Constructing the Female Subject in Anglo-Norman, Middle English and Medieval Irish Romance

by

Giselle Gos

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Centre for Medieval Studies
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Giselle Gos, 2012
Constructing the Female Subject in Anglo-Norman, Middle English and Medieval Irish Romance

Giselle Gos
Doctor of Philosophy
Centre for Medieval Studies
University of Toronto
2012

Abstract

Female subjectivity remains a theoretical question in medieval romance, a genre in which the feminine and the female have often been found to exist primarily as foils for the production of masculinity and male identity, the Other against which the masculine hero is defined. Woman’s agency and subjectivity are observed by critics most often in moments of transgression, subversion and resistance: as objects exchanged between men and signs of masculine prestige, female characters carve out their subjectivity, agency and identity in spite of, rather than with the support of, the ideological formations of romance. The following study makes a case for the existence of a female subject in medieval romance, analogous to the oft-examined male subject, a subject in both senses of the term: subjected to the dominant ideology, the subject is also enabled in its agency and authority by that ideology.

I combine a feminist poststructuralist approach to discourse analysis with a comparative methodology, juxtaposing related romance texts in Anglo-Norman, Middle English and Medieval Irish under the premise that stress-points in ideological structures must be renegotiated when stories are revised and recast for new audiences. The principal texts considered are Roman de Horn, King Horn, Horn Childe and the Maiden Rimnild; Gamair’s Haveloc episode, Lai
d’Haveloc, Havelok the Dane; Gui de Warewic, Guy of Warwick, The Irish Lives of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton; The Adventures of Art, Son of Conn, Mongán’s Love for Dubh Lacha. Through close attention to textual change over time, a profound shift can be seen in the emergence of female characters which cease to be symbols, signs and objects but through a variety of discourses and narrative strategies are established as subjects in their own right.
Acknowledgments

I have a lot of people to thank. First of all, I want to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the generous Canada Graduate Scholarship, through which a large portion of this degree was funded. Many thanks as well to the faculty and staff of the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto for their help and support throughout the many years.

I would like to thank my parents, Silvana and Elci Gos, and my sister Geseca Gos for their support and encouragement and for always believing I could do it. I am also grateful to Freyja for keeping me company during many long days of writing. I want to thank Susan McNair, Elvina Chow, and Randy Ornstein for over a decade of devoted friendship and emotional support. In addition to his constant support, I want to thank my husband Sébastien Rossignol for being so understanding and patient and for reminding me that scholarship should be fun even when it is hard.

I think the process of going through a Ph.D. together is a bonding experience like no other and so I owe a special thanks to my medievalist friends and colleagues, especially Rachel Kessler, Jen Konieczny and Kristen Mills, who were always there with sound advice and shoulders to lean on. For help with proof-reading, I am grateful to Jen, as well as Emily Blakelock and Tadhg O’Muiris, to whom I am grateful for insightful comments on the introduction, conclusion and my Irish chapters. I look forward to returning the favour. I am especially indebted to Victoria Goddard, my out-of-town thesis buddy: I still can’t believe she read everything! Her comments were invaluable, and constant support even more so. I would not have been able to finish this dissertation without her.

My thesis committee was invaluable. I want to thank Ian McDougall, who was a great help in the early stages when Norse was still a chapter. I look forward to going back to his always detailed and helpful notes and comments in my post-doctoral work. Thanks as well to David Townsend, whose critical theory class changed the course of my dissertation and who was so helpful with the theoretical side of my thesis. I also want to thank the members of my defence committee, Will Robins, David Klausner and my external Ivana Djordjević, for their thoughtful questions, suggestions and detailed comments.

Finally, last but not least, I owe special thanks to my two wonderful supervisors. My Middle English supervisor, Suzanne Akbari, I want to thank for being so helpful, insightful, demanding and encouraging, not only with my thesis, but the myriad of professional academic challenges. I have learned so much from her and I count myself so very lucky for having been her student. Ann Dooley, my Irish supervisor, has been so much more than a doctoral supervisor to me over the past ten years. I walked into her Celtic Culture class at eighteen years old, and it changed my life. Ten years later, here I am. I wouldn’t be here without all of her inspiration, support, encouragement, knowledge and wisdom, warmth and kindness. I am so grateful to her for everything, for being not only my mentor, but also my friend.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................ v

Introduction: Introducing the Female Subject of Romance .................................................. 1
  Women in Medieval French and Middle English Romance .................................................. 3
  Gender and Genre: Romance as Ideology and Masculine Subject-formation .................. 12
  Subjectivity ................................................................................................................... 17
Comparative Methodology ............................................................................................... 30

Part One: Romance in England ....................................................................................... 34
Chapter One: Desire, Agency and Women’s Exchange in the Narratives of King Horn ......... 34
  Manuscripts, Texts and Textual Relationships ................................................................. 35
  Sexual Politics and the ‘Wooping Woman’: Gift-Exchange, Desire and Subjectivity ........ 38
  Attempting to Break the Rules: Anglo-Norman Rigmel’s Transgressive Subjectivity ...... 47
  Breaking the Rules?: The Subjectivities of Rimenhild and Rinnild in Middle English Horn Narratives .................................................................................................................. 63
  Hagiographic Interconnections ....................................................................................... 74

Chapter Two: “Quen and levedi”: Goldeboru’s suffering, sainthood and sovereignty in Havelok the Dane ............................................................................................................. 80
  Manuscripts, Texts and Textual Relationships ................................................................. 81
  Argentille’s Disappearance in Gaimar’s Haveloc Narrative and the Lai d’Haveloc .......... 85
  “Pe gest of Hauelok and of Goldeboru”: Parallelism and Goldeboru’s Subjectivity .......... 90
  “Quen and levedi”: Goldeboru’s Formal Access to Power .............................................. 97
  Wisdom, Piety, Chastity and Suffering: Goldeboru’s Hagiographic Life ....................... 101

Chapter Three: Countess of Warwick: Felice’s Penitence, Piety and Praise in Gui de Warwic and Guy of Warwick ........................................................................................................ 114
  Introduction: What’s at stake in the story of Felice? ......................................................... 114
  Texts, Manuscripts and Comparative Methodology .......................................................... 117
  Gender and Subjectivity in Alfred Ewert’s edition of Gui .............................................. 123
  Felice’s Subjectivity ......................................................................................................... 134
  Translation and Transformation in the Middle English Versions of Guy of Warwick ....... 138
  “In all the world ys none here pere”: Felice’s Praise and Piety in the Later Middle English Versions of Guy ............................................................................................................. 158

Part Two: Romance in Ireland ......................................................................................... 178
Interlude: Romance and Rómánsaíocht in Hiberno-Norman Ireland .................................. 178

Chapter Four: Translating Romance in Hiberno-Norman Ireland ..................................... 190
  Felice in the Irish Life of Guy of Warwick ........................................................................ 196
  The Erosion of the Relational Construction of Gender .................................................. 203
  Sisian in the Irish Life of Bevis of Hampton ..................................................................... 222

Chapter Five: Gender, Subjectivity and Sexuality in The Adventures of Art Son of Conn, and Mongán’s Love for Dubh Lacha ...................................................................................... 236
  Exchanging Women: Desire, Gaze and Subjectivity ....................................................... 243
  Sex, Marital Fidelity and Subjectivity .............................................................................. 254

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 266
Works Cited ..................................................................................................................... 273
Introduction: Introducing the Female Subject of Romance

Medieval romance as a genre is traditionally known for its special engagement with questions of identity and individuality.\(^1\) More recently, scholars, recognizing the limitations of the post-Enlightenment, humanist conceptualization of the individual, have opted instead for a post-structuralist model of the fragmented, discursively constructed subject, and moved towards a study of subjectivity and the subject in romance.\(^2\) However, these studies are of male individuality and identity, or the masculine subject of romance. Female subjectivity and the female subject remain theoretical questions in romance, a genre in which the feminine and the female have often been found to exist primarily as foils for the production of masculinity and male identity, the Other against which the masculine hero is defined. Woman’s agency and subjectivity are observed by critics most often in moments of transgression, subversion and resistance. Female characters, as objects exchanged between men and signs and/or symbols of masculine prowess and prestige, are seen to carve out their subjectivity, agency and identity in spite of, rather than with the support of, the ideological formations of romance.

The following study poses the question of whether there is space for a non-transgressive female subject of romance, a female subject that is endorsed by the ideological structures of its text, that is indeed a subject in both senses of the term: subjected to the dominant ideology, the

---


subject is also enabled in its agency and authority by that ideology. In order to do this, I employ a comparative strategy, examining related romance texts in Anglo-Norman, Middle English and Medieval Irish under the premise that stress-points in ideological structures must be renegotiated when stories are revised and recast for new audiences: thus it is in the juxtaposition of different versions of the same story that shifts and differences in ideology become visible. In the linking of genre, gender and ideology, I follow Simon Gaunt and Susan Crane’s view that gender and genre are mutually constructive forces in a text: genre can be seen as an ideological formation that governs constructions of gender, and certain gender configurations and their interrelationships contribute to the production of genre. Through close attention to textual change over time, a profound shift can be seen in the emergence of female characters which cease to be symbols, signs and objects but are established as subjects in their own right.

A review of scholarship on women and gender in Medieval French and Middle English romance will allow me to demonstrate the degree to which female subjects are lacking. The French romances in this project are strictly-speaking Anglo-Norman, that is to say, composed in the dialect of Norman French spoken and written in England. However, both because Anglo-Norman romances are sometimes included in the scholarship on Old French romances and because, as Ian Short stresses, Anglo-Norman literature shares a cultural context with Continental French literature and “can be properly understood only within this wider cultural context,” I include scholarship on both Old French and Anglo-Norman romances in my review of the critical literature. This will be followed by a more detailed introduction of the concept of subjectivity and a close reading of two of the most prominent theorists of gendered and sexed subjectivity in medieval romance criticism, Judith Butler and Gayle Rubin, as examples of how

---

3 Even Peter Haidu, whose study, *The Subject Medieval/Modern*, deeply engages post-structuralist theories of the subject, has little to say about the female subject of romance. Haidu claims that “[*Erec et Enide*’s] focus in the second part on Enide’s subjectivity pushes the issue of women to the forefront” (100), but he never explores Enide’s subjectivity. Rather he finds that, in being dragged along by Erec and told to keep quiet as knights approach, Enide “is forced to face the ideological conflict of multiple semiotic roles” (100). He dichotomizes acting as a woman and acting as a subject: “Will she follow her husband’s order as a properly submissive wife, or will she act as a subject, voicing independent judgment of the danger incurred by the couple and especially the husband?” (100–101).

4 Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 1; Crane, *Gender and Romance*, 4.

5 No investigation has yet been conducted on women and gender in Medieval Irish romance— by which I mean both translations of romances and the closely related genre of *rómaíosaíochta* (“romantic tales”)— and so this study aims to bring such criticism to the study of this group of texts. See chapters 4 and 5.

models of gender and subjectivity indebted to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis do not include possibilities for non-resistant female subjects; I suggest that it is likely that the lack of female subjects in medieval romance criticism is in part due to the fact that the theoretical paradigms underlying the current studies cannot account for them. After demonstrating that Butler’s and Rubin’s theories are are only of limited applicability to the socio-historical context of twelfth to fifteenth century England and Ireland, I will then propose the use of a different, post-structuralist feminist approach to subjectivity that will allow for possibilities of reading female subjects when they appear in romance texts.

**Women in Medieval French and Middle English Romance**

The position of women in medieval romance is a topic that has been key to studies of the genre in Medieval French (by which I refer to both Old French and Anglo-Norman) scholarship since feminist reconsidérations of the “courtly lady” in the 1970s and 1980s, and this interest spread quickly to the study of the related romance tradition of Middle English. An interest in women and gender has gained momentum with the growing influence of post-structuralism, feminist and gender theory in these fields; however, as this survey will demonstrate, certain trends prevail that limit the possibility of the discussion of women as subjects in romance.

The question of the courtly woman’s power was raised early in feminist scholarship on medieval French texts, both continental and insular. E. Jane Burns has provided a detailed summary and analysis of the trends of feminist scholarship on courtly love and the place of women in courtly French texts.⁷ At first the putative power of the woman worshipped by her admirer was connected to a rise in women’s status and held up as a possible figure of empowerment. The texts, taken literally, seemed to reflect an actual increase in status and power for women in twelfth-century France. The romances were seen not only to portray women as powerful, but were understood to do so in response to and because of real historical circumstances.⁸ However, when feminist scholars re-examined this position they found the opposite to be true: the women were disempowered objects of desire, who, as symbols of male prowess, mainly functioned to establish homosocial bonds between men, both horizontal—by establishing the suitor and her father as partners of gift-exchange—and vertical, by awarding the suitor superiority over his rivals. Ultimately constrained by the desires of her loving knight, the courtly woman had no choice but to consent to her wooer, and yet, at the same time, could

---

be held up to misogynistic discourse as the cause of men’s pain. This “vanishing lady” criticism has a strong theoretical debt to Lacanian and French feminist theory. As Burns summarizes, the woman of medieval French romance “is less a woman...than a representation of male nobility.”

Woman as symbol of male nobility is not only limited to the ‘wooed’ lady of French romance, but has been applied to women generally in romance and, as will be seen shortly, the courted lady’s structural opposite, the ‘wooing woman’ of Anglo-Norman romance. Nevertheless, as Burns describes under the heading “Resistant readings: Feminists remap the courtly terrain,” a new trend developed in the 1980s concerned with questions of agency and subjectivity for the displaced and marginalized female characters of these amorous exchange systems that privilege male social bonds. Focused on identifying and exploring points of weakness and breaks in the ideological structures, these studies show how “courtly texts that silence and oppress female characters also stage them as subverting hierarchized structures of gender, effectively – if often subtly – prying those structures open and remapping the terrain of courtly love.” The observation of women’s resistance and the potential for gender-fluidity or gender-contestation marks these feminist readings of romance texts. They typically contain some kind of statement that romance opens up a fictionalized space for the contestation of...
gender roles and thereby allows women to achieve some form of identity and agency through resistance.\(^{13}\)

This resistant agency is not confined to the text, but has also been theorized for women readers of romance. Roberta Krueger observes that several Old French romances raise the question of woman’s agency and authority, only to mask her objectification behind a veneer of choice and systematically erase her from the text. Krueger argues that the contradictions visible in the text can push the resistant medieval female reader to question her status as an object of exchange. Indeed, Krueger suggests that one of Chrétien’s goals may have been to foster such resistance in his romances; nevertheless, such a hypothesis must remain speculative. In positing medieval women readers’ resistance to their textual appropriation, Krueger works to recover possibilities for female agency; her goal is indicative of this trajectory of feminist scholarship, in which a recuperative trend co-exists with the acknowledgment of women as oppressed.\(^{14}\)

Burns’ discussion of subjectivity and ‘subject-positions’ belies the post-structuralist theoretical underpinnings of these studies, a feature which they share with Krueger’s study; nevertheless the theoretical models in this trend of academic inquiry consistently model female subjectivity and agency as partial and resistant. The true subject-position is male:

When women in the courtly world move, however tentatively or partially, into the subject-position – as singers and poets or resisting readers, as desiring ladies or debating women, as knowledgeable or masterful speakers, as cross-dressed minstrels or knights, as mystical or lesbian lovers, and as women working on cloth or fashioning themselves with it – the terms, limitations, and the very features of that male-defined subject position change significantly.\(^{15}\) [my emphasis]

The medieval heroines considered here suggest a kind of agency that is not conscious, controlled, or full-blown; nor is it an expression of autonomous, individual will. Agency emerges in these revised courtly scenarios, rather, as a relational dynamic between individual protagonists and the social formations surrounding them. The complex social positioning of these women in love shows that we cannot understand them unproblematically as dominant, empowered, or active speakers. But neither are they merely subservient, disempowered, silent, or passive players in the courtly world. Rather, they might best be understood in line with Joan Scott’s readings of historical women as discursive sites where numerous competing forces produce political (in our case, “literary”) subjects. Agency in these alternative medieval love plots no longer resides principally in the heroic actions of a knight rescuing a damsel in distress, troubadour lovers entreating an unattainable ladylove, or a Christian lord converting a

\(^{13}\) Burns surveys numerous strategies of resistance, including double-voiced “body talk” and cross-dressing (“Courtly Love,”44–9). See also, E. Jane Burns, Body Talk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

\(^{14}\) Krueger, Women Readers and Ideology of Gender, passim.

\(^{15}\) Burns, “Courtly Love,”48.
Saracen princess through love. Agency in these revised contexts is not something wielded by an empowered and dominant protagonist of either gender. [my emphasis]

Burns suggests that the consideration of women as dominant, empowered or active cannot be understood “unproblematically,” but there seems little space for such readings at all, despite her clearly Foucauldian language of the women as ‘discursive sites’ for the production of ‘literary subjects’; she mentions “empowered and dominant protagonist of either gender,” but provides no female examples. Discourse produces subjects as both enabled and constrained: since dominance, activity or empowerment must necessarily coexist with subjection, defining the subject position as male, or precluding agency as an expression of an “individual will” is not, strictly speaking, necessary. Lack of opportunity and even overt oppression do not negate subject-status or agency, rooted as they are in the very discursive power that produces subjects, as I will discuss in further detail below. Nevertheless, where male subjectivity and the male subject, likewise enabled and constrained by ideology, are discussed, they are understood to be in line with the dominant order. The male subject is supported by and supports medieval patriarchal ideology as it exists in romance. Female subjectivity, on the other hand, is only cast as resistant.

Moreover, a side of this academic inquiry little addressed by Burns is the fact that critics are forced to grudgingly admit that containment follows the space of autonomy and agency for the female characters, who, having been resistant, must be neutralized in order for the dominant patriarchal order to be restored at the end of the romance. For example, in her survey of gender in Old French romance, Roberta Krueger observes of the Roman de Silence, “[h]aving opened up a fictive space where gender roles were trangressed, the romance reimposes traditional notions of sexual identity and social roles.” Indeed, Krueger extends this pattern of subversion and containment to apply to the genre as a whole.

Possibilities for female subjectivity seem more open in Anglo-Norman romance, which can also be seen as a distinct tradition on the basis of certain unique features, one of which is the

---

18 “Courtly romance opened up a discursive space for male and female readers in which the boundaries could be temporarily confused, subverted or resisted—at least in the space of a fiction—even as they were maintained” (Krueger, “Questions of Gender,” 146)
relatively greater autonomy and agency of the female characters.\textsuperscript{19} Judith Weiss has provided the most extended treatment of women and gender in Anglo-Norman romance as a distinct body of texts related to Old French romance. She finds that the female characters, in their initiative, agency and activity, “challenge expected ideals of courtliness”\textsuperscript{20} found in continental Old French romance and “challenge the stereotypes of their period.”\textsuperscript{21} Weiss observes both a powerful side and a powerless side to the portrayal of female characters who are “energetic, able, even formidable – despite being held in check by misogynistic comment, threatened with violence or married off against their will.”\textsuperscript{22} Instead of describing the women of these romances as oppressed and subversive in their agency, Weiss finds that these active women are supported by the text in their portrayal, but that “[a]pproval often coexists uneasily with misogyny, however, so that we may be unsure which position is truly the writer’s own.”\textsuperscript{23} Ambiguity and contradiction mark their presentation.\textsuperscript{24} However, Weiss lacks a theorization of women as subjects, which, as will be seen, could be used to account for their dual nature as both powerful and weak.

Particularly ambiguous and distinctive of the genre of Anglo-Norman romance is the presence of the ‘wooing woman’, a feature which Anglo-Norman romance has more in common with chansons de geste than Old French romance.\textsuperscript{25} Weiss observes that, while present in the twelfth-century chansons de geste, the figure of the wooing woman declines in popularity and opinion with the beginning of French romance and the rise of courtly ideals requiring the man to be the wooer.\textsuperscript{26} This stands in contrast to Anglo-Norman romance, where wooing women are


\textsuperscript{20} Weiss, “Insular Beginnings,” 41.


\textsuperscript{22} Weiss, “Power and Weakness,” 19.

\textsuperscript{23} Weiss, “Power and Weakness,” 16.

\textsuperscript{24} “Their actions are restricted, their choices limited or ignored, they are often victim rather than perpetrator. Yet there is another, equally important side to the pictures. The women in these romances, especially those who rise above mere cardboard figures, seldom come over as weak, passive, helpless: on the contrary, they impress us by their initiative and resourcefulness. They compensate for their subordinate position exercising power through other channels, though occasionally they also have the opportunity to play a male role. The forcefulness of some of these women, especially in juxtaposition to less strong-willed or able heroes, is at first unexpected in a romance context, thought it is a not uncommon feature of both continental and insular chansons de geste” (Weiss, “Power and Weakness,” 13).


not only numerous but, as Weiss observes, “both attractive and formidable figures,” presented with sympathy, humour and occasional approval. At the same time, she admits that these positive depictions “coexist easily” with misogyny and that often “choosing the man they love and wooing him is [the wooing women’s] only active moment in a romance where they are disposed of and married off without consultation.” Weiss determines that the wooing woman contributes to the hero’s process of identity formation by bringing him land, a higher status and heirs. The woman’s distinctive admiring gaze and attempts to secure the hero as a romantic partner serve to enhance his character both by revealing his desirability and giving him the opportunity to demonstrate his chastity and self-control. In this reading, the unavoidable conclusion to be drawn is that, for all of their unique attributes detailed by Weiss, the wooing women’s narrative function is seen to be identical to their courted counterparts: they exist in order to construct the hero. Furthermore, the rampant misogyny in some of the texts, such as Roman de Horn and Ipomedon, problematizes the positive portrayal of these active women.

Middle English romance criticism reveals the same critical trends of viewing female characters as Medieval French: women are understood as oppressed, marginalized, objectified and existing for the creation of male identity; romance itself opens up fictional space for female characters to be resistant subjects, even if containment follows by the end of the text; women are presented ambiguously as simultaneously powerful and powerless.

