithe
Wente to halle blive.
“Kynge,” he sede, “thu leste
A tale mid the beste.
Thu schalt bere crune
Tomoreghe in this tune;
Tomoreghe is thi feste:
Ther bihoveth geste.
Hit nere noght for loren
For to knyht child Horn,
Thine armes for to welde:
God knight he schal yelde.”

Then my serfdom
Will be turned into knighthood
And I will grow to more, dear,
And obey your instruction.”
Rymenhild, that sweet thing,
Woke from her swoon.
“Horn,” she said, “very soon
That will be done!
You will be dubbed a knight
Before seven nights have passed.
Take this cup here,
And this ring with it,
To Athelbruce the steward,
And see that he keeps his word.
Say that I pleaded,
With words of affection,14
For him to fall down
Before the king in the hall
And ask the king directly
To dub you a knight at once.
He will be well-rewarded
With silver and with gold.
May Christ grant him success
In pursuing your case.”
Horn took his leave,
For it was nearly evening.
He looked for Athelbruce
And gave him what he brought
And told him quickly
How he had fared,
And told him his desires,
And promised him his reward.
Athelbruce, just as quickly,
Went promptly to the hall.
“Sire,” he said, “please listen
To a tale as good as the best.
Tomorrow you will bear
Your crown in this town;
Tomorrow is your feast.
It is fitting to enjoy yourself.
It would not be a wasted effort
To knight Child Horn
To bear your arms.
He will make a good knight.”

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13 Hall points out that an unfree man being knighted would have been acceptable under the laws of Ethelred but would have been rare by the thirteenth century (note to 439). Horn is of course already royal, though he ostensibly wishes to minimize the king’s potential anger if he accedes to Rimenhild’s desires.

14 With loveliche speche: Who the ‘loving words’ are for is not clear, and ME has not yet worked out conventions of indirect speech. Rimenhild seemingly asks Horn to tell Athelbruce that she is asking him with fondness. TEAMS also suggests that the king is meant to understand that she is asking him with a daughter’s affection.
The king soon replied, “That is well thought. I am well pleased with Horn. It seems he will be a fine knight. He will have my dubbing and after he will be my favorite. And as for his twelve companions, He will knight them himself. He will dub them all before me this night.”

Until the light of day sprang, Almair was deep in thought. The day began to spring. Horn came before the king with his twelve companions, though some of them were wicked. He dubbed Horn a knight with a sword and shining spurs. He set him on a white steed; there was no knight like him. He struck him a light blow and charged him to be a worthy knight.

Athulf fell on his knees there before King Almair. “Sire, so valiant,” he said, “Grant me a favor. Now Sir Horn is a knight, who was born in the Southlands. He is lord of the land over all of us who stand near him. He has your arms and shield to fight with on the field. Let him knight us all, for that is our right.”

Almair answered at once, in truth, “Do now what your will is.” Horn knelt down and made them all knights. The feast was merry, filled with fine entertainments. But Rimenhild was not there, and it seemed like seven years to her. She sent for Horn, and he went to her chamber. But he would not go alone, as Athulf was his companion.

Rimenhild stood on the floor, pleased with Horn’s coming.

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15 *He smot him a litel wight:* Dubbing by tapping a kneeling knight with a sword is a late medieval development. Dubbing originally involved a firm box on the ear, cheek, or neck (as is probably the case here) or an embrace around the neck. See also Hall’s note (page 126).
| And sede, “Welcome, Sire Horn,  
And Athulf knight the biforn.  
Knight, nu is thi time  
For to sitte bi me.  
Do nu that thu er of spake:  
To thy wif thu me take.  
Ef thu art trewe of dedes,  
Do nu ase thu sedes.  
Nu thu hast wille thine,  
Unbind me of my pine.”  
“Rymenhild,” quath he, “beo stille!  
Ich wulle don al thi wille,  
Also hit mot bitide.  
Mid spere I schal furst ride,  
And mi knighthod prove,  
Ar ich thee ginne to woghe.  
We beth knightes yonge,  
Of o dai al isprunge;  
And of ure mestere  
So is the manere:  
With sume othere knighte  
Wel for his leman fighte  
Or he eni wif take;  
Forthi me stondeth the more rape.  
Ich wulle do pruesse,  
For thi luve in the felde  
Mid spere and mid schelde.  
If ich come to lyve,  
Ich schal thee take to wyve.”  
“Knight,” quath heo, “trewe,  
Ich wene ich mai thee leve:  
Tak nu her this gold ring:  
God him is the dubbing;  
Ther is upon the ringe  
Igrave “Rymenhild the yonge”:  
Ther nis non betere anonder sunne  
That eni man of telle cuinne.  
For my luve thu hit were  
And on thi finger thu him bere.  
The stones beoth of suche grace  
That thu ne schalt in none place  
Of none duntes beon ofdrad,  
Ne on bataille beon amad,  
Ef thu loke theran  
And theke upon thi leman.  
And Sire Athulf, thi brother,  
He schal have another.  
Horn, ich thee bische  
With loveliche speche,  
Crist yeve god erndinge  
The knight hire gan kesse,  
And heo him to blesse. |
| And said, “Welcome, Sir Horn,  
And Sir Athulf before you.  
Knight, now is the time  
For you to sit by me.  
Do now what you spoke about before;  
Take me to be your wife.  
If you are true to your words,  
Do now as you said.  
Now that you have your will,  
Release me from my pain.”  
“Rymenhild,” he said, “be still!  
I will do all that you want  
When the time is right.  
I will first ride with a spear  
And prove my knighthood  
Before I begin to court you.  
We are both young knights,  
Sprung up in one day,  
And this is the custom  
Of our profession.  
It is good for a knight’s lover  
That he fight with some other knight  
Before he takes a wife.  
For you I go in greater haste.  
Today, so Crist me blesse,  
I will prove my abilities,  
For your love, in the field,  
With spear and shield.  
If I come back alive,  
I will make you my wife.”  
“Knight so true,” she answered,  
“I know that I can trust you.  
Take this gold ring here.  
The detailing on it is fine;  
On the ring is engraved  
‘Rymenhild the Young.’  
There is none better under the sun  
That any man can speak of.  
Wear it for my love,  
And bear it on your finger.  
The stones are of such power  
That you need not, in any place,  
Be afraid of any blows,  
Nor be maddened in battle,  
If you look upon it  
And think of your sweetheart.  
And Sir Athulf, your brother,  
He will have another.  
Horn, I plead for you,  
With loving words.  
That Christ give you a good result  
And bring you back again.”  
The knight kissed her  
And she blessed him. |
Leve at hire he nam,
And in to halle cam:
The knightes yeden to table,
And Horne yede to stable:
Thar he tok his gode fole,
Also blak so eny cole.
The fole schok the brunie
That al the curt gan denie.
The fole bigan to springe,
And Horn murie to singe.
Horn rod in a while
More than a myle.
He fond o schup stonde
With hethene honde.
He axede what hi soghte
Other to londe broghte.
An hund him gan bihelde
That spac wordes belde:
“This lond we wullegh winne
And sle that ther is inne,”
Horn gan his swerd gripe
And on his arme wype.
The Sarazins he smatte
That his blod hatte;
At evreche dunte
The heved of wente;
The gunne the hundes gone
Abute Horn a lone:
He lokede on the ringe,
And thoughte on Rimenilde;
He slogh ther on haste
On hundred bi the laste,
Ne mighte noman telle
That fole that he gan quelle.
Of alle that were alive,
Ne mighte ther non thrive.
Horn tok the maisteres heved,
That he hadde him bireved
And sette hit on his swerde,
Anoven at than orde.
He verde hom into halle,
Among the knightes alle.
“Kyng,” he sede, “wel thu sitte,
And alle thine knightes mitte.
Today, after mi dubbing,
So I rod on my pleing
I fond o schup rowe
Mid watere al byflowe
He took his leave of her
And came into the hall.
The knights went to dinner,
And Horn went to the stable.
There he took his fine horse,
As black as any coal.
The foal shook its armor.\(^{16}\)
So that it resounded through the court.
The horse began to spring,
And Horn began to sing merrily.
In a while Horn had ridden
More than a mile.
He found an anchored ship,
Filled with heathen hounds.
He asked what they were looking for
Or had brought to the land.
One pagan dog beheld him
As he spoke belligerent words:
“We will conquer this land
And slay those who are in it.”
Horn gripped his sword
And wiped it on his arm.
He struck at the Saracens
So that his blood grew hot.
With every blow
A head flew off.
Then the hounds began
To surround the lone Horn.
He looked on the ring
And thought of Rimenhild.
He slayed there in his rush
At least a hundred,
Nor might anyone count
The men that he destroyed.
Of all who had arrived.\(^ {17}\)
None would succeed there.
Horn took the leader’s head,
Which he had lost because of him,
And set it on his sword,
On top of the point.
He traveled home into the hall
Among all the knights.
“Sire,” he announced, “sit easily
With all your knights beside you.
Today, after my dubbing.
As I rode for sport,
I found a row of ships
Surrounded by the waters,

\(^{16}\) *The fole schok the brunie*: Horses were commonly armored only after the late twelfth century (Hall, note to 591). Horn is knighted on a white steed (505) and so either this is a slip or he has several horses.

\(^ {17}\) *Alive*: Harleian 2253 MS has *aryve*. 

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Al with Sarazines kyn,
And none londisse men
To dai for to pine
Thee and alle thine.
Hi gonne me assaille:
Mi swerd me nolde faille:
I smot hem alle to grunde,
Other yaf hem dithes wunde.
That heved I thee bringe
Of the maister kinge.
Nu is thi wile iyolde,
King, that thu me knighty woldest.”

In the morning when day began to spring,
The king him rod an huntinge.
At hom lefte Fikenhild,
That was the wurste moder child.
Horn ferde into bure
To sen aventure.
He saw Rymenhild sitte
Also heo were of witte.
Heo sat on the sunne
With tieres al birunne.
Horn sede, “Lef, thin ore!
Wi wepestu so sore?”
Heo sede, “Noght I ne wepe,
Bute ase I lay aslepe
To the se my net I caste,
And hit nolde noght ilaste;
A gret fiss at the furste
Mi net he gan to berste.
Ich wene that ich schal leose
The fiss that ich wolde choese.”
“Crist,” quath Horn, “and Seint Stevene
Turne thine swevene.
Ne schal I thee biswike,
Ne do that thee mislike.
I schal me make thin owe
To holden and to knowe
For everech othere wighte,
And tharto mi trethe I thee plighte.”
Muchel was the ruthe
That was at thare truthe,
For Rymenhild weop ille,
And Horn let the tires stille.
“Lemman, quath he, “dere,
Thu schalt more there.
Thi sweven schal wende
Other sum man schal us schende.
The fiss that brak the lyne,
Ywis he doth us pine.
That schal don us tene,
And wurth wel sone isene.”
Aylmar rode by the Stour,\(^{18}\)
And Horn lay in the room.
Fickenhild was jealous
And spoke these lies:
“Aylmar, I must warn you:
Horn will destroy you.
I heard what he said,
And his sword is laid ready
To take your life
And to take Rymenhild as his wife.
He is lying in her chamber,
Under the bedcovers
With your daughter Rymenhild,
And he does this often.
If you go there straightaway,
You will find him there.
Banish him out of the land
Before he brings you to ruin!”
Almair began to turn back
In great anger and distress.
He found Horn in her arms,
In Rymenhild’s embrace.
“Away, out,” he said, “foul thief!
You will never be dear to me again!
Get out of this room
With cursed fortune!
Unless you flee at once,
I will strike you with my sword!\(^{19}\)
Get out of my land,
Or you will have greater shame!”
Horn saddled his steed
And laid out his arms.
He began to lace his chainmail
As if he were going to battle.
He seized his sword
And did not linger long;
He went forth quickly
To Rymenhild, his betrothed.
He said, “Darling, dear one,
Now you have your dream.
The fish that tore your net
Has now been sent from you.
Rymenhild, goodbye.

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\(^{18}\) **Sture**: TEAMS and Garbaty claim this is the Mersey, but there is a River Stour running through Stourport-on-Severn and Kidderminster, near Worcester. If this is ‘southern’ to the poet, perhaps *Westernesse* is much further northwest, only limited by Ireland. *Suddene* might then refer to southern stretches of the Danelaw, but Worcester was part of Mercia and not occupied by the Danes.

\(^{19}\) This exposure scene is similar to the duke’s discovery of Amis and Belisaunt, or even of the emir and Floris and Blancheflor. The king is relatively lenient here in not attempting to execute Horn by his own hand in a rage or by trial as the emir does.
No leng abiden I ne may.  
In to uncuthe londe,  
Wel more for to fonde;  
I schal wune there  
Fulle seve yere.  
At seve yeres ende,  
Yef I ne come ne sende,  
Tak thee husebonde;

For me thu ne wonde.  
In armes thu ne fonge,  
And kes me wel longe.”  
Heo custe him wel a stunde  
And Rymenhild feol to grunde.  
Horn tok his leve:  
Ne mighte he no leng bileve;  
He tok Athulf, his fere,  
Al abute the swere,  
And sede, “Knight so trewe,  
Kep wel mi luve newe.  
Thu nevre me ne forsoke:  
Rymenhild thu kep and loke.  
His stede he gan bistride,  
And forth he gan ride:  
To the havene he ferde,  
And a god schup he hurede,  
That him scholde londe  
In westene londe.  
Athulf weop with ighe  
And al that him isighe.  
The whyght him gan stonde,  
And drof til Hirelonde.  
To londe he him sette  
And fot on stirop sette.  
He fond bi the weie  
Kynes sones tweie;  
That on him het Harild,  
And that other Berild.  
Berild gan him preie  
That he scholde him seie  
What his name were  
And what he wolde there.  “Cutberd,” he sede, “ich hote,  
Icoemen ut of the bote,  
Wel feor fram biweste  
To seche mine beste.”

I cannot stay any longer,  
But will go to unknown lands  
To find a new life.  
I will stay there  
A full seven years.  
At the end of seven years,  
If I do not come or send word,  
Take a husband  
And do not wait for me.  
Take me in your arms  
And kiss me for a while.”  
She kissed him for a long time  
And Rimenhild swooned to the ground.  
Horn took his leave;  
He could not stay any longer.  
He embraced his friend  
Athulf about the neck  
And said, “Knight so true,  
Keep my new lover well.  
Do not ever forsake me!  
Protect and look after Rimenhild.”  
He mounted his steed  
And began to ride forth.  
He traveled to the harbor  
And hired a sturdy ship  
That would take him  
To western lands.  
Athulf wept from his eyes  
In seeing all that.  
The sea breeze carried him  
And drove him to Ireland.  
He set foot on land  
And put his feet in stirrups.  
He found, on his way,  
The king’s two sons.  One called himself Harold  
And the other Beril.  
Beril asked of him  
That he would say  
What his name was,  
And what he wanted there.  “Cutbeard is my name,” he said.20  
“I come from out of a boat  
From far away on the western coast21  
To seek my fortune.”

20 Cutberd: The name may not have any significance, and Harleian MS 2253 has Godmod. Garbaty posits an influence from the legend of the Anglo-Saxon bishop Saint Cuthbert (c. 634-687), who was also set adrift and landed in Galloway, Scotland (note to 773). For more on possible borrowings from saints’ legends, see Irene P. McKeehan, “The Book of the Nativity of St. Cuthbert,” PMLA 48 (1933): 981-99.

21 Biweste: ‘by way of the west’ or ‘from the west’ does not make sense from the perspective of Ireland. The poet perhaps means ‘western England’ or ‘west Danelaw.’
Berild rode nearer him
And took him by the bridle.
“You are well met, knight!
Stay with me a while.
As sure as I must die,
You shall serve the king!
I never saw such a fair knight
Arrive here in all my life.”
They led Cutbeard into the hall
And fell on to their knees.
They set themselves kneeling
And courteously greeted the good king.
Then Bereld said at once,
“Sire King, you have duties for him.
Entrust him to defend your land.
No man will harm him,
For he is the noblest man
That ever yet came to this land.”
Then the dear king said,
“You are welcome here.
Go now, Berild, quickly,
And make him at ease.
And if you go courting,
Give him your glove.22
If you intend to marry someone,
He will outshine you!
Because of Cutbeard’s manliness
You would surely never succeed.”
It was on Christmas Day,
Neither before or after,
When at noon a giant
Abruptly came inside,
Armed from pagan lands,
Who said this rhyme:
“Be still, Sire King,
And listen to what I say,
Pagan warriors have arrived,
Far more than five.
They are on the shore,
King, on your land.
Tomorrow one of them will fight
Against three of your knights.
If the three slay our one,
This land will remain yours.
If our one overcomes your three,
All this kingdom will be ours.
Tomorrow will be the battle,
When the light of day springs.”

22 Tak him thine glove: The meaning of the line is opaque. The king perhaps praises Horn’s handsomeness and teases his son by saying that Berild should give Horn his glove when he is courting to show that Horn is not a competitor, as otherwise Berild will be outclassed. See TEAMS and Hall, note to lines 793-7.
Thanne sede the Kyng Thurston,
“Our Cutberd will be one,
Berild schal beo that other,
And Berild will be the other,
The thridde Alrid his brother;
And Alfred, his brother, the third.
For hi beoth the strengeste
For they are the strongest
And of armes the beste.
And the finest in arms.
Bute what schal us to rede?
But what shall we do?
Ich wene we beth alle dede.”
I expect we will all be dead!”
Cutberd sat at borde
Cutbeard sat at the table
And sede thes wordes:
And said these words:
“Sire King, hit nis no righte
“Sire King, it is not right
On with thre to fighte:
For one to fight with three,
Aghen one hunde,
To take on one heathen hound.
The king aros amoreghe,
In the morning, the king rose,
That hadde muchel sorghe;
With my sword I will easily
And Cutberd ros of bedde,
Bring the three of them to death.”
With armes he him schredde:
In with great misgivings.
Horn his brunie gan on caste,
He cast on his chainmail coat
And lacede hit wel faste,
And laced it tightly,
And cam to the kinge
And came to the king
At his up risinge.
At his had risen up.
“King,” he sede, “cum t
to felde,
“Sire,” he said, “come to the field
For to bihelde
To behold
Hu we fighte schulle,
How the fighting will go,
And togare go wulle.”
And we will go together.”
Right at prime tide
Right at the first light,
Hi gunnen ut ride
They rode out
And funden on a grene
And met on the green
A geaunt swthe kene,
The giant was very keen,
His feren him biside
With his companions by him,
Hore deth to abide.
Waiting to bring their deaths.
The ilke bataille
Cutbeard began to fight
Cutbeard gan asaille:
The agreed battle.
He yaf dentes inoghe;
He struck blows enough,
The knightes felle iswoghe.
The warriors became faint.
His dent he gan withdraghe,
He began to ease off his strikes,
For hi were negh aslaghe;
For they were nearly slain,
And sede, “Knights, nu ye reste
And said, “Sirs, you may rest now
One while ef you leste.”
For a while if you like.”
Hi sede hi nevre nadde
They said they had never had
Of knighte dentes so harde,
Such hard blows from a knight,
Bote of the King Murry,
Except from King Murray,
That wes swithe sturdy.
Who was also very formidable.
He was of Hornes kunne,
He was from Horn’s family,
Iborn in Suddene.
Born in the Southlands.
Horn him gan to agrise,
Horn began to shudder,
And his blod arise.
And his blood rose.
Bivo him sagh he stonde
He saw standing before him the men
That driven him of lond
Who had driven him from his land
And that his fader sough.
To him his sword he drogh.
He lokede on his rynge
And thought on Rymenhilde.
He smot him thuregh the herte,
That sore him gan to smerte.
The paens that er were so sturne
Hi gunne awei urne;
Horn and his compaynye
Gunne after hem wel swithe highe
And sloghen alle the hundes
Er hi here schipes funde.
To dethe he hem alle broghte.
Of alle the kynges knightes
Ne scathede wer no wighte,
Bute his sones tweie
Bifore him he sagh deie.
The king bigan to grete
And teres for to lete.
Me leiden hem in bare
And burden hem ful yare.
The king com into halle
Among his knightes alle.
―Horn,‖ he sede, ―I s
see thee,
Do as I schal rede thee.
Aslaghen beth mine heirs,
And thu art knight of muchel pris,
And of grete strengthe,
And fair o bodie lengthe.
Mi rengne thu schalt welde,
And to spuse helde
Reynild, mi doghter,
That sitteth on the lofte.‖
―O Sire King, with wronge
Scholte ich hit underfonge,
Thi doghter, that ye me bede,
Ower rengne for to lede.
Wel more ich schal thee serve,
Sire Kyng, or thu serve.
Thi sorne schal wende
Or seve yeres ende.
Whanne hit is wente,
Sire King, yef me mi rente.
Whanne I thi doghter yerne,
Ne shaltu me hire werne.‖
Cuthberd wonede there
Fulle seve yere
That to Rymenild he ne sente

And killed his father.
He drew his sword to himself.
He looked at his ring,
And thought of Rymenhild.
He stabbed them through their chests,
Which pained them harshly.
The pagans, who were so fierce earlier,
Began to run away.
Horn and his company
Took after them in great haste
And slaughtered all the hounds
Before they could reach their ships.
He brought them all to death;
They paid dearly for his father’s murder.
Of all the king’s knights,
Not a person was hurt
Except for his two sons,
Whom he saw die before him.
The king began to weep
And to let tears fall.
Men laid them on a funeral bier
And buried them right away.
The king came into the hall
Among all of his knights.
―Horn,‖ he said, ―I say to you,
Do as I will advise you.
Both of my heirs are dead,
And you are a knight of great fame,
And of great strength,
And fair, with a tall body.
You will rule my kingdom
And will have for a wife
Renild, my daughter,
Who waits upstairs.”
―Oh, Sire King, it would be wrong
For me to accept
Your daughter that you offer me,
Or to govern your realm.
It is better that I serve you,
Sire, before you die."
Your sorrow will be relieved
Before seven years’ end.
When they have passed,
Sire, give me my reward.
If I ask for your daughter,
You will not refuse me.‖
Cutbeard lived there
For a full seven years,
And neither sent word to Rymenildo.

23 Sterve: in OE and ME starve has the more general meaning of ‘die.’ It only later gained the more specific meaning of dying of hunger.
Ne him self ne wente. Rymenhild was in Westernesse With wel muchel sorinesse. A king ther gan arive That wolde hire have to wyve; Aton he was with the king Of that ilke wedding. The daies were schorte, That Rimenhild ne dorste Leten in none wise. A writ he dude devise; Athulf hit dude write, That Horn ne luvede noght lite. Heo sende hire sonde To evereche londe To seche Horn the knight Ther me him finde mighte. Horn noght therof ne herde Til o day that he ferde To wude for to schete. A knave he gan imete. Horn seden, ―Leve fere, What secestu here?‖ "Knight, if beo thi wille, I mai thee sone telle. I seche fram biweste Horn of Westernesse For a maiden Rymenhild, That for him gan wexe wild. A king hire wile wedde And bringe to his bedde, King Modi of Reynes, Ich habbe walke wide, Bi the se side; Nis he nowar ifunde. Walawai the stunde! Wailaway the while! Nu wurth Rymenild bigiled." Horn therded with his ires, And spak with bidere tires: "Knave, wel thee bide! Horn stondeth thee bide. Aghen to hure thu turne And seie that heo nu murne, For I schal beo ther bitime, A Soneday by prime." The knave was wel blithe And higheade aghen blive. Nor did he journey himself. Rimenhild was in the Westlands In great sorrow. Another king arrived there Who wanted to have her as his wife. He was in accord with the king On the matter of the wedding. The days were so short That Rimenhild did not dare To obstruct it in any way. She dictated a letter, And it was written by Athulf, Who did not love Horn lightly. She sent her messenger To every land To seek Horn the knight, Wherever he might find him. Horn heard nothing of it Until one day when he went Into the woods to hunt, And he met a servant there. Horn said, “Dear fellow, What are you looking for here?” “Knight, if it is your will, I will soon tell you. I come from the English coast Seeking Horn of the Westlands For a maiden, Rymenhild, Who is growing mad for his sake. A king will marry her And bring her to his bed, King Moody of Furness, 24 One of Horn’s enemies. I have walked far Along the sea side. He is nowhere to be found. Alas the hour! Alas the time! Now Rimenhild has been deceived!“ Horn heard with his own ears And said through bitter tears, “Lad, good fortune is with you! Horn stands in front of you. Turn back to her again And tell her not to mourn, For I will be there in good time, On Sunday by sunrise.” The servant was very glad And hurried back quickly.

24 Reynes: Perhaps Furness, Lancashire, in the Lake District. Schofield argues that the French MS has Fenice and that the English Reynis might be a corruption (15).
The sea began to surge
Under Rimenhild's walls,
And the servant began to founder there.
Rimenhild thought she could see
Him capsized in the ocean's rush,
Under her chamber walls.
Rimenhild undid the door bolt
Of the house that she was in,
To look with her eyes
If she could see anything of Horn.
When she found the drowned servant
That she had sent for Horn,
Who was to bring him home,
She began to wring her hands.
Horn went to Thurston the king
And told him this news.
Then he was made aware
How Rimenhild was Horn's own,
About Horn's noble father,
The king of the Southlands,
And how he killed on the field
The men who murdered his father.
Horn said, "Wise king,
Reward me for my service.
Help me to win Rimenhild
And do not fail me,
And I will have your daughter
Married into a good family.
She will have for a husband
Athulf, my best friend,
A good knight among the best,
And the truest."
The king said gently,
"Horn, have your will now."
He had letters sent
Around Ireland
For keen knights,
Fighting Irish men.
Enough came to Horn
And boarded the ship,
And Horn got underway
In a strong galley.
The wind began to blow
In a little while.
The sea began to push them
Right into the Westlands.
They struck the sail and mast,
And cast off their anchor
Before another day had sprung
Or a bell was rung.
The word began to spread
Of Rimenhild's wedding.
Horn was on the sea
And could not be late.
He let his ship stand anchored
And went ashore.
He had his company wait
At the side of the woods;
Horn made his way alone,
As if he had sprung from the rocks.
He met a pilgrim there
And greeted him courteously.
“Pilgrim, you must tell me
All that is happening.”
He said in his conversation,
“I’ve come from a bridal feast.”
I was at the wedding
Of a maiden, Rimenhild.

Under the church walls nearby
She wedded a husband.
She could not dry
Her eyes from crying.
She said that she would not
Be married with a gold ring!
She had a husband,
Even if he was in another land.

Moody had married her by force
And had her brought to the tower,
Into a strong hall
Inside the castle walls.
I was there at the gate
But they would not let me in.
Moody had ordered men
To take her to her bower.
I slipped away,
For I could not endure that scene.
The bride weeps bitterly,
And that is a great pity.”
Horn said, “So help me Christ,
We will exchange clothes!

25 Also he sprunge of stone: Garbaty mentions “an ancient belief that the first men originated from stones, singly, and hence were solitary” (note to line 1034). Hall gives as examples Teutonic legends and the Odyssey, xix.162-3, where Penelope tells the beggar, “You must have ancestors, for you did not spring from a tree or a rock.”

26 Garbaty notes that pilgrims, who collected palm branches in the Holy Lands and were thus called palmers, were welcome guests at celebrations as they entertained everyone with their adventures. Refusing visitors during a wedding, as Moody does, was in very poor taste (note to 1037, 1052).

27 Extra lines from MS Laud Misc. 108 (1076-7 and 1084-7). The lines make the sequence clearer: the pilgrim observed the public church ceremony before being shoed away from the reception. They also emphasize that Riminhild is married unwillingly and thus the marriage is both invalid and unconsummated.
Have her clothes myne
And take me thi sclavyne,
Today I schal ther drinke
That some hit schulle ofthinke."
His sclavyn he dude dun legge,
And tok hit on his rigge,
He tok Horn his clothes:

That nere him noght lothe.
Horn tok burdon and scrippe
And wrong his lippe.
He makede him a ful chere,
And al bicolmede his swere.
He com to the gateward,
That him answerede hard:
Horn bad undo softe
Mani tyme and ofte;
Ne mighte he awynne
That he come therinne.
Horn gan to the yate turne
And that wiket unspurne.
The boye hit scholde abugge.
Horn threw him over the brigge
That his ribbes him tobrake,
And suthe com in atte gate.
He sette him wel loghe
In beggeres rowe;
He lokede him abute
With his colmie snute;
He segh Rymenhild sitte
Ase heo were of witte,
Sore wepinge and yerne;
Ne mighte hure no man wurne.
He lokede in eche halke;
Ne segh he nowhar walke
Athulf his felawe,

That he cuthe knowe.
Athulf was in the ture,
Abute for to pure
After his comynge,
Yef schup him wolde bringe.
He segh the se flowe
And Horn nowar rowe.
He sede upon his songe:
"Horn, nu thu ert wel longe.
Rymenhild thu me toke
That I scholde loke;
Ich habbe ikept hure evre;
Com nu other nevre:
I ne may no leng hure kepe.
For soreghe nu I wepe."
Rymenhild ros of benche,
To pour some wine
After mete in sale,
Bothe wyn and ale.
On horn heo bar anhonde,
So laghe was in londe.

Knights and squier
Alle dronken of the ber,
Bute Horn alone
Nadde therof no mone.
Horn sat upon the grunde;
Him thughte he was ibunde.
He sede, “Quen so hende,
To meward thu wende;
Thu yef us with the furste;
The beggeres beoth ofthurste.”

Hure horn heo leide adun,
And fulde him of a brun
His bolle of a galun;
For heo wende h
e were a glotoun.
Heo seide, ―Have this cuppe,
And this thing theruppe.
Ne sagh ich nevre, so ich wene,
Beggere that were so kene.”

