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

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ABSTRACT

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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.
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Soli Deo Gloria.

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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-besetting 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

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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

Warwick is read.6 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.”7 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 styre up couetousnes, inflame angre, and all beastly and filthy desyre.”8 Roger Ascham thundered in 1545 that their reading leads to “none other ends, but only manslaughter and baudrye.”9

Nicola McDonald notes that modern critics have treated such remarks with “humorous detachment,”10 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.11 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 of

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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.  

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,” with formulaic plots and stereotyped characters. Baugh takes it as a commonplace that “everyone knows that the Middle English romances are honeycombed with stock phrases and verbal clichés, often trite and at times seemingly forced.” At best their stylized repetition provides childish diversion, such as “children feel in The Three Bears.” 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.”

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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.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.”²⁸ Chaucer and his contemporaries also seem to have generalized romances as secular and not specifically historical works in French,²⁹ though later usage has the broader idea of any “fictitious narratives”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

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.
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.”^31^ Ker states that the old epic warriors always have “good reasons of their own for fighting”^32^ 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.^33^ 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.^34^

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*,^35^ 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

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^31^ Finlayson, 55.


^34^ Pamela Gradn 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)—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 yseiʒe / þat no Freynsche couþe seye” (25-6). 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. Where continental romances endorse a value system of chivalry, the English ones are often homiletic. 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.

36 For Havelock and all other non-Chaucerian romances here I use TEAMS as sources unless noted.
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 (\(TC\) 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” (\(TC\) I.22) that Chaucer addresses is a real one. Nevertheless, if romances were indeed sung out loud, as the invocation in \(King\ Horn\) 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.\(^{42}\)

**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 \(The\ Canterbury\ Tales\) are extant, a considerable number only surpassed by the \(Prick\ of\ Conscience\). Much of his verse was disseminated in

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\(^{40}\) McDonald, 14.

\(^{41}\) Baugh, “Questions,” 3.

“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 s 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.
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-

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 soulë have / that in his langage was so curious.”\(^{52}\) 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.\(^{53}\) 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,\(^{54}\) 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

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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.\textsuperscript{55}

Chaucer suggests a familiarity with the physical details of acting and staging of drama in the Miller’s Tale, where Absolon “pleyeth Herodes upon a scaffold hye” (I.3384),\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{60} Loomis argues strongly that

\textsuperscript{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.


\textsuperscript{58} Caroline Strong, “Sir Thopas and Sir Guy I,” Modern Language Notes 23:3 (1908): 76.


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. 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*. 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 Alissaunder*, and the *Lybeaus Desconus* cited in *Thopas*.

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.” 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 scripторium 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.\(^\text{72}\)

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.\(^\text{73}\) 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)\(^\text{74}\) 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


\(^{74}\) 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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!

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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”\(^77\) 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 *Troilus*,\(^78\) and the * scop* of *Beowulf*, no less prone to lengthy digressions, constantly reiterates titles or family lineages with metrical appositives such as “Hrōðgar maþelode, helm Scyldinga” (“Hrothgar made a speech, protector of the Scyldings,” 370). These stock epithets link to those used by the improvisational *guslars* documented by Milman Parry in the Balkans, and occur in works as high-culture as Homer’s *Odyssey* with its repetition of “the blue-eyed goddess Athene.”\(^79\) 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.\(^80\) The more that romance makes itself internally

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\(^77\) Loomis, “Sir Thopas,” 491.


\(^80\) 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 doctrine 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.


1 For Goddes love in Trinyté
   Al that ben hend herkenith to me,
   I pray yow, par amoure,
   What sumtyme fel beyond the see
   Of two Barons of grete bounté
   And men of grete honoure;
   Her faders were barons hendе,
   Lordinges com of grete kynde
   And pris men in toune and toure;
To here of these children two
   How they were in wele and woo,
   Ywys, it is grete doloure.
   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—¹
   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,²

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.

¹ 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, Altsächsische Biblioteck 2, Heilbronn: Henninger, 1884.

²
The children both in faire,  
And in what lond thei were born  
And what the children's 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 throo  
That douhty were of dede,  
And trew weren in all thing,
And therfore Jhesu, hevyning,  
Ful wel quyted her mede.  
The children's 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 sooth, without lesyng;
That oon baroun son, ywys  
Was ycleped childe Amys  
At his christenyng;
That other was clepyd Amylyoun,  
That was a child of grete renoun  
And com of hyghe of spryng.
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 fooode;
When they were twel winter olde,  
In al the londe was ther non hold
So faire of boon and blood.
In that tyme, y understand,  
A duk wonyd in that lond,  
Prys in toun and toure;  
Frely 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.³

² Trouth 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 tour (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;
Neither lef ne loothe,
So lyche they were both of syght
And of waxing, y yow plyght,
I tel yow for soothe,
In all thing they were so lyche
The 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 coloure of her cloth.

That riche douke his fest gan hold
With erles and with barouns bold,
As ye may listen and lithe,
Fourtennight, as me was told,
With meet and drynke, meryst on mold
To glad the bernes blithe;

Ther was mirthe and melodye
And al maner of menstracie
Her craftes for to kithe;
Opon the fiftenday ful yare
Thai token her leve forto fare
And thonked him mani a sithe.

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,
Cleped to him that tide
Tho tuay barouns, that were so hende,
And prayd hem also his frende
In court thi schuld abide,
And lette 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 thi 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 thi thonked the douke that day
In wele and wo, in wrong and rig ht,
That thi schuld frely fond
To hold togider at everi nede,
To ride an hunting under riis;
Over al the lond than were thi priis
And worthiest in wede.

Child Amiloun and child Amis,
In court frely to fede,
To ride an hunting under riis;
Over al the lond than were thi priis
And worthiest in wede.

So wele tho children loved hem tho,
Neither in word no in deed;
Between the two, in blood and bone,
There was never truer friendship,
In the stories that we read.
On a day the childer, war and wight,
Trewethes togider thai gun plight,
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
Failen 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 forevermore,
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,⁵
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.

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,
Tho 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 worthy 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 sper to ride on stede,
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 sett 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 i n 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 man,
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 goldsmith 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 waren 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,

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6 According to the UK National Archives website, £300 in 1340 is roughly US$250,000 in modern money, a preposterous amount only credible in a medieval romance. Even the extravagantly lavish ring Havelock gives Ubbe is mentioned as worth £100. Accessed May 17, 2010 at http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/.
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 thank on me, Sir Amiloun,
Now we asondri schal wende.
And, brother, yete y the forbade
The fals steward felawerede;
That sensitive man almost fell faint.
He went to the duke in dreary spirits
And addressed him reverently where he stood
And said, “Sir, for charity’s sake,
Give me permission to travel from you.
Unless I may go with my brother,
My heart, it will break in three!”
The regal duke, of a noble family,
Answered in reply with gracious words
And said with no delay,
“Sir Amis, my good friend,
Would you both now leave me?
Surely not!” he said.
“If you were both gone from me,
Then all my sorrows would be awakened
And my joy would be gone away!
Your brother will go to his country.
Accompany him on his journey
And return again today.”
When they were ready to ride,
Those brave men readied
Themselves for the journey.
Gentle people, listen! There’s nothing to hide.
Such sturdy knights, at that time,
Traveled out of the town.
All that day, as they rode on,
They both made great mourning,
Sir Amis and Amiloun.
And when they had to part in two,
They nobly dismounted from their horses
Together upon a plain.
When they were both set on foot,
Sir Amiloun, that faithful knight,
Was a just man of counsel,
And said straightaway to Sir Amis,
“Brother, as we earlier vowed loyalty,
Both in words and deeds,
From this day on we promise
To never fail the other, for better or worse,
To help him in his need.
Friend, be true to me now,
And I will be as true to you,
As God may help me!
But brother, I warn you beforehand,
For His love, who wore a crown of thorns
To save all mankind,
Do not swear falsely against your lord
In any way. And if you do, you are lost
For evermore without end.
But always be true and never treasonous;
And think of me, Sir Amiloun,
Now that we must travel apart.
And friend, again I warn you against
Fellowship with the false steward.
Certes, he wil the schende!"
As thai stode so, tho bretheren bold,
Sir Amiloun drought forthuay coupes of gold,
Ware liche in al thing,
And sad sir Amis that he schold
Chese whether he have wold,
Withouten more duelling,
And sayd 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 think on me,
It tokneth our parting."
Gret sorwe thai 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
eres hadde be,
And spoused a levedy bright in bour
And brought hir hom with gret honour
And brought her home with great ceremony
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,
Yif thou wilt leve onop mi lare,
And lethe 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 answerd, "Mi treuthe y plight
To Sir Amiloun, the gentil knight,
Thei he be went me fro.

370
Whiles 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 answerd tho,
"Sir, therof give y nought a slo;
Do al that thou may!"
Al thus the wrake gan biginne,
And in wrath they separated,
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 lourand 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 answered, "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.”
Many worthy people were gathered there,
Earls, 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 grand 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 bowers, 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 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 her bed lay.  
Hir moder com with diolful chere  
And al the levedis that were there,  
For to solas that may:  
Belisaunt, that beautiful lass,  
When they had spoken so, truly,  
As you may listen and learn—  
Her heart was all set on fire  
For Sir Amis, the noble knight,  
With a love no man could know.  
Wherever she saw him ride or walk,  
She thought her heart would break in two.  
Because she never spoke with that elegant man,  
As she had no opportunity by night or day  
To speak with him, that fair maiden,  
She wept a good number of times.  
Thus the merry young maiden  
Lay in sadness and lovesickness  
Both by day and night.  
As I tell you in my speaking,  
For sorrow she said nothing to him,  
But lay ill in bed.  
Her mother then came to her  
And asked her about her malaise,  
To help her if she could.  
And she answered without deceit  
That her pains were so hard and strong  
She wanted to be buried in the clay.  
That majestic duke, on one morning,  
Along with many a great lording,  
As princes proud in their bearing,  
Prepared themselves without delay  
To go out deer hunting,  
And so they dressed themselves to ride.  
When every one of the lordings  
Was gone out of that regal residence,  
Sir Amis, without a lie,  
Because of a minor illness he had—  
And because one cannot hide in a crowd—  
Stayed behind at home.  
When the lordinges were all gone out,  
With their men, skilful and bowes bent,  
To hunt in the deep woods,  
Then Sir Amis, in truth,  
Was left at home for the day  
To attend to all who were there.  
Then the gracious knight thought to himself  
That he would go into the garden  
To relax himself there.  
Under a bough as he rested.  
To hear the birds sing for the moment  
Seemed a peaceful state to him.  
Now, gentle people, listen and you will hear  
How the duke`s dear daughter  
Lay in distress in her bed.  
Her mother came in doleful spirits  
With all the ladies that were there  
To give comfort to that maiden.
“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.”

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,
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,
And y plight the mi treuthe 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
And seyd with hert fre,
―Madame, for Him that dyed on Rode,
Astow art comen o
f gentil blode
And air of this lond schal be,
Bithenke the of thi michel honour;
Kinges sones and emperour
Nar non to gode to the;
Certes, than were it michel unright,
Thi love to lain opon a knight
That nath noither lond no fe.
“And yif we schuld that game biginne,
And ani wight of al thi kinne
Might it undergo,
Al our joie and worldes winne
We schuld lese, and for that sinne
Wrethi God therto.
And y rede mi lord this deshonour,
Than were ich an iuel traitour;
Ywis, it may nought be so.
Leve madame, do bi mi red
And thank 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.”†
The lovely lady of great renown
Answered, “Sir Knight, you have no tonsure!”
By God who redeemed you dearly,

* 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.

† 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).

‡ 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 devel of helle ichim biteche,  
Mi brother thei he were!

"Ac," sche seyd, "bi Him that ous wrought,  
Al thi prechinge helpeth nought,  
No stond thou never so long.  
Bot yif thou wilt graunt me 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 you hast me todrawe;

Ytake thou schalt be londes lawe  
And dempt heighe to hong!‖

Then 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,  
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 graunt hir asking  
Than his liif for to spille.  
Than seyd he to that maiden ying,  
“For Godes love, heven king,  
Understond to mi skille.

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

Y schal graunt the thi wilte."  
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 clergymen  
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.”

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!

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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 schalt me plight,
Aston art trewe gentil knight,
Thou schalt hold that day.”
He graunted hir hir wil tho,
And plight hem trewthes bothe to,
And seththen kist tho tuai.

670
Into hir chaumber sche went ogań,
Than was sche so glad and fain,
Hir joie sche couthe no man sai.
Sir Amis than withouten duelling,
For to kepe his lorde’s coming,
Into halle he went anon.
When thai were comen fram dere hunting
And with him mani an heighe lording
Into that worthy won,
When thai were comen fram dere hunting
And with him mani an heighe lording
Into that worthy won,
After his douhter he asked swithe;
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.

680
When the lordinges, withouten les,
Hendelich were brought on des
With levedis bright and sweete,
As princes that were proude in pres,
Ful richeliche served he wes
With menske and mirthe 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 aghried ful sare,
And thought he schuld in a while
Bothe with tresoun and with guile
Bring hem into care.
Thus, ywis, that miri may
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.
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

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 accusation 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.
Wel over four days or five,
So that always, when she saw Sir Amis,
All her cares were gone away;
It was good to her to be alive.
Whether he sat or stood,
She openly watched that noble youth,
Nor did she hold back for any danger.
And the steward, for wrath’s sake,
Brought them both to pain and harm.
May he have foul fortune!\(^{13}\)
The rich duke, on one afternoon,
Took himself out deer hunting,
And many men went with him.
And Belisaunt, the merry maiden,
Went to the chamber where Sir Amis lay,
As she knew the way well.
And the steward, without a lie,
Was in a chamber nearby
And saw the maiden then
And how she breezed into the room.
In order to spy on them both that moment,
He ran quickly toward them.
When the maiden came into that place,
She found Sir Amis there alone.
―Hello,‖ she said, that beautiful lady.
―Sir Amis,‖ she then continued,
―As of t\(\)o day seven nights have passed,
Since the vow that we pledged.
Therefore I have come to you to know,
If you are courteous and generous,
And trusted as a noble knight,
Whether you will reject me
Or you will take me faithfully
And keep me as you promised?‖
―My la\(\)dy,‖ said the knight in response,
―I would marry you now gladly
And keep you as my wife.
But if your father heard it said
That I had slept with his daughter,
He would drive me out of the land.
But if I were king of this realm
And had more possessions in my hand
Than five other kings,
I would happily marry you then.
But I am, sincerely, a poor man!
It is woe for me to live!‖
―Sir Knight,‖ said that elegant maiden,
―For the love of Saint Thomas of India,"
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 oigon him gan gon,
Her conseyl forto unwraun,
"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 trai
Mi douhter forlain;  
Y nold for al this worldes won  
Bot y might the traitour slon  
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 leighe on ous with wrake.”
The steward stirt to him than  
And seyd, “Traitour, fals man,  
Ataint thou schalt be take:
Y seighie 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,
“And 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,  
“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.”
“And I give my glove to you here:  
This man lies about us with hatred.”
The steward bolted to him then  
And yelled, “Traitour! 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 vouwed 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,
Tuenti al bidene.
Then they all said, that with good reason,
Sir Amis should be in prison,
For he should not flee anywhere.
Then the beautiful maiden protested
And swore by Jesus, full of might,
That it would be a great injustice.
―Take my body for that knight,
Until his day comes to fight,
And put me in a strong prison.
If the knight flees away
And does not dare to keep his day,
To face the steward in combat,
Then do to me as the law requires
And have me drawn apart for his love
And hanged high on the gallows!‖
Her mother said, with bold words,
That, in good faith, she would
Be his second as well,
To guarantee his day of battle,
So that he would, as a good knight,
Fight against his foe.
Thus those ladies, fair and beautiful,
Pledged to offer both of their bodies
For that gentle knight.

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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.

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,
Ar that he to bataile yede,
Swere on oth biforn,
That al so God schuld him spede
As he was giltles of that dede,
That ther was on him bor
n;
And than thought he, withouten wrong,
He hadde lever to ben anhong
Than to be forsworn.
Ac oft he bisought Jhesu tho,
He schuld save hem 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 him drede,
Thi bataile to abide.‖
―Madame,” seyd that gentil knight,
―For Jhesus love, ful of might,
Be nought wroth for this dede.
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 speche is falsede;
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 guiltless 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,
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!¹⁸
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.

¹⁸ So God me spede: ME is full of emphatic oaths and this line is likely meant as such.
Certes, y can no rede!"
Then seyd that levedi in a while,
"No mai ther go non other gile
To bring that traitor doun?"
"Yis, dame," 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,
And if I dare to go,
I would swear by Saint John,
That baron is so loyal
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 had 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

21 ME can use brother in the same sense as PDE does with expressions such as blood brother or brothers in arms.
And swore bi Him that schop mankind,  
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 forbode  
That non so hardi were of dede,  
After him noither go no ride.  
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,  
With gile and with trecherie,  
He hath me wrought swiche sorn;  
Bot thou help me at this nede,  
Certes, 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?‖  
―Certes,‖ 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 wretche and michel grame.  
And also he seyd, yplight,  
Hou he had boden on him fight,  
Batail of him to fong,
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: “By Him that Judas sold out, and died upon the Cross, he will now fail in his hopes! And I will take the battle for you, even if he is a madman. 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!”

And died upon 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 schrewe bigile, that wald the forfare!”

“Brother,” he seyd, “wende hom now right to mi levedi, 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 thi be ful fain, thai wil wene that ich it be; ther is non that schal knowe the,

So liche we be bothe tuain!” and when he hadde thus sayd, yplight,
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;

| 1150 | And al thai wende of Sir Amis  
It had ben her lord, ywis,  
So liche were tho tuay,  
When that Sir Amis hadde ful yare  
Told him al of his care,  
Ful wele he wend tho,  
Litel and michel, lasse and mare,  
The levedi loked opon him tho  
Wrothlich with her eighen tuo,  
And 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 laid bituix hem tuo.  
The levedi loked opon him tho  
“Sir,” sche seyd, “whi farstow so?  
Thus were thou noght won to do,  
Who hath changed thi mode?”

| 1170 | “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 wardes gode!”  
Thus, ywis, that hendy knight  
Was holden in that fourtennight  
As lord and prince in pride;  
Ac he forget 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 pried his stede night and day,  
As a gentil knight, stout and gay,  
To court he com ful yare  
That selve day, withouten fail,  
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 steed  
To his brother as a valuable gift  
Via a knight of that country.  
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.  
And when it came to the night,  
Sir Amis and that shining lady  
Made their way to bed.  
And when they were laying together,  
Sir Amis drew out his sword  
And laid it between the two of them.  
The lady looked at him crossly  
With her two eyes.  
She thought that her lord was mad.  
“My lady,” she said, “why are you behaving so?  
You have never acted like this.  
What has changed your mood?”  
“Sir,” she said, “for certain,  
I have such an illness  
That it troubles all my blood.  
And all of my bones are so sore  
That I would not touch your bare body  
For all this world’s goods.”  
In this way, in truth, that righteous knight  
Stayed for those fourteen days  
Honorably as lord and prince.  
But he never forgot for one night  
To lay his sword in the middle  
Between him and that beautiful lady.  
The lady thought in her mind  
That it was her lord, Sir Amiloun,  
Who was sick at that time.  
Therefore she kept herself content  
And did not speak any more about it,  
Only wishing to abide by his will.  
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 ysett of batail,  
And Sir Amis was nought thare.  
Than were tho levedis taken bi hond,  
Her juggement to understand,

1200
With sorwe and sikeing sare.  
The steward hoved opon a stede  
With scheld and spere, bataile to bede,  
Gret bost he gan to blawe;

Bifor the douke anone he yede  
And seyd, “Sir, so God the spede,  
Herken to mi sawe!  
This traitour is out of lond ywent;  
Yif he were here in present,

He schuld ben hong and drawe;

Therefore ich aske jugement,  
That his borwes be tobrent,  
As it is londes lawe.”

That riche douke, with wrethe and wrake,  
He bad men schuld tho levedis take  
And lede hem forth biside;  
A strong fer ther was don make  
And a tonne for her sake,

To bren hem in that tide.  
Than thai loked in to the feld  
And seighe a knight with spere and scheld  
Com prikeand ther with pride.

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.
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, “If I reveal my name,
Than schal mi brother go to schame,
With sorwe thai schul him spille.
Certies,” he sayd, “for drede of care
To hold mi treuth the schal 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 seyed 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.
Al that ther was, yong and old,
Bisought God yif that He wold
Help Sir Amis that tide.
On stedes that were stithe and strong
Thai riden togider with schaftes long,
Til thai toschiverd bi ich a side;
And than drough thai swerdes gode
And hewe togider, as thai were wode,
For nothing thai nold abide.
Tho gomes, that were egre of sight,
With fauchouns felle thai gun to fight
And ferd as thai were wode.
So hard thai hewe on helmes bright
With strong strokes of michel might,
That fer biforn out stode;
So hard thai hewe on helme and side,
Thurch dent of grimly woundes wide,
That thai sprad al of blod.
Fram morwe to none, withouten faile,
Bituixen hem last the bataile,
So egre thai were of mode.
Sir Amiloun, as fer of flint,
With wrethe anon to him he wint
And smot a stroke with main;
Ac he failed of his dint,
The stede in the heved he hint
And smot out al his brain.
The stede fel ded doun to grounde;
Tho was the steward that stounde
Ful ferd he schuld be slain.
Sir Amiloun light adoun of his stede,
To the steward afot he yede
And hulp him up ogain.
“Arise up, steward,” he seyd anon,
“To fight thou schalt afot gon,
For thou hast lorn thi stede;
For it were gret vilani, bi Seyn Jon,
A liggeand man for to slon,
That were yfallen in nede.”
That knight was ful fre to fond
And tok the steward bi the hond
And seyd, “So God me spede,
Now thou schalt afot go,
Y schal fight afot also,
And elles were gret falshed.”
The steward and that douhti man

25 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,  
1350  
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 knownen with reweli chere,  
When he was fallen in care.  
Than was Sir Amiloun wroth and wode,  
Whan al his amour ran o blode,  
1360  
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,  
1370  
Ful glad thai were that tide.  
The heved opon a spere thai bare;  
To toune thai dight hem ful yare,  
For nothing thai nold abide;  
Thaie com ogaines him out of toune  
With a fair processiou  
Semliche bi ich a side.  
Anon thai ladde him to the tour  
With joie and ful michel honour,  
1380  
As prince proude in pride.  
In to the palais when thai were gon,  
Al that was in that worthi won  
Wende Sir Amis it ware.  
“Sir Amis,” seyd the douke anon,  
1390  
“Bifor this lordinges everichon  
Y graunt the ful yare,  
For Belisent, that miri may,  
Thou hast bought hir ful dere today  
With grimli woundes sare;  
Therefo y graunt the now here  
Mi lond and mi douhter dere,  
To hald for ever mare.”  
Ful blithe was that hendri knight  
And thonked him with al his might,  
Glad he was and fain;  
In al the court was ther no wight  
That wist wat his name it hight;  
To save tho levedis tuain,  
Leches swithe thai han yfounde,
That gun to tasty his wounde
And made him hole again,
Than were thi 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 country
To telle his frendes, lasse and mare,
And other lordinges that there ware,

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,
Nothir knight no swain.

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 ich maide, worthli in wede,
That was so comly corn.
Sir Amiloun light of his stede,
And gan to chaungy her wede,
As thi hadde don biforn.
“Brother,” he seyd, “wende hom ogain.”
And taught him hou he schuld sain,
When he com ther thai won.
Than was Sir Amis glad and blithe
And thanked him a thousand sithe

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;

Be it in peril never so strong,
Y schal the help in right and wrong,
Mi liffo lese to mede.”
Asonder than that gun wende;
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.
Sir Amiloun, that knight so hende,
Went home at that time
To his lady who was unknowing,
And was so welcoming to his friend,
As a prince proud in bearing.
And when it came to the night,
Sir Amiloun and that beautiful lady
Were lying beside each other in bed.
In his arms he began to kiss her
And was joyful and greatly content.
He would not leave for anything.
The lady then immediately asked him
Why he had behaved so
All those fourteen nights,
Laying his sword between the two of them
So that she dared not, for good or ill,
Touch his body at all.
Sir Amiloun then was assured
His friend was a faithful man
Who had done this, truly.
―My lady,‖ he said, ―I will tell you
And explain the truth to you gladly.
But betray me to no one.‖
The lady at once began to pester him,
For His love, who redeemed the world,
To tell her what happened.
Then as promptly that gentle man
Told her all the truth,
How he had traveled to the court,
And how he killed the fierce steward,
Who would have destroyed his brother
With treason and with injustice;
And how his friend, that noble knight,
Had laid with her in bed each night
While he was there.
The lady was very irate, truly,
And incessantly criticized her lord that night
In speech between the two of them,
And complained, ―You killed a noble knight
With foul and great injustice.
For certain, it was done in evil!‖
―Lady,‖ he said, ―by Heaven’s king,
I did it for no other thing
But to save my brother from grief.
And I hope, if I had need, that even if
He shortened his own life as a result,
He would help me also.‖
Meanwhile, in the story as we read it,
Sir Amis was glad and at ease
And he traveled to the court.
And when he came back to the court
He was honored, that good man,
By earl, baron, knight, and servant.
The rich duke took him by the hand

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 pride;
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 joie and michel blis,
For nothing he nold abide.
The levedi astite asked him tho
Whi that he hadde farn so
Al that fourten night,
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 n,
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 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 help 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

Sir Amiloun, that knight so gent
Went home at that time
To his lady who was unknowing,
And was so welcoming to his friend,
As a prince proud in bearing.
And when it came to the night,
Sir Amiloun and that beautiful lady
Were lying beside each other in bed.
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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 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,
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And ich hope, yif ich hadde nede,
His owhen liif to lesse to mede,
He wald help 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 sesed him in alle his lond,
To hold withouten ende;

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 fa
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 with
in 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,
Thus 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 adoun,
That ere was hende and fre;
Al so that angel hadde hem told,
In world than was he.
In gest to rede it is gret rewthe,
What sorwe he hadde for his treuteh
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.

And endowed him with all his land
To hold without end.
And afterward with joy, upon one day,
He married Belisaunt, that maiden
Who was so loyal and kind.
There were many fine people in the hall
When he wedded that flower;
Earls, barons, numerous and plenty,
And other gentlemen, great and small,
And ladies, beautiful in their bowers.
They held a royal feast
With earls and brave barons
With joy and stately honor.
Over all the land, east and west,
Sir Amis was lauded as the best
And regarded with praise in the tower.
So within those two years,
They were blessed with grace,
As God Almighty willed:
The rich duke was taken from them
And his lady passed away as well,
And buried in the ground so cold.
Then Sir Amis, generous and noble,
Was a duke and lord of great authority
And was obeyed all over the land.
He fathered two children with his wife,
The fairest that might bear life,
In the story as it is told.
Then that knight was of great renown
And lord of many a tower and town
And a duke of great power.
But his brother, Sir Amiloun,
Who was so noble and generous before,
Was weighed down with sorrow and cares.
Just as the angel had told him,
There was no leper regarded so foully
By the world than he was.
To read the story is great sadness,
What misery he had
Within those three years.
And before those three years came to their end,
He was so weighed down by woe
He did not know where he might go;
For all who were his best friends,
And, namely, all his rich family,
Became his worst foes.
And his wife, to say the truth,
Treated him the worst by day and night
Than anyone else did.
When he had fallen into that hard situation,
Men did not know a more friendless man
Anywhere than he was.
His wife was so wicked and calculating
Sche brac his hert withouten kniif,  
With wordes harde and kene,  
And seyd to him, “Thou wreche chaitif,  
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 -

Withouten 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,  
It is gret spite to ous alle,  
Mi kende is wroth with me.”

The knight gan wepe and seyd ful stille,  
“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—

That she pierced his heart without a knife.  
With words that were hard and sharp,  
She said to him, “You wretched coward,  
The steward wrongly lost his life;  
It is clear to see what you’ve done!  
And so, by Saint Denis of France,  
This hard luck is fated for you!  
Damn whoever feels sorry for you!”

Continually he wrung his hands  
As a man who thinks his life too long  
And lives in trial and pain.  
Alas, alas! That gentle knight,  
Who once was so wise and brave,  
Who was ordained such woe  
That away from his lady, fair and beautiful,  
Out of his own chamber at night  
He was forced to go.

And in his own hall, one day  
He was also ordered away  
From the high table  
To eat at the table’s end.  
No man there would seat him honorably;  
Then he was very miserable.  
By the time half a year was gone  
That he had eaten 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.

“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 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 all my kin.  
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 thanked 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 sere.  
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 fro fot to 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.  
When ich man made gle and song,  
He made drer i mode.  
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,  
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  
While he ware olive.  
Bi than the tuelmoneth was al gon,  
Amorant went into that won  
For his lordes livray;  
The levedi was ful wroth anon  
And comaunde hir men everichon  
To drive that child oway,
And swore by Him that Judas sold,
Even if his lord died where he lay
For hunger and cold,
He would have neither food nor drink,
Nor the aid of any other thing,
From her after that day.
The young man wrung his two hands
And went home again weeping
With sorrow and bitter sighing.
That good man began to question him
And asked him to speak to him
And tell him what had happened.
Then he answered and said,
“Truly, it’s no wonder that I am woeful.
My heart, it breaks from worry!
Your wife has sworn in a fierce mood
That she will never do us any more good.
Alas, how will we live?”
“Ah, God help us!” said that noble knight.
“Once I was a man of might,
One to deal out food and clothing.
And now I am so foul a creature
That for anyone who sees me by sight,
My life is loathsome to them.
Son,” he said, “let go your weeping,
For this is serious news;
We can see that for sure.
For, certainly, I know no other course;
We are obliged to beg our bread.
Now I know how it must go.”
In the morning, as soon as it was light,
The youth and that noble knight
Prepared themselves to go.
And they went straight on their way
To beg their bread, as they had determined,
For they had no food at all.
For a while they went up and down
Until they came to a market town,
Five miles away from that area,
And they wept bitterly from door to door
And begged their food for God’s love.
They had little experience of that!
So in that time, as I understand,
There was great plenty in that land,
Both of food and drink.
The people were generous in giving
And brought them enough to their hand
Of all kinds of things.
For the good man was so wretched then,
And the young man was so fair as well,
That young and old pitied them
And brought them enough of all necessities.
Then the youngster was at ease in spirits
And let go his weeping.
Than wex the gode man fote so sare
That he no might no forthere 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 countré
Com to chepeing everi day,
Thai gat hem lives fode;

Than 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!

Amoraunt went to the court
Before that beautiful and well-born lady.
At once he spoke very courteously to her.
“My lord has sent me as a messenger,
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.”

Before that beautiful and well-born lady.
At once he spoke very courteously to her.
“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,
Thel hunger ous schuld slon.”
The levedi seyd sche wald ful fain
Sende him gode asses tuain,
With thi he wald oway go
1780
So fer that he never eft com ogain.
“Nat, certes, dame,” the child gan sain,
―Thou sest ous never eft mo.”
Than was the levedi glad and blithe
And comaund him an asse as swithe
And seyd with wrethe tho,
―Now ye schul out of lond fare,
God leve you never to com here mare,
And graunt that it be so.”
That child n o 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;
Ther of thai were ful fain.
Thurch mani a cuntré, up an doun,
Thai begged her mete fram toun to toun,
Bothe in winde and rain.
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,
Thel 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
28
And then ordered sourly,
“Now 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.
1820  His asse he ladde with him also
He led the donkey with him as well
And sold it for five shillings.\(^{29}\)
And sold it for five shillings.
And while that derth was so strong,
And while the bad harvest was so biting,
Ther with thai bought hem mete among,
They bought food among themselves with it
When thai might gete no thing.
When they could not beg anything.
And when her asse was ysold
And when their donkey was sold
For five shillings, as y you told,
For five shillings, as I told you,
Tha duelld ther dayes thre;
They stayed for three days there.
Amoraunt wex strong and bold,
Amoraunt had grown strong and hardy.
Of fiftene winter was he old,
He was fifteen years old,
Curtays, hende and fre.
Courteous, handsome, and generous.
For his lord he hadde gret care,
For his lord he had great concern,
And at his rigge he dight him yare
And he placed him cheerfully on his back
And bare him out of that cité;
And carried him out of the city.
And half a yere and sum del mare
For half a year and somewhat more
About his mete he him bare,
He bore him about for his food.
Yblisced mot he be.
May he be blessed for it!
Thus Amoraunt, withouten wrong,
Thus Amoraunt, without fail,
Bar his lord about so long,
Carried his lord around for so long,
As y you tel may.
As I can tell you.

1830  That winter com so hard and strong,
That winter came so hard and fiercely
Oft, ―Alas!‖ it was his song,
That ―Alas!‖ was constantly his song,
So depe was that cuntrey,
The country was so muddy.
The way was so depe and slider,
The way was so slushy and slippery
Thay times bothe togider
That they often both together
Thai fel doun in the clay.
Fell down into the dirt.
Ful trewe he was and kinde of blo
He was faithful and kind-natured
And served his lord with mild mode,
And served his lord with a gentle spirit
Wald he nought wende oway.
And would not turn away.
Thus Amoraunt, as y you say,
Thus Amoraunt, as I tell you,
Served his lord bothe night and day
Served his lord both night and day
And at his rigge him bare.
And carried him on his back.
Oft his song was, ―Waileway!‖
His refrain was continually "Woe is us!"
The winter slush was so deep
That his bones grew sore.
Al her catel than w as spent,
All their money was spent then,
Save tuelf pans, verrament,
Except for twelve pennies, in truth.
Therwith thai went ful yare
With that they quickly went
And bought hem a gode croudewain,
And bought themselves a sturdy pushcart.
His lord he gan ther-in to lain,
He laid his lord inside it;
He no might him bere namare.
He could carry him no more.
Than Amoraunt crud Sir Amiloun
Then Amoraunt carted Sir Amiloun
Thurch mani a cuntré, up and doun,
Through many a land, up and down,
As ye may understond;
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 two for 1d (1/12 of a shilling, £2.25 in modern money). Kenneth Hodges, "Medieval
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 beside
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
He crud 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 mete 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 coupes 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
Withdraw 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.
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.
Therefore 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 on mi playing;
I saw many poor men there,
Small and great, low and high,
Both young and old,
And a lazer ther y fond;
Herestow never in no lond
Telle of so foule a thing.
“The lazer lith up in a wain,

And is so power 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 wet y non.
He is the fairest gone
That ever Crist yaf Cristendome
Or layd liif opon,
And on of the most foole he is
That ever thou herdest speke, ywis,

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;

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,

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

In thine hondes tuain,
And bere it to the castelgate,
A lazer thou shalt 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 foule 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

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 wine,  
And bring me the coupe again."
The squier tho the coupe hent,  
And to the castel gat he went,  
And ful of win he it bare.

To the lazer he seyd, verrament,  
"This coupe ful of wi lord the sent,  
Drink it, yife 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 he no couthe  
Chese the better of hem to,  
So liche bothe thai worn.

He ran again,  
"Certes, sir," he gan to sain,  
"Mani gode dede thou hast lorn,  
And so thou hast lorn this dede now;  
He is a richer man than thou.

Fi the time that God was born,"
The rich douke answerd, "Nay.  
That worth never bi night no 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 this world, bi Seyn Jon,  
So wise a man is ther non  
Asundri schuld hem knawe."  
"Now, certes," seyd Sir Amis tho,  
"In al this world were coupes nomo  
So liche in al thing,  
Save min and mi brothers also,  
That was sett bituix ous to,  
Token of our parting;  
And yif it be so, with tresoun

Mine hende brother, Sir Amiloun,  
Is slain, withouten lesing.  
And yif he have stolen his coupe oway,  
Y schal him sle me self this day,  
Bi Jhesu, heven king!"
Fram the bord he resed than  
And hent his swerd as a wode man  
And drough it out with wake,  
And to the castel gat he ran;
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 stood 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.

“So?” he said, “you are ungracious
And ignorant of what you are doing
To slay that noble 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 aquitested thou his mede,  
Alas, whi fairest thou so?

When Sir Amis herd him so sain,  
He stirt to the knight agin,

Withouten more delay,  
And biclp he in his armes tuain,

And oft, “Allas!” he gan sain;

His song was “Waileway!”

He lokd 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,  
Unknder blod nas never born,

Y not wat y may do;

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,

Wepeand with eighen tuo.

Than was Sir Amis glad and fain,

And hent his brother than,

And tok him in his armes tuain,

Right til he com into the halle ogain,

No bar him no nother man.

The levedi tho in the halle stode

And wend hir lord hadde ben wode,

Ogaines him hye ran.

―Sir,‖ sche seyd, ―wat is thi thought?  
Whi hastow him into halle ybrought

For Him that this world wan?‖

“O dame,” he seyd, “bi Seyn Jon,  
Me nas never so wo bigon,

Yif thou it wost understond,  
For it is mi brother, Sir Amiloun,

Whi hastow him into halle ybrought

For Him that this world wan?‖

“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,

Forget 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!”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
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| 2180 | 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,  
Tuelmoneh 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,  |
| 2190 | 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,  |
| 2200 | 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,  
Thurch 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;  |
| 2230 | And he him answerd again ful stille,  
That the knight had fallen on such hard fortune  
To live in misery and worry.  
Into her chamber she brought him  
And threw off all of his ragged clothing  
And bathed his naked body,  
And brought him quickly to a bed  
With clothes that were fine and well-made.  
They were overjoyed to have him.  
And thus in the story as we say it,  
He stayed twelve months in her chamber.  
They were very dutiful and kind.  
They would never say no to him.  
Whatsoever he asked for, day or night,  
It was never slow in coming.  
Of every dish and every drink  
They had themselves, without a lie,  
Both had him fully in mind.  
And by the time twelve months had passed,  
A wondrous blessing came to them,  
In the story as we find it.  
So it happened one night  
As Sir Amis, that gracious knight,  
Lay asleep, that he dreamed  
An angel came from Heaven’s brightness  
And stood right before his bed,  
And began to say to him  
That if he would rise on Christmas morning  
At the same time as Jesus Christ was born,  
And slay his two children  
And anoint his brother with the blood,  
Through God’s grace, that is so good,  
His disease would fade away.  
Thus he dreamed all through the night  
That an angel out of Heaven’s radiance  
Warned him for evermore  
That if he would do as he was commanded,  
His brother would be as fair a knight  
As he ever was before.  
Then Sir Amis was very gladden,  
But was very sad for his children,  
For there were none born who were so fair.  
He was greatly loath to kill his children,  
But more unwilling to deny his friend,  
Who had such a noble heritage.  
Sir Amiloun also dreamed that night  
That an angel warned him then  
And said to him directly  
That if his brother slayed his children,  
The heart’s blood of the two  
Might bring him out of sickness.  
In the morning Sir Amis was gracious  
And made his way to his friend  
And asked him how he was.  
And the other answered back softly,
“Brother, ich abide her Godes wille,  
For y may do na mare.”  
Al so thai sete togider thare  
And spoke 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 thi 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 keys of the noricerie,  
Er than thai schuld gon,  
And priveliche he cast his eighe  
And aparceved 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 keys 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 thai 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  
that tide,  
For sorwe he sleynt oway biside  
And wepe with reweful chere.  
Than he hadde wopen ther he stode,  
Anon he turned ogain his mode  
And sayd withouten delay,  
“Mi brother was so kinde and gode,  
With grimly wounde he schad his blod  
For mi love opon a d  
ay;  
Whi schuld y than mi childer spare,  
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  
i mode  
And tok his children tho;  
For he nold nought spille her blode,  
Over a bacine fair and gode  
And when he hadde hem bothe slain,  
He laid hem in her bed ogain  
—  
It was no wonder  
he was in anguish!—  
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 though 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 here,  
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 priaire.  
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 warld wan,  
Bothe mi childer ich have slan,  
That were so hende and gode;  
“Brother,” Sir Amiloun cried out,  
“Have you killed your two children?  
Alas, why did you do it?”  
He wept and said, “Woe is us!  
I would have preferred to live  
In pain and misery until Doomsday!”  
Then Sir Amis said, “Be still now!  
Jesus, when it is His will,  
May send me more children.  
Because of me you are barren of joys.  
In truth, I would not spare my own life  
If it would help you now.”  
He took that blood, which was so bright,  
And anointed that noble knight,  
Who was once strong in health,  
And afterward he put him in bed  
And covered him warmly, indeed,  
With blankets that were rich and plentiful.  
“Brother,” he said, “Lie still now  
And fall asleep through God’s will,  
As the angel told in the tale;  
And I fully believe, without falsehood,  
That Jesus, who is Heaven’s king,  
Will relieve you of your suffering.”  
Sir Amis let him lie alone  
And went at once into his chapel,  
In the story as you may hear,  
And for his children that he had slain,  
He made his plea to God in Heaven  
And prayed with a penitent heart  
That He would save him from shame that day,  
And to Mary, His Mother, that blessed maid,  
Who was beloved and dear to him.  
And Jesus Christ, in that place,  
Heard in full that knight’s petition  
And granted him his prayer.  
In the morning, as soon as it was day,  
The lady came home in high spirits  
With ten knights and five more.  
They looked for the keys where they laid them.  
They could not find them; they were gone.  
It was a torment to be alive!  
The duke asked of all who were there  
That they would keep themselves quiet  
And stop being anxious,  
And he said he had taken the keys  
And that no man should go into the chamber  
Except himself and his wife.  
Afterward he took his lady  
And said to her, “My dear heart,  
Be content and glad in mood.  
For in the name of Him who saved this world,  
I have slain both my children,  
Who were so gentle and good.
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;
Tomorow 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 Amys sent ful Hastely
After mony knyght hardy,
That doughthy were of dede,

Wel fyve 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,
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 silf 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 Amys 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 bredale.
When thei had with wrake
Drove outhe 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 palfrays 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 *mede*, ‘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,
Who 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 feflet it ryght wel thoo,
In Lumbardy, in that contray,
To senge for hem tyl Domesday
And for her eldres also.

They both died on the same day
And they were laid in one grave,
Both of the two knyghtes;
And for their trewh and her godhede
The blisse of hevyn they have to mede,
That lasteth ever moo.

Amen.
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,

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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 truite 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 truite. 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 traiour” (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”9 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.”10 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”11 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 even \textit{fart}, but left in \textit{dight}.

\textsuperscript{13} Dean R. Baldwin, “\textit{Amis and Amiloun}: The Testing of Treuþe,” \textit{Papers on Language and Literature} 16 (1980): 361.

The theme of virtue through fidelity to *treuþe* is carried by a series of tests, “arranged roughly in ascending order of difficulty,”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,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.”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.”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”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 nick20 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.21

18 Kratins, 351.
19 Kratins, 351.
20 Baldwin, 361.
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 treuþe 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 chief22) 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.”23 Similarly, Amiloun’s trials and indignities humble him toward a treuþe 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

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

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24 Diana T. Childress, “Between Romance and Legend: ‘Secular Hagiography’ in Middle English Literature,” *Philological Quarterly* 57 (1978): 319. Childress cites “homiletic romance” and “secular hagiography” as Dieter Mehl’s and Ojars Kratin’s terms, respectively (312).


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 oway 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


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 treuþe 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 treuþe 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.

CHAPTER 2

Athalston


Main characters:
Athalstone, 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
Athalstone the messenger

| 1 | Lord that is off myghtys most, | Our Lord, who is of the highest might, |
|   | Fadyr and Sone and Holy Gost,  | Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,          |
|   | Bryng us out of synne          | Deliver us from sin                   |
|   | And lene us grace so for to wyrke | And grant us the grace to bring ourselves |
|   | To love bothe God and Holy Kyrke | To love both God and holy church      |
|   | That we may hevene wynne.      | So that we may win Heaven.            |
|   | Lystnes, lordyngys, that ben hende, | Hear, lordings, in your graciousness, |
|   | Of falsnesse, hou it wil ende  | About disloyalty and how it will end  |
A man that ledes hym therin.
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 under a linden tree.
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 kynge’s cosyn dere;
He was of the kynge’s blood,
Hys eemes sone, I undyrstood;
Therefore he neyghyd hym nere.
And at the laste, weel and fayr,

A man who leads himself into it.
I will tell you about four sworn brothers\(^1\)
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.\(^2\)
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,\(^3\)

\(^1\) 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 Egelond was his name,
Was faithful, as you will hear.

4 Stane: There are many English Stones. Perhaps this is the Stone near Dartford or the one near Faversham, both on the road between London and Canterbury. It seems odd that Athelston would give a close friend an unimportant earldom, but this is not likely Maidstone, which is called as such in the Domesday Book.
Thorwgh the myght off Goddys gras,
He gat upon the countas
Twoo knave-children dere.
That on was fyffteyne 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 blossme 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.

That Eerle of Dovere, wyttyrlye.
In herte he was ful woo.
He thoughte al for here sake
False lesyngys on hem to make,
To don hem brene and sloo.
And thanne Sere Wymound hym bethoughte:
“Here love thus endure may noughte;
Thorwg wurd oure werk may sprynge.”
He bad hys men maken hem yare;
Unto Londone wolde he fare
To speke with the kynge.
Whenne that he to Londone come,
He mette with the kynge 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,
“Their 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 Eerl of Stane,
That waworthy lord in hys wane?
Wente thou ought that gate?
Hou fares that noble knight,
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 said, "yiff it be thi wille
To chaumbyr that thou woldest wenden tylle,
Consayl for to here,
I schal thee telle a swete tydande,
The kyngys herte than was ful woo
With that traytour for to goo;
They wenete 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 said, "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 kyng," 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 kyng," 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.

140 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 —
Be masse-book and belle —
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:
Sertainly, it is non othir
But Egelane, thy weddyd brothir —
He wolde that thou were slayne;
He dos thy sustyr to undyrstand
He wole be kyng of thy lande,
And thus he begynnes here trayne.
He wole 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!"5
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,6
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 that suffryd payne."

Thanne swoor the kyng be Cros and Roode:

"Meete ne drynk schal do me goode
Tyl that he be dede;
Bothe he and hys wyf, hys soones twoo,
Schole they nevere be no moo
In Yngelond on that stede."

"Nay," says the traytour, "so moote I the,
Ded wole I nought my brother se;
But do thy beste rede."

No lengere there then wolde he lende;
He takes hys leve, to Dovere gan wende.

God geve hym schame and dede!