The only full length study on the subject of women in Middle English romance is Nannette McNiff Roberts’ unpublished 1976 doctoral dissertation. Here Roberts concludes that the roles of women in the romances “—whether erotic or victimized —are overwhelmingly subordinate or martyred roles,” and exist “to flatter and enhance the male.” Likewise, in her survey on women in Middle English romance, Elizabeth Archibald observes the subordinated position of heroines, seeing absence from the hero and passivity as their defining characteristics, in contrast to the active, and often powerful, evil enchantresses. She also highlights the androcentric nature of the ideals and fantasies portrayed. Shiela Fisher, examining the late Middle English romances of the Gawain-poet, Chaucer and Malory, finds that trivialization,
dismissal and marginalization mark the authors’ treatment of women, and that “[w]omen often figure significantly not so much for their own sakes, but in order to become involved in the construction (and at times, the destruction) of men’s chivalric identities.” These studies exemplify the “vanishing lady” criticism of Medieval French romance.

David Salter and Jennifer Fellows both observe an ambivalence in the portrayal of women, in this case, mothers, as both positive and negative, constrained and active. Likewise, Jane Tolmie observes that “the romance heroine can be at once powerful and powerless.” This contradictory binary, which Tolmie refers to as “irreconcilable,” is remarkably in line with Judith Weiss’ assessments of Anglo-Norman heroines. Tolmie’s analysis also subscribes to the “vanishing lady” criticism, concluding with the observation that “feminine subjectivity exist[s] ... on an ever-receding horizon.” Similarly, Flora Alexander acknowledges the formally disadvantaged position of women in Middle English romances, but finds at the same time that a number of romances present female lovers as “resourceful, determined and committed to the pursuit of emotional satisfaction” and suggests that perhaps “story-tellers were responding to a desire felt by women in their audience to imagine an autonomy and freedom of action denied them by their actual position in family and society.”

Joanne Charbonneau and Désirée Cromwell’s study on gender and identity in Middle English romance exemplifies the “resistant readings” trend observed by Burns of Medieval French criticism. Charbonneau and Cromwell describe romances as opening a “fictionalized space to explore the proper behaviour of males and females” and providing “space for...
transgression or at least for renegotiating power and redefining identity.⁴⁰ Particularly, they see *Bevis, Emaré, Havelok, Horn Child, King Horn, Sir Isumbras, Sir Triamour* and *Floris and Blanchefleur* as “challeng[ing] culturally sanctioned notions of gender roles that necessitate the female as inferior, passive and powerless in relationships.”⁴¹ Indeed, they go so far as to say that these texts “subvert female inferiority.”⁴² Charbonneau and Cromwell create a dichotomy between texts that interrogate gender roles via fictionalized space and those that assert conventional gender identities and sex-based social roles. Nevertheless, the “proto-feminist texts” they observe only “gesture towards women’s autonomy.”⁴³ Female subjectivity remains part of “anxieties about gender [that] surface” in romance and identity is still understood as male, ignoring the female.⁴⁴ The authors write that “[i]dentity formation is at the core of many of these stories,” yet follow this statement with the question “what constitutes knightly behaviour?”⁴⁵ Finally, Charbonneau and Cromwell must concede, as scholars of Medieval French such as Roberta Krueger do, that even those romances that do portray gender as fluid and contingent and contested end up asserting prevailing cultural norms and containing the resistance and transgression that they momentarily permit.⁴⁶

Helen Cooper’s approach to women in romance is the exception to the trends observed above in both Medieval French and Middle English romance and so merits a more in-depth discussion.⁴⁷ Examining both Anglo-Norman and Middle English romance together as ‘English’ romance, she deliberately presents an “unabashed defense of the romance heroine.”⁴⁸ Cooper asserts – as she herself observes – “counter to almost every critical and theoretical presupposition of the last century or more,” that “[t]he romance texts provide overwhelming evidence for a belief in the desirability of active female desire and for the exploration of women's subjectivity.”⁴⁹ Unfortunately, like much of her argument, this observation is virtually context-less. The almost magpie-like jumping through time and space in *The English Romance*

---

⁴³ Charbonneau and Cromwell, “Gender and Identity,” 110.
⁴⁴ Charbonneau and Cromwell, “Gender and Identity,” 110.
⁴⁵ Charbonneau and Cromwell, “Gender and Identity,” 98.
⁴⁶ Charbonneau and Cromwell, “Gender and Identity,” 103.
⁴⁹ Cooper, *English Romance in Time*, 220.
in Time, while it makes for delightful reading, is problematic in that it obscures—even ignores—the particularities of time and place in individual texts, never mind manuscript versions. This is a problem that lies at the root of a fundamental contradiction in Cooper’s wide-ranging argument. To say that, “[t]he heiress who insists on her freedom to love where she will, and who sets out to win the man she has chosen, is not only endorsed but celebrated” is to completely ignore the complexities and misogynous moments of romances such as Roman de Horn or Boeve de Haumtone, whose wooing women receive much more apt and nuanced treatment in Judith Weiss’ “Wooing-Women in Anglo-Norman Romance,” a study which Cooper cites, but does not engage.\footnote{Cooper, English Romance in Time, 226–227.} In addition, Cooper simply glosses away the problematics of the reading and meaning of foreign, ancient, fairy, or Saracen women, the politics of their otherness and the equivocal nature of these figures’ presentation, as their wooing actions are co-opted to support Cooper’s general thesis, but at the same time reveal its instability.

The active heroine who chooses her own husband regardless of her father’s intentions is represented in romance as admirable. Romances are usually thought of as serving the ideology of the élite, but in this respect they begin to look almost oppositional sufficiently indeed to cause occasional anxiety in their authors, who sometimes try to find ways around presenting such independent-minded heroines as role models. One way to avoid the problem was to substitute a figure so exotic as to place her beyond imitation: a passionate fairy, for instance, or a Saracen princess. Saracen women, in blithe authorial ignorance or carelessness of Islamic mores, are allowed to take an especially aggressive approach towards identifying and winning their man.\footnote{Cooper, English Romance in Time, 226; 474, n.10.}

If such wooing heroines are ‘endorsed and celebrated’ unproblematically, then why the necessity for the use of cultural and social distance? Moreover, although desiring and active women happen in romance and are seemingly validated by happy endings, this does not automatically mean that they or their actions do not carry the registers of transgression within the narrative world of the text itself, or that the situation is as simple as ‘approved and celebrated’ or ‘disapproved and condemned.’ Cooper appears to be trying to have her cake and eat it too in claiming, on the one hand, that romance is presenting socially problematic and transgressive models of female desire against social and literary expectations,\footnote{Cooper writes, “The social transgression inherent in a young woman's active emotional and sexual choice is much more evident, and potentially troublesome, if she is a Christian, and even more so if she is a Christian heiress, capable of bestowing wealth and rank on her chosen knight… There would seem to be abundant social risks in presenting such role models for women… The heiress is not only a commodity but a major capital asset, and, through her capacity to bear children, a guarantee of a return on investment for the future. One would not normally expect one's capital assets to have a mind of their own, to choose their possessor, or to determine their own investment in their future; and even less that such a capital asset should be represented as the most desirable kind of} yet at the same
time observing that “[t]he romances…do not offer any revolutionary attack on conventional sexual morals or a patriarchal system of dynastic inheritance”: indeed, she stops at calling them “almost oppositional.” The strength of the expectation of female subjectivity as resistant shows itself here: in attempting to make space for female subjectivity in romance, Cooper leans towards finding all of English romance socially transgressive, though she ultimately remains equivocal on that position.

Romance is not an unabashedly socially transgressive genre, as Cooper herself grudgingly recognizes, and the texts themselves are not without their ambiguities and anxieties. Asserting that “it is not uncommon for a writer to incorporate some degree of antifeminism within a romance, if only to acknowledge audience anxiety and so to help neutralize it” may present a new point of view and intriguing possibilities, but it also evades the issue with circular logic. Cooper’s whirlwind survey, while thought-provoking, loses a good deal of argumentative force in its ignoring of the details and overwhelming generalizations. Of course, not all of her conclusions are wrong. Indeed, her push towards the consideration of female characters as subjects, supported by their texts, is a welcome counterpoint to the rest of the critical literature, and is certainly congruent with my own project. Nonetheless, the situation is far more complicated than Cooper represents; some of the most surprising and interesting textual dynamics of gender and subjectivity are found within those complexities.

**Gender and Genre: Romance as Ideology and Masculine Subject-formation**

As indicated throughout the previous section, a common observation in scholarship on women in Medieval French and Middle English romance is that female characters contribute to, and are often reduced to their role in, male identity-formation. This relationship between femininity and masculinity has been taken by several critics to be not only the genre’s preeminent mode of gender construction and identity formation, but in fact a definitive feature of romance as a genre. The foundational role that constructions of gender have to play in the formation of romance has been widely recognized and continues to generate numerous studies on the interrelationship between gender and genre in various medieval vernacular literatures,

---

all. In the romances, however, that is exactly what happens, on numerous occasions” (*English Romance in Time*, 227). Cooper also writes that “[t]here would seem to be abundant social risks in presenting such role models for women” (227); “an heiress’s choosing of her own husband, without or against parental authority, was scarcely an approved model in actuality” (222).

53 Cooper, *English Romance in Time*, 221.
particularly Middle English and Old French.\textsuperscript{55} As noted briefly above, both Susan Crane and Simon Gaunt have found that gender and genre are mutually constructive forces in a text, and that the defining gender configuration in a romance text is the construction of the masculine subject in relation to femininity. In doing so, both scholars build on the work of Jean-Charles Huchet’s Lacanian reading of women in romance as the alterity against which the male subject is formed.\textsuperscript{56} Their ‘gender and genre’ approach to medieval romance directly engages with post-structuralist concepts of ideology, discourse, subjectivity and identity. While they produce compelling readings of masculinity and male subjectivity, since both Crane and Gaunt share the same theoretical frameworks as the critical literature discussed earlier, they not only likewise observe the exile of female characters from the subject position, but locate that exile in the very structures of the genre of romance. Although both Gaunt and Crane pinpoint the crucial role female characters and femininity play in the construction of masculinity and masculine identity and subjectivity, there is little room for consideration of what role, if any, masculinity or the male subject might have in the constitution of the subjectivity and identity of those female participants.

With respect to Old French romance, Simon Gaunt finds that the relationship between masculinity and femininity is foundational to the genre. He articulates romance’s uniqueness through its difference from the Old French \textit{chansons de geste} in a way that foregrounds the role gender has to play in that distinction:

One important difference between the two genres lies in their treatment of the differentiation of the male individual and the concomitant problem of otherness… [T]he epic hero’s identity is constructed - albeit problematically - in relation to other men. \textit{Chansons de geste} do not represent as symbolically central the role of women within the kinship structures and hierarchies around which the society which produced them was organized. Romance, on the other hand, consciously makes the role of the exchange of women in the formation of masculine hierarchies within feudal society a central theme. It thereby offers a new model of masculine identity, constructed in relation to the feminine, but which proves to be no less problematic than the epic model.\textsuperscript{57}

In \textit{chansons de geste}, Gaunt observes, the male subject acquires his identity through a homosocial relationship with another man and masculinity is formed “in relation to other

\textsuperscript{57} Gaunt, \textit{Gender and Genre}, 73–4.
models of masculinity.” In romance, by contrast, the “masculine subject … acquires his identity through a relationship with a woman.” For Gaunt, femininity and the female subject are not only beyond the scope of his book, but he also steadfastly views women, or rather ‘women’ in romance, as nothing more than “signs in masculine discourse,” and femininity is “construed as other”:

since all surviving romances from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are as far as we know male authored, ‘women,’ or more accurately femininity in these texts, is a metaphor men use to construct their own subjectivity. Female characters in romance are not real women, but figures within a male discourse. Huchet acknowledges this, but often fails to see the implications. If in romance men evolve and assume new identities through love and their relations with women, it follows that what this engagement with femininity articulates is the construction within a male discourse of masculinity through its relationship with femininity construed as the other.

Gaunt does not push against this, but follows Roberta Krueger in observing the androcentric bias in scholarship, including Jean-Charles Huchet’s work, which fails to examine medieval women’s “response to the use by men of their gender as metaphor.” Krueger, as mentioned above, specifically tries to investigate the response of medieval women readers. She examines the moments where romance equivocates on the matter of its gender models or deconstructs the sex/gender system it simultaneously appears to endorse, as is evident in narratorial expressions of anxiety about the female audience’s responses. Gaunt likewise sees such investigations as the way to redress the androcentric bias and “make reading romance a rewarding experience for the resistant woman reader, whether medieval or modern.” Gaunt makes only brief remarks upon romance’s construction of gender’s effects on the representation of women:

The attitude of romanciers to women is a perfect example of aporia. Women are made into signs of such immense value that masculine identity is defined through women and this leads to apparently fulsome praise of them; yet at the same time romanciers do not like women. The ideal woman is represented as a fiction, and this fiction is underscored by a misogynistic model of femininity, according to which women are bad readers [of the hero’s signs of worth] and consequently unworthy signs in a masculine discourse.

---

58 Gaunt, Gender and Genre, 23.
59 Gaunt, Gender and Genre, 92.
60 “If this study dwells sometimes on masculinity, this is partly a reflection of my material: the vast majority of medieval texts were written by men and therefore partake of a ‘masculinist’ discourse of gender. My attention to constructions of masculinity is also, however, a consequence of my own gender. If at this stage of the feminist project, male academics working with feminist theory should be wary of appropriating authority, and speaking for women, they can perhaps turn their attention critically to men and to masculinity” (Gaunt, Gender and Genre, 3).
61 Gaunt, Gender and Genre, 72.
62 Gaunt, Gender and Genre, 71–2.
63 Gaunt, Gender and Genre, 72.
64 Krueger, Women Readers, passim.
65 Gaunt, Gender and Genre, 72.
The fiction of the ideal woman is underscored by the notion that real women cannot live up to the ideal.\textsuperscript{66}

Gaunt sees misogynistic models of the feminine as a consequence in Old French romance, but does not expand upon the wider implications that observation has for female identity or female subject formation precisely because he views women in romance as mere signs of masculine value, transmitted between men.

Susan Crane, discussing both Middle English romance and medieval romance in general, likewise finds that the formation of masculine identity against the alterity of the feminine is central to the structure of romance. For Crane, what makes romance romance is the differentiation and opposition of masculine and feminine: “women’s difference from man informs the genre’s poetics as well as its configuration of gender.”\textsuperscript{67} This process takes place through courtship, during which “women attest to their suitor’s deeds and reflect back to them an image of their worth.”\textsuperscript{68} Crane finds that romance is so centred on the male subject and masculine identity as to deny any substantive construction of femininity or female subjectivity. Indeed, for Crane, “the feminine in romance can accurately be described as the place where masculinity is not.”\textsuperscript{69} She finds that feminine traits, such as pity and mercy, can be incorporated into masculinity, but such a process does not work the other way around; thus, the masculine position is identified with human experience in general.\textsuperscript{70} Maleness and humanness are thereby conflated: romance’s “polarizing male and female traits does not confer equivalent status on masculine and feminine identity ... exiling those gendered female to the position of difference, otherness and objectification.”\textsuperscript{71} Crane’s approach is very much in agreement with the feminist theorists Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, whose work she draws upon.\textsuperscript{72} Crane, however, takes the position that even if women are absented from textual representation, literature records “not only the dominant cultural versions of gender, but also what those versions suppress and what might resist them.”\textsuperscript{73}

Crane, unlike Gaunt, does examine the effect this exile has on female characters. She uses a different strategy than that used by Krüeger and endorsed by Gaunt to ameliorate the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{66} Gaunt, \textit{Gender and Genre}, 114.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Crane, \textit{Gender and Romance}, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Crane, \textit{Gender and Romance}, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Crane, \textit{Gender and Romance}, 62.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Crane, \textit{Gender and Romance}, 20–26.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Crane, \textit{Gender and Romance}, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Crane, \textit{Gender and Romance}, 55–6. For example, she comments “Romance... insistently exemplifies De Beauvoir’s argument that masculine stands for the universal experience.”
\item \textsuperscript{73} Crane, \textit{Gender and Romance}, 57.
\end{itemize}
androcentric bias. Through a lens shaped by Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis, Crane considers the female characters’ strategies of resistance within the androcentric discourse of romance. She finds that mimicry, masquerade and shape-shifting provide avenues to feminine agency and subjectivity, which is therefore necessarily subversive.

Both Crane and Gaunt’s approaches to gender construction in romance, while powerful lenses of analysis in their own right, dissolve the possibilities for the existence of a feminine subject, in that feminine agency and voice are located only in subversion and resistance of masculine identity projects, rather than existing in their own right. Nevertheless, both scholars’ observations on the mode of gender construction constitutive of romance—namely that masculinity is constructed in contradistinction to femininity, and that the male subject achieves his identity through relationship with a woman—is not only accurate and insightful. It also provides a useful lens to look through in searching for and analysing female subjects of romance. It is possible, as I argue through this dissertation, that women in medieval romance also participate in subjectivity, and that their subjectivity and identity is mutually structured by their relationship to the hero. Since Gaunt and Crane limit their approach to the masculine, I will term the broader conception, involving both male and female, the “relational construction of gender.” Such a shorthand speaks both to the construction of masculinity and femininity in relation to the other, while still including the earlier theories of the construction of the male subject through his relationship to a woman. Most importantly, however, this term will also serve well to refer to the flip-side of that gender-construction, which, as should become clear over the course of this project, is in fact present in medieval romance: construction of the female subject and the acquisition of her identity through her relationship to a man.

The studies of women and gender in Medieval French and Middle English romance surveyed here do not account for the possibility for non-resistant female subjects; instead they observe female characters only in positions of marginalization and resistance, without investigating possibilities for ideologically supported autonomy, authority or self-determining agency (as opposed to agency directed towards masculine interest). But, as Helen Cooper rightly points out, in some texts, women’s desire, agency and activity do contribute to the return to

---

75. Crane finds that through producing estrangement and distance, female characters’ mimicry and misquotation of feminine language scripts of courtship provided by romance critique the restrictive categories of gender forced upon women. Both shape-shifting and masquerade allow the courted lady to resist the grounding of her identity in her body, which functions to reflect masculinity back to itself within the male gaze (*Gender and Romance*, 74); these strategies’ power is rooted in alienation (91), in exposing the arbitrariness of the body’s “tyranny over the feminine” (85).
social order and the hero’s success at the end of the narrative. To what extent can such behaviour really be viewed as transgressive? Is it necessary to push all romances that portray and support strong female characters under the label of ‘transgressive,’ as Cooper unsuccessfully attempts? I suggest rather the adoption of a theoretical approach that can account for the contradictions and inconsistencies of female characters in romance being both powerful and powerless. Such an approach can be found in post-structuralist models of subjectivity.

**Subjectivity**
Subjectivity is a difficult philosophical and critical concept with various forms and meanings. In some cases, it is used to denote the opposite of objectivity, and so refers to the personal, often emotional, perspective of an individual, whether real or fictional, and the articulations of such a perspective. For example, in her examination of subjectivity in medieval troubadour poetry, Sarah Kay defines it as “the elaboration of a first person (subject) position.” Such uses of subjectivity are concerned with identity formation and its relationship to consciousness. Other uses of subjectivity are concerned with identity formation with respect to power relations and social discourses. In this approach, subjectivity is the state of being subject to ideology(ies) and discourse(s), which press upon and limit the range of the subject’s abilities, but at the same time produce the subject as an agent within the constraints of system.

Theories of subjectivity were not in their inception gendered or sexed. Neither Louis Althusser nor Michel Foucault accounted for sex or gender in their theories of the production of individuals as subjects. Althusser theorizes that ideology, being “a system of representation – composed of ideas, concepts, myths, or images – in which people live their imaginary relations to the real conditions of existence,” constructs individuals as social subjects through “interpellation,” giving them the illusion of autonomy, their subject-status or subjectivity, while they are simultaneously subordinated to the social order. Althusser’s subjects are constituted by their submission to power in the form of an Absolute Subject, which both subordinates them and empowers them, not only by ensuring that their existence is intelligible to social practice, but by holding them up as agents. To be a subject is also to be subjected; ideology both enables and constrains.

Althusser’s concept of interpellation sets the stage for Foucault’s theory of subject-formation through discourse. For Foucault, however, it is power, disseminated through

---

discourses rather than a single Absolute Subject, that produces subjects. Discourse is “a broad concept [Foucault] uses to refer to language and other forms of representation – indeed all human mechanisms for the conveyance of meaning and value.”

Foucault locates discourses in social and civic institutions. As systems of language and signification, discourses circulate and distribute power to individuals, licensing thoughts, actions and speech that support their continued existence and prohibiting those that do not. Moreover, they are historically and socially specific. As such power, in Foucault’s model, is more dispersed and varied than in Althusser’s. Foucault’s model of discursively constructed, de-centred subjectivity is, as Chris Weedon observes, politically significant in that it opens up possibilities for change.

But more importantly for our purposes, as will become clear, is that Foucauldian subjectivity also provides a more versatile model for reading and analyzing subjectivity: not being dependent on an identification against a centering Absolute Subject (which in combinations of theories of subjectivity with psychoanalysis is inevitably the Lacanian phallus), it can account for more variable accesses to power (than, for example, ‘having’ or not ‘having’ the phallus).

The relationship between power, the subject, the process of subject-formation and agency in Foucault is well described by Judith Butler, whose own theorization of gendered subjectivity is treated below. She writes,

But if, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend upon for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are. The customary model for understanding this process goes as follows: power imposes itself on us and, weakened by its force, we come to internalize or accept its terms. ... Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency. “Subjection” signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject. Whether by interpellation, in Althusser’s sense, or by discursive productivity, in Foucault’s, the subject is initiated through a primary submission to power.