Horn tok hit his ifere
And sede, ―Quen so dere,
Wyn nelle ich muche ne lite
But of cuppe white.
Thu wenest I beo a beggere,
And ich am a fissere,
Wel feor icome by este
For fissen at thi feste.
Mi net lith her bi honde,
Bi a wel fair stronde.
Hit hath ileie there
Fulle seve yere.
Ich am icome to loke
Ef eni fiss hit toke.
Ich am icome to fisse:
Drynke null I of dyssh:
Drink to Horn of horne.
Feor ich am jorne.”
Rymenhild him gan bihelde;
Hire heorte bigan to chelde.
Ne kne heo noght his fissing.

Ne Horn hymselfe nothing.
Ac wunder hire gan thinke
Whi he bad to Horn drinke.
Heo fulhe hire horn with wyn
And dronk to the pilegrym.
Heo sede, “Drink thi fulle,

With the dinner in the hall,
Both wine and ale.28
She carried a drinking horn in hand,
As was the custom in the land.
Knights and squires
All drank the beer,
All except for Horn,
Who alone had no share of it.
Horn sat on the ground,
Thinking he was overcome.
He said, “Gracious queen,
Come toward me.
Give us some first.
The beggars are thirsty.”

She laid down her horn
And filled a bowl with a gallon
Of beer from a brown jug,
For she assumed he was a drunkard.
She said, “Drink your cup,
And this portion as well.
I never saw, so far as I know,
A beggar that was so bold.”

Horn gave it to his companion
And said, “Dear queen,
I do not want much wine,
Only a cupful of white.
You believe I am a beggar,
But I am a fisherman
Who has come far east
To fish at your feast.
My net lies nearby at hand
Along a fair shore.
It has laid there
A full seven years.
I have come to find out
If it has captured any fish.
I have come as an angler,
Not to drink from a bowl.
Drink to Horn with your horn,
For I have journeyed far.”
Rimenheld looked at him
And her heart began to quake.
She did not understand his fishing
Or recognize Horn himself,
But she thought it so mysterious
That she invited Horn to drink.
She filled her horn with wine,
And drank to the pilgrim.
She said, “Drink your fill,

28 Pouring alcohol for the king and his guests is not a servile task but Rimenhild’s royal privilege. In *Beowulf*, Hrothgar’s wife Wealhþeow ceremoniously fills the warriors’ cups in the mead hall (622-4).
And tell me the truth,  
If you ever saw  
Horn lying in the woods.”  
Horn drank from the horn a while  
And dropped the ring to the bottom.  
He said, “Queen, look for  
What is in your drink.”  
The queen went to her chamber  
With her four maidens.  
She found what she wished then,  
A ring engraved of gold  
That she had given Horn.  
She sorely dreaded  
That Horn was dead,  
For the ring was there.  
Then she sent a maiden  
For the pilgrim.  
“Pilgrim,” she said, “be honest  
About the ring that you dropped.  
Say where you got it  
And why you have come here.”  
He said, “By Saint Giles,  
I have traveled many miles,  
Far beyond the west  
To seek my fortune.  
I found Child Horn in a certain place  
Waiting to board a ship.  
He said he was intending  
To return to the Westlands.  
The ship took to the waters  
With me and good Horn.  
Horn was sick and dying,  
And entreated me courteously,  
‘Go with the ring  
To Rimenhild the Young.’  
He continually kissed it.  
May God give his soul rest!”  
Rimenhild exclaimed at once,  
“Heart, now burst,  
For you no longer have Horn,  
Who has hurt you so sorely.”  
She fell on her bed,  
Where she had hidden a knife  
To slay the loathed king  
And herself as well  
On that same night  
If Horn would not come.  
She set the knife to her heart  
But Horn quickly caught her.  
He wiped the soot off his neck  
And said, “Queen, so sweet and dear,  
I am your own Horn!  
Don’t you recognize me?  
I am Horn of the Westlands.
Kiss me in your arms!"
They kissed each other, certainly,
And had great joy.
“Rymenhild,” he said, “I must go
down to the woods’ end.
My knights are there,
Ready to fight.
Armed under their clothes.
They will make the king
And his guests who have
Come to the feast displeased!
Today I will teach them
And correct them harshly.”
Horn sprang out of the hall
And let his cloak fall.
The queen ran to the chamber
And found Athulf in the tower.
“Athulf,” she said, “be glad,
And go to Horn quickly!
He is under the forest boughs
With knights enough with him.”
Athulf began to hurry
Because of the news,
And ran after Horn as quickly
As a horse might go.
In fact, he overtook him.
They made great rejoicing.
Horn called his band
And set them on their way.
Very soon he came in;
The gates were undone.
Armed heavily
From head to foot,
He made sorry
Everyone who was inside
At the celebration,
Except his twelve companions
And King Almair.
They forfeited their lives there!
Yet Horn took no vengeance
On Fickenhild’s false tongue.
He swore oaths of loyalty,
That he would
Never betray Horn,
Even if death threatened.
They rang the bell
To celebrate the wedding.
Horn went with his men
To the king’s palace.
There was a sweet wedding feast
For the fine men who ate there.
No tongue might tell
Of the joys that were sung there.
Horn sat on the throne,
And bad hem alle ihere.
“King,” he sede, “thu luste
A tale mid the beste.
I ne seie hit for no blame:
Horn is mi name.
Thu me to knight hove,
And knighthod have proved
To thee, king, men seide
That I thee bitraide;
Thu makedest me fleme,
And thi lond to reme;
Thu wendest that I wroghte
That I nevre ne thoghte,
Bi Rymenhild for to ligge,
And that I withsegge.
Ne schal ich hit biginne,
Til I Suddene winne.
Thu kep hure a stunde,
The while that I funde
In to min heritage,
And to mi baronage.
That lond I schal ofreche
And do mi fader wreche.
I schal beo king of tune,
And bere kinges crune;
Thanne schal Rymenhilde
Ligge bi the kinge.”
Horn gan to schupe draghe
With his Irisse felaghes,
Athulf with him, his brother:
Nolde he non other.
The ship began to move;
The wind him bleu lude;
Bithinne daies five
That schup gan arive
Abute middelnighte.
Horn him yede wel righte;
He tok Athulf bi honde
And up he yede to londe.
Hi founde under schelde
A knight hende in felde.
Op the schelde was drawe
A crowch of Jhesu Cristes lawe.
The knight him aslepe lay
Al biside the way.
Horn him gan to take
And sede, “Knight, awake!
Seie what thu kepest?
And whi thu her slepest?
Me thinkth bi thine crois lighte,
That thu longest to ure Drighte.
Bute thu wule me schew,
I schal thee whelewe.”
The gode knight up aros;
And asked them all to listen.
“And King,” he said, “listen to
A tale among the best.
I do not tell it to blame you.
Horn is my name.
You raised me to be a knight,
And I have proven my knighthood.
Men said to you, king,
That I betrayed you.
You made me flee
And to leave your land.
You believed that I had done
What I had never thought of,
To lay with Rimenhild,
And that I deny!
Nor will I begin to do so
Until I win the Southlands.
Keep her for a time,
While I attempt
To recover my heritage
And my own baronage.
I will take that land
And wreak vengeance for my father.
I will be lord of that town,
And bear a king’s crown.
Then Rimenhild will
Lie with a king!”
Horn took to the ship
With his Irish fellows,
With his brother Athulf by him.
He did not want any others.
The ship began to move
And the wind blew loudly.
Within five days
The ship arrived
Around midnight.
Horn set forth right away.
He took Athulf by the hand
And went up onto the land.
Under a shield they found a knight
Who was valiant on the battlefield.
On the shield was drawn
A cross of the faith of Jesus Christ.
The knight lay asleep
Along the pathway.
Horn took hold of him
And said, “Knight, wake up!
What you are guarding,
And why you are sleeping there?
I assume by your shining cross
That you belong to our Lord.
But unless you show me,
I will hack you to pieces.”
The good knight rose up;
Of the wordes him gros.
He sede, “Ich serve aghenes my wille
Payns ful ylle.
Ich was Cristene a while:
Tho icom to this ille
Sarazins blake,
That dude me forsake.
On Crist ich wolde bileve.
On him hi makede me reve
To kepe this passage
Fram Horn that is of age,
That wunieth biweste,
Knight with the beste;
Hi sloge with here honde
The king of this londe,
And with him fele hundred,
And therof is wunder
That he ne cometh to fghte.
God sende him the righte,
And wind him hider drive
To bringe hem of live.
He sloghen Kyng Murry,
Horn hi ut of londe sente;
Twelf felawes with him wente,
Among hem Athulf the gode,
Min owene child, my leve fode:
Ef Horn child is hol and sund,
And Athulf bithute wund,
He luveth him so dere,
And is him so stere.
Mighte I seon hem tweie,
For joie I scholde deie.”
“He was terrified by the words.
He pleaded, “Against my will,
I serve evil pagans!
I was once a Christian.
Then black Saracens
Came to this island,
Who made me abandon my faith.
Otherwise I would follow Christ.
They made me a guard
To protect this passage
From Horn, who is of age
And lives in the Westlands,
A knight among the best.
By their hands they killed
The king of this land,
And with him many hundreds.
It is a mystery that he
Has not returned to fight!
May God send him the right,
And the wind, to drive him here,
To take away their lives!
They slaughtered King Murray,
Horn’s father, a gracious king.
They exiled Horn out of the land;
Twelve fellows went with him,
Among them Athulf the good,
My own child, my dear son.
If Child Horn is whole and sound,
And Athulf is without harm,
He loved my son so dearly that
He was like a guiding star to him.
If I could see the two of them,
I would die for joy.”
“Then rejoice, knight,
More than ever before!
Horn and Athulf his friend
Are both here.”
He rushed to Horn
And embraced him at once.
They made great joy there
While they were together.
“My boys,” he said, “how have you fared?
It is a long time since I saw you.
Will you win back this land
And slay those who rule it?”
He continued, “Dear Child Horn,
You mother Godhild still lives.
She would have great joy
If she knew you were alive.”
Horn said in his speech,
“Blessed be the time
When I came to the Southlands
With my Irish men!
We will teach the hounds

1330
1340
1350
1360
1370
1380
To speken ure speche.
Alle we hem schulle sle,
And al quic hem fle.”
Horn gan his horn to blowe;
His folk hit gan iknowe;
Hi comen ut of stere,
Fram Hornes banere;
Hi sloghen and fughten,
To speak as we want!\(^{29}\)
We will slaughter them all
And quickly flay them.”
Horn began to sound his horn
And his men heard it.
They came out of the stern,
From under Horn’s banner.
They killed and fought
From night until morning.
Of the Saracens’ kind,
None were left in the end.\(^{30}\)
Horn ordered that chapels
And churches be built;
He had bells rung,
And masses sung.
He came to his mother’s hall
In the rock cliffside,
Where he had food readied
And held a merry feast.
He made their lives happy.
But Rimenhild paid dearly for it,
For Fickenhild was proud at heart
And it would bring him pain.
He gave money to young and old
To build alliances with him.
He had stone brought in,
Hoping for success there
By having a strong castle built,
Filled around with sea water.
No one might land there,
Except for birds in flight,
But when the sea drew back,
Men might come enough.
Fickenhild turned his attention
To shaming Rimenhild.
He began to court her intensely;
The king did not dare prevent him.
Rimenhild was sick at heart,
And she wept tears of blood.
That night, Horn became feverish
And began to have nightmares
About Rimenhild, his mate.
She was taken onto a ship,
The boat began to capsize,
And his lover was about to drown.
Rimenhild wished to swim back
To land with her arms,

\(^{29}\) *To spoken ure speche*: Hall interprets this as a euphemism for “we will teach them a humiliating lesson” (note to 1366), whereas Garbaty is more prosaic: “they will meet our spoken terms” (note to 1380).

\(^{30}\) TEAMS makes 1391-2 a simple sentence, so that the *Saracens* leave nothing in the end for the locals, but it does not seem to fit contextually here.
Fikenhild aghen hire pelte
With his swerdes hilte.
Horn him wok of slape
So a man that hadde rape.
“Athulf,” he sede, “felaghe,
To schupe we mote draghe.
Fikenhild me hath idon under
And Rymenhild to do wunder.
Crist, for his wundes five,
Tonight me thuder drive.”
Horn gan to schupe ride,
His feren him biside.
Fikenhild, or the dai gan springe,
Al right he ferde to the kinge,
After Rymenhild the brighte,
To wedden hire bi nighte.
He ladde hure bi the derke
Into his nywe werke.
The feste hi bigunne,
Er that ros the sunne.
Er thane Horn hit wiste,
Tofore the sunne upriste,
His schup stod under ture
At Rymenhilde bure.
Rymenhild, litel weneth heo
That Horn thanne alive beo.
The castel thei ne knewe,
For he was so nywe.
Horn fond sittinde Arnoldin,
That was Athulfes cosin,
That ther was in that tide,
Horn for tabide.
“Horn knight,” he sede, “kinges sone,
Wel beo thu to londe icome.
Today hath ywedde Fikenhild
Thi swete lemman Rymenhild.
Ne schal I thee lie:
He ha thath giled thee twie.
This tur he let make
Al for thine sake.
Ne mai ther come inne
Noman with none ginne.
Horn, nu Crist thee wisse,
Of Rymenhild that thu ne misse.”
Horn cuthe al the liste
That eni man of wiste.
Harpe he gan schewe,
And tok felawes fewe,
Of knightes swithe snelle
That schrudde hem at wille.
Hi yeden bi the gravel
Toward the castel.
Hi gunne murie singe
And makede here gleowinge.

But Fickenhild threw her back
With his sword’s hilt.
Horn woke from his sleep
Like a man in urgent haste.
“Athulf,” he said, “my brother,
We must get on board the ship!
Fickenhild has deceived me
And has put Rimenhild in danger.
May Christ, for his five wounds,
Drive us toward there tonight!”
Horn set off on his ship
With his companions beside him.
Fickenhild, before the day sprang,
Went straightaway to the king
For Rimenhild the bright,
To marry her before sunrise.
He took her in the darkness
Into his new fortress.
The festivities began
Before the sun rose,
And before Horn knew of it.
Before the sun was up,
His ship stood under the tower
Near Rimenhild’s chamber.
Rimenhild little suspected
That Horn was alive.
They did not know the castle,
For it was so new.
Then Horn found Arnold,
Who was Athulf’s cousin,
Who was at that moment
Sitting and waiting for Horn.
“Sir Horn,” he said, “son of the king.
Welcome to this land!
This morning Fickenhild has married
Your sweet lover Rimenhild.
I will not lie to you;
He has deceived you twice.
He had this tower made,
All for your sake.
No man may get inside
By any contriving.
Horn, may Christ guide you now
So that you do not lose Rimenhild.”
Horn knew all the tricks
That any man might know of.
He brought out a harp,
And took a few fellows,
Very keen knights, who disguised
Themselves as they wished.
They went along the sand
Toward the castle.
They began to sing merrily
And made harping music.
Rymenhild heard it  
And asked who they were.  
They replied that they were harpists  
And some were fiddlers.  
They let Horn in  
Right through the hall gate.  
He set himself on the bench  
And grasped his harp.  
He played Rymenhild a lay,  
And made her a lament.  
Rymenhild fell in a swoon then;  
There was no one there who laughed!  
It pierced to Horn’s heart  
So bitterly that it pained him.  
He looked on the ring  
And thought of Rymenhild.  
He went up to the table  
With a good sword edge.  
He made Fickenhild’s head  
Fall to the ground,  
And struck down  
All his men in a row,  
And when they were dead,  
He cut apart Fickenhild.  
There Horn made Arnold king  
To follow King Almair,  
Of all the Westlands,  
For his gentleness.  
The king and his vassals  
Gave Arnold tribute.  
Horn took Rymenhild by the hand  
And led her to the shore,  
And took along Athelbruce,  
The good steward of the house.  
The sea began to flow,  
And Horn began to sail.  
They arrived where  
King Moody had been lord.  
He made Athelbruce their king,  
For his good teaching;  
He gave all the knights clemency  
Because of Sir Horn’s counsel.  
Horn sailed away again,  
And the wind blew him far away.  
He arrived in Ireland, where he  
Had found bittersweet fortune.  

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31 In MS Cambridge Library, the sense is that the aged Almair will be succeeded by Arnold as king and that the knights pay respect to him. Hall suggests a possible darker reading of MS Laud Misc. 108, where 1545 is utrage instead of truage. If so, Almair is deposed and 1507-12 would read more like “Horn made Arnold king there, after King Almair, the knights, and the baronage did him all kinds of outrage.” Yet MS Harleian 2253 agrees more with the Cambridge MS, and Horn has earlier reconciled with Almair (1275-1300).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1530</td>
<td>Ther he dude Athulf child Wedden maide Reynild. Horn com to Suddenne Among al his kenne; Rymenhild he makede his quene; So hit mighte wel beon. Al folk hem mighte rewe That loveden hem so trewe: Nu ben hi bothe dede - Crist to hevene hem lede! Her endeth the tale of Horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1540</td>
<td>There he had young Athulf Wed maid Reynild. Then Horn came home to the Southlands, Among all of his kin. He made Rimenhild his queen So that all might be well. All the people who loved them truly Might grieve for them now. For now they are both dead. May Christ lead them to Heaven! Here ends the tale of Horn, Who was noble and never cowardly. Let us always together be glad, For thus ends Horn’s song. May Jesus, who is Heaven’s king, Give us all His sweet blessing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1545</td>
<td>Amen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32 Garbaty explains this confusing line: *fonde* does not refer to Horn’s last arrival in Ireland but his first, where he finds refuge but also *woe* because of the deaths of Harild and Berild (note to 1526).
King Horn, Real Kings, and the Auchinleck Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild

Medieval English romances usually have apparent roots in French analogues or folktale, but the genesis of King Horn remains especially obscure. TEAMS uses an amalgam of three variant manuscripts, University Library Cambridge Gg.4.27.2, Harleian 2553, and Laud Misc. 108, all from the mid-late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The incomplete Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild in Auchinleck is later than King Horn but current consensus holds that all versions derive from a common Anglo-Norman original of about 1170, Horn et Rimenhild.\(^1\) Schofield argued in 1901 that King Horn was geographically centered on the Isle of Man, for centuries a Norse stronghold, and that the essential tale derived from Norse legend.\(^2\) The names in King Horn are “French transformations of Germanic names,”\(^3\) but other versions retain more Anglo-Saxon trappings. Haþulf of Horn Childe (Murray in King Horn) implies the historic Eadulf who was earl of Northumbria in 966,\(^4\) or might be the enemy of Beowulf’s father: “wearþ he Heaþolafe / to handbonan… þanon he gesohte / Suðdena folc” (“he came to slay Heatholaf with his own hand… from there he searched out the South-Danes,” 460-3).\(^5\) But these connections and explanations are as murky as the geographical King Horn locations Westernesse and Suddene.

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\(^3\) Schofield, 52-3.

\(^4\) Schofield, 69.

\(^5\) Daniel H. Haigh, The Anglo-Saxon Sagas: An Examination of Their Value as Aids to History (London: John Russell Smith, 1861), 64-5.
Holford complains that the Auchinleck *Horn Childe* (HC) has been critically overlooked or disparaged in relation to the *King Horn* (KH) poems, although Mills has edited a recent critical edition. Holford argues that HC was written for the political purpose of creating a comforting foundational narrative for English nationalism during or after the reign of Edward II, a king who had failed to quell Scottish and Welsh rebellions. For such an audience “the defence of the realm would have had particular resonance.”

Thus the HC poet inserts several new scenes such as Haþeolf’s defeat of the Danes and his fatal battle against the Irish, patterned on allegedly historical events. Later legends in North Yorkshire refer to Danish bones stored “by Seyn Sibiles Kirke” (HC 84) and the murderous King Malcan (223) suggests the historical Scottish Malcolm. The poem retains a more traditional sense in its Anglo-Saxon heroic ethos, and the poet has perhaps freely adapted his sources to imply such a nationalistic program.

In the ongoing scholarly dispute over the place names the messages that KH communicates to its audience have equally been neglected. Like HC the KH poet alters the narrative to suit the interests and agendas of his time period. Critics have unfavorably compared the spare style of the English KH to the more elegant and sophisticated French *Horn et Rimenhild* (HR). McKnight complains that such compressions weaken the story both narratively and stylistically. Unlike Rimenhild’s less-than-subtle courtship, the
French Rimenhild “understands the arts of coaxing and of coquetry.” Scholars previously dated KH as early as 1225, making it one of the first English romances, but it has lately been moved to the 1270s or later with a terminus of about 1290, the likely date of the Laud manuscript which also contains Havelock. Much as Havelock might have been a delicately coded ideal for the young Edward I (1272 -1307) to emulate, might KH also have been revised with the subtle intention of evoking either Edward I or his father Henry III (1216-72)?

Allen posits an argument for Henry III, noting among other linkages that Henry lost his father (John) at age nine and was betrayed in his youth by an intimate named Fawkes de Breauté, with the Fawkes/Fickel similarity much like the Godrich/Godard stewards in Havelock who suggest the disloyal Richard, earl of Cornwall (1209-72) and Henry’s brother. Yet Henry apparently had little interest in English or chivalrous romance, unlike Edward who “had been a great lover of all sides of knightly activity since his youth.” To make such an argument involves a simplification of a complex of sources and unanswered questions about authorial intentions and KH’s audience. Yet the text of the poem suggests that one of the poet’s themes might have been the education of a young prince. The trope is evinced in KH’s purposefully universal setting, in the

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9 George H. McKnight, *King Horn, Floriz and Blancheflur, The Assumption of Our Lady* (London: EETS, 1901), xi. Compare also Belisaunt’s courtship of Amis, in which she is so aggressive in her emotions that she threatens Amis with a false charge of rape unless he accepts her.


replacement of specific historical enemies by generic antagonists, and in the emphasis on Horn’s courtly and leadership qualities. All of these emphases imply an instructive model for an English king less prominent in the heroic mood of HC.

As the hero of Bevis of Hampton rushes around Europe and the Middle East, he enters cities and places with now-obscure names, but most are traceable and the poet is hardly to blame for names shifting over seven centuries. HC states its initial setting as north of the Humber (10), and the poet gives precise locations such as York, Stainmore, Westmorland, and Wales. The Anglo-Norman HR also has Suddene but Horn’s boat drifts to Bretaigne (106) and his Irish adventures are set specifically in Dublin (HR 2937). Yet of the three main settings of KH—Ireland, Westernesse, and Suddene—the last two are impossibly vague. No agreement has been reached on whether the placenames signify Scandinavia, Wales, or anything at all, though the west coast of England probably fits most closely as within easy travel of Ireland.¹⁴ No one also seems to have asked why, when other romances unambiguously state Warwick, Lincoln, London, or Lombardy as the homes of their heroes, KH has such nebulous settings. Either the poet assumes a local audience’s knowledge or something else is intended.

We know that Chaucer was especially careful not to annoy the powerful in the Ricardian court and perhaps learned from Froissart “not to attach his poetry too closely to the trivia of court life.”¹⁵ His writings respond to and obliquely reference broad trends but avoid the current topical allusions of a Langland. Chaucer had good reasons to remain a

¹⁴ For a discussion of the placenames see Schofield and also Speed, 564-66. Schofield (564) notes that Horn’s journeys are all between one day (1441) and five (1307), indicating that the locations are close to Ireland if the poet has realism as a goal.

useful and nonthreatening courtier. Even a highly admiring portrayal of Richard might have brought him trouble during the Merciless Parliament and after Richard’s deposition. HC, the Northern version of the story in Auchinleck, reflects an interest in other English power centers, and ones by then safely chronologically and geographically distant from London politics.\(^{16}\) \textit{Havelock}, KH’s manuscript companion, has Lincoln as its main locale but the story occurs in the sentimental and finished past of “are dawes” (27).

If the KH poet intended to praise Edward in his depiction of Horn, he may have chosen a generic geographical backdrop in order to avoid too close an identification with the real king’s problems. Edward spent much of his later reign fighting rebellions in Wales and Scotland. Despite his plaudit on his tomb as \textit{Malleus Scotorum}, “Hammer of the Scots,” and glowing portraits by historians Edward’s forces achieved mixed results. Being awarded the crown lands of Wales in 1254 by his father accomplished nothing. As king, Edward preferred to use diplomacy to rein in such agitators as Llewlyn ap Gruffuld in 1277, but when battle was unavoidable it was a never-ending task, as further revolts occurred in 1282, 1287, and 1294.\(^{17}\) Scotland was equally defiant, but Edward had already antagonized parliament with endless requests for money to fight Wales and France and did not face Scotland until the 1290s.\(^{18}\) Again, after short-term victories new uprisings followed, and Edward died in 1307 en route to Scotland to deal with fresh mutinies. Edward had few issues with Ireland, and correspondingly KH has Ireland in the


\(^{18}\) Prestwich, 165-8.
story but perhaps cautiously avoids including Wales and the Scottish kings, all central to HC’s narrative but in real life likely points of frustration rather than glory for Edward and the English court.

The KH poet does not seem heavily invested in making Horn a saintly soldier for Christ beyond the routine Christian/Saracen antagonism. Horn identifies with the sleeping knight on the shores of Westernesse as “me thinkth bi thine crois lighte / that thu longest to ure Drighte” (1323-4) and later has “chapeles and chirche” (1394) built, but Horn chiefly fights for land, love, and revenge and not for God. His skirmishes in Suddene against Fickenhild and Modi, presumably also Christians, have no religious purposes. His mother adopts an anchoress’s life but out of self-protection, and upon liberation she enjoys a “feste merie” (1400). Elsewhere the poet reduces Horn’s thrashing of a hundred Saracens, nearly a 400-line scene in HR, into an “after-dinner recreation” of some thirty lines. Yet KH curiously retains the Saracens from the French even though no Arab fleets ever reached England and Auchinleck more logically has Danes. KH is careful to have the invaders strand the children on a galeie, an Arabic loanword first appearing in English here, where HC has the usual schipes. KH still has Horn disguise himself as Cutberd in Ireland (773), perhaps a vestige of the story’s possible Norse roots

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19 McKnight, viii.
20 Saracen might also have denoted all pagans, including Danes. But the poet states that the Saracens threaten death to all “bute hi here laye asoke / and to here toke” (“unless they renounced their faith and took theirs,” 69-70). The Vikings generally desired booty and land and not converts. For a discussion of the definition of Saracen see Speed, 567-8 who argues that the term could include Danes in KH—but she notes that the French poet explicitly uses asfricanz, Affrike, aufricant, and Perse in describing the Saracens (HR 297, 1298, 2907, 3000).
as Horn has no need for secrecy if the Arabs are his enemy. Why does the poet have Saracens in England?

Horn’s battles in Ireland, Suddene, and Westernesse form a geographical trio but “no direct causal connection between the story threads”\textsuperscript{22} which would impute meaning to the grouping or the placenames seems to exist. Horn simply sojourns in Ireland until events call him back. Similarly, the Saracens perform no indispensible role beyond narratively propelling Horn’s exile and return motif. Their improbable inclusion as the story’s antagonists might have reminded an audience of Edward’s crusading ventures between 1268–74 but perhaps again reflected a diplomatic desire to avoid depicting the enemies who really were troubling English lands. Holford argues that HC specifically invokes Wales and Scotland to portray an idealized united England which was in real life under renewed and severe threat.\textsuperscript{23} But by the time of Auchinleck the tale was increasingly antique and unlikely to be supposed a portrait of Edward III, who at any rate was successful in finally pacifying the Scots, more than compensating for Edward II’s kingly and martial inabilities.

KH gives fewer lines to the battle scenes with Horn’s antagonists than HR, but even compared to HC, a poem of likely similar length, KH’s combat scenes are understated. Auchinleck HC features additional battles even within the extant fragment. Haþeolf fights both Danes and Irish, and unlike Murray’s sudden seaside ambush the poet lavishes attention on their eleven-day preparation for war with the usual “brinis briȝt” (HC 173) formulas. Horn has an extra clash in arms with a knight in Wales and breaks

\textsuperscript{22} Hynes-Berry, 657.
\textsuperscript{23} Holford, 161.
“his arm & his schulderban” (633), and he falls King Elidan (Thurston) to the ground in jousting (673). The poet stresses that “no man of Yrland / miʒt stond a dint of his hand” (781-82) and at the end of the battle Horn has won Blavain (804), the sword of his father’s slayer. In KH Horn chivalrously offers the enemy knights a breathing space and only rises to righteous rage when informed that they are the same men who killed his father. The poem lacks the grim and distinctly Anglo-Saxon warrior ethos of the Auchinleck analogue.

The narrative stress on Horn’s lof and fighting prowess in HC also comes at the cost of what little courtliness remains in the abridged English texts from the French. Hynes-Berry calls the character development in KH “skimpy,”²⁴ but the poet attempts to give some limited shading to Horn’s personality beyond HC’s sole focus on the chopping of heads. In KH Horn repeatedly receives favor through his nobility by Saracens, Almair, and Rimenhild herself rather than through armed might. The king praises Horn’s nobility by joking that he will steal the heart of whatever woman his son woos (802-4), a courtly quality—along with the description of Horn’s good looks in childhood (10-16)—absent from HC. Horn gains admittance to Thurston’s court by being a “fair knight” (KH 784) rather than fighting his way in through Wales. Upon meeting the Irish king Horn and the princes “sette him a knewelyng” (KH 787), and Horn proves himself to Thurston with his charm rather than through jousting for eighteen days (HC 667). The delicate interplay and romance of the recognition scene in Suddene where Horn costumes himself as a minstrel

and riddles Rimenhild like a courtly Odysseus vanishes in HC to be replaced with yet another battle.

Whereas HC repeatedly stresses Horn’s warrior skills, KH creates an aura of aristocratic courtesy less vital to HC. Edward I has sometimes been called the English Justinian, yet his interest in administrative reform and the nurturing of parliamentary structures should not be seen as a sign of martial impotence. Though the battle was lost Edward fought well at Evesham at age 25 and he would be praised as “in armis strenuus” (“mighty in arms”). Edward was tall and imposing and was respected, if not loved. Neither he nor his father Henry III occasioned the insults of effeminacy and indecision Edward II would receive. Yet despite the incessant irritation of flare-ups in Wales and Scotland and the brief baronial revolt, Edward I grew up in and initially ruled in a period relatively untroubled by war; Henry named him after Edward the Confessor, a king remembered as pious but unsuccessful in battle. Again, a poet interested in an oblique royal portrait in KH might well have directed his attention towards other kingly attributes to praise in Horn. Edward was devoted to his wife to an extent unusual in the English monarchy and KH not surprisingly focuses on the heroic travails of Horn’s patient pursuit of Riminhild.