Now is that traytour hom iwent.
A messanger was afftyr sent
To speke with the kyng.
I wene he bar his owne name:
He was hoten Athelstane;
He was foundelyng.
The lettrys were imaad fullyche thare,
Unto Stane for to fare
Withouten ony dwellyng,
To fette the eerl and his sones twoo,
And the countasse alsoo,
Dame Edyve, that swete thyng.
And in the lettre yit was it tolde,
That the kyng the eerlys sones wolde
Make hem bothe knyght;
And therto his seel he sette.
The messanger wolde nought lette;
The way he rydes ful ryght.

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 Athelstane: 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 messanger, the noble man,
Takes hys hors and forth he wan,
And hyes a ful good spede.
The eerl in hys halle he fande;
He took hym the lettre in his hande
Anon he bad hym rede:
“Sere,” he sayde also swythe,
“This lettre oughte to make thee blythe:
Thertoo thou take good hede.
The kyng wole for the cuntas sake
Bothe thy sones knyghtes make —
To London I rede thee sped e.
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 ryght no lettyng —
That syghte that sche may see.”
Thenne sayde that eerl with herte mylde,
“My wyff goth ryght gret with chylde,
And forthynkes me,
Sche may nought out of chaumbyr wyn,
To speke with non ende of here kyn
Tyl sche delyveryd 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 eerl hys men bad make hem yare;

The noble man, this messenger,
Took his horse and went forth
And hastened at top speed.
He found the earl in his hall.
He gave him the letter into his hand
And asked him to read it straightaway.
“Sir,” he said as quickly,
“This letter ought to make you glad.
Therefore take heed of it.
The king will, for the countess’ sake,
Make both your sons knights.
I advise you to hurry to London.
The king will, for the countess’ sake,
Make both your sons knights,
To make you all the happier.
Bring your fair wife with you,
And let there be no delay,
So that she may see that sight.”
Then the earl said with a tender heart,
“My wife is very much with child,
And so I regret that
She cannot go from her chamber
To speak with anyone of her kin
Until she has given birth.”
But they made their way to the chamber
To read the letter before that gracious lady
And soon told her the news.
Then the countess said, “As I live and breathe,
I will not rest until I am there
Tomorrow, before it is noon.
To see my noble sons knighted,
I will not delay until I am there.
I will not linger any longer.
May Christ reward my lord the king
Who has granted them their dubbing!
My heart is very glad.”
The earl had his men ready themselves.
He and his wife set out,
Traveling quickly to London.
The king’s home was at Westminster.

He and his wyff forth gunne they fare,
To London faste they wente.
At Westemynstyr was the kygys wone;
There they mette with Athelstone,

That afftyr hem hadde sente.
The goode eelr soon was hent
And feteryd faste, verrayment,
And hys sones twoo.
Ful lowde the countasse gan to crye,
And sayde, “Goode brothir, mercy!
Why wole ye us sloo?
What have we ayens yow done,
That ye wolde have us ded so soone?
Me thynkith ye arn ourn foo.”

The kyng as wood ferde in that stede;
He garte hys sustyr to presoun lede —
In herte he was ful woo.

Thenne a squyer, was the countasses frende,
To the qwene he gan wende,
And tydyngys tolde here soone.
Gerlondes of chyryes of sche caste,
Into the halle sche come at the laste,
Longe or it were noone.

“The kyng, I am before thee come
With a child, doughtyr or a sone.
Graunte me my bone,
My brothir and sustyr that I may borwe
Tyl the nexte day at morwe,
Out of here paynys stronge;
That we mowe wete by comoun sent
In the playne parlement.”

Gerlondes of chyryes of 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, “goot fro me! 
Thy bone shall nought igmaunted be, 
I doo thee to undyrstande.

270 For, be Him 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

280 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 lytyl spase
A knave-chylde iborn ther wase,

290 As bryght as blosme on bowgh.
He was bothe whyt and red;

“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 baret 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 Caunturbery,
There the clerkys 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,
Yyff that thyn 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 foryelde 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,°
Asking him to deliver a letter,
And had him go to Canterbury,
Where the priests sing merrily,
Both for mass and evensonge.
“Take this letter to the bishop,
And petition him for God’s sake,
To come rescue them out of their bonds.
He will do more for his brother, I think,
Than for me, even though I am queen,
I will have you understand
That I have as land an earldom in Spain;
I give it all into your hand,
Truly, as I promise you,
And a hundred coins of red gold.
You may save them from death
If your horse is valiant.”
“Madam, enjoy your wedding gifts yourself,
As long as you may live.
I have no right to it,
To your gold or to your property.
Christ in Heaven has given it to you.

° 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).

°° 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.
Madame, 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,¹³
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 messenger, that noble man,
Soon reached London Bridge.
For his labors he had no praise.
¹⁴
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, noes, 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 Cauntyrbery, that noble wyke,
Therin lay that bysschop ryke,
That lord of gret renoun.
And whenne they runggen undernbelle,
He rod in Londone, as I yow telle:
He was non er redy;
And yit to Cauntyrbery he wan,
Longe or evensong began;
He rod mylys fyffty.
The messanger nothing abod;
Into the palays forth he rod,
There that the bysschop was inne.

Ryght welcome was the messanger,
That was come from the qwene so cleer,
Was of so noble kynne.
He took hym a lettre ful good speed
And saide, “Sere bysschop, have this and reed,”
And bad hym come with hym.
Or he the lettre hadde halff iredde,
For dool, hym thoughte hys herte bledde;
The teeres fyl ovyr hys chyn.
The bysschop bad sadele hys palfray:
“Also faste as thay may,
Bydde my men make hem yare;
And wendes before,” the bysschop dede say,
“To my maneres in the way;
For nothyng that ye spare,
And loke at ylke fyve mylys ende
A fresch hors that I fynde,
Schod and nothing bare;
Blythe schal I nevere be,
Tyl I my weddyd brother see,
To kevere hym out of care.”
On nyne palfrays the bysschop sprong,
Ar it was day, from evensong —
In romaunce as we rede.
Sertaynly, as I yow telle,
On London-brygge ded doun felle
The messangeres stede.
“Allas,” 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 bryngen 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.\(^\text{15}\)
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.

\(^\text{15}\) 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 wente 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:

420 “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,
And took hym be the hande.
“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,

430 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 weres the corowne of thorn,
Lat me borwe hem tyl tomorn,
That we mowe enquere,
And weten alle be comoun asent
In the playne parlement
Who is wurthy be schent.

450 And, but yiff ye wole graunte my bone,
With him went both priest and cleric,
Who knew much about God’s work,
To pray to God for the right direction.
When he arrived in the chapel,
He knelted at once before the Cross
And fell on his knees.
“God, who sits in Trinity,
Grant me a plea, Lord,
Just as you conquered Hell.
If they are guiltless men
Who are in my strong prison,
Condemned there to yell,
If they are innocent of their guilt,
Grant that it may be seen by them
Who caused them to be there.”
And when he had made his prayer,
He looked up into the choir loft;
And saw the archbishop standing.
He was astonished by the sight
And went to him quickly,
And took him by the hand.
“Welcome,” he said, “Archbishop,
Our saintly father under God.”
The archbishop swore by the living God,
“My sworn brother, may you prosper long,
For I never had such an urgent need
Since I took the cross in my hand.
Good brother, now change your mind.
Do not put your own blood to death
Unless it were justified.
For Him that wore the crown of thorns,
Let me be surety for them until tomorrow,
So that we may have an inquiry
And decide by common assent
In the full parliament
Who is worthy to be punished.
And if you will not grant my plea,
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:
"They scholen be drowen and hongyd or none —
With eyen thou shalt 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!"
Then bespak that erchebysschop,
Oure gostly fadyr undyr God,
Smertly to the kyng:
"Weel 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  
Hungyr and thyrst 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?”

Thanne he sayde, “Youre cursyd kyng  
Hath me refft of al my thyng,  
And of al my worldly wan;  
And I have entrydtyd Yngelond:  
Ther schal no preest syngge Masse with hond,  
Chylde schal be crystenyd non,  
But yiff he graunte me that knyght,  
His wyff and chyldryn fayr and bryght:  
He wolde with wrong hem slon.”  
The knyght sayde, “Bysschop, turne agayn;  
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 full 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 doun both halle and boure,
Bothe hys castelles and hys toures,
They schole lygge lowe and holewe.
Though he be kyng and were the corown,
We scholen hym sette in a deep dunjoun:
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 doun both halle and boure,
Bothe hys castelles and hys toures,
They schole lygge lowe and holewe.
Though he be kyng and were the corown,
We scholen hym sette in a deep dunjoun:

Oure Crystyndom we wolte 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 Yngeland long and wyde.”

Hereof the bysschop was ful fayn,
And turnys hys brydyl and wende —
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 orysoun,
He asoyllyd 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 sayd yare lyvys alle:
Iblessyd moot thou bee.”

Thenne sayde the bysschop also soone:
“And I schal geven swylke a dome
With eyen that thou schalt see!
Yiff thay be gylty off that dede,
Sorrere the doome thay may drede,
Thanne schewe here schame to me.”

Whanne the bysschop hadde sayd soo,
A gret fyr was maad
In romaunce as we rede —
It was set, that men myghte knawe,
As red as ony glede.
Thanne sayde the kyng: “What may this mene?”
“Sere, of gylt and thay be clene,
This doom hem thar nought drede.”
Thanne sayde the good Kyng Athelstone:
“At mord doom is this on:
God graunte us alle weel to spede.”

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.”

18 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 fetten forth Sere Egelan—
A trewere eelr was ther nan—
Before the fyr so bryght.
From hym they token the rede scarlet,
Bothe hosyn and schoon that weren hym met,
That fel al for a knyght.
Nyne sythe the bysschop halewid the way
That his weddyd brother scholde goo that day,
To praye God for the rytgh.
He was unblemeschyd foot and hand;
That sawgh the lordes of the land,
And thankyd God of Hys myght.
They offeryd hym with mylde chere
Unto Saint Powlys heyghe awtere,
That mekyl was of myght.
Doun upon hys knees he felle,
And thankyd God that harewede helle
And Hys modyr so bryght.
And yit the bysschop tho gan say:
"Now schal the chyldryn gon the way
That the fadyr yede."
Fro hem they tooke the rede scarlete,
The hosen and schoon that weren hem mete,
And al here worldly wede.
The fyr was bothe hydous and rede,
The chyldryn swownyd as they were ded;
The bysschop tyl hem yede;
With careful herte on hem gan look;
Be hys hand he hem up took:

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.”

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

“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.
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 thenne 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.
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.

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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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>Text</th>
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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 unblescheschyd 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  
| 650    | 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,  
| 660    | With markys and with pounde;  
|        | And al afltyr my dede —  
|        | Yngelond to wysse and rede.”  
|        | Now iblesseyd be that stounde!  
|        | Thanne sayde the bysschop to the Kyng:  
|        | “Sere, who made this grete lesyng,  
|        | And who wroughte al this bale?”  
|        | 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 pennies 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?”  

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.
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”
That 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 come,
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:
“It hath gete me this eerldome.”
He sayde, “Felawe, ryght weel thou bee!
Have here besauntys good plenté
For thyn hedyr-come.”

Thanne the messanger made his mon:
“Alas,” said the bishop in return,
“I thought 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, from your good horses give me one. Now grant me my reward!
For yesterday my noble steed died, On your errand as I went,
On the way as I came.”
“My own horse is fat and corn-fed,
And I am anxious for your safety.”
The earl then continued,
“Then, if my horse should throw you,
My lord the king would be well saddened
To lose such 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 ready in full,
And sprang on him nimbly.
“Sir,” he said, “good day to you.
You may come when you will.
I will make the king aware.”

With firm spurs he struck the steed.
He reached Gravesend with good speed,
A journey of forty miles.
The messenger awaited the traitor,
And after they both rode together
To the town of Westminster.
They dismounted there in the palace.
They came right away into the hall
And met with Athelstone.
Wickmond wished to kiss his sweet lord.
The king shouted, “Traitor, not so fast! Stop!
By God and by Saint John!

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 slough myn heyr, scholde have ben kyng,
When my lyf hadde ben gon.”
There he denyyd 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
fallen.
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-lené on rawe,
As red as ony glede.
Nyne sythis the bysschop halewes the way
That that traytour scholde goo that day:
The wers him gan to spedé.
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 lovyd him to mekyl and me to lyte;
Therfore envye I hadde."
Whenne that traytour so hadde sayde,
Fyve good hors to hym were tayde,
Alle men myghten see with yghe —
They drownen him thorwgh ylke a strete,
And sethyn to the Elmes, I yow hete,
And hongyd him ful hyghe.
Was ther nevere man so hardy,
That durste felle hys false body:
This hadde he for hys lye.
Now Jesu, that is Hevene-kyng,
Leve nevere traytour have betere endyng,
But swych dome for to dye.

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.

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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


and has the simple credulity of some fairy-tale character.”

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. The story exalts clergy over royalty generally, and Pound notes that Westminster was one of many monasteries which kept paid minstrels. 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. 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. 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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119
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.
poet more likely includes this 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

13 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


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, and Rowe similarly argues that the ordeals vindicate Athelston by showing that a formal appeal to counsel was unnecessary. 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).

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. 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

17 Crane, 73.
18 Rowe, 83.
19 In an actual purgatorial fire, Virgil also tells Dante to “put down your every fear” (Purg. XXVII.31) but Dante reports that “I’d have thrown myself in molten glass to find coolness” (49-51). Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy, trans. Allen Mandelbaum. Electronic Literature Foundation, accessed 24 October 2010 at http://www.divinecomedy.org/divine_comedy.html.
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 “schryfftte 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, \(^{24}\) 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.\(^{25}\)

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.\(^{26}\) 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,\(^{27}\) 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”\(^{28}\) 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

\(^{24}\) 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.”

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. 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. 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.

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.
"THOU" 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 subtest 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

\textit{Bevis of Hampton} survives in numerous manuscripts: Auchinleck (c. 1330), University Library, Cambridge Ff. 2.38 (c. 1450), Caius College, Cambridge, Gonville and Caius 175 (c. 1375), Royal Library, Naples XIII, B 29 (c. 1450), Egerton 2862 (c. 1400), Chetham Library No. 8009 (c. 1500), Douce Fragments No. 19, and in an early printed text by Wynkyn de Worde (c. 1500). I take as my text source Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, eds. \textit{Bevis of Hampton. Four Romances of England}. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999. 

\url{http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/bevisfrm.htm}. Herzman \textit{et al.} use mainly Auchinleck with some lines from Egerton. Other editions include Eugen Kölbing, ed., \textit{The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun} (1885).

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

\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
1 & Lordinges, herkneth to me tale! \\
& Is merier than the nightingale, \\
& That I schel singe; \\
& Of a knight ich wile yow roune, \\
& Bevis a highte of Hamtoune, \textsuperscript{1} \\
\hline
& Lords and ladies, listen to my tale! \\
& What I will rhyme about \\
& Is merier than a nightingale.\textsuperscript{1} \\
& I will tell you about a knight: \\
& Bevis was his name, of Southampton, \textsuperscript{1} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{1} The first two lines are duplicated almost word for word in \textit{Sir Thopas} (VII.833-4): “yet listeth, lorde, to my tale / mirer than the nightingale.”
Withouten lesing.
Ich wile yow tellen al togadre
Of that knight and of is fadre,
Sire Gii.

10
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 daughter of Scotlonde,
So faire and bright.
Alas, that he hire ever ches!
For hire love his lif a les
With mechel unright.

20
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.
Foble a wexeth and unbelde
Thourgh 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,
Whan his fader was ded.
The levedi hire misbethoughte
And meche aghen the right she wroughte
In hire tour:
“Me lord is olde and may nought werche,
Al dai him is lever at cherche,
Than in me bour.
Haddé 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 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 answerde 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 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 nough beleved,
That he ne smite of his heved
And sende hit me!

In church than in our bed.
If I had married a young knight
Who was never scarred from wars and fighting
As this man is,
He would love me day and night,
And hold me and kiss me with all his might,
And bring me joy.
I won’t stop at anything
Until I can bring him to death
With some trick!"

Right away that fierce woman
Called her messenger to consult with her
And said to him:
―Messenger, give me your word
That you won’t give me away
To anyone!
And if you agree that it will be so
I will give you gold and property
And make you a knight.‖

Then the messenger answered—
He was dishonest, a troublemaker,
And full of pride—
―My lady, if I don’t do your bidding
I vow, may you banish me
From throughout the land.‖

The lady was well pleased.
―Go,‖ she said, ―to Germany
And out of my bower!
Messenger, be prompt and quick
And plead strongly on my behalf
To that emperor,
And ask that on the first day
Which comes in the month of May,
For the sake of my love,
That he be ready to fight
With his army in our forest
Beside the sea.
I will send my lord there
For him to prove his love, to destroy
And to kill.
Tell him that I won’t believe a word he says
Until he chops off his head
And sends it to 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.²
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,⁶
By the neck on my head.”³

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.”

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.

⁷ Be me swere: ME swere does not mean swear or oath, but neck.
“Sai,” a seide, “Icham at hire heste:
Yif me lif hit wilbe lest,
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;

The levedi 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,
Gladder a is for love of thee
Fele sithe!‖
The mesager hath thus isaid,
The levedi was right wel apaid
And maked hire blithe.
In Mai, in the formeste dai,
The levedi 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 havel!”

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 mesager 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 mesager 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 fortinights.
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!  
When 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!”  
Th’erl answered at that sawe:  
“Me thnketh, thow seist ayen the lawe,  
So God me amende!  
Me wif and child, that was so fre,  
Yif thow thenkest beneme hem me,  
Ich schel hem defende!”  
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 eart 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 drough is swerd.  
That erl held is swerd adrawe,  
Th’emperur with he hadde slawe,  
Nadde be sokour:  
Thar come knightes 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.
The Sire Gii him gan defende,  
Thre hundred hevedes of a slende  
With is brond;

Hadde 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 ned;  
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 slaw,  
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 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 morve in the dai.  
Sai him, me swete wight,  
That he come yet to night  
In to me bour!”  
The mesager is wei hath holde,
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 highte 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 leveedi 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>340</td>
<td>Let him anhange swithe highe, I ne reche, what deth he dighe, Sithe he be cold!” Saber stod stille and was ful wo; Nathothes 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 chilides 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 gee And teche thee of corteisie In the youthe. And whan thow ert of swich elde, That thow 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 me might, With dent of swerd to gete thee right, Be thow of elde!” The child him thankede 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 emperor 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;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Porter!” a sede, “Let me in reke! A lite thing ich ave to speke With th’emperur.”

“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 sore 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’emperur 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.

“Porter!” he said, “let me in quickly!
I have a small matter to talk about With the emperor!”

“Go home, you little thug!” the porter said. “Good-for-nothing son of a whore!
I would advise you to get away from the gate!
If you do not move out of here fast, You will regret it as many times
As you set foot in here!”
The lout continued, “See there
How he looks, how he would attack With his bat!
If he says much more, I will thump him sorely On his hat!”

“For God,” Bevis said, “even if I truly am a whore’s son, And I know it well—
I am no beggar, by God’s grace!”

With that he lifted up his club Advancing straight away. Bevis stood outside the gate And struck the porter on the hood So that he fell down And broke his own head apart. With that answer Bevis went forth Into the hall.

He looked all about him. To the emperor, he spoke audacious words With grim anger:
“Sir,” he said, “what are you doing here? Why is that woman there Embracing you about the neck?
The one you have in hand is my mother. What is she doing in my realm Without permission?
Take away my mother and my goods, But if you’d rather not leave, I will bring you grief! Did you not, sir, murder my father? You will be hanged and drawn, By God’s will!
Get up! Fly away from here, I advise you!” The emperor shushed him, “Fool! Be quiet!” Bevis was nearly mad with anger, For being called a fool by name, And he turned to him. In spite of all that were there, He struck him three times with his mace And with his hand. Three times he cracked him on the head And the emperor fell down unconscious Where he sat.
The levedi, is moder, gan to grede:
“Nemeth that treitour!” she sede,
“Anon with that!”
Tho dorste Bevis no leng abide;
The knightes up in ech a side,
More and lasse,
Wo hem was for the childes sake,
Boute non of hem nolde him take
Hii lete him pase.
Beves goth faste ase he mai,
His meister a mette in the wai,
That highte Saber,
And he him askede with blithe mod:
“Beves!” a seide, “for the Rode,
What dostow her?”
“I schel thee telle al togadre:
Beten ichave m
e stifadre
With me mace;
Thries I smot him in the heved,
Al for ded ich him leved
In the place!”
“Beves,” queth Saber, “thow ert to blame:
The levedi wile now do me schame
For thine sake!
Boute thow be me consaile do,
Thow might now sone bringe us bo
In me che wrake!”
Saber Beves to his hous ladde,
Meche of that levedi him dradde.
The levedi out of the tour cam,
To Saber the wei she nam.
―Saber,‖ she seide, ―whar is Bef,
That wike treitour, that fule thef?‖
―Dame,‖ a seide, ―ich dede him of dawe
Be thee red and be thee sawe:
This beth his clothe, thow her sixt.”
The levedi seide: “Saber thow lixt!
Boute thow me to him take,
Thow schelt abegge for is sake.”
Beves herde his meister threte;
To hire a spak with hertte grete
And seide: “Lo, me her be name!
Do meister for me no schame!
Yif thow me sext, lo, whar ich am here!”
His moder tok him be the ere;
Fain she wolde a were of live.
Foure knightes she clepede blive:
“Wendeth,” she seide, “to the stronde:
Yif ye seth schipes of painim londe,
Selleth to hem this ilche hyne,
11 For unexplained reasons the meter shifts here into couplets for the remainder of the poem.
That ye for no gode ne fine,
Whather ye have for him mor and lesse,
Selleth him right in to hethenesse!"
Forth the knightes gonne te,
Til that hii come to the se,
Schipes hii fonde ther stonde
Of hethenesse and of fele londe;
The child hii chepeden to sale,
Marchaundes thai fonde ferli felale
And solde that child for mechel aughte
And to the Sarasins him betaughte.
Forth thai wente with that child,
Crist of hevene be him mild!
The childes hertte was wel colde,
For that he was so fer isolde;
Nathe
les, though him thoughte eile,
Toward painim a moste saile.
Whan hii rivede out of that strond,
The king highte Ermin of that londe;
His wif was ded, that highte Morage,
A doughter a hadde of yong age,
Josiane that maide het,
Hire schon wer gold upon hire fet;
So faire she was and bright of mod,
Ase snow upon the rede blod
- Wharto scholde that may discrive?
Men wiste no fairer thing alive,
So hende ne wel itaught;
Boute of Cristene lawe she kouthe naught.
The marchauns wente an hinding
And presente Beves to Ermyn King.
The king thar of was glad and blithe
And thankede hem mani a sithe:
- "Mahoun!" a seide, "thee might be proute,
And this child wolde to thee aloute;
Yif a wolde a Sarasin be,
Yit ich wolde hope, a scholde the!
Be Mahoun, that sit an high,
A fairer child never I ne sigh,
Neither a lingthe ne on brade,
Ne non, so faire limes hade!
Child,” a seide, “what wer thee bore?

What is thee name? telle me fore!
Yif 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 tobreke,
Me fader deth ich schel wel wreke!”

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 schel thee yeve to wive
And al me lond after me live!”

“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 nolde forsake in any manere
Jesus, that boughte 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 thou ert swain,
Thow schelt be me chamberlaine,
And thow schelt, when thou ert dubbed knight,
Me baner bere in to everi fight!”
Beves answerde al with skil:

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 everi man that him sigh.
Be that he was fiftene yer olde,
Knight 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 inough.
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, as 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,18
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 old19
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!”20

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 Rimmild the poet says of Acula, the Irish king’s daughter, that “of woundes was sche sleiz” (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 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>670</td>
<td>Who hath the wrong, who hath right, Yef him his dom, that he schel have, Whether thow wilt him selen or save!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>675</td>
<td>King Ermyn seide: “Me doughter fre, Ase thow havest seid, so it schel be!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>680</td>
<td>Josiane tho anon rightes Clepede to hire twei knightes: “To Beves now wende ye And prai him, that he come to me: Er me fader arise fro his des; Ful weil ich schel maken is pes!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>685</td>
<td>Forth the knightes gonne gon, To Beves chaumber thai come anon And prai, as he he 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 knights, that 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 an hethene hounde: She is an honde, also be ye, Out of me chaumber swithe ye fle!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>690</td>
<td>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 wile your waraunt be!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700</td>
<td>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 imple 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 guarant.”21 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</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
Forthi 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 as 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 e 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,  
His brostles were gret and long.
Himself was fel and kouthe fighte,  
No man sle him ne mighte.
Beves lay in is bedde 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,  
“She, 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](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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Original Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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</table>
| 760  | That bor a thoughte to honti,  
And tok a spere 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 lemman 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 vem 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,  
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 of 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 gaping 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).
<table>
<thead>
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| 810  | 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.  |
| 820  | Men herde the noise of the swine;  
|      | And, also he made that lotheli cri,  
|      | His swerd Beves hasteli  
|      | In at the mouth gan threste tho  
|      | And karf his hertte evene ato  
|      | The swerd a breide ayen fot hot  
|      | And the bor is heved of smot,  
|      | And on a tronsoun of is spere  
|      | That heved a stikede for to bere,  
|      | Thanne a sette horn to mouthe  
| 830  | And blew the pris ase wel kouthe,  
|      | So glad he was for is honting.  
|      | That heved a thoughte Josian bring:  
|      | And er he com to that maide fre,  
|      | Him com strokes so gret plenté,  
|      | That fain he was to weren is hed  
|      | And save himself fro the ded.  
|      | A stiward was with King Ermin,  
|      | That hadde tight to sle that swin;  
|      | To Beves a bar gret envie,  
| 840  | For that he hadde the meistrie;  
|      | He dede arme his knightes stoute,  
|      | Four and twenti in a route,  
|      | And ten forsters also he tok  
|      | And weneto wode, seith the bok.  
|      | Thar-of ne wiste Beves nought.  
|      | Helpe him God, that alle thing wrought!  
|      | In is wei he rit pas for pas.  
|      | Herketh now a ferli cas:  
|      | A wende pasi in grith and pes,  
| 850  | The stiward cride: “Leith on and sles!”  
|      | Beves seigh that hii to him ferde,  
|      | A wolde drawe to is swerde:  
|      | Thanne had he leved it thor,  
|      | Thar he hadde slawe the bor.  
|      | He nadde nothing, himself to were,  
|      | Boute a tronsoun of a spere.  
|      | Tho was Beves sore desmeid,  
|      | The heved fro the tronsoun a braid,  
|      | And with the bor is heved a faught  |
And wan a swerd of miche maught,
That Morgelai was cleped, aplit.
Beter swerd bar never knight.
Tho Beves hadde that swerd an hond,
Among the hethene knightes a wond,
And sum knight Beves so ofraughte,
The heved of at the ferste draughte,
So harde he gan to lein aboute
Among the hethene knightes stoute,
That non ne pasede hom, aplit;
So tho urgh the grace of God almighty
The kinges stiward a hitte so,
That is bodi a clef ato.
The dede kors a pulte adown
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 foresters 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 founde 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?
Lovesonge I have encought,
Thr of wit Beves right nought;"
Thus that maid made her complaint
Where she stood in the tower alone.
And Bevis lef the people there
And wente home with the heved.
He presente to King Ermin.
The king thr of was glad and blithe
And thanked him ful mani a sithe,
Ac he ne wiste ther of nowight.
How is stiward to dethe was light.
Thre yer after that bataile,
That Beves the bor gan asaile,
A king ther com in to Ermonie
And thoughte winne with meistrie
Josian, that maid bright,
That lovede Beves with al hire might. Brademond cride, as he wer wod, To King Ermin, that a stod: “King,” a seide swithe blive, “Yem me thee daughter to wive! Yif thow me wernest, withouten faile, 
I schel winne hire in plein bataile, On fele half I schel thee anughe, And al thee londe I schel destruye And thee sle, so mai betide, And lay hire a night be me side, And after I wile thee daughter yeve To a weine-pain, that is fordrive!” 
Ermin answerde blive on highe: “Be Mahoun, sire, thow schelt lighe!” Adoun of his tour a went And after al is knightes a sent And tolde hem H Owen Brademond him asailed hadde, And askede hem alle, what hii radde. A word thanne spak that maiden bright: “Be Mahoun, sire! wer Beves a knight, A wolde defende thee wel enoug. Me self I segh, whar he slough Your owene stiward, him beset, Al one in the wode with him a met, At wode he hadde his swerd beleved, Thar he smot of the bores heved; He nadde nothing, himself to were, Boute a tronsoun of is spere, And your stiward gret peple hadde, Four and twenti knightes a ladde, Al y-armed to the teth, And every hadde swore is deth, And ten forsters of the forest With him a broughte ase prest, That thoughte him have slawe thore And take the heved of the bore, And yeve the stiward the renoun. Tho Beves segh that foule tresoun, A leide on with the bor is heved, Til that hii were adoun iweved, And of the stiward a wan that day His gode swerd Morgelay. The ten forsters also a slough And hom a pasede wel inough, That he of hem hadde no lothe.” 
King Ermin thanne swor is othe, That he scholde be maked knight.
His baner to bere in that fight.
He clepede Beves at that sake
And seide: “Knight ich wile thee make.
Thow schelt bere in to bataile
Me baner, Brademond to asaile!”
Beves answere with blithe mod:
“Blethelich,” a seide, “be the Rod!”
King Ermin tho anon righte
Dobbede Beves unto knighte
And yaf him a scheld gode and sur
With thre eglen of asur,
The champe of gold ful wel idight
With fif lables of selver brigt
Sithe a 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,
Thretti thosent and fiftene,
The ferste scheld trome Beves nam.
Brademond aghenes him cam;
His baner bar the King Redefoun,
That levede on Sire Mahoun.
Row he was also a schep,
Beves of him nam gode kep.
He smot Arondel with spures of go
do;
Thanne thoughte that hors, that he scholde,
Aghen Redefoun Beves gan ride
And smot him throught our bothe side,
Hauberke scheld ne actoun
Ne vailede him nought worth a botoun,
That he ne fel ded to the grounde.
“Reste thee,“ queth Beves, “hethen hounde!
Thee hadde beter atom than here!”
“Lay on faste!” a bad his fere.
Tho laide thai on with eger mod
And slowe Sarasins, 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!”
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 thee,” 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,

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
Sexti 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 wretch,
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,
Sexti cites with castel tour
Thin owen, Beves, to thin onour,
With that thow let 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 weree on him night ne day,
And omage ech 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. 28
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.”

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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/](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 straightway, “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 ther-ate!” 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 29 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 bour. 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.”

“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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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.
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!‖

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.  
―Alas!‖ 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 terne.  
“Awake, lemmann!” she seide, “Awake!  
Icham icome, me pes to make.  
Lemman, for the cortesie,  
Spek with me a word or tweie!”

“Damesele,” 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, “leman, thin ore!”

She fel adoun and wep wel sore:  
“Men saith,” she seide, “in olde riote,  
That wimmannes bolt is sone schote.

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,  
“Say 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 about with red gold,  
Fit for a king to wear if he should.”

Boniface thanked him earnestly  
And he turned back home.  
He found the maid in sorrow and anxiousness  
And told her Bevis’ answer,  
That he had no encouragement  
For her desires,  
And added, “You were in the wrong  
To abuse such a noble knight.”  
“Who gave you this clothing here?”  
“Bevis, that gracious knight,” he said.  
“Alas!” she said. “I was to blame  
When I spoke to him so shamefully.  
For it was never a peasant’s way  
To give a messenger such finery.  
“If he will not come to me,  
I will make my way to his chamber,  
And, whatever happens to me,  
I will go into his hall.”

Bevis heard the maid outside.  
As if asleep, he began to snore.  
“Wake up, darling,” she said, “wake up!  
I have come to make peace.  
Sweetheart, for courtesy’s sake,  
Speak with me a word or two.”

“My lady,” Bevis answered,  
“Go away and let me lie here.  
I am exhausted from battle,  
I fought for you, I will not do it anymore.”  
“Mercy,” she said, “darling, your kindness!”

She fell down and wept sorely.  
“Men say,” she cried, “in tavern talk,  
That a woman’s arrow is rashly shot.
Forghem me, that ichave misede,  
And ich wil 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, thegh ye be wrothe,  
No wonder, thegh ye ben agreved,  
Whan Beves, scherewe misbeleved,  
The doughter he hath now forlain."

Hit were gode, sire, that he wer slain!"

Hii lowe, the scherewes, that him gan wreie.  
In helle mote thai hongen beie!

He dede nothing, boute ones hire kiste,  
Nought elles bi hem men ne wiste.  
Tharfore hit is soth isaide  
And in me rime right wel ilaid.  
Delivre a thef fro the galwe,  
He thee hateth after be alle halwe!

―Alas!‖ queth Ermin, the King,  
―Wel sore me reweth that tiding!  
Sethe he com me ferst to,  
So meche he hath for me ido,  
I ne mighte for al peynim londe,  
That men dede him eni schonde!  
Ac fain ich wolde awreke be,  
Boute I ne mighte hit nought ise."

Thanne bespak a Sarasin -  
Have he Cristes kurs and myn -  
"Sire, she scholle for is sake  
A letter swithe anon do make  
To Brademond, the stronge king;  
And do him theder the letter bringe;  
And in the letter thee schelt saie,  
That he hath Josian forlaie!"

When the letter was come to th’ende,  
After Beves the king let sende  
And seide: "Beves, thou most hanne  
To Brademond, thin owene manne:  
Al in solas and in delit

Forgive me that I have misspoken,  
And I will right now in return  
Abandon all my false gods and take  
Christianity for the sake of your love."  
"On those terms," said the knight,  
"I accept you, my sweet girl!"

And kissed her on that accord.  
For this he was nearly destroyed later.  
From the two knights that he freed,  
Who were in Brademond’s hand,  
He made one his chamberlain.  
It would have been better had he slain them!  
They went to the king and swore oaths:  
“It’s 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 rhymne it’s well placed:  
Rescue a thief from the gallows,  
And by all the saints, he will hate you.  
"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 purposes"  
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 Josanne.”  
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.

32 A French proverb: “Save a thief from the gallows and he will help to hang you.” Also see Proverbs 19:19: “A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.”

33 She scholle for is sake: Royal Library, Naples, XIII, B 29 has we schulle, which makes more sense. In Kölberg, Beues, 58.
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.\textsuperscript{34} “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.

\textsuperscript{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 twei 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,
Thow worst that child never the ner!‖
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 understande:
“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
"Sir," said Terry, "by Saint Julian,\textsuperscript{35}
If you please, come near and dine!"
Bevis was sorely hungry
And showed much gratitude to him.
For two days he had been riding,
Garbed in the same clothes.
The pilgrim did not lack for provisions.
He laid out before him
Plenty from his bag, bread and meat,
And wine and ale from his jugs.
When Bevis had eaten abundantly,
Terry asked Sir Bevis
If he had heard anyone, young or old,
Speak of a noble youth who had been sold there.
His name was Bevis,
And he was born in Southampton.
Bevis looked at Terry and laughed grimly
And said he knew the lad well enough.
"It is not," he said, "so long ago
That I saw the Saracens hang that boy."
Terry fell down in a faint
And tore at his hair and clothes.
When he came to his senses and could speak,
He wept bitterly and sighed sorely,
And said, "Alas that he was born!
Is my lord Bevis really lost?"
Bevis lifted him up in that moment
And began to console him.
"Go back home," he said, "to your country.
Tell your friends what I have told you:
Though you sought him these seven years,
You were never nearer the man!"
Terry looked at Bevis
And saw the letter case with a shield.
"It seems to me you are a courier
Who walks here in this land.
I am a scholar and went to school.
Sir, let me read the letter,
For you might have great fears
That you carry around your own death."
Bevis said, so I understand:
“He who put this letter into my hand
Could not have more love for me
Than if I were his own brother.”
Bevis thanked him and so they parted.
Terry went home and informed

\textsuperscript{35} Sein Juline: Saint Julian, patron saint of hospitality. The story of Julian was popular although he appears to have been a legendary figure. E. Gordon Whatley, Anne B. Thompson, and Robert K. Upchurch, eds., "The Life of St. Julian the Hospitaller in the Scottish Legendary (c. 1400): Introduction," in Saints’ Lives in Middle English Collections (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), accessed 25 May 2010 at \url{http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/whjulintro.htm}.
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.
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 tresore, 
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 grauntede 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, 
Hende knight of South Hamtoun, 
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, 
That of swiche vertu is the ston: 
While ichave on that ilche ring, 
To me schel no man have welling, 
And Bevis!” she seide, “be God above, 
I schel it weren for thee love!” 
When hit to that time spedde, 
That Yvor scholde that maide wedde, 
He let sende withouten ensoine 
After the Soudan of Babiloine 
And after the fiftene kinge, 
Then that maid had despair enoug. 
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 Ivorn) 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, Mombrant, 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.
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. King Ermine took Arondel And had him saddled splendidly. He went to Bevis’ room where he had slept And took his sword, Morgelay. 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1540</td>
<td>Snakes and euetes and oades fale,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How mani, can I nought telle in tale,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>That in the prisoun were with him,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>That provede ever with her venim</td>
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<td>To sle Beves, that gentil knight,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Oc, though the grace of God Almighty,</td>
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<td>With the tronsoun, that he to proun tok,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A slough hem alle, so saith the bok.</td>
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<td>A fleande nadder was in an hole,</td>
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<td>For elde blak ase eni cole;</td>
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<td>Unto Beves she gan flinge</td>
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<td>And in the forehed thoughte him stinge.</td>
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<td>Beves was redi with is tronsoun</td>
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<td>And smot hire, that she fel adoun</td>
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<td>Upon aghen the nadder Rowe</td>
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<td>And breide awei his right browe;</td>
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<td>Tho was Beves sore agreve</td>
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<td>And smot the nadder on the heved;</td>
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<td>So harde dent he hire yaf,</td>
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<td>The brein clevede on is staf.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Doun fel the nadder, withouten faile,</td>
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<td>And smot so Beves with the taile,</td>
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<td>That negh a les ther contenaunce,</td>
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<td>Almest is lif was in balauanse.</td>
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<td>Whan he awakede of that swough,</td>
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<td>The tronsoun eft to him a drough</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And bet hire al to pises smale,</td>
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<td>As hit is fonde in Frensche tale.</td>
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<td>Tho he hadde slawe the foule fendes,</td>
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<td>Be that hadde Beves lein in bendes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Seve yer in peines grete,</td>
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<tr>
<td>1550</td>
<td>There were snakes and lizards and toads,</td>
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<td>How many, I cannot count,</td>
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<td>That were in the prison with him,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>That tried to poison Bevis,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>That noble knight, with their venom.</td>
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<td>But through the grace of God Almighty,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>With the club that he had in the prison</td>
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<td></td>
<td>He killed them all, so says the book.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A flying adder was in a crevice,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>As black as any coal from age.</td>
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<td>Toward Bevis she flung herself,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Thinking to sting him in the forehead.</td>
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<td>Bevis was ready with the bat</td>
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<td>And struck her so that she fell down</td>
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<td>The adder reared up again</td>
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<td>And tore away his right eyebrow.</td>
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<td>Then Bevis was sorely angered</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And cracked the adder on the head</td>
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<td>He gave her such a hard blow</td>
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<td>That the brains stuck to the stick</td>
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<td>Down went the adder, without a doubt</td>
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<td>And struck at Bevis with its tail</td>
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<td>So that he nearly lost his wits</td>
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<td>His life was almost in the balance</td>
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<td>When he came to from that swoon,</td>
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<td>He drew the club back to him</td>
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<td>And beat the adder into little pieces</td>
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<td>As it is told in the French tale.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Though he had killed the foul fiends</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bevis laid there in bonds</td>
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<td></td>
<td>For seven years in great pain,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Drinking little and eating less.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>His brow smelled for lack of care,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>When it became infected and scarred</td>
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<td></td>
<td>So that the maid did not know him</td>
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<td>When they were brought together later</td>
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<td>One day, when he was mad and faint,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>He made his plea to Jesus Christ</td>
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<td>And to His mother, sainted Mary,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mournfully crying to them:</td>
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<td>“Lord,” he said, “Heaven’s king,”</td>
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<td>Schepere of erthe and alle thing:</td>
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<td>What have ich so meche misgilt,</td>
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<td>That thow sext and tholen wilt,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>That Thee wetherwines and Thee fo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schel Thee servaunt do this wo?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 anhange!
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 scheltow 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 that 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 th e 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 thatar while
Ase high ase a mighte reche.
Tho queth Beves with reuful speche:
―For the love of Sein Mahoun,
Be the rop glid blive adoun
And help, that this thef 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 hodn,
Beves held up that gode bronde
And felde to gronde that sori wight,
Thourghout is bodi that sword he pight.  
Now er thai ded, the geilers tweie,  
And Bevis lith to the rakenteie,  
His lif him thoughte al to long,  
Thre daies after he ne et ne drong,  
Tofore that, for soth to sai

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 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 grauntede wel sone;  
So yerne he gan to Jesu speke,  
That his vetres gonne breke

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

Of his medel to the grete ston.  
Along with the boulder by his waist.  
Jesu Crist he thanked anon;  
He immediately thanked Jesus Christ

A wente quik out of prisoun  
On the rope the gailer com adoun,  
And wente in to the castel right,  
Ac it was aboute the midnight;  
He lokede aboute fer and ner,  
He beheld forther a lite

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,  
Tha-ринне he segh torges ilight;  
Beves wente theder ful right;  
To a chaunber under a garite,  
Tha-ринне 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 armede him in yrene wede,  
The beste, that he fond at nede,  
And gerte him with a gode bronde

Beves wente there 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 took a gode spere in is honde;  
A scheld aboute is nekke he cast  
A scheld aboute is nekke he cast

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 took a gode spere in is honde;  
A scheld aboute is nekke he cast

And wente out of the chaumber in hast.  
Further 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 wrait,  
Under his hond he made him plai.  
And whan the Sarasins wer islawe,  
The beste stede he let forth drawe

And wente out of the chaumber in hast.  
Further 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 wrait,  
Under his hond he made him plai.  
And whan the Sarasins wer islawe,  
The beste stede he let forth drawe

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,
| 1690 | The porter was al bewaped:  
“Alas!” 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 that contrei,  
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 slep, 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 hor s ase he wer mad,  
Towarde Damas agein, aplight!  
Now reste we her a lite wight,  
And speke we scholle of Brademond.  |
|---|---|
| 1700 | And felle aslepe upon the pleine;  
And also a slep, in is swevene  
He 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,  
Toward the londe of Ermonie.  
He nadde ride in is wei  
Boute seve mile of that contrei,  
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 slep, 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 hor s ase he wer mad,  
Towarde Damas agein, aplight!  
Now reste we her a lite wight,  
And speke we scholle of Brademond.  |
| 1710 | Amorwe, whan he it hadde ifonde,  
That Beves was ascaped so,  
In is hertte him was ful wo.  
That time he 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 fecho 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 Trinchefis  
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 thought min hondes one,  
For sothe, thou schelt thee lif forgon!”  |
| 1720 | 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 Trinchefis,  
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.”  |

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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,
With here launces hei gonne mete,
That hit gonnen al to drive
And teborsten on pises five.
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 agreed
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 Frencsh yfounde.
For nought Beves rolde belave,
The beter hors a wolde have;
Beves Trenchefis bestrit,
And in is 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 grauntede wel sone:
―Lord,‖ a sede, ―hevene king
Schepere of erthe and alle thing,
Thow madest fisch as wel als man,
That nothing of senne ne can,
Ne nought of fishes 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 as eyle ethe
To water fle in this stede,
To fisch, that never senne dede,
Than her daien in londe
In al this Saracines 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
Til he com to a grete toun;
The levedi thar-of over the castel lai,
And Beves hire sone of-say
And wende ben al out of care
And thoughte wel to speede thare.
Beves to the castel gate rit
And speak to hire, above him sit:
―Dame,‖ a seide, ―that sit above,
For that ilche lordes love,
On wham thin herte is on iset:
And rode forth on his way,
And Brademond, with all his men,
Came following with wild boasts.
They drove Bevis for so long
Until they came to the cliffs
Where the wild sea was.
Now hear about a miraculous thing!
He had to go into the sea, surely,
Or else fight against all the heathens.
He made a plea to Jesus Christ,
And He soon granted it to him:
―Lord,‖ he said, ―Heaven’s king,
Shaper of Earth and all things,
You made the fish as well as men,
Who know nothing about sin.
Nor have any kin of fish
Ever yet committed any crimes,
Unlike these heathen hounds
Who overcame and bound You
And beat Your body to death.
Therefore I might as easily
Flee into the water on this steed,
Among the fish, who never sin,
Rather than dying here on land
By the hands of all these Saracens!"
Yeve me today a meles met!
Yeve me today a meal’s portion!
The lady then answered him,
“Grant me today a meal’s portion!”

Boute thow fro the gate go,
“Unless you go away from the gate,
Thewe wer better elleswhar than her.
You would be better off elsewhere.
Go, or the tit an evel diner!
Go, before you get a foul dinner!
Me lord,” she seide, “is a geaunt
My lord,” she continued, “is a giant
And leveth on Mahoun and Tervagaunt
And he follows Mohammad and Tervagan.
And felleth Cristene men to grounde,
For he hates them like dogs!
For he hates them like dogs!

“Be God!” queth Beves, “I swere an othe:
“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 levedi swithe wroth with alle
The lady was very offended with all that
Wente hire forth in to the halle
And went down into the hall
And tolde hire lord anon f
And told her lord at once
More

The geaunt was wonderstrong,
The giant was amazingly strong

Rome thretti fote long;
And thirty feet long in length.
He tok a levour in is hond,
He took a club into his hand
And forth to the gate he wond.
And made his way forth to the gate.
Of Beves he nam gode hede,
He took good notice of Bevis,
Ful wel a knew Beves is stede:
For he knew his steed very well.
Thow ert nome thef, ywis:
―You are caught, thief, that is a fact.
Whar stele thow stede Trenchefis,
Where did you steal Trenchefis,
The steed you ride on here?
That thow ridest upon here?
Hit was me brotheres Grandere!”
It was my brother Grander’s!
“Grander,” queth Beves, “I yaf hod
“I gave Grander a hood,” said Bevis,
And made him a kroune brod;
“And gave him a tonsure.43
When he was pressed under me,
Tho he was next under me fest,
I know well, I made him a priest,
Wel I wot, ich made him prest,
And high de kne ich wile make thee,
And I will make you an archdeacon
Er ich ever fro thee te!”
Before I ever go from you,”
Thanne seide the geaunt: “Meister sire,
Then the giant said, “Sir,
Slough thow me brother Grandere,
If you killed my brother Grander,
For al this castel ful of golde
I would not let you live
A live lete thee ich nolde!”
For all the gold in this castle!”
“Ne ich thee,” queth Beves, “I trowe!”
“Nor I you,” said Bevis, “I promise!”
And so the hostilities were inflamed.
And the hostilities were inflamed.
The giant, whom I spoke of before,
That was twenty feet in length.
Tharto gret and nothing smale:
That was twenty feet in length.
The staf, that he to fighte ber,
It was massive and in no way light.
Was twenti fote in lenythe be tale,
He struck Bevis with it,
Tharto gret and nothing smale:
The staff which he took to the fight
To Sire Beves a smot therwith
That was twenty feet in length.
A sterne strok withouten grith,
It was massive and in no way light.
Ac a failede of his divis
Ac a failede of his divis

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.