The paradox inherent in this understanding of subjectivity is perhaps unsurprising since it is also to be found within the semantic range of the noun ‘subject,’ being both the opposite of object, and therefore active as opposed to passive, but also something or someone dominated by superior power. Butler describes the paradox: “the subject, taken to be the condition for and instrument of agency, is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as the

---

78 Hall, Subjectivity, 91
deprivation of agency." This raises questions for the possibility of resistance, for if agency is produced only by subordination, then any exercise of agency validates and sustains the current power-distribution, which is necessarily unequal. In other words, as queer theorist Alan Sinfield summarizes, “even attempts to challenge the system help to maintain it; in fact those attempts are distinctly complicit, in so far as they help the dominant to assert and police the boundaries of the deviant and the permissible.”

Foucault himself has an answer to this problem in the ambiguous and complex nature of power:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it… We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process by which discourse can be both an instrument and a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

In his example of homosexuality, Foucault explains that formation of a “reverse’ discourse” is made possible through a reversal and redeployment of the “same vocabulary, … the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.” Foucault thus offers a way out of the Althusser’s “entrapment model” of ideology. Butler further deconstructs this premise, explaining that the power which invests and produces the subject and its agency is not the same power as that deployed by the subject through its exercise of agency. In other words, “agency exceeds the power by which it is enabled.” Thus, Butler argues that agency is “the assumption of a purpose unintended by power, one that could not have been derived logically or historically, that operates in a relation of contingency and reversal to the power that makes it possible, to which it nevertheless belongs.” Sinfield and Butler’s efforts to underscore the fact that the existence of ideologies and discourses does not remove the potential for genuine agency and resistance are rooted in their political engagement; nevertheless, an understanding of agency and resistance is also crucial to the application of theories of the subject to the examinations of

---

81 Butler, Psychic Life of Power, 10.
82 Alan Sinfield, Cultural Politics—Queer Reading (London: Routledge, 2005), 24. This is explicitly connected to the issue of political action: “If our subjectivities are constituted within a language and social system that is already imbued with oppressive constructs of class, race, gender, and sexuality, then how can we expect to see past, to the idea of a fairer society, let alone struggle to achieve it?” (Sinfield, Cultural Politics, 24).
84 Foucault, History of Sexuality, 101.
85 The term “entrapment model” is Alan Sinfield (Cultural Politics, 24–6).
86 Butler, Psychic Life of Power, 12–15.
87 Butler, Psychic Life of Power, 15.
88 Butler, Psychic Life of Power, 15.
medieval romance, in which possibilities for female agency and autonomy are almost exclusively described as resistant, subversive or transgressive.

If there seems to be an inherent contradiction in such analysis of dissident women, female characters, or femininity without reference to female subjects (since to have agency for resistance, an individual must have access to subjectivity through a discourse), it is because there is. This contradiction is rooted in the ambiguous approach to the female subject in feminist theory that, on the one hand, takes up the concept of the de-centred, socially-constructed subject, and on the other hand, connecting it to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, finds femininity to be the ‘lack’ against which masculinity is defined.

Psychoanalysis’ legacy in feminist theory and its application to medieval literature can be seen in the works of Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler, both of whom feature prominently in romance criticism. Their theories are compelling and useful for describing certain structures and formations in medieval romance. However, as I will demonstrate, a psychoanalysis-derived model of the subject presents severe problems for the reading of female characters in medieval romance, precisely because it disallows the existence of a female subject in ways that conflict with the historical situation of medieval England and the world represented in its literary productions. Both Rubin and Butler attempt to explain subjectivity produced through power relations using psychic models of subject-formation indebted to a Lacanian reading of Freud. A closer reading of their theories will allow me to provide an account for the current absence of female subjects in medieval romance criticism by demonstrating the inability of psychoanalytically derived paradigms of subjectivity to produce female subjects. In addition, I will be able to show the ways in which such paradigms are only of limited applicability to the socio-historical context of medieval romance, and suggest strategies for expanding the discussion of subjectivity in romance to allow for the possibility of observing and analyzing female subjects when they do appear.

Butler brings to Foucauldian and Althusserian concepts of subjectivity the issue of gender and sex, exploring how social discourses construct subjects differently on the basis of sex and gender. Her indebtedness to feminist psychoanalysis, however, leads her to elide the possibilities for a genuine female subject. In Bodies that Matter, Butler problematizes the divide between sex and gender, the former taken to be natural or given, the latter culturally constructed. She makes the case for ‘sex’ being as discursively constructed a category as gender and questions the relationship of gender performativity to ‘materialization,’ her term for the process by which a body is made culturally intelligible by the assignment of sex: “‘sex’ is a regulatory
ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices.\(^{89}\) Moreover subject-formation is indissociable from materialization: “the subject, the speaking ‘I,’ is formed by virtue of having gone through such a process of assuming a sex.”\(^{90}\) In this schema, Butler finds that a condition of subject-formation is the existence of non-subjects, abject beings who do not have access to the inherent power of subjectivity.\(^{91}\) The “abject” in Butler’s approach is predominantly the homosexual, since, grounded in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, she sees the constitution of the gendered or sexed subject through *melancholia* as a result of a prohibition against homosexual desire.\(^{92}\) One might observe a structural similarity with Althusser and Foucault’s theories of subjectification. Instead of being in relation to Althusser’s Absolute Subject, a subject in Butler’s conceptualization is formed in relation to the abject. Furthermore, just as Foucault finds that discourses of deviancy and stigma can not only produce the deviant and stigmatized as categories, but in doing so, present them with the terms for their own resistance through reversing the discourse, Butler finds that the abject, produced by the constitution of the subject’s disavowal of it, can likewise disavow the subject and so achieve a measure of its own subjectivity by the same process of repudiation that produced the original subject against which the abject is defined;\(^{93}\) in other words: “some of the strategies of abjection wielding through and by hegemonic subject-positions have come to structure and contain the articulatory struggles of those in subordinate or erased positionalities.”\(^{94}\) This is Butler’s account for how resistant and subversive subjectivities can be produced for abject beings—such as those resistant women of medieval romance. Of course, the women of medieval romance are not abjected homosexuals forming their subjectivity through a disavowal of heterosexual subjects. In fact, it would be hard


\(^{90}\) Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3.

\(^{91}\) “[T]he forming of the subject requires an identification with the normative phantasm of ‘sex’ and this identification takes place through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection. This is a repudiation which creates the valence of “abjection” and its status for the subject as a threatening spectre...The task will be to consider this threat and disruption not as a permanent contestation of social norms condemned to the pathos of perpetual failure, but rather as a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility“ (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3).

\(^{92}\) “The abject designates here precisely those “unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject” (Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3).


\(^{94}\) Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 112. For Butler, sceptical of the efficacy of the identity-based politics, this is a negative point. It fails “to refute the logic of mutual exclusion” and thereby replicates and sustains the mechanisms that produce the subject at the expense of the abject. This is akin to the entrapment model in action, but stronger: it is like a refusal of the ability of Foucault’s reverse discourses to be mobilized towards true social change. Butler herself does not make this connection explicitly, but a scepticism towards Foucault’s theories’ ability to allow or enable resistance is hardly new. On the interpretation of Foucault as a “theorist of entrapment” see Sinfield, *Cultural Politics*, 26.
to account for these resistant female subjects in Butler’s schema, as heterosexual women are
abject in relation to heterosexual men:

The feminine position is constituted as the figural enactment of that punishment [i.e. abjection], the very figuration of that threat and hence, is produced as a lack only in relation to the masculine subject. To assume the feminine position is to take up the figure of castration or, at least, to negotiate a relation to it, symbolizing at once the threat to the masculine position as well as the guarantee that the masculine “has” the phallus.  

If feminine bodies can be seen as the abject against which the masculine subject is formed, then what is the possibility for their own subject formation, resistant or otherwise? Butler argues that heterosexual feminine individuals have their own ‘threat’ by which “feminine castration is compelled” and this is the “monstrous ascent into phallicism,” “the phallicized ‘dyke’.” But Butler does not explain the interaction between the feminine as abject of masculine subject and simultaneously subject in relation to the abject of homosexual feminine. In fact, Butler keeps a distinction between the “masculine subject” and the “feminine position” throughout Bodies that Matter. Indeed, Butler never uses the terms “feminine subject” or “female subject.” Butler’s thesis of materialization implies the possibility of a genuine subject-status to female bodies not only because, as quoted above, “the subject, the speaking ‘I’, is formed by virtue of having one through such a process of assuming a sex,” but because the abject body against which a subject is formed is supposed to guarantee that subject, through another similar disavowal, transfer a measure of subjectivity to that abject body. But Butler elides the possibility for true subject-status for any individual in the category of female or feminine. Given the genealogy of Butler’s approach to the subject, this is perhaps not surprising. After all, Beauvoir herself writes, woman “stands before man not as a subject but as an object paradoxically endowed with subjectivity; she takes herself simultaneously as self and as other, a contradiction that entails baffling consequences.” However, Butler’s debt to both Freud and Lacan is most likely the determining factor.

Leaving aside the question of the validity of the theory of psychoanalysis in general, Butler’s analysis has problems: it not only reveals its own gaps and inconsistencies clustering around the question of the female subject, but as Kirsten Campbell points out, fails as a psychoanalytic account of subjectivity, and, as Stevie Meriel Schmiedel observes, actually

95 Butler, Bodies that Matter, 102.
96 Butler, Bodies that Matter, 102, 103.
persists in entrenching the gender-binary that Butler is attempting to challenge.\textsuperscript{98} Furthermore, Butler’s ahistorical and transcultural theory with its psychically-fixed gender binary, as will be detailed below, cannot properly account for the complexity of the socio-cultural situation of twelfth- to fifteenth-century England and Ireland, the historical context of the romances under investigation.

Gayle Rubin’s account of gendered subject-formation suffers from similar limitations as Butler’s. Her influential essay, “The Traffic in Women,” critiques Claude Lévi-Strauss’ account of the systematic oppression of women in The Elementary Structures of Kinship. Lévi-Strauss, locating the oppression of women in culture rather than nature, fails to examine the effects of this system, which can be shorthanded to “the exchange of women,” on women.\textsuperscript{99} As Rubin explains, “exchange of women” rests principally on the concepts deemed key to social organization, namely the incest taboo and Marcel Mauss’ analysis of the significance of the gift.\textsuperscript{100} Lévi-Strauss’ elaboration of these theories is the idea that women are the most important gifts, exchanged in marriage, which is the most basic form of gift-exchange, and that the incest taboo keeps women moving and thereby social relationships expanding. Gayle Rubin, drawing on Foucauldian and Althusserian concepts of subjectivity, explains how this system confers different subjectivities on men and women, because men are partners in the exchange and women are the conduit by which those partnerships are made:

If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it. The exchange of women does not necessarily imply that women are objectified, in the modern sense, since objects in the primitive world are imbued with highly personal qualities. But it does imply a distinction between gift and giver. If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents,

\textsuperscript{98}On Butler’s unintentional reiteration of the gender-binary, see Stevie Meriel Schmiedel, Contesting the Oedipal Legacy: Deleuzian vs Psychoanalytic Feminist Critical Theory (Münster: LIT Verglag, 2004), especially 93–120. Schmiedel specifically finds Butler’s “notion of melancholia in the construction of sex/gender, which she derives from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and sees as indispensable for the description of the operation of repression...reiterat[es] rather than eradict[es] the gender structures she aims to deconstruct” (101). For a critique of Butler’s psychoanalytic account of subject-formation as inadequate from the point of view of psychoanalysis, see Kirsten Campbell, “The Plague of the Subject: Subjects, Politics, and the Power of Psychic Life,” in Butler Matters: Judith Butler’s Impact on Feminist and Queer Studies, eds. Margaret Sönser Breen and Warren J. Blumenfeld (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 81–94. Campbell finds Butler’s theory to fail as psychoanalysis: “The unconscious remains the unthought in Butler’s theory, functioning as its aporia. This failure to engage with the psychoanalytic problematic produces an aporia within Butler’s theory and prevents her from working through her own theoretical and political project” (91). Sarah Salih provides further critique of the contradictions and inconsistencies in Butler’s theory of melancholic gender production and homosexuality, which Salih notes may result from an incompatible combination of psychoanalysis and Foucauldian theory. See Sarah Salih, Judith Butler (London: Routledge, 2001), especially 43–60.


\textsuperscript{100}Rubin, “Traffic in Women,” 171.
upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges — social organization.... To enter into a gift exchange as a partner, one must have something to give. If women are for men to dispose of, they are in no position to give themselves away.101

This produces sexual differentiation as asymmetric and consequently an “asymmetry of gender — the difference between exchanger and exchanged — entails the constraint of female sexuality,”102 because for the proper functioning of the system “the preferred female sexuality would be one which responded to the desire of others, rather than one which actively desired and sought a response.”103 Despite the fact that female attempts to avoid sexual control by their male relatives and to exercise some influence over their sexual and marital destinies is a recognized part of this system,104 Rubin turns to Freudian psychoanalysis to explain the engendering of passive sexuality in women as an intrinsic part of the system:

The presence or absence of the phallus carries the differences between two sexual statuses, “man” and “woman”. Since these are not equal, the phallus also carries a meaning of the dominance of men over women, and it may be inferred that “penis envy” is a recognition thereof. Moreover, as long as men have rights in women which women do not have in themselves, the phallus also carries the meaning of difference between “exchanger” and “exchanged,” gift and giver. 105

She finds that the normal product of this system for a girl to be indoctrinated as “feminine, heterosexual and passive,”106 because she “represses the ‘active’ portions of her libido” in response to “her recognition of the futility of realizing her active desire [i.e. to have the phallus], and of the unequal terms of the struggle.”107 This is how, Rubin contends, that “phallic culture domesticates women,”108 and while she concedes that “concrete kinship systems will have more specific conventions, and these conventions will vary a great deal,”109 she leaves little room for actual variation, because her account rests upon her view that the “paleolithic relations of

107 Rubin, “Traffic in Women,” 195. Failed responses to the system are asexuality, as a result of repression, and homosexuality and or becoming “masculine,” as a result of holding on to narcissism and desire (Rubin, “Traffic in Women,” 196).
sexuality” are still with us. Moreover, she claims that, despite feminist critique of Freud, “[a]s a description of how phallic culture domesticates women, and the effects in women of their domestication, psychoanalytic theory has no parallel.” The problem with Rubin’s analysis is that, like Butler’s, it takes us from a theory of gender and sexuality as socially constructed right back to the same biologically determined gender binary, presented as transhistorical. Locked into that binary are women as non-phallus holding, not-quite subjects, who attain agency only through resistance.

Indeed, as numerous feminist theorists have argued, it is doubtful that theories of the subject ultimately indebted to Freudian psychoanalysis can produce a female subject at all. Eileen Schlee concludes, after her assessment of possibilities for the post-structuralist female subject after the demise of the liberal humanist subject, that, “theoretically, phallocentrism affords no expression of female subjectivity.” “Phallocentrism,” writes Elizabeth Gross, “functions to reduce or categorise femininity so that it is conceived as simulacrum, mirror-image or imperfect double of masculinity. Our received images of femininity have been masculine—inverted, projected images of the male ideals and fantasies, images of the male "other" rather than a female subject.” Moreover, Linda Alcoff observes, psychoanalysis “cannot provide all of the answers we need for a theory of a gendered subject” and “a view that gives psychoanalysis hegemony in this area is misguided, if only because psychoanalysis is still extremely hypothetical.”

Given the predominance of psychoanalysis-dependent feminist theory in medieval studies, it is not surprising that my review of the critical literature revealed the trends it did. Rubin and Butler, as well as other feminist theorists indebted to psychoanalysis, are figures that loom large in the application of theories of subjectivity to gender in medieval romance and they underlie both Crane and Gaunt’s examination of romance’s production of the male/masculine subject. The “traffic in women” and its consequences for female subject-formation, or rather, lack thereof, have certainly been observed to apply well to romance and have been applied well to romance: Roberta Krueger, Simon Gaunt, Susan Crane, and Shiela Fisher all invoke Rubin’s

115 Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism,” 430, n.61.
work to elucidate the exchange of women, their objectification and transformation into signs of male relationships and masculine prestige. However, a number of factors suggest that the situation may be more complicated than it appears. Attention to the evidence for medieval conceptions of sex and gender as amassed by Joan Cadden, as well as a closer look at the socio-historical context of romance in the twelfth century and onwards, provides a substantial theoretical basis for opening up the conception of female subjectivity in the later Middle Ages.

The degree to which the entirety of Rubin’s theory cannot apply to the later Middle Ages is striking. To begin with, the twelfth-century marriage reform’s doctrine of consent, at least symbolically restores to the woman some of the ‘rights to herself’ removed in Rubin’s explanation of the “exchange of women” with its Oedipal psyche-structured guarantee. John Gillingham provides a concise description of the implications of Pope Alexander III’s decree that the validity of a marriage depended upon the free consent of both spouses:

In coming to his conclusion, Alexander rejected two other criteria for testing the validity for a marriage, whether Roman, Germanic, Jewish or Christian. First, that the consent of parents or guardians was necessary; second, that a public ceremony was necessary. One consequence of the rejection of these criteria was that marriages made against the wishes of the family or lord and made, if necessary, in secret, now became valid marriages. That marriages ought to be free (“cum libera debeant esse conjugia”), was by the early thirteenth century a lawyers’ commonplace. Guardians therefore could not force their wards to marry. Since a ward’s marriage was a lucrative asset, lords could not be expected to give it up for nothing, and from the 1190s onwards the English Pipe Rolls show wards, including heiresses, buying the freedom to arrange their own marriages. The freedom to marry implied the right to say no.116

This “ecclesiastical model” of marriage— to borrow Georges Duby’s terminology— was of course not uniformly accepted, and in practice, it competed with the “aristocratic model,” in which parents and guardians had far greater control over the marital destinies of children of both sexes than the children themselves.117 The widespread practice of both men and women being subject to parents, lords, king’s designs and plans for their marriages means that the ‘exchange of men’ is not simply a fiction of romance and chanson de geste, but a real aspect of lived

---


existence. Indeed, the picture of marriage in twelfth- to fifteenth-century England is not a straightforward one of men trading women back and forth, but of parents, lords and barons trading children (of both sexes) back and forth. At the same time, the ecclesiastical model of free consent seems to have caught the imagination of the romance writers, given the sheer number of romances that represent the giving of a woman in marriage without her consent—even one arranged by her father—as a negative, violent and intolerable act that is rightfully opposed and stopped by the hero and frequently by the woman herself. In a world where class, social rank and nobility conferred power in different ways that intersected with the sex/gender system, we cannot assume a simple biologically determined distribution of authority via “the phallus.”

Moreover, as Joan Cadden details, while sex, as in male or female, was taken to be a given in medieval thought, gender, as in masculine and feminine, was fluid, variable and not nearly as tied to a concomitant binary of positive/negative as we might have expected. Feminine men and masculine women were part of a broader conceptual sphere that as a matter of course extended ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ as qualities to a wide range of physical and metaphysical phenomena. While the binary was certainly entrenched, its application was not. Moreover, femininity was not always negative, or always abjured by men, and masculinity was not always positive, or inaccessible to women. Hence, the dichotomies of phallus-possessing/male/giver/subject and phallus-lacking/female/gift/personified object cannot unproblematically apply, and in some cases, may not apply at all.

118 See below, chapters 1 and 2.
120 Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Sex, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 201–227. Cadden observes, “[t]he tradition of praise for men with feminine qualities is not as long or as strong as that of praise for women with masculine characteristics, but it is significant” (*Meanings of Sex Difference*, 206).
121 Cadden writes, “[p]ositive and negative attributions, literal and metaphorical attributions, and essential and accidental attributions of “feminine” and “masculine” all coexist in the later Middle Ages” (*Meanings of Sex Difference*, 208); “flexibility and variety in application of gender notions”; “grounding in natural processes lent medieval language and culture a set of gender traits that conveyed the sense of duality without being strictly dichotomous” (*Meanings of Sex Difference*, 209).
122 Medical and scientific texts do not, however, portray men as more virtuous than women. Rather the evidence suggests that individuals of either sex may partake of any of these properties—that women may be “masculine” and men may be “feminine.” These gender constructs are grounded in the broad notions of sexual differentiations, but they are predicated of the other sex as well as of ostensibly sex–neutral entities. Thus “manly” stands for a set of qualities derived from the notion of an ideal natural man, but applicable to women as well. In particular, the masculine woman, especially when honoured with the title “virago,” took on a glow of manly virtues, although she was unambiguously on the female side of the anatomical spectrum” (Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 205).
The situation in Ireland is no less complex and fits the psychoanalytic binary no more than the social situation in England. In fact, the binary may be even less applicable. In her recent dissertation, the only full length study of gender and sexuality in Irish saga, Sarah Sheehan observes that:

Irish saga discourse does not always define the category of gender in clear or prescriptive ways… indeed, the slim attestation of the adjectives *ferda* ‘manly’ and *banda* ‘womanly,’ despite the availability of Latin equivalents such as *virilis/muliebris* and *masculus/femineus*, may also reflect a cultural unwillingness to define gender in abstract terms. More often, saga discourse reveals its conception of gender in the intersection with other, more concrete concepts and categories such as authority, social status, ethnicity, or tribal affiliation.\(^{123}\)

This suggests that looking for discrete categories of masculine and feminine in the direct descendents of the saga literature, the *rómánsaíochta* and the texts adapted to the same literary context, the Irish translations of Middle English romances, may be on the one hand fruitless, and on the other hand, an exercise involving square pegs and round holes.