26 Prestwich, 178.
27 Prestwich, 29.
McKnight observes that the Horn story involves two intersecting narratives of Horn’s exile/return and his separation/reunion with Rimenhild.28 The weighting favors the courtly love story in KH to the point that the poet has “a strange reduplication”29 of Horn’s previous landing in Suddene, where Rimenhild again faces a coerced marriage and Horn takes a second disguise to deliver her. HC is very much about land, and Horn constantly receives land grants and bequests in each of the three kingdoms, so much so that Rimenhild’s importance diminishes. In KH proper marital love and kingship are mutually supportive, and Horn refuses to sleep with Rimenhild until he has attained his crown: “thanne schal Rymenhilde / ligge bi the kinge!” (KH 1189-90). HC states that “Horn brouȝt her to his bedde” (1112), preventing any such climactic connection.

Holford notes that

The ‘love’ and ‘war’ elements of the plot are, consequently, less well integrated than in the other versions. In King Horn, Horn looks at the ring which Rimmild has given him before defeating important adversaries; there are no such moments in Horn Child. Rather than marriage, the action of Horn Child is directed towards Horn’s recovery of his inheritance…30

Beowulf has no strong love interest, but by the English romance period it may not be coincidence that a poem like Gamelyn which lacks a marriage narrative also lacks aristocratic heroes. Havelock may push people into the mud but his marriage to Goldeboru thematically (and legally) connects him to the English crown. The HC Horn amasses vast land holdings, but the denouement seems more conducive to baronial than royal sentiments. KH inextricably links courtly love with kingly deportment, and when

“Rymenhild he makede his quene” (1533) the end of the poem quickly comes as Horn’s kingdom has been established in full.

Fundamentally, the HC Horn is a warrior and the KH Horn is already a king in childhood. The KH poet steadily depicts Horn with prescient leadership qualities befitting his inborn royalty. As the Saracens dispatch Horn, he enters the boat with twelve children who follow him as his *comitatus*, whereas HC has eight children (19) and lacks the episode. The numeration implies Christ and his disciples, particularly when Fickenhild later betrays him in the fashion of a Judas. Horn captains the marooned ship (122) and within a short space of 1545 lines he undertakes six sea journeys, returning to Rimenhild by boat on a Sunday at sunrise (974). Whereas the ocean panics the other children and drowns the messenger, “Horn’s control over the elemental power of the sea demonstrates his superiority.” The poet delicately depicts Horn’s aristocratic courtesy. Houlac (Almair) dubs Horn “& oper mani” (424) where in KH Horn receives grace to “do nu that thi wille is” (522) and dub them himself. As a subtle touch, in HC Horn attempts to return into the king’s favor after being lied about by Fickel with the gift of a hart, and is forced to leave when Houlac answers that “it is for nouzt” (559). In KH Horn receives a more compelling threat of execution but perhaps displays some injured pride in defiantly lacing his chainmail for battle (721).

Rimenhild’s role also has narrative and thematic implications. All we really know about her “is that she loves Horn,” though she has a passion and temper which reminds


32 Hynes-Berry, 653.
McKnight of Freyja. HC has a rougher edge and when Houlac (Almair) suspects Rimenhild of dallying with Horn “he bete hir so / pat sche gan blede” (499). Yet women play a more proactive role in HC than in KH. Rimenhild has a steadier disposition as she courts Horn and then gives him a sword and a hue-changing ring, explaining its function (571-6). Elidan’s (Thurston’s) daughter Acula has medical abilities and “of woundes was sche sleiȝe” (HC 761), just as in Bevis of Hampton the assertive Josian has healing skills after Bevis faces similar injuries in battle.

In KH, despite Rimenhild’s passionate ire against Athelbruce, she is in the wrong. The good steward, a rarity in medieval romance, rightly worries that “ye wolden pleie / bitwex yo selve tweie” (349-50) and risk Almair’s wrath. From then on Rimenhild does little more than “wexe wild” as she awaits Horn’s return, threatening to slay her coerced husband “and hureselve bothe” (1210). The effect enhances Horn’s kingly dominance through her passivity. Much as feminist critiques of courtly love have argued, while the more genteel KH elevates Horn’s devotion to Rimenhild to be coequal to kingship, her actions ironically are restricted in comparison to the more Germanic HC, where Rimenhild is a lesser objective for Horn but retains more actual agency. To make a further speculation, both Henry III’s and Edward I’s foreign spouses were devoted wives but disliked by the English for their French ambitions and followers. Henry’s wife Eleanor of Provence was pelted with vegetables and debris by a London mob as she rode.

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33 McKnight, 228.

34 Millet charges that “both the courtly and the romantic versions of love are ‘grants’ which the male concedes out of his total power. Both have had the effect of obscuring the patriarchal character of Western culture and in their general tendency to attribute impossible virtues to women, have ended by confirming them in a narrow and often remarkably conscribing sphere of behavior.” Kate Millet, Sexual Politics (1969) (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 37.
on a royal barge in 1263,\textsuperscript{35} and Edward’s wife endured similar xenophobia. A poem in which Horn’s queen seems to be “tamed” into obedience might have had particular appeal to an English audience.

What might Chaucer have made of the Horn story? He certainly knew of it or read it as he mentions “Horn child” as one of the “romances of prys” (897) in \textit{Sir Thopas}. He may have seen HC, uniquely in Auchenleck, or read or heard other versions. Yet the work seems to have had little impression on \textit{Thopas}, and Charbonneau finds only minor and tenuous textual connections—with Thopas “whit was his face as payndemayn / his lippes rede as rose” (725-6) and with Horn “whit so the flur / rose red was his colur” (15-16)\textsuperscript{36}—and these lines come from KH. Chaucer might have taken less interest in a Northern romance simplistic enough to be boiled down into a ballad, which it would be later in the form of “Hind Horn.” Chaucer likely would have enjoyed the defter touch of KH with its finer, courtlier rendering of the hero and the longer and more elegant HR even more so.

Yet King Horn has its own political subthemes relevant to its time period overlaid on its entertaining narrative. Working from possible Norse or French analogues of the story, the Auchenleck \textit{Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild} depicts a heroic Germanic warrior who ably fights for \textit{lof}, land, and Rimenhild, in that order of priority. KH has a more aristocratic atmosphere which prioritizes Horn’s noble fairness, his courtly love toward Rimenhild, and his kingly leadership. Though Havelock is slightly earthier and

\textsuperscript{35} Prestwich, 112.

more passive, both characters display the sort of regal character and charisma appropriate
to a king. Possibly both poets gently allude to Edward I in this portrait, a charismatic king
who combined an able and intelligent hand at administration with a firm personal will,
and whose wife enjoyed and patronized romances. Edward, had he ever heard of *King
Horn*, might have found the tale pleasing, particularly in his latter days of declining
popularity when Eleanor was deceased and Horn’s happy ending was eluding him.

37 Prestwich notes that Eleanor was a cultured women who owned a library of romances, and “some
Arthurian works were dedicated to her” (137), though probably none in English.
CHAPTER 9

Sir Degare

Sir Degare is well-preserved in six manuscripts: Auchinleck (c. 1330), British Library MS Egerton 2862 (c. 1400), Cambridge University Library MS Ff. 2.38 (c. 1450), Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson Poetry 34 (c. 1450), Bodleian Library MS Douce 261 (dated 1561), and British Library Add. MS 27879 (dated 1650). There are also several sixteenth-century print editions. I take as my text source Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds. Sir Degaré. The Middle English Breton Lays. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995. http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/degarfrm.htm. Laskaya et al. chiefly use Auchinleck as a base text and use Cambridge to supply the missing ending. Among the few modern editions is Walter Hoyt French & Charles Brockway Hale, eds., Middle English Metrical Romances (1930).

| Lysteneth, lordinges, gente and fre,   | Listen, lordinges, noble and generous,   |
| Ich wille you telle of Sire Degarre:  | And I will tell you about Sir Degare.    |
| Knightes that were sometyne in londe | There were once in this land knights,    |
| Ferli fele wolde fonde                 | A wondrous number, who would             |
| And sechen aventures bi night and dai,| By day and night seek out adventures     |
| Hou thi mighte here strengthe asai;    | To see how they might test their valor.  |
| So dede a knyght, Sire Degarree:      | So did one knight, Sir Degare.           |
| Ich wille you telle wat man was he.    | I will tell you what kind of man he was.|
| In Litel Bretaygne was a kyng          | In Brittany there was a king¹         |
| Of gret poer in all thing,             | With great might in all things,         |
| Stif in armes under sscheld,           | Stout in arms wielded under his shield,|
| And mochel idouted in the feld.        | And greatly feared on the field.        |
| Ther nas no man, verraiment,           | There was no man, truly,                |
| That mighte in werre ne in tornament,  | Who faced him in war or tournament      |
| Ne in justes for no thing,             | Or in jousts who might by any means     |
| Him out of his sadel bring,            | Force him out of his saddle             |

¹Litel Bretaygne: This may either refer to ‘Little Britain’—Brittany, or more specifically the northwest tip between Brest and Quimper. There are few other placename clues, and the poet may simply be giving the lay a suitably mythical Celtic setting.
Ne out of his stirop bringe his fot,
So strong he was of bon and blod.
This Kyng he hadde none hair
But a maidenchild, fre and fair;
Here gentiresse and here beauté
Was moche renound in ich countré.
This maiden he loved als his lif,
In travailing here lif she les.
And tho the maiden of age wes
Kynges sones to him speke,
Emperours and Dukes eke,
To haven his doughter in mariage,
For love of here heritage;
Ac the Kyng answered ever
That no man sschal here halden ever
But yif he mai in turneying
And maken him lesen hise stiropes bayne.
Many assayed and myght not gayne.
That ryche Kynge every yere wolde
A solempne feste make and holde
On hys wyvys mynnyng day,
That was beryed in an abbay
In a foreste there besyde.
With grete meyné he wolde ryde,
And mani knyghtes bi his side,
His doughter also bi him rod.
Amidde the forest hii abod.
Here chaumberleyn she clëpede hire to
And other dammaineles two
And seide that hii moste alighte
To don here nedes and hire righte;
Thai alight adoun alle thre,
Twee dammaineles and ssche,
And longe while ther abiden,
Til al the folk was forth iriden.
Thai wolden up and after wolde,
And couthen nowt here way holde.
The wode was rough and thikke, iwis,
And thai token the wai amys.

Or bring his feet out of his stirrups,
So strong was he in body and blood.
This king had no heir,
Other than a young maiden, noble and fair.
Her courtliness and her beauty
Were renowned in every land.
He loved this maiden as much as his life.
The queen, his wife, had died having her;
She had lost her life in childbirth.
And when the maiden was of age,
The sons of kings asked him,
Emperors and dukes as well,
To have his daughter in marriage,
For the love of their heritage.
But the king always answered
That no man should ever have her
Unless he could throw him
Out of his saddle in tourneying,
And make him lose both his stirrups.
Many tried and did not succeed.
Every year that noble king would
Proclaim and hold a magnificent feast
On the memorial day of his wife,²
Who was buried in an abbey
In a forest nearby.
With a great company he would ride
And perform a dirge and mass as well,
Feed the poor and clothe the naked,
Bring offerings, in great plenty,
And support the convent with lavish gifts.
As he came riding toward the abbey,
With many knights by his side,
His daughter also rode with him
As they journeyed in the forest.
She called her chamberlain to her,
And two other maidens,
And said that they must dismount
To relieve themselves as their natural right.³
All three of them dismounted,
The two damsels and her,
And paused there a long while
Until all the company had ridden past.
They wanted to mount and ride after them,
But could not find their way.
These woods were rough and thick, I know,
And they took the wrong way.

² *Mynnyng day*: A ‘minding day’ was a day “set apart for prayers and penances for the soul of a dead person” (French & Hale 289, quoted in TEAMS). As in many of these romances, building a religious house for prayers for the dead was common among the nobility. W.H. French and C. B. Hale, ed., *The Middle English Metrical Romances* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964).

³ *To don here nedes and hire righte*: the poet considers answering nature’s call “a natural right” (TEAMS).
Thai moste souht and riden west
Into the thikke of the forest.
Into a launde hii ben icome,
And habbeth wel undermine
That thai were amis igon.
Thai light adoun everichon
And cleped and criede al ifere,
Ac no man aright hem ihere.
Thai nist what hem was best to don;
The weder was hot bifor the non;
Hii leien hem doun upon a grene,
Under a chastein tre, ich wene,
And fillen aslepe everichone
Bote th
The damaisele alone.
She wente aboute and gaderede floures,
And herknede song of wilde foules.
So fer in the launde she goht, iwis,
That she ne wot nevere whare se is.
To hire maidenes she wolde anon.
Ac hi ne wiste never wat wei to gon.
Whenne hi wende best
to hem terne,
Aweiward than hi goth wel yerne.
―Allas!‖ hi seide, ―that I was boren!
Now ich wot ich am forloren!
Wilde bestes me willeth togrinde
Or ani man me sschulle finde!‖
Than segh hi swich a sight:
Toward hire comen a knight,
Gentil, yong, and jolif man;
A robe of scarlet he hadde upon;
His visage was feir, his bodi ech weies;
Of countenaunce right curteis;
Wel farende legges, fot, and honde:
Ther nas non in al the Kynges londe
More apert man than was he.
―Damaisele, welcome mote thou be!
Be thou afered of none wihghte:
Ich am comen here a fairi knyghte;
Mi kynde is armes for to were,
On horse to ride with scheld and spere;
Forthi afered be thou nowt:
I ne have nowt but mi swerd ibrout.
Ich have iloved the mani a yer,
And now we beth us selve her,
Thou best mi lemmar ar thou go,
Wether the liketh wel or wo.”
Tho nothing ne coude do she
But wep and criede and wolde fle;
They should have gone south but rode west,
Into the thick of the forest.
They came into a land
And saw clearly
That they had gone astray.
Each of them dismounted
And called and cried together,
But no man heard them well enough.
They did not know what was best to do.
The weather was hot before noon.
They laid themselves down on a green,
Under a chestnut tree, as I know. 4
And everyone fell asleep
Except for the princess alone.
She walked about and gathered flowers
And listened to the songs of wild birds.
She strayed so far in the land, indeed,
That she did not know where she was.
She wanted to go back at once to her ladies,
But she did not know which way to walk.
Wherever she thought it best to turn,
In her hurrying she ended up further away.
―Alas,‖ she said, ―that I was ever born!
Now I know that I am lost!
Wild beasts will grind me up
Before any man will find me!‖
Then she saw such a sight.
Toward her came a knight,
A graceful, young, and handsome man,
With a robe of scarlet upon him.
His face and body were fair in every way,
And his appearance was perfectly noble,
With well-shaped legs, feet, and hands.
There was no one in all the king’s land
Who was more chivalrous than he was.
―Lady, may you be welcome!
Do not be afraid of any man.
I have come here as a fairy knight.
Our nature is to wear arms,
And to ride on horse with shield and spear,
And so do not be afraid!
I have brought nothing but my sword.
I have loved you for many a year,
And now we are here by ourselves.
You will be my lover before you go,
Whether you like it or not.”
There was nothing she could do
But cry and shout and try to flee,

4 Chastein tre: TEAMS points out that chestnut trees not only represent Christian chastity but serve as a medial point between reality and fairy otherworlds. Like Queen Herodis in Sir Orfeo, the maidens fall asleep, but here the princess does not.
And he anon gan hire at holde,
And dide his wille, what he wolde.
He binam hire here maidenholde,
And setththen up toforen hire stod.
“Lemman,” he seide, “gent and fre,
Mid schilde I wot that thou schalt be;
Siker ich wot hit worht a knave;
Forthi mi swerd thou sschalt have,
And whenne that he is of elde
That he mai himself biwelde,
Tak him the swerd, and bidde him fonde
to seech en his fader in eche londe.
The swerd his god and avenaunt:
Lo, as I faugt with a geaunt,
I brak the point in his hed;
And siththen, when that he was ded,
I tok hit out and have hit er,
Redi in min aumener.
Yit paraventure time bith
That mi sone mete me with:
Be mi swerd I mai him kenne.
Have god dai! I mot gon henne.”
Thi knight passede as he cam.
Al wepende the swerd she nam,
And com hom sore sikend,
And fond here maidenes al slepend.
The swerd she hidde als she mighte,
And awaked hem in highte,
And doht hem to horse anon,
And gonne to ride everichon.
Thanne seghen hi ate last
Tweie squiers come prikend fast.
Fram the Kyng thai weren isent,
To white whider his doughter went.
Thai browt hire into the righte wai
And comen faire to the abbay,
And doth the servise in alle thingges,
Mani masse and riche offringes;
And whanne the servise was al idone
And ipassed over the none,
The Kyng to his castel gan ride;
His doughter rod bi his side.
And he yemeth his kyngdom overal
Stoutliche, as a god king sshal.
Ac whan ech man was glad an blithe,
His doughter siked an sorewed swithe;
But he seized her at once
And did his will as he desired.5
He took away her maidenhead,
And soon after stood over her.
“Lover,” he said, “noble and free,
I know that you will be with child,
And know for sure it will be a boy.
For this you shall take my sword.
And when he is of age,
So that he may protect himself,
Give him the sword, and tell him to try
To seek his father in every land.
The sword is firm and powerful.
Listen to me; as I fought with a giant,
I broke the point in his head.
And later, when he was dead,
I took it out and have it here,
Ready in my pouch.
If by chance the time comes
That my son meets with me,
I will know him by my sword.
Good day to you! I must go on.”
The knight disappeared, just as he came.
All in tears, she took the sword,
And came back sighing bitterly
And found her maidens all sleeping.
She hid the sword as best she could,
And awakened them in haste,
And ordered them to their horses at once
And for everyone to ride.
Then at last she saw
Two squires coming, riding swiftly.
They were sent from the king
To find out where his daughter went.
They showed her the right way
And they came pleasantly to the abbey.
They did every part of the service,
With many masses and rich offerings.
And when the ceremony was all done,
And the afternoon was past,
The king rode back to the castle,
And his daughter rode by his side,
And he ruled over all his kingdom,
Stoutly, as a good king does.
But when each man was glad and at ease,
His daughter sickened and grieved sorely.

5 In *Sir Orfeo* the queen is abducted by the fairy king, but here the princess is raped. TEAMS notes that actual sexual assault is rare in medieval romance, and notes the connection to the Wife of Bath’s tale. Loomis states that no other analogue of the Loathly Lady story has a rape incident and posits that Chaucer might have been reminded of Degare. Laura Hibbard Loomis, “Chaucer and the Breton Lays of the Auchinleck,” *Studies in Philology* 38:1 (1941): 30-1.
Here wombe greted more and more; 
While she could, she hid herself miserably. 
On a dai, as hi wepende set, 
One day as she sat weeping, 
On of hire maidenes hit underyet. 
One of her maidens noticed it. 
“Madame,” she seide, “par charité, 
“Madam,” she said, “for charity’s sake, 
Whi wepe ye now, telleth hit me.” 
Why are you crying now, tell me.” 
“A! gentil maiden, kinde icoren, 
“Oh, gentle maiden, chosen one, 
Help me, other ich am forloren! 
Help me, for otherwise I am lost. 
Ich have ever yete ben meke and milde: 
I have always been obedient and mild. 
Lo, now ich am with quike schilde! 
Listen, now I am with a living child! 
Yif ani man hit underyete, 
If anyone realized it, 
Men wolde sai bi sti and strete 
Had me near some sty or back alley,6 
That mi fader the King hit wan 
For I was never intimate with a man! 
And yif he hit himselve wite, 
And if he himself learns of it, 
Swich sorewe schal to him smite 
It will strike his heart with such sorrow 
That never blithe schal he be, 
That he will never be happy again, 
For all his joy is in me,” 
For all his joy is in me.” 
And tolde here al togeder ther 
And she told her there in full 
Hou hit was bigete and wher. 
How the child was fathered and where. 
‖Madame,” quad the maide, “ne care th 
“Madam,” said the maid, “don’t be anxious. 
ou nowt: 
It will be taken quietly away.7 
Stille awai hit sschal be browt. 
It will be taken quietly away. 
No man schal wite in Godes riche 
No man in God’s realm will know 
Whar hit bicometh, but thou and iche. 
Where it went but you and I.” 
Her time come, she was unbounde, 
Her time came and she was unburdened 
And delivred al mid sounde; 
And delivered, all in sound health. 
A knaveschild ther was ibore: 
A boy was born there; 
Glad was the moder tharfore. 
The maiden servede here at wille, 
The mother was glad for it. 
Wond that child in clothes stille, 
Silently wrapped the child in clothes, 
And laid hit in a cradel anon, 
And laid it at once in a cradle, 
And was al prest tharwith to gon. 
And was all ready to leave. 
Yhit is moder was him hold: 
Yet his mother was faithful to him. 
Four pound she tok of gold, 
She took four pounds of gold, 
And ten of selver also; 
And ten of silver as well; 
Under his fote she laid hit tho, - 
And she laid it under his feet 
For swich thing hit mighte hove; 
For such things as it might help with. 
And setthen she tok a paire glove 
And then she took a pair of gloves 
That here lemmen here sente of fairi londe, 
Which her lover had sent her from fairyland 
That nobde on no manne honde, 
And would not fit any man’s hand, 
Ne on child ne on womman yhe nobde, 
Nor on any child or a woman,

6 Bi sti and strete: MED defines sti as a pigsty but also as a place of degradation. But compare MS Digby No. 86 “Love is sofft, love is swet, love is goed”: “Love hath his stivart [steward] by sti and by strete.” The poet may intend some irony in that Degare later does marry his mother, though without knowledge or consummation.

7 John Boswell, in The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), states that child abandonment for economic or social reasons was endemic in the ancient and medieval world and may have been as high as 20-40% of all live births in some periods. Babies were abandoned to religious houses and often took church positions or became servants to nobility, although many landed in brothels. The maid seems suspiciously knowledgeable about how to discreetly deal with just such a situation.
But on hire selve wel yhe wolde.
Tho gloven she put under his hade,
And siththen a letter she wrot and made,
And knit hit with a selkene thred
Aboute his nekke wel god sped
That who hit founde sscholde iwite.
Than was in the lettre thoues iwrite:
"Par charité, yif ani god man
This helples child finde can,
Lat cristen hit with prestes honde,
And bringgen hit to live in londe,
For hit is comen of gentil blod.
Helpeth hit with his owen god,
With tresor that under his fet lis;
And ten yer eld whan that he his,
Taketh him this ilke gloven two,
And biddeth him, wharevere he go,
That he ne lovie no womman in lon
But this gloves willen on hire honde;
For siker on honde nelle thai nere
But on his moder that him bere."
The maiden tok the child here mide,
Stille awai in aven tide,
Alle the winteres longe night.
The weder was cler, the mone light;
Than warhth she war anon
Of an hermitage in a ston:
An holi man had ther his woniyng.
Thider she wente on heying,
An sette the cradel at his dore,
And durste abide no lengore,
And passede forth anon right.
Hom she com in that other night,
And fond the levedi al drupni,
Sore wepinde, and was sori,
And tolde hire al togeder ther
Hou she had iben and wher.
The hermite aros erliche tho,
And his knave was uppe also,
An seide ifere here matines,
And servede God and Hise seins.
The litel child thai herde crie,
And clepede after help on hie;
The holi man his dore undede,
And fond the cradel in the stede;
He tok up the clothes anon
And biheld the litel grom;
He tok the letter and radde wel sone
That tolde him that he scholde done.
The heremite held up bothe his honde

Except for herself, as she knew well.
She put the gloves under his head,
And then she wrote out a letter,
And tied it with a silk thread
About his neck for God’s blessing
That whoever found it would see
What was thus written in the letter:
For charity’s sake, if any good man
Can save this helpless child,
Let him be christened by a priest’s hand,
And raise him to live in the land,
For he has come from noble blood.
Help him using his own goods,
With the treasure that lies under his feet.
And when he is ten years old,
Give him these two gloves here
And instruct him, wherever he goes,
Not to love any woman in the land
Unless these gloves will go on her hands.
For certain, they will never fit any hand
Except his mother who bore him.
The maid took the child with her
And stole away in the evening,
All the long winter’s night.
The weather was clear, the moon was bright.
Soon she was aware
Of a hermitage in a cliffside
Where a holy man had his dwelling.
She went there in haste
And set the cradle at his door,
Not daring not wait any longer,
And passed on right away.
She came home the next day
And found the lady all despondent,
Weeping bitterly and full of regret.
She told her in full there
How she had fared and where she had been.
The hermit rose early,
And his servant was up as well,
And they said their matins together
And worshipped God and His saints.
They heard the little child crying
And called for help in haste.
The holy man unfastened his door
And found the cradle on the step.
He lifted up the clothes at once
And saw the little boy.
He took and quickly read the letter
Which told him what he should do.
The hermit held up both his hands

8 On hie: Or, possibly “They called for help from on high.”

523
An thonked God of al His sonde,
And bar that child in to his chapel,
And for joie he rong his bel.
He dede up the gloven and the tresour
And cristned the child with gret honour:
In the name of the Trinité,
He hit nemnede Degarre,
Degarre nowt elles ne is
But thing that not never what hit is,
Other thing that is neggh forlorn also;
Forthi the schild he nemnede thoues tho.
The heremite that was holi of lif
Hadde a soster that was a wif;
A riche marchaunt of that countré
Hadde hire ispoused into that cité.
To hire t
He hit wolde tech of clergise.
The litel child Degarre
Was ibrout into that cité.
The wif and hire loverd ifere
Kept his ase hit here owen were.
By that hit was ten yer old,
He taughte him of clerkes lore
Other ten wynter othe
r more;
And when he was of twenti yer,
Staleworth he was, of swich pouser
That ther ne wan man in that lond
That o breid him might astond.
Tho the hermite seth, withouten les,
Man for himself that he wes,

And thanked God for all His blessings,
And carried the child into his chapel,
And rang his bell for joy.
He put away the gloves and the treasure
And baptized the child with great honor.
In the name of the Trinity,
He named it Degare.
Degare meant nothing else
But something that is unknown,
A thing that was almost lost.\(^9\)
For this the child was named so.
The hermit, who led a holy life,
Had a sister who was a wife.
A rich merchant of that land
Had married her in the city.
He sent the child to her,
And the silver as well, by his servant,
And asked her to take good care
To foster and raise him,
And if God Almighty would
Give him ten years of life,
She should arrange for him to return,
And he would teach him the clergy.
The little child Degare
Was brought into the city.
The wife and her husband together
Kept him as if he were their own.
By the time he was ten years old,
He was a fair and spirited child,
Well-raised, kind, and courteous.
There was no one better in all the area.
He fully thought that the good man
Was his father who had begotten him,
And the woman his mother also,
And the hermit his uncle as well.
And when the tenth year had past,
He was sent to the hermitage.
The hermit was glad to see him,
For he was so fair and so noble.
He taught him the lore of clerics\(^10\)
For another ten years or more.
And when he was in his twentieth year,
He was sturdy and of such might
That there was no man in the land
Who could stand one blow from him.
Then the hermit said, without a lie,
That he was ready to be his own man,

---

\(^9\) French égaré has the meaning of misplaced or strayed, and TEAMS gives the meaning of Degarre as “almost lost.”

\(^10\) Clerkes lore: Degare is receiving a Latin education. He is evidently not being groomed for priestly vows but for a lay position.
Staleworht to don ech werk,
And of his elde so god a clerk,
He tok him his florines and his gloves
That he had kept to hise bihoves.
Ac the ten pound of starlings
Were ispended in his fostrings.
He tok him the letter to rede,
And biheld al the dede.
“O leve hem, par charité,
Was this letter mad for me?”
“Ye, bi oure Lord, us helpe sschal!"  
Thus hit was,‖ and told him al.
He kneled adoun al so swithe,
And thonked the ermite of his live,
And swor he nolde stinte no stounde
Til he his kinrede hadde ifounde.
For in the lettre was thous iwrite,
That bi th e gloven he sscholde iwite
Wich were his moder and who,
Yhif that sche livede tho,
For on hire honden hii wolde,
And on non other hii nolde.
Half the florines he gaf the hermite,
And halvendel he tok him mide,
And nam his leve an wolde go.
“Nai,” seide the hermite, “schaltu no!
To seche thi ken mightou nowt dure
Withouten hors and god armure.”
“Nai,” quad he, “bi Hevene Kyng,
Ich wil have first another thing!”
He hew adoun, bothe gret and grim,
To beren in his hond with him,
A god sapling of an ok;
Whan he tharwith gaf a strok,
Ne wer he never so strong a man
Ne so gode armes hadde upon,
That he ne scholde falle to gronde;
Swich a bourdon to him he founde.
Tho thenne God he him bitawt,
And aither fram other wepyng rawt.
Child Degarre wente his wai
Thourgh the forest al that dai.
No man he ne herd, ne non he segh,
Til hit was non ipassed hegh;
Thanne he herde a noize kete
To do all his work with steadfastness,
And for his age a fine clerk.
He gave him his gold coins and gloves
That he had kept to fulfill his needs,
Except for the ten pounds of silver,
Which were spent in raising him.
He gave him the letter to read,
And watched all that happened.
“Oh, dear uncle, for charity’s sake,
Was this letter written for me?”
“Yes, by our Lord, our help,
So it was,” and he told him everything.
The youth knelt down as quickly
And thanked the hermit for his life,
And swore he would not lose a moment
Until he had found his kin.
For in the letter it was so written
That by the gloves he would know
Who his mother was,
If she were still alive,
For they would fit on her hands
And would go on no other’s.
He gave the hermit half the gold
And took the other half with him,
And made his goodbye and readied to go.
“No,” said the hermit, “you must not.
Your search for your kin will not last
Without a horse and strong armor.”
“No,” he replied, “by Heaven’s king,
I will first have other assistance.”
He chopped down a stout oak sapling,
Both huge and forbidding,
To carry in his hand with him.
When he gave a blow with it
There would be no strong man
Wearing fine arms upon himself
Who would not fall to the ground.
He found for himself such an aid.
Then he commended the hermit to God
And each left the other, weeping.
Child Degare made his way
Through the forest all that day.
He heard no man, nor did he see anyone
Until it was well into the afternoon.
Then he heard a loud noise

11 Florines: Florins were gold coins first minted in Florence in 1252, and issued in England only once by Edward III in 1344. Several European countries had their own florins but not France.