1890

“O,” queth Beves, “so God me spede,
Thow havest don gret vileinie,
When thow sparde me bodi
And for me gilt min hors aqueld,
Thow witest him, that mai nought weld.
Be God, I swere thee an oth:
Thow schelt nought, whan we tego
Laughande me wende fram,
Now thow havest mad me gram!”

Beves is swerd anon up swapte,
He and the geaunt togedre rapte
And delde strokes mani and fale:
The nombre can I nought telle in tale.

1900

The geaunt up is clobbe haf
And smot to Beves with is staf,
So that his scheld flegh from him thore
Thre akres brede and sumdel more.
Then Beves in strong erur
And karf ato the grete levour
And on the geauntes brest a wonde,
That negh a felde him to the grounde.

The giant thought this battle hard,
He quickly drew a spear to him
self
And hurled it through Bevis’ shoulder.
The blood ran down to Bevis’ feet.
When Bevis saw his own blood,
He nearly became enraged out of his wits.
He ran in a rush to the giant
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
And he met the lady there.

1910

―Dame!‖ a seide, “go, yeve me mete,
That ever have thow Cristes hete!”
The levedi, sore adrad with alle,
Ladde Beves in to the halle,
And of everiche sonde,
That him com to honde,
A dede hire ete al ther ferst,

1920

That she ne dede him no berst,
And drinke ferst of the win.
Thow Beves hadde ete inough,
A keverchef to him a drough
In that ilche stounde,
To stope mide is wonde.

1930

―Dame, dame,” Beves sede,
―Let sadele me a gode stede,
For hennes ich wile ride,
I nel lo lenger her abide!”

1940

The levedi seide, she wolde fawe;
And hit Trenchefis in the head,
And the steed fell dead to the ground.
“Oh!” exclaimed Bevis, “so God help me,
You have done a villainous crime
When you spare my body
And kill this horse for my actions!
You blame it when it has no control.
By God, I swear you an oath.
You will not, when we meet together,
Walk away from me laughing.
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.
I cannot count the number of them.
The giant heaved up his club
And struck at Bevis with his staff
So that his shield was thrown from him,
Three acres away and somewhat more.
Then Bevis was in a hot temper
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.
He quickly drew a spear to himself
And hurled it through Bevis’ shoulder.
The blood ran down to Bevis’ feet.
When Bevis saw his own blood,
He nearly became enraged out of his wits.
He ran in a rush to the giant
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
And he met the lady there.

1950

―Madam,” he said, “go, bring me food,
Or you will have Christ’s hate forever!”
The lady, badly frightened by all this,
Brought Bevis into the hall
And from every dish
That came to his hand,
He had her eat of it first
So that she would do him no injury,
And drink of the wine first
So that no poison would be in it.
When Bevis had eaten enough,
He drew a handkerchief to him
At that same moment
To stop up his wound.
―Lady, lady,” Bevis said,
―Have a good horse saddled for me,
For I will leave and ride away.
I will no longer linger here.‖
The lady said that she would gladly.
A gode stede she let forth drawe
And sadeled hit and wel adight,
And Beves, that hendi knight,
Into the sadel a lippte,
That no stirop he ne dri ppte.
Forth him wenete Sire Bevoun,
Til he com withoute the toun
In to a grene mede.

Now, loverd Crist,” a sede,
“Yeve it, Brademond the king,
He and al is ofspring,
Wer right her upon this grene:
Now ich wolde of me tene
Swithe wel ben awreke,
Scholde he never go ne speke:
Now min honger is me aset,
Ne liste me never fighten bet!”
Forth a wente be the strem,
Til a come to Jurisalem;
To the patriark a wente cof,
And al his lif he him schrof
And tolde him how hit was bego,
Of is wele and of is wo.
The patriark hadde reuthe
Of him and ek of is treuthe
And forbed him upon his lif,
That he never toke wif,
Boute she were clene maide.

“Nai, for sothe!” Sire Beves saide.
On a dai aghenes the eve
Of the patriarke he tok is leve;
Erliche amorwe, whan it was dai,
Forth a wente in is wai;
And also a rod himself alone:
“Lord,” a thoughte, “whar mai I gone?
What ich in to Ingelonde fare?
Nai,” a thoughte, “what sholde I thare,
Boute yif ichadde ost to gader,

For to sle me stifader?”
He thoughte, that he wolde an hie
In to the londe of Ermonie,
To Ermonie, that was is bane,
To his leman Josiane.
And also a wente theder right,
A mette with a gentil knight,
That in the londe of Ermonie
Hadde borne him gode companie;

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.
“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 Josanne.
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 Ermine’s gile:
Yet ich thanke to yelde is while,
For he me sente to Brademond,
To have slawe me that stonde:
God be thanked, 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 bore,
Swiche game hadde ich never before,
As ich hadde that ilche tide,
Whan I segh King Yvor ride
Toward Mombraunt on Arondel;
The hors was nought ipaied wel:
He arned away 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,
Kropes in the contrè 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,
Also is me stede Arondel,
Yet scholde ich come out of wo!”
And at the knight he askede tho:

They kissed each other upon meeting
And asked about each other’s condition.
Then Bevis laughed and said,
“I have fared hard enough,
Suffered both hunger and cold,
And other pains, many and strong,
Through King Ermine’s guile.
For that I intend to repay him.”
He sent me to Brademond
To have me killed at that time.
May God be thanked that he did not do so;
But I have spent these seven years
In his prison with great suffering,
And now I have escaped far from him
Through God’s grace and my own cunning.
But I blame it all on King Ermine.
And if it were not for his daughter Josanne,
For certain, I would be his mortal enemy!”
“Josanne,” replied the knight, “is now a wife,
Against her will and with great coercion.
Seven years has passed and more
Since the rich king Yvor has married her
And brought her to Mombraunt,
Both for his table and for his bed.
And he has the sword Morgelai
And Arondel, that fine horse.
But since the time that I was born,
I never before had such amusement
As I had in that moment
When I saw King Yvor ride
Toward Mombraunt on Arondel!
The horse was not pleased at all.
He bolted away with the king.
Through fields and woods, without a lie,
And threw him down in the mud,
Almost killing him in its haste.
Before they could catch the steed,
They had to lay traps in the countryside.
But since then, without a lie,
That horse was so sorely angered that day
That he has never come out of the stable.
Since then, no man dares to ride him.”
At this news Bevis was delighted;
He could not put his joy in words.
“If Josanne were as faithful,” he thought,
“As my steed Arondel is,
I would still yet come out of woe!”
And then he asked the knight,

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 pasaunt,
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,
―in hire bour.‖
―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!"
Beves, hit ful wel he sai,  
Hit nas boute yong dai;  
A thoughte that he wolde er than  
Wende aboute the barbican;  
For to loke and for to se,  
How it mighte best be,  
Yif he the castel wolde breke,  
Whar a mighte best in reke;  
And also a com be a touret,  
That was in the castel iset,  
A herde wepe and crie;  
Thederward he gan him hie.  

―O allas,‖ she seide, ―Bevoun,  
Hende knight of Southhamtoun,  
Now ichave bide that day,  
That to the treste I ne may:  
That ilche God, that thow of speke,  
He is fals and thow ert eke!‖  
In al the seven ye ech dai  
Josiane, that faire mai,  
Was woned swich del to make,  
Al for Sire Beves sake.  

The levedi gan to the gate te,  
The palmeres thar to se;  
And Beves, after anon  
To the gate he gan gon.  
The palmers gonne al in threste,  
Beves abod and was the last  
And whan the maide segh him thar,  
Of Beves she nas nothing war;  
―Thee semest,‖ queth she, ―man of anour,  
Thow schelt this dai be priour  
And beginne oure deis:  
Thee semest hende and corteis,‖  
Mete and drinke thai hadde afyn,  
Bothe piment and plenté a wynn,  
Swithe wel thai hadde ifare;  
Thanne seide the quene to eche palmare:  
―Herde ever eny of yow telle  
Tranche en de and of yow till.  
Bevis 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.  

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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 ihave iwent  
And me warisoun ispent  
I sought hit bothe fer an  
d ner,  
Men telleth me, that it is her;  
Yif ever lovedestow wel that knight,  
Let me of that hors have a sight!”  
What helpeth hit, to make fable?  
She ladde Beves to the stable:  
Josian beheld him before,  
She segh his browe to-tore;  
After Bonefas she gan grede,  
At stable dore to him she sede;  
“Be the moder, that me hath bore,  
Ner this mannes browe to-tore,  
Me wolde thenke be his fasoun,  
That hit were Beves of Hamtoun!”  
When that hors herde nevene  
His kende lordes stevene,  
His rakenteis he al terof  
And wente in to the kourt wel kof  
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!‖  
Thanne seide Beves and lough:  
―Ich can take hit wel inough:  
Wold ye,” a sede, ―yeve me leve,  
Hit ne scholde no man greve!’  
―Take hit thanne,” she sede,  
―And in to stable thow it lede  
And teie it thar it stod,  
And thow schelt have mede gode!’”  
Beves 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,  
Anon seide Josian with than:  
“O Beves, gode lemmam,  
Let me with thee reke  
In that maner, we han ispeke,  
And thank, thow me to wive toke,  
Whan ich me false godes forsoke:  
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.
The sword I give thee, let us haste,
And let me come 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,
Fifteen told al in tale,
Dukes and erles mani and fale.
Whan hii fonde us alle agon,
Thai wolde after us everichon
With wondergret chevalrie,
And do us schame and vileinie;
Ac formeste, sire, withouten fable,
Lead 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 Dabilent,
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 patriarch 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 Abilient,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,

50 Dabilent: 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 Abilant 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
Theder 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,
Ase Bonefas him bad;
And to the gate Beves yode
With other beggers, that ther stode,
And pyk and skrippe is side,
In a sklavin row and wide;
His berd was yelw, to is brest wax
And to his gerdel heng is fax.
Al thai seide, that hii ne sighe
So faire palmer never with eighe,
Ne com ther non in that contré:
Thus wondred on him that him gan se;
And so stod Beves in that thring,
Til noun belle began to ring.
Fram honting com the King Yvore,
And fiftene kinges him before,
Dukes and erles, barouns how fale
I can nought telle the righte tale.
Mervaile thai hadde of Beves alle.
Yvor gan Beves to him calle
And seide: “Palmer, thow comst fro ferre:
Whar is pes and whar is werre?
Trewe tales thow canst me sain.”
Then answerde Beves again:
“Sire, ich come fro Jurisalem
Fro Nazareth and fro Bedlem,
Emauns castel and Synaie;
Ynde, Erop, and Asie,
Egippte, Grese, and Babiloine,
Tars, Sesile and Sesaoine,
In Fris, in Sodeine and in Tire,
In Aufrick and in mani empire,
Ac al is pes that ichave went,
Save in the lond of Dabilent.
In pes mai no man come thare,
Thar is werre, sorwe and care.

The kyng of that londe, verament,
By this tym ey trow be shent
Three kinges and dukes five
His chevalrie adoun ginneth drive,
And meche other peple ischent,
Cites itake and tounes ibrent;
Him to a castel thai han idrive,

He will go there in haste
With all his power and his host.
Then we can set forth
On our way with little trouble,"
Bevis said, “It will 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.

The king of that land, in truth,
Must be overthrown by now, I believe.
Three other kings and five dukes
Have driven down his cavalry,
And many other people are killed,
Cities taken and towns burned.

51 Extra lines from Egerton 2862. In Kölberg, Beues, 110.
That stands by the sea upon a cliff,
And all their host surrounds him.
By today his life must be in doubt.
King Yvor said, “Alas, alas!
Lordings, this is a sorry situation.
That is my brother, you know well,
Who lies besieged in that castle.
To horse, to arms, high and low,
At great speed so that we will be there!”
They immediately armed themselves,
Yvor and his fifteen kings,
And they went forth together
To the city of Abilent.
But he left an old king whose name
Was Garcy at home to guard the lady.
Bevis then said, “Get yourselves ready
If you wish to go with me.”
Sir Boniface answered,
“If you will do as I counsel.
The old king Garcy is here,
Who knows a great deal about sorcery.
He can see in his gold ring
What any man is doing in all matters.
I know an herb in the forest;
I will send for it quickly now
And open a cask of Rhenish wine
And put that herb in it at once.
And whoever drinks from it
Will be induced to nod off
And will sleep right away afterward
For all day and all night.”
Sir Boniface did all these things.
They rose up at dawn;
They took enough of what they wished,
Both silver and gold,
And took other treasures as well,
And set off on their way.
And when they had gone away,
Garcy woke up the next morning
And was full of great puzzlement
That he had slept for so long.
He reached for his ring
To look and to see
And in his ring he saw
The queen traveling with the pilgrim.
He cried out to his men at once,
“To arms, gentlemen, to battle!”
And he told his people, truly,
How the queen had gone away.
They clothed themselves in fine armor,
And every knight leaped on his steed
And then all the company went out
And beset the queen and Bevis all around.
Then Bevis said to Boniface,
“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 my fylle 
And hem overcom by Goddes wille!”

Tho Bonefas to him saide: 
―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 ther 
forst!‖

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. 

In the cave they were al nyght 
Withoute 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 wood 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. 

―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.‖

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 was very angered because of it. 
He and his host decided among themselves 
To turn back home again and to send 
The giant, Ascopard, to destroy them. 

Garcy was vexed 
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, Beuis, 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 set out,
Two lyouns ther com yn thare,
Grennand and rampand with her feet.

As soon as he had set out,
Two lions came inside there,
Snarling and raised up on their hind legs.

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

Just as quickly Sir Boniface
Took to his horse
And armed himself sufficiently
And offered battle to the lions.

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

His might was all too little.

The twoo lyouns sone had sl
That oon his hors, that other the man.

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 muehe grame,
But they ne myght do hur no shame.

Josanne shut herself in the cave,
And the two lions were at her heels,
Snarling at her with great savagery.

Josanne shut herself in the cave,
And the two lions were at her heels,
Snarling at her with great savagery.

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

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

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 saw,
Where Josain sate in grete doute
And twoo lions hur about.

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.

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 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 countrie.
If you will not let both of them go,
Goodbye and I will go from you!”

She let them jump up and down
"A commonplace of medieval lore was that virginity could confer invulnerability” (TEAMS). Spenser’s Faerie Queene also has the heroine Una, who is escorted by a lion that protects her chastity. Here the lions menace Josian but are unable to touch her.

He sowned soone: Swooning conjures up images of Victorian women fainting theatrically, but in ME it can also simply mean being overcome by emotion. Although in Floris and Blancheflour the constant swooning tests a modern reader’s patience, it would normally not have been seen as effeminate.
And Bevis assailed the lyoun.
Strenger bataile ne strenger fyght
Herde ye never of no knyght
Byfore this in romaunce telle,
Than Bevis had of beestes felle.
Al that herkeneth word and ende,
To hevyn mot her sowles wende!
That oon was a lionesse,

2430
That Sir Bevis dide grete distresse;
At the first begynnyng
To Beves hondes she gan spryng
And al to peces rent he
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.

2440
And in his thyghe a wel grete wound.
Thoo was Beves in hert grame,
For the lioun had do him shame;
As he were wood, he gan to fyght;
The liounesse 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,
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.

2450
Thoo Josian gan understonde,
That hire lord scholde ben slawe;
Helpe him she wolde fawe.
Anon she hente that lion:
Beves bad hire go sitte adoun,
And swor be God in Trinité,
And Bevis attacked the lion.
You have never before heard a tale
Of a stronger battle or fiercer fight
Faced by any knight in a romance
Than Bevis had with the cruel beasts.
May all who hear every word to the end,
Have their souls ascend to Heaven!
The other was a lioness
Who gave Sir Bevis great distress.
At the first instant
She sprung on Bevis’ hands
And ripped them to pieces
Before Bevis could be wary of it.
The other lion, which Josanne held,
Was very keen to fight with Bevis.
He leaped at him with great passion
And with his paws he tore down
His armor, almost to the ground,
And gave him a savage wound in his thigh.
Then Bevis was steeled at heart,
For the lion had shamed him.
He began to fight as if he were mad.
The lioness saw that sight
And rushed at Bevis without fail.
Both at once they attacked him.
Then Bevis was in great danger;
These beasts were so strong and eager
That they nearly killed him there.
He barely protected himself with his shield.
He began to strike at the lion
With Morgelai, which had a strong bite.
He sheared off his right foot.
The lion ran under Sir Bevis’ shield,
And with its teeth, with sorry luck
It caught a piece of his shirt,
And Bevis, in that same instant,
Was pulled to the ground in anguish.
But Bevis started up hastily,
For he was enraged in his heart.
Then he knew what to do. He was angered
And split the lion’s head in two
And thrust the point to its heart.
Thus the lion died in the end.
Then the lioness pounced on Bevis,
That hardy man, with determination,
Clomping his shield with her mouth
So firmly, so the book says,
That it was pulled down off his left hand.
Josanne then believed
That her lord was about to be slain.
She would gladly help him.
At once she seized the lioness.
Bevis ordered her to go sit down
And swore by God in Trinity
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 worthe 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 ou tis sparlire;
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, yf I mai!"

"Thourgh Godes help," queth Beves, "nai!"
Beves priked Arondel a side,  
Aghen Ascopard he gan ride  
And smot him on the scholder an high,  
That his spere al to-fligh,  
And Ascopard with a retret  
Smot after Beves a dent gret,  
And with is o fot a slintte

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 Ascopard  
And struck him on the shoulder in haste  
So that his spear was splintered.  
And Ascopard, 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 begged him to desist.

―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 drandom hit fondhe ther stonde,  
That wolde in to hethene londe,  
With Sarasines stout and fer,  
Boute thai nadde no maroner.

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 Ascopard coming,  
They thought well, all and some,  
That he would surely pilot them,  
For he was a fine mariner in need.

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 became his page.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 Ascopard 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 hetennesse a quene,
And she wile, for me sake,
Cristendome at thee take."
"Who is this with the grete visage?"
"Sire," a sede, "hit is me page
And wile 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 Launcete de Lake,
He faught with a fur drake
And Wade dede also,
And never knightes bouts 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 thecontre, saundoute,
Thai distruede hit al aboute;
Thai hadde mani mannes kours,
Wharhough 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?"
"Sire," 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 fought 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 foughted 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 graunteed 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
Can ask pilgrims who have been there
For thai can telle yow, iwis,
Of that dragoun how it is.
That other thanne felgh 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 lest was 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
It was twenty-foure fot, saunfaile.
His taile was of gret 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
Who received merciful grace from God;
He prayed to Jesus Christ
That He would soon drive the dragons
Out of that very place,
So that they would do no more harm.
And Jesus Christ, who sits in Heaven,
Heard that hermit’s voice clearly
And granted him his prayer.
At once both of the dragons
Took flight together and flew away,
So that men never saw them after.
They quickly flew from there
Until they came to Tuscany.
The second dragon took flight
To Saint Peter’s Bridge in Rome.
There he will lay forever
Until Judgment Day comes.
And once every seven years,
When the dragon shifts his bones,
A vapor and a stink
Comes out of the water from under the brink,
Causing men to become feverish,
From which they never recover.
And whoever does not believe me
Can ask pilgrims who have been there
For they can tell you, truly,
How it is with that dragon.
The other then flew on high
Through Tuscany and Lombardy,
Through Provence without delay,
Into the land of Cologne.
There the dragon arrived
In Cologne under a cliff.
His ears were rough and long as well;
His forehead was hard and strong.
Eight tusks stuck out from his mouth;
The smallest was seventeen inches around.
His hair and the scales under his jowls
Were both loathsome and grim.
He was maned like a steed
And bore his head with great pride;
Between the shoulder and the tail
It was twenty-four feet, without a doubt.
His tail was of great strength;
It was sixteen feet in length.
His skin was like a wine barrel.
When the bright sun shone,
His wings glinted like glass.
His sides were as hard as any brass;
His breast was as hard as any stone.
A fouler thing was never known.
If you will stay for a while,
I will tell you about Bevis’ might.
Bevis went to bed that 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
d at all.”
And in his lament he said, “Alas
That I was ever created!”
Soon when it was daylight,
Bevis awoke and straightaway 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

With targes and with candel light.
Whan he was in bedde ibrought,
On Jesu Crist was al is thought.
Him thoughte, a king, that was wod,
Hadde wonded him ther a stod;
He hadde wonded him biter and sore,
A wende a mighte leve namore,
And yet him thoughte a virgine
Him broughte out of al is pine.
Whan he of is slep abraid,
Of is swevene he was afraid.
Thanne a herde a reuli cri,
And besoughte Jesu merci:
―For the venim is on me throwe,
I legge al to-blowe,
And roteth me flesch fro the bon,
Bote ne tit me never non!‖
And in is cri a seide: ―Allas,
That ever yet I maked was!‖
Anon whan hit was dai light,
Beves awakede and askede right,
What al that cri mighte ben.
His men him answerde aghen
And seide, that he was a knight,
In bataile he was holden wight;
Alse a wente him to plaie
Aboute her in this contrai,
In this contré aviroun
A mette with a vile dragoun,
And venim he hath on him throwe:
Thar a lith al to-blowe!
“Lord Crist,” queth Beves tho,
“Mai eni man the dragoun slo!”
His men answerd, withouten lesing:
“Thar nis neither emperur ne king,
That cometh the dragoun wore,
An hondred thosend men and more,
That he holde hem everichon,
Ne scholde hii never thannes gon.”
“Ascopard,” a seide, “what errow?”
“Icham her; what wilt now?”
“Wile we to the dragoun gon?
Though Godes help we scholle him slo!”
“Ya, sire, so mot I the,
Bletheliche wile I wende with thee!”
Beves armeade him ful wel,
Bothe in yeene and in stel,
And gerte him with a gode bronde
And tok a spere in is honde.
Out ate gate he gan ride,
And Ascopard be his side.
Alse hii wente in here pleging,
Hii speke of mani selkouth thing.
That dragoun lai in is den
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
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,
Whan Beves mighte aboute sen,
Blithe he gan thanne ben;
Beves on the dragoun hew,
The dragoun on him venim throw;
Al ferde Beves bodi there
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 ventaile,
And of his hauberk a thosend maile.
Thanne Beves, sone an highe
Wel loute 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,
| And leide on, ase he wer wod; | Laid on as if he were berserk. |
| The dragoun harde him gan asaile | The dragon fought him ruthlessly |
| And smot on the helm with is taile, | And struck at his head with his tail, |
| That his helm clevede ato, | So that his helmet was split in two, |
| And his bacinet dede also. | With his underhelmet as well. |
| Tweies a ros and tweis a fel, | Twice he rose and twice he fell. |
| The thredde tim overthrew in the wel; | The third time he was thrown into the well |
| Thar-inne a lai up right; | He lay inside it facing upward, |
| A neste, whather hit was dai other night. | Not knowing whether it was day or night. |
| Whan overgon was his smerte | When the pain had diminished |
| And rekevred was of is herte, | And his courage was renewed, |
| Beves sette him up anon; | Bevis raised himself up at once. |
| The venim was awei igon; | The venom had faded away; |
| He was ase hol a man | He was as whole a man |
| Ase he was whan he theder cam. | As he was when he came there. |
| On is knes he gan to falle, | He fell on his knees |
| To Jesu Crist he gan to calle: | And began to call on Jesus Christ. |
| “Help,” a seide, “Godes sone | “Help me,” he said, “Son of God, |
| That this dragoun wer overcome! | So that this dragon will be overcome. |
| Boute ich mowe the dragoun slon | Unless I can slay the dragon |
| Er than ich hennes gon, | Before I go from here, |
| Schel hit never aslawe be | It will never be slain |
| For no man in Cristenté!” | By any man in Christendom!” |
| To God he made his praiere | He made his prayer to God |
| And to Marie, his moder dere; | And to Mary, His dear mother. |
| That herde the dragoun, ther a stod, | The dragon heard that where he stood |
| And flehg awei, ase he wer wod. | And flew away as if he were in a panic. |
| Beves ran after, withouten faile, | Bevis ran after, without fail, |
| And the dragoun he gan asaile; | And continued to attack the dragon |
| With is swerd, that he out braide, | With his sword that he drew out. |
| On the dragoun wel hard a laide, | He laid on the dragon furiously, |
| And so harde a hew him than, | And he hacked at him so hard |
| A karf ato his heved pan, | That he split his skull in two. |
| And honred dentes a smot that stonde, | He struck a hundred blows in that place. |
| Er he mighte kerven a wonder, | Before he could cut another wound, |
| A hitte him so on the cholle | He hit him so hard on the chest |
| And karf ato the throte bolle. | That he carved his throat in two. |
| The dragoun lai on is side, | The dragon lay on his side, |
| On him a yenede swithe wide. | Gaping its mouth widely at Bevis. |
| Beves thanne with strokes smerte | Then Bevis, with painful strokes, |
| Smot the dragoun to the herte, | Pierced the dragon in his heart. |
| An honred dentes a smot in on, | He struck a hundred blows |
| Er the heved wolde fro the bodi gon, | Before he could remove the head from the body, |
| And the gode knight Bevoun | And the good knight Bevis |
| The tonge karf of the dragoun; | Carved the tongue from the dragon. |
| Upon the tronsoun of is sperre | Upon the handle of his spear, |
| The tonge a stikede for to bere. | He stuck the tongue to carry it. |

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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.
Tho the bishop hadde of him a sight,
A thankede Jesu ful of might
And broughte Bevis 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?”
The beschop 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 yeve 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,
Aghen th’emperur to fight.
While thow dost this ilche tourne,
The levedi schel with me sojurne,
And the page Ascopard
Schel hire bothe wite and ward.”
Forth wente Beves with than
To his lemmman 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 bishop 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 dorre to Hamtoun gon,
To th’emperur of Almaine,
Al prest an hundreth knighte
That fore his love wilen fighte
Both with spere and with launce,
Al fresch icome out of Fraunce!
Ac ever, an erneste and a rage,
Ever speketh Frensche laungage,
And sai, ich hatte Gerard,
And fighte ich wile be forward,
And of the meistri icham sure,
Yif he wile yilde min hure?”
Forth ther com on redi reke,
That renabliche kouthe Frensch speke;
“Sire,” a seide, “ich wile gon,
The mesage for to don anon!”
Forth a wente to the castel gate
The porter a mette ther-
To th’emperur he hath him lad,
Al a seide, ase Beves him bad.
Th’emperur and Beves sete ifere
That ilche night at the sopere;
Th’emperur askede him, what a het;
“Gerard!” a seide alse sket
“Gerard!” a seide, “for soth iwis,
This levedi hadde her er this
An eel to lord, er ich hire wedde,
A sone betwene hem to thai hadde,
A proud wreche and a ying,
And for sothe a lite gadling;
So was is fader of proud mode,
Icomen of sum lether blode;
His sone, that was a proud garsoun,
Men him clepede Bevoun;
Sone he was of age,
A solde me his eritage
And spente his panes in scham and schede,
And sithe flegh out of Ingelonde.

And Ascopard, my good page,
Will protect you from harm.”
“Yes, I have Ascopard,” she said,
“I have no fear of any man.
I entrust you to God and Saint Mary.
As soon as you can, return to me!”
Bevis at once set forth
With every one of his men
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.
“Lordings,” 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 in truth, a little good-for-nothing.
He was like his father, with a defiant spirit,
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 cleimeth his eritage,  
And ofte me doth her gret gile,  
If you could pay back his efforts  
Him to sle with swerd in felde,  
I would pay your army well!”  
“Sire,” Bevis replied at once,  
“I have knights of formidable might  
Who are here unclothed in armor,  
For we could not muster out  
Over the sea without great difficulty.  
Therefore, sire, you might quickly  
Have each of my knights armed  
And give them good horses speedily enough.  
Send a hundred men yourself,  
As many as I have on my half.  
Fit out my ship and your men as well,  
And I will swear you an oath,  
That I will give such an assault  
On that same Saber  
That within a little while  
You will hear word of a cunning plot!”  
All this the emperor supplied him with,  
Both horses, arms, and knights,  
Fitted on the ship with good provisions.  
They went forth and drew their sails.  
On the ship the knights sat paired, for sure,  
One of Bevis’, another of the emperor’s.

Thow schelt here of a queinte gile: Bevis seems fond of making ironic jokes, as here the ‘cunning trick’ will be on the emperor and not Saber. Similarly, Bevis tells Terry that “You were never nearer the child” (1320), which is true in a sense Terry does not realize.

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60 *Thow schelt here of a queinte gile*: Bevis seems fond of making ironic jokes, as here the ‘cunning trick’ will be on the emperor and not Saber. Similarly, Bevis tells Terry that “You were never nearer the child” (1320), which is true in a sense Terry does not realize.
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,
That made with him the forward,
And sai him, ich hatte Bevoun,
And cleymeth the seinori of Hamtoun,
And that is wif is me dame,
That schel hem bothe terne to grame;
Now of hem bothe togadre
I schel fonde wreke me fadre?”
Up thar sterte an hardi on:
―Sire,” a seide, ―ich wile gon,
The mesage fordoth hem bothe,
And maken hem sori and wrothe.”
Forth a wente ase hot
Over the water in a bot,
Forth a wente also whate
In at the castel gate;
At the soper alse a set,
Th’emperur he gan thus gret:
“Sire emperur, I thee bringe
A swithe sertaine tiding:
Wel the grete that ilche knight,
That sopede with thee yerstene night;
A saith a hatte nought Gerard,
A saith, that he 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:
A threw is knif and kouthe nought redi
And smot his son through 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 his 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 afar’d,
For thee wretze 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 schold
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!”
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:
“What 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, Bevis. 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 ghtae 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:
“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!”
“I schel thee wedde aghenes thee wille,
Tomorrow I schel hit ful fille!”

And kiste hire anon right
And sente after baroun and knight
And bed hem come 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 when 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 compainie
With pyment and with spisorie,
With al the gamen that hi hedde,

For to make hire dronke a bedde;
Ac al another was hire thought,
Ne gamnede 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.”
“That I will marry you against your will.
Tomorrow I will see it done.”
And he kissed her right after that
And sent for barons and knights
And ordered them to come, lowest and highest,
To honor that merry feast.
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 seide to that erl sone,  
“Ich bidde thow graunte me a bone,  
And boute thow graunte me this one,  
I ne schel thee never bedde none.  
Ich bidde thee at the ferste frome,  
That man ne winman her in come;  
Belok hem thar-oute for love o me,  
That no man se our privité!  
Women are modest in our deeds  
And particularly maidens,” sche seide.

That erl seide a wolde faine.  
A drof out bothe knight and swaine,  
Levedies, maidenes, and grome,  
That non ne moste ther-in come,  
And schette the dore with the keie.  
Litel a wende have be so veie.  
Josian he com aghen to:  
“Lemman,” a seide, “ichave ido,  
Thee bone ichave do with lawe,  
Me schon I mot me self of drawe,  
As I never yet ne dede.”

He set himself down in that stede;  
Thanne was before his bed itight,  
Ase fele han of this gentil knight,  
A covertine on raile tre,  
For no man scholde on bed ise.  
Josian bethoughte on highing,  
On a towaile she made knotte riding,  
Aboute his nekke she hit threw  
And on the raile tre she drew;  
By the nekke she hath him up tight  
And let him so ride al the night.

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.”

Middai com, it drew to noon;  
The barons soon after spoke again.  
The boldest said, “How can this be?  
I will go up and see!”

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 Erl Mile,
Thow havest sleped 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 it 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!”

Al hii made meche sorwe;
Anon rightes in that morwe
Sum hire demte thanne
In a tonne for to branne.

Withoute the toun hii pighte a stake,
Thar the fur was imake.
The tonne thai hadde ther iset,
The fisher 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,

The castel wal he hath tobroken;
He was maroner wel gode,
A steritte in to the salte flode,
A fischer he segh fot hot,
Ever a swam toward the bot.
The fisher wende, sum fend it were,
For he was in the castel beloke,

Beves com and him oftok:
“Treitour,” a seide, “what 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, sir!” 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.

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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 sholde hire forbrenne,
Beves on Arondel com renne
With is swerd Morgelai;
Ascopard com be another way,
And slowen in that ilche stounde
Al that hii aboute the fur founde,
And that he hadde for is while,
That proude erl, Sire Mile.
A sette Josian on is palfrai,
And wente forth in here wai;
Thai wente to schip anon righte
And sailede forth in to Wighte.
Wel was Saber paid with than
Of Ascopard and of Josian.
Beves and Saber sente here sonde
Wide in to fele londe,
And hii sente an hie
After gret chevalrie,
Of al the londe the stringeste knighte,
That hii owhar finde mighte.
That emperur negh daide,
His wif confortede him and saide:
―Sire,‖ she seide, ―doute yow nought!"
Of gode consaile icham bethought:
Ye scholle sende, for sertaine,
After your ost in to Almaine,
And whan your ost is come togadre,
Send to the King of Scotlonde, me fadre;
He wile come to thee an highe
With wondergret chevalrie,
That thou derst have no sore
Of that thef, Saber the hore,
Ne of Beves, that is me lothe:
Yit ye schollen hem hangen bothe!"
Tho the letters were yare,
The masegers wer forth ifare.
In Mai, whan lef and gras ginth springe,
And the foules merie to singe,
The King of Scotlonde com to fighte
With thretti thosend of hardi knighte
Of Almaine, is owene barouny,
With wonder-gret chevalry.
―Lordinges," a seide, “ye wiethe alle,"
Whan hii were before him in the halle,
“That ofte this thef, Saber the hore,
Me hath aneied swithe sore.

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.

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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 Sarasin 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 gaunt brought:  
Erliche 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.  
Thai pighte pavilouns and bente ginne.  
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 swoe be his berde hore,  
Hit scholde some of hem rewe sore.  
Saber doun of his tour went,  
After al is knyghtes a sent:  
“Has armes, lordinges!” he gan segge,  
“Th’emperur ther oute us wile belegge.  
Make we thre vintaine,  
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 wol 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 beter at Rome,  
Thanne hii hadde hider icome.”  
Tho th’emperur herde in castel blowe,  
Tharbi he gan to knowe,

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 asaile.”
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
Threre hundred knightes hardie.
Sire Morice of Mounclere
His stede smot aghenes Sabere;
His spere was sumdel kene,
And Saber rod him 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 fors
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;
Tharfere 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 castei!”
“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 wenete to that emperur,
And hasteliche 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, lordinges, 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.
Wolde he, nolde he, faire and wel
He bar hors and man to the castel.
Of al that other, siker aplighte,
That were ensemled in that fighte,
Of Scotlonde and of Almaine,
Beves and Saber with might and maine
With deth is dentes gonne doun drive,
That thar ne scapede non alive.
And thus Sire Beves wan the pris
And vengede him of is enemis,
And to the castel thai wente isame
With gret solas, gle and game,
And that his stifader wer ded,
Ase tit he let felle a led
Ful of pich and of bremston,
And hot led let falle ther-on;
Th‘emperur thar in a deth,
Thar a lay atenende.
Wende his saule, whider it wende!
His moder over the castel lai,
Hire lord sethen in the pich she sai;
So swithe wo hire was for sore,
She fel and brak hire nekke therfore.
Alse glad he was of hire,
Of his damme, ase of is stipsire,
And seide: “Damme, forgheve me this gilt,
I ne yaf thee nother dent ne pilt!”
Thanne al the lordes of Hamteschire
Made Beves lord and sire
And dede him feuté and omage,
Ase hit was lawe and right usage.
Tho was Beves glad and blithe
And thankede God ful mani a sithe,
That he was wreke wel inough
On him, that his father slough.
Wel hasteliche she let sende
To Coloine after the bishop hende,
And spusede Beves and Josiane.
Of no joie nas ther wane;
Though ich discrive nought the bredale,
Ye mai wel wite, hit was riale,
That ther was in alle wise
Mete and drinke and riche servise.
Now hath Beves al is stat;
Tweie children on hir he begat
In the formeste yere,
Whiles that hii were ifere.
And Saber him redder thar
Wende to the King Edgar;

He carried horse and man to the castle,
Whether they liked it or not, firmly and strongly.
Of all the others, for a certain fact,
Who were engaged in that battle,
From Scotland and from Germany,
Bevis and Saber, with might and strength,
Drove them down with deadly blows
So that none there escaped alive.
And thus Sir Bevis won victory
And avenged himself on his enemies.
They went to the castle together
With great relief, joy, and freedom.
And to ensure that his stepfather was dead,
At once he had a lead kettle filled
Full of pitch, burning sulfur,
And molten lead, which was poured out.
When all who were in it seethed,
The emperor met his death there
Where he lay at his end.
May his soul go wherever it may!
His mother lay on the castle top,
And she saw her lord boiling in the pitch.
She was so distressed from shock,
She fell and broke her neck from it.
Bevis was as satisfied with her,
His mother, as he was with his stepfather,
And said, “Mother, forgive me this act;
I never gave you any blow or knock!”
Then all the lords of Hampton shire
Made Bevis lord and sire
And performed fealty and homage,
As was lawful and customary.
Then Bevis was glad and content
And thanked God many times
That he was avenged well enough
On him who killed his father.
Very speedily, Josanne sent word
To Cologne for the gracious bishop
Who married Bevis and Josanne.
There was no lack of joy!
Though I won’t elaborate on the wedding,
You might well guess that it was royal,
That there was in every way
Food and drink and lavish hospitality.
Now Bevis had all his estate.
With her he fathered two children
In their first year
While they were together.
And Saber then advised him
To go to King Edgar.67

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 Loudne.
Beves a knes doun him set,
The king hendeliche a gret;
The king askede him, what he were
And what nedes a wolde there.
Thanne anserwe 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 quene,
And levede withoute treie and tene
Twenti yer, so saith the bok.

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 thar 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.
God yeve us alle Is benesoun!

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!

Amen.

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.”

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.

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” 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


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 \textit{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,

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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.”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.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.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

¹⁰ Calkin, 72.
¹¹ Myra Seaman, “Engendering Genre in Middle English Romance: Performing the Feminine in Sir Beves
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 \textit{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,” 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 “wæron 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, and dragon sightings in England are recorded from as late as 1408. 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.

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.

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, “gennand 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 doughter, 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.

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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

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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

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. In answer to the criticism that romances lack psychological shading, Hanna argues that “romance shows interiority allusively.” In Bevis as well, the animals do not need to talk to interact and harmonize with what the humans experience.

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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](http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/ekfbfrm.htm).


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Oyez, signor, tout li amant,
Cil qui d’amors se vont penant,
Li chevalier et les puceles,
Li damoiseel, 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;
Puis fu mere Charlemaine,
Qui puis tint et France et le Maine;

Listen, lords, and all the lovers
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,
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 père, que vous dî,

Uns rois payens l’engenuï;

Et Blancheflor, que tant ama,

Uns cuens crestiens l’engendra:

Floire fut tout nés de payens,

Et Blancheflor de crestiens.

Bautzizier se fist en sa vie

Floire, por Blancheflor s’amie:

Car en un biau jor furent né

Et en une nuit engender.

Puisque Floire fu crestiens

Li avint grans honors et biens.

Or sivrai mon proposement:

Si parlerai avenanment.

En une chambre entrai l’autr’ier,

Un venredi apres mangier,

Por deporter as demoiselles,

Don’t en la chambre avoit de beles.

Illoec m’assis por escouter

Deus puceles qu’oi parler:

Eles estoient doi serors;

Ensamble parloient d’amors.

L’aisnée d’une amor contoit

A sa seror que moult amoit,

Qui fa ja entre deus enfans;

Mais a un clerc dire l’oït

Qui l’avoit lèu en escrit.

El commenca avenanment:

Or oyez son commencement.

Dé chauviers ot grand compagnie:

En sa nef ot la mer passée;

En Galisse fu arivée.

Felix ot non; si fu payens:

Mer ot passé sor crestiens,

Por ou pais la praie prendre,

Et la viles tornier en cendre.

Un mois entier et quinze dis

Sejorna li rois ou païs.

Ains ne fu jors qu’o sa maisnié

Ne féist li rois chevauciée;

Viles reuboit, avoirs praoit

Et a ses nes tout conduisoit:

De quinze liues el rivache,

Ne remanoit ne bués ne vache,

Ne castel ne vile en estant:

Vilains n’i va son boef querant.

Es-vos le païs tout destruï;

Floris, their forefather whom I speak about,

Was fathered by a pagan king,

And Blancheflor, who was loved by many,

Was fathered by a Christian earl.3

And so Floris was born to heathens,

And Blancheflor to Christians.

Floris had himself baptized in his life

Because of the love he had for Blancheflor,

For on one joyful day they were born,

And on the same night conceived.

Because Floris was later a Christian,

He became a king of great honor and riches.

Now to continue with our story,

If I might come to speak about it.

Not long ago on a Friday

I entered a room after supper

To have some conversation with some ladies

Who were having a chat there.

There I seated myself

To listen to what the two women were saying,

They were two sisters;

They spoke together about love.

The older one told a story

Which the younger one enjoyed very much,

And it was about two children

Who were well over two years old.

But they had heard it recited by a clerk

Who had written it down.

The story is pleasant,

And so now listen to its beginning.

A king came from Spain

With a large company of knights.

He passed over the sea in his ship

And arrived in Galicia.

Felix had no faith and so he was pagan;

He passed over the sea to Christendom.

Wherever he went, he ravaged the land

And turned the villages into ashes.

For an entire month and a half

The king stayed in that country.

There was no day in that time when the king

Did not campaign with his army.

He despoiled villages, preying on them,

And had everyone driven away.

Within the limit of fifteen miles

No cattle or oxen remained;

No castle or village was standing.

Peasants could find no beef.

The countryside was totally destroyed.

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 eft, 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 deffendre;
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 présente,
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 quand 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 païs sont arrive.
Es-vos 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 mout 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 francois aprent de s’escole.
La meschine ert cortoise et prous;
Moult se faisot amer a tous:
La roïne mout 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.
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 son 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.
Moulte le norrissoit doucement
Et gardoit enteentivement
Plus que sa fille, et ne savoit
Lequel des deus plus chier aivoit:
Onques 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,
Moulte 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 loyvd hem both twoo.
So longe she fedde hem in feere
That they were of elde of seven yere.
The king beheld 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.
No one in the land would ever need
To try to find fairer children.
The Christian woman cared for them at the time.
She loved the two of them very deeply.
She reared them together
Until they were seven years of age.
The king beheld his dear son
And said to him on this occasion
That it would be a great loss
Unless his son were sent
To study books and to know letters,

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 Blancheflour,” 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 lovyd togeder soo,
They myght never parte atwoo.
When they had five yere to scoole 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 nog ht her love withdrawe,
When Florys 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 fond
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,
10 Felix likely worries that his son will take a wife who is not only socially disadvantaged but a Christian, and that when Floris becomes of age the king will have difficulty preventing their marriage.
Hit were muche more honour
Than slee that mayde 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 contree.
And when she woot for whoom
That we have sent him us from,
She wyl doo al hur myght,
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 before 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 togoder 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.
Yif that ye me hur sende,
I rekke never wheder y wende.”
That the child graunted, the kyng was fayn
And him betaught his chambrlayn.
With muche honoure they theder coom,
As fel to a ryche 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 they 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.”
“Ye, 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\textsuperscript{11}  
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,\textsuperscript{12}  
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,
An to the haven was she brought.
Ther have they for that maide yolde
Twenté mark of red golde,
And a coupe good and ryche,
In all the world was non it lyche;
Ther was never noon so wel grave,
He that it made was no knave.
Ther was purtreyd on, y weene,
How Paryse led awaye 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 all the world there was no cellar so deep
That it would not give light to a butler
To fill it with either ale or wine.
It was of silver and gold, good and fine.
Aeneas the king, that valiant man,
Won it at Troye in batayle he it wan,
And brought it into Lombardy,
And gave it to his beloved, his Lavinia.¹⁴
The cup was stolen from the Caesar;
A thief carried it out of his treasure house.
And afterward that same thief
Gave it in trade for Blancheflour.
For he expected to gain such a profit
If he could bring her to his country.
Now these marchaundes saylen over the see
With this mayde to their contree.
They journeyed so far
Until they arrived in Babylon.
Very quickly, they sold the girl
To the emir of the city.
Hastily, they soon agreed on the sale.
The emir bought her at once,
And paid for her, as she stood upright,
Seven times her weight in gold.
For he thought, without a doubt,
To have that fair maid as queen.
He had her placed, with great honor,
Among the maidens in his harem.
Now the merchants left the maid behind,
And were pleased with their earnings.
Now we will let Blancheflour be,
And speak of Floris in his country.
The agent returned to the king

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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 coupe of golde.  
They lete make in a chirche  

A swithe feire grave wyrche,  
And lete ley ther uppon  
A new feire peynted ston,  
With letters al aboute wryte  
With ful muche worshipp.  

Whoso couth the letters rede,  
They spoken and thu  

―Here lyth swete Blaunchefloure  
That Florys lovyd par amoure."  
Now Florys hath undermine,  

And to his fader he is coome.  
In his fader halle he is lyght.  
His fader he grette anoonryght,  
But unnethes myght he tha  
That he ne asked where his leman bee.  
Nonskyns answere chargeth hee.  
So longe he is forth noom,  
Into chamber he is coom.  
The maydens moder he asked ryght:  
―Where is Blauncheflour, my swete wyght?‖  
―Sir,‖ she 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.  
Tell me where my leman be.‖  
Al wepyng seide thenne shee:  
―Sir,‖ she seide, ―deed.‖ ―Deed?‖ seide he.  
―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 byfor  
On sowne the childe that she had born.  
The kinges hert was al in care,  
That sawe his son for love so fare.
When he awooke and speke myght,  
Sore he wept and sore he syght,  
And seide to his moder ywys:  
“Lede me there that maybe is.”  
Theader they him brought on hyghe;  
For care and sorow he wold dyde.  
As sone as he to the grave com,  
Sone there behelde he then,  
And the letters began to rede  
That thus spake and thus seide:  
“Here lyth swete Blauncheflour,  
That Florys lovyd par amourer.”  
Thre sithes Florys sownydde nouth,  
Ne speke he myght not with mouth.  
As sone as he awoke and speke myght,  
“Blauncheflour,” he seide, “Blauncheflour!  
So swete a thing was never in boure;  
Of Blauncheflour is that y meene,  
For she was com of good kyn.