It is clear that what is needed is an alternative approach to gendered subjectivity that does not depend on a model of the feminine as ‘lack.’ This is surely beyond the scope of my project, being more a question of philosophy than literary criticism. However, Linda Alcoff offers a corrective to essentializing and psychoanalyzing methods of modelling and reading gendered subjectivity. She suggests that emphasizing the historical aspect of subjectivity will waylay the tendency to produce general, universal, or essential accounts by making all our conclusions contingent and revisable. Thus, through a conception of human subjectivity as an emergent property of a historicized experience, we can say “feminine subjectivity is construed here and now in such and such a way” without this ever entailing a universalizable maxim about the “feminine.”\(^{124}\)

Alcoff is advocating a more of a materialist, historicist approach to subjectivity — a return to Foucault’s model of subjectivity produced by discursively circulated power. In turning away from psychoanalysis, Alcoff is not alone among feminist theorists. This is very much the approach taken by Chris Weedon’s *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Nicola Gavey draws together the works of several feminist theorists advocating for a discourse analysis-based approach to subjectivity and gender under the umbrella term “feminist poststructuralism,” which she draws from Weedon. She describes feminist poststructuralism as having the goal of staying historically, socially and culturally specific in the development of

\(^{123}\) Sarah Sheehan, “Gender and Sexuality in Early Irish Saga” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2008), 194–5. My thanks to Sarah Sheehan for providing me with a copy.

\(^{124}\) Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism,” 431.
theories and understandings and subtended by the understanding that language and discourse constitute subjectivity:

Discourses are multiple, and they offer competing, potentially contradictory ways of giving meaning to the world. They offer “subject positions” for individuals to take up. These positions or “possibilities” for constituting subjectivity (identities, behaviors, understandings of the world) vary in terms of the power they offer individuals. Discourses vary in their authority. The dominant discourses appear “natural,” denying their own partiality and gaining their authority by appealing to common sense. These discourses, which support and perpetuate existing power relations, tend to constitute the subjectivity of most people most of the time (in a given time and place). 125

Gavey’s goal is to make a case for applying the discourse analysis used in a post-structuralist approach to literary texts to analyses of psychology subjects’ interviews. However, in the process she provides a useful summary of a post-structuralist approach to literature: a literary text is “an embodiment of various discourses available in the social, cultural and historical context of the author.” 126 The principal critical tool of this approach to language and subjectivity is discourse analysis, which is a form of close reading that aims at identifying not only the social discourses present “in a given culture and society at a given time” (and in our case, in a literary text), but the power relations and subject positions offered by those discourses. Such an approach cannot account for the formation of gendered, sexed subjectivity at the level of psychic structures, but it can provide a focus for the reading of textual representations of subjectivity that will not preclude possibilities for female subjectivity.

My examination of female subjectivity in medieval romance is at its root a discourse analysis: approaching romance as a discourse, I investigate each text for its discursive representation of female characters as subjects, objects, signs or symbols, keeping a broad view of subjectivity as a display of agency that is both enabled and constrained by its discursive formation. In looking at the construction of female subject positions, a key aspect will be the consideration of how the relational construction of gender identified by Crane and Gaunt to be crucial to romance as a genre operates to produce femininity, female subjectivity and identity in a way that is mutually constructed by masculinility and male subjectivity and identity. My goal is to provide an account of female subjectivity and femininity as it is “construed here and now in

such and such a way” within each romance, a process made considerably richer through the juxtaposition of related romances representing different permutations of a common story.

As for the question of sex versus gender, i.e. male and female versus masculine and feminine, which until this point I have avoided addressing directly, I propose the following usage. In light of a) medieval scholars’ use of both terms, often interchangeably; b) Judith Butler’s accurate observation that dividing sex from gender implies that the former is a pre-discursive, non-culturally conditioned category, where the latter is the cultural meaning of a ‘natural’ formation, when in fact, the meaning of sex and sex differences is also culturally constructed\textsuperscript{127}; and c) the existence and predominance of medieval essentialist and essentializing conceptions of the body, sex and gender and discrete categories of men and women, male and female, masculine and feminine,\textsuperscript{128} I will use masculine and feminine when gender as performed social code of behaviour is the more prominent issue, and male and female when the social meaning of embodied sex difference is the more pressing concern. This will allow me to talk about the female subject and female identity as well as femininity and dominant femininities in a way that does not dichotomize and oppose gender and sex as cultural versus natural, but bears witness to their fundamental discursive connection.

**Comparative Methodology**

The comparative strategy is key to this project of studying constructions of femininity and female subjectivity in romance because attention to the similarities and differences between alternative versions of the same stories puts into relief the particularities of gender and subjectivity in each narrative. Examining different versions provides us a way to read the respective texts’ ideologies of gender and power, as the characters and stories change over time and move across ethnolinguistic communities. When translation is an issue, we can see points where ideology cracks, breaks, and must be reconstituted. Towards that goal, I have chosen a selection of romances to investigate that exist in multiple versions which differ in language and date. These are the romances of *Horn, Havelok, Guy of Warwick* and, to a lesser extent, *Bevis of Hampton*.

In the Middle English and medieval Irish texts that can be described as translations, the basic structures of the translated romances depend on their Anglo-Norman and Middle English forebears. As a result, not only does the position of the heroine and other female characters

\textsuperscript{127} See Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 1–12.
\textsuperscript{128} See below.
remain approximate, but the differences and, when they can be glimpsed, adaptations/deliberate changes, illuminate the differences in gender ideology and constructions of gendered subjectivity within the respective narratives. This applies to the variety of Middle English versions of Guy of Warwick and Medieval Irish translations of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton. On account of space limitations, the Anglo-Norman Boeve de Haumtone and Middle English Bevis of Hampton feature only in the context of romance and translation in late medieval Hiberno-Norman Ireland. With respect to the Middle English romances that cannot conclusively be shown to be translations of Anglo-Norman romances, such as King Horn and Havelok the Dane, the construction of female subjectivity and gender in the Middle English and Anglo-Norman romances can still be described more precisely through comparison because the events and characters depend on the common earlier tradition drawn upon by both the Anglo-Norman and Middle English romancers: the pre-existing story places boundaries on its subsequent permutations and the texts represent alternative ways of telling the same story and are therefore especially reflective foils for each other.

In the case of the Irish rómánsaíochta, as original tales with demonstrable romance influence, a broader body of texts is needed for comparison. Hence, I analyze them both in comparison with structurally and thematically similar Early Irish tales, and the Irish translations of Middle English romances, with which they also share structural and thematic similarities. In the case of one rómánsaíocht, a much earlier version of the tale is extant, and the juxtaposition is especially productive for revealing the considerably more limited and constrained models of female subjectivity in these fifteenth-century texts.

This project places critical emphasis on the fact that, as Middle English romance scholars Ivana Djordjević and Alison Wiggins observe, “choice of language was just one among a spectrum of linguistic changes that romances underwent during transmission.” That is not to say that patterns and trends within linguistically-bounded literary traditions cannot be observed, but that, as Ivana Djordjević has pointed out, while “we tend to identify the passage from French to English as the one significant rupture in the otherwise smooth progression from text to text…

---

129 The methodological complications of determining deliberate changes and adaptations in the translated texts are outlined in chapters three and four.
130 See chapter four and the Conclusion, in which I discuss future comparative work to be done on Boeve de Haumtone, Bevis of Hampton and the Old Norse Bevers saga.
this is not necessarily an accurate perception,“\textsuperscript{132} and other factors, particularly socio-cultural change over time, may be more formative influences on the differences observable from one version of a romance to the next.

Close attention to textual change over time reveals a profound shift in the emergence of female characters which cease to be symbols, signs and objects but are established as subjects in their own right. This can be seen on a number of fronts, namely in the reciprocity of gender and identity construction with the hero, whose masculine identity they have long been seen to establish, and through a growing intertextual relationship with hagiography, a genre which allows its own female characters subject-status through various forms of recognized agency, including gift-exchange, desire and suffering, patience, piety and charity. One of the Irish translations of a Middle English romance, \textit{The Irish Life of Guy of Warwick}, shows a radical alteration towards a different mode of gender construction in which male and female subjectivity are analogously structured via their relationship to patriarchal authority.

As will become clear over the course of this study, some female characters, such as Rigmel of the \textit{Roman de Horn} and Argentille of the \textit{Lai d'Haveloc}, do indeed follow the oft-observed pattern: despite the ideology of the romance, they emerge as agents, and resistant subjects. Romance, having opened up a fictionalized space, momentarily allows the female subject to emerge, but by the end of the text has returned her to her rightful, subordinated place. These female subjects disappear over the course of their romance, at which point they are not ‘subject as subject’ because they are not even represented as ‘subjected’ – they are truly objectified or reduced to symbols. They not only are more acted upon than acting, but the narrative has so dramatically reduced or erased their resistance from the text that they do shift back into the space of symbol and object.

However, this is not always the case. Sometimes the female protagonist, such as Rimenhild of \textit{King Horn}, Goldeboru of \textit{Havelok the Dane}, Felice of \textit{Gui de Warewic} and \textit{Guy of Warwick}, can be described as a subject, in the sense that she might be marginalized or oppressed, but she is also narratively endorsed as an agent in ways analogous to the male hero. She is subjected to different forces than her male counterpart, and so it follows that she almost certainly does have less power and less visibility, but this is a condition of being a subject. Moreover, her subjectivity, still represented within the text, can hardly be construed as resistant or transgressive, particularly when the text closes with the social order that she herself helped to

restore. Romances almost by definition dramatize conflict and restitution. Something is broken, wrong, disordered at the beginning of the narrative that must be restored by the end of it. The male heroes find their identity in the course of fixing what is broken; sometimes it is only their lack of identity that is what is amiss. The female protagonists are part of that adventure of restoration, indeed such an integral part that it is through their relationship with the hero that the hero obtains his identity; but these women can also be agents within that adventure of identity-formation: not only is it through their actions, their help, sometimes through that alone, social order and the male hero’s identity can be restored, but they too have an identity that is formed and guaranteed through their relationship to the hero. In other words, the relational construction of gender is not the one-sided operation it is often found to be, but mutual and reciprocal. To cast these characters’ subjectivity solely as resistant can cause us to miss the broader project of the romance text.

This study does not aim to debunk or discredit the view that male subjectivity in romance is formed in relation to an indefinable ‘other’ of femininity, that the exchange of women does operate, making men the givers and women the gifts, or that the women against which male subjectivity is defined are primarily signs of masculine prestige passed between men and the spectre of their agency and identity is raised only to be occluded by the end of the romance. These readings are textually supported and deeply theoretically informed. Rather, in this dissertation, I seek to expand the study of gender and subject construction in medieval romance to include female subjects and femininities that are not ‘what masculininity is not’ or exclusively resistant. The romances under examination provide ample evidence that there is a need to look at the other side of the relation, to see what the reflection of men and masculinity does for women and femininity within medieval insular romances, to acknowledge and examine how the female subjects are invested and complicit with the dominant social order. There is no guarantee that we will find female subjects if we go looking for them, but it is certain that we will not find them if we do not.
Part One: Romance in England

Chapter One: Desire, Agency and Women’s Exchange in the Narratives of King Horn

This chapter considers one of the most compelling and contested figures in medieval romance, the so-called ‘wooing-woman,’ who has received less consideration in her Middle English permutations than her Anglo-Norman or her predominately Saracen sisters in *chansons de geste*. Like the wooing women of the *chansons de geste*, Rigmel, Rimenhild and Rimnild of the Horn narratives raise questions about the meaning of female desire and agency in romance. Are these women merely products of male fantasy, existing to embellish the hero, and whose desire is suspiciously complicitious with the hero’s interests? Why and how do they exist in romance, being so apparently contrary to prevailing social and cultural expectations of passive feminine behaviour\(^{133}\)? Are they socially transgressive within the text, or is their behaviour permitted,

\(^{133}\) On didactic background, see Weiss, “Wooing Women,” 150–1.
supported or even celebrated, as Helen Cooper suggests? Are they simply reflections of the hero, constructing his identity, or is the identity construction mutual, i.e. do they have their own identity that is constructed by him?

Drawing on strategies used by Sarah Kay and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne to observe the construction of female subjects in romance’s contiguous genres of *chansons de geste* and hagiography, I juxtapose readings of the three female protagonists of the Horn narratives to compare the ways in which their subjectivity is discursively constructed in the text. Rigmel’s ultimately frustrated attempt to step into the desiring male subject position, her failed exchange with Horn, her powerlessness in the face of Horn’s decisions, and gradual eclipse by the narrative as male bonds move into the forefront cast the Middle English Rimenhild and Rimnild in a new light. Both women not only succeed in exchanging themselves, being recognized by Horn as sufficiently subject to do so, they also plan, act and radically affect not only Horn’s identity formation, but the trajectory of the narrative itself, actively contributing to the restoration of social order broken at the beginning of the poem with Horn’s father’s death and his childhood exile. Absent in the Middle English narratives, the overt misogyny and condemnation of Rigmel’s actions make it clear that her stepping into a subject position is transgressive. Her silencing and erasure over the course of the narrative produce her more as an object exchanged between men and a symbol of Horn’s prowess. Her effect on Horn’s subject-formation is passive, and he does not construct her as a subject in return. The prevailing view of women in romance does hold true for Rigmel: she is momentarily allowed agency and gender-bending subjectivity, but all of that is reversed and contained by the end of the poem. Rimenhild and Rimnild, however, although oppressed and not the focus of the poem, are presented as subjects: they are held up as agents within narrative, being capable of positively portrayed and effective action, and with an identity that is produced by their relationship with Horn, just as his identity is established through them.

Manuscripts, Texts and Textual Relationships

The *Roman de Horn*, written around 1170 by an unidentified poet named Thomas, is one of the earliest extant Anglo-Norman romances.\(^{134}\) Judith Weiss calls it “[a] neglected masterpiece and

---

incontestably the finest of the romances in the French of England.”

On women in the poem, she notes that, as typical of romance, they play a much more significant role in the plot than in *chansons de geste*, the genre to which *Horn* owes its metrics and some of its stylistics. She observes that “[t]hough Thomas frequently adopts the moralizing and misogynistic rhetoric so often used of women by medieval clerks, he also describes women with sympathy and humour.”

It survives in three thirteenth century manuscripts, all incomplete, and two fragments, the first dated to the end of the thirteenth century, the second to the fourteenth century. The result of Mildred K. Pope’s edition is a composite text, the base-text of which, MS “C,” Pope finds to have been somewhat remodelled, updated and corrected in the early thirteenth century. It is to this composite text that my observations pertain.

The Middle English *King Horn* is about a hundred years younger and dates from the late thirteenth century. It is a strong candidate for the earliest Middle English romance, and is related to the Anglo-Norman poem in an indefinable way. It exists in three manuscripts: MS Harleian, 2253 (L), MS Laud Misc.108, Bodleian Library, Oxford (O), and MS. Gg.iv.27.2, University Library, Cambridge (C) from the early-to-mid fourteenth century. C, usually thought to be the oldest, has been reassessed by Rosamund Allen, who concludes instead that O is the oldest. Because, as James Hurt notes, there is remarkable variation across the three versions in the specific phrasing of the lines and small details, though not in the sequence of events or major features, I will be considering all three manuscript versions, which Hall edits

---


137 The manuscripts are Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 132 (O), containing 3,042 lines; Cambridge, University Library, MS.Ff.6.17 (C), containing 4519 lines; London, British Library, MS Harleian 527 (H), containing 2,761 lines. The fragments are “F1” and “F2,” Cambridge, University Library MSS Addit.4407 (21 lines) and 4470 (238 lines). See Weiss, *Birth of Romance* 10-11. See also Pope, *Horn*, ix–lix. Pope’s edition privileges C, “the best of those extant” (lvi), but which sadly lacks the beginning and the ending, and O, which fortunately does not. Her edition is as follows: ll.1–96 from O, ll.97–4595 from C, ll.4596–5250 from O. Lines missing in C are supplied from O; lines missing from O are supplied from F2. H lacks beginning and ending. Where the texts overlap, readings are supplied as variants.


140 Hall, *King Horn*, vii–ix. Hall dates L to between 1314 and 1320, O after 1310 and C to 1260, a remarkably early date that has been revised by Rosamund Allen. Allen finds C and O to date from the first quarter of the fourteenth century, and L from the second quarter. Rosamund Allen, *King Horn: An Edition Based on Cambridge University Library MS Gg.4.27(2)* (New York: Garland, 1984), 3, 8, 13.

141 Allen, “Date and Provenance,” especially 100–03.
separately in parallel texts, rather than simply following the usual practice of privileging the C text. The fact that, despite their differences, the three manuscripts present a consistent picture of Rimenhild as a subject testifies to the breadth of the conceptualization of Rimenhild as a subject, as indeed, does Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild.

Earlier editors and critics, particularly George H. McKnight and Joseph Hall, who each edited the poem from its three manuscripts in 1901, concluded that it is impossible for the English version to be derived in any way from the Anglo-Norman or vice versa. McKnight concludes that the Anglo-Norman is an elaborated version of an English story, and that the Anglo-Norman may have derived from a lost English version, or rests upon the same oral tradition that directly produced King Horn. Mildred K. Pope, the editor of the Anglo-Norman Roman de Horn, concluded that the texts both have a common origin in a lost Middle English original. J.A.W. Bennett accords with this opinion, writing that “indeed, it may well be the Norman who borrowed or adapted the native English story, for the later and longer Anglo-Norman romance of Horn by one Thomas is clearly related to some version of this poem.”

Maldwyn Mills, editing the later version of the story from the early fourteenth century, Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild from its single-manuscript witness, the Auchinleck manuscript, sees neither Middle English version as a direct translation of the Anglo-Norman, and in fact remains equivocal as to whether Horn Childe or King Horn are direct descendents of the Roman de Horn. Where Susan Crane accepts that Helmut Christmann and Stefan Hofer’s studies from

---

142 James R. Hurt, “The Texts of King Horn,” Folklore 7 (1970), 47–59: 50. Hurt points out that “the three texts have only 1170 lines in common, out of a total of 1530 lines in the C text” (50).
143 George H. McKnight, King Horn, Floris and Blancheflur, The Assumption of our Lady first edited in 1866 by J. Rawson Lumby, and now re-edited from the manuscripts with Introduction, Notes and Glossary, by George H. McKnight. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Early English Text Society, O.S. no. 14, 1866, 1091, reprint 1962, viii–xiii. McKnight writes, “That the ballad-like version K.H., simple, even primitive in matter, in manner, and in metrical form, should have been derived from the sophisticated, artificial R.H. [Roman de Horn] deserves little consideration. On the other hand that the artificial romance should have been derived from the simple ballad-like story, incomplete in its record of details, is even more unworthy of consideration” (xiv). McKnight also notes that in the introduction to the Anglo-Norman Waldef, it is said that the romance of Horn derives from an English original. He sees the English King Horn as being composed directly from the oral tradition, and the Anglo-Norman from a lost English text (xxvi). Hall King Horn, li–lvi. Hall concludes that “(1) no one of the versions is a slavish adaptation of any other. (2) [Horn Childe] lies nearer [Roman de Horn] than does [King Horn]... (4) [King Horn] is probably not derived from [Roman de Horn]... [King Horn] is essentially English, a plain impersonal tale, picturing a simple state of society and full of primitive touches centuries older than its language, written in a metre which is a natural development of Old English prosody. It cannot possibly have been derived from [Roman de Horn]” (liii–liv).
146 Maldwyn Mills, ed., Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1988). He writes that Roman de Horn “if not necessarily the direct source of most of what we find in [Horn Childe], quite
the mid-twentieth century “plausibly conclude” that K[ing] H[orn] is a “direct descendant from the R[oman de] H[orn], and that R[oman de] H[orn] is not drawn from a lost source but is a new creation drawn from contemporary material,” Mills remains sceptical: “The interrelationship of all these texts is complex, and has been debated over a long period of time, though never resolved in a wholly convincing way. The only real certainty is that the R[oman de] H[orn] was the direct source of P[ontus et la Belle] S[idoyne],” the later French prose romance, eventually translated into English. Mills concludes that Horn Childe and Maiden Rimmild is actually closer to the Roman de Horn, a view which accords with Joseph Hall’s, but even when he does consider Horn Childe as a direct descendant, stresses its difference: “the M[iddle] E[nglish] redactor, even when staying closest to R[oman de] H[orn] in the detailed content of his romance, not only consistently abbreviates this material, but also reshapes it and fuses it with motifs from other sources.”

The only consensus seems to be that Middle English texts are too different from the Anglo-Norman to be considered translations. Rather Middle English texts are best approached as separate productions, sharing a common tradition with the Anglo-Norman. What is important for this investigation is that the three texts present the same story, with the same basic structure and characters, but in different ways, adapted to their own unique contexts.

Sexual Politics and the ‘Wooing Woman’: Gift-Exchange, Desire and Subjectivity

Two potential avenues to subjectivity are at stake in the ‘wooing women’ narratives in general and in the narratives of Horn in particular. These are, in short, the interrelated acts of desire and gift-giving. Both have been examined with respect to structurally analogous women in neighbouring genres, the ‘wooing women’ of the chansons de geste and the passionate virgin martyrs of hagiography. I will be drawing upon strategies used by scholars to assess the nature of subjectivity inscribed in these female characters in order to examine the bases of Rigmel, Rimenhild and Rimmild’s subjectivities. As the “exchange of women” described in the introductory chapter prescribes, men are the exchangers and women the exchanged, making men into subjects and partners of the exchange and women into gifts, objects and signs of male
certainly stands closer to such a source than does any other surviving version of the story” (44). All quotations are from this edition.


149 Hall, King Horn, liii–liv.

150 Mills, Horn Childe, 77.
relationships. However, as Sarah Kay observes of the Saracen princesses in the *chansons de geste* and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne observes of the virgin martyrs, women who attempt to control their own sexual destiny by choosing and giving themselves to their beloveds, human or divine, trouble that binary of giver and gift, and, in being successful partners in a reciprocal exchange, can certainly be described as subjects. Their desire, as the fuelling force of that subject-formation, not only contributes to their subjectivity in that way, but also commands narrative attention for the expression of a first-person position, which can be seen as a route to subjectivity in itself. In romance, this is additionally true because of the generic convention of male heroes occupying the lover subject-position, with their beloved ladies often read by romance scholars as the objectified, passive vehicles for their wooer’s subject-formation. The critical literature on romance, for the most part, sees active desire and acting on that desire the preserve of male-subjects. But these active desiring female characters who exchange themselves challenge this view.