12 Degare declines a knight’s gear in favor of an oak club as a sign of humility, as does Havelock, who fights with a door bar. TEAMS also gives Ferguson’s note that oaks had significance both as objects of worship in the pagan Celtic world and as Christian symbols of faith and virtue. George Ferguson, Signs & Symbols in Christian Art (London: Zwemmer, 1955). See also the note to line 371.
In o valai, an dintes grete.
Blive thider he gan to te:
What hit ware he wolde ise.
An Herl of the countré, stout and fers,
With a knight and four squiers,
Hadde shon a der other two,
And al here houndes weren ago.
Than was thar a dragon grim,
Ful of filth and of venim,
With wide throte and teth grete,
And wynges bitere with to bete.
As a lyoun he hadde fet,
And his tail was long and gret.
The smoke com of his nose awai
As se fer out of a chimenai.
The knyght and squiers he had torent,
Man and hors to dethe chent.
The dragon the Erl assaile gan,
And he defended him as a man,
And stoutliche leid on with his swerd,
And stronge strokes on him gerd;
Ac alle his dentes ne greved him nowt:
His hide was hard so iren wrout.
Therl flei fram tre to tre
- Fein he wolde fram him be
- And the dragon him gan asail;
The doughti Erl in that batail
Ofsegh this child Degarre;
―Ha! help!‖ he seide, ―par charité!‖
The dragoun seth the child com;
He laft the Erl and to him nom
Blowinde and yeniend also
Als he him wolde swolewe tho.
Ac Degarre was ful strong:
He tok his bat, gret and long,
And in the forehefd he him batereth
That al the forehefd he tospatereth.
He fil adoun anon right,
And frapte his tail with gret might
Upon Degarres side,
That up-so-doun he gan to glide;
Ac he stert up ase a man
And with his bat leide upan,
And al totrust him ech a bon,
That he lai ded, stille as a ston.
Therl knelede adoun bilive
And thonked the child of his live,
In a valley and a great clashing.
He hurried that way swiftfly,
Wanting to see what it was.
An earl of the countryside, hardy and fierce,
With a knight and four squires,
Had hunted a deer or two,
And all their hounds were gone.
A fearsome dragon had appeared,
Full of filth and venom,
With a wide throat and great teeth,
And wings to beat cruelly with.
He had feet like a lion,
And his tail was long and massive.
The smoke came from his nose
Like a fire out of a chimney.
He had torn apart the knight and squires
And sent man and horse to their deaths.
The earl began to face the dragon,
And he defended himself as a man,
And laid on stoutly with his sword,
And struck him with harsh blows.
But all his strokes gave him no harm.
His hide was as tough as wrought iron.
The earl fled from tree to tree,
Wanting only to escape from him,
But the dragon began to attack him.
In that battle the hardy earl
Saw Child Degare, and shouted,
“Hey! Help! For charity’s sake!”
The dragon saw Degare coming.
He left the earl and turned to him,
Blowing and gaping as well, 13
Wishing to swallow him there.
But Degare was very powerful.
He took his club, great and long,
And battered him on the forehead
So that he shattered his skull.
The dragon fell down at once
And slapped his tail with great force
Upon Degare’s side,
So that he was thrown upside down.
But Degare leaped up like a man
And laid on with his club,
And crushed each bone of his
So that he lay dead, as still as a stone.
The earl knelt down humbly
And thanked the youth for his life.

13 Yeniend: Yawning, not in boredom but in stretching his mouth to swallow Degare. TEAMS cites French & Hale, who state that “monsters usually could not be injured with manmade weapons; they had to be fought with their own (see also the sword in Beowulf) or with primitive things like the club here, or even with bare hands” (299). Degare’s choice of an oak is providential.
And maked him with him gon
to his castel right anon,
And wel at hese he him made,
And proferd him al that he hade,
Rentes, tresor, an eke lond,
For to holden in his hond.
Thanne answerede Degarre,
―Lat come forst bifor me
Thi levedi and other wimmen bold,
Maidenes and widues, yonge and olde,
And other damoiseles swete.
Yif mine gloven beth to hem mete
For to done upon here honde,
Thanne ich wil take thi londe;
And yif thai ben nowt so,
Iich wille take me leve
and go.‖
Alle wimman were forht ibrowt
In wide cuntries and forth isowt:
Ech the gloven assaie bigan,
Ac non ne mighte don hem on.
He tok his gloven and up hem dede,
And nam his leve in that stede.
The Erl was gentil man of blod,
And gaf him a stede fu
And noble armure, riche and fin,
When he wolde armen him therin,
And a palefrai to riden an,
And a knave to ben his man,
And yaf him a swerd bright,
And dubbed him ther to knyght,
And swor bi God Almighty
That he was better worthi
To usen hors and armes also
Than with his bat aboute to go.
Sire Degarre was wel blithe,
And thanked the Erl mani a sithe,
And lep upon hiis palefrai,
And doht him forth in his wai;
Upon his stede righte his man,
And ledde his armes als he wel can;
Mani a jorné thai ride and sette.
So on a dai gret folk thei mette,
Erles and barouns of renoun,
That come fram a cité toun.
He asked a seriaunt what tiding,
And whennes hii come and what is this thing?
―Sire,‖ he seide, ―verraiment,
We come framward a parlement.

And had him go with him
to his castle straightaway,
And made him well at ease.
He offered him all that he had,
Incomes, treasures, and lands as well,
To hold in his hand.
Degare answered then,
―First let your lady come before me,
With other noble women,
Maidens and widows, young and old,
And other sweet damsels.
If my glove is proper
To fit on their hands,
Then I will accept your lands.
And if it is not so,
I will take my leave and go.‖
All the women were brought forth,
Sought from lands far and wide.
Each attempted to try on the gloves,
But none could put them on.
He took his gloves and put them away
And made his goodbye in that hall.
The earl was a well-bred man of courtesy,
And gave him a very fine steed
And noble armor, rich and strong,
For when he wished to arm himself,
And a palfrey to ride on,
And a servant to be his man.
He gave him a shining sword,
And dubbed him a knight there,
And swore by God Almighty
That he was far more worthy
To have a horse and arms as well
Than to walk about with his club. 14
Sire Degare was well pleased,
And thanked the earl many times.
He leaped upon his palfrey
And went forth on his way.
His squire rode upon his steed,
And carried his arms as he knew well to.
They rode and set upon many a journey.
One day they met a great crowd,
With earls and barons of renown,
Who came from a fortress city.
He asked an officer for news, where
They came from, and what was happening.
―Sir,‖ he said, ―in truth,
We are returning from a parliament.

14 Go: go in romance often has the modern nuance of general action, but here the regular ME meaning walk is likely intended. Compare Chaucer’s plea “go, litel bok, go” (Troilus V.1786). For general go OE also had wendan, indirectly leading to PDE past simple went.
| 440 | The King a grete counseil made  
For nedes that he to don hade,  
Whan the parlement was plener,  
He lette crie fer and ner,  
Yif ani man were of armes so bold  
That with the King justi wold,  
His dowter and his heritage,  
That is kingdom god and fair,  
For he had non other hair.  
Ac no man ne dar graunte therto,  
For mani hit assaieth and mai nowt do,  
Mani erl and mani baroun,  
Knightes and squiers of renoun;  
Ac ech man, that him justeth with,  
Hath of him a foul despit:  
Some he breketh the nekke anon,  
And of some the rig-bon;  
Some thourgh the bodi he girt,  
Ech is maimed or hurt;  
Ac no man mai don him no thing  
Swich wonder chaunce hath the King.  
Sire Degarre thous thenche gan:  
―Ich am a staleworht man,  
And of min owen ich have a stede,  
Swerd and spere and riche wede;  
And yif ich felle the Kyng adoun,  
Evere ich have wonnen renoun;  
And thei that he me herte sore,  
No man wot wer ich was boren.  
Whether deth other lif me bitide,  
I will ride against the king!‖  
In the cité his in he taketh,  
And resteth him and meri maketh.  
On a dai with the King he mette,  
And kneled adoun and him grette:  
“Sire King,” he saide, “of muchel might,  
Mi loverd me sende hider anong right  
For to warne you that he  
Bi thi leve wolde juste with the,  
And winne thi dower, yif he mai;  
As the cri was this ender dai,  
Justes he had to the inome.”  
“De par Deus!” quath the King, “he is welcome.  
Be he baroun, be he erl,  
Be he burges, be he cherl,  
No man wil I forsake.  
He that winneth al sschal take.”  
Amorewe the justes was iset;  
The King him purveyd wel the bet,  
And Degarre ne knew no man,  
Ac al his trust is God upon.  
Erliche to churche than wente he;  
The masse he herde of the Trinité.
| 450 |  
| 460 |  
| 470 |  
| 480 |  

The king called a great council  
For needs he had to fulfill.  
When the assembly was in full session,  
He had it proclaimed, near and far,  
That if any man were so bold in arms  
That he would joust with the king,  
He would have his daughter  
In marriage, his heritage,  
And his kingdom, fair and clear,  
For he has no other heir.  
But no man dared accept the challenge,  
For many have tried and could not do it,  
Many earls and many barons,  
And knights and squires of renown.  
But each man who jousted with him  
Has quickly been disgraced by him.  
With some he broke their neck at once,  
And some their back-bone.  
Some he thrusts through their body.  
Each is maimed or hurt.  
But the king has such miraculous fortune  
That no man can do him any harm.”  
Sir Degare began to think to himself,  
“I am a sturdy man,  
And I have a steed of my own,  
Sword and spear, and rich armor.  
And if I take down the king,  
I will have won fame for ever.  
And if he hurts me badly,  
No man knows where I was born.  
Whether life or death awaits me,  
I will ride against the king!”  
He took lodging in the town  
And rested and amused himself.  
One day he met with the king,  
And knelt down and greeted him.  
“Sire king,” he said, “of great might,  
My lord has sent me here directly  
To notify you that, with your permission,  
He wishes to joust with you,  
In answer to the call the other day,  
He will prepare to joust with you.”  
“By God,” exclaimed the king, “he is welcome!  
Whether he is a baron or earl,  
Or townsman or peasant,  
I will overlook no man.  
He that wins shall take all.”  
The joust was set for the morning.  
The king outfitted himself in the best manner  
While Degarre had no man’s support;  
But all his trust was in God.  
He went early to church  
And heard the mass of the Trinity.
To the Fader he offerth hon florine,
And to the Sone another al so fine,
And to the Holi Gost the thri
dde;
The prest for him ful yerne gan bidde.
And tho the servise was idon,
To his in he wente wel son
And let him armi wel afin,
In god armes to justi in.
His gode stede he gan bistride;
His squier bar his sschaft biside;
In the feld the King he abide gan,
As he com ridend with mani a man,
Stoutliche out of the cité toun,
With mani a lord of gret renoun;
Ac al that in the felde beth
That the justes iseth
Seide that hi never yit iseghe
So pert a man with here egye
As was this gentil Degarre,
But no man wiste
whennes was he.
Bothe thai gonne to justi than,
Ac Degarre can nowt theron.
The King hath the gretter schaft
And kan inowgh of the craft.
To breke his nekke he had iment:
In the helm he set his dent,
That the schaft al tosprong;
Ac Degare was so strong
That in the sadel stille he set,
And in the stiropes held his fet;
For sothe I seie, withoute lesing,
He ne couthe nammore of justing.
―Allas!‖ quath the King, ―allas!
He taketh a wel gretter tre
And swor so he moste ithe,
―Yif his nekke nel nowt atwo,
His rigg schal, ar ich hennes go!‖
He rod eft with gret raundoun
And thought to beren him adoun,
And girt Degarre anon
Right agein the brest-bon
The schaft was stef and wonder god,
And Degarre steede astod,
And al biforen he ros on heghth,
And tho was he ifallen neghth;
But as God Almighty wold,
The schaft brak and might nowt hold,
And Degarre his cours out ritte,
And was agramed out of his witte.
―Allas!‖ quath he, ―for vilaynie!
The King me hath ismiten twie,
And I ne touchede him nowt yete.  
Nou I schal avise me bette!"
He turned his stede with herte grim,  
And rod to the King, and he to him,  
And togider thai gert ful right,  
And in the scheldes here strokes pight
That the speres al toriveth
And up right to here honde sliveth,
That alle the lordings that ther ben
That the justing mighte sen
Seiden hi ne seghse never with eyge
Man that mighte so longe dreghye,
In wraththe for nothing,
Sitten a strok of here King;
“Ac he his doughti for the nones,
A strong man of bodi and bones.”
The King with egre mod gan speke:
―Do bring me a schaft that wil nowt breke!
A, be mi trewthe, he sschal adoun!
Thai he be strengere than Sampson;
And thei he be the bare qued,
He sschal adoun, maugré his heved!‖
He tok a schaft was gret and long,
The schild another al so strong;
And to the King wel evene he rit;
The King faileth, and he him smit;
His schaft was strong and god withal,
And wel scharped the coronal.
He smot the Kyng in the lainer:
He might flit nother fer ne ner.
The King was strong and harde sat;
The stede ros up biforn with that,
And Sire Degarre so thriste him than
That, maugré whoso grochche bigan,
Out of the sadel he him cast,
Tail over top, right ate last.
Than was ther long houting and cri;
And the lordines comen with might and mein
And broughthe the King on horse agein,
An seide with o cring, iwis,
“Child Degarre hath wonne the pris!”
Than was the damaisele sori,
For hi wist wel forwhi:
That hi scholde ispoused ben

And I have not touched him at all yet.
Now I will take a better course!"  
He turned his steed with a fierce heart  
And rode to the king, and he did to him,  
And they crashed directly together,  
And blows were struck on shields  
So that the spears were broken apart  
And split right up to their hands. 
All the lords who were there  
And could see the jousting  
Said they never saw with their eyes  
A man who could endure so long,  
Who could in combat, for anything,  
Withstand a blow from their king. 
“But he shows courage for the occasion,  
A mighty man in flesh and bones!”
The king was in furious spirits and said,  
“Go, bring me a shaft that will not break!  
Now, by my word, he will go down!  
Even if he is stronger than Sampson,  
Or if he is the naked devil himself;  
He will fall, in spite of his might!”
He took a shaft that was huge and long,  
And Degare took another just as strong,  
He stabbed the king in the armor straps;  
He could not flee, neither near or far.  
Yet the king was strong and sat firmly.  
With that his steed reared before him,  
And Sir Degare thrust at him,
He threw the king out of the saddle,  
And finally, head over feet.  
There was a long shouting and crying then,  
And the king was sorely ashamed for it.  
The lords came in force with their company  
And brought the king to his horse again,  
And said with one shout, in truth,  
“Child Degare has won the prize!”
Then the princess was sorry,  
For she knew well what had happened,  
That she had been promised

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15 The bare qued: ‘Naked evil.’ TEAMS explains that this is a euphemism for the devil, who cannot be named for fear of attracting him: “Speak of the devil!” The Havelock poet does not seem to share these qualms and compares both Godrich and Godard to Sathanas (1135, 2512).

16 Child Degarre: Though Degare has already been knighted (416), for him to be called child (knight-in-training) even as a young adult is commonplace and not an insult. The lords may also see Degare’s youth and inexperience and do not know his full rank.
To a knight that she had never seen,
To lead her life with such a man
That she did not know who had fathered him,
Nor in what land he had been born.
And so the lady was miserable.

Then the king said to Degare,
“My noble son, come here to me." 17
If you are as decent a man
As you seem to our sight.
And as skilful in wise deeds
As you are rugged and manly,
I think my kingdom will be well served.
But whether you are better or worse,
I will hold my agreement with you.

See, here before my brave barons,
I give you my daughter’s hand,
And award her to you with all my land.
You will be king after me.

God grant that you be a good man!"

Then Degare was glad and joyful,
And thanked the king many times.

Great preparations were made.
They were brought together to church,
And he married that lady, truly,
Under the holy sacrament.

See what fate and great wonder it is,
That misfortune should befall a man
Who comes into an unknown land,
And takes a wife for whatever reward,
Knowing nothing of her family,
Nor she of his, neither more nor less,
And to be wedded to live together,
And by chance to be close kin!

Thus did Sir Degare the valiant
Wed his own mother there,
And that gracious lady as well
Was married to her own son,
Whom she bore from her own body.

See what chance brought them there!
But God, who can guide all matters,
Did not wish for them to sin together.
They went to church with noble barons,
And a rich feast was held for them.
And when the afternoon had long passed
And the day was all done,
They wanted to go to bed, that noble pair,
The princess and Sir Degare.

But he stood still and thought to himself
How the hermit, the holy man,

17 Min hende sone: Calling a young man son is an unusual address in romance, and the audience might know or later realize the irony that Degare is the king’s grandson.
Bad he scholde no womman take
For faired ne for riches sake
But she mighte this gloves two
Lightliche on hire hondes do.
“Alas, alis!” than saide he,
“What meschaunce is comen to me?
A wai! witles wreche ich am!
Ich hadde levere than this kingdom
That is iseised into min hond
That ich ware faire out of this lond!”
He wrang his hondes and was sori,
Ac no man wiste therefore wi.
The King parceyved and saide tho,
―Sire Degarre, wi farest thou so?
Is ther ani thing don ille,
Spoken or seid agen thi wille?‖
―Ya, sire,‖ he saide, ―bi Hevene King!‖
―I chal never, for no spousing,
Therwhiles I live, with wimman dele,
Widue ne wif ne dammei
But she this gloves mai take and fonde
And lightlich drawen upon hire honde.‖
His yonge bride that gan here,
And al for thout chaunged hire chere
And ate laste gan to turne hire mod:
Here visage wex ase red ase blod:
―Schewe hem hider, leve sire.‖
Sche tok the gloves in that stede
And lightliche on hire hondes dede,
And fil adoun, with revli crie,
And seide, ―God, mercy, mercie!
Thou art mi sone hast spoused me her,
And ich am, sone, thi moder der.
Ich hadde the loren, ich have the founde;
Blessed be Jhesu Crist that stounde!”
Sire Degarre tok his moder tho
And helde here in his armes two.
Keste and clepte here mani a sithe;
Than the Kyng gret wonder hadde
Why that noise that thi made,
And mervailed of hire crying
And seide, “Doughter, what is this thing?”
“Fader,” she seide, “thou schalt hire:
Thou wenest that ich a maiden were,
Ac certes, nay, sire, ich am non:
Twenti winter nou hit is gon
That mi maidenhed I les
Ordered that he should take no wife,
For beauty or for riches,
Unless she might put these two gloves
Lightly on her hands.
“Alas, alas!” he said then,
“What misfortune has come to me?
Oh, woe! I am a witless wretch!
I would rather be gone from this land,
Than have this kingdom
That was given into my hand!”
He wrang his hands and was miserable,
But no man knew why.
The king took notice and so he said,
“Sir Degare, why do you behave so?
Has anything wrong been done,
Spoken, or said against your will?”
“Yes, Sire,” he said, “by Heaven’s king!
While I live I can never consort
With a woman in marriage,18
Not a widow or wife or damsel,
Unless she takes and tries these gloves
And draws them lightly on her hands.”
His young bride overheard that,
And in realization her expression changed,
And at last her mood turned.
Her face blushed as red as blood.
She knew those gloves were hers.
“Show them here, dear sir.”
She took the gloves in that moment
And put them easily on her hands,
And fell down in a doleful cry,
And said, “God have mercy, mercy!
You are my boy who has married me here,
And I am, son, your dear mother.
I had lost you, I have found you.
May Jesus Christ be blessed that moment!”
Then Sir Degare took his mother
And held her in his two arms,
Kissing and embracing her many times.
He was joyful, for it was her.
The king had great puzzlement then
Over the fuss that they made,
And wondered about her crying
And said, “Daughter, what is going on?”
“Father,” she said, “you will hear all.
You thought that I was a maiden,
But for sure, Sire, I am not.
Twenty years have passed now
Since I lost my virginity

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18 *With wimman dele:* The MED states that *dele with* can mean sexual intercourse. While it fits the situation, Degare is probably not saying this to the king about his daughter.
In a forest as I wes,
And this is mi sone, God hit wot:
Bi this gloves wel ich wot.”
She told him al that sothe ther,
Hou the child was geten and wher;
And hou that he was born also,
To the hermitage yhe sente him tho,
And seththen herd of him nothing;
“But thanked be Jhesu, Hevene King,
Ich have ifounde him alive!
Ich am his moder and ek his wive!”
‖Leve moder,‖ seide Sire Degarre,
‖Telle me the sothe, par charité:
Into what londe I mai terne
To seke mi fader, swithe and yerne?‖
“Sone,‖ she saide, "by Hevene Kyng,
I can the of him telle nothing
But tho that he fram me raught,
His owen swerd he me bitaught,
And bad ich sholde take hit the forthan
Yif thou livedest and were a man.”
The swerd sche fet forht anon right,
And Degarre hit out plight.
Brod and long and hevi hit wes:
In that kyngdom no swich nes.
Than seide Degarre forthan,
“Whoso hit aught, he was a man!
Nou ich have that ikepe,
Night ne dai nel ich slepe
Til that I mi fader see,
Yif God wile that hit so be.”
In the cité he reste al night.
Amorewe, whan hit was dai-lit,
He aros and herde his masse;
He dighte him and forth gan passe.
Of al that cité than moste non
Neither with him ridden ne gon
But his knave, to take hede
To his armour and his stede.
Forth he rod in his wai
Mani a pas and mani jurnai;
So longe he passede into west
That he com into theld forest
Ther he was bigeten som while.
Therinne he rideth mani a mile;
Mani a dai he ride gan;
When I was in a forest.
And this is my son, God knows.
By these gloves I know it well.”
She told him all the truth there,
How the child was fathered, and where,
And how he was born as well,
How she sent him to the hermitage,
And after then heard nothing of him.
“But Jesus be thanked, Heaven’s king,
I have found him alive!
I am his mother and also his wife!”
"Dear mother,” said Sir Degare,
“Tell me the truth, for charity’s sake.
What land must I turn to,
Swiftly and readily, to find my father?”
“Son,” she said, “by Heaven’s king,
I can tell you nothing of him,
Except that when he departed from me,
He entrusted me with his own sword,
And ordered that I should give it to you
If you lived to become a man.”
She fetched the sword right away,
And Degare pulled it out.
It was broad and long and heavy,
No such sword was known in that kingdom.
With that, Degare said,
“Whoever owned it, he was a man!
Now that I have it in my possession,
I will not rest day or night
Until I see my father,
If God willeth that it be so.”
He slept all night in the fortress.
In the morning when it was daylight,
He rose and heard mass.
He prepared himself and went forth.
In all the city there was no one
Who might ride or go with him,
Except his servant, to take care
Of his armor and his steed.
He rode forth on his way through
Many a pass and many a journey.
He traveled into the west a long time,
Until he came into the ancient forest
Where he was conceived before.
He rode in it many a mile,
And went on for many a day.

19 Ich am his moder and ek his wive: Again, while this line seems disturbing to the point of risible for a modern reader, the important point for a medieval audience is that the marriage was not consummated. This permits the quick annulment at the end (1092-3). TEAMS points out that The Legend of Pope Gregory, an Auchinleck text and a possible influence on Degare, also features a hero set adrift at birth who returns home to unwittingly marry his mother. Both stories suggest the Oedipal myth, but neither are tragedies.
| 740 | No quik best he fond of man, | Meeting no living beast that was tame. |
|     | Ac mani wilde bestes he seghth | But he saw many wild animals, |
|     | And foules singen on hegthh. | And birds singing from on high. |
|     | So longe hit drouwth to the night, | It continued until the fall of night, |
|     | The sonne was adoune right. | When the sun had gone down. |
|     | Toward toun he wolde ride, | He wanted to ride toward town, |
|     | But he nist never bi wiche side. | But he did not know which way to go. |
|     | Thennhe segh a water cler, | Then he saw clear waters, |
|     | And amidde a river, | And alongside the river, |
|     | A fair castel of lim and ston: | A stately castle of lime and mortar. |
|     | Other wonying was ther non. | There was no other dwelling. |
|     | To his knave he seide, “Tide wat tide, | He said to his servant, “Come what may, |
|     | O fote forther nel I ride, | I will not ride one foot farther, |
|     | Ac here abide wille we, | But we will stay here |
|     | And aske herberewe par charité, | And ask for harbor for charity’s sake, |
|     | Yif ani quik man be here on live.” | If there is anyone alive staying here.” |
|     | To the water thai come als swithe; | They came to the water as quickly. |
|     | The bregge was adoune tho, | The bridge was down, |
|     | And the gate open also, | And the gate was open as well, |
|     | And into the castel he gan spede. | And they sped into the castle. |
|     | First he stabled up his stede; | First he stabled his horse |
|     | He taiede up his palefrai. | And tied up his palfrey. |
|     | Inough he fond of hote and hai; | They found plenty of oats and hay. |
|     | He bad his grom on heying | He asked his servant in haste |
|     | Kepen wel al here thing. | To keep all their things well. |
|     | He passed up into the halle, | He passed into the hall, |
|     | Biheld aboute, and gan to calle; | Looked around, and began to call. |
|     | Ac neither on lond ne on hegh | But he saw no living person, |
|     | No quik man he ne segh. | Either on the ground floor or higher. |
|     | Amidde the halle flore | In the middle of the hall floor |
|     | A fir was bet, stark an store, | A fire was raised, strong and blazing. |
|     | “Par fai,” he saide, “ich am al sure | “By my faith,” he said, “I am sure |
|     | He that bette that fure | That whoever made that fire |
|     | Wil comen hom yit tonight; | Will come home tonight yet. |
|     | Abiden ich wille a litel wight.” | I will wait a little while.” |
|     | He sat adoun upon the dais, | He sat down on the platform, |
|     | And warmed him wel eche wais, | And warmed himself well all over. |
|     | And he biheld and undernam | Then he perceived and saw |
|     | Hou in at the dore cam | Coming in through the door |
|     | Four dammaineles, gent and fre; | Four ladies, noble and elegant. |
|     | Ech was itakked to the kne. | Each was bare-legged from the knees down. |
|     | The two bowen an arewen bere, | Two carried bows and arrows, |
|     | The other two icharged were | And the others were laden |
|     | With venesoun, riche and god. | With venison, rich and fine. |
|     | And Sir Degarre upstod | Sir Degare stood up |
|     | And gret hem wel fair aplitght, | And greeted them very courteously, |
|     | Ac thai answerede no wight, | But they did not answer at all. |
|     | But yede into chaembre anon | They only advanced into their chamber |
|     | And barred the dore after son. | And barred the door soon after. |
|     | Sone therafter withalle | Following that, in a little while |
|     | Ther com a dwerw into the halle. | A dwarf came into the hall. |
|     | Four fet of lengthe was in him; | His body was four feet tall. |
|     | His visage was stout and grim; | His appearance was firm and severe; |
|     | Bothe his berd and his fax | Both his beard and his hair |
Was crisp an yhalew as wax;
Grete sscholdres and quarré;
Right stoutliche loked he;
Mochele were hise fet and honde
Ase the meste man of the londe;
He was iclothed wel aright,
His sschon icouped as a knight;
He hadde on a sorcot overt,
Iforred with blaundeuer apert.

Sire Degarre him biheld and lowggh,
And gret
him fair inowggh,
Ac he ne answerede nevere a word,
But sette trestles and laid the bord,
And torches in the halle he lighte,
And redi to the soper dighte.

Than ther com out of the bour
A dammeisele of gret honour;
In the lond non fairer nas;
In a diapre cloathed she was
With hire come maidenes tene,
Some in scarlet, some in grene,
Gent of bodi, of semblaunt swete,
And Degarre hem gan grete;
Ac hi ne answerede no wight,
But yede to the soper anon right.

―Certes,‖ quath Sire Degare,
―Ich have hem gret, a
and hi nowt me;
But thai be domb, bi and bi
Thai schul speke first ar I.‖
The levedi that was of rode so bright,
Amidde she sat anon right,
And on aither half maidenes five.
The dwerw hem servede al so blive
With riche metes and wel idight;

The coppe he filleth with alle his might.
Sire Degarre couthe of curteisie:
He set a chaier before the levedie,
And therin himselfe set,
And tok a knif and carf his met;
At the soper litel at he,
But bhelde the levedi fre,
Were crisp and yellow like wax.
With large, square shoulders,
He looked very rugged.
His feet and hands were as huge
As the biggest men in the land.
He was clothed very finely,
With his shoes scored like a knight’s.20
He had on an open overcoat,
Trimmed with white fur.
Sir Degare saw him and laughed,
And greeted him politely enough,
But he did not answer a word.
He only set supports and laid the table,
And lit torches in the hall,
And prepared to make supper.
Then there came out of the rooms
A young lady of great honor.
There was no one fairer in the land.
She was dressed in patterned clothes,
And ten maidens came with her,
Some in scarlet, some in green.21
Delicate in body and sweet in appearance.
Degare began to greet them,
But they answered no man
And only went right to their supper.
―For certain,‖ said Sir Degare,
―I have greeted them, and they ignored me.
Unless they are mute, by and by,
They shall speak first before I do!‖
The lady who had so bright a complexion
Sat right down in the middle,
With five maidens on either side.
The dwarf served them swiftly
With rich foods, sumptuously prepared.
He filled the cup with all his attention.
Sir Degare knew court manners.
He set a chair before the lady
And sat himself there,
And took a knife and carved his meat.
He ate lightly of the supper,
But beheld the gracious lady,

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20 His sschon icouped as a knight: TEAMS cites both French & Hall, who state that this was a fashion where the upper part of shoes were scored to show the bright colors of the stockings underneath (311), and Laing, who notes that early editors dated the poem to the early thirteenth century from this style. David Laing, ed., Sire Degarre, a Metrical Romance of the End of the Thirteenth Century (Edinburgh: Abbotsford Club, 1849).