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

She took away his little knife,

\[16 \text{ That thus spake: Floris is reading out loud. It was considered unusual to read silently until the modern era. There is a famous story of St. Augustine’s curiosity at seeing Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (d. 397), reading without vocalizing.}\]

\[17 \text{ Four lines from the London Vitellius MS, not in Auchinleck.}\]
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:

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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 kyngriche.
Seven horses and sevyn men,
And thre knaves without hem,
And thyn own chambrlayn,
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 forylkoled.
―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 arsouns were golde pur and fin,
Stones of vertu set therin,
Bigon abouten with orfreis.
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 cheere
Than thai seye him ligge on bere.
Nou forht thai nime with alle main,
Himself and his chamberlain.
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 buck
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 loverd of the hous was wel hende;
The child he sette next his hende,
In the altherfarest 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 livedi 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 dalilight,
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.

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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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>440</td>
<td>Wind and weder he hadde ful god. To the mariners he gaf largeliche</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>He had favorable wind and weather. He paid the mariners generously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That brought him over bletheliche To the londe thar he wold lende, For thai founden him so hende. Sone so Florice com to londe, Wel yerne he thankede Godes sonde To the lond ther his lemmman is; Him thoughte he was in paradis.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Who gladly brought him across To the land where he wished to go For they found him so gracious. 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,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>460</td>
<td>To a fair cité he is icome. Wel faire men hath his in inome, Ase men scholde to a kinges sone, At a palais - was non hit iliche. The louerd of the hous was wel riche, And gold inow him com to honde, Bothe bi water and be londe. Florice ne sparede for no fe, Inow that there ne scholde be Of fissc, of flessch, of tendre bred, Bothe of whit w</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>British Library Egerton 2862 MS has For to fynde my marchaundise (464).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The louerd hadde ben wel wide; The child he sette bi his side, In the altherferste sete. Gladliche thai dronke and ete. Ac Florice et an drank right nowt, On Blauncheflour was al his thought. Than bispak the bourgeois, That hende was, fre and curteys: “Child, me thinkketh swithe wel</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>480</td>
<td>Thi thought is mochel on thi catel.” “Nai, on mi catel is hit nowt, On other thing is al mi thought. Mi thought is on alle wise Mochel on mi marchaundise; And yit that is mi meste wo, Yif ich hit finde and schal forgo.” Thanne spak the louerd of that inne:</td>
<td></td>
<td>“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,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Thous sat this other day herinne
That faire maide Blauncheflour.
Bothe in halle and ek in bour,
Evere she made mourning chere,
And biment Florice, here leve fere.
Joie ne blisse 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 saide, “to thine honour,
And thou hit mightethonke Blauncheflour.
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, as 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
gth,
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, yif 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 ipleight.
He thee can wissen and reden aright.
Thou schalt beren him a ring
Fram miselve to tokning,
That he thee helpe in eche 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,
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,

22 An hondred schillinge: about £2590 or $US4100 in modern money (UK National Archives), rather an expensive hotel bill but in keeping with Floris’ aristocratic refinement. The sentiment also emphasizes by extension Blancheflor’s value to Floris. See also line 736.
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 burgesis 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,
Bothe 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 ser,
That thou makest thou deolful 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 thinke in alle wise
Upon min owen marchaundise,
Wherfore ich am hide here,
Lest I ne finde hit nowt al fer,
That thou makest thou deolful cher.
Other thee liketh nowt thin in?"

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."

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 underyete,
Sone thou were of live quite.
Abouten Babiloine, withouten wene,
Sexti 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 hundrele 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 hundred taises he is wid,
And smakedy 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 wonen in that an.
Now thouht him nevere, ful iwis,
Willen after more blisse.
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
Sware 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 hundred: Another confusing expression which TEAMS interprets as “half of a second hundred,” 150 in total.
No servant may go in there
Who has his manhood in his pants.  
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.  
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.
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 brech 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 Scheherazade 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 wilre 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 iclepde the Tre of Love,
For flores and blossmes beth ever above.

So sone so þe olde beoþ idon
Þer springeþ niwe riʒ anon

And thilke that clene maidenes be,
Men schal hem bringe under that tre.
And wichso falleth on that flour,
Hi schal ben 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.

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 colvard and feloun;
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

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

720 When thou art to the scheker brought,
Withouten pans ne plai thou nowt.
Thou schalt have redi mitte
Thrietti 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 bide and praiye
That thou come amorewe and plaie.

730 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 atholde,
That ilke self coppe of golde
That was for Blanchefflour iylode.
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.

740 Wel yerne he thee wille bide and praiye
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 swichre thre.’

750 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 thouis his love winne,
He mai thee help with som ginne.’

760 Nou also Florice hath iwrowt
To make another in thy 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 Blanchefflour.
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

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\(^{30}\) 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 Blanchefflour.
Also Darie him hath itawt,
That thourgh his gold and his garsome
The porter is his man bicome.
―Nou,‖ quath Floris, ―Thou art mi man,
And al mi trest is thee upan.
Nou thou might wel eth
Arede 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
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.
Bitwene this and the thridde dai
Don ich wille that I m
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:
Florice 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 thai weren ibede
Ne were thai nowt aight birede,
Acc thai turned in hire left hom,
Blauncheflores 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 wenent 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.32
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.
Clarice 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.33
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,
For anyone’s love, or for anyone else, ever,
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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32 Of his deth he ne gaf nowt a bene: Egerton 2862 has lyf. ME often uses straw, berry, or oyster in such expressions to mean something almost worthless. PDE might use ‘plugged nickel’ or an obscenity. I take the translation from Taylor, who lists several related phrases. A.B. Taylor, Floris and Blancheflor: A Middle English Romance (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927), note to line 878.

33 In Cambridge MS.
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.
Blancheflour 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 thai to clippe and kisse,
And made joie and mochele blisse.
Florice ferst speke bigan,
And saide: "Louerd that madest man,
Thee 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 Blancheflour,
"Come now and see that flower!"
They went to the basket.
Floris was very blissful
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 together.
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 Blancheflour
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."
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.
That thai han ben atwo so longe.  
Clarice hem servede al to wille,  
Bothe dernelich and stille,  
But so ne mighte she hem longe iwite  
That hit ne sscholde ben underyete.  
Nou hadde the Amerail swich a wone  
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.  
That other scholde bringge comb and mirour,  
To serve him with great honour.  
And thai thai servede him never so faire,  
Amorewen scholde another paire;  
And mest was woned into the tour  
Therto Clarice and Blauncheflour.  
So longe him servede the maidenes route  
That hire service was comen aboute:  
On the morewen that thider com Florice  
Hit fel to Blauncheflour and to Clarice.  
Clarice - so wel hire mote bitide -  
Aros up in the morewentide,  
And clepede after Blauncheflour,  
To wende with here into the tour.  
Blauncheflour saide: “Ich am comende,”  
Ac here answere was al slepende.  
Clarice in the wai is nome,  
And wende that Blauncheflour had come.  
Sone so Clarice com in the tour  
The Ameral asked after Blauncheflour.  
“Sire,” she saide anonright,  
“She hath iwaked al this night,  
And knelt and iloke,  
And irad upon hire boke,  
And bad to God here oreisoun,  
That He thee give His benisoun  
And thee helde longe alive.  
Nou sche slepeth al so swithe,  
Blauncheflour, that maiden swete,  
That hii ne mai nowt comen yhete.”  
“Certe,” said the kyng,  
“No is hi a swete 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,”  
Blauncheflour 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 Blancheflour,
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 Blancheflour,
Whi and wharfore she ne come,
As hi was woned to done.

“She was arisen ar ich were,
Ich wende here haven ifonden here.
What, ne is she nowt comen yit?‖
―Now 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.
He stood before her bed
To find two there, face to face,
Body to body, and mouth to mouth.
Very soon the disaster was known!
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.
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?  
To wrotherhale ware ye bore;  
Ye schollen tholie deth therfore.”  
Thanne saide Florice to Blancheflour:  
“Of oure lif nis non socour.”  
And mercy thai cride on him so swithe,  
That he gaf hem respit of here live  
Til he hadde after his baronage sent,  
To awreken him thourgh jugement.  
Up he bad hem sitte bo  
And don on other clothe,  
And siththe he let hem binde fast,  
And into prisoun hem he cast,  
Til he hadde after his baronage sent  
To wreken him thourgh jugement.  
What helpeth hit longe tale to sschewe?  
Ich wille you telle at wordes fewe.  
Nou al his baronage hath undernome,  
And to the Amerail they beth icome.  
His halle, that was heighe ibult,  
Of kynges and dukes was ifult.  
He stod up among hem alle,  
Bi semblaunt swithe wroth withalle.  
He said: “Lordingges, of mochel honour  
Ye han herd speken of Blancheflour,  
Hou ich hire bought dere aplight  
For seven sithes of gold hire wight.  
For hire faired and hire chere  
Ich hire boughte allinge so dere,  
For ich thoughte, withouten wene,  
Hire have ihad to mi quene.  
Bifore hire bed miself I com,  
And fond bi hire an naked grom.  
Thei thai were me so lothe  
I thoughte to han iqueld hem bothe,  
Ich was so wroth and so wod;  
And yit ich withdrough mi mod.  
Fort ich have after you isent,  
To awreke me thourgh jugement.  
Nou ye witen hou hit is agon,  
Awreke me swithe of mi fon.”  
Tho spak a kyng of on lond:  
“We han iherd this schame and schonde  
Ac, er we hem to dethe wreke,  
We scholle heren tho children speke,  
What thai wil speke and sigge,  
Yif thai ought agein wil allegge.  
Hit ner nowt right jugement  
Withouten answere to acouement.”  
After the children nou men sendeth  
Hem to brene fur men tendeth.  
Thoa Sarazins forth hem bringe  
Toward here deth, sore wepinge.  
Dreri were this schildren two;  
And lie there by Blancheflour?  
You were born for ill fortune,  
And you will suffer death for it.”  
Then Floris said to Blancheflour,  
“There is no help for our lives.”  
They cried to him for mercy so intently  
That he gave their lives postponement  
Until he could send for his barons  
To avenge himself through judgment.  
He ordered them both to sit up  
And put on their clothes,  
And then he had them bound fast  
And cast into prison  
Until he had sent for his baronage  
To take punishment through a verdict.  
What good is it to tell a long tale?  
I will tell you in a few words.  
Now all his barons had arrived,  
And came to the emir.  
His hall, which was built high,  
Was filled with kings and dukes.  
He stood up among them all,  
With his expression one of great anger.  
He said, “Lords, of great honor,  
You have heard Blancheflour spoken about,  
How I bought her dearly and rightfully  
For seven times her weight in gold.  
For her fairness and her beauty,  
I bought her in full at such expense.  
For I thought, without a doubt,  
To have her as my queen.  
I came myself to her bed  
And found with her a naked boy.  
At the time they were so detestable to me  
That I thought to kill them both,  
I was so enraged and so crazed.  
And yet I held back my emotions.  
On that basis I have sent for you,  
To avenge me through your decision.  
Now that you know how it happened,  
Avenge me swiftly on my foes!”  
Then a king of one land spoke up:  
“We have heard this shame and disgrace.  
But, before we condemn them to death,  
We will hear the children speak  
Whatever they wish to say, to see  
If they have anything as a defense.  
It would not be a just deliberation  
Without an answer to the accusation.”  
Men now sent for the children,  
Intending for them to burn in fire.  
Two Saracens brought them forth  
Toward their death, as they wept bitterly.  
The two lovers were inconsolable;
Nou aither biwepeth otheres wo.
Florice saide to Blancheflour:
"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."
Blancheflour saide agen 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."
Blancheflour saide tho:
"So ne schal hit never go,
That this ring schal ared 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,
Dreri 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 withdrewe,
And with grete garisoun hem begge -
Yif thai dorste speke other sigge -
For Florice was so fair a yongling,
And Blancheflour 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 llen adoun bi here nebbe.
The Ameral was so wroth and wod
That he ne might withdraw his mod.
He bad binde the children fase,
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,
And he him told swithe skete.
“Sire,” he said, “Yf hit were thi wille,
Thou ne aughtest nowt thi maiden spille.

Blaunccheflour said tho:
“The gilt is min of oure bother wo.”
And the Ameral said tho:
“Iwis ye sculle die bo.
With wreche ich wille me awreke,
Ye ne scholle nevver go ne speke.”
His sword he braid out of his schethe,
The children for to do to dethe.

And Blaunccheflour pult forth hire swire,
And Florice gan hire agein tire.
—Ich am a man, ich schal go bifore.
Thou ne aughtest nought mi deth acore."
Floris forht his swire pulte
And Blaunccheflour agein hit brutte.
Thilke duk that the ring found
With th’Ameral spak and round,
And ful wel therwith he spedde;
The children therwith fram dethe he redde.

“Sire,” he said, “hit is litel pris
Thise children to slen, iwis.
Hit is the wel more worsschipe
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 might be war.”

Than saide th’Ameraile to Florice tho:
“Tell me who thee taughte herto.”
“And that,” quath Florice, “ne schal I nevver do,
But yf hit ben forgiven also
That the gin me taughte theerto;
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,

And he told him very promptly.
“Sire,” he said, “If it is your will,
You ought not to let this maiden die
But, sire, to let me be executed,
And let the maiden go alive.”
Blaunccheflour then protested,
“The guilt is mine for both of our troubles.”
The emir then thundered,
“For certain, both of you will die!
I will have revenge in my anger.
You will never walk or speak again!”
He drew his sword out of its sheath
To put the couple to death,
And Blaunccheflour thrust forth her neck,
And Floris began to pull her back.
“I am a man, I will go before.
You should not suffer my death.”
Floris presented his neck forth
And Blaunccheflour drew it back.
All who saw this
Were sorry for it, I know,
And said, “It is too much sadness
To see these youngsters in such anguish!”
The emir, as angry as he was,
Changed both his mood and his expression,
For each was ready to die for the other,
And he saw so many weeping eyes.
And because he had loved the maid so much,
He turned his head away in tears
And his sword fell to the ground.
He could not hold it at that moment.
The duke who had found the ring
Spoke and whispered with the emir,
And fared successfully for it,
For he saved the couple from death.
“Sire,” he said, “There is little honor
In slaying these children, for sure.
It would be much more commendable
For you to know Floris’ confidante,
Who showed him the trick
To come inside your tower,
And who brought him there,
So that you might be more aware of others.”
Then the emir said to Floris,
“Tell me who taught you to do this.”
“That,” replied Floris, “I will never do,
Unless there is also forgiveness
For him who taught me the trick.
Before that it will never be done.”
All there pleaded for this, for sure;
The emir granted it.
Then Floris told him every detail,
How the maid was sold from him,
And how he was a prince of the king of Spain,
For hire love thider icome,
To fondon 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.
Nou the Amerail - wel him mote bitide -
Florice he sette next his side,
And made him stonde ther upright,
And had idubbed him to knight,
And bad he scholde with him be
With the formast of his mené.
Florice fallet to his fet,
And bit him gif him his lef so swet.
The Ameral gaf him his lemman;
Alle the othere him thanked than.
To one chirche he let hem bringge
And wedde hene with here owene ringge.
Nou bothe this children alle for bliss
Fil the Amerales fet to kis;
And thorough counseil of Blancheflour
Clarice was fet doun of the tour,
And the Amerale here wedded to quene.
There was feste swithe breme
I ne can nowt tellen alle the sonde,
Ac the richest feste in londe.
Nas hit nowt longe after than
That Florice tidingge to cam
That his fader the king was ded.
And al the barnage gaf him red
That he scholde wenden hom
And underfongen his kyndom.
At Ameral he nom his leve,
And he him bad with him bileve.
Thanne bispak the Ameral:
“Yif thou wilt do, Florice, bi mi conseil,
Dwelle here, and wend nowt hom.
Ich wille thee given a kyngdom
Also longe and also brod,
Als eve re ythi fader bod.”
“I nel bileve for no winne;
To bidde me hit were sinne.”
Thai bitauht the Amerail oure Dright,
And thai com hom than thai might,
And let crowne him to king,
And hire to quene, that swete thing,
And underfeng Cristendom of prestes honde,
And thonked God of alle His sonde.

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,
“He will not stay for any pleasures.
To order me to would be a sin.”
Their 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.

36 In other versions the emir annually executes his wives and the French poet stresses that the emir gives up
this practice for Clarice (Taylor, note to 1279). Taylor’s lineation differs from that of TEAMS.
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.

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.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) 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.”⁵ 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.”⁶ 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 SundayPasque-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.

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).


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”\(^\text{12}\) 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.\(^\text{13}\) 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,”\(^\text{14}\) and the emir partly melts because \textit{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,”\textsuperscript{15} but the English texts seldom depict any real smut, despite the desires of modern critics to make romance seem more ‘dangerous.’ Much of \textit{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.\textsuperscript{16} But their babyish courtship goes no further than reading stories of Ovid’s lovers together, and only in the French;\textsuperscript{17} 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 Blaunchefloure” (19-20) has more the tone of a child pleading for his playmate than \textit{eros}. Gilbert argues that effeminacy is “a common characteristic of boyhood in medieval literature,”\textsuperscript{18} 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),


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

\textsuperscript{17} Segol, 252.

\textsuperscript{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 boute ones 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.”

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 Haidu, 134.
CHAPTER 5

*Gamelyn*


Fitt 1

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 knight his fadere lyved so yore,
That deth was comen hym to and handled hym 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.
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.
If thei wolle speke with hym whilst he was alyve..
When the knyghtes heard that he lay sick that he lay,
Had thei no rest neither nyght ne day,
Til thei come to hym ther he lay stille
On his dethes bedde to abide goddys wille.
Than seide the good knyght seke ther he lay,
"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 parcelled 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,

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.7 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 wylle” (37).
Of alle his good stedes noon was hym byleved;  
His hous were unhilled and ful evell dight;  
Tho 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 thy self I wil not be thi coke!”  
“What? brother Gamelyne howe anserwerst thou nowe?  
Thou spekest nevver 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?”  
Than seide 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 algates 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,
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,

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;  
And whan his brother segh that he byganne to gon;  
He fley up into a loft and shette 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!  
Wil 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 Gamelyn “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;  
“I most nede,” seide Gamelyn, “wreth me at onys,  
To Hell with you unless you are the one to do it!”

9 But thou be that oon: Interpreters disagree on this line. Gamelyn may also be saying “Christ’s curse on you unless you are the one beaten.”

10 Pestel: In a kitchen, a grinding bat could be an imposing tool (TEAMS). Havelock also uses a kitchen weapon, in his case a door-beam (1794).

11 Evel mot ye the: “May you thrive evilly.” This expletive, or variations, is common in ME but lacks bite in translation. Compare PDE “to hell with you.”

12 Bokelere: A buckler was a small, round shield for hand-to-hand combat. As with his puns about beating priests later (512), Gamelyn is making a grim joke about playing martial sports with his pestel.

13 Seint Richere: Probably St. Richard of Chichester, 1197-1253, revered for brotherly love.
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 harmes.”
“Gamelyn,” seide his brother, “be thou not wroth,
For to sene the han harme me 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 faderere 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!

Part 2

Lytheneth, and listeneth, and holdeth your tonge,
And ye shul here talking of Gamelyn the yonge.

“He 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 wrastelinge,
And therfore ther was sette a ramme and a ringe;
And Gamelyn was in wille to wende therto,
Forto preven his myght what he coude doo.
“Brothere,” seide Gamelyn, “by Seint Richere,
Thow most lene me tonyght 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 wrastelinge,
And therfore shal be sette a ram and a ringe;
Moche 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 wrastelinge 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 mygte 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 gras,
And ther he herde a frankeleyn “weiloway” singe,
A wrestling match was announced nearby,
And a ram and a ring were set for it.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.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 steed 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 younger 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!”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 bygonne 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?”
“Alas!” seide this frankeleyn, “that ever was I bore!
For he hath sclayn my two sones but if God hem borowe.
I will yeve ten pound by Jesu Christ! and more
17 On the spot if I foun
And I will to place gon to loke if I may sped.”
“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.
Barefoot and ungirt Gamelyn inne came,
Alle that were in the place hede of him nam,
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 stede,
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 durst aventure him to doon his myght.
Barefoot and ungirt Gamelyn inne came,
Alle that were in the place hede of him nam,
That was so doghty a champion in wresteling 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 alvye, 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 alvye;
And thi silt, 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?”
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And thi silt, Gamelyn, I wit that thou it here,
While thou were a yonge boy a moche shrewe thou were.”

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 neve re the.”
It was wel within the nyght and the mone shone,
Whan Gamelyn and the champioun togider gon gone.
The champion cast turns 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 that 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 s\textsuperscript{240}ide 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.‖
Again answerd 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 neve re 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.”
\textsuperscript{260}Gamelyn in the place stode stil l as stone,
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.
Straightaway, Gamelyn jib\textsuperscript{2}ed 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,
“The is yonge Gamelyne that 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

\textsuperscript{18}On hym stode hym noon eye: Eye does not refer to vision here but to \textit{awe}: “he no longer stood in awe of him.”
For to abide wrastelinge but ther come none;
Ther was noon with Gamelyn that wold wrastel more,
For he handeled the champioun so wonderly sore.
Two gentle 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 yete 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 frankeleyne 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.

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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 “Be 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 God dys 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 boon to
brake,
And toke hym by that oon arme and threwe hym in a welle,
Seven fadme it was depe as I have herde telle.

When Gamelyn the yonge thus had plaied his playe,
Alle that in the yerde were drowen hem awaye;
Thei dredden him ful sore for werk that 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.
Yesternight 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 amoure 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.”
Seven daies and seven nyghtes Gamelyn helde his feest,
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, “will 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, lordinges and listeneth aright,  
Whan alle gestis were goon how Gamelyn was dight.  
Alle the while that Gamelyn heeld his mangerye,  
His brotheire 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 quarreling troubled the great merriment.  
His brother 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.  
“Gentlemen,” 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, lordinges, 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 study²²  
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 prove,
For the mete and the drink that we han spended nowe."

Than seide the fals knyght (evel mot e he thee!)
―Harken, brothere 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.
"Gamelyn," seyde he, “oon thing I the telle;
When you threw my porter in the drowe-
To holden myn avowe as I the bihote."
"Brother," seide Gamelyn, “as moto I thee!
Thou shalt not be forswore for the love of me.”
Tho maden thei Gamelyn to sitte and not stonde,
To thei had hym bounde both fote and honde.
The fals knyght his brother of Gamelyn was agast,
And sente after 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!

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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, 
“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, 
Yf 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 londe.” 
“Up such forward,” seide Adam, “ywis, 
I wil do thereto 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 fotte 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.
Ther is noon in this hous 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 privy 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 that 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 hem 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,
Warne me, brother Adam, when we are to begin.”
“Gamelyn,” said Adam, “by Saint Charity.\(^{26}\)

\(^{25}\) *Borowe*: 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 forbid 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 the sake of 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 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 foully!—
“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.

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 assoilled ther shal non passe.‖
―Doute the not,‖ seide Gamelyn ‖whil we b
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,
Thus Gamelyn and Adam wroughte ryght faste,
And pleide with the monkes and made hem agaste.
Thidere thei come ridinge joly with swaynes,
And home ayein thei were ladde
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-
And sette him in the fetters theras he sat arst.
―Sitte ther, brothe
For to colen thi body as I did myn.”
As s witch 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 struck 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 ayeynste the kingges pees;
Tho bygan sone strif for to wake,
And the shereff about Gamelyn forto take.

Fitt 5

Now lithen and listen so God geve you good fyne!
And ye shul here good game of yonge Gamelyne.
Four and twenty yonge men that helde hem ful bolde,
Come to the shiref and seide that thei wolde
Gamelyn and Adam fette by her fay;
The sheref gave hem leve soth for to say;
Thi hiden fast wold thei not lynne,
To thei come to the gate there Gamelyn was inne.
They knocked on the gate the porter was nyghe,
And loked out atte an hool as man that was scleghe.
The porter hadde bihold hem a litel while,
He loved wel Gamelyn and was dradde of gyle,
And lete the wikett stonde ful stille,
And asked hem without what was her wille.
For all the grete company speke but oon,
―Undo the gate, porter and lat us in goon.‖
Than seide the porter ―So brouke I my chyn,
Ye shul saie youre erand er ye come inne.‖
―Sey to Gamelyn and Adam if theire wil be,
We wil speke with hem two wordes or thre.‖
―Felawe,‖ seide the porter ―stonde ther stille,
And I wil wende to Gamelyn to wete his wille.‖
Inne went the porter to Gamelyn anoon,
And saide, ―Sir, I warne you here ben komen youre foon;
The shireves men bene at the gate,
How Gamelyn and Adam had made a grievous assault
Against the king’s peace, binding and wounding men.
Then strife soon began to rage,
And the sheriff came to arrest Gamelyn.

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.
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

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,
Thei ben swore togidere that we shal be nomen.”
“Gamelyn,” seide Adam, “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
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 eveere 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 manmys 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.”
Adam toke by the honde yonge Gamelyn;
To take you both before you can escape.”
“Porter,” said Gamelyn, “as I live and breathe,
I will reward your warning when I see a good time.
Go back to the gate and delay them a while, porter,
And you will very soon see a trick.”
“Adam,” said Gamelyn, “get ready to go.
We have many men as enemies and not one friend.
It’s the sheriff’s men who have come here.
They are sworn together that we should be taken.”
“Gamelyn,” answered Adam, “hasten quickly,
And if I fail you this day may I fare evilly!
And we will welcome the sheriff’s men in such a way
That some of them will make their beds in the mud.”
Gamelyn went out at the rear gate
And seized a rugged cart shaft in his hand.
Adam grabbed another great staff
To help Gamelyn to give painful blows.
Adam took down twenty and Gamelyn three.
The other took to his feet and began to flee.
“Where are you going?” said Adam. “As ever I hear mass,
I have more fine wine for you to drink before you leave!”
“No, by God,” they answered. “Your drink is not good.
It would make a man’s brain lie on its side.”30
Gamelyn stood still and looked about him,
And said, “The sheriff is coming with a large company.
Adam,” said Gamelyn, “what is your advice now?
Here comes the sheriff and he will have our heads.”
Adam said to Gamelyn, “My counsel is this:
We can stay no longer without coming to ruin.
I advise that we go to the woods before we are found.
Better to be free there than bound up in the town.”
Adam took young Gamelyn’s hand,

30 A manny’s brayn to lyen on his hode: An idiom for a hangover (TEAMS). Here the joke is to compare the beatings to wine, and the sheriff’s men gripe that their heads hurt enough already from the ‘wine.’
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 unfetred hym right sone anoon,
And sente aftere 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 my clothes to 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 compas 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 whan he segh mete was glad ynogh;
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 the forest.

“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.

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 sevenc from the dynere,
And metten with Gamelyn and Adam Spencere.
Whan 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 outlawe 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 anserwed 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!
Sire, 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 bystad under wode lynde."
Of Gamelyns wordes the maister had reuthe,
And seide, “Ye shul have ynow have God my trouth!”
He bad hem sitte down for to take rest;
And bad hem ete and drink and that of the best.
As they eten and dronken wel and fyne,
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 kinoge.
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,
Whan Gamelyn her lord wolfeshede was made;
And sente out of his men wher thei might hym fynde,
For to go seke Gamelyne under the wode lynde,
To telle hym tydinge the wynde was wente,
And al his good reved and al his men shente.
Whan thei had hym founden on knees thei hem setten,
And adoune with here hodes and her lord gretten;
And are in hard straits out in the forest branches.”
At hearing Gamelyn’s words the master felt pity,
And said, “I vow to God you will have enough!”
He invited them to sit down and take a rest,
And had them eat and drink of their best.
As they ate and drank sumptuously and in full,
One said to the other, “This is Gamelyn.”
Then the master outlaw was taken into their confidence
And was told how Gamelyn had come there.
As soon as he heard how things had happened,
He made him second in command over them all.
Within the third week, news came to him,
To the master outlaw who was their king,
That he should come home, as peace had been made.
He was gladdened by that good news.
Then he said to his young men, to tell the truth,
“News has come to me that I need not stay longer!”
Soon after then without delay,
Gamelyn was made master outlaw and crowned their king.
When Gamelyn was crowned king of outlawes,
And had walked a while under the forest cover,
His brother the false knyght became sheriff and lord,
And had his brother indicted, in hate and anger.
His bonded tenants were sorry and had nothing to be glad of
When a bounty was placed on Gamelyn, their lord.32
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, wreh 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 wolfe and 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 neste shyre have God my lif!”
Gamelyn come redy to the neste shyre,
And ther was his brother both lord and sire.
Gamelyn boldly 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 brothre that highte Sir Ote,
Als good an knyght and hende as might gon on foote.
Anoon yede a massager to that good knyght
And tolde him altogidere how Gamelyn was dight.
Anoon whan Sire Ote herd howe Gamelyn was dight,
He was right sory and nio thing light,
And lete sadel a stede and the way name,
And to his tweyne bretheren right sone he came.
“Sire,” seide Sire Ote to the sherreve tho,
“We bene but three bretheren shul we never be mo;
And thou hast prisoner 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.”
“Alas!” cried Gamelyn, “That I was so slack
To spare his neck when I broke his back!
Go, gret well my bondsmen and their wives.
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.
“Sir,” 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 befell 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 judgement 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 dwelled 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 s
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 seest tyme and bringe us out of blame.”

Fitt 6

Litheneth, and listeneth and holde you stille,
And ye shul here how Gamelyn had al his wille.
Gamelyn went under the wode-ris,
And fonde ther pleying yenge men of pris.
Tho was yonge Gamelyn right glad ynough,
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 adventures that they had founde,
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 father’s 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 all his will.
Gamelyn went under the forest branches,
And found men of excellence playing there.
Then young Gamelyn was cheered enough
When he found his men under the wooden boughs.
Gamelyn and his men talked together,
And they had exciting things for their master to hear.
His men told him of adventures they had found,
And Gamelyn tolde hem agein howe he was fast bounde.
While Gamelyn was outlawe had he 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 evel 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 brothere 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
e Gamelyn from under the wode-
ris,

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 segh there stonde lords grete and stoutse,
And Sir Ote 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 Ote stont fetere in the mote halle.”
“Yonge men,” seide Gamelyn, “his ye heeren alle:
Sir Ote stont fetered in the mote halle.

And Gamelyn told them again how he was bound tightly.
While Gamelyn was an outlaw he earned no curses;
There was no man who fared the worse for him,
Except for abbots and priors, monks and canons.
On them, he left nothing when he could capture them.
While Gamelyn and his men had made fun,
His brother the false knight—may he have bad fortune!—
Was out and about both day and night,
To pay off the inquest in order to hang his brother.
Gamelyn stood one day and beheld
The woods and the groves and the wild field.
He thought about his brother, how he promised Otis
That he would be ready when the justices sit.
He resolved that he would, without delay,
Come before the justices to keep his day,
And he said to his young men, “Get yourselves ready,
For when the justices sit we must be there,
For I am under a guarantor until I arrive,
And my brother will be taken to prison for me.”
“By Saint James,” said his young men, “if you counsel it,
Give orders how it should be and it will be done.”
While Gamelyn was traveling there the justices sat.
His brother the false knight did not overlook anything
To bribe the men of the inquest to hang his brother;
If they did not have one, they would have the other.
Gamelyn came from out of the forest cover
And brought with him young men of distinction.
“I see well,” said Gamelyn, “that the judge is sitting.
Go before, Adam, and see what is happening.”
Adam went into the hall and looked about.
He saw lords standing there, great and well-built,
And Sir Otis his brother fettered tightly.
Adam went out of the hall as if he were in dread.
Adam said to Gamelyn and to all his company,
“Sir Otis stands chained in the meeting hall.”
“Lads,” said Gamelyn, “hear you all this:
Sir Otis stands fettered in the meeting hall.
If God give us grace well forto doo,
He shal it abigge that it broughte therto."

Then 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 gilitf 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.

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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
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.

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 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

⁵ Skeat, xii-xiii.

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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” 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, 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.\textsuperscript{20} 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.”\textsuperscript{21} 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.”\textsuperscript{22} 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 \textit{Cook’s Tale} as a possible contest between a youthful protagonist and a dour elder and assigns \textit{Gamelyn} to the Cook on the basis of \textit{Gamelyn}’s parallel theme of young rebellion.\textsuperscript{23} 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

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{21}] Hoffman, 166.
  \item[\textsuperscript{22}] Hoffman, 163.
  \item[\textsuperscript{23}] Crawford, 34.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
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 Kaeuper, 55.
28 Kaeuper, 59.
the King’s justice, men wanted more of it” 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. 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.” 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

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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” 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. 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. 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, 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

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” (1.3949). 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

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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.” 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 | May God grant Heaven’s bliss to reward |
|   | That herken to mi romaunce rede | Those who listen to me read my romance, |
|   | Al of a gentil knight; | All about a noble knight. |
|   | The best bodi he was at nede | He was the best person in need |
|   | That ever might bistriden stede | That might ever ride a steed, |
|   | And freest founde in fight. | And the bravest to be found in a fight. |
|   | The word of him ful wide it ran | Word of him spread wide; |
|   | Over al this warld the priis he wan, | All over this world he won a reputation |
|   | As man most of might. | As a man greatest in might. |

| 10 | Balder bern was non in bi, | There was no bolder man around. |
|    | His name was hoten Sir Gii | His name was called Sir Guy |
|    | Of Warwike wise and wight. | Of Warwick, wise and fearless. |
|    | Wight he was for sothe to say | He was manly, to say the truth, |
|    | And holden for priis in everi play | And respected highly in every contest |
|    | As knight of gret boundé. | As a knight of great valor. |
|    | Out of this lond he went his way | He traveled out of this land, |
|    | Thurth mani divers cuntray | Through many different countries |
That was beyond the sea.
Sethen he com into Inglond
That was bothe hende and fre.
For his love ich understand
He slough a dragoun in Northumberlond
Ful fer in the north cuñtré.
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;
His air was Sir Gioun.
Alle that held of him lond or fe
Deden him omage and feuté
And com to his somoun.
He tok alle his faders lond
And gaf it hende Herhaud in hond
Right to his warisoun.
And alle that hadde in his servise be
He gaf hem gold and riche fe
Ful hendeliche on honde
And sethen he went with his meyné
To th’erl Rohaud that was so fre,
At Warwike he him fond.
All were then glad and at ease
And thanked God a thousand times
That Gii was comen to lond.
Sethe on hunting thai gun ride
With knightes fele and miche pride
As ye may understond.
On a day Sir Gii gan fond
And feir Felice he tok bi hond
And seyd to that bird so blithe

1 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.

1 That was biyond the see.
Sethen he com into Inglond
That was bothe hende and fre.
For his love ich understand
He slough a dragoun in Northumberlond
Ful fer in the north cuñtré.
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;
His air was Sir Gioun.
Alle that held of him lond or fe
Deden him omage and feuté
And com to his somoun.
He tok alle his faders lond
And gaf it hende Herhaud in hond
Right to his warisoun.
And alle that hadde in his servise be
He gaf hem gold and riche fe
Ful hendeliche on honde
And sethen he went with his meyné
To th’erl Rohaud that was so fre,
At Warwike he him fond.
All were then glad and at ease
And thanked God a thousand times
That Gii was comen to lond.
Sethe on hunting thai gun ride
With knightes fele and miche pride
As ye may understond.
On a day Sir Gii gan fond
And feir Felice he tok bi hond
And seyd to that bird so blithe

That were beyond the sea.
Then he came into England
And met with Athelston the king,
Who was both gracious and generous.¹
For his love, as I understand,
He killed a dragon in Northumberland,²
Far up in the north country.
He and Herhaud, to say the truth,
Made their way to Wallingford,³
Which was his father’s town.
Then his father, in truth as well,
Died and was buried in the clay.
His heir was Sir Guy.⁴
All who held land or property from him
Pledged their homage and loyalty
And came at his summons.
He took all his father’s own land
And gave it into noble Herhaud’s hand,
As a fitting reward.
And for all who had been in his service,
He gave them gold and rich properties
Graciously into their hands,
And then he went with his attendants
To Earl Rohaud, who was so courteous,⁵
Finding him at Warwick.
All were then glad and at ease
And thanked God a thousand times
That Guy was coming to their land.
Then they rode out hunting
With many knights and stately pride
As you may understand.
One day, Sir Guy set out
And took fair Felicia by the hand
And said to that lady so fair,
“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 swee Felice,” he seyd than,
“Y no schal never spouse wiman
Whiles thou art oliv.”
Than answerd that swee wight
And seyd ogain to him ful right
“Bi Him that schope mankinne,
Icham desired day and night
Of erl, baroun, and mani a knight;
For nothing wil thai blinne.
Ac Gii,” sche seyd, “hende and fre,
Al mi love is layd on thee,
Our love schal never tuinne;
And bot ich have thee to make
Other lord nil Y non take
For al this warld to winne.”
Anon to hir than answerd Gii,
To fair Felice that sat him bi
That semly was of sight,
“Leman,” he seyd, “gramerci.”
With joie and with melodi
He kist that swee wight.
Than was he bo the 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,
“Douhter,” he seyd, “now understond
Why wiltow have non husbond
That might thee spouse with pride?
Thou has ben desired of mani man
And yete no wostow never nan
For nought that might bitide.
Leve douhter hende and fre
Telle me now par charité
What man thou wilt abide.”
Felice answerd ogain
“Fader,” quath hye, “ichil thee sain
With wordes fre and hende.

Gui Li quons apele par grant amur

“I have,” he said, “through God’s grace,
Won the respect in many lands
Of knights, strong and sturdy,
And a great honor has been offered to me:
The daughter of the king and emperor,
To have as my wife.
But sweet Felica,” he said then,
“I will never marry another woman
While you are alive.”
Then that sweet lass answered
And replied to him at once,
“By He who created mankind,
I am pursued, day and night,
By earl, baron, and many a knight.
They will not stop for anything.
But Guy,” she said, “gentle and noble,
All my heart is set on you.
Our love will never fail.
And if I cannot have you as mine,
I will have no other lord,
Even for all this world with it.”
Guy immediately replied to her,
The fair Felica who sat by him,
Who was beautiful to behold:
“Darling,” he said, “my kind thanks.”
With joy and with melody
He kissed that sweet girl.
Then he was both glad and happy;
He could express his joy to no one
For that woman shining so bright.
He was never before
Half so happy since he was born,
For anything that men had given him.
One day the earl set out
And took fair Felicia by the hand
And her mother beside her.
“Daughter,” he said, “now hear me:
Why you will not have a husband
Who would marry you with pride?
You have been wanted by many men
And yet you’ve never taken one
For anything that might happen.
Dear daughter, gracious and free,
Tell me now, for charity’s sake,
What man you will accept.”
Felicia answered in reply,
“Father,” she said, “I will tell you
With free and courteous words.”
-- Felice sa fille qui tant ert sage:  
-- “Fille, di mei tun corage.”

| Lines from Gui de Warewic, 7464-66. As TEAMS points out, Felicia replies twice in an awkward way in the English MS, as the scribe has compressed a slightly longer conversation in the original source. |
|---|---|
| 100 | 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 warld 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, yblised mot thou be Of Godes mouthe to mede. Ich hadde wele lever than al mi fe Withe than he wald spousye thee, That douhti man of dede. He heth ben desired of mani woman And he hath forsaken hem everilcan, That worthily were in wede. Ac natheles ichil to him fare For to witen of his answare, That douhti man of dede.” On a day withouten lesing Th’erl him rode on dere hunting And Sir Gii the conquerour, Als thai ridden on her talking Thai spoken togider of mani thing, Of levedis bright in boulb. Th’erl seyd to Sir Gii hende and fre, “Tel me the sothe par charité Y pray thee, par amoure.” | Felicia his daughter, who was so wise, “Daughter, tell me your heart.” |
| 110 | Hastow ment ever in thi live Spouse ani wiman to wive That falleth to thine anour?” Sir Gii answard and seyd than “Bi Him,” he seyd, “that this warld wan To saven al mankende, Bi nought that Y tel can Y nil never spouse wiman Save on is fre and hende.” “Sir,” quath th’erl, “listen nou to me: Y have a douther bright on ble, Y pray thee leve frende, To wive wiltow hir understand Y schal thee sese in al mi lond To hold withouten ende.” “Gramerci,” seyd Gii anon, | “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,
Sir Gii, yif thou wilt trowe me
No lenger thou no schalt abide.

Now for fourtenight it schal be
The bridal hold with gamen and gle
At Warwike in that tyde.

Than was Sir Gii glad and blithe
His joie couthe he no man kithe,
To his ostel he gan ride.

And tho Gii com hom to h is frende
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.

Than 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 druries riche and dere.

Ther was mirthe and melody
And al maner menstracie
As ye may fortheward here.

Ther was trumpes and tabour,
Fithel, croude, and harpour

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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 mouth 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 mirth 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,  
Her giftes were nought gnede.  
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  
Fiftendays 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 -  
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,  
With their skill on full display.  
Organists and good bagpipers,  
Storytellers and many entertainers,  
To gladden those happy people.  
There is no tongue which can describe  
The joy that was at that wedding,  
With hospitality and fun, as was fitting.  
For there were all sorts of amusements  
That heart could imagine or eye see,  
As you may listen and hear about.  
Earls, barons, gracious and noble,  
Were gathered there from many lands,  
Who were stately in their clothing;  
They rewarded the entertainers for their craft  
With rich robes, gold, and goods.  
Their gifts were not stingy!  
On the fifteenth day, early on,  
They made their goodbyes to leave  
And thanked them for their kindness.  
Then Guy, that gentle knight,  
Had Felicia at his pleasure day and night,  
As we read in the story.  
When Guy had wedded that graceful flower,  
The fair Felicia, so beautiful in her bedroom,  
Who was so beloved and dear to him,  
In truth, in that tower in Warwick,  
For fifteen days they were together  
With joy and honor.  
It so happened on the first night,  
When he slept with that sweet lass,  
That they conceived a child together.  
But later, with sorrow and mournful sighing,  
Their joy changed into sadness,  
As you may from here on learn.  
Sir Guy was of great renown then,  
And respected as lord of many a town,  
A prince magnificent in pride.  
Earl Rohaud and Sir Guy  
Would ride out hunting  
In the woodlands to take the deer.  
It so happened one summer’s day  
When Sir Guy lay at Warwick—  
There is no reason to hide anything—  
That at night, in the tale as it is told,  
The valiant couple went to bed  
At their time, to rest the night.  
But Sir Guy went to a turret  
And beheld the heavens  
That stood crowded with stars.

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8 Mithe: TEAMS notes that this orphan word is not in the MED and appears nowhere else. OE *mīðan*, ‘conceal,’ does not fit the context. A misspelling or variant of *meet*, ‘proper’?
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.

“Allas,” he seyd, “that I 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 Gi stode thus in tour alon
In hert him was ful wo bi
gon,
“Alas!” it was his song.

Than com Felieis 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 Gi again,
“Ichil thee telle the sothe ful fain
Whi icham brought to grounde.

Sethen Y thee seyge 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 mannes blode
With mani a griseli wounde.
Now may me rewe al mi live
That ever was Y born o wife
Wayleway that stounde!”

“Ac yif ich hadde don half the dede
For Him that on Rode gan blede
With grimly woundes 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 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,
Of blis icham al bare.
"Bot God is curteys and hende
And so dere he hath bought mankende
For no thing wil hem let.
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.
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.
For mani a bern and knight hardi
Ich have ysleyn sikerly
And strued cites fale
And for ich have destrued mankin
Y schal walk for mi sinne
Barfot bi doun and dale.
That ich have with mi bodi wrought,
With mi bodi it schal be bought
Tobote me of that bale.
"Leman," he seyd, "par charité,
Astaw art bothe hende and fre
O thing Y thee pray:
Loke thou make no sorwe for me
Bot hold thee stille astow may be
Til tomorwe at day.
Gret wele thi fader that is so hende
And thi moder and al thi frende
Bi sond as Y thee say:
Gret wele Herhaud Y thee biseche;
Leman, God Y thee biteche.

Y wil fare forth in mi way.
“Leman, Y warn thee biforn
With a knave child thou art ycorn
That douhti beth of dede.
For Him that bar the croun of thorn,
Therfore, as sone as it is born
Pray Herhaud wight in wede
He teche mi sone as he wele can
Al the thewes of gentil man
And helpe him at his nede.

For he is bothe gode and hende
And ever he hath ben trewe and kende,
God quite him his mede.
―Leman,‖ he seyd, ―have here mi brond
And take mi sone it in his hond
Astow art he
nde and fre,
He may therwith ich understond
Winne the priis in everi lond
For better may non be.
Leman,‖ he seyd, ―have now godeday.
Ichil fare forth in mi way
And wende in mi jurné.‖

Thai kist hem in armes tuo
And bothe thai fel aswon tho
Gret diol it
was to se.
Gret sorwe thai made at her parting
And kist hem with eyghen wepeing,
Bi the hond sche gan him reche
“Leman,” sche seyd, “have here this ring;
For Jhesus love heven-king

A word Y thee biseche:
When thou ert in fer cuntré
Loke heron and thenk
on me
And God Y thee biteche.”
With that word he went hir fro
Wepeand with eyghen to
Withouten more speche.
Now is Gii fram Warwike fare,
Unto the se he went ful yare
And passed over the flod.