Helen Cooper, of course, as already noted, has recently attempted to overturn this assumption, arguing that English romance, Anglo-Norman and Middle English, makes the motif of the active desiring heroine a central feature of romance and does so in a celebratory, positive way.\(^\text{151}\) As I asserted in the introduction, this unqualified, context-less blanket-approach misses much of the complexities and nuances of individual texts. Nevertheless, the issues grappled with by Cooper are very much the same ones raised by Judith Weiss, who struggles to harmonize obvious contradictions between the “hostile” didactic literature of the period and the fact that neither these women nor their *chansons de geste* counterparts are presented as “contemptible slut[s].”\(^\text{152}\) But where Weiss has no concrete answers, Cooper claims that English romances constituted a rival discourse to French and Latin courtly and misogynistic literature (225), having a fundamentally positive view of women’s sexuality and their active pursuit of it and “endorse[d] an ideal of wifely living and loving.”\(^\text{153}\) Cooper, however, seems blind to the
ubiquitous misogyny that troubles Weiss. While Cooper’s suggestion that the active desiring women can be seen as “‘subjects’ in the full modern sense of the term, as unique individuals with a self-conscious awareness of their own place in the scheme of things” is promising and certainly congruent with my own project, that “women’s sexuality is centrally regarded as positive, to the point where it is one of the key factors that enables the restoration of social and providential order” is certainly debatable.\footnote{Cooper, English Romance in Time, 219, 220.} As my juxtaposition of Rigmel, Rimenhild and Rimmild will show, women’s sexuality is not regarded as unambiguously positive, nor it is necessarily a key factor in the restoration of social order, moreover, the active desiring women may achieve subject-status, but they do not necessarily retain it, nor is it necessarily represented as a legitimate and sustainable subject-position. Active, desiring, positively portrayed female subjects emerge in King Horn and Horn Childe, but not in Roman de Horn.

The question of the possibility of female subjects in the wooing women narratives is necessarily related to the issue of male fantasy.\footnote{The possibility of these women as merely the products of male fantasy is raised by Judith Weiss, as well as Sarah Kay, in her discussion of the wooing Saracen princess, and by Helen Cooper. Weiss, “Wooing Woman,” 152; Sarah Kay, The Chansons de geste in the Age of Romance, Political Fictions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 45–8; Cooper, English Romance in Time, 225–6.} As Cooper remarks, the narrative of the desiring heiress seems to “serve the wishful thinking of male readers, with their recurrent promise of marriage to a beautiful woman who is desirable both physically and in terms of wealth and status.”\footnote{Cooper, English Romance in Time, 225.} The crucial question in light of this possibility, is, as Sarah Kay observes, “[w]hat then of the status of the Saracen princesses as narrative subjects? Whether they get the man they want or acquiesce in a marriage which is decided for them, are they not, in fact, being represented as complicitous with male Frankish interest?”\footnote{Kay, Chansons de geste, 45.} The Saracen wooing women of romance and chansons de geste may be seen as licensed in their provocative behaviour by their cultural and religious distance from the hero and the audience,\footnote{Weiss, “Wooing Woman” 152; Cooper, English Romance in Time, 226–7.} but at the same time, their choice of the Christian hero can be seen as a “mystification of the Christian conquerors’ claims to the spoils of war,” as well as producing for the hero a sexual victory over the Saracens in addition to his military one.\footnote{Kay, Chansons de geste, 45.} I would like to add that a similar possibility exists for the overall population (e.g. perhaps a woman often committed infidelity, but it was generally with another male who had a recent common ancestor with her husband; this scenario is particularly likely if population densities are low or if the population is very homogeneous). I would like to thank Vikram Mulligan for assistance with these points. See Bryan Sykes and Catherine Irven, “Surnames and the Y Chromosome,” American Journal of Human Genetics 66 (2000), 1417–19.
Christian wooing woman: her desiring gaze can be seen as a fiction designed to justify and naturalize the exchange of women along the lines of patriarchal priorities. She falls in love with the hero on the basis of his superior masculine prowess, validating his status and power, which will be an asset to her father and to her land, which he will rule after her father’s death. By wanting to be exchanged between her father and the hero, she affirms the legitimacy of male hierarchical structures and is complicitous with patriarchal values. That her father is opposed to the match may serve to reveal his weakness as a ruler in comparison to the superior hero, who is likely to find himself conquering his soon-to-be-father-in-law’s land when he liberates his bride from her inevitable forced marriage. If the wooing woman appears to threaten the structures of male exchange by attempting to exchange herself, it is nevertheless justifiable, not only because she secures rank and land for the hero, but because social disorder is already underway, and by contributing to the hero’s victory over his enemies and rise to prominence as the primary patriarchal figure in the text, she participates in the restoration of order. How then can we read against the possibility that the woman is always nothing more than an asset to or attribute of the male hero?

Judith Weiss, Helen Cooper and Sarah Kay offer possibilities for how the wooing women can be seen as self-determining narrative agents and this is, in part, guaranteed by their resistance. Weiss describes the wooing woman as ‘usurp[ing] the male role’ characterized as “someone of energy, determination, life, and this initial impression may be confirmed by her later role in the romance.”160 Cooper asserts that because the romances “spend considerable time exploring the minds of their women,” their ability “to serve male fantasies is therefore constrained.” Cooper casts this feature as romance authors’ deliberate strategy to encourage their young women audience members’ “resistant readings” to the obedience they owe their male authority-figures, maintaining that “the degree of narrative sympathy accorded to these independent-minded heroines can hardly be accidental, whether in Anglo-French or medieval or Renaissance English.”161 In this view, romance is resistant, and so its female characters must be resistant, while at the same time endorsed by their authors. I would like to challenge Cooper to

161 Cooper writes, “[t]he romances’ readiness to enter the minds of their heroines makes it all but inevitable that women readers or listeners should empathize with them, even project some degree of their own wishful thinking onto the stories, and not only through the regular provision of strong and handsome lovers … but also through the freedom to make their own choices affecting their own lives. The romances are fully conscious of the male power to which their young women owe a duty of obedience, and of the likelihood of their desire to resist it. Such resistant readings are often actively encouraged by the authors” (English Romance in Time, 226).
point out the ‘narrative sympathy’ in Hue de Roteland’s portrayal of La Fiere. Indeed, she has to rest her analysis on the Middle English version of the romance, which is considerably altered in the two hundred years between Hue’s version and the translation, avoiding the visceral, cruel and misogynistic narration of the original, which she trivializes as Hue’s “own version,” as if it has no originary status. Acknowledging that only Hue “occasionally drops overtly antifeminist remarks,” rather than systematically builds the humiliation and degradation of women into the fabric of his narrative, she claims that “the story itself takes its characters rather more seriously.” What she means by “the story itself” is unclear.

Kay’s strategy is the most compelling, and, as I have alluded earlier, it is this approach I will be adapting in my own reading. Kay examines the political and social ramifications of women’s exchange through an anthropological lens focused on the role of the gift. She frames the problem of the Saracen princess’ possible complicity with Frankish interest as a question of whether or not she is an object of exchange, a ‘gift,’ given by the narrator to the hero. She finds that the princesses’ acts of prophecy grant them not only “control over the plots of these stories” but that they also “exercise an uncanny authority at the level of their telling.” As such, the princesses are allied with the narrator, their ‘giver,’ for whom they serve as doubles. She concludes that “[t]he Saracen princess, then, does not merely ventriloquize a controlling masculine fantasy: she helps to shape it, and thereby disrupts assumed hierarchies. Her desire for a partner of her choice challenges the authority of the male characters, whether Saracen or Frankish.” Furthermore, “although the self-interest of the Franks may ironize the desire of the Saracen princess, the derision, autonomy, and narrative authority of the Saracen princess can also be seen as ironizing the pretentions of male hegemony.”

Kay’s conclusions, to some degree, rest on the particularities of the process by which the union between the Saracen princess and her chosen man is achieved, namely that the princess herself is a ‘gift’ rather than a ‘commodity’ and as such can exploit the personification of the gift that occurs in gift-giving economies, which, in contrast to commodity-economies, personify

162 Gaunt remarks on the extreme nature of the misogyny in (Anglo-Norman) Ipomedon: [Ipomedon’s] length (over 10,000 lines) and its repetitive structure, which endlessly re-enacts the heroine’s humiliation at the hands of the hero, are symptomatic of obsession and of Hue’s compulsion to denigrate women. Why does he need to humiliate women so obsessively? Is his fear justified, or is it a symptom of his own inadequacy?” (Gender and Genre, 115). On misogyny in Ipomedon, see also Krueger, Women Readers, 68–82.


164 Kay, Chanson de geste, 46

165 Kay, Chanson de geste, 46–7

166 Kay, Chanson de geste, 47.
things rather than objectify persons. She draws principally on Marilyn Strathern's *Gender of the Gift*, but, of course, as already observed, gift-giving forms an intrinsic part of the exchange of women and its implications for subjectivity as described by Gayle Rubin. The Saracen princess “stage[s] her own bestowal” by promising help to the hero only on the condition of marriage and in doing so, her own desire supersedes both Frankish and Saracen male desires and she “shows up the process of male conferment as mere trompe-l’œil.” Indeed, Kay shows how in reversal of the pattern “familiar from male-authored anthropology of men exchanging women and thus founding society,” it is the man who is exchanged. What allows Kay’s women to remain subversive and resistant is their complicity with narratorial intentions to undermine the Saracens, but also to interrogate Christian epic heroism and society. Simon Gaunt likewise observes that women in the *chansons* are often “surrogate voices for critical impulses within the genre.” As such, they can be endorsed as “successful architects of narrative and social structure,” but still be “subversive of male control.” Kay’s observations pertain to the world of the *chansons de geste*, the symbolic structures of which are found by Kay and Gaunt to differ from romance in the spheres of economy and gender respectively. Nevertheless, Kay’s strategies for revealing female subjectivity and agency by focusing on the power-dynamics of gift-exchange remain profoundly effective tools; indeed, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne takes up Kay’s approach in her own dissection of ideological structures in hagiography.

Acknowledging that anthropological approaches to gift giving have been “persuasively deployed by Sarah Kay in reading the period's *chansons de geste,*” she finds that they “apply with even greater closeness to contemporary narratives of virgin saints, whom the imagery of treasure encodes as a particularly valuable form of gift.” She explains how the virgin martyr’s gift of herself to her chosen bridegroom, Christ, troubles the usual exchange of women by men in the formation of masculine networks: as gift-giver and gift, the virgin acquires agency and

---

169 Kay, *Chanson de geste*, 44.
170 Kay, *Chanson de geste*, 45.
173 Kay, *Chanson de geste*, 47.
subject-status: giving herself to Christ is “an assertion of honour, agency and free will.”\textsuperscript{175} In doing so she “escapes from dotal control” and becomes “self-donating gift.”\textsuperscript{176}

Drawing upon anthropological literature, Sarah Kay and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne explain that gift-giving establishes relationships between people and compels reciprocity. By entering into gift-giving, the Saracen princesses and virgin martyrs make their own contracts and thereby become exchange partners, even if they are simultaneously the exchanged. Being narratively and ideologically endorsed in these exchanges, they are, in every sense of the term, subjects. The ideological structures of their genres not only enable but support their actions, which are the actions of self-determining, autonomous partners in an exchange that elicits reciprocity. Even if it does not necessarily denote equality between the partners on an absolute level – after all, who or what could possibly be equal to God? – it does suggest a certain level of equality and equivalency within the structures of the exchange, as the partners must be of such a state as to be able to negotiate, to be worth entering an exchange with and worthy of the gift.

In this chapter, I will apply similar theories of gift-exchange to the romance narrative of the wooing woman who attempts, just as the Saracen princess in the \textit{chansons de geste} and virgin martyr of hagiography, to “stage[s] her own bestowal,” to the bridegroom of her choice. It is significant that she is a Christian woman, not a Saracen or a fairy, who can be seen to operate by different cultural rules. The politics of desire, choice and active pursuit of that choice have rather more material consequence for the formation of female subjectivity in narratives in which they operate within the social zone contiguous to the audience’s own.\textsuperscript{177} Do Rigmel, Rimenhild and Rimmild successfully exchange themselves, and thereby move into a subject position? Two factors, however, must be kept in mind. First, Kay finds that the Saracen princess’s narrative agency is dependent on her collusion with the narrator and on her position as a gift, which is personified, rather than a commodity, which is objectified. Finding that gift-giving and commerce are both represented in the \textit{chanson}, Kay nevertheless sees the prevalence of gift-giving as a marker of \textit{chanson de geste} still operating with the semiotics of the symbol, in contrast to romance, which operates with the semiotics of the sign in line with the new market economies.\textsuperscript{178} In this, Kay follows R. Howard Bloch’s argument that the development of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{175} Wogan-Browne, \textit{Saints' Lives and Medieval Women}, 89, 88.
\item \textsuperscript{176} Wogan-Browne, \textit{Saints' Lives and Medieval Women}, 77.
\item \textsuperscript{177} See the Conclusion for a description of future comparative work to be done on Josiane, the Saracen “wooing woman” of \textit{Boeve de Haumont}, \textit{Bevis of Hampton} and the Old Norse \textit{Bevers saga}. For reasons of space, in this project she features only in her Irish incarnation as part of a broader discussion on romance and translation in late medieval Hiberno-Norman Ireland.
\item \textsuperscript{178} Kay, \textit{Chansons de geste}, 39.
\end{itemize}
coinage and commerce occur alongside a transition from symbol, with a “quasi-participatory relationship to its referent,” to a sign, which is recognized to be arbitrarily assigned.\textsuperscript{179} She finds that this concomitant difference of economy and semiotics marks the difference between chanson de geste and romance, particularly in their portrayal of women:

Far from being the object of desire that they primarily are in romances, women in the chansons de geste are perceived as persons and as gifts; this assumption that gifts are persons, personifying social transactions, leads to women being represented both as parties to such transactions, and as commentators upon them.\textsuperscript{180}

As will be seen shortly, while this distinction may work within francophone romance, which is to say Anglo-Norman and Old French, it is not one that can be seen to translate into Middle English; that is to say, the representation of women “as persons and as gifts” as opposed to “objects” is visible. At the same time, however, the ‘woman as commentator’ in collusion with the narrator, is certainly absent in both French and English romance. What we are left with in English romance is desiring, active women, the nature of whose resistance or subversion is debatable.

Second, the virgin martyr’s power to participate in gift-exchange as a giver is, of course, rooted in her connection to and with God. Her object of desire, Christ, guarantees her agency and subjectivity as grounded in divine will, expressed through grace. This dynamic is one of hagiography, not romance, and this distinction must be kept in mind when analyzing the root of agency and subjectivity performed by the female protagonists of romance. Moreover, the virgin martyr’s transgression of patriarchal structures in a fallen, often pagan, social order, guarantees the value and moral superiority of that transgression, even as it dooms it to impossibility in the secular world. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne observes,

To its medieval audiences, virginity literature seems to have offered versions of autonomy—of a kind… The virgin is none the less potentially recontained: if she combats the earthly patriarchy's demands for her marriage and child-bearing, it is in order to enter into spiritual patriarchal marriage with a top-ranking bridegroom and a truly omnipotent Father and Lord. For defying her pagan father, suitor, judge, or governor and his pagan gods, the virgin martyr is tortured, dismembered, and finally executed before she proceeds triumphantly to her Christ bridegroom in heaven. Death and transcendence take the role of marriage in romance closure here, while torture and execution greet the virgin's eloquent resistance.\textsuperscript{181}


\textsuperscript{180} Kay, Chansons de geste, 235.

\textsuperscript{181} Wogan-Browne, Saints’ Lives and Medieval Women, 4, 5.
The female characters of the Horn narratives can offer no such morally and divinely-grounded resistance to the patriarchal structures of their social worlds, which are neither pagan nor overtly evil. However, as the oft-noted structural resemblance of women threatened with forced marriage or rape in romance and the virgin martyrs of hagiography suggests, there is potential for their radical resistance supported by the moral order of the text, but which is nevertheless grounded in the woman’s own choice of husband against her father’s wishes. The differences with which the contravention of women’s consent in the threat of marriage or sexual contact against her will are presented in the three versions will provide insightful and productive avenues into structuring of female subjectivity in each text.

One of the issues that will emerge from this examination is the possibility of hagiographic influence on romance, as a deliberate intergeneric strategy for guaranteeing the legitimacy of what is apparently subversive, unacceptable, harshly punished subjectivity. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and other scholars such as Karen Winstead detail how romance tropes were employed to write the romance of the virgin martyr heroine and her passionate desire for Christ in both Anglo-Norman and Middle English hagiographic texts.\(^{182}\) Indeed, Wogan-Browne’s analysis of the desiring virgin-subject depends in part upon the observation of intergeneric borrowing from romance:

Virginity texts announce themselves as seeking to sustain professed and vowed women with a romance script where the virgin is not only the object of quest, but in part the subject, the active selector of her bridegroom, Christ. This incontestably superior and self-chosen marriage is also offered as aristocratic freedom from drudgery: as, for example, a life which includes authorized spaces for reading and contemplation.\(^{183}\)

Wogan-Browne sees her virgin-subject as defined against romance and the choice of a life with Christ as the alternative that permits the movement from object into subject. However, Wogan-Browne compares the hagiographic romance primarily to modern romance narratives, as

---

\(^{182}\) For example, the “twelfth and thirteenth-century virgin passio can in general be said both to be romanced in newly intense and different ways from the earlier instantiations of this long-enduring model and to become itself intertextual with romance.” (Wogan-Browne, Saints’ Lives and Medieval Women, 95). Wogan-Browne points particularly to the Early Middle English Katherine Group, of which she remarks, “no other legendary in twelfth or thirteenth-century England so intensely presents the female saint as virgin martyr and romance heroine,” (6). For an extended discussion, see Wogan-Browne, Saints’ Lives and Medieval Women, 96–100. On romance courtship narratives as models for virgins’ relationship with Christ, see Karen Winstead, Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 178–80; Matthew Woodcock, “Crossovers and Afterlife,” in A Companion to Middle English Hagiography, ed. Sarah Salih (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 141–156: 147.

\(^{183}\) Wogan-Browne, Saints’ Lives and Medieval Women, 4–5.
analyzed by Janice Radway.\textsuperscript{184} As this discussion will show, romances can also permit a movement from object to subject through self-chosen marriage. In the case of \textit{King Horn}, this subject-status may in fact be constructed and guaranteed through the invocation of virgin martyr discourse. A juxtaposition of Rimenhild with the virgin martyrs in the \textit{South English Legendary}—with which \textit{King Horn} “O” shares a manuscript—and a consideration of broader hagiographic images and motifs will reveal that certain features of Rimenhild’s story deliberately recall features of the virgin martyr \textit{passio}, and that these critically affect the reading of her as a subject. As far as I can tell, the cross-fertilization and exchange of ideas and imagery between romance and hagiography has been explored only with respect to the presentation of the virtuous and suffering female protagonists of the “pious romances,” such as \textit{Emaré, Octavian, Le Bone Florence of Rome, The King of Tars, the Earl of Tolous}.\textsuperscript{185} Taking into consideration Karen Winstead and Andrea Hopkins’ studies of the use of hagiography in these texts, I suggest that similar hagiographic borrowing from virgin martyr legends also marks the presentation of the overtly secular protagonist Rimenhild of \textit{King Horn}.

Not dissociable from the female character’s subject formation through her exchange of herself is the issue of desire. Desire, of course, is what prompts the wooing woman to seek out her husband or heavenly bridegroom. Her desire can certainly, and has certainly, been seen as more at the service of male subject formation than her own, in that by choosing him, she validates his prowess and position in male hierarchies. In some texts, the woman’s desire cannot be seen as a route to her own subjectivity, as it is not narratively deployed to explore and develop her own personality and point of view, so much as reflect the beauty and worth of the hero by marking his superiority over other suitors. When, however, this is not the case, and the narrative expression of a woman’s desire does substantiate her characterization, underlies and produces her effective action and is validated in its own right by the narrative (i.e. not trivialized, dismissed or undermined), desire can be seen as a route to subjectivity.

\textbf{Attempting to Break the Rules: Anglo-Norman Rigmel’s Transgressive Subjectivity}

Like other wooing women, Rigmel exhibits ‘uncourtly,’ active behaviour by going after her lover, rather than waiting passively and deferring the granting of her love to her lover in order to

---


prompt an increase of his prowess and reputation. The narrative spends a considerable amount of time exploring her emotions. As a result, critical statements about the gendered power dynamics in courtly love situations are not directly applicable: her “status as [a] desiring subject” is not “occluded” nor is she overtly “subjected to social rules and regulatory systems that privilege heterosexual men as the desiring, speaking, and most visible subjects of amorous exchange.” Indeed, from her first introduction, she is the desiring, speaking, if not gazing subject (unless we count her mind’s eye, since she cannot initially see Horn), and her role in the establishing of the romantic relationship that will eventually alter Horn’s identity is far more active and prominent than Horn’s, who is both reluctant and resistant to her offers. Moreover, the eventual success of her active pursuit of Horn seems to suggest that her behaviour is endorsed by the text. However, close attention to the text reveals that, rather than being a more liberated woman, indeed, a subject rather than a desired object, Rigmel’s subjectivity is indeed transgressive. The depiction of her desire is an inversion of the male courtly lover’s, whose role she attempts unsuccessfully to usurp. Her attempt at exchanging herself is contained and reversed as she becomes the passive object of exchange between her father, Modi, and Horn. If her wooing of Horn produced the results that she intended (marriage to Horn), it is not through her own agency, but through God’s and Horn’s.