21 Some in scarlet, some in grene: Scarlet could refer either to a type of woolen cloth or to the hue, though both had connotations of luxury or authority, being the color of cardinals’ robes. Green was an ominous color suggesting untamed nature, and devils were depicted not as red but green. Medieval clothing, even for peasants, was not as drab as the modern stereotype suggests, but there is a special air of mystique to the attire here.
And segh ase feir a wimman
Als he hevere loked an,
That al his herte and his thouht

830 Hire to love was ibrowt.
And tho thai hadde souped anowgh,
The drew com, and the cloth he drough;
The levedis wessche everichon
And yede to chaumbre quiq anon.
Into the chaumbre he com ful sone.
The levedi on here bed s
et,
And a maide at here fet,
And harpede notes gode and fine;
Another broughte spices and wine.

840 Upon the bedde he set adoun
To here of the harpe soun.
For murthe of notes so sschille,
He fel adoun on slepe stille;
So he slep al that night.
The levedi wre
ith him warm aplight,
And a pilewe under his heved dede,
And yede to bedde in that stede.
Amorewe whan hit was dai-
ight,
Sche was uppe and redi dight.

850 Faire sche waked him tho:
“Aris!” she seide, “grait the, an go!”
And saide thus in here game:
“Thou art worth to suffri schame,
That al night as a best sleptest,
And non of mine maidenes ne keptest.”
“O gentil levedi,” seide Degarre,
“For Godes love, forgif hit me!
Certes the murie harpe hit made,
Elles misdo nowt I ne hade;
Ac tel me, levedi so hende,
Ar ich out of thi chaumber wende,
Who is louerd of this lond?
And who this castel hath in hond?
Wether thou be widue or wif,
Or maiden yit of clene lif?
And whi her be so fele wimman
Allone, withouten ani man?”
The dameisele sore sighte,
And bigan to wepen anon righte,
“Sire, wel fain ich telle the wolde,
Yif evere the better be me sscholde.
Mi fader was a riche baroun,
And hadde mani a tour and toun.
He ne hadde no child but me;

Seeing as beautiful a woman
As he had ever looked upon,
So that all his heart and his mind
Were moved to love for her.
And when they had eaten enough,
The dwarf came and withdrew the tablecloth.
Each one of the ladies washed
And went right away to her chamber.
Degare quickly followed into the room.
The lady sat on her bed
With a maid at her feet,
Who played music on a harp, sweet and fine.
Another brought spices and wine.
He sat down upon the bed
To listen to the harp’s sound.
From enjoyment of the beautiful music,
He fell down into a sound sleep,
And so he slept all that night.
The lady tucked him in warmly, I know,
And placed a pillow under his head,
And went to bed in that place.
In the morning, when it was daylight,
She was up and already dressed.
Then she woke him up gently.
“Get up,” she said, “dresst yourself and go.”
And she added playfully,
“You deserve to suffer shame,
For sleeping like a beast all night
And not protecting any of my maidens.”
“Oh, gracious lady,” said Degare,
“For the love of God, forgive me!
For sure, the merry harping caused it.
Otherwise I would not have behaved so.
But tell me, noble lady,
Before I go out of this room,
Who is lord of this land?
And who has this castle in hand?
Are you a widow or a wife,
Or still a maiden, pure in body?
And why are there so many women here,
Allone, without any man?”
The dame sawd with deep sighs,
And immediately began to cry.
“Sir, I would gladly tell you
If it might ever do me any good.
My father was a rich baron
And had many a tower and town.
He had no children but me.

|Ich was his air of his cuntré. | I was the heir of his country. |
|In mené ich hadde mani a knight | In my company I had many knights, |
|And squiers that were gode and light, | And squires who were good and able, |
|An staleworht men of mester, | And sturdy men of skill, |
|To serve in court fer and ner; | To serve the court near and far. |
|Ac thanne is thar here biside | But then there came around here |
|A sterne knight, iknawe ful wide. | A cruel knight who is widely known. |
|Ich wene in Bretaine ther be non | I believe there is no one in Brittany |
|So strong a man so he is on. | So strong a man as he is. |
|He had ilove me ful yore; | He had loved me for a long time, |
|Ac in herte nevere m | But I could never in my heart |
|Ne mighte ich lovie him agein; | Love him in return. |
|But whenne he seghye ther was no gein, | But when he saw there was no use, |
|He was aboute with maistri | He was ready to ravish |
|For to ravisse me awai. | Me away with force. |

|Mine knightes wolde defende me, | My knights attempted to defend me, |
|And ofte fowghten hi an he; | And they continually fought with him. |
|The beste he slowgh the firste dai, | He slaughtered the best the first day, |
|And sethen an other, par ma fai, | And then a second, by my faith, |
|And sethen the thriddle and the ferthe, | And then the third and fourth, |
|The beste that mighte gon on erthe! | The best that might walk on earth! |
|Mine squiers that weren so stoute, | My squires who were so strong, |
|Bi foure, bi five, thai riden oute, | Rode out, by four, by five, |
|On hors armed wel anowgh: | On horses, armed well enough. |
|His houen bodi he hem slough. | He destroyed them by his own hand. |
|Mine men of mester he slough alle, | He killed all of my skilled men |
|And other pages of mine halle. | And other pages in my hall. |
|Therfore ich am sore agast | For this I am sorely afraid |
|Lest he wynne me ate last.” | That he might finally conquer me.” |
|With this word sche fil to grounde, | With these words she fell to the ground |
|And lai aswone a wel gret stounde. | And lay in a faint for a good while. |
|Hire maidenes to hire come | Her maidens came to her |
|And in hire armes up hire nome. | And took her up in their arms. |
|He beheld the levedi with gret pité. | He looked at the lady with great pity. |
|“Loveli madama,” quath he, | “Lovely madam,” he said, |
|“On of thine ich am here: | “I am here as one of yours. |
|Ich wille the help, be mi pouere.” | I will help you by my own power.” |
|“Yhe, sire,” she saide, “than al mi lond | “Sir, yes,” she said, “then I will give you |
|Ich wil the give into thin hond, | All of my land into your hand, |
|And at thi wille bodi mine, | As well as my body, at your will, |
|Yif thou might wreke me of hine.” | If you can avenge me of him.” |
|Tho was he glad al for to fighte, | Then he was glad to be able to fight, |
|And wel gladere that he mighte | And even gladder that he might |
|Have the levedi so bright | Have the lady so bright |
|Yif he slough that other knight. | If he destroyed that other knight. |
|And als thai stod and spak ifere, | And as they stood and spoke together, |
|A maiden cried, with reuful chere, | A maiden cried, with a dolorous voice, |
|“Her cometh oure enemi, faste us ate! | “Here comes our enemy toward us fast! |
|Drauwe the bregge and sschet the gate, | Raise the bridge and shut the gate, |
|Or he wil slen ous everichone!” | Or he will slay every one of us!” |
|Sire Degarre stirr up anon | Sir Degarre started up at once |
|And at a window him segh, | And saw him through a window, |
|Wel i-armed on hors hegh; | Well armed and high on his horse. |
|A fairer bodi than he was on | He never saw a fairer body |
In armes ne segh he never non.
Sir Degare armed him blive
And on a stede gan out drive.
With a spear of great gayn,
To the knight he rit agein.
The knighte spere al tosprong,
Ac Degare was so strong
And so hard of to him thrast,
But the knight sat so fast,
That the stede rigge tobrek
And fel to grounde, and he ek;
But anon stirte up the knight
And drough out his swerd bright.
—Alight," he saide, "adoun anon;
To fight thou sschalt afote gon.
For thou hast slawe mi stede,
Deth-dint schal be thi mede;
Ac thine stede sle I nille,
Ac on fote fighte ich wille."
Than on fote thai toke the fight,
And hewe togidere with brondes bright.
The knight gaf Sire Degarr
Sterne strokes gret plenté,
And he him agen also,
That helm and scheld cleve atwo.
The knight was agreved sore
That his armour toburste thore:
A strok he gaf Sire Degarre,
That to grounde fallen is he;
But he stirte up anon right,
And swich a strok he gaf the knight
Upon his heved so harde iset
Thurh helm and heved and bacinet
That ate brest stod the dent;
Ded he fil doun, verraiment.
The levedi lai in o kernel,
And biheld the batail every del.
She ne was never er so blithe:
Sche thanked God fele sithe.
Sire Degare com into castel;
Agein him com the dammaisel,
And thonked him swithe of that dede.
Into chaumber sche gan him lede,
And unarmed him anon,
And set him hire bed upon,
And saide, "Sire, par charité,
I the prai dwel with me,
And al mi lond ich wil the give,
And miselwe, wel that I live."
"Grant merci, dame," saide Degarre,
"Of the gode thou bedest me:
Wende ich wille into other londe,
More of haventours for to fonde;
And be this twelve moneth be go,
I will come back again to you.”
The lady made great sadness
Over the knight’s departing,
And gave him a steed, fine and sure,
Gold and silver, and strong armor,
And entrusted him to Jesus, Heaven’s king.
They wept bitterly at their parting.
Sir Degare went forth
Through many different lands,
Always riding west.
And so one day in a forest valley
He met with a rugged knight
On a steed, strong and lively,
In arms that were rich and sturdy,
With a shield of azure
With three boars’ heads on them.
Finely painted with costly gold.
At once Sir Degare
Politely greeted the knight
And said, “God be with you, sir.”
He answered in return,
“Villain, what are you doing here
In my forest, chasing my deer?”
Degare replied with gentle words,
“Sir, I do not want any of your deer.
I am a faithful knight,
Out to seek adventure and combat.”
The knight said, without doubt,
“If you’ve come to seek battle,
You’ve found your match here!
Arm yourself fast in this place!”
Sir Degare, with his squire,
Armed himself in rich clothing,
With a fine helmet for the occasion.
It was full of precious stones
That the maiden gave him, without doubt,
For whom he battled earlier.
He put a shield about his neck
Which had rich and precious ornaments,
With three maidens’ heads of bright silver,
And with costly-looking crowns of gold.
He took a shaft which was not small,
With a keen point.
His squire took another spear
And carried it alongside his lord.
See what fortune awaited them!
The son began to ride against the father,
And neither knew who the other was!
Now the first charge began.

23 Thre bor-hevedes: Having boars’ heads on a crest was common in Celtic heraldry and in many other nations, perhaps suggesting either the fierceness of the boar or a hunter who had defeated them.
Sire Degarre tok his cours thare;  
Agen his fader a sschaft he bare;  
To bere him doun he hadde imint.  
Right in the sscheld he set his dint;  
The sschaft brak to peces al,  
And in the sscheld lat the coronal.  
Another cours thai gonne take;  
The fader tok, for the sones sake,  
A sschaft that was gret and long,  
And he another also strong.  
Togider thai riden with gret raundoun,  
And aither bar other adoun.  
With dintes that thai smiten there,  
Here stede rigges toborsten were.  
Afote thai gonne fight ifere  
And laiden on with swerdes clere.  
The fader amerveil  
Whi his swerd was pointles,  
And seide to his sone aplight,  
―Herkne to me a litel wight:  
Wher were thou boren, in what lond?‖  
―In Litel Bretaigne, ich understond:  
Kingges doughter sone, witouten les,  
Ac I not wo mi fader wes.‖  
―What is thi name?‖ tha  
Then said he.  
―Certes, men clepeth me Degarre.‖  
―O Degarre, sone mine!  
Certes ich am fader thine!  
And bi thi swerd I knowe hit here:  
The point is in min aumenere.‖  
He tok the point and set therto;  
Degarre fel iswone tho,  
And his fader, sikerli,  
Also he gan swony;  
And whan he of swone arisen were,  
The sone cride merci there  
His owen fader of his misdede,  
And he him to his castel gan lede,  
And bad him dwelle with him ai.  
―Certes, sire,‖ he saide, ―nai;  
Ac yif hit youre wille were,  
To mi moder we wende ifere,  
For she is in gret mourning.‖  
―Blethelich,‖ quath he, ―bi Hevene Kyng.‖  
Syr Degaré and his father dere,  
Into Ynglond they went in fere.  
They were armyd and well dyghtt.  
As sone as the lady saw that knyght,  
Wonther wel sche knew the knyght;
Anon sche chaunyed hur colowr aryght,  
And seyd, "My dere sun, Degaré,  
Now thou hast brought thy father wyth the!
"Ye, madame, sekyr thow be!
Now well y wot that yt ys he."
"I thank, by God," seyd the kyng,  
"Now y wot, wythowtt lesyng,  
Who Syr Degaré his father was!"
The lady swounyd in that plass.
Then afterward, now sykyrly,  
The knyghtt weddyd the lady.  
Sche and hur sun were partyd atwynn,  
For they were to nyghe off kyn.  
Now went forth Syr Degaré;  
Wyth the kyng and his meyné,  
His father and his mother dere.  
Unto that castel thei went infere  
Wher that wonnyd that lady bryght  
That he hadd wonne in gret fyght,  
And weddyd hur wyth gret solempnité  
Byfor all the lordis in that cuntré.  
Thus cam the knyght outt of his care;  
God yff us grace well to fare.  
Amen

At once her color changed entirely  
And she said, "My dear son, Degare,  
You have brought your father with you!"
"Yes, madam, you may be sure!  
Now I know well that it is him."
"I am thankful, by God," added the king.  
"Now I know, without a lie,  
Who Sir Degare’s father was."
The lady fell faint at that moment.  
Then afterwards, now in certainty,  
The knight wedded the lady.  
She and her son’s marriage was annulled,  
For they were too close of kin.  
Now Sir Degare went forth  
With the king and his retinue,  
And his father and dear mother.  
They went together into the castle  
Where that shining lady lived  
That he had won in fierce combat,  
And he married her with great ceremony  
In front of all the lords in that country.  
Thus the knight came out of his troubles.  
May God give us grace to fare as well!  
Amen.

The lyff of Syr Degaré  
Both curteys and fre.
Sir Orfeo

Sir Orfeo survives in three manuscripts: Auchinleck (c. 1330), British Library MS Harley 3810 (c. 1400), and Caius College Library, MS 175 (c. 1500). I take as my text source Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds. Sir Orfeo. The Middle English Breton Lays. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995.


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<td>1</td>
<td>We redeth oft and findeth y-write, And this clerkes wele it wite, Layes that ben in harping Ben y-founde of ferli thing: Sum bethe of wer and sum of wo, And sum of joie and mirthe also, And sum of trecherie and of gile, Of old aventours that fel while; And sum of bourdes and ribaudy, And mani ther beth of fairy. Of al things that men seth, Mest o love, forsothe, they beth. In Breteyne this layes were wrought, First y-founde and forth y-brought, Of aventours that fel bi dayes, Wherof Bretouns maked her layes. When kinges might our y-here Of ani mervailes that ther were, Thai token an harp in gle and game And maked a lay and gaf it name. Now of this aventours that weren y-falle Y can tel sum, ac nought alle. Ac herkneth, lordinges that ben trewe, Ichil you telle of “Sir Orfewe.” Orfeo mest of ani thing Lovede the gle of harping.</td>
<td>We often read and find written, And these clerks know them well, Lays set to harping, Composed about marvelous things, Some are about war and some woe, Some are about joy and fun as well, And some are about treachery and deceit, About old adventures that happened before. Some are about bawdy jokes and games, And many are about fairies. And of all things that men relate, Most, in truth, are about love. These lays were crafted in Brittany, First found and then brought forth, About adventures from the old times, For which Bretons made them into lays. When kings would hear somewhere Of any wonders that were there, They took a harp in pleasure and fun And made a lay and gave it a name. Now of these adventures that took place, I can tell of some, but not all. But listen, lordings that are true, And I will tell you the tale of Sir Orfeo. Orfeo, more than any thing, Loved the joys of harping.</td>
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1 The first thirty-nine lines are reconstructed from the Bodleian Library Ashmole 61 and Harley 3810 manuscripts, as a page is missing from Auchinleck. The introduction closely follows the Lay de Freine, also in Auchinleck.
Siker was everi gode harpoure
Of him to have miche honour.
Himself he lerned forto harp,
And leyd theron his wittes scharp;
He lerned so ther nothing was
A better harpoure in no plas.
In al the wurld was no man bore
That ones Orfeo sat bifore -
And he might of his harping here -
Bot he schuld thenche that he were
In on of the joies of Paradis,
Swiche melody in his harping is.
Orfeo was a king,
In Inglond an heighe lording,
A stalworth man and hardi bo;
Large and curteys he was also.
His fader was comen of King Pluto,
And his moder of King Juno,
That sum time were as godes yhold
For aventours that thai dede and told.
This king sojournd in Traciens,
That was a cité of noble defens -
For Winchester was cleped tho
Traciens, withouten no.
The king hadde a quen of priis
That was y-cleped Dame Heurodis,
The fairest levedi, for the nones,
Ful of love and godenisse -
Ac no man may telle hir fairnise.
Bifel so in the comessing of May
When miri and hot is the day,
And oway beth winter schours,
And everi feld is ful of flour,
And blosme breme on everi bough
Over al wexeth miri anought,
This ich quen, Dame Heurodis
Tok to maidens of priis,
And went in an undren tide
To play bi an orchardside,
To se the floures sprede and spring
And to here the foules sing.
Thai sett hem doun al thre
Under a fair ympe-tre,

For certain, every good musician
Held him in great honor,
He taught himself to play the harp
And then set his sharp wits to it.
He learned so there was in no way
A better harpist anywhere.
In all the world there was no man born,
Who having once sat before Orfeo
And heard his harping,
Did not think himself
Among the joys of Paradise,
Such melody was in his playing.
Orfeo was a king,
A great lord in England,
And both sturdy and brave.
He was generous and courteous as well.
His father was a descendant of King Pluto,
And his mother one of King Juno,
Who were once considered gods
For the adventures they had and told of.
King Orfeo dwelled in Thrace,
Which was a great and fortified city,
For Winchester was then called
Thrace, without any denying.
The king had a queen of great renown
Who was called Lady Herodis,
The fairest lady at that time
Who might walk in flesh and bones,
Full of love and goodness.
No man could describe her beauty!
It so happened at the coming of May
When the day is warm and pleasant,
And winter showers have gone away,
And every field is full of flowers,
And blossoms appear on every bough,
Growing everywhere merrily enough,
That this queen, Lady Herodis,
Took two maidens of noble worth
And went one late morning
To play by the side of an orchard,
To see the flowers spring and blossom,
And to hear the birds sing.
They set themselves down together
Under a fine orchard tree.

2 King Juno: Pluto was god of the underworld and Juno was not a king but a goddess, Jupiter’s wife. The poet rather clumsily tries to establish a mythical and pre-Christian setting for the main characters, complete with medieval armor and feudal social conventions.

3 The poet again conflates the Greek myth of Orpheus with an English setting, and the audience would likely have cheerfully accepted this mythical reality where Winchester was once called Thrace, modern Bulgaria and northern Greece! Nevertheless, in Layamon’s Brut Winchester is one of Arthur’s main cities, and Geoffrey of Monmouth claims that the kings of Briton descend from Aeneas.
And wel sone this fair quene
Fel on slepe opon the grene.
The maidens durst hir nought awake,
Bot let hir liege and rest take.
So sche slepe til after none,
That undertide was al y-done.
Ac, as sone as sche gan awake,
Sche crid, and lothli bere gan make;
Sche froet hir honden and hir fete,
And crached hir visage - it bled wete -
Hir riche robe hye al to-rett
And was reveyd out of hir wit.
The two maidens hir biside
Did not dare with hir no leng abide,
But ourn to the palays ful right
And told bothe squier and knight
That her quen awede wold,
And bad hem go and hir at-hold.
Knightes urn and levedis also,
Damsels sexti and mo.
In the orchard to the quen hye come,
And her up in her armes nome,
And brought hir to bed atte last,
And held hir there fine fast.
Ac ever she held in o cri
And wold up and owy.
When Orfeo herd that tiding
Never him nas wers for nothing.
He come with knyghtes tene
To chaumber, right bifo the quene,
And bi-held, and seyd with grete piti,
“O lef liif, what is te,
That ever yete hast ben so stille
And now gredest wonder schille?
Thy bodi, that was so white y-core,
With thine nailes is all to-tore.
Alas! thy rode, that was so red,
Is al wan, as thou were ded;
And also thine fingres smale

And soon this fair queen
Fell asleep upon the green. 5
The maidens did not dare wake her,
But let her lie and take her rest.
So she slept until after noon,
When the morning tide had passed.
But as soon as she began to awaken,
She cried out, making a hideous face.
She wrung her hands and her feet,
And clawed her face until it bled.
She tore apart her rich robes
And was driven out of her wits.
The two maidens beside her
Did not dare to stay with her
But ran to the palace straight away
And told both squire and knight
That their queen was going mad,
And begged them to go and take hold of her.
Knights ran, and ladies with them,
Damsels numbering sixty and more.
They came to the queen in the orchard
And took her up in their arms,
And finally brought her to bed
And bound her there tightly.
But she continually made one cry
And strained to rise and get away.
When Orfeo heard the news,
He was never so grieved by anything.
He came with ten knights
To the chamber, right by the queen,
And beheld her and said with great pity,
“Oh, dear one, what is wrong?
You have always been so mild,
And now your voice is strange and shrill.
Your body, which was so beautifully fair,
Is clawed to pieces by your nails.
Alas! Your face, which was so bright, 6
Is all ashen, as if you were dead.
And your delicate fingers as well

4 Ympe-tre: English gardens were highly sculpted versions of nature, and one of the gardener’s arts were trees grafted from two species. The blurring of two tree-types also perhaps symbolizes the meeting of the real and fairy worlds. Seth Lerer, “Artifice and Artistry in Sir Orfeo,” Speculum 60:1 (1985): 95-6.

5 Sleeping under a tree in the morning asks for trouble in romance as “it openly invited the intervention of fairies and placed one in their power.” Thomas J. Garbaty, Sir Orfeo, Medieval English Literature (Long Grove, Il: Waveland, 1984), note to lines 69-72. See also Sir Launfal for a similar occurrence. One of the jokes of Sir Thopas is that Thopas intentionally sleeps outside in order to meet the fairy queen but nothing happens.

6 Thy rode, that was so red: Red cheeks with a white complexion was a sign of medieval beauty, as it marked a woman aristocratic enough to not need to labor outside. Nevertheless, Sir Orfeo evidently sees that the queen is unhealthily pale from shock.
Beth al blodi and al pale.
Allas! thy lovesum eyyen to
Loketh so man doth on his fo!
A, dame, ich biseche, merci!
Lete ben al this reweful cri,
And tel me what the is, and hou,
And what thing may the help now.”
Tho lay sche stille atte last
And gan to wepe swithe fast,
And seyd thus the King to:
“Alas, mi lord, Sir Orfeo!
Sethen we first togider were,
Ones wroth never we nere;
Bot ever ich have yloved the
As mi liif and so thou me;
Ac now we mot delen ato;
Do thi best, for y mot go.”
―Allas!” quath he, ―forlorn icham!
Whider wiltow go, and to wham?
Whider thou gost, ichil with the,
Whider y go, thou schalt with me.”
―Nay, nay, Sir, that nought nis!
Ichil the telle al hou it is:
As ich lay this undertide
And slepe under our orchardside,
Ther come to me to fair knightes,
Wele y-armed al to rightes,
And bad me comen an heighing
And speke with her lord the king.
And ich answerd at wordes bold,
Y durst nought, no y nold.
Thai priked oyain as thai might drive;
Tho com her king, also blive,
With an hundred knightes and mo,
And damisels an hundred also,
Al on snowe-white stedes;
As white as milke were her wedes.
Y no seighe never yete bifoire
So fair creatours y-core.
The king hadde a croun on hed;
It nas of silver, no of gold red,
Ac it was of a precious ston -
As bright as the sonne it schon.
And as son as he to me cam,
Wold ich, nold ich, he me nam,
And made me with him ride
Opon a palfray bi his side;
And brought me to his palays,
Wele atird in ich ways,
Are all bloody and pale.
Alas! Your two lovely eyes
Look like a man does on his enemy.
Oh, lady, have mercy on us!
Let go all this pitiful crying
And tell me what troubles you, and how,
And what thing will help you now.”
At last she lay still
And immediately began to sob,
And said this to the king:
“Alas, my lord, Sir Orfeo!
Since we were first together, we have
Never once been angry with each other,
But I have always loved you
As much as my life, and you the same.
But now we must be split apart.
Do your best, for I must go!”
“Alas!” he shouted. “I am lost!
Where will you go, and to who?
Wherever you go, I will follow,
And wherever I go, you will be with me.”
“No, no, sir, it cannot be!
I will tell you all about it.
As I lay down this morning
And slept under the shade of our orchard,
Two noble knights came to me,
Well-armed, as was proper,
And requested that I come in haste
To speak with their lord, the king.
I answered with bold words
That I did not dare to, nor did I want to.
They rode away as fast as they could.
Then their king came, just as quickly,
With a hundred knights and more,
And a hundred damsels as well,
All on snow-white steeds,
With their clothes as white as milk.
I never before saw
Such perfectly fair creatures!
The king had a crown on his head.
It was not silver, nor red gold,
But of a precious stone.
It shone as bright as the sun!
And as soon as he came to me,
Whether I liked it or not, he took me,
And made me ride with him
Upon a palfrey by his side.
He brought me to his palace,
Which was well-decorated in every way.

Sir Orfeo repeats Ruth 1:16. TEAMS notes that although Ruth is speaking to her mother-in-law Naomi, “the lines were frequently associated with holy matrimony.”
And schewed me castels and tours,
Rivers, forestes, frith with flours,
And his riche stedes ichon.
And sethen me brought oyain hom
Into our owhen orchard,
And said to me thus afterward,
‘Loke, dame, tomorwe thatow be
Right here under this ympe-tre,
And than thou schalt with ous go
And live with ous evermo,
And yif thou makest ous y-let,
What thou be, thou worst y-let,
And toto thine limes al
That nothing help the no schal;
And thei thou best so totorn,
Yete thou worst with ous y-born.”
When King Orfeo herd this cas,
―O we!‖ quath he, ―Allas, allas!
Lever me were to lete mi liif
Than thus to lese the quen, mi wiif!”
He asked conseyl at ich man,
Ac no man him help no can.
Amorwe the undertide is come
And Orfeo hath his armes y-nome,
And wele ten hundred knightes with him,
Ich y-armed, stout and grim;
And with the quen wenten he
Right unto that ympe-tre.
Thai made scheltrom in ich a side
And sayd thai wold there abide
And dye ther everichon,
Er the quen schuld fram hem gon.
Ac yete amiddes hem ful right
The quen was oway y-twight,
With fairi forth y-nome.
Men wist never wher sche was bicom.
Tho was ther criing, wepe and wo!
The king into his chaumber is go,
And oft swoned opon the ston,
And made swiche diol and swiche mo
That neighe his liif was y-spent.
Ther was non amendement.
He cleped togider his barouns,
Erls, lordes of renouns,
And when thai al y-comen were,
“Lordinges,” he said, “bifor you here
Ich ordainy min heigne steward
To wite mi kiomdom afterward;
In mi stede ben he schal

And showed me castles and towers,
Rivers, forestes, woods with flowers,
And each one of his fine steeds.
And after he brought me back home
Into our own orchard,
And said this to me after:
‘See to it, madam, that tomorrow
You are right here under this tree,
And then you will go with us
And live with us forever.
And if you make difficulties for us,
Wherever you are, you will be fetched,
And your limbs all ripped apart,
So that nothing will help you at all.
And even if you are so torn,
You will still be carried away with us.’
When King Orfeo had heard this matter,
“Oh, woe,” he exclaimed, “alas, alas!
I would rather lose my life
Than lose the queen, my wife, in this way!”
He asked for counsel from each man,
But no one could help him.
The next day, when morning had come,
Orfeo took up his arms
And a good thousand knights with him,
Each well-armed, strong, and fierce.
And with the queen he went
Right under that orchard tree.
They made a shield wall on each side
And said they would stand there
And die to the last man
Before the queen would go from them.
But yet from right in the middle of them,
The queen was snatched away,
Taken from them by fairies.
Men did not know where she had gone.
Then there was crying, weeping, and woe!
The king went to his chamber
And continually fell on the floor,
And made such mourning and moaning
That his life seemed nearly spent,
For there was no remedy.
He called together his barons,
Earls, and lords of renown,
And when they had all arrived,
“Lordings,” he said, “before you all here,
I appoint my high steward
To rule my kingdom from here on.
In my place he will have authority

8 Scheltrom: A “shield wall,” the defense tactic of the Anglo-Saxon forces used at Hastings (Garbaty, note to 187).
To kepe mi londes overal.
For now ichave mi quen y-lore,
The fairest levedi that ever was bore,
Never eft y nil no woman se.
Into wildernes ichil te
And live ther evermore
With wilde bestes in holtes hore;
And when ye understond that y be spent,
Make you than a parlement,
And chese you a newe king.
Now doth ther wepeing in the halle
And grete cri among hem alle;
Unnethe might old or yong
For wepeing speke a word with tong.
Thai kneled adoun al y-fere
And praid him, yif his wille were,
That he no schuld nought fram hem go.
‖Do way!‖ quath he, ―It schal be so!‖
Al his kingdom he forsoke;
Bot a sclavin on him he toke.
He no hadde kirtel no hode,
Schert, ne no nother gode,
Bot his harp he tok algate
And dede him barfot out atte gate;
He that had y-werd the fowe and griis,
And on bed the purper biis,
Now on hard hethe he lith,
With leves and gresse he him writh.
He that hadde castels and tours,
River, forest, frith with flouris,
Now, thei it comenci to snewe and frese,
This king mot make his bed in mese.
He that had y-had knightes of priis
Bifor him kneland, and levedis,
To manage all my lands.
For now I have lost my queen,
The fairest lady who was ever born.
Never again will I see a woman!
I will go into the wildernes
And live there forevermore,
With wilde bestes in dark foreste.
And when you learn that I am dead,
Then call a parliament
And choose yourselves a newe king.
Now do your best with all my affairs.‖
There was weeping in the hall,
And a great cry among them all.
Young and old could hardly speak
A word with their tongue for weeping.
They kneeled down all together,
And pleaded with him, if it were his will,
That he would not desert them.
―Enough!‖ he said, ―It shall be so!‖
He abandoned all his kingdom,
Taking only a pilgrim’s cloak.
He had neither tunic nor hood,
Nor a shirt, nor any other goods.
He continually held only his harp
And passed barefoot by the gate.
No man might go with him.
Alas! What weeping and woe there was
When he, who had been a king with a crown
Went out of town in such poverty.
He walked through woods and bushes
Into the wilderness.9
He found nothing that would comfort him,
But always lived in great hardship.
He who had worn rich and colorful furs,10
And slept on purple sheets in bed,
Now slept on the hard brush,
With leaves and grass to cover himself.
He who had castles and towers, now had
Rivers, forests, and woods with flowers.
Now that it began to snow and freeze,
This king had to make his bed in moss.
He who had knights of great estate,
Kneeling before him with ladies.