See that you make no sorrow over me
But keep yourself as silent as you can
Until 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.9
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 noble 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 open arms
And then both of them were overcome.
It was a tearful sight to see.
They made great sorrow at their parting
And 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.
He intended to travel to Jerusalem.
Thus he would not cease from wandering
Until he had reached Jerusalem,
After crossing many strange lands,
Where he could see God’s holy relics.10

The lady was left at home in grief,
With sorrow and woe and bitter sighs;
Her mood was dark and dreary.
“Alas, alas!” was her refrain;
She tore her hair, she wrung her hands,
Her fingers ran with blood.
All that night until it was day
Her lament was “Woe is me!”
She nearly went mad from sorrow.
She drew her lord’s sword before her
And thought to slay herself out of grief
Without any more delay.
But in killing herself before the child was born
She thought her soul would be lost
Forevermore on Judgment Day,
And that her father and all of her friends
Would say her lord had done it
And had flown away because of it.
Therefore she put his sword back,
For fear that she slay herself in sorrow,
In the story as I tell you.
Early in the morning when it was day light,
She came wringing her hands
To the chamber where her father lay.
“Father,” she said, “I must tell you
My lord has gone from me
To undertake a pilgrimage.
He will pass over the sea;
He will never come back to me
Again in England.”
For the anguish she had at that moment
She swooned down to the ground;
She could not stand on foot.
“Daughter,” said her father, “let this go.
I do not think that gracious Sir Guy
Has traveled far from you.
Truly, he has not passed the sea.
He is doing no more than testing you,
To see how true your heart is.”
“No, sir,” she said, “so help me God,
He is walking in tattered clothing
To beg for his food in toil.
And for this I can sing

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10 Lines from the French Gui de Warewic, 7732-36. Excerpted in TEAMS.
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 thi hadde gret care
For he was went hem fro.
Thai sou
That 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 br other Tirry.”
Menssangers anon thai sende
Over al this lond fer and hende
Fram London into Louthe
Over al biyonde Humber and Trent
And est and west thurthouth 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.
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 loked on him than
And hadde of him gret care.

He sayd, “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 thenke 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.”
“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 warld 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
Thurth a batayl unride,
Thurth Sarrayins that fel wore
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 God’s love in Trinity,
Who lived in this world.
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.

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13 *Durras*: Probably modern Durrës in coastal Albania.
To Jerusalem thai com ful yore
To rob and reve with pride.
And we toke our ost anon
Ogaines hem we gun gon
Bateyl of hem to abide;
The accountré of hem was so strong
That mani dyed ther among
Or we walde rest that tide.

“Thurth mi fiftene sone
Were the geauntes overcome
And driven doun to grounde.
Fifteen amirals ther wer nome,
The king gan fle with alle his trome
Ich and mi sones withouten lesing
Out of that lond we driven the king
And his men gaf dedli wounde.

The king him hight Triamour,
A lord he was of gret honour
And man of michel mounde.
“Than dede we wel gret foly:
We suwed him with maistrie
Into his owhen lond.
Into Alisaundre thai fleye owy,
The cuntré ros up with a cri
To help her king an hond.

In a brom feld ther wer hidde
Thre hundred Sarrayins wele yschridde
With helme and grimly brond,
Out of that brom thai lepen anon
And bilapped ous alle yschridde
And slouwen of her ferred,
And ar that we were alle ynome
Mani of hem were overcome

Ded wounded under wede.
Thai were to mani and we to fewe,
Al our armour thai tohewe
And stiked under ous our stede;
Yete we foughten afot long
Til swerdes brosten that were strong
And than yeld we ous for nede.

“To the king we yolden ous al and some
That we might to raunsoun come
To save our lives ichon,
Into Alisaunder he ladde ous tho
And into his prisoun dede ous do,
Was maked of lime and ston.
Litel was our drink and lasse our mete,
For hunger we wende our lives lete;
Wel wo was ous bigon.

They came eagerly to Jerusalem
To rob and plunder with arrogance.
And we took out our army 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.
“With a roke he brac his heved than
That the blod biforn out span
In that ich place.
‘Sadok,’ sayd than Fabour,
‘Thou dost me gret dishonour
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

14 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.

15 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>
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| 690  | That thou me manace.  
Nar thou mi lordes sone were  
Thou schuldest dye right now here.  
Schustow never hennes passe.'  
Sadok stirte 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 agreve sore  
And stirt 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 beth  
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; |
| 730  | Bot thai hem therof were might  
In strong peril he schuld hem dight  
And to her jugement.  
“Than dede he com forth a Sarrayine -  
Have he Cristes curs and mine  
With boke and eke with belle -  
Out of Egypt he was ycome,  
Michel and griselich was that gone |

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 |

16 Medieval chessboards were not balsa-wood affairs but could be carved from ivory or marble, and were certainly heavy enough to kill.  
17 *With boke and eke with belle*: The ritual tools of Catholic excommunication. See also *Athelston*, 682.
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| 740  | With any god 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 twelue 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 |
| 750  | Yif he durst founde  
That he wald 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 fourti 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 - Thiddendel 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 him he 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 |
| 760  | That for him durst take the fight; Were he burjayes other knight |
| 770  | Against any good man in a duel. He is so gigantic and hideous That any man might dread his sight, As I tell you with my tongue. He is as black as burnt nails; He seems as if he were a fiend That had come out of hell. For he is so powerfully built in body that Twelve men against him have no chance, However strong they are. For he is so incredibly tall That he is four feet higher, certainly, Than any man standing by him. If King Triamour, who was there, Wished to defend himself on open ground Against that great crime, Then that foul monster Would be appointed the sultan’s champion To face him in battle. King Triamour then gave his reply To that rich sultan In that same place That he would defend himself well enough, If the sultan would not slay his son Or inflict deadly wounds on him. No man would dare fight with him When he saw Amoraunt, so grim, So savagely did he stand on the ground. Then he asked for a reprieve for a time To find another man, if he might Dare to face against him. Then he had a reprieve all that year And forty days, as was the custom, According to the law in the land then. If he dared not fight himself, He might find another if he Would dare to stand against him. The king went home as swiftly; At once he sent word all over his land For earls, barons, and bond men, And asked if any were so bold. He who dared to take the battle in hand Would have a third portion of his land. But his promises were for nothing. There was no one who dared accept the fight With the giant for his sake. Then I was taken out of prison. He made me appear before him To take counsel with me, And asked me in few words If I could think of or knew A man so mighty in combat Who would dare take the fight for him. If he were a burgess or knight, |
Riche prince he wald him make.
“And yif Y might ani fende
He wald make me riche and al mi kende
And gif me gret honour
And wold sese into min hond
To helden threiddel his lond
With cite, toun, and tour.
Ac ichim answerd than

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 traitour
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,

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 bendे.
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

810 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.’

820 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 bendе.
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,
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And into kinges lond of Tars
And thurth al Aquitayne,
In Cisil, in Hungri and in Ragoun,
In Romayne, Borgoine, and Gastoine

18 Merci: This word was probably usually ‘mercy’ in the sense of asking for help or pardon, but here it makes contextual sense that Triamour is showing gratitude and using French merci as an interjection.

19 Tars: Perhaps Tarsia, Italy, or Tarsus, modern Turkey.
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 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 almighten foryeld it thee That is so michel of m
ight 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 schreve 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 ble. “Erl Jonas,” seyd the king, “Telle me now withouthen 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 Ingland ben And Y no might hem nowhar sen,
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 cuntré.”
“What cuntré artow?” the king said.
“Of Inglond, so God me rede;
Therin ich was yborn.”
“Ah!” said the king, “You are an English knight?
Then I should, by reason and right,
Hate you forever more.
Did you not know this good Guy
Or Herhaud, who was so manly?
Tell me the truth to my face.
I should very well be Guy’s enemy.
He killed my brother Helmadan.
Because of him he is lost to me.
He killed my uncle, the rich sultan,
At his dinner, among every one of us!
I never saw a man behave so!
I saw how he struck his head off
And carried it away with him in haste,
Despite all who were there!
We chased after him then.
The devil helped him to get away;
I believe he is of his kin.
Mohammad grant that you were him!
I would then be fully certain
To win the victory.”
Sir Guy answered the king,
“So help me God, I know Herhaud
Very well, without a lie.
And if you had one of them here,
You would be sure of triumph.

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,
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Men clepeth me in mi cuntré.”
“What cuntré artow?” the king said.
“Of Inglond, so God me rede;
Therin ich was yborn.”
“O we,” said the king, “artow Inglis 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 everilkan.
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 halm 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 fortó winne.”
Sir Gii answerd to the king,
“Wel wele Y knowe withouten lesing
Herhau 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 thenketh 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
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
Y’f 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 therof evermo
As wide as this warld is wroght.
“All 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 cité
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
“You, 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.
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,  
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.  
There 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 asayle.
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,
What wonder doth he here?
―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.

1160 Thai priked the stedes thai on sete
And smitten 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 Than thai drough her swerdes grounde
And hewe togider with grimli wounde
Til thai spradde al ablode.
Sir Amoraunt drough his gode brond
That wele c
arf al that it fond
When he hadde lorn his launce.
That never armour might withstond
That was made of smitthes hond
In hethenesse no in Fraunce.
It was Sir Ercules the strong
That mani he slough therwith with wrong
In batayle and in destauance.
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 heweinde
With her brondes wele kerweinde
And maden her sides blede
Sir Amoraunt was agreved in hert
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
Andwarred 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 Amorant 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
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.

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 ogress.
| 1200 | Al of the helme the swerd out stint  
And forth right with that selve dint  
Other half Fot of the scheld  
That never was atamed ar than  
For knight no for no nother man  
No were he never so beld.  
The sadelbowe he clef atuo,  
The stedes nek he dede also  
With his grimli brond;  
Withouten wem or ani wounde  
Wele half a fot into the grounde  
The scharp swerd it wond.  
Sir Gi to gronde fallen is,  
He stirt up anon, ywis,  
And loked and gan withthond. |
|---|---|
| 1210 | Anon right in that ich stede  
To God almighten he bad his bede  
And held up bothe his hond.  
Sir Gi anon up stirt  
As man that was agremeid in hert;  
Nought wel long he lay.  
“Lord,” seyd Gi, “God Almight  
That made the therkenes to the night  
So help me today.  
Scheld me fro this geaunt strong  
Aston art lord verray.  
That dint,” he seyd, “was ivel sett  
Wele schal Y com out of thi dett,  
Yf that Y libbe may.”  
Gi hent his swerd that was ful kene  
And smot Amoraunt with hert tene  
A dint that sat ful sore  
That a quarter of his scheld  
He made to flye in the feld |
| 1220 | That Y no deth of him afong  
Astow art lord verray.  
That dint,” he seyd, “was ivel sett  
Wele schal Y com out of thi dett,  
Yf that Y libbe may.”  
Gi hent his swerd that was ful kene  
And smot Amoraunt with hert tene  
A dint that sat ful sore  
That a quarter of his scheld  
He made to flye in the feld |
| 1230 | Al with his grimli gore.  
The stedes nek he smot atuo,  
Amoraunt to gronde is fallen tho,  
Wo was him therfore.  
Than were on fot tho knightes bold,  
Fight o fot yif thai wold -  
Her stedes thai han forlore.  
Amoraunt with hert ful grim  
Smot to Gi, and Gi to him  
With strokes stern and stive. |
| 1240 | Hard thi hewe with swerdes clere  
That helme and swerd that strong were  
Thai gun hem al todrive.  
Hard foughten tho champiouns  
That bothe plates and hauberjouns  
Thai gun to ret and rive;  
And laden on with dintes gret  
Aither of hem so other gan bete  
That wo was hem olive. |

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 pommele 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 withstanded 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 Amoraunt 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?

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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 hehenisse
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
200
ove thou levest on,
A
214
stow art gode and hende.
For thrist mi hert wil tospring
And for hete withouten lesing
Mi life 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 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 Gii answerd, “I graunt it to you
If you yeld it back to me today
Withoutani 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 stirr up with hert grille
And Sir Gii he gan to asayle.
“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 all the people of the caliphate
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.
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.”

27 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, ofermode—pride, recklessness, or sporting courtesy—is still debated.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1390</td>
<td>Than thai drowen her swerdes long</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tho knightes that wer stern and strong</td>
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<td>Withouten more dueling</td>
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<td>1390</td>
<td>And aither gan other ther asayle</td>
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<td>1400</td>
<td>And ther bigan a strong bataile</td>
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<td>With wel strong fighting.</td>
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<td>Amoraunt was ful egre of mode</td>
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<td>And smot to Gii as he wer wode -</td>
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<td>Ful egre he was to fight -</td>
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<td>That a quarter of his scheld</td>
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<td>He made it fleye into the feld</td>
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<td>And of his brini bright.</td>
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<td>Of his scholder the swerd glod doun</td>
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<td>That bothe plates and hauberjoun</td>
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<td>He carf atuo, Y plight.</td>
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<td>Al to the naked hide, ywis,</td>
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<td>And nought of flesche atamed is</td>
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<td>Thurfh grace of God almighty.</td>
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<td>The scharp swerd doung gan glide</td>
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<td>Fast bi Sir Gyes side -</td>
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<td>His knew it com ful neye -</td>
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<td>That gambisoun and jambler</td>
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<td>Bothe it karf atuo yfere;</td>
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<td>Into th’erthe the swerd it fleye</td>
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<td>Withouten wem or ani wounde</td>
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<td>Half a fot into the grounde,</td>
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<td>That mani man it seye.</td>
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<td>And when Gii seye that fair grace</td>
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<td>That nothing wounded he was</td>
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<td>Jhesu he thanked on heye.</td>
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<td>And when Gii feld him so smite</td>
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<td>He was wroth ye mow wite;</td>
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<td>To Amoraunt he gan reken</td>
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<td>He hent his brond with wel gode wille</td>
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<td>And stroke to him with hert grille;</td>
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<td>His scheld he gan tobreken.</td>
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<td>So hetelich Gii him smot</td>
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<td>That into the scholder half a fot</td>
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<td>The gode swerd gan reken.</td>
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<td>And with that strok Gii withdrew</td>
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<td>Weri he was forfoughten ynough,</td>
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<td>To Amoraunt he gan speken.</td>
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<td>“Sir Amoraunt,” than seyd Gii,</td>
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<td>1430</td>
<td>“For Godes love now merci</td>
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<td>Yif that thi wille be.</td>
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<td>Ichave swiche thrist ther Y stond</td>
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<td>Y may unnethe drawe min hond</td>
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<td>Therfore wel wo is me.</td>
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<td>Yeld me now that ich dede,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Y gaf thee leve to drink at nede.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Astow art hende and fre,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leve to drink thou lat me go</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As it was covenaunt bituen ous to</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For Godes love Y pray thee.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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  
Leve no hastow non.  
Ac now that Y the sothe se  
That thou ginnes to feynt thee  
Thine heved thou schalt forgon.”  
“Amoraunt,” seyd Gii, “do aright,  
Lete me drink a litel wight  
As Y dede thee anon  
And to거다 fight we;  
Who thi schal be maister we schal se  
Wiche of oux may other slon.”  
“Hold thi pays,” seyd Amoraunt,  
“Y nil nought held thee covenaut  
For ful this toun of gold,  
For when ichave thee sleyn now right  
The Soudan treweli 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 miritiest may on mold.  
When ichave thee sleyn this day  
He schal give me that fair may  
With alle his lond to hold.  
“Ae 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.”  
“Nay,” seyd Gii, “thar war no lawe.  
Ich haddde lever to ben todrawe  
Than swiche a dede to don.  
Ar ich wald creauant yeld me  
Ich haddde lever anhanged be  
And breet bothe fleche and bon.”  
Than seyd Amoraunt at a word  
“Bi the treuthe thou owye thi lord  
That thou lovost so dere  
Tel me whati 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 unbiiknownen here.”  
“Frende,” seyd Gii, “Y schal telle thee;  
Astor 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.”  
“As 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 Amorant saw clearly
That it was the good Guy
Who was set against him,
He looked at him with great wrath,
Coldly with his black eyes,
With a hideous glare.
“Sir Guy,” he said, “welcome!”
I thank Mohammad, my lord
That I have you here!
You have caused me great shame.
You will in short time lose your life;
Your body will be cut in two.
And your head, by Termagant,
Will be a present to my lover,
Who is of a fine lineage.
From here on you can be sure that
I won’t permit you to do anything,
Not for all this world.”
“Alas!” said Guy, “what will I do
Now that I cannot have a drink?
My heart is breaking in two.”
At once he resolved to himself
That he must run straight to the river;
He turned away and began to go.
Amorant, with his sword in hand,
Thought he had brought Guy to ruin
And that he would slay him in pain.
Guy ran straight into the water;
Unless he called on God Almighty
He would never come up again.
Sir Guy was then in great fear.
He stood in the water up to his waist,
And it felt refreshing to him.
A t once he dipped his head in
Out of those waters.
Amorant stood upon the land
With a sword drawn in hand
And struck Guy where he stood.
He hit Guy fiercely;
He fell down into the water
From that ugly blow
So that the water ran about him.
Sir Guy started up in great fear,
For he would delay for nothing,
And he shook his head as a hardy knight.
“I am very cold from this water
In my stomach, back, and sides;
And I had no permission from you.
Therefore, may you have great shame
And may evil fortune befall you.”

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
rt breketh 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 flod
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 gret 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 therfore have thou miche maugré
And ivel thee mot bitide.”
Sir Gii stirt up withouten fayl
And Amoraunt he gan to asayl;
To fight he was ful boun.
Hard togider thai gan to fight;
Of love was ther no speche, Y plight,
Bot hewing with swerdes broun.
“Amoraunt,” than seyd Gii,
“Thou art ful fals sikerly
And fulfilt of tresoun.
No more wil Y trust to thee
For no bihest thou hotest me.
Thou art a fals glotoun.”

The right arme with the swerd fot-hot
Bi the scholder of he it smot,
To grounde it fleye oway.
When Amoraunt feld him so smite
In his left hond with michel hete
The swerd he hent fot-hot.
As a lyoun than ferd he,
Thrith sautes he made and thre
With his swerd that wel bot.
Bot for the blod that of him ran
Amoraunt strengthe slake bigan.
When Gii that soth wot
That Amoraunt was faynting
Sir Gii him folwed withouten dueling;
That other hond of he smot.
When Amoraunt had bothe hondes forlore
A wreche he held himself therfore;
His wit was al todreved.
On Sir Gii he lepe with alle his might
That almast he had feld him doun right,
And Sir Gii was agreved
And stirt bisiden fot-hot,
And Amoraunt in the nek he smot.
His might he hath him bireved;
He fel to grounde withouten faile
And Sir Gii unlaced his ventayle
And he strok of his heved.

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 Gii 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 Gii 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.

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28 Glotoun: Cohen explains that giants are often called gluttons 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.
Over the water he went in a boat
And present therewith hot-hot
The king Sir Triamour.

The king Sir Triamour than
Went to that riche Soudan
And also his sone Fabour.
Than was the Soudan swithe wo,
Quite-claim he lete hem go
With wel michel honour.
Into Alisaunder thai went that cité
And ladde with hem Sir Gii the fre
That hadde ben her socour.
The king tok th’erl Jonas tho
And clept him in his armes to
And kist him swete, ich wene,
An hundred times and yete mo
And quite-claim he lete him go
And his sones fiftene.
“Erl Jonas,” seyd the king,
“Herken now to my teling
And what ichil mene:
For mi li
If thou savedest me
Half mi lond ich graunt thee
With this knight strong and kene.
“Understond to me, sir knight,
Mahoun gave ful of might
Thou wost duelle with me;
Thridde part mi lond Y give thee to,
Michel honour ichil thee do,
A riche prince make thee.
Y nil nought thou forsake God thine;
Thou art bileveand wele afine,
Better may no be.”
Sir Gii answerd him ful stille:
“Sir, of thi lond nought Y nille
For sothe Y telle thee.”
That erl to Jerusalem went anon,
Gii of Warwike with him gan gon
And alle hi sones on rawe.
Th’erl wold yif he might
Wite the name of that knight
Yf he him evermore sawe.
“In conseyl, sir knight,” than seyd he,
“That thou Youn dost clep thee,
Thou no hatest nought so Y trowe.
For Jhesu love Y pray thee
That died on the Rode tre
Thi right name be aknawe.”
Sir Gii seyd, “Thou schalt now here
Sethen thou trainest me in this maner;
Mi name ichil thee sayn:
Gii of Warwike mi name is right,
Astow art hende and gentil knight
To non thou schalt me wrayn.
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 cursed the time that he was bore,
―Allas!‖ 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 beggare.
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 nede.
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 schalt 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.
Earl 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
Haddi don him oft gret tresoun
He slough him with gret grame.
Now is his nev
\[30\]
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 f
\[31\]
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 hi
\[1760\]

to al this lond
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 hi
\[1770\]

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 hi
\[1780\]

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 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.

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\[30\] 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.

338
For his erls he sent his sond.
Y come thider with michel prede
With an hundred knihtes bi mi side
At nede with me to stonde.
“And when Y come unto the court
The steward with wicked pourn
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 forдрeddye;
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,
Mi ne 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 thay bisought and bede
To pay for me ransoun.
Th’emperour and Sir Berard
Deliverd me bi a forward
And bi this enchousen:
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 salt 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 superceded 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
That whilom was so noble a knight
And lord of michel mounde.
His bodi was sumtim wele yschredde,
Almost naked it was bihedde
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
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,
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
Has called a parliament over this matter,
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 yplight
Y schal bring Sir Gii tonight
To fight ogain that qued
To fende ous of that felonie
He is gone to seek Guy’s son,
Who was stolen by force.33
Thus I believe that Guy is dead.
I do not know where to turn for sorrow.
My heart will break into five!”
Sir Guy beheld Sir Thierry closely
Who had once been so noble a knight
And a lord of great power.
His body, which was formerly finely attired,
Looked as though it was almost naked,
Overcome with sorrow and hardship.
His legs, that were once sumptuously hosed,
Could be seen weathered all over.
“Allas,” Guy cried, “that moment!”
For the grief he had then
He could speak no more words
But fell faint to the ground.
Sir Thierry came to him at once
And took him up in his arms
And called to him there.
“You have fared poorly.”
Sir Guy answered after a long while,
“These evils grieve me so strong
That I wish I were in the ground!
For since I was first a man,
I have never felt such sorrow
That pained me so sorely!”
“Friend,” he said, “what troubles you?
It seems to me you are ill at ease;
Since I went out of this land
To search for Guy, my good friend.
I have found nothing near or far,
And so I am ruined.
For now I am told that our emperor
Has called a parliament over this matter,
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 yplight
Y schal bring Sir Gii tonight
To fight ogain 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.*
Ogain the douke Berard of Pavi
Al of his emes ded.
Y wot wele yif Y thider fare
Thai schal me sle with sorwe and care,
Certes Y can no red.”
Gii biheld Tirri with wepeand eighe
And seighe him al that sorwe dreighe
That was him lef and dere.

“Alas,” thought Gii, “that ich stounde
That Tirri is thus brought to grounde;
So gode felawes we were.”
He thought, “Might Y mete that douke
His heved Y schuld smite fro the bouke
Or hong him bi the swere.
Y no lete for al this warldes won
That Y no schul
d 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.
Take heart, and have no fear at all,
For God is so caring and gracious
That he will help you in full.
Then the two knights rose up.
With great worries and heavy spirits,
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.35

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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 wonderef for that sake.  
And when he out of that roche cam  
Into Tirries mouthe he nam,  
Anon Tirri gan wake.  
Sir Gii was wonderef of that sight  
And Tirri sat up anonright  
And biheld Gii opon.  
Than seyd Titri, “Fader of Heven,  
Sir pilgrim, swiche a wonder sweven  
That to yon hille that stont on heighe  
That thou may se with thin eighe  
I dreamed that Y was gon  
And at an hole in Y wond  
And so riche tresour as Y fond  
Y trow in this world is non.  
“Beside that tresour lay a dragoun  
And theron lay a swerd broun,  
The sckauberk comly corn.

In the hilt was mani precious ston,  
As bright as ani sonne it schon  
Withouten oth ysworn.  
And me thought that Y was biweved  
Astow de st me biforn.  
Lord merci, and it wer so  
Wele were me than bigo  
That ever yete was Y born.”

“Now felawe,” seyd Gii, “bi mi leuté  
That sweven wil turn gret joie to thee  
And wele Y schal it rede.  
Thurth Gii thou schalt thi lond kever.  
Trust wele to God thei thou be pouer  
The better thou schalt spede.  
To the hulle nim we the way  
Ther thee thought the tresour lay  
And in thou schalt me lede.  
Now God that schope al mankinde  
Wald we might that tresour finde  
It ran without pausing to a hill  
And slipped into a cleft in the rock.

Guy was mystified on account of it.  
And when it came out of that rock  
And disappeared back into Thierry’s mouth,  
Thierry at once began to awaken.  
Sir Guy was amazed by the sight,  
And Thierry immediately sat up  
And looked upon Guy.  
Then Thierry said, “Father of Heaven!  
Sir pilgrim, I dreamed just now  
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 me36  
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.

36 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 Thierry in that s
sted,
“Bi God and Seyn Michiel,
Of alle this riche tresore
Y no kepe therof no more
Bot this brond of stiel.”

2000
Y no kepe thereof 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 Thierry 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 Thierry the hende,
“Kepe me wele this swerd, 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
Him tit a warld schame.”
Gii goth to toun with michel hethe,
Th’emperour 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 axe to mi socour.”
Th’emperour seyd, “To court come

2020
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.”

37 The rhyme scheme (aabccbbdddbeeb) is broken here, suggesting three missing lines, although there is no break or visual damage in Auchinleck at this point.
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 Perci
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.”
When 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,
Wele tuenti on a rawe.
He seyd to Gii, “Vile traitour,
Ner thou bifor th’emperour
Thei Y wende to ben tohewe
Bi thi berd Y schuld thee schokke
That al thi teth it schuld rokke,
For thou art a kinde schrewere.
“Bi thi semblaunt se men may
Thou hast ben traitour mani a day -
God gif thee schame and schond.
If I can get a hold of you,
You will be put to a miserable death,
As a traitor to lie in shackles.
This is how men should punish foul wretches
For slandering good barons
Who are lordings in their land.”
“Ow sir,” seyd Gii, “ertow thas?
Y nist no nar hou it was
Bi the gode Rode.
And now Y wot that thou art he,
Thou art uncurteys so thankest me.
Thou farst astow wer wode,
And art a man of fair parage
Ycom thou art of heighe linage
And of gentil blood.
It is thee litel curteysie
To do me swiche vilanie
Bifor th’emperour ther Y stode.
“And for thee wil Y wond no thing,
Y schal telle thee the sothe withouten lesing
Bifor 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 ichave gon
2100
2110

That he is gilitles 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 Gii
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
Whereso thou may be sought.”
Sir Gii seyd, “Than thou it hast
Than make therof thi bast;
For yete no getes thou it nought.”
Bifor th’emperour than come Gii
And seyd, “Sir Berard of Pavi
Is a man of mighti dede,
2120
2130

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 retort
ed, “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 Pavi
Is a man of mighty deeds,
38

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 flyting 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.

345
And I have come from faraway lands
And am a poor, simple man.
I have no family here,
Nor do I have weapons or shining armor.
For the love of God Almighty
Grant me armor and a steed.”
The emperor answered, “By Jesus,
Pilgrim, you will have enough
Of everything necessary for you.”
Duke Berard went away.
His heart was in great torment;
He did not know what he might do.
The emperor called the maid, his daughter:
“Dear daughter,” he said to her,
“Attend to this pilgrim tonight.”
She took charge of him with kindness
And bathed him very gently,
And wished to dress him in silk.
But his intentions were not that,
Only to ask her for firm armor
To fight with Duke Berard.
In the morning the emperor rose
With earls and barons of great honor.
They went with him to church.
And when the barons were gathered,
Men could then see in that place
A fine assembly together.
Duke Berard came forward,
As proud and stern as a leopard.
He was well-armed on horseback
And spurred on like he was berserk
Among the barons who stood there,
In order to invite battle.
The maiden did not forget any detail.
The pilgrim was armed in full
With a firm spear in hand
And a swift-galloping steed.
She led him out fully equipped
With the best of the land.
Sir Guy had remembered
And did not forget the good sword
That he found in the treasure.
He sent it privately;
No man knew anything of it,
And Thierry sent him the sword.
After that maiden had prepared Guy
He was equipped richly and finely;
Men began to behold him.
She led him forth very demurely;
With good faith, she delivered him
To the emperor for the battle.
Then the emperor, noble and free, spoke:
“Lordinges, listen to me now,
Both young and old.
This knight that ye see now here
Hath taken batail in strong maner
Al forto fight in feld.
“This knight,” he seyd, “that stount me bi
Wil fight for th’erl Sir Tirri -
For nothing wil he wond -
And defende him of that felonie
Ogain the 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 nothing 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
The 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
And tho knightes bothe yfere
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 shulder 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 kinges Costentine.
Strong batayl held tho knightes bold
That alle that ever gan hem bihold
Thai seyden hem among
This knight that you see here
Has accepted battle with valor
In order to fight in the field.
This knight,” he said, “who stands by me
Will fight for Earl Thierry.
He will not fall back for anything.
And he will defend him from that crime
Against Berard, the duke of Pavia,
Who accuses him with his own hand.
For Thierry has gone out of the land
To seek Guy, in truth,
So that he might stand for him.
This day is set between the two of them,
Or else he will be disinherit forevermore
And exiled out of the land.
But now this knight has come here
And has taken the fight against Berard.
He will not flee for anything.
But, lordinges,” he said, “all of you,
Confer on where the battle will be done,
Where it may best take place.”
They decided then that it should be
On a plain below the city.
They went toward there to wait.
Many men prayed to God that day
To help the pilgrim as He might
In order to slay Duke Berard.
The ready knights leaped on their horses
And charged together until shafts
That were sturdy and firm split apart,
And saddle straps that were strong burst;
And the knights were at the same moment
Thrown out of their saddles.
After that they drew their good swords,
Which were fine and new,
And laid on as if they were mad.
And as one sees the sparks from flint,
They hacked at each other so feverishly
That the steam rose from their helmets.
The stout knights were well armed,
But that false Berard
Had more iron around him.
He was wrapped in two mail-coats
And on his head he had two helmets
Which were forged in Saracen lands.
On his shoulder hung a double shield—
No better one could be carried on the field—
Matched with a rugged sword of fine steel.
Many men had lost their life by it;
Before then it was once owned
By the kings of Constantinople.
The valiant knights fought hard combat
So that any who ever looked upon them
Said amongst themselves
The pilgrim was non erthely 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 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  
But for knoweing of his fon  
Wel sore he gan him drede.  
Ac natheles he ros up tho  
With 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 hungri,  
And he is of michel might.  
Y trow non erthelich man it be,  
On Gii Y thenke when ichim se  
So douhti he was in fight.  
Yif Gii 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 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.

39 Again there is no lacuna in the manuscript, but a line is missing from the rhyme scheme.
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
Thai couthe no rede what thai do may.
To th’emperour thai hem brought.
“Younger, thai seyd 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 seyd 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 fayl
Understode Berard to kepe
The douke Berard forgat him nought;
Of a foule tresoun he him bithought:
Four knightes he gan clepe.
“For mi love,” he seyd, “goth tonight
Ther the pilgrim lith ful right
And sleth him in his slep.”
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 told him hou thai hadden don,
Therof he was ful fawhe.
“Sir,” thai seyd, “be nought adred.
Bothe the pilgrim and the bed
Into the se we han ythrawe.”
The pilgrim waked and loked an heyghe,
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 seyghe, ywis,
Bot winde and wateres wawe.

“Lord,” sayd Gi, “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."

2370 Bi himself alon.
He seth that bed floter by
“On Godes hal!” he gan to cri,
“What artow? Say me son.”
The pilgrim his heved upplight
And crid to him anonright
And made wel reweli mon.
“Gode man,” than sayd 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 seigh 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 Thirri 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;

He saw the stars in the heavens
As the water washed about him.40
If he was afraid, it is no wonder!
He saw no other thing, truly,
But wind and water.

“Lord,” said Gi, “God Almighty,
Who made wind and waves and all things,
Have pity on me now.
Why have I fallen into this dreadful trial?
I do not fight to win anything,
Neither gold nor possessions,
For any city or any castle;
But only for my friend I loved so well
Who was of great kindness.
For he was once so valiant
And now he is so poor in body.
Truly it fills me with remorse.”
Now listen to a short tale
About how Christ, who sits on His throne,
Saved the pilgrim’s life
With a fisherman who was approaching,
Catching fish in the sea
By himself alone.
He saw that bed floating by him
And began to call, “For the love of God!
Who are you? Tell me right away.”
The pilgrim lifted up his head
And called to him immediately
And made a pitiful cry.
“Good man,” he then said,
“As I trust in God in Trinity,
You will now hear the truth.
Do you know anything about the hard contest
Between the pilgrim and Sir Berard,
How they fought between themselves?”
The fisherman said, “I saw the battle
From the morning to the night,
For they would not retreat for anything.
Then the emperor commanded
That both of them should be guarded
And brought back again tomorrow.”
“I am,” he said, “the pilgrim
Who fought with Duke Berard
For Thierry, the noble knight.
Last night we were separated.
I was put away in a chamber
With sergeants who were wise and keen.
How I came here I do not know.

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 that this world hath wrought
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,
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 empeour,” he seyd, “listen to me.
Of the pilgrim ichil telle thee
Yif thou me herken wold.”
“Fischer,” seyd th’empeour 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’empeour 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 thai fight,
With her brondes that wer bright
Thai hewe hauberk of mayle.
Thus togider gun thai play
Til it was the heyghe midday
With wel strong batayle.
The douk Berard was egre of mode,
He smot to Gii as he wer wode
His liif he wende to winne.
He hit him on the helm on hight
That alle the florres feir and bright
He dede hem fleughe 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.

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42 For a third time the rhyme scheme is broken, but the manuscript has no defect.
Sir Gii was wroth anon fot-hot
And Berard on the helme he smot;
To stond hadde he no space
For bothe helmes he carf atuo
And his heved he dede also
In midward of the face.
Thurth al his bodi the sword bot
Into the erthe wele half a fot,
That seighe men in the place.
The sjourle went fro the bodi there,
The fol[k] of the cite wel glad were,
The[i]ai] thonked our Lordes grace.
Bifor th’emperour than com Sir Gii,
“Ichave wroken th’erl Tirri -
The sothe thou might now sen -
And defended him of that felonie
Ogain the douke Berard of Pavi
That was so stout and ken.
Therfore the sothe ich ax thee
Yif Tirri schal quite-cleymed be
And have his lond ogen;
And whoso ther ogain withstond
He schal have schame of min hond.
Wel siker may he ben.”
The emperour sayd, “Sikerly
Thou hast wroken th’erl Tirri;
Gret honour thou hast him don.
Therfore when he is come
His londes than al and some
He schal have everichon.”
Than was Gii glad and blithe
And kest of his armes also swithe,
After him he thought to gon.
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.
“Theirri anon his heved upbreyd
And sayd, “Pilgrim hastow me treyd?
Allas, that ich stounde!
“Allas, alas!” than seyd he,
“To what man may men trust be
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 people of the city were overjoyed;
They gave thanks for our Lord’s grace.43
Then Sir Guy came before the emperor:
“I have avenged Earl Thierry
You can now see the fact of that—
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 straightforwardly,
“No 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?  
Thou that semed so stedefast  
To th’emperour me wraied hast,  
To sle me thou hast take.  
In iwel time was it to me  
That Y ni me told to thee;  
Allas that ich sake.”  
For sorwe that he hadde tho  
O word no might he speke mo  
Bot stode and gan to quake.  
“Tirri,” seyd Gii, “drede thee nothing,  
Thou schalt today here gode tiding  
Thurth gr  
ace of Godes sond.  
The schrewed Douke Berard he is ded,  
Under the cité he is yleyde,  
Y slough him with min hond.”  
Tho was Tirri glad and blithe,  
To court he went also swithe  
For nothing wald he wond.  
―Sir emperour,‖ seyd Gii anon,  
―Now is Tirri comen hom  
To resceive his lond.‖   |
| 2560 |  
To chese to his make?  
Thou that semed so stedefast  
To th’emperour me wraied hast,  
To sle me thou hast take.  
In iwel time was it to me  
That Y ni me told to thee;  
Allas that ich sake.”  
For sorwe that he hadde tho  
O word no might he speke mo  
Bot stode and gan to quake.  
“Tirri,” seyd Gii, “drede thee nothing,  
Thou schalt today here gode tiding  
Thurth gr  
ace of Godes sond.  
The schrewed Douke Berard he is ded,  
Under the cité he is yleyde,  
Y slough him with min hond.”  
Tho was Tirri glad and blithe,  
To court he went also swithe  
For nothing wald he wond.  
―Sir emperour,‖ seyd Gii anon,  
―Now is Tirri comen hom  
To resceive his lond.‖   |
| 2570 |  
To chese to his make?  
Thou that semed so stedefast  
To th’emperour me wraied hast,  
To sle me thou hast take.  
In iwel time was it to me  
That Y ni me told to thee;  
Allas that ich sake.”  
For sorwe that he hadde tho  
O word no might he speke mo  
Bot stode and gan to quake.  
“Tirri,” seyd Gii, “drede thee nothing,  
Thou schalt today here gode tiding  
Thurth gr  
ace of Godes sond.  
The schrewed Douke Berard he is ded,  
Under the cité he is yleyde,  
Y slough him with min hond.”  
Tho was Tirri glad and blithe,  
To court he went also swithe  
For nothing wald he wond.  
―Sir emperour,‖ seyd Gii anon,  
―Now is Tirri comen hom  
To resceive his lond.‖   |
| 2580 |  
To chese to his make?  
Thou that semed so stedefast  
To th’emperour me wraied hast,  
To sle me thou hast take.  
In iwel time was it to me  
That Y ni me told to thee;  
Allas that ich sake.”  
For sorwe that he hadde tho  
O word no might he speke mo  
Bot stode and gan to quake.  
“Tirri,” seyd Gii, “drede thee nothing,  
Thou schalt today here gode tiding  
Thurth gr  
ace of Godes sond.  
The schrewed Douke Berard he is ded,  
Under the cité he is yleyde,  
Y slough him with min hond.”  
Tho was Tirri glad and blithe,  
To court he went also swithe  
For nothing wald he wond.  
―Sir emperour,‖ seyd Gii anon,  
―Now is Tirri comen hom  
To resceive his lond.‖   |
| 2590 |  
To chese to his make?  
Thou that semed so stedefast  
To th’emperour me wraied hast,  
To sle me thou hast take.  
In iwel time was it to me  
That Y ni me told to thee;  
Allas that ich sake.”  
For sorwe that he hadde tho  
O word no might he speke mo  
Bot stode and gan to quake.  
“Tirri,” seyd Gii, “drede thee nothing,  
Thou schalt today here gode tiding  
Thurth gr  
ace of Godes sond.  
The schrewed Douke Berard he is ded,  
Under the cité he is yleyde,  
Y slough him with min hond.”  
Tho was Tirri glad and blithe,  
To court he went also swithe  
For nothing wald he wond.  
―Sir emperour,‖ seyd Gii anon,  
―Now is Tirri comen hom  
To resceive his lond.‖   |
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,
“For 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
pilgrim
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
e 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.

2620
Y no seighe never ere this pilgrim
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 dede 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.

2630
And Tirri into his chaumber he nam
And richeliche gan him schrede.
He fonid 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 athold
Ac sikerliche he seyd he hold.

2640
With Tirri hom he yede.
When Tirri was comen hom
The pilgrim he wald anon
Sesen in al his lond.
And he forsoke 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 wiif he fond.

2650
Tho was sche founden 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 behits 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 were al his enimis,  
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 Tirri 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  
Ther thai duelled a litel while  
Tho gomes of michel might.  
―Tirri,‖ 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 bitho  
ught,  
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 fiften outlawes ken  
He slough hem al on rawe  
And slough the four knightes 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.  
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 pitable 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 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  
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 kne,
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.
―Tirri,‖ seyd Sir Gii tho,
―Thou schalt bileve and Y schal go;
Y biteche thee heven -
Bot Ich have a sone, ywis -
Y not whether he knight is
For he is bot a yongling -
Yif he have ani nede to thee
Help him for the love of me
Y pray thee in all thing.
Ich hope he schal be a gode knight,
Y entrust you to Heaven’s king.
But in truth, I have a son.
I do not know whether he is a knight
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.”
“Mercy, sir,” Thierry answered then.
“For God’s love, live here with me yet,
I pledge my oath with my hand
That I will endow you with all my land,
Both in town and tower.
I will be your man and serve you forever,
While my life might last,
To protect your honor.
And if you will not, I will go with you.
In faith, I would rather do so
Than stay with the emperor.”
“Enough, Sir Thierry, no more talk of it.
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,
I commend you to God, who rules all things
And made them with His hand.”

Thai kisten hem togider tho;
Olive thai seyghen hem never eft mo
As the gest doth ous understond.
Gret sorwe thai made at her parting
And kist hem w
Y biteche thee God that al thing walt
And maked with His hond.‖

Als swithe th'erl Tirri went him hom;
Thre days he no ete mete non,
In hert him was ful wo.
And when the countas sikerly
Herd seyn it was Sir Gii
That than was went hem fro
Sche upbreyd hir lord day and night
That he no had holden him with strengthe
And might / And laten him nought thenes gon.
Now went Gii forth in his way
Toward the see so swithe he may,
For Tirri he siked sare.
Into schip he went bilive,
Over the se he gan drive,
Into Inglond he gan fare.

And how he banished you out of the land
And is now disinherit,\textsuperscript{44}
And slain with great sorrow indeed,
And driven to ruin in disgrace.
I shall go and you will stay.
I commend you to God, who rules all things
And made them with His hand.”

The two then kissed each other.
They never saw each other alive again,
As the story has us understand.
They made great sorrow at their parting
And kissed with weeping eyes.
They went their separate ways.
As swiftly, 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\textsuperscript{45}
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,\textsuperscript{46}
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

\textsuperscript{44} And he now desirite is: Duke Berard is of course more than disinherit, 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., \textit{Livre de Roi} (c. 1200), in \textit{Crusader Institutions}, ed. Joshua Prawer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 433-4.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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 \textit{Garland Studies in Medieval Literature} 14 (New York: Garland, 1996).
And han purvayd withouten lesing
Thre days to ben in fasting
To biseke God in tron
He sende hem thurth His swet sond
A man that were douhti of hond
Ogain Colbrond to gon.
Ther is the king and the barnage, ywis,
For doute of her enemis
That wayt hem forto slon.
“For Sir Anlaf the king of Danmark
With a nost store and stark
Into Inglond is come
With fifteen thousand knightes of pris,
Alle this lond thai stroyen, ywis,
And mani a toun han nome.
A geaunt he hath brought with him
Out of Aufrike stout and grim,
Colbrond hat that gome.
For him is al Inglond forlore
Bot Godes help be bifore
That socour sende hem some.
Anlaf has sent word to the king
To yield all of England to him
And gif him trowage outright
If he no wil nought finde a baroun,
A geaunt other a champioun
To fight against Colbrand,
And therof thai han taken a day.
Ac our king non finde may
Erl, baroun, no knight,
No squier, no serjaunt non
Ogain the geaunt dar gon
So grim he is of sight.”
Than seyd Sir Gii, “Whare is Herhaud?
That in his time was so bald?”
And thai answerd ful swithe.
“To seche Gyes sone he is fare
That marchaunce hadde stollen thare,
For him he was unblithe.”
“And where is th’erl Rohaut of pris?”
And thai answerd, “Dede he is -
A gode while is go sithe -
And Felicia his douhter is his air,
So gode a levedi no so fair,
Ywis, nis non olive.”
Gii went to Winchester a ful gode pas
Ther the king that time was
To held his parlement;
The barouns weren in the halle.

And has arranged, without a lie,
To spend three days in fasting
To call on the throne of God,
That through His sweet grace
He will send a man hardy in arms
To face against Colbrand.
The king is there with the baronage, truly,
Because of fear of their enemies
Who lie in wait to slaughter them.
For Sir Anlaf, the king of Denmark,
Has come into England
With an army, fierce and strong,
And fifteen thousand picked knights.
They are ravaging all the land, indeed,
And have taken many a town.
He has brought with him a giant
Out of Africa, strong and grim.
Colbrand is the name of that creature.
Because of him all England is lost
Unless God’s favor is before them
To send them some help.
Anlaf has sent word to the king
To yield all of England to him
And to give him outright tribute\(^47\)
If he does not produce a baron,
A giant, or a champion,
To fight against Colbrand,
And for this they have set a day.
But our king cannot find
Any earl, baron, or knight,
No squier or any officer,
Who dares fight against the giant,
So fearsome is he to look upon.”
Then Sir Guy said, “Where is Herhaud,
Who was so bold in his time?”
And they answered promptly,
“He has set out to look for Guy,
Who was stolen away by traders.
For him he was inconsolable.”
“And where is the renowned Earl Rohaud?”
And they answered, “He is dead—
It has been a good while since—
And Felicia, his daughter, is his heir.
There’s no lady so good or fair
Indeed, none alive.”
Guy went to Winchester in great haste
Where the king was at that time
To hold his parliament.
The barons were in the hall.