Looking at the main elements of the “courtly love paradigm” outlined by E. Jane Burns in her article “Courtly Love – Who Needs it?,” the degree to which they apply to Rigmel’s behaviour in the *Roman de Horn* is striking. Burns outlines three main elements, all of which are to some degree present in the *Roman de Horn*, but with a female wooer in the suffering knight’s place:

In these texts, courtly love emerges as an ideology of male love service displaying the following features: [1] a putatively reversed gender hierarchy in which the supplicant male lover claims or appears to suffer physically from lovesickness, wounding, or other corporeal dysfunction, all of which lead to more generalized helplessness; [2] the allied claim that the fetishized, desired, beautiful body of the lady alone holds the power to fulfill the lover’s wish and heal his ailments...; and finally, [3] a refined art of courting,

---

186 See Weiss, “Wooing Woman”; “Power and Weakness.”
188 Speaking about a ‘courtly love paradigm’ is, of course, problematic, precisely because the material is far more varied than earlier scholarship was interested in admitting. E. Jane Burns (“Courtly Love”) notes that the “standard courtly paradigm” which for a long time dominated the scholarship on courtly love is actually derived from a small group of twelfth century texts, particularly Andreas Capellanus’ *Art of Courtly Love*, troubadour lyric and Arthurian romance. As a result, its validity has been called into question. While scholars are currently destabilizing and problematizing the accuracy and dominance of this paradigm, it is still worth observing that the individual elements, all typically aspects of masculine subjectivity in romance, are in the *Roman de Horn* aspects of Rigmel’s feminine subjectivity and completely absent from Horn’s subjectivity.
expressed through rhetorical persuasion by the poet/lover and through physical prowess by the knight, which develops according to highly codified and highly gendered rules of proper conduct. Simply put, the lover professes publicly to serve the lady and carry out her wishes all the while presuming that his entreaties and/or valor will bring both amorous gratification and social renown to himself.\textsuperscript{189}

Courtly love in \textit{Roman de Horn} is gender-inverted to comic effect, with the women, Rigmel and Lenburc, suffering for love of Horn, and attempting to bring about a consummation of the relationship, in this case by marriage, by modifying their behaviour and conforming to the requests and conditions of their beloved. Rigmel clearly physically suffers from lovesickness and “corporeal dysfunction,” even though at the time she has not yet met Horn: she cannot sleep; she is pale, suffering and “esfremie” [“terrified”] (ll.699–718, 1718).\textsuperscript{190} Moreover, Horn’s physical body is clearly portrayed as the cure to her misery: when Herselot tells Rigmel that she saw Horn in the hall, she says that “Del mal qu’avez ëu il en a la mescine” [“he has the cure for the pain you have had”] (l.955; 63). Herselot then describes his body in detail and proclaims “Des or vuil ke seize desuz sa discipline/ A faire sun comand suz cuvertur hermine” [“Henceforth I would like you to be in his power, to carry out his will under an ermine coverlet”] (963–4; 63), thus explicitly linking the cure for Rigmel’s sickness with Horn’s body and the sexual pleasure which it would bring. Finally, Rigmel engages in “rhetorical persuasion” not only of Horn himself, but of the steward Herland, whom she must bribe to bring Horn to her chambers. Her convincing of Herland occupies no less than 112 lines (ll.538–650) before he agrees, after which he brings Haderof, Horn’s closest companion first, fearing her intentions towards Horn. When Herland finally brings Horn, Rigmel’s persuasion of him to accept her love occupies another 164 lines (ll.1063–1227), during which Horn protests considerably. Rigmel appears to be the very model of a male courtly lover, except for the fact that she is female.

In addition to momentarily acting as gazing, desiring subject, objectifying Horn and his body, Rigmel in this stage of the romance seems to move into the subject-position through gift-giving. With Herland, she exchanges numerous luxuries for a meeting with Horn, demonstrating her considerable wealth and ensuring his significant indebtedness to her. Her exchange with Horn, however, is less successful. With her declaration of love, she offers him her ring, and her language evokes the very ‘exchange of men’ observed by Sarah Kay. She says: “Joe vus otrei m’amur, si l’estes otreiant;/ Par cest anel que tience vus sui seisissant” [“I offer you my love, if you consent; by this ring I hold, \textit{I take possession of you} (my emphasis)”] (ll. 1104–5; 65). She

\textsuperscript{189} Burns, “Courtly Love,” 32–3.
wants to *seisir* Horn, “seize,” “capture,” “take charge of” Horn, the very opposite of what Horn tells her is in her future: “orrad li fiz d’aukun empereür./ Bele, parler de vus, kar d’autres estes flur,/ Si vus prendra a per a sun oes e oixor” [“some emperor’s son will hear tell of you, for you are the flower of all women, and then he will take you for himself, to wife”] (1214–17; 67).191 Weiss provides an elegant translation, but *a sun oes* literally means “for his use,” “for his advantage.”192 Rigmel tries to “take possession of” Horn, and he counters her attempt by reasserting her proper place as the object to be taken “for the use” of some noble man “dun li reis iert förçor/ E sun regné avra loenge e pris mœr” [“will strengthen the king and bring more praise and fame to his realm”] (ll.1221–22; 67).

Horn persists in rejecting her throughout their conversation, with constant attention to her father’s will, asserting repeatedly that he does not want to do anything that will anger or displease King Hunlaf, his lord, who raised him (ll.1116, 1169–71, 1211). First he refuses her love and her ring on account of his landless and orphaned status (ll.1109-1118a). She argues with his logic, saying that he is of noble birth and wealthy upbringing and will, if God is willing, vanquish the Saracens and possess his land again (ll.1119–39). He still refuses her ring, saying that it is not the custom of his people to wear an engraved ring without having proven himself in battle or tournament (ll.1150–59). She then offers him her body and her possessions, to do with what he will, and he refuses again (ll.1181–1202). This time, however, he says that once he has been proven in battle, then, if it pleases God and will not shame the king, he will do as she asks (ll.1203-1214). Rigmel, bitter at how long his knighthood might take, and powerless to advance the situation further, can only pray to God that the king of Paris or the count of Poitiers or a nearby lord would attack her kingdom, so that her father would be “si de la guerre suzpris,/ Par bosoing chevalier feïst Horn al cler vis!” (ll.1281–2) “so overwhelmed with war that he would have to knight fair-faced Horn out of need!” (ll.1277-82a; ll. 68). Her gift-exchange at this point has failed. Horn will not exchange his body for her love, her ring, her body or her possessions.

Luckily, a Saracen attack from Africa prompts Hunlaf to knight Horn. Rigmel bides her time until he is knighted and made constable by King Hunlaf. At this point, she sends him a banner of Russian silk. Being a very public token, the pennon does not have the same intimate connotations as Rigmel’s ring, and Horn accepts it. In typical courtly fashion, her favour inspires him to perform great martial deeds. Finally, after Hunlaf places the realm under Horn’s

governance, Horn wins a great victory over Anjou and all of Hunlaf’s other enemies, and “est
Horn mut cremu et duté./ Si ke nul ne nest taut en la crestienté” “Horn was held in more fear
and awe than anyone else in Christendom,” (ll.1760–1; 76), Rigmel calls him to her again. She
reminds him of the conditions he enumerated earlier and tells him “ne·l poez refuser/ Ke joe
n’aië l’amur dont jeo vus soil preier” [“you can’t deny me the love I used to beg for”] (ll.1784–
5; 77). She commands him to take the ring and a kiss, “N’i ad rien d’escuser!” [“There is no
avoiding it!”] (ll.1794; 77). Horn, who could hardly mount any kind of defence against her
argument at this point, finally agrees and says the first reciprocally affecionate thing to her
“l’amur entre nus vuil tuz jorz seit novel./ Mut me vient bien a quoer‖ [“I want the love between
us constantly to be kept alive. I am very happy with it”] (ll.1802–3; 77) and takes her ring. For
the moment, Rigmel appears to secure her position as Horn’s lover, following a pattern which is
remarkably reminiscent of the typical courtly love wooing, in which she occupies the place of
the besotted man, and he the deferring damsel. A closer look, however, reveals that throughout
the entire process she is consistently undermined by both the narrator and Horn, and eventually,
er her status as gift-giving subject is shut down and she moves back into being an object-gift.

Immediately after the “amisté” [“love pact”] (ll.1818; 77) is concluded, the narrator
comments that “Pur un poi ke n'i fud icel amur passez/ Par force ke l'en fist a Rigmel as
beautez‖ [“this love was nearly defeated by the forceful constraint of Rigmel the beautiful”]
(ll.1825–6; 77). This comment is completely baseless, given that Wikele’s motivation to lie to
king Hunlaf about Horn sleeping with Rigmel stems from his own anger about Horn refusing to
give him the horse given to him by Herland. It is not as if Wikele overhears the “love pact” – he
merely fabricates a convenient offence that will get Horn into severe trouble with the king
(ll.1818–7970). Moreover, Horn refuses to swear that he is not sleeping with her not out of any
guilt, but because among his people, oaths are taken only by men who are old, lame or maimed
and so cannot prove themselves in combat; indeed, he begs the king to let his accuser, with two
of the man’s kinsmen, fight him so that he can prove his innocence (ll.1941–59). Rigmel’s
“forceful constraint” has nothing at all to do with Wikele’s accusation of Horn or Horn’s refusal
to swear, yet the narrator insists it is her fault in what I believe is part of a general effort to
control the meaning of Rigmel’s actions as inappropriate and dangerous, even at the expense of
narrative coherence.

In the Roman de Horn, there is a persistent and direct link between Horn’s beauty and
his nobility. When the men in the poem ‘read’ his beautiful body, they see his nobility and
excellence and react with mercy and generosity. It is first read by the evil African King
Rodmund, who cannot bear to kill him directly (ll.19–39), then read by the steward Herland on the beach (ll.138–56), and by King Hunlaf, who gives him and his companions to his lords to foster and educate (ll.308–45). However, criticism of jumping to conclusions about Horn’s worth is not levied at the men, who are guilty of being stunned by his beauty into presuming his worth, but consistently at the women. The women of the poem likewise react to Horn’s beauty as a sign of his heroic worth, but their response is characterized as lust and desire: “Dame ne l’ad veü ki vers li n’aït amur/ E ne·l vousist tenir, suz hermin covertur/ Enbracie belement, sanz seü de seignur./ Kar sur tuz de la curt iert il esmireûr” [“No lady seeing him did not love him and want to hold him softly to her under an ermine coverlet, unknown to her lord, for he was the paragon of the whole court”] (ll.476–9; 54). Typically misogynistic, this comment at once serve to enhance Horn and ridicule the women, whose adulterous desires are comically presented as inappropriate.

Judith Weiss points out, “[t]he way all women, according to Thomas, react towards Horn is reminiscent of Ovid and the *Facetus*. They are attracted by his extraordinary beauty, courtliness and accomplishments, rather than by any inner worth manifested in prowess,” but this is not strictly speaking true. Indeed, there is a lengthy description of his peerless accomplishments under Herland’s tutelage, including music, hunting, hawking, swordsmanship, riding, and his great modesty and cleverness, that precedes the women’s response (ll.369–403). The narrator comments that “E id çoe si avoit valur de largeté,/ Ke plus vaillant de lui ne pout ester trove” [“He had so many talents that no one was worthier than he”] (ll.401a; 52) and is “sur tuz de la curt iert il esmireûr” [“he was the paragon of the whole court”] (l.479; 54).

Indeed, it is in the context of his praise that Rigmel is introduced in the first place:

E sis los creist par tut; par tut en est parlé,
Kome Horn est vaillant, de grant nobilité.
Enz es chambres reaus en est forment preisié
Taunt ke Rigmel loï, od le vis coluré —
N’out taunt bele pur veir en la crestënté:
Fille esteit dan Hunlaf, al bon rei coruné.
Rigmel fille iert le rei, danzele de grant pris (ll.402–07).

[“And his renown spread everywhere: everyone talked of how noble and excellent Horn was. He was praised so much in the king’s apartments that rosy-cheeked Rigmel,

---

193 For example, King Hunlaf’s immediate response to Horn’s story is “‘beau vallet, tu es sage./ Mut es gentil e franc: bien piert en tun visage./ Nî avras mal par meï – c’estët forsen e rage ~/ Ainz te rendrai si pus encore tun heritage’” [“My fair boy… you are indeed wise, and your face reveals your nobility and high birth. I shall do you no harm- that would be stupidity and madness- but, if I can, I shall restore your inheritance”] (ll.320–3; 51).
daughter of good King Hunlaf, came to hear of it — indeed there was none fairer than her in all Christendom”] (54).

Rigmel’s desire is based directly on his reputation. Because she has not seen him, base lust can hardly play a part in her desire and estimation of him, yet her desire of him is presented as an extension of his widespread incitement of lust among the female population of the court. Ironically, she acts as a guarantor of his inner worth at the same time she is criticized by Horn for not having access to that knowledge. He tells her

‘Danzele, or me creez, vostre anel estuiez; 
Në a mei n'a autrui par mun los ne·l donez, 
Tresque saciez de veir ke bien seit enpleiez. 
Tiel le purra aheir ke vus repenterez 
Ke tiel l'avreit éú, quaut le conoistrïez 
K'eiul sereit pur coard e pur malveis notez. 
Pur çoe ne·l me donez, kar ne me conoissiez. 
Joe ne sai ke joe sui, ne fui onc espruvez, 

[“Now trust me, my lady, put away your ring. Do not give it to me or anyone else, I advise you, until you are certain that it will be well bestowed. Someone might receive it whose possession you will regret, should you discover he is reputed cowardly and base. So do not give it to me, for you do not know me. I do not know myself, I was never yet put to the test and so I do not wish now to make a pact of love with you”] (66).

In reality, she has access to the same knowledge he tells her to consider. Horn is not reputed to be cowardly and base, just the opposite. The entire interview between Horn and Rigmel functions to give Horn ample and repeated opportunity to criticize Rigmel’s conduct and pontificate about how a woman should behave: “La grant beauté de vus ne turnez a folur,/ Tost en direient mal li garçon menteür,/ Ki mençoinges cuntroevent cumme losengeür” [“do not wantonly bestow your great beauty: slander will quickly follow you, from scurrilous knaves who deceitfully invent lies”] (ll. 1218–20; 67). Rigmel is hardly doing so: she has specified, “Joe ne demand amur, dunt aie huniement,/ Dunt seië par vilté notéé entre gent,/ Mes amur d'ehonesté en bon atendement / Taunt qu'aiez vostre honur qu'a vostre dreit apent’” [“I do not ask for a love that would disgrace me, that people would consider shameful, but for an honourable love, whose hopes are high until such time as you recover your domain”] (ll. 1194–97; 67). Yet Horn’s response that if after he is knighted and distinguished “vus...a mei parlez d'amur,/ Ke ne turt a vilté al rei, nostre seignur,/ Vostre pleisir ferai, si plest al creatur’” [“you talk to me of love, which will not shame the king our lord, I shall do your will’”] (ll. 1210–12; 67) clearly implies that what she is offering now certainly would shame the king. In this, he
undermines her own understanding of the situation, which is based in the reality of what she offers, and privileges his understanding, based in its potential appearance to the court. Of course, the invented lies that eventually do separate them have nothing to do with her “wantonly bestowing her great beauty” and everything to do with Horn’s own jealous and evil retainer. While, as Judith Weiss observes, we can point to the irony that the women do see Horn accurately and are therefore justified in their estimation of him, their conduct is still clearly chastised, and is linked to the wider discourses of medieval misogyny.

For all of her insistence on her good intentions, Rigmel undermines her own position as well, as she knows that her request to be alone with Horn is inappropriate. She states explicitly that she does not care: “‘Ne lerrai pur home ki seit nez de mun lin —/ Ja ne m’iert taunt procein ne parent ne cosin —/ Ke ne parouge a Horn, si j’o pus, le matin’” [“‘No man of my family, however close, whether parent or cousin, will stop me talking to Horn’”] (ll.720–22; 58). Her maid Herselot even tells her directly not to incessantly pester Herland to bring Horn because “‘S’aparceit que l’amez si·n fer gabement,/ E cu m’il onc plus purra fera delaëëment,/ Kar taunt par criemt le rei, qu’il le harreit mortelment,/ Ne voldreit a sun voel ke ja·n fust parlement’” [“‘if he notices you love him, he will treat it in jest and hinder it as much as he can, for he is very afraid of the king, who would bear him mortal hatred and whose wish would be you should never talk to each other’”] (1036–39; 64); Rigmel agrees with her. The narrative is unequivocal about the inappropriateness of her behaviour. Rigmel’s wooing of Horn is seen not only as inappropriate by Horn and Herland, articulated as such by the narrator, who attempts to blame their separation on her “forceful constraint,” but perceived as such by her maid and herself. In inviting Horn to her chambers, in desiring to be at his command, in offering him her body and her possessions before they are formally betrothed, she places her reputation at risk, even as she acknowledges the transgressive nature of her conduct. Rigmel’s desire functions to enhance Horn in revealing his desirability, and in giving him the opportunity to refuse, demonstrating his chastity and strength of will, particularly in contrast to Herland, who is easily and extensively bribed. It also renders him the spokesperson for appropriate gendered conduct within the poem and gives him the opportunity to demonstrate his exceptional loyalty to her father, whom he invokes incessantly and consistently prioritizes over Rigmel in his dealings with her.

At the same time, there is deeper significance to Rigmel’s sexual behaviour. As we have seen, the courtly lover subject position Rigmel limitedly occupies allows her a greater agency than her pedestal-lifted sisters of continental romance, but perhaps more significantly, it enables her to trouble momentarily the patriarchal rules of gendered conduct. In wooing Horn, she very
nearly succeeds in exchanging herself, and thereby destabilizing the hierarchical masculine bonds which need to result from her being exchanged between her father and her lover. We can see this tension throughout their interaction. As observed above, Horn obsessively articulates his concern for her father’s wishes. He presents her desire as irrelevant: the most important thing is that she have a husband that will strengthen her father and bring praise to the kingdom. Horn, therefore, systematically shuts down the possibilities of her gift-giving, which would indebt him to her, and re-works the situation to be contingent upon her father.

When he finally accepts her ring, he refuses everything else she offers, namely her possessions, the ability to use them, and her, as he pleases: she says “‘jo frai voz pleisirs ke voldrez cummander: Tut a vostre pleisirs del mien purrez user’” [“I will do whatever you command me: you can use my possessions entirely as you please’”] (ll.1785–87; 77). Instead, he turns the acceptance of her ring and her love into a gift to her: he asks in return for her to beg her father King Hunlaf to help him regain his kingdom, “‘E par grant le rei pus ferai vostre avel’” [“‘Then, if the king permits, I will do as you wish’”] (l.1812; 77) The conditions upon which he will properly accede to her desire depend entirely on her father’s actions, not her own. If Hunlaf agrees to help him, and if they are successful and if Hunlaf then agrees to the match, then he will take control of her possessions and her body (ll.1798–1817). He also refuses any future gifts: “‘Mar me dorra od vus or, argent ne vessel,/ Fors tut sul vostre cors en un sengle mantel’” [“‘No need to give me anything with you – gold, silver, or plate – only your body, in nothing but a cloak’”] (ll.1813–14; 77). Her body, however will not really be given by her, but by her father, upon whose agreement their marriage depends.

The turning point in her position can be seen in that very moment in which Horn agrees to her desire to be her beloved. Here the limits of her power bleed through in his words. Even the love that he professes wants “tuz jors seit novel” [“constantly to be kept alive”] (l.1802; 77) between them, he is only pleased with it “‘mes qu’a Hunlaf seit bel,/ Kar querrai vers lui rien dunt jeo port chapel’” [“‘provided that it please Hunlaf, for I seek nothing that makes me ashamed before him’”] (ll.1803–05; 77). The priority of relationships between men, in this case lord and vassal, overrides his commitment to her, even as the importance of women as objects of exchange in establishing those relationships is reasserted. As Herland worries many times, the marriage must be brokered through the king for it to succeed. For Rigmel, to exchange herself is an assault on the patriarchal order, as it destabilizes the relationship structures between men, as it prioritizes the relationship between a man and a woman over the relationship between two
men. The threat of this possibility is so great that even the limited manner in which Rigmel steps into the subject position as gift-giver and desiring lover must be contained.

Rigmel’s only display of action, initiative and self-determination is her choice and her wooing of Horn. And yet, at the same time, her agency in this process is undermined, displaced onto God by the narrator in the very moment of her introduction into the narrative:

Rigmel fille iert le rei, danzele de grant pris:
Gent aieit mut le cors e coloré le vis;
N'out nule tauant vaillant en seisante païs.
Requise l'orent mut reis e ducs e marchis,
Mes ne l'orent néent, kar ne fu sis assis
Ne ne l'out purveü li rei de paraïs;
A foes Horn la voleit, si cum il m'est a vis,
Si·l volez escuter ke ne seiez noisis (Il.408–15).

[“Rigmel was the king’s daughter and a maiden of great renown. Her body was beautiful, her face rosy; there was none like her in sixty kingdoms. Many kings, dukes and marquises had sought her in marriage, but to no avail; it had not been arranged, nor had the King of Paradise ordained it: He intended her for Horn, I believe, as you will hear, unless you are noisy”] (53).

The narrator negates Rigmel’s will and desire on two fronts. In the first, in being silent about Rigmel’s position in the negotiations with the suitors (did she herself reject them? Did her father?), her choice is presented as irrelevant. God’s plan prevented the success of previous marriage proposals. In the second, in reporting that “[God] intended her for Horn,” the narrator paradoxically erases Rigmel’s choice in loving Horn, even as he goes on to dramatize for several hundred lines the emotional effect and consequences of her love.

In attempting to broker her own deal of her body and her possessions to Horn, Rigmel cannot be seen as ultimately successful, as her agency in the process is erased. Women who exchange themselves are dangerous because they threaten the hierarchies and relationships established by the men who exchange them. Rather than allowing/admitting that Rigmel is actively exchanging herself, the narrator reconfigures her to be an object of exchange between God and Horn, who, being superior to all other men, must therefore find his superior in God, who is this case not a rival but a benefactor, and vertical hierarchical relationships between men are thereby preserved. Sarah Kay questioned whether the wooing Saracen princess was a gift from the narrator to the hero, and so thereby still confined to the role of gift as opposed to giver. She found that the princess’ “uncanny authority” in the telling of their own story.