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9 Why Orfeo enters an ascetic life in the woods is disputed. It may be an act of despair, atonement, or an expression of love for his wife. Gros Louis argues that Orfeo is not searching for Herodis: “The ten years he spends in the wilderness constitute a kind of penance, and because of it, Orfeo receives a gift of grace - Herodis is returned to him” (247). Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, “The Significance of Sir Orfeo’s Self-Exile,” Review of English Studies 18 (1967): 245-52. But see lines 129-30.

10 The fowe and griis: The MED defines fowe as a “parti-colored fur” and griis as possibly fur from “the Russian grey squirrel in winter.” The phrase shows up in numerous texts and evidently suggests warm and luxurious clothing.
Now seth he nothing that him liketh,  
Bot wilde wormes bi him striketh.  
He that had y-had plenté  
Of mete and drink, of ich deynté,  
Now may he al day digge and wrote  
Er he finde his file of rote.  
In somer he liveth bi wild frut,  
And berien bot gode lite;  
In winter may he nothing finde  
Bot rote, grases, and the rinde.  
Al his bodi was oway dwine  
For missays, and al to-chine.  
Lord! who may telle the sore  
This king sufferd ten yere and more?  
His here of his berd, blac and rowe,  
To his girdel-stede was growe.  
His harp, whereon was al his gle,  
He hidde in an holwe tre;  
And when the weder was clere and bright,  
He toke his harp to him wel right  
And harped at his owhen wille.  
Into alle the wode the soun gan schille,  
That alle the wilde bestes that ther beth  
For joie abouten him thieth,  
And alle the foules that ther were  
Come and sete on ich a brere  
To here his harping a-fine -  
So miche melody was therin;  
And when he his harping lete wold,  
No best bi him abide nold.  
He might se him bisides,  
Oft in hot undertides,  
The king o fairy with his rout  
Com to hunt him al about  
With dim cri and bloweing,  
And houndes also with him berking;  
Ac no best thai no nome,  
No never he nist whider they bicome  
And other while he might him se  
As a gret ost bi him te,  
Wele atourned, ten hundred knightes,  
Ich y-armed to his rightes,  
Of cuntenaunce stout and fers,  
With mani desplaid baners,  
And ich his swerd y-drawe hold -  
Ac never he nist whider thai wold.  
And otherwise he seighe other thing:  
Knightes and levedis com daunceing  
In queynt atire, gisely,  
Queynt pas and softly;  
Tabours and trunpes yede hem bi,  
And al maner menstraci.  
And on a day he seighe him beside  
Sexti levedis on hors ride,
Gentil and jolif as brid on ris;  
Nought o man amongst hem ther nis;  
And ich a faucoun on hond bere,  
And ridden on haukin bi o riwer.  
Of game thai founde wel gode haunt  
- Maulardes, hayroun, and cormeraunt;  
The foules of the water ariseth,  
The faucouns hem wele deviseth;  
Ich faucoun his pray slough  
That seigh Orfeo, and lough:  
"Parfay!" quath he, "ther is fair game;  
Thider ichil, bi Godes name;  
Ich was y-won swiche werk to se!"  
He aros, and thider gan te.  
To a levedi he was y-come,  
Biheld, and theth wele undernome,  
And seth bi al thing that it is  
His owen quen, Dam Heurodis.  
Yern he biheld hir, and sche him eke,  
Ac noither to other a word no speke;  
For messais that sche on him seighe,  
The teres fel out of her eighe.  
The other levedis this y-seighe  
And maked hir oway to ride -  
Sche most with him no lenger abide.  
"Alas!" quath he, "now me is wo!"  
Whi nil deth now me slo?  
Allas! wreche, that y no might  
Dye now after this sight!  
Alas! to long last mi liif,  
When y no dar nought with mi wiif,  
No hye to me, o word speke.  
Alas! Whi nil min hert breke!  
Parfay!" quath he, "tide wat bitide,  
Whiderso this levedis ride,  
The selve way ichil streche -  
Of liif no deth me no reche."  
His sclavain he deede on also spac  
And henge his harp opon his bac,  
And had wel gode wil to gon -  
He no spard noither stub no ston.  
In at a roche the levedis rideth,  
And he after, and nought abideth.  
When he was in the roche y-go,  
Wele thre mile other mo,

As joyful and fair as birds on boughs.  
Not one man was among them.  
And each bore a falcon on her hand,  
And rode on, hawking by a river.  
They found game in great plenty,  
Mallards, herons, and cormorants.  
The birds of the water rose up,  
The birds of the water rose up,  
And the falcons marked them precisely.  
Each falcon killed its prey.  
Orfeo saw that and laughed.  
"By my faith," he said, "there's good sporting!  
I'll go there, by God's name.  
I would like to see such skill!"  
He got up, and went toward them.  
He came up to a lady,  
Beheld her, and realized clearly,  
And saw, by all things, that it was  
His own queen, Lady Herodis.  
He gazed at her earnestly, and she did also.  
But neither said a word to the other.  
For the sadness that she saw in him,  
Who had been so rich and so exalted,  
The tears fell out of her eyes.  
The other ladies saw this  
And made her ride away.  
She could no longer stay with him.  
"Alas!" he said, "now woe is me!  
Why will death not take me?  
Alas! My life lasts too long  
When I dare not do any thing with my wife,  
Nor her with me, nor speak a word.  
Alas! Why does my heart not break!  
By my faith," he cried, "come what may,  
Wherever these ladies are riding,  
I will hurry the same way.  
I do not care about life or death."  
He threw on his cloak as quickly,  
And hung his harp on his back,  
And was fully set on going.  
He spared neither stump nor stone.  
The ladies rode into a cliffside,  
And he followed and did not wait.  
When he had gone into the cave  
Well over three miles.

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11 Ac noither to other a word no speke: Garbaty suggests an echo of the original Orpheus-Eurydice story in this "magic communication ban," but adds that in folklore mortals could not address fairies or they might disappear (note to 324).

12 He no spard noither stub no ston: He did not spare his foot from hitting stump or stone, i.e. he ran with abandon. Compare Havelock (899), "Sparede he neyther tos ne heles."
He com into a fair cuntray
As bright so sonne on somers day,
Smothe and plain and al grene -
Hille no dale nas ther non y-sene.
Amidde the lond a castel he sighe,
Riche and real and wonder heighe.
Al the utmast wal
Was clere and schine as cristal;
An hundred tours ther were about,
Degiselich and bataild stout.
The butras com out of the diche
Of rede gold y-arched riche.
The vousour was avowed al
Of ich maner divers aumal.
Within ther wer wide wones,
Al of precious stones;
The werst piler on to biholde
Was al of burnist gold.
Al that lond was ever l
ight,
For when it schuld be therk and night,
The riche stones light gonne
As bright as doth at none the sonne.
No man may telle, no thenche in thought,
The riche werk that ther was wrought.
Bi al thing him think that it is
The proude court of Paradis.
In t
his castel the levedis alight;
He wold in after, yif he might.
Orfeo knokketh atte gate;
The porter was redi therate
And asked what he wold hav y-do.
―Parfay!‖ quath he, ―icham a minstrel, lo!
To solas thi lord with mi gle,
Yif his swete wille be.‖
The porter undede the gate anon
And lethe him into the castel gon.
Than he gan bihold about al,
And seighe liggeand within the wal
Of folk that were thider y-brought
And thought dede, and nare nought.
Sum stode withouten hade,
And sum non armes nade,
And sum thurt the bodi hadde wounde,

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13 Bataild: The towers had battlements, parapets, or other military or ornamental indentations in the walls (TEAMS and MED). Degiselich, perhaps “strange or wonderful,” has no other citation besides Orfeo in the MED.

14 Divers aumal: Probably enamel. Garbaty reads animal, suggesting painted creatures. The Auchinleck scribe does not dot i’s and so on the page it is a maddening animal. Lerer argues that an enamel-like look achieved by painting on glass or foil was popular in late medieval architecture and calls the rendering animal “nonsensical.” Lerer 99-100 and E. W. Tristram, English Medieval Wall Painting: The Thirteenth Century (Oxford: University Press, 1950), 407.

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And sum lay wode, y-bounde,
And sum armed on hors sete,
And sum astrangled as thai ete;
And sum were in water adreynt,
Wives ther lay on childe bedde,
Sum ded and sum awedde.
And wonder fele ther lay bisides
Right as thai slepe her undertides;
Eche was thus in this warld ynome,
With fairi thider ycome.
Ther he seighe his owhen wiif,
Dame Heurodis, his lef liif,
Slepe under an ympe tre
Bi her clothes he knewe that it was he.
And when he hadde bihold this mervails alle,
He went into the kinges halle.
Than seighe he ther a semly sight,
A tabernacle blisseful and bright,
Therin her maister king sete
And her quen, fair and swete.
Her crounes, her clothes schine so bright
That unnethe bihold he him miught.
When he hadde biholden al that thing,
He knelt adoun bifor the king:
―O lord,‖ he seyd, ―yif it thi wille were,
Mi menstraci thou schust yhere.‖
The king answered, ―What man artow,
That art hider ycome now?
Ich, no non that is with me,
No sent nev er after the.
Sethen that ich here regni gan,
Y no fond never so folheardi man
That hider to ous durst wende
Bot that ic him wald ofsende.‖
―Lord,‖ quath he, ―trowe ful wel,
Y nam bot a pover menstre;
And, sir, it is the maner of ous
To seche mani a lorde hous -
Thei we nought welcom no be,
Yete we mot proferi forth our gle.‖
Bifor the king he sat adoun
And tok his harp so miri of soun,
And tempreth his harp, as he wele can,
And blisseful notes he ther gan,
That al that in the palays were
Com to him forto here,
And liggeth adoun to his fete -
Hem thenketh his melody so swete.
The king herkneth and sitt ful stille;
To here his gle he hath gode wil.
Gode bourde he hadde of his gle;
The riche quen also hadde he.
When he hadde stint his harping,
### Than seyd to him the king,

“Menstrel, me liketh wel thi gle.
Now aske of me what it be,
Largelich ichil the pay;
Now speke, and tow might asay.”

“Sir,” he seyd, “ich biseche the
Thatow woldest give me
That ich levedi, bright on ble,
That slepeth under the ympe-tree.”

“Nay!” quath the king, “that nought nere!
A sori couple of you it were,
For thou art lene, rowe and blac,
And sche is lovesum, withouten lac;
A lothlich thing it were, forthi,
To sen hir in thi compayni.”

“O sir!” he seyd, “gentil king,
Yete were it a wele﻿ fouler thing
To here a lesing of thi mouthe!
So, sir, as ye said nouthe,
What ich wold aski, have y schold,
And nedes thou most thi word hold.”

The king seyd, “Sethen it is so,
Take hir bi the hond and go;
Of hir ichil thatow be blithe.”
He kneled adoun a
and thonked him swithe.
His wiif he tok bi the hond,
And dede him swithe out of that lond,
And went him out of that thede
Right as he come, the way he yede.
So long he hath the way y
To Winchester he is y
That was his owhen cité;
Ac no man knewe that it was he.
No forther than the tounes ende
For knoweleche no durst he wende,
Bot with a begger, y-bilt ful narwe,
Ther he tok his herbarwe
To him and to his owhen wiif
As a minstrel of pover liif,
And asked tidinges of that lond,
And who the kingdom held in hond.
The pover begger in his cote
Told him everich a grot:
Hou her quen was stole owy,
Ten yer gon, with fairy,
And hou her king en exile yede,

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15 As TEAMS notes, a promise must be kept, especially by a king, as “faireyland abides by the customs of the ideal medieval court.” The Rash Promise is common in folklore and even exists in scripture: in Mark 6:22-28 Herod makes a similar blank cheque to Herodias, who asks for John the Baptist’s head. Herod grieves but consents. Orpheo’s wiliness is especially ‘Greek’ here as he maneuvers the king into the bargain and then quickly leaves.

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But no man nist in wiche thede; And how the steward the lond gan hold, And other mani thinges him told. Amorwe, oyain nonetide, He maked his wiif ther abide; The beggers clothes he borwed anon And heng his harp his rigge opon, And went him into that cité That men might him bihold and see. Amorwe, oyain nonetide, He maked his wiif ther abide; The beggers clothes he borwed anon And heng his harp his rigge opon, And went him into that cité That men might him bihold and see. Earlis and barouns bold, Buriays and levedis him gun bihold. “Lo!” thai seyd, “swiche a man!” Hou long the here hongeth him opan! Lo! Hou his berd hongeth to his kne! He is y-clongen also a tre!‖ And, as he yede in the strete, With his steward he gan mete, And loude he sett on him a crie: “Sir steward!” he seyd, “merci! Icham an harpour of hethenisse; Help me now in this destresse!” The steward seyd, “Com with me, come; Of that ichave, thou schalt have some. Everich gode harpour is welcom me to For mi lordes love, Sir Orfeo.” In the castel the steward sat atte mete, And mani lording was bi him sete; Ther were trompours and tabourers, Harpours fele, and crouders - Miche melody thi maked alle. And Orfeo sat stille in the halle And herkneth; when thai ben al stille, The blissefulest notes he harped there That ever ani man y-herd with ere - Ich man liked wele his gle. The steward biheld and gan y-se, And knewe the harp als blive. “Menstrel!” he seyd, “so mot thou thrive, Where hadestow this harp, and hou? Y pray that thou me telle now.” “Lord,” quath he, “in uncouthe thede Thurth a wildernes as y yede, Ther y founde in a dale With lyouns a man totorn smale, And wolves him frete with teth so scharp. Bi him y fond this ich harp; But no man knew in which country; And how the steward had managed the land, And many other things. The next morning, near noon, Orfeo had his wife stay there. He borrowed the beggar’s clothes And hung his harp on his back, And went into the city So that men might behold him and see. Earlis and bold barons, townsmen and Ladies, all began to notice him. “Look,” they said, “at such a man! See how long the hair hangs on him! Look how his beard comes to his knee! He is as gnarled as a tree!” And then, as he walked in the street, He met up with his steward, And he cried out to him loudly, “Sir steward,” he said, “have pity! I am a harpist from heathen lands. Help me now in my distress!” The steward said, “Come with me, come. I will share with you from what I have. Every good harpist is welcome here For the love of my lord, Sir Orfeo.” The steward sat in the castle at dinner, And many lords were seated by him. There were trumpet players and drummers, Lute players, and many harpists. They all made a rich melody, And Orfeo sat quietly in the hall And listened. When they were all still, He took his harp and tuned it firmly. There he harped the most beautiful notes That any man ever heard with his ears. Each man was pleased with his music. The steward watched and began to notice And recognized the harp at once. “Minstrel,” he said, “as you live and die, Where did you get this harp, and how? I ask that you tell me now.” “My lord,” he answered, “as I wandered Through the wilderness in a strange land, There I saw in a valley A man torn to tiny pieces by a lion, And gobbled by wolves with teeth so sharp! Beside him I found this same harp.

16 Rather than the usual “false steward” motif of romance, here the steward is loyal and upright. TEAMS notes the resemblance to the faithful servant of Luke 12:35-46. In the fragments of the analogous Scottish King Orphius the steward is the king’s nephew. Felicity Riddy, “The Uses of the Past in Sir Orfeo,” Yearbook of English Studies 6 (1976): 7.
Wele ten yere it is y-go,"
“O!” quath the steward, “now me is wo!
That was mi lord, Sir Orfeo!
Allas, wreche, what schal y do,
That have swiche a lord y-lore?
A, way that ich was y-bore!
That him was so hard grace y-yarked,
And so vile deth y-marked!”
Adoun he fel aswon to grounde;
His barouns him tok up in that stounde
And telleth him how it geth-
“IT is no bot of mannes deth!”
King Orfeo knewe wele bi than
His steward was a trewe man
And loved him as he aught to do,
And stont up, and seyt thus, “Lo,
Steward, herkne now this thing:
Yif ich were Orfeo the king,
And hadde y-suffred ful yore
In wildernisse miche sore,
And hadde y-won mi quen o-wy
Out of the lond of fairy,
And hadde y-brought the levedi hende
Right here to the tounes ende,
And with a begger her in y-nome,
And were mi-self hider y-come
Poverlich to the, thus stille,
For to asay thi gode wille,
And ich founde the thus trewe,
Thou no schust it never rewe.
Sikerlich, for love or ay,
Thou schust be king after mi day;
And yif thou of mi deth hadest ben blithe,
Thou schust have voided, also swithe.”
Tho al tho that therin sete
That it was King Orfeo underyete,
And the steward him wele knewe -
Over and over the bord he threwe,
And fel adoun to his fet;
So dede everich lord that ther sete,
And all thai seyd at o cring:
“Ye beth our lord, sir, and our king!”
Glad thai were of his live;
To chaumber thai ladde him als belive
And bathed him and schaved his berd,
And tired him as a king apert;
And sethen, with gret processioun,
Thai brought the quen into the toun
With al maner menstraci -

It was a good ten years ago,"
“Oh,” exclaimed the steward, “now me is wo!
That was mi lord, Sir Orfeo!
Alas, wreche, what shall I do
Now that I have lost such a lord!
Oh, woe that I was ever born,
That such hard grace was fated for him
And such a vile death ordained!”
He fell faint to the ground.
His barons lifted him up at that instant
And said it was the way of the world.
“There is no remedy for man’s death!”
By this King Orfeo knew well
That his steward was a true man
Who loved him as he ought to do,
And he stood up and said, “Look,
Steward, listen now to my words:
If I were Orfeo the king,
And had suffered long ago
In the wilderness with great sorrow,
And had won back my queen
Out of the land of fairies,
And had brought the gracious lady
Right here to the town’s borders,
And had left her with a beggar,
And had come here myself,
In poverty to you, in that way still,
In order to test your good will,
And I found you so faithful,
You would never regret it.
For certain, for love or fear,
You would be king after my day!
But if you were pleased with my death,
You would as quickly be banished.”
When all those sitting there
Realized that he was King Orfeo,
And the steward recognized him in full,
He turned over the table boards17
And fell down to his feet.
Every lord that sat there did the same,
And they all said in one voice,
“You are our lord, sire, and our king!”
They were glad of him being alive.
They brought him at once to a chamber
And bathed him and shaved his beard,
And clothed him as a proper king.
And then, with great ceremony,
They brought the queen into town
With all kinds of music.

17 Over and over the bord he threwe: the poet likely wishes to emphasize that rather than walking around a long row of tables, the steward instantly throws aside the boards to rush across the stands to Orfeo.
Lord! ther was grete melody!
For joie thai wepe with her eighe
That hem so sounde y-comen seighe.
Now King Orfeo newe coround is,
And his quen, Dame Heurodis,
And lived long afterward,
And sethen was king the steward.
Harpours in Bretaine after than
Herd hou this mervaile bigan,
And made herof a lay of gode likeing,
And nempned it after the king.
That lay "Orfeo" is y-hote;
Gode is the lay, swete is the note.
Thus com Sir Orfeo out of his care:
God graunt ous alle wele to fare! Amen!

Lord, there was a great melody!
Whoever saw them come back safe
Wept with their eyes for joy.
Now King Orfeo was newly crowned
With his queen, Dame Herodis,
And they lived long afterward,
And later the steward was king.
After then the harpists in Brittany
Heard about this marvelous story,
And made a lay of great delight from it,
And named it after the king.
That lay is called Sir Orfeo.
The tale is good, and the notes are sweet.
Thus Sir Orfeo came out of his troubles.
May God grant that we fare as well! Amen.

The End
Sex and Consequences in *Sir Degare* and *Sir Orfeo*

Despite the harsh post-Reformation and modern belief that the medieval Catholic church could do no good, there were no doubt capable and well-intentioned administrators in holy offices and honest servants such as Chaucer’s Parson. Although most of our written knowledge comes filtered through the lens of clerics, it was an age of general belief which permeated medieval values and culture. Throughout these chapters I have at times endeavored to show how such works as *Amis and Amiloun* or *Bevis of Hampton* symbolize, depict, or reflect religious themes. Yet other subject matters were available, and poets did not at least in practice have the strictures operant in the Muslim world. Directly anti-religious texts were not an option, though constructively critical depictions of the church such as *Piers Plowman* or *Gamelyn* were, and stories non-religious but still set in a Christian (or Christianized) milieu such as bawdy riddles and fabliaux also circulated with reasonable liberty.

In interpreting *Sir Orfeo* Doob sees Orfeo as a sort of holy wild man and reads the poem as “shaped by the Christian pattern of Fall, Redemption, and Judgment,” though not strictly as direct allegory. The story has non-Christian roots in Ovid and Virgil, perhaps filtered through translations of its summary in Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* (III.Metr. xii). Yet the poet takes the usual romance liberties in recasting Orpheus into a medieval realm, ending with a benediction. *Sir Degare* also has hagiographic hints in depicting Degare as a foundling raised by hermits, with possible

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origins in the *vita* of Pope Gregory the Great. Both stories reside in Auchinleck alongside homiletic texts and *Degare* follows *The Paternoster* and *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*. But our conceptions of printed books as unified verbal units is modern, and manuscripts showed less concern for genre uniformity than printed books do. The Auchinleck manuscript has also been explained as separate booklets which were later gathered. In their treatment of the main narrative event of the poems, the sexual assault or abduction of the heroines by fairies, *Sir Degare* and *Sir Orfeo* are non-religious texts in mode and theme. In both poems the ravishing does not suggest evil in the antagonist or sin in the heroine, and the concluding restoration is a secular one.

Claims that medieval romances were salacious often betray the romanticism of critics more than the texts. English romances seldom conform to the prescriptive definition of courtly love as adulterous, and sex usually reflects traditional morality in its (non) depiction. A wide stylistic divide separates most medieval romances from *Dame Sirith*. Yet *Degare* has the queasy subthemes of incest and rape, with *Orfeo*’s plot vehicle an equally ominous ravishing scene. Herodis explains the fairy king’s physical confrontation in the language of sexual force—“wold ich, nold ich, he me nam” (154)—much like the fairy knight’s words to the princess, “thou best mi lemman ar thou go / wether the liketh wel or wo” (107-8). While actual sexual assault was rare in romance,
“rape frequently overlaps with abduction.”⁴ Chaucer shunned incest as a theme and the Man of Laws refuses to discuss “swiche unkynde abhomynacions” (II.88).⁵ Yet the Wife of Bath’s “lusty bacheler” rapes a maiden and in return receives “a bath of blisse” (III.1253) with a beautiful bride.⁶ Despite the fairy-tale scenario the reward for his crime seems outrageously undeserved.

In the *Wife of Bath’s Tale* the offended community demands execution for the knight, who “sholde han lost his heed” (II.892), but the reader knows the extreme sentence will not be carried out and only appears for dramatic effect. In *Havelock*, under Athelwold anyone “wo so dide maydne shame” (84) has limbs cut off, but such severity was rare in fact and prosecution was difficult. Penalties in medieval Europe were situational depending on the extremity of the act, but in broad principle rape was “both a sexual crime and a crime against property and family interests,”⁷ and thus a virgin’s violation was considerably more serious than a married woman’s. As unpleasant as such realities are to modern ears, “the punishment for rape tended to be less severe than for other crimes, such as stealing.”⁸ Medieval romance often seems less concerned with sexual assault than with men falsely accused of the crime by spurned women. Belisaunt threatens Amis (632-6) and the queen in *Sir Launfal* accuses the hero only to have the

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⁶ For arguments that Chaucer might have used the *Degare* rape in writing the Wife of Bath’s tale see Laura Hibbard Loomis, “Chaucer and the Breton Layes of the Auchinleck,” *Studies in Philology* 38:1 (1941): 30-1.
fairy Dame Tryamour avenge him by blowing on her “swych a breþ / þat never eft myȝt sche se” (*Launfal* 1007-8).  

We want to see the fairy king and fairy knight punished or at least damned by the narrator for their respective violations, but neither happens. The knight in *Degare* is a strangely well-mannered rapist who speaks kindly and reassuringly to the princess, announcing “damaisele, welcome mote thou be!” (98) before taking her maidenhead by force. He then “stands before her as if nothing has happened and speaks to her as a courtly gentleman might speak.” The scene ends with an affectionate dictum, “‘lemman,’ he seide, ‘gent and fre / mid schilde I wot that thou schalt be’” (115-6) and a breezy “have god dai.” The poet makes no moral comment on the event, and later when the son meets the father Degare even apologizes for fighting him: “the sone cride merci there / his owen fader of his misdede” (1067-8). Degare and the knight then return to the castle where the princess happily marries him. The king has no objections to the man who has given him a bastard grandson, in English law a state irremediable *post hoc* by marriage. No one in the poem has assigned any stain of sin or wrongdoing to the fairy knight for his actions.

Equally with the *Orfeo* poet, “nowhere in fact does he betray an attitude towards the fairies that is anything other than approving or awed” despite the fairy king threatening to “totore thine limes al” (“rip off all your limbs,” 171) to the queen, who

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claws her face with her nails in crazed terror before her forced abduction the next morning. The poet seems oblivious that Orfeo’s tender promise that “whider thou gost, ichil with the” (129), in juxtaposition with the fairy king’s ultimatum to “with ous go / and live with ous evermo” (167-8), makes the latter sound “like a prison sentence.” As with Degare’s knight, the fairy king has a curious mix of transcendent gentility and brutality. The queen’s rapturous narration that the fairies rode “al on snowe-white stedes / as white as milke were her wedes / Y no seighe never yete before / so fair creatours” (145-8) is followed by the fairy king’s thuggish threat, “and yif thou makest ous y-let / whar thou be, thou worst y-fet” (“and if you make difficulties for us, wherever you are, you will be found,” 169-70). No one in either poem attaches normative Christian valuations of sin or evil to these criminal actions, and no scenes of petition or prayer follow for mercy or guidance.

The fairy otherworld which Orfeo infiltrates to find Herodis has been given traditional identifications with Hell or Purgatory, but neither fits. Orfeo beholds a grim spectacle oftormented deaths, but no one actively suffers in a manner suggesting punitive or restorative justice. The overwhelming emotion of the tableau is frozen stasis: “wonder fele ther lay bisides / right as thai slepe her undertides” (401-2). Davies finds a purgatorial reference here in that all “died suddenly and unshriven.” Yet the otherworld lacks any movement, unlike Dante’s vision where souls run impotently from winds and fire or slowly ameliorate and journey in penitence with thankful grace. Despite her horse ride earlier Herodis still sleeps under the tree (407). The souls are not necessarily souls

but apparently bodies, as they are “thought dede, and nare nought” (390). The spirits are shocked by Dante when he casts a shadow (Purg. III.88-90), but Orfeo brings Herodis back to Winchester alive and in fully physical form without losing her by making the mistake of looking back.

Though the frame of the story operates in a Christian world, the otherworld occupies a reality unconnected to it. The poet drew upon traditions of Orpheus’ visit to Hades but also perhaps Gaelic folklore in which the daoine maithe, the “Good People,” take away the bodies of those dying in violent or unnatural ways. In many ways the fairy otherworld simply perfects Orfeo’s harmonious court. Both Orfeo and the narrator are awed by the fairy palaces: “al the utmast wal / was clere and schine as cristal,” (357-8) and “no man may telle, no thenche in thought / the riche werk that ther was wrought” (373-4). Yet Lerer notes that “romance often portrays the hero’s encounter with palaces of illusory splendor,” and like the emir’s garden in Floris and Blancheflor the beautiful vistas deceptively mask their danger or moral torpidity. Despite its glittering charms the castle imprisons its occupants, and though the fairy king is no devil—he keeps his word and seems remarkably human in his surprise at Orfeo’s audacity and his enthusiastic but rash promise—the king also attempts a prevarication and only grudgingly awards


15 Lerer, 93.

Herodis to Orfeo, who hurries “swithe out of that lond” (474) before the king has time or opportunity to change his mind.

Yet Degare and Orfeo do not see Christian sin in the fairy knight and king’s rape-abduction, nor do they attach religious meaning to the heroines’ experience of the actions. The narratives intimate neither a retributive or restorative purpose for the trials faced by the protagonists. Colopy sees Degare as a highly Oedipal piece where the princess launders her desire for her father through his representative in the fairy knight, but such a reading also finds no moral dimension in the sexual assault. Colopy posits that the princess ambivalently craves and avoids her father by hiding in the forest, yet the narrative plainly has the ladies needing to “don here nedes” (54), to go to the bathroom. The princess’ rape seems to lack any moral justification as punishment. The occasion of her journey, to hear a mass for her mother and “poure men fede, and naked clothe” (44), hardly suggests sin or lasciviousness on her part.