\(^47\) *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 silently, 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,
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 right.
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,
So may 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 understond to me,
Y schal schewe thee al our nede:
The king of Danmark with gret wrong
Thurth a geaunt that is so strong
Wil strou al our thede.
―And whe han taken of him batayle
On what maner, saunfayle,
Y schal now tellen thee.
Thurth the bodi of a knight
Ogains that geaunt to hold fight
Schal this lond aquite be.
And pilgrim for Him that dyed on Rode
And that for ous schadde His blod
To bigge ous alle fre,
Take the batayle now on hond
And save ous the right of Inglond
For Seynt Charité.”
―Do way, leve sir,‖ seyd Gii,
―Icham an old man, a feble bodi;
Mi strengthe is fro me fare.”
The king fel on knes to grounde
Did send him a noble knight,
As you will learn from here on.
An angel from Heaven’s light appeared
And spoke directly to the king
Through the grace of God’s command.
He said, “King Athelston, are you asleep?
I am sent here by King Jesus
To attempt to comfort you.
Tomorrow, go quickly to the north gate.
When you have stood for a while.
You will see a pilgrim coming before long.
Ask him, for Saint Charity’s sake,
To accept the battle for you
And he will take it into his hand.”
The king was glad and at peace then.
In the morning he hurriedly rose
And went straight to the gate.
Two earls went there with him
And two bishops did as well.
The weather was fair and bright.
At the break of daylight,
The king saw the pilgrim coming;
He grasped him by his cloak.
―Pilgrim,‖ he said, “I ask you
To come home with me to the court
And lodge there all night.”
―Let me be, sir,‖ said the pilgrim,
―It is not time yet to take my room,
So may God help me.”
The king then implored him,
And the lordings did as well,
That he go with them to court.
―Pilgrim,‖ said the king, “for charity’s sake,
If it be your will, listen to me;
I will explain to you all our need.
With great injustice the king of Denmark,
Through a giant who is so strong,
Will destroy all our nation.
And we have agreed to combat with him,
The manner of which, without fail,
I will tell you now.
This land will be spared
Through the body of a knight
Who will face against the giant.
Pilgrim, for He who died on the Cross,
And who shed His blood for us
To redeem us all into freedom,
Accept the battle into your hand,
And save us the right of England
For Saint Charity!”
―Enough, good sir!‖ said Guy,
“I am an old man with a feeble body;
My strength has gone from me.”
The king fell on his knees to the ground
And crid him merci in that stounde  And begged for mercy in that place,  Yif it his wille ware,  If it were his will,  And the barouns dede also,  And the barons did the same.  O kne thai fellen alle tho  With sorrow and bitter sighs.  With sorwe and sikeing sare.  Sir Gii 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 Gii hadde of hem care,  And had compassion for them.  Sir Gii tok up the king anon  Sir Guy brought the king to his feet  And bad the lordinges everichon  And told the lordings, each of them,  Thai schuld up stond,  That they should stand up,  And seyd, ―For God in Trinite  And said, “For God in Trinity,  And forto make Inglond fre  And to make England free,  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 Inglond.  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 war wel fawe.  They were very eager to fight.  And Gii was armed swithe wel  And Guy was armed to the full  In a gode hauberk 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.  Which was beautiful to behold.  Trust and trewe was his ventayle  His face-guard was firm and strong,  Gloves and gambisoun and hosen of mayle  With gloves and jacket and mail-hose,  As gode knight have scholde;  As a good knight should have.  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.  Mirier was non on mold.  There were none more beautiful on earth!  And a swift-ermand 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 Gii 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.
Astow art mighti heven-king

3020
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,
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,

3030
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,
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,

3040
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 blede on the Cross,
Who saved Susanna from the lying men,
And protected Daniel from the lion,
Guide me and aid me today.
As You are the mighty king of Heaven,
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,
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 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 skilfully 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.

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\(^{51}\) 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.
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.
Thëi Gii were than sore agast
It was litel wonder.
Tho was Gii sore desmayd
And in his hert wel ivel ypayd
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 other 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.
By 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.”
Colbrand swore bi Apolin,
―Of al the wepen that is min
Her schaltow non afong.

Now thou wilt nought do bi mi rede
Thou schalt dye on iwel dede
Er that it be ought long.”
When Gii herd him speke so
Al sone he gan him turn tho
And to his wepen he geth
Ther his axes stode bi hemselfe;
He kept on with a wel gode helve
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,
“How schal the Inglis be slain in feld!
England will yield to us great tribute
And will be our servant foreevermore.”
“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.”
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.”
Colbrand swore by Apollon, 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 speke 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,

52 Apolin: Apollon, 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 swerd into the erthe went
A fot and more, Y wene.
And with Colbrandes out-draught
Sir Gii with ax a strok him raught
A wounde that was wele sene.
So smertliche he smot to Colbrond
That his right arm with alle the hond
He strok of quite and clene.
When Colbrond fell him so smite
He was wel wroth ye may wel wite,
He gan his swerd up fond
And in his left hond op it haf
Gii 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, a
And King Athelston,
Thai toke Sir Gii 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 Gii unarmed him and was ful blithe;
His sclavain he axed also swithe,
No lenger he nold abide.
“Sir pilgrim,” than seyd the king,
“Whenhnes thou art withouten lesing?
Thou art douhty 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 Laudamus 53
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,
“How 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 treu the 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,  
“Tell me for Him that made man  
- For nothing thou ne spare  
- Tell me what thi name it be,  
Whennes thou art and of what cuntré  
Or Y schal tel it thee."

―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, ―understond to me.  
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."

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 fro him wald his way  
On knees he fel adoum to grounde,  
“Leve Sir Gii,” in that stounde,  
“Merci,” he gan to say.

“For Godes love bileve with me  
And mi treu the Y schal plight thee  
That Y schal this day  
Sese and give into thine hond  
Half the reme of Ingland;  
For Godes love say nought nay.”
“Sir King,” seyd Gii, “Y nil nought so. Have thou thi lond for evermo And God Y thee biteche; Ac yif Herhaud to thi lond com And bring with him Reynbroun mi sone Help him Y thee biseche. For thi er bothe hende and fre, On Herhaud thou might trust thee To take of thine fon wreche.”

Thai kisten hem togider tho Al wepeand thai wenten ato Withouten ani more speche. The king wel sore wepe for pité And went him hom to his meyne With a mournand chere. His folk ogaines him gan gon And asked the king anon What man the pilgrim were. They seyd, “He is a douhti knight. Wald Jhesu ful of might He wald leve with ous here.” The king seyd, “Al stille ye be. What he is your non schal wite for me, Iwis, of al this yere.” Sir Gii went in his way forth right, Oft he thonked God Almight That the geaunt was slawe. To Warwike he went to that cité Ther he was lord of that cuntré To hold with right lawe. He nas knownen ther of no man When he to the castel gates cam, Therof he was ful fawe. Among the pouer men he him dede Ther thai weren up in a stede And sette him on a rawe. And Felisi the countas was ther than. In this world was non better wiman, In gest as so we rede, For thritten pouer men and yete mo For hir lordes love sche loved so, Ich day sche gan fede With than God and our Levedi

“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 Reinerboun, 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 bitterley 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.” The king said, “Be still, all of you. None of you will learn from me who he is, In truth, for all this year.” 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. For love of her lord, she cared for Thirteen poor men and more yet. Each day she fed them: With the hope that God and our Lady

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.
| Line 3350 | Schuld save hir lord Sir Gii
And help him at his nede.
Sche no stint noither 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 thruth Godes 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,\textsuperscript{56}
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

\textsuperscript{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
Bot 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 goth forth and Gii bileft stille,
His bedes he bad with gode wille
To Jhesu Heven-king.
And when his term was nere gon
His knave he cleped to him anon
And seyd withouten lesing,
―Sone,‖ he seyd, ―Y pray now thee
Go to Warwike that cité
Withouten more duelling;
With grete solempneté.‖
The angel goth forth and Gii bileft stille,
His bedes he bad with gode wille
To Jhesu Heven-king.
And when his term was nere gon
His knave he cleped to him anon
And seyd withouten lesing,
―Sone,‖ he seyd, ―Y pray now thee
Go to Warwike that cité
Withouten more duelling;
With grete solempneté.‖
The angel departed and left Guy in stillness.
He made his prayers with good will
To Jesus, Heaven’s king.
And when his time 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,
Greets 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 hermite 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 blis
Ther joies her ful swete.”

The knave went forth anon,
Into Warwike he gan gon
Bifor that levedi 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.‖

The levedi was glad of that tiding
And thonked Jhesu Heven king
And was in hert ful blithe
That sche scheid sen hir lord Sir Gii;
Ac for o thing sche was sori
That he schuld dye so spinne
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
With knights and with lovely ladies. They set her on a mule, And with all the finest of the city She went to the hermitage, As you may listen and learn. When they had come to the hermitage They dismounted, all and some, And she went straight inside. When she saw her lord, Sir Guy, She wept and made a doleful cry With a mournful voice. As Sir Guy looked on her there, His soul began to pass from his body. A thousand angels and seven Received the soul of Guy And bore it with great melody Into the bliss of Heaven. Then the lady was full of grief, For her lord had gone from her, And “Alas!” was her refrain. She kissed his mouth, and his chin as well, And wept with both her eyes And wrung her hands. Our Lord performed a great honor for Guy. A sweet scent came from his body That lasted all that day, So that of all the spices in this world, None could have cast a sweeter fragrance Than was among them. The lady swiftly sent her summons To the bishops and abbots of the land, The best that might be found. And when that fair company had arrived To Warwick, they wished to honor him As a lord of great authority. But all the people who were there Could not move him from that place Where he lay on the ground. A hundred men were around him But could not bear him away From there for his heaviness. Then the lady said, “Let him be. I will never have him moved Or allow him to be taken away. He sent me his decree with his page To bury him in this hermitage, Simply, without showiness.” They took a box of marble stone And laid his body inside, Attired in knight’s clothes. There was a stately funeral With the bishops and abbots who were there, And clerks to sing and read. When they had buried his body,
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.

Felicia lives another fifteen days, the same length of time that she and Guy were together in marriage (221).

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

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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,"3 and Crane cites King Horn as a
narratively repetitive poem endorsing a conservative view of kingship.4 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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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.

Guy,\textsuperscript{9} 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.\textsuperscript{10}

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.\textsuperscript{11} 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


\textsuperscript{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*. Although the following list alters sequence, using a few selected elements from Baugh’s list suggests deliberate patterns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Description</th>
<th>Line Numbers</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>They crash together</em> and smitten togider with dentes grete* (1157)</td>
<td>with hard strokes forto drive / thai gun hem to asayle (2477-9)</td>
<td>Sir Gii to him gan to drive / that his spere brast afive (3109-10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Some armor jewels fly off</em> alle the stones of michel might / fleyghe doun in the feld* (1193-4)</td>
<td>alle the floures feir and bright / he dede hem fleyghe atuinne (2489-90)</td>
<td>his floures everichon / and his gode charbukel ston / wel even he carf atuo (3136-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Spear breaks, horse is killed</em> the stedes nek he dede also* (1202)</td>
<td>and lopen togider til schaftes brest (2222)</td>
<td>that sadel and hors atuo he smot (3118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Both fight as if crazed</em> and ferd as thai wer wode* (1158)</td>
<td>leyd on as thai were wode (2228)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Prayers</em> “Lord,” seyd Gii, “God Almighty”* (1216)</td>
<td>“Lord, merci,” Tirri gan say (2281)</td>
<td>to our Levedi he gan calle (3162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Opponent taunts hero</em> trewelich yeld thou thee to me* (1466)</td>
<td>thi wordes that er so prout / schal be ful dere abought (2129-30)</td>
<td>do now wele, yeld thee to me (3172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Opponent’s limb chopped off</em> the right arme with the swerd fot-hot* (1570)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>his right arme with alle the hond / he strok of quite and clene (3115-6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Enemy decapitated</em> he strok of his heved* (1596)</td>
<td>bothe helmes he carf atuo / and his heved he dede also (2500-1)</td>
<td>his heved fro the bodi he smot (3223)</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

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our early romances,” 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 onfundon 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

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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 sagh 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. 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

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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

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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.
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 $3 \times 5 = 15$? 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

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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.”^20^ 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.^21^ 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.\textsuperscript{22} Yet the stanzaic \textit{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.\textsuperscript{23}

This rather risky speculation on the stanzaic \textit{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.”\textsuperscript{24} Yet the poem was popular and has numerous rhetorical echoes in \textit{Sir Thopas}, resulting in thorny but necessary questions of how Chaucer and his audience might have perceived \textit{Guy}. We know that Chaucer was fond enough of numbers to write his \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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


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1 Herkneth to me, gode men -
    Wives, maydnes, and alle men -
    Of a tale that ich you wile telle,
    Wo so it wile here and therto dwelle.
The tale is of Havelok imaked:
    Whil he was litel, he yede ful naked.
Havelok was a ful god gome -
    He was ful god in everi trome;
    He was the wicteste man at nede
    That thurt e riden on ani stede.
That ye mowen now yhere,
    And the tale you mowen ylere,
    At the biginnig of ure tale,
    Fil me a cuppe of ful god ale;
And wile drinken, her I spelle,
    That Crist us shilde alle fro helle.
Krist late us hevere so for to do
    That we moten comen Him to;
And, witthat it mote ben so,
    Benedicamus Domino!
Here I schal biginnen a rym;

20 Pay attention to me, good men,
    Wives, maidens, and everyone else
    To a tale that I will tell you
    For whoever wants to stay and hear it.
The story is about Havelock,
    Who when he was little went half-naked.
Havelock was a good man,
    The best in every company.
    He was the bravest man in need
    Who might ride on any steed!
So that you may hear me,
    And so that you might know the tale,
    At the beginning of our story,
    Fill me a cup of your best ale.
And while drinking, while I tell it,
    May Christ shield us all from Hell!
    May Christ protect us forever
    So that we might come to Him,
And, so that it may be so,1
    Let us praise the Lord!
    Here I’ll begin the rhyme,

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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).

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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;
Hym lovede yung, him lovede holde -
Erl and barun, dreng and thayn,
Knict, bondeman, and swain,
Wydues, maidens, prestes and clerkes,
And al for hise gode werkes.
He lovede 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,
And heye hengen on galwe tre -
For hem ne yede gold ne fee!
In that time a man that bore
Wel fifty pund, I wot, or more,
Of red gold upon hiis bac,
In a male with or blac,
Ne funde he non that him misseyde,
Ne with ivle on hond leyde.
Thanne micthe chapmen fare
Thuruth Englond 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 brouth,
And pouere maked and browt to mouth.
Thanne was Engelond at hayse -
Michel was swich a king to preysye
That held so Englond 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 fellede 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.

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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 sho ne couthee
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 m
eself 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 nevere 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 hete,
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 speak with her mouth.
Then he was taken by a violent illness,\(^5\)
So that he knew well and understood
That his death was coming.
And he said, “Christ, 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.”\(^6\)
When he had made this plea,
He shivered strongly after.\(^7\)
At once he sent out writs
To his earls, each one of them,
And to his barons, rich and poor,
From Roxburgh through to Dover,\(^8\)
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 yerne 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 Winchester ther he lay,  
“Welcome,” he sayde, “be ye ay!  
Ful michel thank kan I you  
That ye aren comen to me now.”  
Quanne he weren alle set,  
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 movere 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 movere wel ben quene.”  
The king was payed of that rede,  
A wol fair cloth bringen he dede,  
And thereon leyde the messebok,  
The caliz, and the pateyn ok,  
The corporau  
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 curteysye,  
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 Godrich 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 old10  
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 micthe 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 
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 micte men finde 
So mikel men micte him in winde, 
Of his in arke ne in chiste,

In Engelond, that noman wiste; 
For al was yoven, faire and wel, 
That him was leved no catel.

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 micte men se
The meste sorwe that micte 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 coffor 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 sauteres deden he manie reden,
That God self shulde his soule leden
Into hevene biforn his Sone,
And ther wituten hende wone.
Than he was to the erthe brouth,
The riche erl ne foryat nouth

250
That he ne dede al Engelond
Sone sayse intil his hond,
And in the castels leth he do
The knictes 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.
Twenti winter hold and more.

Than he havede taken this oth
Of erles, baruns, lef and loth,
Of knictes, cherles, fre and thewe,
Justises dede he maken newe
Al Engelond to faren thorw
Fro Dovere into Rokesborw.

12
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 kings dowther bigan thrive
And wex the fairest wman on live.
Of alle thewes was she wis
That gode weren and of pris.
The mayden Goldeboru was hoten;
For hire was mani a ter igroten.
Quanne the Erl Godrich him herde
Of that mayden - hw wel she ferde,
Hw wis sho was, hw chaste, hw fayr,
And that sho was the rithe eyr

They soon after rang bells,
Monks and priests sang mass,
And they read out many psalm books,
Praying that God Himself would lead his soul
Into Heaven before His Son
To live with Them there without end.
After 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 ears 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.

And forto haven alle at his cri,
At his wille, at hise merci,
That non durste ben him ageyn -
Erl ne barun, knict ne sweyn.
Wislike for soth was him wel
Of folc, of wepne, of catel:
Sothlike, in a lite thrawe
Al Engelond of him stod awe
Al Engelond was of him adrad,
So his the beste fro the gad.

280
The kings dowther bigan thrive
And wex the fairest wman on live.
Of alle thewes was she wis
That gode weren and of pris.
The mayden Goldeboru was hoten;
For hire was mani a ter igroten.
Quanne the Erl Godrich him herde
Of that mayden - hw wel she ferde,
Hw wis sho was, hw chaste, hw fayr,
And that sho was the rithe eyr

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.
| 290 | Of Engelond, of al the rike;  
Tho bigan Godrich to sike,  
And seyde, “Wether she sholde be  
Quen and levede 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 ere more hwil I live!  
She is waxen al to prud,  
For gode metes and noble shrud,  
That hic have yoven hire to offte;  
Hic have yemed hire to softe.  
Ich have a sone, a ful fayr knave;  
He sha  
ll 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  
Pourleike 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 wren.  
Of Goldeboru shul we now laten,  
That nouth ne blinneth forto graten  |
|---|---|
| 300 | Of England, of all the kingdom,  
Then Godrich began to complain,  
And griped, “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 |

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Heye hangen on galwe tre
That hire haved in sorwe brouth,
So as sho ne misdede nouth.
Say we now forth in hure spelle!
In that time, so it bifelle,

340 Was in the lond of Denemark
A riche king and swythe stark.
The name of him was Birkabeyn;
He havede mani knict and sweyn;
He was fayr man and wict,
Of bodi he was the beste knicth
That evere micte leden uth here,
Or stede on ride or handlen spere.
Thre children he havede bi his wif -
He hem lovede so his lif.

350 He havede a sone, douhtres two,
Swith e 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 mouthe 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 spear.
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 days 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 ride 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 best¹⁵
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,

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 mouthe 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 made of Denemark. He wel trowede that he seyde, And on Godard handes leyde; And seyde, “Here bitteche 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,
That thou mine children shalt wel yeme,
That hire kin be ful wel queme,
Til mi sone mowe ben knicth.
Thanne bitteche him tho his ricth:
Denemark and that ther til longes -
Casteles and tunes, wodes and wonges.”
Godard stirt up and s\v\or al that
The king him bad, and sithen sat
Bi the knicthes that ther ware,
That wenpen 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 sperd 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 evre in erthe shaped was.
Withuten on, the wike Judas.
Have he the malisun today
Of alle that evre spoken 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 himselfe ran on blode!
Crist warie him with His mouth!
Waried wrthe he of north and suth,
Offe alle men that speken kunne,  
Of Crist that made mone and sunne!  
Thanne he havede of al the lond  
Al the folk tilled intil his hond,  
And alle haveden sworn him oth,  
Riche and pour, lef and loth,  
That he sholden hise wille freme  
And that he shulde him nouth greme,  
He thouthe a ful strong trechery,  
A trayson and a felony,  
Of the children for to make -  
The devel of helle him sone take!  
Hwan that was thouth  
onon he ferde  
To the tour ther he woren sperde,  
Ther he greten for hunger and cold.  
The knave, that was sumdel bold,  
Kam him ageyn, on knes him sette,  
And Godard ful feyre he ther grette.  
And Godard seyde, “Wat is yw?  
Hwi grete ye and goulen now?”  
“For us hungreth swithe sore” -  
Seyden he, “we wolden more:  
We ne have to hete, ne we ne have  
Her inne neythre knith ne knave  
That yeveth us drinke ne no mete,  
Halvendel that we moun ete  
Wo is us that we weren born!  
Alwai! nis it no korn  
That men micte maken of bred?  
Us hungreth - we aren ney ded!”  
Godard herde here wa,  
Ther-offe yaf he nouth a stra,  
But tok the maydnes bothe samen,  
Al so it were up on his gamen,  
Al so he wolde with hem leyke  
That weren for hunger grene and bleike.  
Of bothen he karf on two here throtes,  
And sithen hem al to grotes.  
Ther was sorwe, wo-so it sawe,  
Hwan the children by the wawe  
Leyen and sprawleden in the blod.  
Havelok it saw and therbi stod -  
Ful sori was that sely knave.  
Mikel dred he mouthe have,  
For at hise herte he saw a knif  
For to reven him hise lyf.  
But the knave, that litel was,  
He knelede biffer that Judas,  
And seyde, “Loure, mercy now!  
Manrede, louer, biddi you:  
Al Denemak I wile you yeve,  
To that forward thu late me live.  
Here hi wile on boke swere  
That nevremore ne shal I bere  
By all men who can speak,  
By Christ, who made the moon and sun.  
For after then he had all the land,  
And all the folk, tilled into his hand,  
And all had to swear him oaths,  
Rich and poor, fair and foul,  
That they would perform his will,  
And that they would not oppose him.  
He worked up a villainous treachery,  
A treason and a felony,  
To carry out on the children.  
May the devil soon take him to Hell!  
When that was planned, he went on  
To the tower where they were kept,  
Where they wept for hunger and cold.  
The boy, who had more courage,  
Came to him and set himself on his knees,  
And greted Godard courteously.  
Godard said, “What’s the matter with you?  
Why are you all bawling and yowling?”  
“Because we are bitterly hungry,” he said.  
“We need more to eat.  
We have no heat, nor do we have  
Either a knight or a servant in here  
Who gives us half the amount of food  
Or drink that we could eat.  
Woe is us that we were born!  
Alas! Is there not even grain  
That someone could make bread from?  
We are hungry and we are nearly dead!”  
Godard heard their plea,  
And did not care a straw about it,  
But lifted up both of the girls together,  
Who were green and pale from hunger,  
As if it were a game,  
As if he were playing with them.  
He slashed both of their throats in two,  
And then cut them to pieces.  
There was sorrow in whoever saw it  
When the children lay by the wall,  
Sprawled in the blood.  
Havelock saw it and stood there.  
The innocent boy was full of grief.  
He must have been frozen in terror,  
For he saw a knife pointed at his heart  
To rob him of his life.  
But the boy, who was so small,  
Kneeled before that Judas,  
And said, “Lord, have mercy now!  
Lord, I offer you homage.  
I will give you all of Denmark,  
On the promise that you let me live.  
I will swear on the Bible right here  
That I will never bear against you
Ayen thee, louerd, sheld ne spere,  
Ne other wepne that may you dere.  
Loureid, have merci of me!  
Today I wile fro Denemark fle,  
Ne neveremore comen agheyn!  
Sweren I wole that Bircabein  
Nevere yete me ne gat.”

Hwan the devel herde that,  
Sumdel 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 nouth ne slou,  
But for rewenesse him witdrow -  
Of Avelok rewede him ful sore,  
And thoucte he wolde that he ded wore,  
But for rewnesse him witdrow  
- Of Avelok rewede him ful sore.

“Yif I late him lives go,  
He micte me wirchen michel wo -  
Grith ne get Ineveremo;  
He maye me wartn for to slo.  
And if he brouct of live,  
And mine children wolden thrive,  
Louerdinges after me  
Of al Denemark michten 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 fishere that he wende  
That wolde al his wille do,  
And sone anon he seyd him to:  
“Grim, thou wost thu art my thral;  
Wille don my wille al  
That I wile bidden thee?  
Tomorwen shal maken thee fre,  
And aucyte thee yeven and riche make,  
Withthan 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,  
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 bide his time to kill me.  
And if his life we re 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.”

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 tortured 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 miete laste,  
That weren of ful strong line.  

Tho was Havelok in ful strong pine -  
Wiste he nevher her wat was wo!  
Jhesu Crist, that makede go  
The halte and the doumbe spaken,  
Havelok, thee of Godard wreke!  
Hwan Grim him havede faste bounden,  
And sithen in an eld cloth wenden,  
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.  

When you see the moonlight,  
Go into the sea and throw him in it.  
I will take on myself all the sin.”  
Grim took the boy and tied him up tightly,  
While the bonds might last,  
Which were made of strong rope.  
Then Havelock was in great pain;  
He never knew before what torment was!  
May Jesus Christ, who makes the lame walk  
And the dumb speak,  
Wreak revenge on Godard for Havelock!  

When Grim had tied him up fast,  
And then bound him in an old cloth,  
He tightly shoved in his mouth  
A gag of filthy rags,  
So that he could not speak or snort out  
Wherever he might carry or lead him.  
When he had done that deed  
And obeyed the traitor’s orders,  
That he should take him out  
And soak him in the sea  
In a bag, big and black,  
Which was the agreement they made,  
He immediately threw him on his back  
And took him home to his hut.  
Grim entrusted him to his wife Leve,  
And said, “Watch this boy  
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.  
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!”

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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 wey, or I wol caste a ston” (CT 1.3712), perhaps reflecting the same practice.
| 580 | **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?**  
|     | **Ne wile I nouth be forloren.**  
|     | **I shal beren him to the se**  
|     | **Thou wost that hoves me**  
| 590 | **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,**  
|     | **Aboute the knave ther he lay,**  
|     | **Of hise mouth it stod a stem**  
|     | **Als it were a sunnebem;**  
|     | **Als so lith was it therinne**  
|     | **So ther brenden cerges inne.**  
|     | **“Jesu Crist!” wat Dame Leve,**  
|     | **“Hwat is that lith in ure cleve?”**  
| 600 | **He stirten bothe up to the knave**  
|     | **For man shal god wille have,**  
|     | **Unkeveleden him and swithe unbounden,**  
|     | **And sone anon him funden,**  
|     | **Als he tirveden of his serk,**  
|     | **On hise rith shuldre a kynmerk,**  
|     | **A swithe brith, a swithe fair.**  
|     | **“Goddot!” quath Grim, “this ure eir,**  
|     | **That shal louerd of Denemark!**  
|     | **He shal ben king, strong and stark;**  
|     | **He shal havem in his hand**  
|     | **Al 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!”**  
| 620 | **Louerd, we aren bothe thine -**  
|     | **Thine cherles, thine hine.**  
|     | **Louerd, we sholen thee wel fede**  

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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.
Until you know how to ride a steed,
Until you know well how to bear
A helmet on your head with shield and spear.
Godard, that foul traitor,
Will never know, for sure.
I will never be a free man, Lord,
Except through you.
You, my lord, will release me,
For I will protect and watch over you.
Through you I will have freedom.”
Then Havelock was a happy lad.
He sat up and asked for bread,
And said, “I am nearly dead,
What with hunger, what with the ropes
That you laid on my hands,
And at last because of the gag
That was stuck fast in my mouth.
With all that I was so tightly pressed
That I was nearly strangled!”
Leve said, “God knows, I’m just pleased
That you can eat. I will fetch you
Bread and cheese, butter and milk,
And meat pies and desserts.
We’ll soon feed you well with these things,
My lord, in your great need.
It’s true what people say and swear;‘No one can harm whom God wishes to help.’”
When she had brought some food,
At once Havelock began to eat
Ravenously, and was very pleased;
He could not hide his hunger.
He ate a loaf, I know, and more,
For he was half-starved.
For three days before then, I guess,
He had eaten nothing—that was clear to see!
When he had eaten and was content,
Grim made him a comfortable bed,
Took his clothes off, and tucked him in,
And said, “Sleep, son, in great peace.
Sleep fast and do not be afraid of anything.
You have been brought from sorrow to joy.”
Soon it was the light of day.
Grim made his way
To the wicked traitor Godard,
Who was the steward of Denmark,
And said, “My lord, I have done
What you ordered me to do with the boy.
He is drowned in the water.
With a firm anchor around his neck.

\[23\] 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.
Yf 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 thoucte to late that he
ran
Fro that traytour, that wicke man,
And thoucte, “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.”

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 wele 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 sholdel therinne do.
Hwan he havedet greythed so,
Havelok the yunge he dede therinne,
Him and his wif, hise sones thrinne,
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 woren 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 hear.

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.

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.

“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.

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 ware.
Kam he nevere hom hand -
That he ne broucte bred and sowel
In his shirte or in his cowel,
In his poke benes and korn -
Hise swink he havede he nowt forlorn.
And hwan he took the grete lamprey,
Ful wel he coute the rithe wei
To Lincolne, 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, shepes and swines;
And hemp to maken of gode lines,
And stronge ropes to hise netes,
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 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 -  
Ich woth ne shal it me nouth dere,  
They ther be inne a bithene gret  
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 panier on his bac,  
With fish giveled 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 -  
Wit held he nouth a ferthinges nok.

He went out this way each day  
And was so eager to learn his trade  
That he never idled at home again.

But it so happened that a bad harvest  
Brought a shortage of grain for bread,  
So that Grim could find no good solution  
To how he should feed his household.

He was very anxious about Havelock,  
For he was strong and could eat  
More than every mouthe there could get.

Nor could Grim catch on the sea  
Either cod or skate,  
Nor any other fish that would serve  
To feed his family.

He was very worried about Havelock  
And how he might fare.

He did not think of his other children;  
All of his thoughts were on Havelock,  
And he said, “Havelock, dear son,  
I fear that we must all die from hunger,  
For this famine is so bad  
And our food is long gone.

It would be better if you go on  
Than to stay here for long.

You might leave here too late.  
You know very well the right way  
To Lincoln, the fine town,  
For you have been there often enough.  
As for me, my efforts aren’t worth a bean.

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,  
The herles mete he bouth  
Of Cornwalie and kalde oft:  
―Bermen, bermen, hider forth alle!”

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.  
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 birthene of his croun,
The kok stod and on him low,
And thoute him stalworthe 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 o of here hides;
Ful wel kan ich dishes swilen,
And don al that ye evere wilene.”
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 nyte,
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 pleye.  
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,  
Knicctes, 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 big  
an 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,  
Non that evere moder bere;  
It was nevere m  
an that yemede  
In kinneriche that so wel semede  
King or casyer for to be,  
Than he was shrid, so semede he;  
For thanne he weren alle samen  
At Linconle at the gamen,  
And the erles men worn al thore,  
Than was Havelok bi the shuldren more  
Than the meste that ther kam:  
In armes him noman nam  
That he doune sone ne caste.  
Havelok stod over hem als a mast;  
Als he was heie, als he was long,  
He was bothe stark and strong -  
In Engelond non hise per  
Of strengthe that evere kam him ner.  
Als he was strong, so was he softe;  
They a man him misdede ofte,  
Neveremore he him misseyde,  
Ne hond on him with yvele leyde.  
Of bodi was he mayden clene;  

He could fully hide his sorrows.  
There was no boy so little  
Who wanted to sport or have fun  
That he would not play with him.  
For all the children who came his way,  
He did everything they wanted,  
And played with them to their fill.  
He was loved by all, meek and bold,  
Knights, children, young, and old.  
All took to him who saw him,  
Both high and low men.  
Word spread far and wide of him,  
How he was great, how he was strong,  
How handsome a man God had made him,  
Except that he was almost naked.  
For he had nothing to wear  
Except a rough cloak,  
Which was so dirty and foul  
That it was not worth a stick of firewood.  
The cook began to feel sorry for him  
And brought him brand new clothes.  
He bought him both hose and shoes,  
And soon made him put them on.  
When he was clothed, hosed, and in shoes  
There was no one so handsome under God  
Who was ever yet on earth,  
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.

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.
With hem com mani chambioun,
Mani with ladde, blac and brown,
And fel it so that yungemen,
Wel abouten nine or ten,
Bigunnen the for to leyke.

Thider komen bothe stronge and wayke,
Thider komen lesse and more
That in the boru thanne weren thore -
Chaunpiouns and starke laddes,
Bondemen with here gaddes,
Als he comen fro the plow.
There was sembling inow;
For it ne was non horse-

With hire ne wolde he leyke ne lye,
No more than it were a strie.

In that time Earl Godrich
Had all of England in his hand,
And he ordered into the town
Many earls and many barons,
And all who were alive
In England then were there,
For they had been sent for
To be present at the parliament.\(^3^5\)
With them came many champions,
Many with servants of all sorts,
And so it happened that young men,
Well about nine or ten,
Began to play sports there.
Both the strong and weak came there.
Both the lesser and greater came
Who were there in the town then:
Heroes and rugged lads,
And bondsmen with their cattle prods
Who had just come from the plow.
The assembly was large enough,
For there was no stable boy
Who did not come to see the games,
Even if he should have been on duty.
Before their feet they laid a tree,
Where the strong lads, a good number,
Shot-put with a giant stone.
The stone was solid and huge as well,
And as heavy as an ox.
It would have to be a very hardy man
Who might lift it to his knee.
There was neither cleric nor priest
Who might bring it to his chest.
With it the athletes shot-put,
Those who had come with the barons.
Whoever there who could throw it
Further than an inch or more,
Whether he was young or old.

\(^{34}\) 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 therilo -
And of puttinge 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 puttinge gang,
But seye, “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 ladders 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

| He was considered a hero. | And so they stood and watched intently, |
| And so they stood and watched intently, | The athletes and the lads as well, |
| The athletes and the lads as well, | And they made a heated argument |
| And they made a heated argument | About who had made the greatest shot, |
| About who had made the greatest shot, | Havelock stood and looked at it |
| Havelock stood and looked at it | But he knew nothing about putting, |
| But he knew nothing about putting, | For he had never seen |
| For he had never seen | Or thrown the stone before then, |
| Or thrown the stone before then, | His master told him to go try |
| His master told him to go try | As he was best able to do, |
| As he was best able to do, | Though his master asked him, |
| Though his master asked him, | He was sorely doubtful of himself. |
| He was sorely doubtful of himself. | With that, he got up quickly |
| With that, he got up quickly | And plucked up that heavy stone |
| And plucked up that heavy stone | Which he was supposed to put, |
| Which he was supposed to put, | On the first try he threw it |
| On the first try he threw it | Farther than anyone who was there, |
| Farther than anyone who was there, | Twelve feet and somewhat more. |
| Twelve feet and somewhat more. | When the champions saw that shot, |
| When the champions saw that shot, | They jostled each other and laughed. |
| They jostled each other and laughed. | They would not put any more, only saying |
| They would not put any more, only saying | “We’ve 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 hexte that mithe live,
The beste, the fairest, the strongest ok -
That gart he me sweren on the bok.
Hwere mithe I finden ani so hey,
So Havelock is, or so sley?
Thou I southe hethen into Inde,

37 Thee: Some editors read we in the manuscript here, as there is some textual confusion between þe and pe.
So fayr, so strong, ne mithe I finde.  
Havelok is that ilke knave  
That shal Goldeboru have!"

This thouthe with trechery,  
With traysoun, and wit felony;  
For he wende that Havelok wore  
Sum cherles sone and no more;  
Ne shulde he haven of Engellond  
Onlepi foru in his hond  
With hire that was therof eyr,  
That bothe was god and swithe fair.

He wende that Havelok wer a thral,  
Therthoru he wende haven al  
In Engelond, that hire rith was.  
He was werse than Sathanas  
That Jhesu Crist in erthe stoc.  
Hanged worthe he on an hok!

After Goldeboru sone he sende,  
That was bothe fayr and hende,  
And dide hire to Lincolne bringe.  
Belles dede he ageyn hire ringen,  
And joie he made hire swithe mikel;  
But netheless he was ful swikel.

He saide that he sholde hire yeve  
The fayreste man that mithe live.  
She anweredde and saide anon,  
By Crist and bi Seint Johan,  
That hire sholde noman wedde  
Ne noman bringen hire to bedde  
But he were king or kinges eyr,  
Were he nevere man so fayr.

Godrich the erl was swithe wroth  
That she swor swilk an oth,  
And saide, ―Whether thou wilt be  
Quen and levedi over me?  
Thou shalt have a gadeling -  
Ne shalt thou haven non other king!  
Thee shal spusen mi cokes knave -  
Ne shalt thou non other lourered have.  
Datheitt that thee other yeve  
Everemore hwil I live!

Tomorrow ye sholen ben weddeth,  
And maugre thin togidere beddeth.

Goldboru gret and yaf hire ille;  
She wolde ben ded bi hire wille.  
On the morwen hwan day was sprungen  
And day-belle at kirke rungen,  
After Havelok sente that Judas  
That werse was thanne Sathanas,  
And saide, ―Maister, wilte wi?‖  
―Nay,‖ quoth Havelok, ―bi my lif!  
Hwat sholde ich with wi do?  
I ne may hire fede ne clothe ne sho.

Wider sholde ich wimman bringe?

I would not find someone so fair, so mighty.  
Havelock is the very boy  
That Goldeboru 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 Godeboro, 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 ne have none kines thinge -
I ne have hws, I ne have cote,
Ne I ne have stikke, I ne have sprote,
I ne have neythir bred ne sowel,
Ne cloth but of an hold whit covel.
This clothes that ich onne have
Aren the kokes and ich his knave!"

Godrich stirt up and on him dong,
With dintes swithe hard and strong,
And seyde, “But thou hire take
That I wolde yeven thee to make,
I shal hangen thee ful heye,
Or I shal thristen uth thin heie.”

Havelok was one and was odrat,
And grauntede him al that he bad.
Tho sende he after hire sone,
The fayrest wymman under mone,
And seyde til hire, fals and slike,
That wicke thrall that foule swike:
“Unless you accept this man,
Or I will gouge out your eyes!”

She was adrad for he so thrette,
And durste nouth the spusing lette;
But they hire likede swithe ille,
She thouthe it was Godes wille
God, who makes to growen the korn,
And who criped her to be born.
When he had compellede them by drede,
That he sholde hire spusen and fede,
And that she sholde til him holde,
There weren penies thicke tolde
A great plenty, upon the mass bok.
He gave her tokens and she accepted his.

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).
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.  
He told us to pass on to you  
Gold and silver and all other goods.  
We have sheep, we have pigs;
Bileve her, louerd, and al be thin!
Tho shalt ben louerd, thou shalt ben syre,
And hure sistres sholen do
Al that evere biddles sho:
He sholen hire clothes washen and wringen,
And to hondes water brigen;
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 brooth 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 shal
Denemark haven and Englund al.
He shal ben king strong and stark,
Of Engelond and Denemark -
That shal thut whit tin 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

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41 Wesseyl: ‘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 aungel 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 eveire yete cam I til.

It was so hey that I wel mouthe
Al the word se, als me thouthe.
Als I sat upon that Iowe
I bigan Danemark for to awe,
The borwes and the castles stronge;
And mine armes weren so longe
That I faimede 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 knes bigunnen for to falle -
The keyes fellen at mine fet.
Another drem dremede me ek:
That ich fley 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 shal knele to thi fet;
Alle the castles that aren therinne
Shaltou, lemman, ful wel winne.
I woth so wel so ich it sowe,
Of the angel from Heaven,
She was glad so many times over
That she could not contain her joy,
But at once kissed Havelock,
Who slept and knew nothing
Of what the angel had said.
In a while he started out of his sleep
And said, ―Dear, are you asleep?
I just dreamed an amazing dream;
Listen now to what happened.
It seemed as though I was in Denmark,
But on one of the highest hills
That I ever came to yet.
It was so high that it seemed to me
I could see all the world.
As I sat upon that summit,
I began to embrace Denmark,
The towns and the strong castles,
And my arms were so long
That I held everything in Denmark
At once with my long limbs!
And then I drew my arms back
Toward myself and to lift up
Everyone who ever lived in Denmark,
Holding them fast within my arms.
And all the strong castles
Began to fall to their knees,
And the keys fell at my feet.
I dreamed another dream too,
That I flew over the salty sea to England,
And everyone came with me
Who was alive in Denmark,
Except for bondsmen and their wives.
And when I came to England
I enclosed it all in my hand,
And Goldeboro, I gave it to you.
My God! Dear, what does this mean?”
She answered and soon explained,
―Jesus Christ, who made the moon,
Will turn your dreams to joy.
He who sits on the throne will lead you.
There are none so mighty, king or emperor,
As you will be, for you will wear
A crown in England yet.
Denmark shall kneel at your feet,
And you will, dear, win in full
All the castles that are in it.
I know it as well as if I had seen it.

42 A few lines are missing or defective here, as there is no rhyme for joye or trone. The referent in 1317 is likely Christ.
To thee shole come 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,
- Not the value of a nut!
- Do not have any doubt about it,
- For within one year
- You will be made king with great honor.
- And you will be made king with great honor.
- Denmark will be yours, every bit.
- Do not have any doubt about it,
- Not the value of a nut!
- For within one year
- You will be ruler of every part.
- But now do as I will advise you:
- Let’s both go to Denmark together
- And don’t put off this task.
- Ambition and success go together!
- For I will never be at peace
- Until I see Denmark with my own eyes,
- Because I know that all the land
- Will be yours in your hand.
- Insist to all three of Grim’s sons
- That they journey forth with you;
- I know they will not refuse.
- They will go eagerly with the wind,
- For they love you with all their hearts.
- For I will never be at peace
- Until I see Denmark with my own eyes,
- Because I know that all the land
- Will be yours in your hand.
- Insist to all three of Grim’s sons
- That they journey forth with you;
- I know they will not refuse.
- They will go eagerly with the wind,
- For they love you with all their hearts.
- You can tell that they are quick to act,
- Wherever in the world they might be.
- Have them prepare the ship quickly,
- And see that you don’t delay.
- Procrastinating often brings harm.”
- When Havelock had heard what she counseled,
- Soon it was day, soon he dressed himself,
- And soon he went to the church
- Before he did any other thing.
- He fell before the Cross and began to
- Call upon Cross and Christ,
- And said, “Lord, who rules all,
- Wind and water, woods and fields,
- For the sake of Your holy kindness,
- Have mercy on me now, Lord!
- And avenge me yet on my foe
- Whom I saw slaying my sisters
- With a knife, before my own eyes,
- And then would have taken my life,
- For he ordered Grim
- To drown me in the sea.
- He holds my land with great wrong.
- With great injustice, and with great harm,
- For I never wronged him in any way

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Burgeys: A burgess could be a town magistrate, but often simply meant an urban citizen with a trade. As a member of the nascent middle class the word also led to PDE *bourgeois* (from Old French *borjois*, ‘town-dweller’).
And he has brought me to sorrow!  
He drove me to beg for my food  
And to lie in constant sorrow and pain.  
Lord, have mercy on me,  
And though I have fears and worries,  
Let me cross the sea safely  
And pass over without storms  
So that I will not be drowned in the water,  
Nor shipwrecked because of any sin,  
And bring me sound to the land  
That Godard grips in his hand,  
Which is my right, every bit.  
Jesus Christ, You know it well!”

When he had said his prayer  
And laid his offering on the altar,  
He took his leave of Jesus Christ  
And His sweet mother Mary also,  
And of the Cross that he lay before.  
Then he went away, weeping bitterly.  
When he came home they were ready,  
All of Grim’s sons, to set out  
Into the sea to get fish  
So that Havelock might eat well.  
But Havelock had something else in mind.  
First he called the eldest brother,  
Robert the Red, by his name,  
And then William Wende and Hugh Raven,  
All three of Grim’s sons,  
And said, “Listen now to me all!  
Lordinges, I will recount to you  
Something about me you know well.  
My father was king of Danish lands.  
All of Denmark was in his hand  
The day that he was alive and dead.  
But then he followed wicked counsel,  
So that I and all of Denmark  
And my sisters were entrusted to a servant.  
He trusted an instrument of the devil with us  
And all his land and all that he owned,  
For I saw that foul fiend  
Slay my sisters with his hand!  
First he cut their throats in two,  
And then hacked them into bits,  
And then ordered Grim, your father,  
To drown me in the sea.  
He had him solemnly swear  
On the Bible that he would take me  
Into the water and sink me in it,  
And he would take on himself the sin.  
But Grim was wise and kindly,  
And he would not stain his own soul.  
He would rather be falsely sworn  
Than drown me and be damned himself.  
At once he prepared to flee.
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!”

| 1430 | 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 mak you riche men;  
Ilk of you shal have castles ten,  
And the lond that thor til longes -  
Borwes, tunes, wodes, and wonges. |
| 1440 |  
Ben glad til that ich Denemark se!  
I preie you that ye wende with me,  
And ich mak you riche men;  
Ilk of you shal have castles ten,  
And the lond that thor til longes -  
Borwes, tunes, wodes, and wonges. |
| 1445 |  
| 1625 | “With swilk als ich byen shal.  
Ther of biseche you now leve  
Wile ich speke with non other reve  
But with thee, that justise are,  
That I mithe seken mi ware  
In gode borwes up and doun,  
And faren ich wile fro tun to tun.”  
A gold ring drow he forth anon -  
An hundred pund was worth the ston -  
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 —  

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
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,
Yiff 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 heard what Ubbe offered,
Though he was sorely afraid
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,

47 Far from censuring Havelock’s bribery of an official, the poet praises his shrewdness. Smithers explains that “a soi-disant merchant might get hirself, as an alien, exemption from the payment of local tolls” through such candid palm-greasing. G.V. Smithers, ed., Havelock (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), xlviii.

48 Why Havelock needs repeated guarantees of protection is not clear, although it emphasizes both Goldeboru’s vulnerable beauty and nobility and Denmark’s general lawlessness under Godard. Skeat claims that Ubbe was a close friend of Birkabeyn based on other traditions (note to 1444), and if Ubbe recognizes his lost son, Havelock is taking a dangerous gamble by trusting him.
<table>
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| 1680 | Or he fro him ferde,  
Seyde he, that his folk herde:  
“Loke that ye comen bethe,  
For ich it wilde 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 | Before he had traveled far  
He called so that Havelock’s family heard,  
“See that you both come,  
For it’s both my desire and my advice!”  
Though he was anxious, Havelock did not  
Dare oppose what Ubbe asked.  
He had his wife follow with him,  
And they went into the high court.  
Robert led her, who was well-advised  
And would have suffered death for her  
Before anyone shamed her  
Or laid a hand on her in evil.  
William Wendut, Robert’s brother,  
Was the other who accompanied her,  
Who was bold in all times of need.  
Fortunate is he who keeps good men!  
When they had come to the hall  
Before Ubbe and all his men,  
Ubbe went up to them,  
Along with many a knight and servant,  
In order to see and to inspect them.  
Havelock stood like a hill then  
Above those who were present,  
A good head above  
Any others who stood inside there.  
Then Ubbe was in a glad mood  
When he saw him so handsome and noble.  
He could not turn his heart away,  
Not from him, nor from his wife;  
He loved him as much as his life.  
There was no one in Denmark he thought  
He might have loved more.  
He had more affection for Havelock alone  
Than for all Denmark, by my word.  
See now how God can help  
Many a prudent woman and man!  
When the time to eat had come,  
Ubbe fetched his own wife inside,  
And said to her in joking,  
“My lady, you and Havelock will eat together,  
And I will dine with Goldeboro,  
Who is as beautiful as a flower on a tree.  
In all of Denmark there’s no woman  
As pretty as her, by Saint John!”  
When the table was laid and set,  
And the blessing was said,  
Before them came the best dinner  
That a king or emperor could eat—  
Cranes, swans, venesysun, |
Lax, lampreys, and god sturgeon,  
Pyment to drinke and god claré,  
Win hwit and red, ful god plenté —

1730 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 —

1740 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!"

1750 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

1760 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 bihove everil del,  
That he mithe supe swithe wel,  
Al so he seten and shoide soupe,  
So comes a ladde in a joupe,  
And with him sixti 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.

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.