---

195 Kay, Chanson de Geste, 45.
militated against this reading. No such participation can be seen for Rigmel; rather, the narrator explicitly gives Rigmel to Horn. Horn’s prioritizing of her father’s wishes and refusing her gifts with the depiction of Rigmel as a gift from God to Horn functions to contain her incipient and transgressive subjectivity and reproduce her as an object exchanged between men and a sign of Horn’s superior prowess and worth.

Rigmel’s desire of Horn thus is not a matter of her own subject-formation but of Horn’s. Horn’s refusal of Rigmel’s initial offer of love laid out the expected and familiar courtly ideology: that a woman’s love ought to be granted on the basis of a man’s reputation. In romance, the possession of a beautiful woman is only half the battle. Her estimation of him and her desire of him are the deciding factors in a man’s worth, and in this case, an index to the man’s success. But, as Simon Gaunt observes, aporia marks the attitude of romanciers to women: women may be “made into signs of such immense value that masculine identity is defined through women” but this is an uneasy fiction, fraught with resentment and mistrust, as misogynistic discourses repudiate the ability of women to be reliable or loyal readers of male worth.

Hence, a paradox emerges that the narrative expression of Rigmel’s desire for Horn functions to mark his superiority over her rejected suitors, even as her desire is rendered immaterial in the face of God’s plans for Horn. Here we begin to see some of the effects the romance’s relational construction of gender has on female subject-formation.

Rigmel’s renowned beauty is the cause of a significant number of worthy suitors, none of whom are successful. Horn’s eventual marriage of Rigmel may be a gift from God, but it is also one that functions to secure his superiority over such men. This is dramatically demonstrated in his triumphing over her later unwanted husbands, Modi and Fikenild. The value of her desire and choice is rooted in her desirability by other men. Her beauty and her rank are only important in so far as they make her desirable to other men, whose inability to obtain her in spirit marks their inferiority to the hero. If she is not beautiful and not high-ranking, she is not desirable to other men, and so her desire of the hero does not signify anything for him because it does not concretize a hierarchy of masculinity. Horn is desired because he is worthy. She needs to be desired in order to be worthy. Horn’s reputation configures his desirability by women, which functions to guarantee his heroic worth. Likewise, Rigmel’s reputation configures her desirability, which also functions to guarantee his heroic worth. For Roman de Horn, Gaunt’s estimation that “‘women’, or more accurately femininity in these texts, is a metaphor men use to

---

196 Gaunt, Gender and Genre, 114.
construct their own subjectivity” and that “[f]emale characters in romance are not real women, but figures within a male discourse” seems to hold true.\textsuperscript{197} Roberta Krueger’s observation of the trajectory of female displacement from the centre of the romance narratives can certainly be seen in the \textit{Roman de Horn}.\textsuperscript{198}

As the narrative progresses, Rigmel is gradually erased and her agency and subjectivity are successively eroded. Having in a very limited matter contributed to the establishment of a relationship with Horn, she is powerless to convince him to swear his innocence, clearing his reputation and her own: “‗mei l'estoet otreier;/ Quant el estre ne poet, a Deu puissez aler’” [“I must consent. Since it can’t be otherwise, you may go, with God’s blessing”] (ll.2020–48a; 81). While Horn is in Ireland, being wooed by another woman, she is forced by her father into a marriage with King Modin of Fenenie, Horn’s kinsman, against which she cannot defend herself, or even contribute to her eventual rescue by Horn (ll.3710–25). Horn’s interview with the messenger who seeks him in Ireland reveals not only that she is being exchanged between men against her will, but that she is truly objectified. Kay’s observation that the giving of women as \textit{gifts} rather than \textit{commodities} retains a sense of personhood reveals the degree to which Rigmel is objectified, since her personhood and her will in the matter are treated as completely irrelevant.\textsuperscript{199} Despite the messenger’s insistence that the marriage is against her will (ll.3735–41), and Horn’s own apparent perception of this fact (ll.3733–36; ll.3766–7), Horn persists in presenting her as going along with the marriage, thus wilfully erasing her agency. He tells the Irish king, who has offered him his own daughter as a wife and his land with her:

\begin{quote}
Or irrai al païs, si plest al salvëor,  
Enquerrai qu'ele ad fait: tost en avrai ditur.  
Si ad fait par mal art ici fel traitur,  
Qu'ele m'aït guerpi pur prendre autre seignor,  
Tost revendrai a vus …  
Mes pur véeir Rigmel en Breaigne einz irrai  
Fille est lo rei Hunlaf ke joe ja mut amai,  
E s'ele n'elad forfet, encore l'amérai.  
Wikel[e] le cumparra, si joe eises en ai;  
S'ele ad autrë ami, par lui est, bien le sai:  
Joe m'en vengerai tost; Lenburc espuserai (ll.3813–17, 3829–34).
\end{quote}

[“Now, if it please our Saviour, I shall go back to that land and inquire what she has done: I’ll soon get someone to tell me. If that wicked traitor has made her forsake me in order to take another husband, I shall quickly come back to you… First I shall go to see

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[197]{Gaunt, \textit{Gender and Genre}, 71–2.}
\footnotetext[198]{Krueger, \textit{Women Readers}, passim.}
\footnotetext[199]{Kay, \textit{Chansons de geste}, 39–42.}
\end{footnotes}
Rigmel in Brittany. She is King Hunlaf’s daughter whom I loved very much, and if she has done no wrong I shall still love her. Wikele shall pay for it, if I get the chance. If she has another lover, I know it’s his fault, I shall soon take my revenge: I shall marry Lenburc”] (113).

Horn simultaneously recognizes that Wikele is forcing Rigmel into the marriage and presents it as her fault: Modin is hardly Rigmel’s “ami” from her perspective,\textsuperscript{200} and yet Horn claims the right to revenge against Rigmel as well as Wikele, as marrying Lenburc can hardly be construed as revenge against anyone but Rigmel. Even if Weiss’ punctuation in the translation is obscuring the meaning, suggesting a causal link between Horn’s marrying of Lenburc and his desire to take revenge, that the two sentiments share a single poetic line still establishes a link between them. What is clear is that Rigmel’s will is irrelevant from Horn’s perspective: what happens to her body is at issue. Moreover, Rigmel’s importance is further diminished in the ancillary role her fate plays in Horn’s purpose and desire to return to Brittany.

The messenger who arrives in the Irish court seeking Horn does not arrive on Rigmel’s behalf, but on Herland’s. He is the son of the seneschal who raised Horn, and seeks Horn to help restore his father’s position in Hunlaf’s court. Horn’s enemy Wikele has turned the king against his father, forcing him to flee and live in exile and poverty and has taken over the position of seneschal (ll.3688–701). Rigmel’s fate is not quite an afterthought, but neither is it important for its own sake, but because it is a further element of Wikele’s treachery, since the marriage was counselled and arranged by Wikele. Horn’s response is not at all focussed on his potential loss of his beloved to another man, but on the revenge he wants on Wikele: “‘C’est la rien del munde kë ore plus desir,/ Ke me seië vengé del culvert; a çoe tir./ Ne li remeindra rien ke li puisse tolir;/ Qu'envers mei est parjure li ferai tut geïr/ E le cunseil de lui ferai al rei [re]lenquir,/ E l'amur qu'est entr'aus ferai tute partir’” [“‘That’s what I desire most in the world, to be avenged on that scoundrel [Wikele]; that’s my aim. He will have nothing left worth taking. I shall make him confess all the perjury against me, make the king discard his advice, and quite sever the love between them’”] (ll.3892–7; 114).

The continued negative approach to Rigmel’s blame in her forced marriage is a striking aspect of Horn’s return to the Breton court. At the marriage feast, Rigmel is sad and dejected on account of Horn, but she is nevertheless still characterized as cheating or deceiving him. The verb used is tricher, “to cheat, deceive”\textsuperscript{201}: “Tant li pesout de Horn qu'el li deveit trichier” [she thought so much about Horn, with whom she had to break faith”] (l.14126; 140). The narrator

\textsuperscript{200} Later, he even refers to Modin as Rigmel’s \textit{druz}, “beloved” or “lover” (l.3940).

proceeds to comment “/Mes ele n'en poeit mes e meins fist a blasmer:/ Force feseit li reis par malvais cunseiller” [“But she could not help it and was the less to blame: the king had forced her, through wicked advice’’] (ll.4126–8; 140); yet she is still “meins” [“less’’] to be blamed, rather than not to be blamed. Her desire and choice have so little narrative importance that here even Rigmel appears to be alienated from her own will, internalizing guilt that she should not have to bear. Later, when Horn approaches her in disguise and drinks from her cup at the feast, he claims that he knows that she loves him “poi” [“little’’] (l.4211) and “quant Rigmel foït, mal se tint de pasmer,/ Taunt li tocha el quoc k'out dit le reprovier” [“when Rigmel heard him she nearly fainted, so much did the reproach pierce her to the heart’’] (4213–4; 120). Horn’s test of her consists of lying about being destitute and gauging her reaction. Considering that when she first proposed love to him, he was only an orphan page in her father’s court, it is strange that her willingness to follow him into poverty is the answer he is looking for to prove her faithfulness to him, that is, unless he really believes her to be – as he wonders about the metaphorical goshawk – “jolifs” (l.4262) “frivolous, fickle, irresponsible; lascivious, wanton; foolish.” Given, however, that the narrator comments before Horn approaches her with riddles and verbal tests, “Or verreit si fust veirs qu'ele jadis l'ama” [“Now he would see if it was true she had once loved him’’] (1.4229; 120), this seems a likely possibility. After her vigorous pursuit of him and exhortation for him to keep her ring “chastement” (l.2058) upon his departure, it would seem to go without saying that her love was and is true, and yet, it appears that misogynistic discourse concerning women’s fickle nature exerts such pressure on the narrative, that it must be manifested despite narrative coherence.

Equally significant in this reunion is the fact that Rigmel does not give herself to Horn. Her gift-giving subjectivity having been undermined previously, she must be won in battle and bestowed upon Horn by another man. Upon pronouncing her “lëale” “faithful’’ (l.4321), instead of simply escaping from the court with her, Horn tells Rigmel to convince Modin to head outside the city walls for the customary display of prowess by the groom at a wedding, where he will defend his claim to her in the games (ll.4323–9). Horn, of course, beats Modin and takes him hostage and calls in his knights, upon which everyone flees, except Rigmel, and it is Haderof, Horn’s closest companion, the second after him in prowess, who gives her to Horn after his victory: “Haderof vint a lui, ki mut tost l'ad saisie/ E a Horn la livra, kar ele esteit s'amie,/ E dan Horn la reçut e forment l'ad joïe” [“Haderof came and quickly seized her, and

handed her over to Horn, for she was his beloved, and lord Horn received her and warmly welcomed her”) (ll.4493–5; 124). Hunlaf, seeing that Horn already has Rigmel “ad devers” [“in his keeping”] (l.4512; 124) and Modin as a hostage, does not protest against the new marriage; as the narrator comments, Si vers lui tient estrif si iert grant lecherie “it would be great folly to contend with him” (4514;124). Thus, for all intents and purposes, Rigmel is won by Horn, not only from Modin, but also her father, who is powerless to fight Horn.

As the narrative continues, Rigmel slips from view. Indeed, the last time she speaks is during Horn’s battle against Modin, where she tells Haderof to go help him in the fight (ll.4472–77), at which point approximately 800 lines are still left in the poem. Left with her father during Horn’s expedition to reclaim his own kingdom, she is surrendered by her father under martial threat by Wikele, who marries her against her will. That Rigmel functions primarily as the mediator of the contest between Wikele and Horn can clearly be seen in Horn’s prophetic dream: she is drowning in a river and Wikele is trying to drown her (ll.4958–77). Horn and Wikele stand on opposite sides of the river and Rigmel is in the centre. Horn, enraged, gets into a boat, and goes across to shore and pursues and kills Wikele. There is no mention of Rigmel getting out or being pulled out of the river. Instead, it is by hanging Wikele that he is described as saving her.

Meanwhile, at her second marriage, Rigmel is described as weeping and lamenting Horn’s abandonment of her (5108-14); this time, her faith in Horn is shown to be weak, rather than her loyalty to him. When Horn arrives, it is the sight of Wikele that primarily prompts his enraged attack; Rigmel is part of the scenery: “El palais sunt entré, venent al pavement,/ Veient Wikele seer al plus halt mandement,/ Juste bele Rigmel, ki la face resplent, /Lors s'en marist dan Horn – e cel irusement” [“They entered the palace, came to the paved hall, and saw Wikele sitting on the highest dais, next to lovely Rigmel with the bright face. Then Horn was angered – and furiously too”] (5188–91; 136). Rigmel never speaks and we never see their reunion. What is important for the narrative is that Wikele has usurped Horn’s superior position, symbolized by the height of the dais and his proximity to — and possession of — Rigmel.

Judith Weiss observes of the wooing women the Roman de Horn, Rigmel and the Irish princess Lenburc, that “for these two women, choosing the man they love and wooing him is their only active moment in a romance where they are disposed of and married off without consultation.”203 Close attention to Rigmel’s “active moment,” however, reveals that neither her

choice nor her love are taken seriously by the narrative, her initiative in wooing Horn is constantly forestalled and undermined: she emerges neither as loving subject nor self-donating gift. She does not manage to “stage her own bestowal” so much as God gives her to Horn, who proceeds to win her through martial prowess, leaving her as little more than a symbol of his victory over his archenemy Wikele.

By the end of the narrative, Rigmel emerges as little more than a reflection on Horn. She is part of his heroic destiny: even where her choice is important to narrative, it is only important insofar as it establishes Horn as superior to other men. She exists in the narrative only in the context of her desire of Horn, and with the exception of wooing him, never acts independently of him. While Horn gains his heroic masculine identity in part through her desire and their marriage, she, on the other hand, does not exist without reference to Horn. Indeed, the narrative focus suggests this. Rigmel’s actions and perspective are described at length only when she is pining for and planning to woo Horn. Once they conclude their love pact, amisté, Rigmel is only present in Horn’s presence. After they are separated, the narrative never returns to focus on her in Horn’s absence, as it does in the Middle English. When Horn is not with Rigmel, she disappears. To make a semiotic analogy, he is the signified, and she is the signifier: she cannot exist without him.

As a heroine, Rigmel is disempowered but resourceful, strategic, patient, active and begins the narrative with a subjectivity echoing the masculine subjectivity of the suffering knights of courtly love. As such, she initially avoids the displacement and marginalization suffered by the worshipped women of more courtly romances. However, her behaviour is criticized — albeit unjustly — by both the narrator and Horn, and even perceived as inappropriate by herself. Moreover, she quickly reaches the limits of her power as the text reasserts the priority of male relationships over the male-female relationship she established in her attempt to exchange herself. Her place is to mediate the male-male relationships, the power dynamics of which play out on her coerced, abducted, threatened body. Finally, her agency is quietly erased in the narrator’s presentation of her as an object of God’s exchange with Horn. Having been ordained by God for Horn, Rigmel’s choice disappears: her body and her will are presented as part of Horn’s divine destiny and she becomes little more than a symbol of his heroic prowess. The *Roman de Horn* raises the spectre of a self-determining woman, resisting her position as an object of exchange, only to contain her transgressive subjectivity within the safe space of divine will, and then subject her to precisely that fate as a prized sign of Horn’s power, silenced, abducted and threatened in his absence.
Breaking the Rules? : The Subjectivities of Rimenhild and Rimnild in Middle English
Horn Narratives

*King Horn* and *Horn Childe and the Maiden Rimnild* both present radically different female
protagonists from *Roman de Horn*. A comparison with the Anglo-Norman *Roman de Horn*
reveals the great extent to which Rimenhild and Rimnild can be described as subjects, not only
with respect to their desire and gift-giving but also, in the case of Rimenhild, of participating in
the relational construction of gender in a reciprocal manner, that is to say, that where Horn has
an identity constructed through his relationship to her, she likewise has an identity constructed
through her relationship to him. Rather than representing a femininity that is confined to ‘what
masculinity is not,” both Rimenhild and Rimnild have their own substantive subjectivity that
does not merely contrast or reveal the masculine subject, but actively aids its construction and is
validated and praised for doing so. Rather than being erased or displaced from the narrative,
Rimenhild and Rimnild remain central actors and succeed in exchanging themselves, without
Horn’s criticism or constant deferral to their fathers’ wills. In general, their position ‘between
men’ has less narrative significance and impact on their roles in the narrative, resulting in a lack
of their objectification and reduction into signs of male prowess. Moreover, with their wills
aligned with the hero to a degree unparalleled by Rigmel, their actions can only be viewed as
transgressive or subversive in a limited manner. They resemble Sarah Kay’s Saracen princess in
their alignment with the narrator, but the lack of ironization and undercutting of male identity
and society does not permit the observation of them as subversive or resistant. Instead, like the
virgin martyr aligned with Christ, their relationship to the social order of their romance is
governed by their relationship to the hero. The virgin martyr, in a fallen, pagan world, is
transgressive to her secular world but celebrated in the heavenly, and this is determined by her
fidelity to Christ. Rimenhild and Rigmel, in a socially disordered world where Horn is exiled
and landless, may be transgressive to this socially disordered world, but are celebrated and
dominant in the restored one, and this is contingent upon their fidelity to Horn, whose struggle
to restore social stability is actively helped by them.

In the three manuscripts of *King Horn* and the one manuscript of *Horn Childe*, neither
Rimenhild nor Rimnild are described as sought by unsuccessful, high-ranking suitors. They are
only described as the king’s only child (ll.254–5; ll.259–6; 240–1; ll.302–6) (ll.302–6).²⁰⁴
Rimenhild is not even described as beautiful, nor are any of her qualities enumerated. None of

²⁰⁴ The first set of parentheses presents line numbers from the three *King Horn* manuscripts in the order found in
Hall’s edition, L, O, C. The second set presents line numbers from *Horn Childe*. 
the texts include any of the misogynistic descriptions of the lustful court women. Indeed, Rimenhild’s love for Horn is set up in the context of the entire court’s love for Horn: it is not at all portrayed as a female prerogative, or particularly out of the ordinary. Instead, she is marked out as loving him most of all (ll.250–3; ll.256–8; ll.245–7).

On the matter of her asking Horn to her chamber, it is noteworthy that Rimehild and Rimnild do not need to bribe the seneschal to speak with Horn; they only need to ask. In *King Horn*, Rimenhild is not shut away in the women’s quarters and so is able to see Horn. Rather, she is not able to speak to Horn at the table or in the hall, in O because there were so many people (l.269) and in C it is specified that “Of folk heo hadde drede” (l.258), presumably on account of gossip; L does not specify any reason. Athulf, the steward, is afraid that Rimenhild requests him for no good (l.288; l.293; l.282) and that she will “misrede” him (l.298; l.303; l.292). In *Horn Childe*, Arlund the steward is worried that “lesinges schulde beginne” (l.321) if he brings Horn. Neither steward worries that she has fallen in love with him, nor that the king will disapprove, especially if any match between them is not arranged through him (cf. *Roman de Horn*, II.651–8).

Athulf/Arlund brings Horn’s closest companion, Althelbrus/Haþerof, instead, and Rimenhild/Rimnild mistakes him for Horn. However, no rebuke of “you are too easily attracted” is levied by either one upon their realization that her words are for his companion, not him. In *King Horn*, Rimenhild proposes marriage immediately, unlike Rigmel who offers “to be at his command”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>horn quoþ heo wel longe y haue loued þe stronge þou shalt þy treuþe plyhte in myn hond wiþ ryhte me to spouse welde  &amp; ich þe louerd to helde (ll.309–14).</td>
<td>Horn hye seye so longe Ic habbe y loued þe stronge þou schalt me treuþe plyȝte in mine honde wel ryhete Me to spouse wekde And ich þe louerd to helde (ll.314–19).</td>
<td>‘Horn,’ quaþ heo, ‘wel longe Ic habbe þe luued stronge. þu schalt þi treuþe plyȝte On myn hond her riȝte Me to spuse holde, &amp; ich þe lord to wolde’ (ll.303–8).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Middle English versions, Horn’s friend tells her directly that he is not Horn, unlike the Anglo-Norman Haderof, whose identity is revealed by Rigmel’s nurse, adding to her humiliation (ll.853–75). Rimenhild is still furious, and Athulf begs her forgiveness—he was afraid that they would “pleye” and so the king would be angry at all of them, Horn having been placed in his charge (ll. 347–54; ll.353–60; ll.341–48). He promises to bring Horn the next day,
“wham so it recche” (l.357; l.364; l.352). When Rimenhild says that she will have her will of Horn “haue ich of him mi wille;/ ne recchi whet men telle” (l.369–70; l.377–8; l.365–6), while it may potentially imply sex, it more likely refers to what she has just expressed as her desire, namely to pledge her faith to him, to be his spouse and have him as a husband.

In *Horn Childe*, Rimnild offers Haderof a goshawk and greyhounds as a gift; she makes no declaration of love or desire to be his wife. Haderof tells her that he is not Horn and she calmly tells him “‘Whateuer þi name it be,/ þou schalt haue þis houndes þre,/ þat wele can take a dere/ & [Harlaund], for þe loue of me,/ Com tomorn & Horn wiþ þe’” (ll.349–54). Haderof accepts her gifts and Harlaund brings Horn the next morning, “With a bliþe chere” (l.357). There is no hint of his reservation, or a sense that it is in appropriate.