Falk sees an identification between Orfeo and Edward II, and suggests that the maids who see Herodis and “durst hir nought awake” (73) and then rush away to embarrass the king with her madness reflect English antipathy towards the incompetent Edward and scheming Isabella. But the argument reads a spiteful tone into durst, “dared,” unsupported by the poem, where Herodis also “durst nought” (140) accompany the fairy king and Orfeo “no durst” (482) enter Winchester without a disguise, and poorly fits the mood and events of the poem. The real Edward and Isabella waged war over England,

17 Colopy, 33.
whereas when Orfeo and Herodis return to the townspeople, “for joie thai wepe with her eighe” (591). Critics have puzzled over why Herodis deserves her fate with recourse to the usual misogynist identification that she shares an Eve-like sensuality and idleness in her orchard nap which precipitates her fall.19 The charge seems a mean-spirited stretch, and the narrator imputes no such blame to her actions. Moreover, she returns to wedded joy at the poem’s close.

Medieval lore might better explain Herodis’ fortune. In numerous romances falling asleep under trees at undertide brings fairies, and Jirsa notes that in medieval lore the shadows of some trees such as the yew, walnut, and juniper were considered noxious or dangerous.20 Scholars from Pliny to Bartholomaeus Anglicus warn of headaches or other ailments, and as late as the fourteenth century John Trevisa writes of the yew that “þe schadowe þerof is grevous and slee hem þat slepiþ þerunder.”21 The ladies protecting the princess in Degare similarly fall asleep under a chestnut tree (74) as if enchanted, leaving her vulnerable. English gardens were highly sculpted affairs meant to exclude the chaos of the forest, and the artifice of the grafted (ympe) tree was particularly attractive to aristocratic sentiments.22 Yet the ympe-tree also contains two species unnaturally blended, just as the fairy and real world ominously intersect for Herodis.23

19 Doob, 174.
20 Jirsa, 143-6.
22 Lerer, 95-6.
23 Alice E. Lasater, “Under the Ympe-tre or: Where the Action is in Sir Orfeo,” Southern Quarterly 12 (1974): 355. Lasater argues that the ympe is a grafted apple tree. The word also etymologically links to imp, a mischievous demon.
Christian theology mitigates against the idea of unexplainable randomness, but it formed an important part of Germanic wyrd. When the dragon attacks his kingdom, Beowulf believes in anguish that “he wealdende / ofer ealde riht  ecean dryhtne /
bitre gebulge” (“he had violated the old law, and had severely offended the Ruler, the eternal Lord,” 2329-31). But the terror of Beowulf lies in the existential unpredictability of its world, for the dragon or other monsters have no apparent cause to exist. Fate brings them and men must show fortitude regardless of risk. Similarly in Orfeo, albeit at a less epic level, the abduction simply happens and allows Orfeo to demonstrate nobility by repairing the breach of harmony in his kingdom wrought by the troublesome fairies. The arbitrary and random nature of the fairy king’s attack intensifies both its drama and Orfeo’s surmounting of fate.

Medieval theologians explained human misfortune through a complex mesh, interpreting it as God’s retributive or correcting punishment or as a Job-like testing such as Amiloun undergoes. The Ancren Riwle (c. 1200) sermonizes that “alse þe goldsmið clenseð þet gold iðe fure, al so deð God þe soule iðe fure of fondunge” (“as the goldsmith cleans the gold in the fire, so does God purify the soul in the fire of trials”). The princess in Degare laments her secret pregnancy but otherwise endures no apparent adversity after a maid discreetly removes the newborn Degare. When the hermit adopts him out to his sister, Degare “wende wel that the gode man / had ben his fader that him wan / and the wif his moder also / and the hermite his unkel” (279-82). As an older boy Degare receives security and a clerical education before taking on the trappings of a

knight. Degare has a deservedly tearful reunion with his mother, but the poem does not
pretend that Degare’s upbringing has been tragic or a transformative spiritual experience.
For a noble boy to be fostered by a maternal uncle would not have been in any way
unusual in a medieval court.

Orfeo’s self-exile presents a more difficult problem. Narratively, Herodis’
vanishing poses no existential crisis for the kingdom as does Beowulf’s dragon; if heirs
are an issue Orfeo can remarry. Doob asserts that the wild man in exile was associated
with divine punishment but “if the acts of penance are viewed as voluntary… the wild
man is holy.”26 Yet neither Orfeo nor Herodis has especially sinned or requires expiation.
Orfeo instead explains his departure in mourning terms: “for now ichave mi quen y-lore /
the fairest levedi that ever was bore / never eft y nil no woman se” (209-11). Critics have
suggested that Orfeo has a rather effeminate nature for a king as he is lost without his
wife and uses music and not arms to regain her.27 Yet the scheltroms have proven useless
where Orfeo’s eloquence and musicianship do not. Gros-Louis also argues that Orfeo
does not actually seek his wife but chooses self-exile to honor her memory. He makes
provisions for his kingdom and leaves civilization, and “not once, in all these years, does
he look for Heurodis”28 until meeting her by chance. Yet whatever his goals regarding
Herodis, Orfeo’s motivation is love rather than a desire for spiritual aims.

26 Doob, 159.
27 Joanne Charbonneau and Désirée Cromwell, “Gender and Identity in the Popular Romance,” in A
Companion to Medieval Popular Romance, ed. Raluca L. Radulescure, and Cory James Rushton,
246.
Both *Degare* and *Orfeo* feature unorthodox endings somewhat different from the usual exile-and-return narratives. *Degare* ends with reconciliation and a double wedding, validating the aristocratic values of a knight who is “both curteys and fre” (1106). Colopy calls the poem “the story of an Oedipus with a happy ending who marries his mother, fights with his father and wins the princess in the end.” These psychological undercurrents may operate in *Degare* as they may in *Floris and Blancheflor* as well. Yet both readings are essentially secular. Though the narrator gives a benediction, none of the characters has learned anything resembling saintly virtue. *Orfeo* similarly ends with Herodis having no lines at all. Orfeo returns to his kingdom with a deeper and richer appreciation of the limits of his power and of the qualities he finds in his steward. Oren reads a dark note at the close as Orfeo and Herodis apparently leave no heir, but the celebratory mood clearly shows otherwise. Orfeo rejoins his wife and reassumes his kingdom and the two actions dovetail in harmony. He is “newe coround” (593), and with his wife he “lived long afterward” (595). Narratively the ceremony “stands in for the marriage which so commonly ends lais” and romances generally.

*Degare* receives land, a wife, and family reconciliation at the poem’s denouement. Orfeo enjoys the fruits of a newly repaired and restored kingdom and marriage along with a faithful steward. In their endings both poems conform to standard romantic conventions of narrative structure, but neither story has them buried in monastic houses with monks to

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29 Colopy, 32.
30 Gros Louis, 251.
31 Oren, 248.
32 Nicholson, 170.
pray for them, and their benedictions are especially automatic. *Degare* has a rather odd structure in making the chief heroine the hero’s mother but the poem resolves the issue concisely. *Orfeo* has a richer personality, imbued with the exotic Celtic flavors of music, fairies, and otherworldly adventures. The poem’s qualities as a “swete” (602) tale of music and eloquence organically circle back to refer to the teller’s own *swete* skill in creating the lay. Although its identity as a *lai* places it in question as a genre, in one aspect *Sir Orfeo* is the most romantic, in the modern sense, of all these ten romances—a poem about a man who already has a kingdom and gives it up for the wife he loves, and receives both as a reward.
The Tale of Sir Thopas appears among the eighty-two extant manuscripts of The Canterbury Tales, most or all postdating Chaucer. Editors have generally used the Ellesmere manuscript (c. 1400), now held in the Huntington Library. As a source text I use Larry D. Benson, ed., The Riverside Chaucer, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). There are innumerable versions and popular translations but few approach Benson’s as the standard edition of Chaucer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>689</th>
<th>The Prologue to the Tale of Sir Thopas</th>
<th>The Prologue to the Tale of Sir Topaz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whan seyd was al this miracle, every man</td>
<td>When this miraculous tale was all finished,(^1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As sobre was that wonder was to se,</td>
<td>It was a sight to see everyone so serious,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Til that oure Hooste jappen tho bigan,</td>
<td>Until our Host(^2) began to joke around,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And thanne at erst he looked upon me,</td>
<td>And then at last he stared at me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And seyde thus: “What man artow?” quod he;</td>
<td>And spoke. “What kind of man are you?” he said.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Thou lookest as thou woldest fynde an hare,</td>
<td>“You look like you are trying to catch a rabbit,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For evere upon the ground I se thee stare.</td>
<td>For I always see you staring at the ground.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Approche neer, and looke up murily.</td>
<td>Come near, and look up with merriness!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now war yow, sires, and let this man have place!</td>
<td>Now make way, sirs, and let this man have space!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He in the waast is shape as wel as I;</td>
<td>He is shaped in the waist as well as I am.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This were a popet in an arm t’enbrace</td>
<td>This would be a doll, with a small and pretty face,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For any womman, small and fair of face.</td>
<td>For any woman to embrace in her arms!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He semeth elvyssh by his contenaunce,</td>
<td>He seems elvish by his behavior,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce.</td>
<td>For he has no conversation with anyone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sey now somwhat, syn oother folk han sayd;</td>
<td>Now say something, since the others have spoken.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telle us a tale of myrthe, and that anon.”</td>
<td>Tell us a tale of fun, and do it right away!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For oother tale certes kan I noon,</td>
<td>For sure, I know no other tale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But of a rym I lerned longe agoon.”</td>
<td>Except for a rhyme I learned long ago.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) The pilgrims have just heard the Prioress’ tale, a pious and sentimental story about a Christian boy whose throat is cut by the Jews and whose body is found when he miraculously sings out hymns. The sissysih depiction of the “litel child” with “his litel book” may be Chaucer the pilgrim’s link to the effeminate Sir Thopas, who is also described as Childe, a young knight-in-training.

\(^2\) Harry Bailly, the owner of the Tabard Inn, where the pilgrims begin their travel. The Host has a coarse and blunt humor and by this point in the Canterbury Tales has been drinking heavily.
“Ye, that is good,” quod he; “now shul we heere Som deyntee thyng, me thynketh by his cheere.”

The Tale of Sir Thopas

The First Fit

Listeth, lordes, in good entent,
And I wol telle verrayment
Of myrthe and of solas,
Al of a knyght was fair and gent
In bataille and in tournemente;
His name was sire Thopas.

Yborn he was in fer contree,
In Flaundres, al biyonde the see,
At Poperyng, in the place.
His fader was a man ful free,
And lord he was of that contree,
As it was Goddes grace.
Sire Thopas wax a doghty swayn;
Whit was his face as payndemayn,
His lippes rede as rose;
His rode is lyk scarlet in grayn,
And I yow telle in good certayn
He hadde a semely nose.
His heer, his berd was lyk saffroun,
That to his girdel raughte adoun;
His shoon of cordewane.
Of Brugges were his hosen broun,
His robe was of syklatoun,
That coste many a jane.

He koude hunte at wilde deer,
And ride an haukyng for river
With grey goshauk on honde;
Therto he was a good archeer;
Of wrastlyng was ther noon his peer
Ther any ram shal stonde.

“Ye, that is fine,” he said. “Now we will hear Some dainty thing, I think, by his expression.”

The Tale of Sir Topaz

Chapter 1

Listen, lords, in good faith,
And I will tell you, truly,
Something amusing and entertaining,
All about a knight who was fair and elegant
In battle and in tournament.
His name was Sir Topaz.

He was born in a faraway country,
In Flanders, far beyond the sea,
In Poperinge, in that place.³
His father was a very noble man
And he was lord of that country,
As it was God’s grace.
Sir Topaz grew to be a rugged youth.
His face was as fair as fine white bread,⁴
His lips were as red as a rose.
His complexion was like dyed scarlet,
And I tell you with good certainty,
He had a decorous nose.

His hair—his beard—was like saffron,
Which ran down to his waist.
His shoes were of Spanish leather;⁵
His brown hose were from Bruges.
His robe was silk woven with gold,
Which cost a pretty penny.
He could hunt for wild deer,
And ride with hawks for waterfowl
With a grey eagle on his hand.
Moreover, he was a good archer.
In wrestling there was no one his equal
Where any ram would be contested.⁶

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³ Poperinge is a Belgian town slightly west of Ypres, famous for linen. The gag is that, rather than being an exotic, faraway locale, the town is nearby and mundane: “Grendel returned to the accursed mere, just outside Winnipeg on Route 4.” Some critics disagree, arguing the poem mocks the Flemish generally, but this is the only Flemish reference besides the Bruges hose (733).

⁴ Pandemain is a fine, delicate white bread, hardly fitting for a rugged knight. Compare this to the earthy Wife of Bath, who calls herself ‘barley bread.’

⁵ Cordovan is expensive burgundy-colored leather from Cordoba, Spain.

⁶ Ther any ram shal stoned: A ram was the traditional prize in wrestling matches, which were enormously popular in the medieval English countryside. Some critics feel that wrestling and archery were undignified
| Ful many a mayde, bright in bour, They moorne for hym paramour, Whan hem were bet to slepe; But he was chaast and no lechour, And sweete as is the brembul flour That bereth the rede hepe. | Many a maiden, beautiful in her bower, Yearned for him passionately When it was better for her to sleep. But he was chaste and no libertine, And was as sweet as the blackberry bush That bears the red fruit. |
| And so bifel upon a day, For sothe, as I yow telle may, Sire Thopas wolde out ride. He worth upon his steede gray, And in his hand a launcegay, A long swerd by his side. | And so it happened one day, In truth, as I may tell you, Sir Topaz wished to go out riding. He mounted his grey steed, With a light spear in his hand And a long sword by his side. |
| He priketh thurgh a fair forest, Therinne is many a wilde best, Ye, bothe bukke and hare; And as he priketh north and est, I telle it yow, hym hadde almost Bitid a sory care. | He spurred through a fair forest Where there were many wild beasts inside, Yes, both deer and rabbits! And as he rode north and east, I will tell you, he almost Happened into grievous trouble. |
| Ther spryngen herbes grete and smale, The lycorys and the cetewale, And many a clowe-gylofre; And notemuge to putte in ale, Whether it be moyste or stale, Or for to leye in cofre. | There were herbs springing, great and small, The licorice and the ginger spice, And many a clove flower; And nutmeg to put in ale, Whether it is fresh or stale, Or to lay in a coffer chest. |
| The briddes synge, it is no nay, The sparhauk and the papejay, That joye it was to heere; The thrustelcok made eek hir lay, The wodedowve upon the spray She sang ful loude and cleere. | The birds sang, it could not be denied— The sparrow-hawk and the parrot, Which was a joy to hear. The thrush also made her song; The wood-pigeon upon her branch Sang very loudly and clear. |
| Sire Thopas fil in love-longynge, Al whan he herde the thrustel synge, And pryked as he were wood. His faire steede in his prikyng So swatte that men myghte him wrynge; His sydes were al blood. | Sir Topaz fell into lovesickness When he heard the thrush sing, And spurred as if he were mad. His fair steed, from his spurring, Sweated so that men could wring him! His sides were all bloody. |


8 *Pryked*: By constantly re-using the verb, Chaucer may intend a gentle joke on the limited vocabulary of romances like *Guy of Warwick*, which uses some form of *prick* 40 times. He probably does not mean the modern sexual double entendre, first recorded in 1450 (MED). See note 31 in the essay on *Sir Thopas*. 
Sire Thopas eek so wery was  
For prikyng on the softe gras,  
So fiers was his corage,  
That doun he leyde him in that plas  
To make his steede som solas,  
And yaf hym good forage.  

“O Seinte Marie, benedicite!  
What eyleth this love at me  
To bynde me so soore?  
Me dremed al this nyght, pardee,  
An elf-queene shal my lemman be  
And slepe under my goore.  

Into his sadel he clamb anon,  
And priketh over stile and stoon  
An elf-queene for t’ espye,  
Til he so longe hath riden and goon  
That he foond, in a pryve woon,  
The contree of Fairye  
So wilde;  
For in that contree was ther noon  
That to him durste ride or goon,  
Neither wyf ne childe;  

Til that ther cam a greet geaunt,  
His name was sire Olifaunt,  
A perilous man of dede.  

He seyde, “Child, by Termagaunt,  
But if thou prike out of myn haunt,  
Anon I sle thy steede  
With mace.  
Heere is the queene of Fayerye,  
With harpe and pipe and symphonye,
| 820 | Dwellynge in this place."
|     | The child seyde, “Also moote I thee,  
|     | Tomorwe wol I meete with thee,  
|     | When I have myn armour;  
|     | And yet I hope, par ma fay,  
|     | That thou shalt with this launcegay  
|     | Abyen it ful sowre.  
|     | Thy mawe  
|     | Shal I percen, if I may,  
|     | Er it be fully pryme of day,  
|     | For heere thow shalt be slawe.”
|     | Sir Thopas drow abak ful faste;  
|     | This geant at hym stones caste  
|     | Out of a fel staf-slynge.  
|     | But faire escapeth child Thopas,  
|     | And al it was thurgh Goddes gras,  
|     | And thurgh his fair berynge.
| 830 | Dwelling in this place.”
|     | The child said, “As I live and breathe,  
|     | Tomorrow I will meet with you  
|     | When I have my armor.  
|     | And then I expect, by my faith,  
|     | That you will pay for it very painfully  
|     | With this parade-spear!  
|     | I will pierce  
|     | Your mouth, if I can,  
|     | Before it is mid-morning,  
|     | For you will be slain here!”
|     | Sir Topaz pulled back quickly;  
|     | The giant flung stones at him  
|     | Out of a formidable wooden sling.  
|     | But Child Topaz nobly ran away,  
|     | And it was all through God’s grace,  
|     | And through his fair bearing.
| 840 | The Second Fit  
|     | Yet listeth, lorde, to my tale  
|     | Murier than the nightyngeale,  
|     | For now I wol yow rowne  
|     | How sir Thopas, with sydes smale,  
|     | Prikyng over hill and dale,  
|     | Is comen agayn to towne.  
|     | His myrie men comanded he  
|     | To make hym bothe game and glee,  
|     | For nedes moste he fighte  
|     | With a geaunt with hevedes three,  
|     | For paramour and joiltie  
|     | Of oon that shoon ful brighte.  
|     | “Do come,” he seyde, “my mynstrales,  
|     | And geestours for to tellen tales,  
|     | Anon in myn armynge,  
|     | The tale has textual divisions in the MSS, but are only called fits by modern editors. Burrow notes that the chapter divisions, like the plot, seem to peter out as each is half the size of its previous one: Fit 1 is 18 stanzas, Fit 2 is 9, and Fit 3 is 4½. John A. Burrow, “Sir Thopas: An Agony in Three Fits,” Review of English Studies 22:85 (1971): 57.
|     | “Summon,” he said, “my minstrels,  
|     | And storytellers to tell tales,  
|     | Later as I am arming—  
|     | “Do come,” he seyde, “my mynstrales,  
|     | And geestours for to tellen tales,  
|     | Anon in myn armynge,  

11 *Symphonye*: Not the modern symphony but “probably a hurdy-gurdy, a sort of mechanized fiddle,” according to Benson (920, note to line 815). Like a blues harmonica now, by Chaucer’s time it is more a street instrument than courtly accompaniment for a fairy-queen.

12 *Child* refers to the feudal rank of young knight-in-training in lines 830 and 898 but here may simply mean “little boy.” The term’s ambiguity in the poem might be humorously intentional.

13 The tale has textual divisions in the MSS, but are only called fits by modern editors. Burrow notes that the chapter divisions, like the plot, seem to peter out as each is half the size of its previous one: Fit 1 is 18 stanzas, Fit 2 is 9, and Fit 3 is 4½. John A. Burrow, “Sir Thopas: An Agony in Three Fits,” Review of English Studies 22:85 (1971): 57.

14 *Hevedes three*: For comic effect, Sir Thopas is evidently excusing his cowardice by exaggerating the giant, who is never indicated as having three heads.
Of romances that been roiales,
Of popes and of cardinales,
And eek of love-likynge."

They fette hym first the sweete wyn,
And mede eek in a mazelyn,
And roial spicerye
Of gyngebreed that was ful fyn,
And lycorys, and eek comyn,
With sugre that is trye.

He dide next his white leere
Of cloth of lake fyn and cleere,
A breech and eek a sherte;
And next his sherte an aketoun,
And over that an haubergeoun
For percynge of his herte;
And over that a fyn hawberk,
Was al ywroght of Jewes werk,
Ful strong it was of plate;
And over that his cote
- armoure
As whit as is a lilye flour,
In which he wol debate.

His sheeld was al of gold so reed,
And therinne was a bores heed,
A charbocle bisyde;
And there he swoor on ale and breed
How that the geaunt shal be deed,
Bityde what bityde!

And over that a fyn hawberk,
Was al ywroght of Jewes werk,
Ful strong it was of plate;
And over that his cote-armour
As whit as is a lilye flour,
In which he wol debate.

Their brought him first the sweet wine,
And mead as well in a maple bowl,
And royal delicacies,
And gingerbread that was very fine,
And licorice, and cumin as well,
With sugar that was proven in trial.

He put next to his white flesh
Clothes of linen, fine and unspotted,
A pair of pants and also a shirt;
And, next to his shirt, a quilted jacket,
And over that a coat of mail
To ward off piercing of his heart.

And over all that fine plate armor
Which was all crafted with Jews’ work;\(^{15}\)
It was of strong iron plate.
And over all that went his overcoat,
As white as a lily flower,
In which he would face challenge.

His shield was all of gold, so red,
And on it was a boar’s head,
With a carbuncle stone beside.
And there he swore on bread and ale
That the giant would be dead,
Come what may!

His leg guards were of hard leather,
His sword’s sheath of ivory,
And his helmet was shining brass.
His saddle was of polished bone;
His bridle shone like the sun
Or like the moonlight.

His spear was of fine cypress,\(^{16}\)
Which foretold war, and nothing peaceful,
And the point was sharply ground.
His steed was all spotted grey;
It went ambling on the way,

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\(^{15}\) *Jewes werk*: a puzzling reference as *Jew* and *jewelry* have no etymological connection, although the medieval Jews did work and trade jewelry. Burrow lists some speculations, noting that “A fine Saracen hauberk in one French chanson de geste is said to have been forged by ‘Ysac de Barceloigne,’ presumably a Spanish Jew” ([Riverside Chaucer](https://www.chaucer.org.uk/), note to 864, page 921).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>890</td>
<td>Ful softly and rounde In londe. Loo, lorde myne, heere is a fit! If ye wol any moore of it, To telle it wol I fonde.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900</td>
<td>Very softly and easily On the land. Now, my lords, here is the next part! If you want any more of it, I will try to tell it. The Third Fit</td>
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<td>The Third Fit</td>
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<td>Now holde youre mouth, <em>par charitee</em>, Bothe knyght and lady free, And herkneth to my spelle; Of bataille and of chivalry, And of ladies love-drury Anon I wol yow telle.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Men spoken of romances of prys, Of Horn child and of Ypotys, Of Beves and sir Gy, Of sir Lybeux and Pleyndamour— But sir Thopas, he bereth the flour Of roial chivalry!</td>
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<td>His goode steede al he bistrood, And forth upon his wey he glood As sparcle out of the bronde; Upon his creest he bar a tour, And therinne stiked a lilie flour— God shilde his cors fro shonde!</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And for he was a knyght auntrous, He holde slepen in noon hous, But liggen in his hoode; His brighte helm was his wonger, And by hym baiteth his dextrer Of herbes fyne and goode.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hymself drank water of the well, As dide the knyght sire Percyvell So worly under wede, Til on a day — Heere the Hoost stynteth Chaucer of his Tale of Thopas.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Now hold your tongue, for charity’s sake, Both knights and gracious ladies, And listen to my story Of battle and of chivalry And of ladies’ love-longing. I will tell it to you right away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men talk about famous romances, Of Child Horn and of Ypotis, Of Bevis and of Sir Guy, Of Sir Lybeaux and Plendamour.¹⁷ But Sir Topaz, he bears the flower Of royal chivalry!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He mounted his trusted steed And he went forth on his way, glowing Like a spark out of the burning log. On his helmet’s crest he bore a spike And on it he stuck a lily flower; God shield his body from harm!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And because he was a wandering knight, He would not sleep in anyone’s house, But lay in his hood. His shining helmet was his pillow, And by him his war-steed grazed On herbs, fine and good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He himself drank water from the well, As did the knight Sir Percival,¹⁸ So noble in his attire! Until one day— Here the Host interrupted Chaucer in his <em>Tale of Topaz</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁷ *Plendamour*: No story or MS has been found by this name, though Skeat found a minor character named Pleyn de Amours in Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur* (IX.7). Laura A. Hibbard Loomis, “Sir Thopas,” in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, ed. W.F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (New York: Humanities Press, 1958), 487.

“Namoore of this, for Goddes dignitee,”
Quod oure Hooste, “for thou makest me
So wery of thy verray lewednesse
That, also wisly God my soule blesse,
Myne eres aken of thy drasty speche!
Now swich a rym the devel I biteche!
This may wel be rym dogerel,” quod he.
“Why so?” quod I, “why wiltow lette me
Moore of my tale than another man,
Syn that it is the beste rym I kan?”
“By God,” quod he, “for pleynly, at a word,
Thy drasty rymynge is nat worth a toord!
Thou doost noght elles but despendest tyme.
Sire, at o word, thou shalt no lenger ryme.
Lat se wher thou kanst tellyn aught in geeste,
Or telle in prose somwhat, at the leeste,
In which ther be som murthe or som doctrine.”
“Gladly,” quod I, “by Goddes sweete pyne!
I wol yow telle a litel thing in prose
That oghte liken yow, as I suppose,
Or elles, certes, ye been to daungerous.
It is a moral tale virtuous,
Al be it told somtyme in sondry wyse
Of sondry folk, as I shal yow devyse…

“No more of this, for God’s sake!”
Bellowed our Host. “For you make me
So worn-out from your outright foolishness
That, as surely as God blesses my soul,
My ears are aching from your ridiculous story.
Now such a rhyme I give to the devil.
This may well be hack rhyming!” he said.
“Why so?” I protested. “Why do you stop me
From telling more of my tale like the other men,
Since it is the best story I know?”
“By God!” he said, “Because plainly, in short,
Your rotten rhyming is not worth a crap!
You do nothing more than waste time.
Sir, in one word, you will no longer rhyme.
Let’s see if you can say something in other verse,
Or speak something in prose, at least,
Which has some amusement or lesson in it!”
“Gladly,” I said, “By Christ’s sweet pains!
I will tell you a little story in prose”¹⁹
That ought to satisfy you, I think,
Or else, for sure, you are too hard to please.
It is a moral tale of virtue,
Although it is sometimes told in various ways
By different people, as I will explain to you.”

¹⁹ Chaucer may be making another joke on “litel” here, as he segues from Sir Thopas into The Tale of Melibee, a ponderous, weighty morality tale which is anything but little at 1888 lines.
English Romances and Festive Parody in *The Tale of Sir Thopas*

“The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there,”¹ when applied to medieval England, is both a benign and harmful statement. Recognizing the basic dissimilarities of the period does warn against ‘false friends,’ against assuming Chaucer means the same thing a twenty-first century writer does in calling someone gentle, but it can also serve the agendas of classicists and modernists who wish to emphasize the irretrievably peculiar and perverse alterity of the medieval age. Burrow expresses discomfort with the spacial analogy of considering the past a different place,² as such a binary totalizes and simplifies. A Catholic graduate student at Notre Dame may be disconnected from the rhythms of daily street life in Chaucer’s London but may see the era’s religious traditions clearly.

Mitchell and Robinson begin a discussion of daily life in Anglo-Saxon England by reminding us that its people “were human beings like yourself, subject to weariness and pain, and prey to the same emotions as you are.”³ Yet the customs and assumptions which reflected these human needs have shifted. My father attended school but also received a farm boy’s education, and so where I simply see birds, trees, and clouds, he sees robins, aspens, and fair weather. Going back further generations, the experiences and practices of my ancestors would seem both familiar and increasingly alien. The difficult task for understanding the medieval period involves recognizing such cultural and

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² Burrow, “Alterity,” 484.
psychological differences, not in order to indulge in the current fetish of English departments to use other as a verb incessantly but to understand their significances. Incidents of bowing and kneeling in medieval romance seem not only foreign now but are judged as sentimental and affected clichés of chivalry typical of the “extreme exaggerations” of the genre. Yet when such customs are understood as normal displays of greeting or respect predating handshakes, the acts and the literature they appear in are cast in a new light.

Similar problems apply in taxonomizing what effect Chaucer intends in Sir Thopas. Satire, a “full dish,” is not specifically medieval but comes from the Roman world with its connotations of dinnertime recreation. Parody as a term is first used in English by Ben Jonson, and with its related synonyms burlesque and lampoon, it enters the French lexicon of literary criticism in the seventeenth century and becomes as systematized as any other genre of poetry. Parody certainly operates in Thopas regardless of labels, and Chaucer’s pilgrims like to “laughe and pleye” (CT VI.967) as much as any other culture. Few critics have disputed the basic idea that the poem is meant to be humorous. Nevertheless, while Chaucer may have had French exemplars, he “could not have written Sir Thopas as a ‘parody,’ ‘burlesque,’ or ‘travesty’ if these words and the generic categories which these words tend to create did not exist.”


5 Burrow, “Alterity,” 488. Burrow believes the gesture of shaking hands to be unknown in medieval England, finding its first OED usage in Coverdale’s Bible of 1535 (489).


7 Dane, 347.
identifications lack both consensus and critical analysis, and thus I would like to examine Chaucer’s possible parodic intentions in *Thopas* and their relationship to medieval English romance.

A variety of readings have attempted to explain the point of *Sir Thopas*, some more credible than others. Much early criticism asserted that *Thopas* satirizes contemporary political targets. The Flemish were a perennial xenophobic target for their claimed low morals, and Manly asserted that Chaucer mocks the Flemish bourgeoisie for their aristocratic pretensions.  