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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.
| 1770 | With swerdes drawen and knives longe,  
Ilkan in hande a ful god gleive,  
And seyde, “ Undo, Bernard the greyve!  
Undo swithe and lat us in,  
Or thu art ded, bi Seint Austin!”  
Bernard stirt up, that was ful big,  
And caste a brinie upon his rig,  
And grop an ax that was ful god -  
Lep to the dore so he wore wod,  
And seyde, “Hwat are ye, that ar ther-oute,  
That thus biginnen for to stroute?  
1780 | 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 tightley!”  
“What did you say?” said one lad.  
“We are not afraid!  
We will go through this door  
Before long, you oaf, in spite of you!”  
1790 | He gripen sone a bulder ston  
And let it fleye, ful god won,  
Agen the dore, that it to-rof.  
Avelok it saw, and thider drof  
And the barre sone ut drow,  
That was unride and gret ynow,  
And caste the dore open wide  
And seide, “Her shal I now abide!  
Comes swithe unto me -  
Datheyt hwo you henne fle!”  
1800 | 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 soon drew out the door bar,  
Which was huge and rough enough,  
And flung the door open wide  
And said, “Here I stand waiting now!  
Come to me fast!  
Damn any of you who runs away!”  
“No!” said one. “You will pay for that!”  
And he began to run toward Havelock,  
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.

422
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 sixte wende for to fle,
And he clapte him with the tre
Rith in the fule necke so
That he smot hise necke on to.

Thanne the sixe weren doun feld,
The seventh brayd ut his swerd
And wolde Havelok riht in the eye;
And Havelok let the barre fleye
And smot him sone agheyn the brest,
That havede he nevere schrift of prest
For he was ded on lesse hwile
Than men mouthe renne a mile.

Alle the othere weren ful kene;
A red they taken hem bitwene
That he sholde him bihalve,
And brisen so that wit no salv
Ene sholde him helen leche non.

They drowen ut swerdes, ful god won,
And shoten on him so don on bere
dogges that wolden him to-
tere,
Thanne men doth the bere beyte.

The laddes were kaske and teyte
And umbiyeden him ilkon.
Sum smot with tre and sum wit ston,
Summe putten with gleyve in bac and side
And yeven wundes longe and wide
In twenti stedes and wel mo,
Fro the croune til the to.
Hwan he saw that, he was wod
And was it ferlik hw he stod!

Fly out of the socket,
And then clapped him on the head
So that he fell down stone dead.
The fifth that he overtook
He gave a painful blow as well,
Between the shoulders where he stood,
So that his heart’s blood was spent.
The sixth turned to run away,
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 of his sides
So water that fro the welle glide.
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,

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 grete dints,
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!
That ich here this sorwe se!
Roberd! Willam! Hware ar ye?
Gripeth ether unker a god tre
And late we nouth thise dogs fle
Til ure louerd wreke be.
Cometh swithe, and folwes me:
Ich have in honde a ful god ore
- Datheit wo ne smite sore!‖
―Ya! leve, ya!‖ quod Roberd sone,
―We haven ful god lith of the mone.‖
Roberd groip a staf strong and gret,
That mouthe ful wel bere a net,
And Willam Wendut groip a tre
Mikel grettere than his the,
And Bernard held his ax ful faste
I seye was he nouthe the laste!
And lopen forth so he weren wode
To the laddes ther he stode,
And yaf hem wundes swithe grete;
Ther mithe men wel se boyes bete,
And ribbes in here sides breke
And Havelok on hem wel wreke.
He broken armes, he broken knes,
He broken shankes, he broken thes.
He dide the blod there renne dune
To the fet rith fro the crune,
For was ther spared heved non.
He leyden on hevedes ful god won,
And made crowe breke and crake
Of the broune and of the blake.
He maden here backes al so bloute
Als here wombles and made hem rowte
Als he weren kradelbarnes -
So dos the child that moder tharnes.
Datheit the recke! For he it serveved.
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
Drawen 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.

Mi dore he broken up ful sket,
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 slug 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.\
―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 Hevenen'z 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?‖
―Mercy, 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,\n
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  
And summe grep tre and sum grep ston  
And drive hem ut. thei he weren crus,  
So dogges ut of milne-hous.  
Havelok grep 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  
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 unri  
And he haves on thoru his arum  
Ther of is full mikel harum;  
And he haves on thoru his the -  
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 herenpanne  
So hard that he ne dede al to-crufsse  
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 havede hem slawen,  
Or al to-hewen or al to-drawen.  
"Louerd, havi nomore plith  
Of that ich was grethed tonith.  
Thus wolde theves he have reft;  
But, God thank, he havenet sure keft!  
But it is of him mikel scathe -  
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!55

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,56
They will hang by the neck!
Curse whoever cares about their death,
Since they ran about at night
To tie up both townsman 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

56 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, thy 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
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 thou 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 Hav elok lay
Al so brith so it were day.
“Deus!” quoth 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 onme 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
Fro Havelok cam that was so brith.
Of his mouth it com il del -
That was he war ful swithe wel.
“Deus,” quoth he, “Hwat may this mene!”
He calde bothe arwe men and kene,
Knithes and serganz swithe sleie,
Mo than an hundred, withuten leye,
And bad hem alle comen and se
Hwat that selcuth mithe be.
Als the knithes were comen alle,
Ther Havelok lay ut of the halle,
So stod ut of his mouth a glem,
Rith al swilk so the sunne -bem,
That al so lith was thare, bi hevene,
So ther brenden serges sevene
And an hun
dred serges ok
That durste I sweren on a book!
He slepen faste, alle five,
So he weren brouth of live;
And Havelok lay on his lift side,
In his armes his brithe bride:
Bi the pappes he leyen naked -
So faire two weren nevere maked
In a bed to lyen samen.
The knithes thouth of hem god gamen,
Hem for to shewe and loken to.
Rith al so he stoden alle so,
And his bac was toward hem wend,
So weren he war of a croiz ful gent
On his right shuldre swithe brith,
 Brigter than gold ageyn the lith,
That it was kunrik that he sawe.
It sparkede and ful brith shon
So doth the gode charbuncle ston
That men see mouthe se by the lith
A peni chesen, so was it brith.
Thanne bihelden he him faste,
So that he knewen at the laste
That he was Birkabeynes sone,
That was here king, that was hem wone
Wel to yeme and wel were
Ageynes uten-laddes here -
“For it was nevere yet a brother
In al Denemark so lich another,
So this man, that is so fayr,
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;
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 fellon sone a t hise fet.
Was 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 come n of Birkabeyn,
That havede mani knith and sweyn,
And so shalt thou, louerd, have:
Thou thou be yet a ful yung knave
Thou shalt be King of al Denemark -
Was ther inne never non so stark.

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 come n of Birkabeyn,
That havede mani knith and sweyn,
And so shalt thou, louerd, have:
Thou thou be yet a ful yung knave
Thou 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 comen anon
Biforen him sone everilkon,
Al so he loven here lives
And here children and here wives.

His bode ne durste he non atsitte
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,
And how that he, bi youre red
Bitaunte hise children thre
Godard to yeme, and al his fe.
Havelok his sone he him tauhte
And hise two douhters and al his auhnte.
Alle herden ye him swere
On bok and on messe gere
That he shulde yemen hem wel,
Withuten lac, withuten tel.
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:
The knife was drawn at his heart,
But God wished to save him.
He gave the boy's sweres:
That he should not kill him
With his own hand, that miserable fiend!
But he soon after forced a fisherman
To swear solemn othes
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 on his knees;
Nothing might prevent him from it.
And he became Havelock's man right there,
So that all who were there saw it.
After him ten lads started up
And became his men,

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,
And sithen drenges, and sithen thaynes
And sithen kithnes, and sithen sweynes;
So that, or that day was gon,
In al the tun ne was nouth on
That it ne was his man bicom -
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 worn 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 seyde 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 wone
Us for to yemen and wel were
With sharp swerd and longe spre.
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 sheriff59
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 Ne conestable, ne shireve: 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.
Hwan he havede manrede and oth
Taken of lef and of loth,
Ubbe dubbede him to knith
Wi 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 with talevaces 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 mouthe 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 neveere yete joye more
In al this werd than tho was thore.
Ther was so mikel yeft of clothes
That, thou I swore you grete othes,
I ne wore nouth 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 neveere 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,

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
Sergaunz 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 knithes 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 seyde, ―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 thenchew what thou him dedes
Whan thu refes with a knif
Hise sistres here lif
And sithen bede thou 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,
Bí Crist that wolde on Rode blede!"
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!  

| 2410 | 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  
      | Slowen 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?”  

| 2420 | Ich have you fed and yet shal fede -  
      | Helpe me nw in this nede  
      | And late ye nouth mi bodi spille,  
      | Ne Havelok don of me hise wille!  
      | Yif ye it do, ye do you shame  
      | And bringeth yoself 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.  

| 2430 | The kinges men, hwan he that sawe,  
      | Scuten on hem, heye and lowe,  
      | And everilk fot of hem he lowe,  
      | 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  

| 2440 | With dogges forto bite and beite.  
      | Were the bondes nouth to leite -  
      | He bunden him so fele sore  
      | That he gan crien Godes ore,  
      | That he sholdhe of his hend plette;  
      | Wolden he nouht ther fore lette  
      | That he ne bunden hond and fet.  
      | Datheitt that on that ther fore let!  
      | But dunten him so man doth bere  
      | And keste him on a scabbed mere,  

| 2450 | Hise nese went unto the crice.  
      | So ledden he that ful swike  

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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.

435
Til he biforn Havelok was broOUTH,
That he havede ful wo wrowHT,
BoTHE with hunger 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.

Nu 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,
Drenge 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.
The dom is demd - seye we namore.”
Hwan the dom was demd and give,
And he was wit the prestes shrive,
And it ne mouhte 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

Until he was brought before Havelock,
To whom he had caused so much woe,
Both with hunger and with cold
Before he was twelve years old,
And with much heavy labor,
With poor food and little drink,
And with ragged clothing,
For all his many fine oaths.
Now he paid for his earlier crime;
Old sin makes new shame!

When the foul traitor was so
Disgracefully brought before the king,
The king had Ubbe quickly call
His earls and all his barons,
Vassal and retainer, citizen and knight,
And ordered that they should judge him,
For they knew the criminal well.
God was angry with him in every way!
They seated themselves by the wall,
Rich and poor, high and low,
The old men and the young as well,
And made their judgment there.
Soon they said to the king,
Who sat as still as a stone,
―We order that he be flayed alive,
And then taken to the gallows,
Facing this foul mare’s tail,
With a good strong nail through his feet,
And be hanged there on two chains.63
With these letters written there:
‘This is the traitor who fully intended
To rob the king of every acre of land,
And took the lives of both
His sisters with a knife.’
This writ will hang by him there.
The verdict is given. We have no more to say.”
When the judgment was given and approved,
And he received rites from the priests,
There was no other course,
Not for father nor for brother,
But that he should lose his life.
A lad came swiftly with a knife
And began right at the toe
To cut and to slice,
As if it were a gown or dress.64

63 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).
64 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!  

2500  
The ladde ne let nowith forthi,  
They he criede, “Merci! Merci!”  
That ne flow him everil del  
With knif mad of grunden stel.  
Thei garte bringe the mere sone,  
Skabbed and ful ivele o bone,  
And bunden him rith at hire tayl  
With a rop of an old seyl  
And drowen him unto the galwes,  
Not by the road but over the falwes,  
And henge him thore bi the hals  
-Datheit hwo recke: he was fals!  
When he was dead, that devil,  
All that was his was quickly seized  
Into the king’s hand, every bit,  
Lands and tenants and other goods  
And the king immediately placed it  
Into Ubbe’s hand with a fine staff  
And said, “I hereby invest you  
With all the land, and all the properties.”  

2510  
In al the lond, in al the fe.”  

979  
Quant Haueloc est rois pussanz,  
Le regne tint plus d’eii. anz;  
Merueillos tresor i auna.  
Argentille li commanda  
Qu’il passast en Engleterre  
Pur son heritage conquerre,  
Dont son oncle l’out engetée,  
[Et] A grant tort desheritée.  
Li rois li dist qu’il fera  
Ceo qu’ele li comandera.  
Sa nauie fet a-turner,  
En mier se met quant orré a,  
Et la reyne od lui mena.  
Quatre vinz & quatre cenz  
Out Haueloc, pleines de genz.  
Tant out nagé & siglé,  
Q’en Carleflure est ariué.  

990  
Ses genz & ses ostz mander,  
And Godard began to roar then  
So that men a mile away  
Might hear him yell, that foul wretch!  
The youth did not stop at all for that,  
Even though he cried, “Mercy! Mercy!”,  
To skin every bit of him  
With a knife made of ground steel.  
Soon they had the mare brought,  
Scabbed and sick to the bone,  
And bound him right to the tail  
With a rope from an old sail.  
They took him to the gallows,  
Not by the road but over the fields,  
And hanged him there by the neck.  
Damn whoever cares! He was false!  
When he was dead, that devil,  
All that was his was quickly seized  
Into the king’s hand, every bit,  
Lands and tenants and other goods.  
And the king immediately placed it  
Into Ubbe’s hand with a fine staff  
And said, “I hereby invest you  
With all the land, and all the properties.”  

· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·

Havelock was a mighty king then,  
And he reigned more than four years  
And amassed marvelous treasures.  
But Goldeborou 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.  


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’Aueloc 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,


68 Skeat posits that this is either Wellow Abbey in Grimsby, established by Henry I in 1110, or the Grimsby Friary, founded around 1290 (note to line 2521). TEAMS asserts that the ‘black monks’ are Benedictine, but Skeat and Garbaty have Augustinians. See also Smithers’ note, p.144.
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 dreedde swithe sore,  
So runcy spore, and mickle more.  

2570  
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.  

2580  
Hise uten laddes here comen,  
And haves nu the priorie numen -  
Al that evere mithen he finde,  
He brenne kirkes and prestes bind;  
He strangeth monks and nunnes bothe -  
Wat wile ye, frend, her-offe rede?  
Yif he regne thusgate longe,  
They may overcume us all.  
They may hang or slay us all alive,  
Or make us slaves and do us great woe,  
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 slos upo the dogges swithe.  
For shal I nevere more be blithe,  
Ne hoseled ben ne of prest shriven  
Til that he ben of londe driven.  

2590  
Or thral maken and do ful wo  
Ne haseled ben ne of prest shriven  
Til that he ben of londe driven.  
Nime we swithe and do hem fle  
And folwes alle faste me!  
For ich am he of al the ferd  
That first shal slo with drawn swerd.  
Datheyt hwo ne stonde faste  
Bi me hwil hise armes laste!‖  
“Ye! lef, ye!” quoth the erl Gunter;  
“And so dide alle that ther stode

2600  
Nime we swithe and do hem fle  
And folwes alle faste me!  
For ich am he of al the ferd  
That first shal slo with drawn swerd.  
Datheyt hwo ne stonde faste  
Bi me hwil hise armes laste!‖  
“Ye! lef, ye!” quoth the erl Gunter;  
“And so dide alle that ther stode

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69 Godard threatens to disinhe
rit 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 held drawn out.
William Wendut drew out his sword,
And he struck a third so hard
That he made his left arm fly off
Onto the field with his sword.
Hugh Raven did not forget to use
The sword he had brought there.
He swung it up, and struck hard
On an earl that he saw spurring there
Nobly upon a steed,
Who galloped quickly toward him.
He struck him on the head so forcefully
That he cleft the skull in two,
And near the shoulder-blade
He let the sharp sword pass
Through the breast into the heart.
The blow began to hurt so painfully
That the earl fell down at once,
As dead as any stone.
Ubbe said, “I hold back too long!”,
And immediately charged his horse
Toward Godrich, with a good spear
That he saw another bear,
And the two struck at each other
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,
So that the sweat and blood ran.
To the fote right there adune. 
Ther mouthe men se to kniches bete 
Ayther on other dintes grete, 
So that with the althereste dint 
Were al to-shivered a flint. 
So was bitwenen hem a fih 
Fro the morwen ner to the nght, 

2670 
So that thei nouth ne blumne 
Til that to sette bigan the sunne. 
Tho yaf Godrich thorw the side 
Ubbe a wunde ful unride, 
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.

2680 
But er he were fro Godrich drawen, 
Ther were a thousand knihtes slawen 
Bi bothe halve and mo ynowe, 
Ther the ferdes togidere slowe, 
Ther was swilk dreping of the folk 
That ne stod of blod so ful 
That the strem ran intil the hul. 
Tho tarst bigan Godrich to go 
Upon the Danshe and faste to slo 

2690 
And forthirth, also leun fares 
That nevere kines best ne spares, 
Thanne his gon, for he garte alle 
The Denshe men biforn him falle. 
He felde browne, he felde blake, 
That he mouthe overtake. 
Was nevere non that mouhte thave 
Hise dintes, noyther knith ne knave, 
That he felde so dos the gres 
Biforn the sythe that ful sharp es.

2700 
Hwan Havelok saw his folk so brittene 
And his ferd so swithe littene 
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

2710 
On knees and sweren on messe bok, 
On caliz and on pateyn ok, 

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
70 
Upon the Danish again, killing swiftly 
And relentlessly, as a lion pounces 
Who spares no kind of prey 
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.

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70 Tarst: The word is unrecorded in the MED, and Skeat believes it may be an error for faste. The poet compares Godard to a lightning strike.
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,

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

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.

2740 Of his brinie ringes mo
Than that ich kan tellen fro,
And woundede him rith in the fleshe,
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

2750 For his swerd he hof up heye,
And the hand he dide of flye
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, datheati who recke!
And dide him binde and fetere wel
With gode feteres al of stel,

2760 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,
2770
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.
But or bad he that thider were brouth
The quen for hem swilk was his thouth
For 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.
2790
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,
alle
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,
2800
For Englond 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 mikel wronge -
God leve him sone to honge!”
Quot Havelok, “Hwan that ye it wite,
Nu wile ich that ye doe not site;
2810
And after Godrich haves wrouth,
That haves in sorwe himself brouth,
Lokes that ye demen him rith,
For dom ne sapereh clerk ne knith,
And sithen shal ich understonde
Of you, after lawe of londe,
Manrede and holde othes bothe,
Yif ye it wilnen 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 Goldeboru, 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 disproloyal 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, hwan 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
Everemore 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.‖

Havelok anon manrede tok
Of alle Englishe on the bok
And did hem grete othes swere
That he sholden him god feyth bere
Ageyn hem alle that woren lives
And that sholde ben born of wives.
Thanne he haveden sikernesse
Taken of more and of lesse,
Al at hise wille, so dide he calle
The Erl of Cestre and hise men alle,
That was yung knith withuten wif,
And seyde, ―Sire erl, bi mi lif;
And thou wile mi conseyl tro,
Ful wel shal ich with thee do;

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.\(^\text{71}\)
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,\(^\text{72}\)
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.

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\(^71\) *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
The fairest thing that is o live.
That is Gunnild of Grimesby,
Grimes doughter, bi Seint Davy,
That me forth broute and wel fedde,
And ut of Denemark with me feldde
Me for to burwe fro mi ded.
Sikerlike, thoru his red,
Have ich lived into this day-
Blissed worthe his soule ay!
I rede that thu hire take
And spuse and curteyse make,
For she is fayr and she is fre,
And al s
do hende so she may be.
Ther tekene, she is wel with me;
That shal ich ful wel shewe thee.
For ich wile give thee a give
That everemore, hwil ich live,
For hire shaltu be with me dere,
That wile ich that this folc al here.‖
The erl ne wolde nouth ageyn
Thee king be, for knith ne sweyn
Ne of the spusing seyen nay,
But spusede that ilke day.
That spusinge was in god time maked,
For it ne were nevere, clad ne naked,
In a thede samened two
That cam togidere, livede so
So they diden al here live:
He geten samen sones five,
That were the beste men at nede
That mouth the ridden on ani stede.
Hwan Gunnild was to Cestre brouth,
Havelok the gode ne forgat nouth
Bertram, that was the erles kok,
That he ne dide callen ok,
That he ne dide called ok,
And seyde, “Frend, so God me rede,
Nu shaltu have riche mede,
For wissing and thi gode dede
That tu me dides in ful gret nede.
For thanne I yede in mi cuvel
And ich ne haveide bred ne sowel.
Ne I ne haveide no catel,
Thou feddes and claddes me ful wel.
Have nu forthi of Cornwayle
The erldomilk del, withuten fayle,
And al the lond that Godrich held,
Bothe in towne and ek in feld;
And ther-to wile ich that thu spuse,
And faire bring hire until huse,
Grimes douther, Levi 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 seysed 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 liveden ay in blisse and gamen.

When both of the maidens were married,
Havelock 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.

Then the Danes began to go
To the king to aske leve;
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, 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,” 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.” 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. 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.

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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*. 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.” The minstrel narrator of the poem may be a fiction. But if so, “where did this convention come from?”

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). 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,” 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, 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, shepes, 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.” 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

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interspersed with feasting in the poem, and Havelock’s rise in prosperity is indexed by his diet. 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, 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. 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.

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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 Ûbbe 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”\textsuperscript{22} 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.\textsuperscript{23} 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,\textsuperscript{24} receiving the angelic visitor and directing her husband to return to Denmark to claim the throne. Havelock’s obedience to her \textit{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.”\textsuperscript{25}

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

\textsuperscript{22} Swanton, \textit{English Literature}, 195
\textsuperscript{24} Swanton, \textit{English Literature}, 203.
\textsuperscript{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 lor 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 / ðe 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 duguð 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. 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 win after the defeat of Harold’s foot soldiers at Hastings.

The general culture of Havelock seems suspiciously 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 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, and the recurrence of declamatory openings such as “lithes now alle to me” (1401) suggest the heightened and monologic mapelode-speeches of the Anglo-Saxon epic heroes.

Ker says that the Germanic hero “sails his own ship.” The Anglo-Saxons use earl to refer to nearly any warrior displaying leadership, and Havelock seems equally

29 Garbaty, 244.
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

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,39 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).40 He has also been read as suspiciously enthusiastic to carry out Godard’s orders.41 The inference in either interpretation is that Havelock’s royalty and goodness redeem Grim, just as Ubbe is later reformed from his corrupt tendencies.42 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

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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,” 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, 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.”\textsuperscript{45} This seems unlikely. Bertram clearly knows his craft, and he has Havelock sit and rest while he stirs “\textipa{þe broys in þe led}” (924). The English poet gives a wealth of “concrete details of the life of the kitchen”\textsuperscript{46} 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.\textsuperscript{47}

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,”\textsuperscript{48} 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 \textit{Clerk’s Tale} Walter’s subjects worry about their bachelor lord. The coda that Havelock and Goldeboru were inseparable and did not quarrel—“\textipa{nevere yete no weren he wrothe}”

\textsuperscript{45} Delaney, 72.
\textsuperscript{46} Halverson, 148.
\textsuperscript{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.” 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. 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 44th 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, hey

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56 Given-Wilson, 57.
57 Crane, 8.
58 Crane, 48.

464
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

\textsuperscript{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).
\textsuperscript{61}A.C. Spearing, \textit{Readings in Medieval Poetry} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 44.
\textsuperscript{62}Delaney, 67.
\textsuperscript{63}Swanton, 197.
his advisors, Godrich makes only a perfunctory show of consultation: “wat wile ye, frend, her-offe rede?” (2585).\textsuperscript{64} 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.”\textsuperscript{65} Lacking the personal bonds of loyalty of the \textit{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.\textsuperscript{66} Instead of a religious ceremony, there is a

\textsuperscript{64} Scott, 155.

\textsuperscript{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, \textit{Plantagenet England 1225-1360} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 118.

\textsuperscript{66} Delaney, 71.
forty-day feast (2771). One explanation is that the historical Edward also ruled for years before ecclesiastical confirmation. Such an omission would be consistent in the more secular French version, 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 Havelock, as it appears in MS Laud Misc. 108 next to several pietistic texts such as the South English Legendary.

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

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67 Delaney, 72.
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.\footnote{Staines, 619.}

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 \textit{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.\footnote{Swanton, \textit{English Literature}, 23.} \textit{Havelock} is not an
anti-clerical poem, but genuine faith is consistently portrayed in personal rather than
institutional terms.
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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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. 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.

10 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
Was non his iliche.
He had twelve companions
Who always went with him,
All noble men’s sons,
And all of them were fine boys
For him to have fun with.
And he loved two the most—
One of them was called Child Athulf, 3
And the other Fickenhild.
Athulf was the best,
And Fickenhild the worst.
It was on a summer’s 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 by the shore.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>20</th>
<th>Nas non his iliche.</th>
<th>He was fair and brave as well,</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Twelf feren he hadde</td>
<td>And fifteen years old.</td>
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<td>That he alle with him ladde,</td>
<td>In no other rich kingdom</td>
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<td>Alle riche mannes sones,</td>
<td>Was there anyone like him.</td>
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<td>And alle hi were faire gomes,</td>
<td>He had twelve companions</td>
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<td>With him for to pleie,</td>
<td>Who always went with him,</td>
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<td>And mest he luvede tweie;</td>
<td>All noble men’s sons,</td>
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<td>That on him het Hathulf child,</td>
<td>And all of them were fine boys</td>
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<td>And that other Fikenild.</td>
<td>For him to have fun with.</td>
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<td>Athulf was the beste,</td>
<td>And he loved two the most—</td>
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<td>And Fikenylde the werste.</td>
<td>One of them was called Child Athulf, 3</td>
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<td>Hit was upon a someres day,</td>
<td>And the other Fickenhild.</td>
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<td>Also ich you telle may,</td>
<td>Athulf was the best,</td>
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<td>Murri, the gode King,</td>
<td>And Fickenhild the worst.</td>
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<td>Rod on his pleing</td>
<td>It was on a summer’s day,</td>
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<td>Bi the se side,</td>
<td>As I can tell you as well,</td>
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<td>Ase he was woned ride.</td>
<td>When Murray, the good king,</td>
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<td>With him ridden bote two -</td>
<td>Rode for leisure</td>
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<td>Al to fewe ware tho!</td>
<td>By the seaside,</td>
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<td>He fond bi the stronde</td>
<td>As he was accustomed to do.</td>
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<td>Arived on his londe,</td>
<td>There were only two riding with him;</td>
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<td>Schipes fiftene</td>
<td>They were all too few!</td>
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<td>With Sarazins kene</td>
<td>He noticed by the shore.</td>
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<td>He axeđe what hi soghte</td>
<td>Fifteen ships</td>
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<td>Other to londe broghte.</td>
<td>That had arrived on his land</td>
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<td>A payn hit oherde,</td>
<td>With zealous Saracens.</td>
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<td>And hym wel sone answarede:</td>
<td>He asked what they were looking for</td>
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<td>“Thy lond folk we schulle slon,</td>
<td>Or what they brought to the land.</td>
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<td>And alle that Crist luveth upon</td>
<td>A pagan heard him</td>
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<td>And the selve right anon.</td>
<td>And answered him brusquely,</td>
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<td>Ne shaltu todai henne gon.”</td>
<td>“We will kill your land’s people</td>
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<td>The king alighte of his stede,</td>
<td>And all who have love for Christ,</td>
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<td>For tho he havede nede,</td>
<td>And yourself right away.</td>
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<td>And his gode knightes two;</td>
<td>You will not leave here today.”</td>
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<td>Al to fewe he hadde tho.</td>
<td>The king dismounted from his horse,</td>
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<td>Swerd hi gunne gripe</td>
<td>For he needed the help</td>
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<td>And togadere smite.</td>
<td>Of his two good knights.</td>
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<td>Hy smytęn under schelde</td>
<td>He had all too few then!</td>
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<td>That sume hit yfeldē.</td>
<td>They began to grip swords</td>
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<td>The king hadde al to fewe</td>
<td>And strike against each other.</td>
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<td>Togenes so fele schrewę;</td>
<td>They struck under shields</td>
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<td>So wele mighten ythe</td>
<td>So that some were brought down,</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>Bringe hem thre to dithe.</td>
<td>But the king had all too few</td>
</tr>
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<td>----</td>
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<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>The pains come to londe</td>
<td>Against so many villains.</td>
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</table>

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 Rolan). Normally boys began as pages very young and became squires around age fourteen. See also Guy of Warwick, line 1625.
And neme hit in here honde
That folc hi gunne quelle,
And churchen for to felle.
Ther ne moste libbe
The fremde ne the sibbe.
Bute hi here laye asoke,
And to here toke.
Of alle wymmanne
Wurst was Godhild thanne.
For Murri heo weop sore
And for Horn yute more.
He wente ut of halle
Fram hire maidenes alle
Under a roche of stone
Ther heo livede alone.
Ther heo servede Gode
Aghenes the paynes forbode.
Ther he servede Criste
That no payn hit ne wiste.
Evre heo bad for Horn child
That Jesu Crist him beo myld.
Horn was in paynes honde
With his feren of the londe.
Muchel was his fairhede,
For Jhesu Crist him makede.
Payns him wolde slen,
Other al quic flen,
Yef his fairnesse nere:
The children alle aslaye were.
Thanne spak on admirad
- Of wordes he was bald,
- "Horn, thu art well kene,
And that is wel isene.
Thu art gret and strong,
Fair and evene long;
Thu schalt waxe more
Bi fulle seve yere.
Yef thu mote to live go
And thine feren also,
Yef hit so bi faile,
Ye scholde slen us alle:
Tharvore thu most to stere,
Thu and thine ifere;
To schupe schulle ye funde,
And sinke to the grunde.
The se you schal adrenche,
Ne schal hit us noght ofthinche.
For if thu were alive,
With swerd other with knive,
We scholden alle deie,
And thi fader deth abeie.”
The children hi broghte to stronde,
Wringinde here honde,
Into schupes borde
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 bigan 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

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 childrens’ 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).

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.

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
Wordes that were mild:
“Whannes beo ye, faire gumes,
That her to londe beoth icume,
Alle throtten,
Of bodie swithe kene?
Bi God that me makede,
160
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. 
Kyang, wel mote thee tide.”
Thanne hym spak the gode king,
“Wel 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
210 
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. 
220 
“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
230 
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 yfere. 
Horn in herte laghte 
Al that he him taghte. 
240 
In the curt and ute, 
And elles al abute 
Luvede men Horn child,
250 
“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!8
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.9 
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. 

dHorn 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 “biformal the fader at the table” (CT I.100).
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 Athelbruce’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 Rimenhild 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, Rimenhild 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. | In her two arms, |
| ―Horn,‖ quath heo, ―wel longe | “Horn,” she said, “for the longest time |
| Ich habbe thee luved stronge. | I have loved you passionately. |
| Thu schalt thi trewthe plighte | You must swear your faithfulness |
| On myn hond her righte. | On my hand right here, |
| Me to spuse holde, | To hold me as your spouse, |
| And ich thee lord to wolde.” | And for me to have you as lord.” |
| Athulf sede on hire ire | Athulf whispered in her ear, |
| So stille so hit were, | As gently as possible, |
| ―Thi tale nu thu lynne, | “Stop your talking now, |
| For Horn nis noght her inne. | For Horn is not in here. |
| Ne beo we noght iliche: | We are not alike; |
| Horn is fairer and riche, | Horn is more handsome and strong, |
| Fairer bi one ribbe | Fairer by a rib |
| Than any man that lives! | Than any man that lives! |
| Even if Horn were under the earth | Even if Horn were under the earth |
| Or wherever else he was, | Or where ever else he was, |
| Or a thousand miles from here, | Or a thousand miles from here, |
| I cannot deceive him or you!” | I cannot deceive him or you!” |
| Rymenhild changed her mood, | Rymenhild changed her mood, |
| And reviled Athelbruce fouully. | And reviled Athelbruce fouilly. |
| “Get out of here, you foul thief! | “Get out of here, you foul thief! |
| You will never again be dear to me. | You will never again be dear to me. |
| Leave my bower, | Leave my bower, |
| With cursed luck! | With cursed luck! |
| May shame undo you | May shame undo you |
| And hang you high on the gallows! | And hang you high on the gallows! |
| I have not spoken to Horn. | I have not spoken to Horn. |
| He is not so plain! | He is not so plain! |
| Horn is fairer than this man is. | Horn is fairer than this man is. |
| May you die in great disgrace!” | May you die in great disgrace!” |
| In a moment, Athelbruce | In a moment, Athelbruce |
| Fell to the ground. | Fell to the ground. |
| “My dear lady, | “My dear lady, |
| Listen to me for a moment! | Listen to me for a moment! |
| Hear why I hesitated | Hear why I hesitated |
| To bring Horn to your hand. | To bring Horn to your hand. |
| For Horn is fair and rich, | For Horn is fair and rich, |
| And there is no one his equal anywhere. | And there is no one his equal anywhere. |
| Almair, the good king, | Almair, the good king, |
| Placed him in my care. | Placed him in my care. |
| If Horn were about here, | If Horn were about here, |
| I would be sorely worried | I would be sorely worried |
| That you would go too far” | That you would go too far” |
| With the two of you alone. | With the two of you alone. |
| Then, beyond question, | Then, beyond question, |
| The king would make us sorry. | The king would make us sorry. |

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, foryef me thi tene,
Lefdi, my quene,
And Horn ich schal thee fecche,
Wham so hit recche.”
Rymenhild, yef he cuthe,
Gan lynne with hire muthe.
Heo makede hire wel blithe;
Wel was hire that sithe.
"Go nu,” quath heo, “sone,
And send him after none,
On a squieres wise.
Whane the kyng arise
To wude for to pleie,
Nis non that him biwreie.
He schal with me bileve
Til hit beo mir eve,
To haven of him mi wille;
After ne recche ich what me telle.”
Aylbrus wende hire fro;
Horn in halle found he tho
Bifore the kyng on benche,
Wyn for to schenche.
―Horn,” quath he, “so hende,
To bure nu thu wende,
After mete stille,
With Rymenhild to dwelle;
Wordes swthe bolde,
In herte thu hem holde.
Horn, beo me wel trewe;
Ne schal hit thee nevre rewe.”
Horn in herte leide
Al that he him seide;
He yeode in wel righte
To Rymenhild the brighte.
On knes he him sette,
And sweeteliche hure grette.
Of his feire sighte
Al the bur gan lighte.
He spac faire speche -
Ne dorte him noman teche.
“Wel thu sitte and softe,
Rymenhild the brighte,
With thine maidenes sixe
That the sitteth nixte.
Kinges stward ure
Sende me in to bure;
With thee speke ich scholde.
Seie me what thu woldest:
Seie, and ich schal here
What thi wille were.”
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.”
Rymenhild up gan stonde
And tok him bi the honde:
Heo sette him on pelle
Of wyn to drinke his fulle:
Heo makede him faire chere
And tok him abute the swere.
Ofte heo him custe,
So wel so hire luste.

Welcome horn þus sayde
Rymenild þat mayde
An even & amorewe
For þe ich habbe sorewe
For þe y have no reste
Ne slepe me ne lyste.

“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,‖ heo sede, ―withute strif,
Thu schalt have me to thi wif.
Horn, have of me rewthe,
And plist me thi trewthe.
Horn tho him bithoghte
What he speke mighte.
“Crist,” quath he, “thee wisse,
And yive thee hevene blisse
Of thine husebonde,
Ich am ibore to lowe
Such wimman to knowe.
Ich am icome of thralle
And fundling bifalle.
Ne feolle hit the of cunde
To spuse beo me bunde.
Hit nere no fair wedding
Bitwexe a thral and a king.‖
Tho gan Rymenhild mislyke
And sore gan to sike:
Armes heo gan bughe;
Adun heo feol iswoghe.
Horn in herte was ful wo
And tok hire on his armes two.
He gan hire for to kesse
Wel ofte mid ywisse.
“Lemman,” he sede, “dere,
Thin herte nu thu stere.
Help me to knighte
Bi al thine mighte,
To my lord the king
That he me yive dubbing:

12 Rimenhild’s wooing seems abrupt here, and Hall believes the copyist has missed some lines (note to 410, p. 118, in TEAMS). The inserted six lines are from MS Harleian 2253, in Hall.
Thanne is mi thralhod
I went in to knighthod
And I schal wexe more,
And do, lemmann, 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 seve 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 tok his leve,
For hit was negh eve.
Athelbrus he soghte
And yaf him that he broghte,
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
Thone after blithe;
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.”

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 arms.
He will make a good knight.”

\(^{13}\) 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.”

Til the light of day sprang, Almar 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 Almar. “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.” Almar 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.  
Kniȝt, 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 lemmen 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.”  
“Knighȝt,” 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 dunes beon ofdrad,  
Ne on bataille beon amad,  
Ef thu loke theran  
And thanke upon thi lemman.  
And Sire Athulf, thi brother,  
He schal have another.  
Horn, ich thee biseche  
With loveliche speche,  
Crist yeve god emdinge  
The knyȝt 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 bless me,  
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.”  
“Knighȝt 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 knyȝt kissid her  
And she blessed him.
Leve at hire he nam,
And in to halle cam:
The knightes yeden to table,
And Horne yede to stables:
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 thoghte on Rimenilde;
He sloygh ther on haste
On hundred bi the laste,
Ne mighte noman telle
That folc 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\(^\text{16}\)
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\(^\text{17}\)
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*. 
All with Saracenes 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.‖
A moreghe tho the day gan springe,
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 Rymenild 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 stilre.
„Lemman, quath he, „dere,
Thu schalt more thare.
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.”
Aymlar rod bi Sture,
And Horn lai in bure.
Fykenhild hadde envye
And sede thes folaye:
“Aymlar, ich thee warne
Horn thee wule berne:
Ich herde whar he sede,
And his swerd forth leide,
To bringe thee of lyve,
And take Rymenhild to wyve.
He lith in bure
700
Under coverture
By Rymenhildi thoigther,
And so he doth wel ofte.
And thider thu go al right,
Ther thu him finde might.
Thu do him ut of londe,
Other he doth thee schonde!”
Aymlar aghen gan turne
Wel modi and wel murne.
He fond Horn in arme
710
On Rymenhilde barne.
“Awey ut,” he sede, “fule theof,
Ne wurstu me nevremore leof!
Wend ut of my bure
With muchel messaventure.
Wel sone bute thu fritte,
With swerde ich thee anhitte.
Wend ut of my londe,
Other thu schalt have schonde.”
Horn sadeled his stede
And his armes he gan sprede.
His brunie he gan lace
So he schold in to place.
His swerd he gan fonge:
Nabod he noght to longe.
He yede forth blive
To Rymenhild his wyve.
He sede, “Lemman derling,
Nu havestu thi swevening.
The fiss that thi net rente,
730
Fram thee he me sente.
Rymenhild, have wel godne day:
And will soon be seen.”
Almair rode by the Stour,
And Horn lay in the room.
Fykenhild was jealous
And spoke these lies:
“And, 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 Rimenhild as his wife.
He is lying in her chamber,
Under the bedcovers
With your daughter Rimenhild,
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 Rimenhild’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 Rimenhild, his betrothed.
He said, “Darling, dear one,
Now you have your dream.
The fish that tore your net
Has now been sent from you.
Rimenhild, goodbye.

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 arnes thu me 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.

The whyght him gan stonde,
And dorf til Hirelondre.
To londe he him sette
And fot on stirop sette.
He fonf 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,
Icomen 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 Berild.
Berild 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 coast 21
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’

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 gan him nier ride  
And tok him by the bridel:  
“Wel beo thu, knight, ifounde;  
With me thu lef a stunde.  
Also mote I serve,  
The king thu schalt serve.  
Ne saug I nevre my lyve  
So fair knight aryve.”

Cutberd heo ladde in to halle,  
And hi a kne gan falle:  
He sette him a knewelyng  
And grette wel the gode king.

Thanne sede Berild sone:  
―Sire King, of him thu hast to done;  
Bitak him thi lond to werie;  
Ne schal hit noman derie,  
For he is the faireste man  
That evre yut on thi londe cam.”

Then Bereld said at once,  
―Sire King, you have duties for him.  
Enterst him to defend your land.  
No man will harm him,  
For he is the noblest man  
That ever yet came to this land.”

It was at Cristemasse,  
Neither more ne lasse;  
Ther cam in at none  
A geaunt swthe sone,  
Iarmed fram paynyme

And seide thes ryme:  
―Site stille, Sire Kyng,  
And herkne this tything:  
Her buth paens arived;  
Wel mo thane five  
Her beoth on the sonde,  
King, upon thy londe;  
On of hem wile fighte  
Aghen thre knights.  
Yef other thre slen ure,  
Al this lond beoyre youre;  
Yef ure on overcometh your threo,  
Al this lond schal ure beo.  
Tomoreghe be the fightinge,  
Whane the light of daye springe.”

Tak him thine glove:  
Iment thu havest to wyve,  
Awai he schal thee dryve;  
For Cutberdes fairhede  
Ne schal thee nevre wel spede.”

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.”
Thanne sede the Kyng Thurston,  
“Cutberd schal beo that on;  
Berild schal beo that other,  
The thridde Alrid his brother;  
For hi beoth the strengeste  
And of armes the beste.  
Bute what schal us to rede?  
Ich wene we beth alle dede.”

Cutberd sat at borde  
And sede thes wordes:  
―Sire King, hit nis no righte  
On with thre to fighte:  
Aghen one hunde,  
Thre Cristen men to fonde.  
Sire, I schal alone,  
Withute more ymone,  
With mi swerd wel  
Bringe hem thre to dethe.”

The king aros amoreghe,  
That hadde muchel sorghe;  
And Cutberd ros of bedde,  
With armes he him schredde:  
Horn his brunie gan on caste,  
And lacede hit wel faste,  
And cam to the kinge  
At his up risinge.  
"King," he sede, "cum t to felde,  
For to bihelde  
Hu we fighte schulle,  
And togare go wulle.”

Right at prime tide  
Hi gunnen ut ride  
And funden on a grene  
A geaunt swthe kene,  
His feren him biside

Hore deth to abide.  
The ilke bataille  
Cutberd gan asaille:  
He yaf dentes inoghe;  
The knightes felle iswoghe.  
His dent he gan withdraghe,  
And sede, “Knights, nu ye reste  
One while ef you leste.”

Hi sede hi nevre nadde

Of knightes dentes so harde,  
Bote of the King Murry,  
That wes s withe sturdy.  
He was of Hornes kunne,  
Iborn in Suddene.  
Horn him gan to agrise,  
And his blod arise.  
Bivo him sagh he stonde  
That driven him of lond

King Thurston said after,  
“Cutbeard will be one,  
And Berild will be the other,  
And Alfred, his brother, the third.  
For they are the strongest  
And the finest in arms.  
But what shall we do?  
I expect we will all be dead!”

Cutbeard sat at the table  
And said these words:  
“Sire King, it is not right  
For one to fight with three,  
For three Christian men  
To take on one heathen hound.  
Sire, I will go alone,  
Without any other companions.  
With my sword I will easily  
Bring the three of them to death.”

In the morning, the king rose,  
With great misgivings.  
And Cutbeard got out of bed  
And fitted himself with arms.  
He cast on his chainmail coat  
And laced it tightly,  
And came to the king  
When he had risen up.  
“Sire,” he said, “come to the field  
To behold  
How the fighting will go,  
And we will go together.”

Right at the first light,  
They rode out  
And met on the green.  
The giant was very keen,  
With his companions by him,  
Waiting to bring their deaths.  
Cutbeard began to fight  
The agreed battle.  
He struck blows enough,  
And the warriors became faint.  
He began to ease off his strikes,  
For they were nearly slain,  
And said, “Sirs, you may rest now  
For a while if you like.”

They said they had never had  
Such hard blows from a knight,  
Except from King Murray,  
Who was also very formidable.  
He was from Horn’s family,  
Born in the Southlands.  
Horn began to shudder,  
And his blood rose.  
He saw standing before him the men  
Who had driven him from his land
And that his fader slogh.
To him his swerd he drogh.

He lokevede on his rynge
And thoghte 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 smot them 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
ee 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 sterve.

Thi sorwe schal wende
Whanne hit is wente,
Sire King, yef me mi rente.

Whanne I thi doghter yerne,
Ne shaltu me hire werne.‖

Cutberd 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 Rimenhild.
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 Rimenhild

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.
Rymenild 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 sechestu 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 therde with his ires,
And spak with bidere tires:
―Knave, wel thee bitide!
Horn stondeth thee biside.
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 hig hed 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, Rimenhild,
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.

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.”

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).

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 shooed away from the reception. They also emphasize that Rimenhild is married unwillingly and thus the marriage is both invalid and unconsummated.
Take my clothing here,
And give me your cloak.
Today I will drink there
To something others will regret.”
The pilgrim laid down his cloak
And took Horn’s clothes,
And put them on his back.
They were not displeasing to him!
Horn took the staff and bag
And twisted his lip.
He gave himself a foul appearance
And dirtied up his neck.
He made himself unattractive
As he had never looked before.
He came to the gatekeeper,
Who answered him coldly.
Horn asked him softly to open it,
Many times repeatedly.
He did not gain permission
So that he might come in.
Horn finally turned to the gate
And kicked out the wicket.
The oaf would pay for it!
Horn threw him over the bridge
So that his ribs cracked,
And swiftly came through the gate.
He set himself down low,
Among a row of beggars.
He looked about him
With his dirty snout.
He saw Rymenhild pining
As if she were out of her wits,
Weeping sadly and earnestly.
No man might console her.
He looked in each corner,
But he did not see his friend
Athulf walking anywhere,
As far as he could tell.
Athulf was in the tower,
Keeping a lookout
For his coming,
If a ship were to bring him.
He saw the ocean flow
And Horn nowhere on it.
He said in singing,
“Horn, you are slow to come.
You entrusted Rymenhild to me,
That I should look after her.
I have always watched over her.
Come now or never!
I cannot protect her any longer,
And now I weep for sorrow.”
Rymenhild rose from the bench
To pour some wine
After mete in sale,  
Bothe wyn and ale.  
On horn heo bar anhonde,  
So laghe was in londe.  
Knightes 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;”  
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 fiss:  
Drynke null I of dyssh:  
Drink to Horn of horne.  
Feor ich am jorne.”  
Rymenhild him gan bihelde;  
Hire heorte bigan to chelde.  
Ne knew heo noght his fissing,  
Ne Horn hymselfe nothing.  
Ac wunder hire gan thinke  
Whi he bad to Horn drinke.  
Heo fulde hire horn with wyn  
And dronk to the pilegrym.  
Heo sede, “Drink thi fulle,  
With the dinner in the hall,  
Both wine and ale.”  
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.”  
Rymenhild 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,
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 maids.
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.
In armes thu me cusse."
Hi custe hem mid ywis
And makeden muche blisse.
"Rymenhild," he sede, "I wende
Adun to the wudes ende:
Ther beth myne knightes
Redi t o fighte;
Iarmed under clothe,
Hi schulle make wrothe
The king and his geste
That come to the feste.
Today I schal hem teche
And sore hem areche."