Some scholars have adduced historical personages as the object of satire. Winstanley claimed that Sir Thopas is Philip van Artevelde, son of a Flemish burgher, and Richard II’s purported effeminacy has also been suggested as a model. Textual credence for the Flemish argument seems slim, as Sir Thopas is born in Popering but there are no other explicit Flemish references. Chaucer was normally careful about antagonizing the powerful and was unlikely to mock the king’s masculinity, although he does have the “foppish clerk” Absolom, whose blonde hair is long and parted like Richard’s.

Other interpretations are more oblique, such as the reading following Terry Jones’ work on the *Knight’s Tale* that Chaucer satirizes knights generally in *Thopas*. Jones’

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views have been widely challenged. Moreover, many of Chaucer’s friends and possible readers were knights who might not have enjoyed the barb, though Jones does believe that the refined knights in Chaucer’s circle would have been able to distinguish themselves from the soldier-of-fortune knight. Haskell suggests that the poem is an extended joke where Thopas is metaphorically and literally a wooden puppet, as his saffron hair (VII.730) is compared to a dye, he rides “as he were wood” (774), and Popering sounds like puppet. Cohen posits that Sir Thopas is a harmless, sexually neutered avatar expiating Chaucer’s guilt over raping Cecily Champagne. Like many psychoanalytical readings, evidence sometimes seems a superfluous detail.

Nevertheless, any of these readings could indicate valid background influences. Mitchell and Robinson politely comment on theories of interpretation regarding “The Wife’s Lament” that “the only available curb to ever more ingenious speculations” is common sense. The difficulty in applying such advice to Chaucer is determining common sense while lacking the circumstances of Thopas’ composition. Early critics concerned themselves with Troilus and Criseyde and not Chaucer’s humor. At best, by the Restoration a sort of patronizing indulgence of his coarse wit prevailed, the sentiment that would move Matthew Arnold to praise him but accuse him of lacking “high

11 Pearsall in particular feels that Chaucer views his Knight sympathetically, arguing that “it is an anachronistic modernism that makes of Chaucer’s Knight a ruthless and cold-blooded mercenary killer.” Derek Pearsall, The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 44.
15 Mitchell and Robinson, 249.
seriousness." Chaucer’s near-contemporaries saw Thopas as silly, but not as a “meta-romance” satirizing a specific literary form. French aristocrat Jean of Angoulême called it a *valde absurdum*, “an absurd quarrel.” Skelton writes in 1523, “But hyde the, sir Thopas, Nowe into the castell of Bas, And lurke there, like an as.” Olivia’s clown in Twelfth Night impersonates “Sir Topas the curate” (IV.iv.2), and another poet in 1611 refers to Thopas as “Chaucers jest.” Academics do not apply the term *burlesque* to the poem until the 1760s, and Sir Walter Scott is the first to call the poem a parody in his Essay on Romance in 1824.

Dane goes further to assert that eighteenth century critics did not so much develop the idea that *Sir Thopas* is a satire on medieval English romance as create it. Thomas Warton’s History of English Poetry (1774) locates the focus of Chaucer’s parody in Thopas in “discerning improprieties in books.” Chaucer’s intentions were “to ridicule the frivolous descriptions and other tedious impertinences” of the popular romances, and editors through Skeat generally assented to such an interpretation. Twentieth-century scholarship came to appreciate Chaucer’s humor but generally continued Warton’s

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17 Dane, 355.
19 Dane, 355.
20 Hurd, 349.
22 Warton quotes Richard Hurd, in a letter written in 1765. Quoted in Dane, 353.
argument that Chaucer parodies “the endless Middle English tail rhyme romances”23 and mocks their “plot[s], characters, jog-trot rhythm, and verbal clichés.”24 The emphasis switches entirely from Sir Thopas as a comic character to Chaucer’s satirical technique through his calculated sabotage of his own failed romance as an “explicit assessment of the genre.”25 Pearsall calls the poem “brilliantly bad.”26 Presumably, Bevis and Guy are cited to serve as representative examples of the romances’ hack writing.

Nevertheless, some recent scholarship has reappraised Chaucer’s tone. C.S. Lewis was prescient in 1936 in looking alarmingly at the tendency to assume parodic intent in an increasing number of tales and segments. The Squire’s Tale had long been read by some as ironic, but within the same century works as seemingly devout as Melibee and The Knight’s Tale would be given acerbic interpretations. Lewis fretted that “many of us now read into Chaucer all manner of ironies, slynesses, and archnesses, which are not there,” 27 much as Larry Benson has written in frustration about the tittering of critics who see every incidence of queynte as a sexual joke.28 Chaucer likely intends some myrthe in the project, as ultimately a Canterbury Tale is ME slang for a lie.29

26 Pearsall, Life, 195.
Nevertheless, he does not have “the waspish mind of Pope,” \textsuperscript{30} and to view \textit{The Canterbury Tales} as a cynical, nihilist joke offers the same lure the conspiracy theory does—it cannot be disproven—but it seems alien to what is known about Chaucer and his community. His biographical details and writings do not suggest the misanthropic bitterness of a Juvenal.

As some of the Victorian condescension toward humor and works lacking epic \textit{gravitas} has faded, more recent studies have recaptured some of the fun of \textit{Sir Thopas}. Jost sees in the poem “a birthday-party setting, jovial and childlike.”\textsuperscript{31} More sympathetic readings of oral and folkloric narrative have appeared, and there has been a stronger critical sentiment that Chaucer does not satirize English romances as a group but only bad ones. Both Manly and Loomis were careful to make the distinction that Chaucer is “not necessarily parodying romance as a thing in itself”\textsuperscript{32} or even specific texts, but creating a generalized comic depiction of the defects and extremes he saw in the format. Evidently Chaucer did not see all romantic tag-formulas as trite clichés, as otherwise questions rise about his own use of the “diction, formulaic conventions, and even compositional methods”\textsuperscript{33} of romance in his ostensibly serious texts. There Chaucer appropriates phrases such as “sighed sore” (\textit{Bevis} 1312, \textit{Guy} 943, four times in the \textit{Romaunt}, six times in \textit{Troilus}) and “it befel upon a cas” (\textit{Bevis} 1283, \textit{CT} I.1074, \textit{LGW} 1907).\textsuperscript{34} Variations of

\textsuperscript{30} Garbaty, “Chaucer and Comedy,” 81.
\textsuperscript{31} Jost, introduction to \textit{Chaucer's Humor}, xxv.
\textsuperscript{32} Loomis, “Sir Thopas,” 492.
\textsuperscript{33} Charbonneau, 651.
\textsuperscript{34} Edward R. Haymes, “Chaucer and the English Romance Tradition,” \textit{South Atlantic Bulletin} 37:4 (1972): 38. Haymes believes it unlikely that Chaucer coincidentally translates these poetic formulas from French
the formula “leof ne looth” (“friend or foe”) appear in CT I.1837 and BD 8, but the expression goes back as far as Beowulf—“ne leof ne lað” (511).  

The conclusion that Chaucer intends at least a gentle Horatian laugh on certain romances does seem unavoidable. Magoun identifies numerous narrative parallels between Thopas and Lybeaus, but the parodic element shines most clearly in the many borrowings from Guy of Warwick, which are often narrative but are occasionally directly textual, as Strong cites:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guy</th>
<th>Thopas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In this warld is man non</td>
<td>For in that contree was ther noon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That ogaines him durst gon,</td>
<td>That to him dorste ryde or goon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herl, baroun, no knight (1771-3)</td>
<td>Neither wyf ne childe (804-6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The correspondence is close, but in the latter is made ridiculous by Sir Thopas being an object of fear only to women and children. Equally, Chaucer sees Guy’s repetition of equine terms such as *pricking*, used forty times in the text, and repeats it *ad nauseum* in Thopas, eight times in 84 lines.  

Chaucer the pilgrim similarly beats down the adjective *fair* to joke at what Chaucer the poet perhaps sees as an impoverished romance lexicon, even employing it as Thopas runs away (830). Nevertheless, the parody seems scattershot, as Chaucer also borrows images and text from such un-romantic sources as biblical sources as many are alliterative. See also Albert C. Baugh, “Improvisation in the Middle English Romance,” Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 103:3 (1959): 418-454.


38 Strong, “Sir Guy II,” 103. Whether Chaucer intends the modern double entendre on *prick* is unclear but improbable. Its first usage with a sexual meaning is recorded in 1450 (MED), and likely no one was laughing at the devotional *Prick of Conscience* (1340). See also Benson, “Queynte,” who notes that when the clerk John in the Reeve’s Tale “pricketh harde and depe” (4231) the word has a humorous sexual nuance only in context and not based on a recognized secondary meaning (26).

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scripture. The giant slinging rocks comes straight from the David and Goliath narrative in I Samuel 17, although “staf-slynge” (829) is first recorded in Richard Coeur de Lion (5226), also in Auchinleck.39

Yet still the only two critical choices are whether Chaucer pokes fun at English romance as a whole or merely the worst literary failings of substandard texts within the genre. Both arguments position works such as Guy and Bevis as negative examples against which the poem is a reaction, insisting that Thopas is knowingly and humorously bad because the English romances it parodies (or perhaps just Guy and Bevis) are also wretched. I would instead like to argue an opposite thesis: that Chaucer does not cite the worst romances but the best, in order to heighten the humorous effect when they are compared to the amusing failure of Sir Thopas as a romance. Thus the comic focus in the poem is on the knightly ineptness of Thopas and, by extension, Chaucer the pilgrim’s incompetence as a storyteller, and not on the romances cited, which serves to throw into greater and funnier contrast the difference between successful romances and the poverty of Chaucer’s attempt.

One of the chief impediments to this interpretation lies in the modern insistence that parody as a rule must be negative and to the object’s disadvantage. One avenue which may prove fruitful is Mikhail Bakhtin’s studies of carnival folk humor.40 In Rabelais and His World (1965), Bakhtin asserts that public displays of comedy, from


clowns and jugglers to oral and textual parodies of ceremonies and establishment values, are little documented but were a vital part of ecclesiastical and civic festivals in medieval Europe. Bakhtin sees an institution stretching from the Roman Saturnalias to modern holdovers such as Mardi Gras.\textsuperscript{41} While Punch and Judy do not appear in England until the Restoration, they continued a similar tradition of slapstick imbued with social commentary. Hanna similarly lists Maypole plays, Christmas mummings, and Corpus Christi pageants as celebrations in Chaucer’s London,\textsuperscript{42} events which may have had informal and ephemeral components unrecorded by contemporary historians but permeated drama and secular literature.

A key attribute of Bakhtin’s conception of folk humor is the sense of recreational and regenerative laughter. In contrast to Restoration and Victorian satire, “which was actually not laughter but rhetoric… No wonder it was compared to a whip or scourge,”\textsuperscript{43} carnival humor was playful, often involving games where social rank was leveled or reversed, another inheritance from the Roman Saturnalias. A second is its inclusiveness. Like the angry partisan satire of American talk-show radio which derides the opposition, a Pope or Juvenal isolates and places himself above the object of scorn, whereas folk comedy also laughs at its author:

This is one of the essential differences of the people’s festive laughter from the pure satire of modern times. The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it… The people’s ambivalent

\textsuperscript{43} Bakhtin, 51.
laughed, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it.44

A third convention is that, while festive humor mocked state and ecclesiastical authority, it ironically “sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it,”45 in effect reaffirming the dominant establishment by forming a tolerated inverse. Such bread-and-circus public expressions may have served as a useful safety valve for the grievances of the marginalized. The tradition also extended into clerical ranks. Bakhtin asserts that folk humor underlies “the entire recreational literature of the Middle Ages”46 and he attributes considerable patience on the part of church and secular authorities, who indulged witty parodies of such artifacts as hymns and wills, council decrees, and debates, all “created and preserved under the auspices of the ‘Paschal laughter,’ or of the ‘Christmas laughter.’”47 Bakhtin sees a line of humorous texts from ancient parodies of Latin grammar to Erasmus’ In Praise of Folly (1509) and such comic, earthy genres as the French fabliaux. Yet as an officially tolerated discourse it could be highly sophisticated and learned.

Bakhtin’s portrait of folk humor does suggest a certain amount of Marxist wish-fulfillment for the medieval era in Europe. His “carnival cult”48 has been dismissed as a utopian simplification of the period. Comic wags who progressed from nonspecific tomfoolery into pointed criticism of individuals, or who shaded from theological

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44 Bakhtin, 12.
45 Bakhtin, 9.
46 Bakhtin, 13.
47 Bakhtin, 14.
playfulness into open heresy, might have seen their enterprise brought to a quick end. Rabelais himself would see his writings banned by church and state authorities. Jesters, the supposed epitome of festival comedy and foolishness, are depicted in literature with extraordinary liberties to buffoon even royalty, as does Lear’s Fool who mockingly tells the king, “I am better / than thou art now: I am a fool, thou art nothing” (I.iv.715-6). Yet these are fictional characters, and Carlyon argues that the romantically subversive image of the jester “speaking truth to power” is an ahistorical fantasy: “Try to imagine Stalin, or Hitler honoring someone who attacked him with jokes.” The period did see Olivia’s “allowed fool[s]” (I.v.94) in royal courts, but even Feste is careful to direct his sharpest barbs at those who are not in favor, such as Malvolio.

Yet this tradition of festive foolishness may have influenced English works as diverse as animal debate poems such as *The Owl and the Nightingale* (c. 1200) with its petty and comic quarreling and the *Tournament of Tottenham* (1400-30) with its slapstick humor and wedding finale. In Germany, Brand suffered no prosecution for his anticlerical satire *Ship of Fools* (1494). Even in the miracle and mystery plays of England, serious biblical narratives coexist with such stock comic types as Noah’s henpecking wife who wants to leave the ark to put away the forks and knives (*Noah and His Wife*, 110) or The Second Shepherd’s Play where a shepherd and his wife attempt to hide a stolen sheep in their crib for dinner, in a blasphemous parody of the Nativity, before viewing the newborn Christ child. No doubt the clergy intended some sugar with the homiletic


50 Carlyon, 15.
medicine, but such scenes of alternating piety and lampoon were staged on church lofts and porches during festival occasions such as Corpus Christi Day, lending to their carnival moments.

If Chaucer can be seen as part of this literary tradition of festive humor, the import of Thopas is more easily recognized as laughing at Sir Thopas as a comic type. Chaucer’s main joke is Thopas’ foppish effeminacy, a fertile and ancient trope. The description of this “incredible shrinking knight” is hopelessly metrosexual with a face of payndemayn, dainty white bread, and lips like roses, everything that a “doughty swain” (CT VII.724-6) should not be. He rides out lightly armed, as “perhaps a full suit of armor would hide his good looks,” and he must climb into his saddle (797) rather than mounting his steed. The woods forebode with wild beasts, “bothe bukke and hare” (“both deer and rabbits!” 756). Danger finally looms in the form of Olifaunt, who merely menaces Thopas’ horse (812), threatening him with “the inconvenience of having to walk home.” Thopas’ valiant response is to ask the giant if he can come back the next morning and then to flee, and that evening his preparation for battle consists mostly of music and “sweets for the sweet,” gingerbread and licorice treats, rather than sober armament. On the field itself he has a warhorse which “gooth an ambil in the way / ful

54 Cohen, 146.
softely and rounde” (885-6). The joke barbs romances but chiefly plays on Thopas’ ridiculous unfitness as a knight.

Part of the comic element is Thopas’ implicit sexual inadequacy. Naming a knight after a pale gemstone certainly lacks the virile connotation of a Hrothulf or Wulfgar, but subtler meanings may also apply to Thopas’ appellation. Loomis posits that Chaucer borrows the name Thopas from a French poem by Watriquet de Couvin, who praises the Constable of France as “la jemme et la topase,”56 but most critics agree that the name simply reflects medieval traditions identifying the topaz with chastity.57 Thopas himself, like the “litel clergeon” whose tale precedes his, is as sexless as the popes and cardinals he asks for tales about (849), the last people who ought to be in romances. Seemingly unable to confront the maids who “moorne for hym paramour” (742), Thopas’ desire surfaces in his frothing steed which must be ‘pricked,’ but the scene ends with the horse exhausted and an erotic dream of an elf-queen who never appears.58 Despite the over-elaborate details of his arming, Thopas seems to have nothing on (or in) his pants. There is a sheath (876) but no spurs or sword,59 merely a launegay, a flaccid costume lance. His spear is made of cypres, a softwood which hardly “bodeth were” (882).

57 Woodburn O. Ross, “A Possible Significance of the Name Thopas,” Modern Language Notes 45:3 (1930): 172-174. Not everyone agrees. For a discussion of alternative theories of the meaning of Thopas, see Charbonneau, 655. Charbonneau also notes that Richard Couer de Lion and Il Filocolo have characters named Topaz, but both are women (655).
58 Berry, 155-6.
59 In comparison, even the Wife of Bath wears sharp spurs (CT I.473). See also Irving Linn, “The Arming of Sir Thopas,” Modern Language Notes 51:5 (1936): 310. Linn notes that “in degrading an unworthy knight the symbolic action consisted in depriving him of sword and spurs” (310).
The role of the giant is additionally important. Giants often psychologically embody sexual menace, and in Monmouth’s *Historia* the giant both symbolizes sexual assault and literally rapes the heroine. The giant may also represent the hero’s own moral temptations, and Cohen asserts that “the hero defeats the monster and decapitates him and then publicly displays the severed head in a ritual that announces to the world that he has conquered his own dark impulses.” Here Thopas seemingly has no impulses at all, and any sexual drama is punctured by Olifaunt’s easy comment that the elf-queen is not in prison in peril of ravishment but relaxing comfortably: “heere is the queene of Fayerye / with harpe and pipe and symphonye” (814-5). To make matters worse, Thopas still impotently fails to master the giant’s shrunken threat.

Structurally, the arc of the joke lays in the audience’s expectations of romance conventions which are repeatedly and comically disappointed. The stock structures of romance, such as the adventure quest, the love interest, the threatening monster, are all present and promising but collapse in laughter: “it is the non-functional display of rituals which generates the parodic humor, not simply the rituals themselves.” Thopas sleeps outside, a risky self-exposure to peril in both *Sir Orfeo* and *Launfal*, and expresses a yearning for adventure and action, but even danger ignores him. He wishes to appear

60 Cohen, 150. For a fuller discussion of the sexual menace and gender implications of giants, see Cohen’s introduction to his book *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University Press, 1997).


62 Cohen, 149.

aristocratic, but wears clothing priced in janes, an insignificant Genoese coin,\textsuperscript{64} and he swears on bread and ale (872), humble fare lacking any elevated significance. His attempts to win love and lof through heroic deeds of courage take place without any community of family, ladies, or warriors to witness them, “stranding him on an empty stage where his rushing about looks absurdly autonomous.”\textsuperscript{65} Nevertheless, \textit{Sir Thopas} does not mock romances any more than the \textit{Nun’s Priest’s Tale} mocks epics or medieval rhetoric. Rather, the poem amusingly violates the expectations of a poetic register. Chaucer dramatically builds the heroic tenor by saying that Thopas “koude hunte at wilde deer / and ride an haukyng for river” (736-7) and then collapses it with “therto he was a good archeer” (739), a pedestrian skill fit only for yeomen. The reader is led to expect wild beasts and gets rabbits.

In the same manner, Bevis, Guy, and Lybeaux are held up as ideals against whom Thopas looks ridiculously inadequate. Chaucer makes the comparison additionally risible by claiming that Thopas “bereth the flour / of roial chivalry!” (901-2) rather than those other heroes. The obvious incredibility of the praise makes both Thopas and the storyteller look foolish and produces laughter. Throughout the poem, Chaucer overlays an additional comic dimension in that the audience sees Chaucer the narrator’s “drasty rymyng” while being aware that the pilgrim-narrator also represents the master-poet writing the tale. The reader or auditor again expects something different and instead, to humorous effect, hears a story so intolerable to the other pilgrims that it is “marked as a

\textsuperscript{64} Haskell, 255.

public failure, put down and shut off by that Master of High Seriousness, Harry Bailly,“66 who tells his own creator, “Sire, at o word, thou shalt no lenger ryme” (932).

Such an identification depends on the problematic assumption that the narrator is Chaucer.67 The Ellesmere manuscript places a portrait of Chaucer beside the ending of Sir Thopas (f. 153v), but this is a later artistic interpretation. The Man of Laws states that he has no tale that “Chaucer, thogh he kan but lewedly / on metres and on rymyng craftily” (CT II.47-8) has not already said. He adds that Chaucer has already told more tales of lovers than Ovid, breaking the fourth wall by referring to Chaucer the poet, but this is not necessarily Chaucer the pilgrim. Pearsall quotes Henry Miller, who once dispelled any mystery by saying about a critic, “If he means the narrator, then it’s me,” arguing that the performative Chaucer is concurrent with and fluidly shades into the man,68 rendering such concerns misplaced. If the gap between Chaucer and his fictional representation is minimal or nonconsequential, Thopas also participates in the second aspect of Bakhtin’s folk humor, its self-inclusiveness. In the carnival atmosphere of general laughter everyone, including Chaucer, is part of the spectacle. As a subtle dig, Chaucer the poet even intensifies the Host’s condescension toward himself in the Prologue to the poem by sarcastically using the rarified stanza form of rime royal.69

67 Strohm reminds us that Chaucer’s addressed audience, let alone Chaucer’s representation of himself as narrator, are “ways of orienting discourse” and are constructed, fictional entities which may or may not correspond to real ones. Paul Strohm, Social Chaucer (Harvard University Press, 1989), 62.
Chaucer’s self-deprecating portraits of himself serve multiple purposes. His physical depiction of himself as diminutive but “in the waast is shape as wel as I” (700) performs the comic type of the roly-poly short man. Such a portrayal also builds sympathy with an audience, just as Saint Paul, by tradition an unappealing man, calls his appearance “unimpressive” (2Cor. 10:10). Chaucer’s protestations that he is a lewed man may be pro forma statements but additionally serve as poetic insurance, in that he can forestall audience criticism by positioning himself as a mere reporter and not responsible for flawed or morally dubious content. This limited omniscience where Chaucer can always back away by adding “I gesse” is a fictional guise not only humorous but consistent with Chaucer’s real-life inclination to avoid provoking his more secure betters. But most significantly, there is a playful sense of absurdity in making Chaucer a put-upon victim, for wherever he goes he is treated with impatience by the Black Knight, lectured to by an Egle, yanked out of bed and shoved hither and yon by the Noble Roman Africanus, condemned to talk about endlessly faithful women by the God of Love, and finally told to shut up by the Host of the Tabard Inn.  

Yet the *Canterbury Tales* is different as Chaucer the narrator is not a detached dreamer-observer but shares in the communal humor of the pilgrim entourage, being bumped and verbally jostled as much as the others. However, matters are still more complicated. Like Chinese boxes, Chaucer’s seeming jokes-within-jokes can be fascinating and frustrating. Above the level of the humor of Thopas’ foppish impotence and Chaucer the narrator-poet’s self-deprecation is

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70 Garbaty, “Chaucer and Comedy,” in Garbaty, 95.
his relationship to Harry Bailly. The storytelling in *Thopas* has been described as “a masterful display of incompetence,” in effect Chaucer’s parody on himself as a poet too inept to tell a satisfactory story. Kimpel asserts that *Thopas* loses force if the narrator is “deliberately rather than unintentionally funny,” yet the joke is perhaps not ruined but doubled if Chaucer actually teases the Host by giving him exactly what he asks for, “a tale of myrthe” (706) with no substance. Tschann notes that Chaucer the pilgrim follows *Thopas* with *Melibee*, a story of a dutiful and virtuous wife totally unlike Harry’s harridan Goodelief, a needling which he can only impotently grouse about, as Chaucer has only followed orders in giving a prose story of no mirth, all sentence. Nevertheless, these are not vindictive flytings directed at Harry any more than Chaucer intends to savage the Prioress with a tale of her sissyish *litel clergeon* as an effeminate knight. No other lines suggest that he intends more than a gentle jest on the Host. Harry may be impolite, but he tends to be most rough and ready among those he feels most comfortable with as equals.

If the comic element is not Chaucer the narrator’s incompetence as a storyteller but rather his knowing and humorous reply to Harry’s demand for “som deyntee thyng” (711) to follow the somber mood after the Prioress’ tale, the dynamics of *Sir Thopas* change. The humorous effect no longer derives solely from the narrator’s bungling obliviousness to Thopas’ and his story’s vapid banality, but also in Chaucer’s subtle joke

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71 Tschann, 7.
73 Lawrence, 90.
74 Pearsall, *Life*, 247. Pearsall points out that Bailly is a tavern-owner but was also a member of parliament. Thus he perhaps is entitled to be more familiar with Chaucer the pilgrim (247).
on the Host. The poem’s exposition returns full circle to the assertion that Chaucer tells a deliberately wretched tale. Yet the target is changed, as the intent is not a parody of romances but a mockery of Harry’s glib request. The joke is driven home by Harry missing the point and responding angrily to the content and form of the tale rather than its intent. Chaucer the pilgrim thus joins in the holiday bantering of the others by exchanging another humorous requital. In effect Chaucer has his cake and eats it too, comically giving himself a self-deprecating portrait of a harassed popet, who can also banter back with a tale that turns out to be no ham-fisted pastiche, but the product of a skilled poet in firm control.

A final dimension of Sir Thopas which may serve to support this argument is the disconnect between its content and its metrical construction. Much of the earlier criticism of Thopas has assumed that the two were stylistically coterminous, that the muddle of rhyme schemes, lacking “any discernible principle of arrangement,”75 is in keeping with the inanity of the narrative. Even the new Sources and Analogues (2005) of the Canterbury Tales simply assumes “paralyzingly bad meter.”76 A closer examination shows a more knowing and sophisticated touch. Chaucer draws attention to the stanza form by jumping from rime royal in the Prologue, the only link in CT not in rhymed couplets, to various couplet and tail-rhyme forms in the tale.77

That Chaucer wants the audience to pay attention to the meter also seems clear from the unique arrangement of line groupings on early manuscripts of the poem such as

76 Charbonneau, 712.
Ellesmere, where couplets are linked by brackets. Chaucer displays some “careful mischief,” varying the stanza form and employing bobs and filler lines for added comic effect: one line has Thopas vowing “how that the geaunt shal be deed / bityde what bityde!” (873-4), building drama and then crashing it down with an empty cliché. The poetic art, often surprisingly elegant, comically contrasts Thopas’ banality and the tale’s inertia. Words suggesting immediacy and enjambed lines—“he dide next his white leere / of cloth of lake fyn and cleere” (857-8)—humorously give “the illusion of action where none is present.”

The meaning of Chaucer’s poetic control here is to heighten the contrast between the elegiac tone of the poetry and the comically trivial story and protagonist. Harry not only misses the joke played on him but additionally fails to distinguish the two, complaining not about story but versification, the “rym dogerel.” Description and narrative reality are poetically and comically mismatched. The narrator’s insistence that Thopas’ clothes, armor, underwear, and gingerbread are universally fyn, and that his appearance, steed, and retreat from the giant all display “fair berynge” (832), is an implausibility only resolved in laughter. The humor attains added poignancy from the

78 For more detail, see Tschann, “Layout.” Tschann notes that this special bracketing layout is used in Ellesmere, Hengwrt, and Cambridge Dd.4.24 and Gg.4.27.
83 Monty Python references come naturally to Chaucer, but the tale of Sir Robin in Monty Python & the Holy Grail (1975) comes closest to the same humorous effect of endlessly repeating counterfactual praise: “Brave Sir Robin ran away / Bravely ran away, away / When danger reared its ugly head / He bravely
sense that Chaucer the pilgrim intends the disparity, perhaps partly to goad the Host and partly to emphasize Thopas the character’s comic failure to achieve anything fitting the poetic register. To return to the citations of *Guy, Bevis, Lybeaux*, and other romances, the narrator consciously creates a heroic, dramatic stage for added contrast against his humorously insipid hero. These English romances are not negative examples of a parodied genre but idealized ones casting the carnival frivolity of *Thopas*’ mood into heightened relief.

To summarize, while Chaucer defies simplification in his objectives and motives, he likely used the Auchinleck manuscript as broad source materials for *The Tale of Sir Thopas*. While he may have intended a carnival burlesque of the English romance genre and was “no doubt aware of its insufficiencies as well as its virtues,” he wrote within a culture which enjoyed and would continue to read romances, or at least for an audience familiar with its markings. The references to romance texts in *Thopas*—*Child Horn, Ypotis, Bevis, Guy, Lybeaux, Plendamour*, and *Perceval*—are not there for mocking parody or to serve as representatively bad examples of the genre. Rather, they are perhaps the best English romances Chaucer knows, and they humorously juxtapose against the comic failure of *Sir Thopas* to match such standards, in a deliberately vacuous narrative perhaps meant to requite the Host’s request for “Som deyntee thyng” (711) to follow the Prioress’ heavy tone.

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84 Pearsall, *Life*, 75.
How nice it would be if Chaucer had a Bosworth in Adam Pinkhurst, someone who committed to posterity all the daily minutiae of his life—or if Chaucer had a blog. While scholars would certainly appreciate knowing more about the life behind Chaucer’s poetics, such details would not fully illuminate us on his audience’s context or on how it would have interpreted *Sir Thopas* during the first seconds of hearing or reading the text. Lengthy academic arguments have a way of diluting humor, and for new students of Middle English romance *Thopas* risks becoming “a joke explained to death.” Chaucer’s friends, living in that foreign past, perhaps recognized instantly and with delight what now requires longer explication.

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85 Brantley L. Bryant does just such a thing with his parody website “Geoffrey Chaucer hath a Blog.” 2 Oct. 2010, [http://houseoffame.blogspot.com](http://houseoffame.blogspot.com). In a running spat with John Gower, Chaucer gossips, “that wankere Gowere… kan be a drama queene in thre languages.”

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Dissertation Title:
Chaucer’s Reading List: Sir Thopas, Auchinleck, and Middle English Romances in Translation

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