Horn sprong ut of halle
And let his sclavin falle.
The quen yede to bure
And fond Athulf in ture.
"Athulf," heo sede, "be blithe
And to Horn thu go wel swithe.
He is under wude boghe
With knights enough with him."

Athulf began to springe
For the tithinge.
After Horn he arnde anon,
Also that hors mighte gon.
He him overtok ywis;
Hi makede swithe muchel blis.
Horn tok his preie
And dude him in the weie.
He com in wel sone:
The yates were undone.

Of Fikenhildes false tunge.
Hi sworen othes holde,
That nevre ne scholde
Horn nevre bitraie,
Thegeh he at dithe laie.
Hi runge the belle
The wedlak for to felle;
Horn him yede with his
To the kinges palais,
Ther was bridale swete,
For riche men ther ete.
Telle ne mighte tunge
That gle that ther was sunge.
Horn sat on chaere,
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.
That schup bigan to crude;
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 schewe,
I schal thee wulle.”
The gode knight up aros;
And asked them all to listen.
“Sire 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;
"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..."
To spoken ure speche.
Alle we hem schulle sle,
And al quic hem fle.”
Horn gan his horn to blowe;
His folk hit gan ikenowe;
Hi komen ut of stere,
Fram Hornes baner;
Hi sloghen and fughe,

The night and the lighten.
The Sarazins cunde
Ne lefte ther non in th’ende.
Horn let wurche
Chapeles and chirche;
He let bellis ringe
And masses let singe.
He com to his moder halle
In a roche walle.
Corn he let serie,

And makede feste merie;
Murye lif he wroghte.
Rymenhild hit dere boghte.
Fikenhild was prut on herte,
And that him dude smerte.
Yonge he yaf and elde
Mid him for to helde.
Ston he dude lede,
Ther he hopede spede,
Strong castel he let sette,

Mid see him biflette;
Ther ne mighte lighte
Bute foghel with flighte.
Bute whanne the se withdrewe,
Mighte come men ynoghe.
Fikenhild gan wende
Rymenhild to schende.
To woghe he gan hure yerne;
The kyng ne dorste him werne.
Rymenhild was ful of mode;

He wep teres of blode.
That night Horn gan swete
And hevie for tomete
Of Rymenhild, his make,
Into schupe was itake.
The schup bigan to blenche:
His leman scholde adrenche.
Rymenhild with hire honde
Wolde up to londe;

To speak as we want!29
We will slaughter them all
And quickly fly 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,

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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 wu.
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.

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 hath 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 hit gan ihere
And axede what hi were.
Hi sede hi weren harpurs
And sume were gigours.
He dude Horn in late
Right at halle gate.
He sette him on the benche,
His harpe for to clenche.
He makede Rymenhilde lay,
And heo makede walaway.
Rymenhild feol yswoghe
Ne was ther non that loughe.
Hit smot to Hornes herte
So bitere that hit smerte.
He lokede on the rin
And thoghte on Rymenhilde:
He yede up to borde
With gode swerdes orde:
Fikenhildes crune
Ther he fulde adune,
And al his men a rowe,
Hi dude adun throwe.
Whanne hi weren aslaghe
Fikenhild hi dude todraghe.
Horn makede Arnoldin thare
King after King Aylm
Of al Westernesse
For his meoknesse.
The king and his homage
Yeven Arnoldin trewage.
Horn tok Rymenhild bi the honde
And ladde hure to the stronde,
And ladde with him Athelbrus,
The gode stward of his hus.
The se bigan to flowe,
And Horn gan to rowe.
Hi gunne for to arive
Ther King Modi was sire.
Athelbrus he makede ther king
For his gode teching:
He yaf alle the knightes ore
For Horn knightes lore.
Horn gan for to ride;
The wind him blew wel wide.
He arivede in Yrlonde,
And Horn gan to rowe.
He arivede in Yrlonde,
Ther he wo fonde.
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 Rimenhild a lay,
And made her a lament.
Rimenhild 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 Rimenhild.
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 Rimenhild 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.32

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 urfrage 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 made 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>That fair was and noght unorn. Make we us glade evre among, For thus him endeth Hornes song. Jesus, that is of hevene king, Yeve us alle His sweete blessing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1545</td>
<td>Amen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There he had young Athulf Wed maid Reynild. Then Horn came home to the Southlands, Among all of his kin. He made Rymenhild 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. Amen.

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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 Rimmild

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 Rimmild 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.

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.\(^6\) 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.”\(^7\) 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)\(^8\) 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


\(^7\) Holford, “History and Politics,” 167.

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

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.\textsuperscript{16} 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{16}] Ralph Hanna, \textit{London Literature 1300-1380} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 130.
\item[\textsuperscript{18}] Prestwich, 165-8.
\end{itemize}

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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”\(^{22}\) 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.\(^{23}\) 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 briʒt” (HC 173) formulas. Horn has an extra clash in arms with a knight in Wales and breaks

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\(^{22}\) Hynes-Berry, 657.

\(^{23}\) 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.\textsuperscript{28} The weighting favors the courtly love story in KH to the point that the poet has “a strange reduplication”\textsuperscript{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

\begin{quote}
The ‘love’ and ‘war’ elements of the plot are, consequently, less well integrated than in the other versions. In \textit{King Horn}, Horn looks at the ring which Rimnild has given him before defeating important adversaries; there are no such moments in \textit{Horn Child}. Rather than marriage, the action of \textit{Horn Child} is directed towards Horn’s recovery of his inheritance…\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

\textit{Beowulf} has no strong love interest, but by the English romance period it may not be coincidence that a poem like \textit{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

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\textsuperscript{28} George H. McKnight, “Germanic Elements in the Story of \textit{King Horn},” \textit{PMLA} 15:2 (1900): 222.


\textsuperscript{30} Holford, “History and Politics,” 153-4.
\end{flushright}
“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 nouʒ” (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 / þat 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

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, 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 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 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)—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 Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild depicts a heroic Germanic warrior who ably fights for lof, land, and Rimnild, in that order of priority. KH has a more aristocratic atmosphere which prioritizes Horn’s noble fairness, his courtly love toward Rimnild, and his kingly leadership. Though Havelock is slightly earthier and

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.

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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).

1 Lysteneth, lordinges, gente and fre,
Ich wille you telle of Sire Degarre:
Knightes that were sometyme in londe
Ferli fele wolde fonde
And sechen aventures bi night and dai,
Hou thai mighte here strengthe asai;
So dede a knyght, Sire Degarree:
Ich wille you telle wat man was he.
In Litel Bretaygne was a kyng
Of gret poer in all thing,
Stif in armes under sscheld,
And mochel idouted in the feld.
Ther nas no man, verraiment,
That mighthe in werre ne in tornament,
Ne in justes for no thing,
Him out of his sadel bring,

Listen, lordings, noble and generous,
And I will tell you about Sir Degare.
There were once in this land knights,
A wondrous number, who would
By day and night seek out adventures
To see how they might test their valor.
So did one knight, Sir Degare.
I will tell you what kind of man he was.
In Brittany there was a king
With great might in all things,
Stout in arms wielded under his shield,
And greatly feared on the field.
There was no man, truly,
Who faced him in war or tournament
Or in jousts who might by any means
Force him out of his saddle

Litel 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,
Of hire was ded the Quene his wif:
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
Him out of his sadel bring,
And maken him lesen hise st
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.

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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 undernome
That thai were amis ignon.
Thai light adoun everichon
And cleped and criede al ifere,
Ac no man ariht 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 e 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.
But 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!
Nou ich wot ich am forloren!
Wilde bestes me willeth togrinde
Or ani man me sschulle finde!‖
Then 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 Heroidis 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 maidenhod,
And seththen 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 sech 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 come 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 daughter 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 daughter rod bi his side.
And he yemeth his kyngdom overal
Stoutliche, as a god king sschal.
Ac whan ech man was glad an blithe,
His daughter 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;
Therwhile she mighte, se hidde here sore.
On a dai, as hi wepend set,
On of hire maiden hits underyet.
"Madame," she seide, "par charité,
Whi wepe ye now, telleth hit me."
"A! gentil maiden, kinde icoren,
Help me, other ich am forloren!
Ich have ever yete ben meke and milde:
Lo, now ich am with quike schilde!
Yif ani man hit underyete,
Men wolde sai bi sti and strete
That mi fader the King hit wan
And I ne was never aquint with man!
And yif he hit himselve wite,
Swich sorewe schal to him smite
That never blithe schal he be,
For al his joie is in me,"
And tolde here al togeder ther
Hou hit was bigete and wher.
"Madame," quad the maide, "ne care th
Stille awai hit sschal be browt.
No man schal wite in Godes riche
Whar hit bicometh, but thou and iche.
Her time come, she was unbounde,
And delivred al mid sounde;
A knaveschild ther was ibore:
Glad was the moder tharfore.
The maiden servede here at wille,
Wond that child in clothes stille,
And laid hit in a cradel anon,
And was al prest tharwith to gon.
Yhit is moder was him hold:
Four pound she tok of gold,
And ten of selver also;
Under his fote she laid hit tho, -
For swich thing hit mighte hove;
And setthen she tok a paire glove
That here lemmen here sente of fairi londe,
That nolden on no manne honde,
Ne on child ne on womman yhe nolde,
Her womb grew greater and greater.
While she could, she hid herself miserably.
One day as she sat weeping,
One of her maidens noticed it.
"Madam," she said, "for charity’s sake,
Why are you crying now, tell me."
"Oh, gentle maiden, chosen one,
Help me, for otherwise I am lost,
I have always been obedient and mild.
Listen, now I am with a living child!
If anyone realized it,
People would say my father the king
Had me near some sty or back alley,6
For I was never intimate with a man!
And if he himself learns of it,
It will strike his heart with such sorrow
That he will never be happy again,
For all his joy is in me."
And she told her there in full
How the child was fathered and where.
"Madam," said the maid, "don’t be anxious.
It will be taken quietly away.7
No man in God’s realm will know
Where it went but you and I."
Her time came and she was unburdened
And delivered, all in sound health.
A boy was born there;
The mother was glad for it.
The maid served her in her needs,
Silently wrapped the child in clothes,
And laid it at once in a cradle,
And was all ready to leave.
Yet his mother was faithful to him.
She took four pounds of gold,
And ten of silver as well.
And she laid it under his feet
For such things as it might help with.
And then she took a pair of gloves
Which her lover had sent her from fairyland
And would not fit any man’s hand,
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 soff, 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 knitt hit with a selkene thred  
Aboute his nekke wel god sped  
That who hit founde schsolde iwrite.  
Than was in the lettre thous iwrite:  
"Par charité, yif ani god man  
This helples child finde can,  
Lat cristen hit with prestes honde,  
And bringen 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  
Warhth she  
Of an hermitage in a ston:  
An holi man had ther his woniyng.  
Thider she wente on heying,  
And 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.²  
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

² On hie: Or, possibly “They called for help from on high.”
An thanked God of all 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 thous tho.  
The hermite that was holi of lif  

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Hadde a soster that was a wif;  
A riche marchaunt of that countré  
Hadde hire ispoused into that cité.  
To hire that schild he sente tho  
Bi his knave, and the silver also,  
And bad here take gode hede  
Hit to foster and to fede,  
And yif God Almighty wolde  
Ten yer his lif holde,  
Ayen to him hi scholde hit wise:  
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.  
Bi that hit was ten yer old,  
Hit was a fair child and a bold,  
Wel inorissched, god and hende;  
Was non betere in al that ende.  
He wende wel that the gode man  
Had be n his fader that him wan,  
And the wif his moder also,  
And the hermite his unkel bo;  
And whan the ten yer was ispent,  
To the hermitage he was sent,  
And he was glad him to se,  
He was so feir and so fre.  
He taughte him of clerkes lore  
Other ten wynter other more;  
And when he was of twenty yer,  
Staleworth he was, of swich pover  
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.  
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 passed,  
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 but for a lay position.

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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 isspended 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 grounde;
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 at dai.
No man he ne herd, ne non he segh,
Til hit was non ipassed hegh;
Thanne he herde a noise kete
To do all his work with steadfastness,
And for his age a fine clerk.
He gave him his gold coins and gloves
11
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, 12
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 Degarre 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

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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 ihonted 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
Ase 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 tofrusst 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 swiftly,
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 \textit{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 first 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 ful god
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.

Sir 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 mete,
Erles and barouns of renoun,
That come fram a cité toun.
He asked a seriaunt what tiding,
And whenne 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
Sir Degare was well pleased,
And thanked the earl many times.
He leaped upon his palfrey
And went forth on his way.
His suire 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 barouns of renoun,
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.
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 Degare 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 thridde;
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 isehe
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!
Me ne fil nevere swich a cas,
That man that ich mighte hitte
After mi strok mighte sitte!‖
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 stede 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.  
Now I will take a better course!"
He turned his stede with herte grim,  
And rode 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 seghe never with egye  
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.  
There was ther long houting and cri;  
The King was sor asschameth forth;  
The lordinges comen with might and mein  
And broughthe the King on horse again,  
An seide with o cring, iwis,  
“Child Degarre hath wonne the pris!”  
Then was the damaisele sori,  
For hi wist wel forwhi:  
That hi scholde ispoused ben

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 never had sen,
And lede here lif with swich a man
That sche ne wot who him wan,
No in what londe he was ibore;
Carful was the levedi therefore.
Than seide the King to Degarre,
"Min hende sone, com hider to me:
And thou were al so gentil a man
As thou semest with sight upan,
And ase wel couthest wisdomes do
As thou art staleworht man therto,
Me thouwte mi kingdoms wel biset:
Ac be thou werse, be thou bet,
Covenaunt ich wille the holde.
Lo, her biforn mi bar
Mi douwter I take the bi the hond,
And seise the her in al mi lond.
King thou scalt ben after me:
God graunte the god man for to be!"
Then was the child glad and blithe,
And thonked the Kyng mani a sithe.
Gret perveaunce than was ther iwrout:
To churche thai were togidere ibrout,
And spoused that levedi verraiment,
Under Holi Sacrement.
Lo, what chaunse and wonder strong
Bitideth mani a man with wrong,
That cometh into an uncouthe thede
And spouseth wif for ani mede
And knowes nothing of hire ki
Ne sche of his, neither more ne min,
And beth iwedded togider to libbe
Par aventoure, and beth neghth sibbe!
So dede Sire Degarre the bold
Spoused ther is moder
And that hende levedi also
Here owene sone was spoused to,
That sche upon here bodi bar,
Lo, what aventoure fil hem thar!
But God, that alle thingge mai stere,
Wolde nowt that thai sinned ifere:
To chirche thai wente with barouns bolde;
A riche feste thai gonne to holde;
And wan was wel ipassed non
And the dai was al idon,
To bedde thai sscholde wende, that fre,
The dammaisele and Sire Degarre.
He stod stille and bithouwte him than
Hou the hermite, the holi man,
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."
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.

“Allas, allas!” than saide he,
“What meschaunce is comen to me?
A wai! witles wrecche ich am!
Iich 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:
She knew tho gloves that were hire.
“Schewe hem hider, leve sire.‖
Sche tok the gloves in that stede
And lightlich 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;
That hit was sche, he was ful blithe.
Than the Kyng gret wonder hadde
Why that noise that thai made,
And mervailed of hire crying
And seide, “Doughter, what is this thing?”
“Fader,” se seide, “thou schalt thare:
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.
“Sheow 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

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.
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 they 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 wills 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.
No quik best he fond of man,
Ac mani wilde bestes he seghth
And foules singen on heghth.
So longe hit drouthth to the night,
The sonne was adoune right.
Toward touh he wolde ride,
But he nist never bi wiche side.
Thenne he segh a water cler,
And amidde a river,
A fair castel of lim and ston:
Other wonying was ther non.
To his knave he seide, ―Tide wat tide,
O fote forther nel I ride,
Ac here abide wille we,
And ask herberewe par charté,
Yif ani quik man be here on live.‖
To the water thai come als swithe;
The bregge was adoune tho,
And the gate open also,
And into the castel he gan spede.
First he stabled up his stede;
He taiede up his palefrai.
Inough he fond of hote and hai;
He bad his grom on heying
Kepen wel al here thing.
He passed up into the halle,
Biheld aboute, and gan to calle;
Ac neither on lond ne on hegh
No quik man he ne segh.
Amidde the halle flore
A fir was bet, stark an store,
―Par fai,‖ he saide, ―ich am al sure
He that bette that fure
Wil comen hom yit tonight;
Abiden ich wille a litel wight.‖
He sat adoun upon the dais,
And warmed him wel eche wais,
And he biheld and undernam
Hou in at the dore cam
Four dammaiseles, gent and fre;
Ech was itakked to the kne.
The two bowen an arewen bere,
The other two icharged were
With venesoun, riche and god.
And Sire Degarre upstod
And gret hem wel fair aplithe,
Ac thai answerede no wight,
But yede into chaambre anon
And barred the dore after son.
Sone thereafter withalle
Ther com a dwerp into the halle.
Four fet of lengthe was in him;
His visage was stout and grim;
Bothe his berd and his fax
Meeting no living beast that was tame.
But he saw many wild animals,
And birds singing from on high.
It continued until the fall of night,
When the sun had gone down.
He wanted to ride toward town,
But he did not know which way to go.
Then he saw clear waters,
And alongside the river,
A stately castle of lime and mortar.
There was no other dwelling.
He said to his servant, ―Come what may,
I will not ride one foot farther,
But we will stay here
And ask for harbor for charity’s sake,
If there is anyone alive staying here.‖
They came to the water as quickly.
The bridge was down,
And the gate was open as well,
And they sped into the castle.
First he stabled his horse
And tied up his palfrey.
They found plenty of oats and hay.
He asked his servant in haste
To keep all their things well.
He passed into the hall,
Looked around, and began to call.
But he saw no living person,
Either on the ground floor or higher.
In the middle of the hall floor
A fire was raised, strong and blazing.
―By my faith,‖ he said, ―I am sure
That whoever made that fire
Will come home tonight yet.
I will wait a little while.‖
He sat down on the platform,
And warmed himself well all over.
Then he perceived and saw
Coming in through the door
Four ladies, noble and elegant.
Each was bare-legged from the knees down.
Two carried bows and arrows,
And the others were laden
With venison, rich and fine.
Sir Degare stood up
And greeted them very courteously,
But they did not answer at all.
They only advanced into their chamber
And barred the door soon after.
Following that, in a little while
A dwarf came into the hall.
His body was four feet tall.
His appearance was firm and severe;
Both his beard and his hair
Was crisp an yhalew as wax;
Grete ssholdres and quarré;
Right stoutliche loked he;
Mocle were hise fet and honde
Ase the meste man of the londe;
He was iclothed wel aright,
His sshon 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 clothed 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 Degarre,
―Ich have hem gret, 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 bifore the levedie,
And therin himselfe set,
And tok a knif and carf his met;
At the soper litel at he,
But biheld 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,

20 His sshon 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 thout
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 quik 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.

830
Upon the bedde he set adoun
To here of the harpe soun.
Formurthe of notes soschille,
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.

840
Faire sche waked him tho:
“Aris!” she seide, “graith 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;

850
Ac tel me, levedi so hende,
Ar ich out of thi chaumber wende,
Who is louerd of thi lond?
And who this castel hath in hond?
Wether thou be widue or wif,
Or maiden yit of clef li?
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;

860
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, “dress 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,
Alone, without any man?”
The damsel sighed sorely,
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.

I was the heir of his country.
In my company I had many knights,
And squires who were good and able,
And sturdy men of skill,
To serve the court near and far.
But then there came around here
A cruel knight who is widely known.
I believe there is no one in Brittany
So strong a man as he is.
He had loved me for a long time,
But I could never in my heart
Love him in return.
But when he saw there was no use,
He was ready to ravish
Me away with force.
My knights attempted to defend me,
And they continually fought with him.
He slaughtered the best the first day,
And then a second, by my faith,
And then the third and fourth,
The best that might walk on earth!
My squires who were so strong,
Rode out, by four, by five,
On horses, armed well enough.
He destroyed them by his own hand.
He killed all of my skilled men
And other pages in my hall.
For this I am sorely afraid
That he might finally conquer me.”
With these words she fell to the ground
And lay in a faint for a good while.
He beheld the lady with great pity.
“Loveli madama,” quath he,
“I am here as one of yours.
I will help you by my own power.”
“Sir, yes,” she said, “then I will give you
All of my land into your hand,
As well as my body, at your will,
If you can avenge me of him.”
Then he was glad to be able to fight,
And even gladder that he might
Have the lady so bright
If he destroyed that other knight.
And as they stood and spoke together,
A maiden cried, with a doleful voice,
“Here comes our enemy toward us fast!
Raise the bridge and shut the gate,
Or he will slay every one of us!”
Sir Degare started up at once
And saw him through a window,
Well armed and high on his horse.
He never saw a fairer body
In armes ne segh he never non.
Sir Degare armed himself swiftly
And on a stede gan out drive.
And drove out on his steed.
With a speere gret of gayn,
With a spear of great force
To the knight he rit agein.
He rode toward the knight.
The knighte speere al tospromg.
The knight broke the spear into pieces;
Ac Degare was so strong
But Degare was so strong
And so harde to him thrast,
And thrust on him so hard,
But the knight sat so fast,
That because the knight sat so firmly,
The stede rigge tobræk
The horse’s backbone was broken
And fel to grounde, and he ek;
And it fell to the ground with him;
But anon stirt up the knight
But the knight jumped up at once
And drough out his swerd bright.
And drew out his bright sword.
―Alight,‖ he saide, ―adoun anon;
―Get down,‖ he said, ―dismount right now.
To fight thou sschalt afote gon.
To fight me you must go on foot.
For thou hast slawe mi stede,
Because you have slain my steed,
Deth-dint schal be thi mede;
A death blow will be your reward.
Ac thine stede sle I nille,
I do not want to slay your horse;
Ac on fote fighte ich wille.‖
And I will fight you on foot.‖
Than on fote thai toke the fight,
Then they took the fight to the ground,
And hewe togidere with brondes bright.
And clashed together with shining blades.
The knight gave Sir Degare
The knight gave Sir Degare
Harsh blows in great plenty,
Harsh blows in great plenty,
And he him agen also,
And he struck him in return as well,
That helm and scheld cleve atwo.
So that helmet and shield were cut in two.
The knight was agreved sore
The knight was sorely angered
That his armour toburste thore:
That his armor was broken there.
A strok he gaf Sir Degarre,
He gave Sir Degare a stroke
That to grounde fallen is he;
That brought him to the ground.
But he stirt up anon right,
But he stood up right away
And swich a strok he gaf the knight
And gave the knight such a blow,
Upon his heved so harde iset
So powerfully set upon his head,
Thurh helm and heved and bacinet
Through helmet and steel cap and head,
That ate brest stod the dent;
That the stroke only stopped at the breast.
Ded he fil doun, verraiment.
He fell down dead, in truth.
The levedi lai in o kernel,
The lady stayed in the barricade
And biheld the batail everi del.
And saw every moment of the battle.
She ne was never er so blithe:
She was never before so happy
Sche thankede God fele sithe.
And thanked God many times.
Sire Degare com into castel;
Sir Degare came into the castle
Agein him com the dammaisel,
And the damsel came to him
And thanked him switly for his deeds.
She led him into her chamber
She led him into her chamber
And unarmed him at once,
And unarmed him at once,
And set him hire bed upon,
And set him upon her bed
And saide, ―Sire, par charité,
And said, ―Sir, for charity’s sake,
I the prai dwel with me,
I beg that you stay with me,
And al mi lond ich wil the give,
And I will give you all my land,
And miselwe, whil that I live.‖
And myself, while I live.‖
―Grant merci, dame,‖ saide Degarre,
―Many thanks, my lady,‖ said Degare,
―Of the gode thou bedest me:
―For all the goods that you offer me.
Wende ich wille into other londe,
But I will travel to other lands,
More of haventours for to fonde;
To find more adventures.
And be this twelve moneth be go,
Agein ich wil come the to.”
The levedi made moche mourning
For the knightes departing,
And gaf him a stede, god and sur,
Gold and silver an god armur,
And bitaught him Jhesu, Hevene King.
And sore thei wepen at here parting.

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,
“How, what are you doing here
In my forest, chasing my dear?
Degare replied with gentle words,
“Sir, I do not want any of your dear.
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 did rather battle.

A shield he kest aboute his swere
That was of armes riche and dere,
With thre maidenes hevedes of silver bright,
With crounes of gold precious of sight.
A shaft he tok that was nowt smal,
With a kene coronal.
His squier tok another spere;
Bi his louerd he gan hit bere.
Lo, swich aventoure ther gan bitide -
The sone agein the fader gan ride,
And noither ne knew other no wight!
Now the first flight.

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.
Sir Degare took his course there,
Bearing a lance against his father.
He intended to bear him down
And set his aim right on the shield.
The shaft broke into pieces,
And left the point in the shield.
They began to take another charge.
To attack the son, the father seized
A lance which was great and long,
And Degare took another just as strong.
They rode together with great violence,
But neither bore the other down.
With the blows that they struck there,
Their horses’ backs were broken.
They started to battle on foot,
And laid on with shining swords.
The father was puzzled
As to why Degare’s sword was pointless,
And said to his son, fittingly,
“Listen to me for a moment.
Where were you born, in what land?”
“In Brittany, as I understand.
I am a king’s daughter’s son, without a lie,
But I do not know who my father was.”
“What is your name?” he then asked.
“For certain, men call me Degare.”
“Oh, Degare, my son!
Truly, I am your father.
And I know it by your sword here.
The point is in my pouch.”
He took the point and set it on.
Degare was overcome then,
And his father, certainly,
Also began to faint.
And when they rose from their shock,
The son asked for forgiveness there
For his offence from his father,
Who invited Degare to his castle
And asked him to stay with him forever.
“For certain, no sir,” Degare said.
“But if it is your will,
We will go together to my mother,
For she is in great anxiousness.”
“Gladly,” he said, “by Heaven’s king.”
Sir Degare and his dear father
Went together into Brittany.
They were armed and finely dressed.
As soon as the lady saw that knight,
She knew him very well.

24 At line 1076 Auchinleck stops, as a final page is missing. Editors generally use Bodleian Rawlinson Poetry 34 for the ending, although Bodleian transfers the setting to England (line 1077).
Anon sche chaunyd hur colowr aryght,  
And seyd, “My dere sun, Degaré,  
Now thou hast brought thy father wyth the!”  
“My, 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  
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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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Original Text</th>
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<tr>
<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 bourdys and ribaudy, And mani ther beth of fairy.</td>
<td>We often read and find written,¹ 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 <em>Sir Orfeo.</em> Orfeo, more than any thing, Loved the joys of harping.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Of al thinges that men seth, Mest o love, forsothe, they beth. In Breteyne this layes were wrought, First y-founde and forth y-brought, Of adventours that fel bi dayes, Wherof Bretouns maked her layes. When kinges might our y-here Of ani mervailleys that ther were, Thai token an harp in gle and game And maked a lay and gaf it name.</td>
<td>Of all things that men set, Most, in truth, they are. In Brittany these lays were crafted, First found and then brought forth, About adventures from the old times, For which Bretons made them into lays. When kings might hear of some 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 <em>Sir Orfeo.</em> Orfeo, more than any thing, Loved the joys of harping.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>We we 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 tell of these adventures that were fallen They can tell some, as none. And hearken, lordings that are true, I will tell of “Sir Orfeo.” Orfeo, more than any thing Loved the joys of harping.</td>
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</tbody>
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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 harpour
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 harpour in no plas.
In al the world 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 Ingland 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,
That might gon on bodi and bones,
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 florws,
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 undrentide
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 lete hir ligge 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 froted 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
No durst 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,
Damisels 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 knightes tene
To chaumber, right bifor the quene,
And bi-held, and seyd with grete pité,
“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 straightaway
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,
And 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,
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 palfrey 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 snowe-white stedes,
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 owen 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-fet,  
And totore 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-name,  
And wele ten hundred knightes with him,  
Ich y-armed, stout and grim;  
And with the quen wenent 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-name.  
Men wist never wher sche was bicome.  
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 cleded togider his barouns,  
Erls, lorde of renouns,  
And when thai al y-comen were,  
“Lordinges,” he said, “bifor you here  
Ich ordainy min heighe steward  
To wite mi kingdom afterward;  
In mi stede ben he schal

And showed me castles and towers,  
Rivers, forests, 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!”

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 wilderness 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 your best with al mi thing.‖
Tho was 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;
No man most with him go.
O way! What ther was wepe and wo,
When he that hadde ben king with croun
Went so poverlich out of toun!
Thurth wode and over heth
Into the wilderness.
Nothing he fint that him is ays,
Bot ever he liveth in gret malais.
He that hadde y-werd the fowe and griis,
And on bed the purper bis,
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 sneewe 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 wilderness
And live there forevermore,
With wild beasts in dark forests.
And when you learn that I am dead,
Then call a parliament
And choose yourselves a new 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,

\(^9\) 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 grisi: The MED defines fowe as a “parti-colored fur” and grisi 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 fille 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 breere  
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 bcome  
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 amonges hem ther nis;
And ich a faucoun on hond bere,
And riden on haukin bi o rivere.

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-

Biheld, and hath wele undermined,
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,
That had ben so riche and so heighe,
The teres fel out of her eighe.
The other levedis this y-

Sche most with him no lenger abide.
“Alas!” quath he, “now me is wo!”
Whi nil deth now me slo?
Alas, 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 dede 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,
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, wretch, that I do not
Die now after this sight!
Alas! My life lasts too long
When I dare not do anything 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.

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 sonn 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
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.  

He came into a fair country,
As bright as the sun on a summer’s day,
Smooth and flat and all green.
Neither hill nor dale was to be seen.
In the middle of the land he saw a castle,
Rich and royal and incredibly high.
All of the outside wall
Was as clear and shining as crystal.
A hundred towers surrounded it,
With wondrous and firm battlements.  

The supports rising out of the moat
Were richly arched with red gold.
The vaulted roofs were all adorned
With every kind of different finish.  

There were spacious chambers inside,
All of precious stones.
The least pillar to look upon
Was all of burnished gold.
All the land was always light,
For when it should have been dark and night,
The rich stones shone
As bright as the sun at noon.
No man could describe, nor imagine in thought,
The rich work that was crafted there.
All these things made him believe that it was
The proud court of Paradise.
The ladies dismounted in this castle,
And he wished to follow in, if he might.

Orfeo knokketh atte gate;  
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 lete 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.
And sum lay wode, y-bounde,
And sum armed on hors sete,
And sum astraunged as thai ate;
And sum were in water adreynt,
And sum with fire al forschreynt.
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 wyrld ynome,
With fairi thider ycome.
Ther he seighe his owhen wiif,
Dame Heurodis, his lef liif,
Slepe under an ympetree
Bi her clothes he knewe that it was he.
And when he hadde bihold thys 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 miyght.
When he hadde biholden al that thing,
He knelde 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 nevyr after the.
Sethen that ich here regni gan,
Y no fond never so folerhardi man
That hider to ous durst wende
Bot that ic him wald ofsende.‖
―Lord,‖ quath he, ―trowe ful wel,
Y nam bot a pover menstrel;
And, sir, it is the maner of ous
To seche mani a lordes 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 blisful notes he ther gan,
That al that in the palays were
Com to him forto here,
And liggheth adoun to his fete -
Hem thenketh his melody so swete.
The king herkneth and sitt ful stille;
To here his gle he hath gode wille.
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 ynome  
To Winchester he is ycome,  
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 fulnarwe,  
Ther he tok his herdwarwe  
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,  
The king said to him,  
“Minstrel, I’m well pleased with your songs.  
Now ask me for whatever you wish,  
And I will reward you generously.  
Now speak, if you wish to prove it.”

“Sire,” he said, “I beg of you  
That you would give me  
That lady with the shining face,  
Who sleeps under the orchard tree.”

“No,” said the king, “that could never be!  
You would make a sorry couple.  
For you are haggard, rough, and dirty,  
And she is lovely, without blemish.  
It would be a loathsome thing  
To see her in your company!”

“Oh, sire,” he said, “gracious king,  
It would be a much fouler thing  
To hear a falsehood from your mouth!”

For sire, as you said just now,  
I should ask for what I desire,  
And by necessity you must keep your word.”

The king sighed, “Since it is so,  
Take her by the hand and go.  
I hope that you will be pleased with her.”

He knelt down and thanked him quickly.  
He took his wife by the hand,  
And swiftly took himself out of that land,  
And left that country.  
He returned the same way he came.  
He made his way  
Until they came to Winchester,  
Which was his own city.  
But no man knew that it was him.  
To avoid being recognized, he did not  
Dare go further than the edge of town,  
But took his lodging  
In a beggar’s home, built shabbily,  
For him and his own wife,  
Posing as a minstrel with a poor living.  
He asked for news of that land,  
And about who held the kingdom in hand.  
The poor beggar in his cottage  
Told him every detail,  
How their queen was stolen away  
By fairies ten years earlier,  
And how their king went into self-exile.

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15 As TEAMS notes, a promise must be kept, especially by a king, as “fairyland 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. Orpheous’s wiliness is especially ‘Greek’ here as he maneuvers the king into the bargain and then quickly leaves.
But no man nist in wiche thede; And how the steward the lond gan hold, And other mani things him told. Amorwe, oyan nonetide, He makeyd his wiif ther abide; The beggers clothes he borwed anon And heng his harp his rigge opon, And went him into that cié That men might him bihold and se. 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 se. Erls 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! Icha m 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 thi ben al stille, He toke his harp and tempred schille; The blissefulest notes he harped there That ever ani man y-herd with ere - Ich man liked wele his gle. The steward biholded 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. Earls 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.
It was a good ten years ago."
"Oh," exclaimed the steward, "now I am in
Misery! That was my lord, Sir Orfeo!
Alas, wretch, 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 boards!
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.
| 590 | 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,  
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,  
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. |
| 600 | Explicit | 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,”¹ 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

origins in the *vita* of Pope Gregory the Great.² 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.³ 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 lemmar ar thou go / wether the liketh wel or wo” (107-8). While actual sexual assault was rare in romance,

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“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 Lays 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).9

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.”10 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”11 despite the fairy king threatening to “totore thine limes al” (“rip off all your limbs,” 171) to the queen, who

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.”\(^{12}\) 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 bifore / 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 of tormented 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.”\(^{13}\) 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 utmost 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-abdiction, 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 laundered 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.\footnote{Doob, 174.} 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 \textit{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.\footnote{Jirsa, 143-6.} 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 “\textit{þe schadowe þerof is grevous and slee hem þat slepiþ þerunder.}”\footnote{17.161; “De taxo,” M. C. Seymour, et al., ed., \textit{On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa’s Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text}. Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), quoted in Jirsa, 145.} The ladies protecting the princess in \textit{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 (\textit{ympe}) tree was particularly attractive to aristocratic sentiments.\footnote{Lerer, 95-6.} Yet the \textit{ympe-tree} also contains two species unnaturally blended, just as the fairy and real world ominously intersect for Herodis.\footnote{Alice E. Lasater, “Under the Ympe-tre or: Where the Action is in \textit{Sir Orfeo},” \textit{Southern Quarterly} 12 (1974): 355. Lasater argues that the \textit{ympe} is a grafted apple tree. The word also etymologically links to \textit{imp}, a mischievous demon.}

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\footnote{19 Doob, 174.}
\footnote{20 Jirsa, 143-6.}
\footnote{22 Lerer, 95-6.}
\footnote{23 Alice E. Lasater, “Under the Ympe-tre or: Where the Action is in \textit{Sir Orfeo},” \textit{Southern Quarterly} 12 (1974): 355. Lasater argues that the \textit{ympe} is a grafted apple tree. The word also etymologically links to \textit{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 “als 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.”

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.

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” until meeting her by chance. Yet whatever his goals regarding Herodis, Orfeo’s motivation is love rather than a desire for spiritual aims.

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26 Doob, 159.
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.


CHAPTER 10

Sir Thopas

*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 <em>Tale of Sir Topaz</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whan seyd was al this miracle, every man As sobre was that wonder was to se, Til that oure Hooste japen tho bigan, And thanne at erst he looked upon me, And seyde thus: “What man artow?” quod he; “Thou lookest as thou woldest fynde an hare, For evere upon the ground I se thee stare.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Approche neer, and looke up murily. Now war yow, sires, and lat this man have place! He in the waast is shape as wel as I; This were a popet in an arm t’enbrace For any womman, small and fair of face. He semeth elvyssh by his contenaunce, For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sey now somwhat, syn oother folk han sayd; Telle us a tale of myrthe, and that anon.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hooste,” quod I, “ne beth nat yvele apayd, For oother tale certes kan I noon, But of a rym I lerned longe agoon.”</td>
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<td></td>
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</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 sissyish 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>710</th>
<th>“Ye, that is good,” quod he; “now shul we heere Som deyntee thyng, me thynketh by his cheere.”</th>
<th>“Yes, that is fine,” he said. “Now we will hear Some dainty thing, I think, by his expression.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>712</td>
<td>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 tournement; His name was sire Thopas.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>720</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>He was born in a faraway country, In Flanders, far beyond the sea, In Poperinge, in that place. His father was a very noble man And he was lord of that country, As it was God’s grace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>730</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Sir Topaz grew to be a rugged youth. His face was as fair as fine white bread, 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>740</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>His hair—hear—is like saffron, Which ran down to his waist. His shoes were of Spanish leather; His brown hose were from Bruges. His robe was silk woven with gold, Which cost a pretty penny.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>740</td>
<td>He koude hunte at wilde deer, And ride an haukyng for river With grey goshauk on honde; Ther to he was a good archeer; Of wrastlyng was ther noon his peer Ther any ram shal stonde.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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.

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.

He priketh thrugh 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 almest
Bitid a sory care.

Ther spryngen herbes grete and smale,
The lycorys and the cetewale,
And many a clowe-gylofre;
And notemuge to putte in ale,
Wheither it be moyste or stale,
Or for to leye in cofre.

The briddles 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.

Sire Thopas fil in love-longynge,
Al whan he herde the thrustel synge,
And pryked as he were wood.
His faire steede in his prikynge
So swatte that men myghte him wrynge;
His sydes were al blood.

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 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 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.

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.⁷

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.

Sir Topaz fell into lovesickness
When he heard the thrustel sing,
And spurred as if he were mad.⁸
His fair steed, from his spurring,
Sweated so that men could wring him!
His sides were all bloody.

pursuits for knights in this period, adding to the joke of Thopas’ faux-elegance. Chaucer’s boorish, drunken
Miller also enjoys wrestling: “At wrastlynye he wolde have alwey the ram” (CT I.547).


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.
Sir Topaz was so tired as well
From riding on the soft grass—
So fierce was his courage!—
That he laid himself down in that spot
To give his steed some rest
And gave him good foraging.

“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.

I will love an elf-queen, for sure!
For in all this world there is no woman
Worthy to be my mate
In the town."
All other women I leave behind
And I will search for an elf-queen for me
By hill and by valley as well!”

He climbed into his saddle at once
And rode over fence and stone
To spy out an elf-queen,
Until he had ridden and traveled so far
That he found, in a secluded place,
The country of Fairyland,
So wild.
For in that country there was no one
Who dared to ride to or confront him,
Neither woman or child;
Until there appeared a great giant.
His name was Sir Elephant,
A perilous man of deeds.
He said, “Child, by Termagaunt,
Unless you spur out of my territory,
I will kill your horse at once
With my mace!
The queen of Fairyland is here,
With harp and pipe and fiddle.”

Chaucer imitates the tail-rhyme romances such as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, with its formulaic and regular two-syllable lines (‘bobs’).

Termagaunt: Termagant is a deity incorrectly claimed to be worshipped by Muslims in medieval romance, both English and French. Muslims are typically depicted as pagans who worship both Mohammad and various heathen gods such as Apollo. The origins of Termagant are unclear and he is usually invoked in romance simply as an idiomatic oath. See also the translation of Bevis of Hampton, line 500.
Dwellynge in this place.”

The child seyde, “Also moote I thee, Tomorwe wol I meete with thee, Whan 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.”

Sire 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.

The Second Fit

Yet listeth, lordes, to my tale Murier than the nightyn gale, 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 joaltee Of oon that shoon ful brighte.

“Do come,” he seyde, “my mynstrales, And geestours for to tellen tales, Anon in myn armynge,

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.

Part 2

Yet listen, gentlemen, to my tale; It is merrier than the nightingale. For now I will reveal to you How Sir Topaz, with his slender waist, Spurring over hill and valley, Came back to town.

He commanded his merry men To make song and entertainment for him, For he needed to fight With a giant who had three heads, For love and for the delight Of one who shone very brightly.

“Summon,” he said, “my minstrels, And storytellers to tell tales, Later as I am arming—

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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 hauberk,  
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.

His sheeld was al of gold so reed,  
And therinne was a bores heed,  
A charboele bisyde;  
And there he swoor on ale and breed  
How that the geaunt shal be deed,  
Bityde what bityde!

His jambeux were of quyroily,  
His swerdes shethe of yvory,  
His helm of latoun bright;  
His sadel was of rewel boon,  
His brydel as the sonne shoon,  
Or as the moone light.

His spere was of fyn ciprees,  
That bodeth werre, and nothyng pees,  
The heed ful sharpe ygrunde;  
His steede was al dappull gray,  
It gooth an ambil in the way

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, note to 864, page 921).

Ful softly and rounde
In londe.
Loo, lordes myne, heere is a fit!
If ye wol any moore of it,
To telle it wol I fonde.

The Third Fit

Now holde youre mouth, *par charitee,*
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.

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!

His goode steeede 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!

And for he was a knyght auntrous,
He holde slepen in noon hous,
But liggen in his hoode;
His brighte helm was his woerger,
And by hym baiteth his dextrer
Of herbes fyne and goode.

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.

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.

Part 3

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.

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!

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!

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.

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 *Tale of Topaz.*

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.

¹⁸ Possibly a reference to *Sir Percival of Galles.* The only MS known is the Thornton (Lincoln Cathedral MS 91) from about 1440. See Mary Flowers Braswell, ed., *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), [http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/percint.htm](http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/percint.htm).
“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 kannst tellen 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 devysse…

“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.


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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.”

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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).

6 Joseph A. Dane, “Genre and Authority: The Eighteenth-Century Creation of Chaucerian Burlesque,”

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.\(^8\) 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,\(^9\) 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.”¹⁶ Chaucer’s near-contemporaries saw Thopas as silly, but not as a “meta-
romance” satirizing a specific literary form.¹⁷ French aristocrat Jean of Angoulême called
it a valde absurdum, “an absurd quarrel.”¹⁸ 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.”¹⁹ 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 1824.²⁰

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.”²¹ Chaucer’s intentions were “to ridicule
the frivolous descriptions and other tedious impertinences”²² 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

(New York: St. Martin’s, 1986), 370.
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”\textsuperscript{23} and mocks their “plot[s], characters, jog-trot rhythm, and verbal clichés.”\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{25} Pearsall calls the poem “brilliantly bad.”\textsuperscript{26} Presumably, \textit{Bevis} and \textit{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. \textit{The Squire’s Tale} had long been read by some as ironic, but within the same century works as seemingly devout as \textit{Melibee} and \textit{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 archinesses, which are not there,”\textsuperscript{27} much as Larry Benson has written in frustration about the tittering of critics who see every incidence of \textit{queynte} as a sexual joke.\textsuperscript{28} Chaucer likely intends some \textit{myrthe} in the project, as ultimately a \textit{Canterbury Tale} is ME slang for a lie.\textsuperscript{29}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Albert C. Baugh, \textit{Chaucer’s Major Poetry} (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 347, quoted in Dane, 346.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Pearsall, \textit{Life}, 195.
\end{itemize}
Nevertheless, he does not have “the waspish mind of Pope,” and to view *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 gravitas has faded, more recent studies have recaptured some of the fun of *Sir Thopas*. Jost sees in the poem “a birthday-party setting, jovial and childlike.” 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” 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” of romance in his ostensibly serious texts. There Chaucer appropriates phrases such as “sighed sore” (*Bevis* 1312, *Guy* 943, four times in the *Romaunt*, six times in *Troilus*) and “it befel upon a cas” (*Bevis* 1283, *CT* I.1074, *LGW* 1907). Variations of

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30 Garbaty, “Chaucer and Comedy,” 81.
31 Jost, introduction to *Chaucer’s Humor*, xxv.
33 Charbonneau, 651.
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).35

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,36 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>
</tr>
</thead>
<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.38 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).
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.\footnote{Laura A. Hibbard Loomis, “Sir Thopas and David and Goliath,” Modern Language Notes 51:5 (1936): 312.}

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.\footnote{For a longer discussion of Chaucer and Bakhtin, see S.H. Rigby, Chaucer in Context (Manchester: University Press, 1996), 18-77, in Gillian Rudd, The Complete Critical Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer (New York: Routledge, 2001), 169.} In Rabelais and His World (1965), Bakhtin asserts that public displays of comedy, from

\footnote{584}
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 Saturnalia to modern holdovers such as Mardi Gras. 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, 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,” carnival humor was playful, often involving games where social rank was leveled or reversed, another inheritance from the Roman Saturnalia. 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

43 Bakhtin, 51.
laughter, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it.\textsuperscript{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,”\textsuperscript{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”\textsuperscript{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.’”\textsuperscript{47} Bakhtin sees a line of humorous texts from ancient parodies of Latin grammar to Erasmus’ \textit{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”\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{44} Bakhtin, 12. 
\textsuperscript{45} Bakhtin, 9. 
\textsuperscript{46} Bakhtin, 13. 
\textsuperscript{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.”\(^\text{49}\) 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.\(^\text{50}\)

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,” but most critics agree that the name simply reflects medieval traditions identifying the topaz with chastity. 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. 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, merely a launegay, a flaccid costume lance. His spear is made of cypres, a softwood which hardly “bodeth were” (882).

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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.\(^{60}\) 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.”\(^{61}\) 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: \(^{62}\) “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.”\(^{63}\) 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, 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.” Nevertheless, _Sir Thopas_ does not mock romances any more than the _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

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64 Haskell, 255.

public failure, put down and shut off by that Master of High Seriousness, Harry Bailly,‖ 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. 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 lewdely / 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, 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.

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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. 70

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

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,”\(^\text{71}\) 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,”\(^\text{72}\) 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,\(^\text{73}\) 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.\(^\text{74}\)

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

\(^{71}\) 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

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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.


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 thrre languages.”

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