In *King Horn*, Horn responds to the request to come to Rimenhild’s room completely differently than in *Roman de Horn*: even though the steward warns him that she has “words swithe bolde” to tell him (ll.379; 389; 274), he does not have to be directed to talk to her by the steward, rather he addresses her first, and warmly. She takes him by the hand, seats him on the bed, kisses him and tells him how she has had no rest on account of her sorrow and that he will allieve her sorrow marrying her and pledging his faith to her:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>an euen &amp; amorewe for þe ich habbe sorewe þat y haue no reste ne slepe me ne lyste horn þou shalt wel swyþe mi longe sorewe lyþe þou shalt wþ oute striue habbe me to wyue horn haue of me reuþe &amp; plyht me þi treuþe (ll.407–416).</td>
<td>An heue and amorwe For þe ich habbe sorwe. [habbe] halbe MS.] Haue ich none reste Skepe me ne liste Leste me þis sorwe Lyue hy nawt to morwe Horn þou schalt wel swiþe My longe sorwe liþe Þou schalt wit uten striue Habben me to wiue Horn haue on me rewþe And plyct þou me þi trewþe (ll.421–432).</td>
<td>‘Horn,’ heo sede, ‘wþute strif Þu schalt haue me to þi wif; Horn, haue of me rewþe &amp; plist me þi trewþe.’ (ll.408–10).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, it is clear that Rimenhild is seeking a marriage-promise. Horn protests that he is born too low. In L and O, he says that he was born a thrall, “ich am ybore þral” (l.23), “Ich am bore þrall” (l.442); in C, he says he is a thrall (Ihc am icome of þrall, l.419). He says it is not a fair wedding between a thrall and a king (l.427–8; ll.445–6; l.ll.422–3). On the one hand, as Kim
Phillips has observed, Horn’s words seem to denote a serious social concern with cross-class sex and marriage. She describes the importance of rank as a definitive factor in medieval sexualities, noting that “social status played as great a role or greater role than biological sex in creating categories of licit and illicit sexualities.”\textsuperscript{205} Her observation that there was “a kind of revulsion against cross-class sex,”\textsuperscript{206} may apply to this moment of \textit{King Horn}. In addition, Horn may be concerned that her marriage to him may harm her. As will be seen in the following chapter, disparagement, i.e. marriage below one’s station, can cause her to lose her inheritance, because she would take on her husband’s lower legal status and be ineligible to inherit.\textsuperscript{207} In comparison with the Anglo-Norman version, what is striking is the degree to which her father’s wishes do not at all figure in Horn’s response. He appears completely unconcerned with angering her father by not including him in the arrangement of the marriage, or even with her father’s potential disapproval at the romantic nature of their interaction. When she faints upon his refusal, he proceeds to take her in his arms and reciprocate her kisses and tell her that if she can help him become a knight, then he will do as she advises:

\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{L} & \textbf{O} & \textbf{C} \\
\hline
Horn hire vp hente & Horn hire ofte wende. & Horn in herte was ful wo, 
\& in is armes trente & And in hys armes trende & \& tok hire on his armes two:
he gon hire to cusse & Lemman qwat he dere & He gan hire for to kesse
& feyre forte wisse & \pound herte gyn poou to stere & Wel ofte mid wyisse.
rymenild quop he duere & And help poou me to knicte. & ‘Lemman,’ he sede, ‘dere,
help me \pound ych were & Oppe \pound myȝte & \pound herte nu \pound stere.
ydobbed to be knyhte & To my louerd \pound kinge & Help me to kniȝte
suete bi al \pound myȝte & \pound he me \pound yue dobbinge & Bi al \pound myȝte,
to mi louerd \pound kynge & And \pound hys my \pound pralhede & To my lord \pound king,
\pound he me \pound yue dobbinge & Ytnered in knyt hede & \pound he me \pound yue dobbing.
And \pound hys my \pound pralhede & And \pound enne hy schal wite more & \poundane is mi \pound pralhod
\pound nne hy schal wite more & And don after \pound li lore & Iwent in to kniȝthod,
\& do rymenild \pound li lore & (ll.433–46). & \& ischal washe more
\hline
\end{tabular}

Unlike Anglo-Norman Horn, he enters into proper exchange with her. He does not make his accession conditional upon her father’s approval, nor does he turn her gift to him around into a

\textsuperscript{206} Phillips, \textit{Medieval Maidens}, 157
\textsuperscript{207} See below.
gift from him. Instead, he presents her *miʒte* as essential to his heroic career, as it is she who procures his knighthood, providing the cup and ring and direction to bribe the steward to suggest Horn’s knighthood to the king. While Horn uses *lore* to refer to her marriage plan, it is clear that her *lore* is also part of his knighthood. Anglo-Norman Rimnild is an oblation of God’s to Horn. She can only attempt to exchange herself, but gifts she gives are not exchanges—they fail to circulate. Middle English Rimenhild, on the other hand, does, in fact, enter into an exchange with Horn, being sufficiently recognized as subject to do so. She chooses Horn of her own free will and offers herself to him as a gift. Rimenhild’s gift is accepted and exchanged, even as the actual objects of exchange are reversed. She is asking for him as a husband, and the emotional and sexual joy that comes with it. He cannot give himself to her without the proper status to render their union acceptable (and without disparaging her of whatever inheritance she might have), and so a new exchange is proposed: if she gives her energy and aid to his knighthood, which must be granted by the king, then he can give her what she wants, her *wille*. He carries out her *lore* forthwith and is quickly knighted. Herlaund’s worry that she would ‘misrede’ him appears to be false.

Horn Childe presents a completely different scene. Rimnild does not propose love or marriage immediately. Rather, having insider knowledge of his upcoming knighthood, she grants him useful gifts. Among other things, she presents him with the horse and heraldic banner he will need to obtain that knighthood, along with the magic sword whose blow no warrior can withstand (ll.377–408). Horn, in this version, does not in any way refuse her, responding, ‘‘So God me spede,/ Rimnild, for þe loue of þe,/ Y schal iuste þat þou schalt se/ Opon þis ich stede’’ (ll.411–414). Horn gives her a ‘loue wound’ in that moment (1.416), and she tells him that if he is made a knight, she will give him her maidenhood as a reward (ll.418–20). The implication is that he accepts her offer, as he does not refuse, or defer to her father’s wishes.

Rimnild’s offering of her maidenhood to Horn seems curiously explicit and dangerously unorthodox. On the one hand, however, while promising her maidenhood to him obviously foregrounds the sexual intercourse, it does not exclude marriage: indeed, later when they have been slandered by Wikel, the narrator makes it very clear that Rimnild and Horn have not slept together: ‘‘Giltles sche was of þat dede:/ Horn hadde nouʒt hir maidenhead,/ Bot in word & þouʒt‘‘ (ll.502–4). Moreover, it may be that Rimnild believes herself to be acting within the bounds of established custom. When Horn and his companions are knighted, and he has won the tournament thrown by the king (presumably in honour of the knighting), King Houlac ‘‘ʒaf Horn
leue/ In his bour forto chese/ Þe maidens þat were fre:/ Riche of kin & hondes sleye/ þai hadde
frendes fer & neiʒe:/ He miʒt avaunced be” (ll.434–8). Mills notes that “chese” could mean
“select” or “find/visit.” 208 It is ambiguous; however, clearly some kind of betrothal or sexual
contact leading to marriage is expected to happen between Horn and the maiden he chooses.
Moreover, Mills suggests that because Rimenhild directs Horn “Þat he schuld take non oþer
rede./ Non oþer þan chese he;/ For sche wel trewely haþ him hiʒt,/ ʒif þat sche liue miʒt./ His
leman wald sche be” (ll.440–44) “the lovers – though not [King] Houlac – might take þe
maidens of 435 to include Rimnild.” 209 Rimnild’s promise to give Horn her maidenhead might
very well be due to her expectation that her father will be offering the victor of the tournament,
whom she could reasonably expect to be Horn, to “chese” among the maidens, in which case she
would be indicating her expectation to be chosen by him not only in this instance in the wake of
his victory (ll.440–44), but also in her earlier offer of her maidenhood to Horn upon the
condition of knighthood (ll.418–20).

Rymenhild and Rimnild’s helping of Horn to obtain his knighthood is in stark contrast to
Rigmel’s helpless and destructive wish that the kingdom be attacked so that her father will have
to knight Horn out of necessity. Middle English protagonists enter into exchanges as gift-giving
subjects, giving both themselves and the objects that assist in the establishing of Horn’s
knighthood. Their desire of Horn is neither criticized nor undermined nor presented as lust— it
is “trewe love” in Rimnild’s case (l.369) and marriage in Rimenhild’s. The complete absence of
Horn’s concern for their father’s wishes foregrounds the importance of the exchange as solely
between the two of them. In King Horn, as soon as Horn has proven his knighthood in the field,
he returns to Rimenhild’s chamber and makes what appears to be a marriage vow to her:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ne shal y þe byswyke ne do þat þe mis lyke ich take þe myn owe to holde &amp; eke to knowe for euerich oþer wyhte þerto my trouþe yþlyhte wel muche was þe reuþe þat wes at þilke treuþe (ll.669–676).</td>
<td>Ne shal ich neuere swike Ne do þat þe mis like Ich nime þe to my nowe To habben and to howe For euerich wyþte Parto my treuþe ich plicte Miche was þat rewþe þat was at here treuþe (ll.687–694).</td>
<td>Ne schal ðe biswike, Ne do þat þe mislike. Ischal me make þinowe To holden &amp; to knowe For eureche oþere wiþte, &amp; þarto mi treuþe ðe plice. Muchel was þe reuþe Þat was at þære treuþe (ll.667–674).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

208 Mills, Horn Childe, 115.
209 Mills, Horn Childe, 115.
Nothing like this scene appears in either of the other poems. Margaret F. Swezey makes a compelling case for Horn and Rimenhild entering into a clandestine marriage. She revisits the courtship scenes in *King Horn* and puts them in the context of thirteenth and fourteenth century sources on marriage contracts and rituals. Not only does she find the language of Horn’s oath to Rimenhild to echo contemporary marriage vows, Swezey also points out that after this point in the narrative, “Horn and Rimenhild both clearly understand themselves to be married, as reflected in the references to Rymenhild as Horn’s wife and to Horn as Rymenhild’s husband.”

While unacceptable by secular custom and unorthodox by Church standards, clandestine marriage is completely legal by canon law; it not only validates Rimenhild’s desire for Horn and her behaviour of lying with Horn in her arms (as her father finds them after Fikenild’s lie), it renders her faithfulness to Horn all the more honourable, as she is presented as a chaste and loyal wife. Their lack of marital consummation, indicated by Horn’s comment he has not lain with her (ll.1283–4; ll.1318–19; ll.1275–76) and that he will not lie with Rimenhild until she can lie beside a king (ll.1295–96; ll.1330–32; ll.1287–88), may, as Swezey suggests, be intended to “enhance the hero” by presenting him as “unselfish and unsensual,” it seems more likely that boundaries of licit sexualities outlined by Philips are in play: “English elite society was materialistic and pragmatic enough to tolerate marriages between merchant and gentry, or gentry and aristocratic, groups, if worldly ambitions were served thereby, but powerful taboos, born out of intense class consciousness, lurked just below the surface.”

Rimenhild is a king’s daughter. While it might be acceptable for her to be wedded and bedded by a renowned knight, it would far more honourable for her to consummate a marriage with her social equal.

Rimnild and Horn, on the other hand, do not appear to have exchanged marriage vows; however, their agreement on the matter of their relationship is clear from their reactions after Wikel’s lie to Houlac that Horn slept with his daughter. Rimnild, having been beaten bloody by her father, presents a strategy to Horn to secure their eventual marriage, and he willingly undertakes it:

“Fals men hāþ on ous leyd

---

211 Swezey, “Marriage Middle English Romance,” 87.
& to mi fader ous biwraid,
Y drede he flemes te.
Bot Horn, ȝif it so schal bitide
Þat þou schalt out of lond ride
& flemed schaltow be,
Þis seuen winter y schal abide
Mi maidenhed to hele & hide,
For þe loue of þe;
Þei an emperour come,
King oþer kinges sone,
For to wedde me,
Of no loue ne schal he spede
Þat y ne schal kepe mi maidenhede,
So help me God, to þe‖ (ll.526–540).

Rimnild’s careful strategizing contrasts considerably with Rigmel’s powerless begging of Horn to swear an oath proving their innocence. Not only does she have agency in their separation, entering into it willingly, she puts forward the plan that eventually secures their success. She gives him a ring that warns him when to return by changing colour (ll.838–840). Moreover, the messenger whom Horn meets on his way back to Houlac’s court reports that he comes looking for Horn, and has been for seven years. Although it is not explicit that she sent him, it is almost certain, as it is clear that he comes on Rimnild’s behalf: he tells Horn directly that Y go to seke after him ay/ & þus haue don mani a day/ Til þat we mete yfere. / Today is Moging þe king/
Wiþ Rimnild at spouseing,/ Þe kinges douhter dere;/ Mani sides schuld be bibled/ Er he bring hir to his bed /
if Horn in lond were (ll.868–876). Rimnild can further be seen to participate in her defence against the forced marriage through her typical organization and planning. When Horn returns in disguise, she quickly discerns his identity. She faints in order to be taken out of the hall, so that she can speak to Haþerof alone and tell him of Horn’s presence. She details complicated plans for their escape, which, to be fair, turn out to be unnecessary because Horn deals with his enemies in the tournament.

Rimenhild shows even more resourcefulness and activity in her defence against the forced marriage that additionally contrasts to Rigmel’s passive waiting. As soon as her father agrees to the marriage to Modi, she dictates a message that Athulf writes and sends a messenger to deliver it to Horn (ll.929–44; ll.964–979; ll.921–36). Moreover, when Horn finally returns in disguise, her drastic plan to protect herself against being untrue to Horn is revealed. Horn, pretending to be a friend of Horn, claims that Horn is dead. Rimenhild responds by attempting to stab herself with a knife with which she planned to kill her hateful husband and then commit suicide. Horn has to catch the knife out of her hands (ll.1191–1211; ll.1226–1246; ll.1185–
1203). Thus, Rimenhild shows her vigorous and violent loyalty to him. Finally, in the second threatened forced marriage to Fikenild, in the C it is Rimenhild who enables Horn and his men, disguised as harpers, to enter the impenetrable castle (ll.1469–75). Rigmel does nothing of the sort; again, she waits passively. Horn Childe is unfortunately broken off by this point.

The depiction of Rimenhild and Rimnild’s desire and faithfulness to Horn is also markedly different from the Anglo-Norman. Neither woman’s loyalty to Horn is ever placed in serious doubt in the face of her forced marriage, neither by the narrative nor by Horn. In King Horn, when Rimenhild’s messenger arrives at the Irish court, he announces that he is seeking Horn on Rimenhild’s behalf. In O and C, he describes her “ne y waxeþ wild” (l.991), and she “gan wexe wild” (l.948) because a king is about to marry her. In contrast to Roman de Horn, it is Horn’s loyalty that is placed in doubt. In O and C the messenger laments that Rymenhild has been betrayed, “Nis nower founde/ A weylawey þe stounde/ Reymyld worþ by gile/ Weylawey þe wile” (ll.1000–3), “Nis he nowar ifunde:/ Waðawai þe stunde:/ Wailaway þe while!/ Nu wurþ Rymenhild bigiled” (ll.955–7). In the narrative world, the cultural and social opinion is on her side, validating the legitimacy and power of their exchange of gifts and vows. Horn weeps in all three texts for Rimenhild’s plight (1970; l.1005; 1960); Fikenild is not even mentioned, much less focussed upon by Horn. Instead, Rimenhild alone forms the purpose of his trip home and he does not voice any doubt as to her fidelity to him. Her protest, unlike Rigmel’s sad silence, is loud and expressive. Her misery has even deterred the pilgrim whom Horn meets en route to the castle from going to the wedding feast, so dreadful is her pain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>y come from a brudale from brudale wykde of maide remenylde ne mihte hue nout dreȝe þat hue ne wep wip eȝe hue seide þat hue nokle be spoused wip golde hue hade hosebonde þah he were out of londe ich wes in þe halle wip inne þe castel walle a wey ygon glide þe dole ynokle abyde þer wofþ a dole reuly</td>
<td>Hy com fram on bridale Ich com fram brode hykle Of Mayden reymylde Fram honder chyrche wowe Pe gan louerd owe Ne miȝte hye hyt dreye Pat hye wep wyt eye He seyde þat hye nokle Be spoused Myd golde Hye hadde hosebonde Pey he nere nawt in londe Mody Myd strenþe hyre hadde And in to toure ladde</td>
<td>Ihc was at o wedding Of a Maide Rymenhild: Ne miȝte heo adriȝe þat heo ne weop wip iȝe: Heo sede þat heo nokle Ben ispused wip golde, Heo hadde on husebonde þeȝ he were vt of londe, &amp; in strong halle, Biþinne castel walle, þer iwas atte ȝate, Nokle hi me in late, Modi ihote hadde</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

213 In L, the messenger’s lament may refer to Horn, who he worries has met with deception, or may refer to Rimenhild: “ne may ich of him here/ in londe fer no nere/ wey la wey þe while/ him may hente gyle” (ll.956–68).
The pilgrim’s speech seems to suggest a broader social condemnation of forced marriages, “Þer þe bryd wepeþ sore.” Her unceasing tears, great “dole” she displays and her vociferous claim of having a husband leave no doubt as to her innocence. Horn never reproaches Rimenhild for loving him little. His lying to her about his death, presumably in order to gauge her reaction seems to be a cruel and harsh test, but it is one that allows for a crucial demonstration of her character and, as will be seen shortly, can be seen as integral to a broader hagiographic subtext in the construction of Rimenhild’s subjectivity.

No reproach is present in *Horn Childe*, which provides no description of Rinnild at the wedding feast. In addition, the ‘fidelity test’ is so diluted that she merely has to drink from the Horn “For Hornes loue.../ʒif euer he was þe dere” (ll.988–90) and ask him outright “ʒif Horn þerin ware” (l.1001) for him to admit his presence. Unwavering loyalty characterizes both Rinnild and Rimenhild, neither of whose desire of Horn appears at the service of guaranteeing his reputation and enhancing him by demonstrating his extreme desirability. Indeed, while both women are fought over by Horn and his enemies, they are not passive signs of homosocial bonds of competition or exchange. Rather they both decisively participate in their own rescue. Nor can they be viewed as mere reflections of Horn’s prowess, as their desire of him is not primarily to valuate him in relation to other potential suitors. Just as Horn’s dream of Rigmel’s danger at Wikele’s hands reveals her as a contested object between men, and a disappearing one at that, Horn’s dream in *King Horn* demonstrates Rimenhild’s subjectivity. In this dream, Rimenhild is in a rudderless boat on the sea, like the pious Emare. Horn himself is not present in his dream, and so there is no configuration of Rimenhild between Horn and Fikenhild. Her boat capsizes and while she is trying to swim to land, Fikenild is trying to drown her, pushing her down with his sword hilt. The dream represents Rimenhild as trying to save herself from miserable fate, rather than helpless in the face of male competition: both the Anglo-Norman and Middle English dreams accurately mirror Rigmel and Rimenhild’s participation (or lack thereof).
in their defence of themselves and their desires. While it incontestable that Horn has to step in and rescue her in both versions, Rimenhild’s independent action, lack of situation between men, lack of erasure in the face of Horn’s contest with Fikenhild incisively speak to and symbolize the construction of her as a subject in her own right. Additionally, Rimenhild and Rimnild’s active contribution to Horn’s knighthood shows that their role in the relational construction of his masculinity is neither passive nor reflective. His identity is not established through them simply by marriage and its attendant kingship over a new land, it is affected by their actions, and his exchange of gifts with them as subjects.

There are real constraints on both Rimnild and Rimenhild’s agency and activity: they are confined; Rimnild is beaten; they are expected to accept their father’s choice of husband and are forced against their will into a marriage with Modi; Rimenhild is eventually abducted by Fikenild. Both may be treated as objects by their fathers and unwanted suitors, but the degree to which this treatment is condemned is remarkable. Moreover, their exercise of agency and choice is consistently endorsed by the narrative, which presents their wooing of Horn as honourable and based upon unwavering loyalty. While unorthodox, Rimenhild’s pursuit and achievement of a secret marriage is legal in canon law. Swezey’s comment on Rimenhild applies to Rimnild as well (with the exception of her queenship, which, while likely, is unaccounted for due to the text’s incompleteness): “[s]urprisingly, [Rimenhild’s] sexuality and agency are not punished in the romance but are instead rewarded: although her father punishes her (and Horn), the narrative doesn’t — she ends up wife and queen.”

Key in this description is the notion that “the narrative doesn’t” punish the women, which, as we have seen, is not true for Roman de Horn.

That Rimenhild “ends up wife and queen,” as Swezey puts it, reveals that the relational construction of gender in King Horn is clearly reciprocal: Rimenhild has an identity — even a public identity — that is constructed by Horn. She procures his knighthood and marriage to her gains him another kingdom; he makes her his queen, a formal position he waits to give her until he arrives among all of his own kin:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ant horn com to sudenne</td>
<td>Horn wente to sodenne</td>
<td>Horn com to sudenne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to is oune kenne</td>
<td>To hys owe kunne</td>
<td>Among al his kenne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rymenild he made her is</td>
<td>Reynyld he makede queune</td>
<td>Rymenild he makede his queune</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

214 Recall that Horn Childe is broken off by this point.
Furthermore, all three manuscript versions end with a description of their mutual true love and their common placement in heaven. By contrast, the Anglo-Norman ends with

```
... Dium cum il s'en alat
En Suddene la grant. Sa muiller ameinat
E mult grant tens od li bone vie menat,
Tant k'en richesce sa vie la fina.
Or en die avant ki l'estorie saverat!
Tomas n'en dirrat plus, 'Tu autem' chanterat:
'Tu autem domine miserere nostri.' (5234–40)
```

[“Let us tell how he returned to Suddene the great. He brought his wife and led a good life with her for a very long time, ending his days in prosperity. Now let him who knows any more of the story, say so! Thomas will say no more, but sing ‘have mercy’: ‘And thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us’”] (137).

Rigmel is simply Horn’s “muiller” that he brings home with him. The narrative never shifts to include her; the verbs are all singular: he lives a good life with her; they do not live life together.

**Hagiographic Interconnections**

A final aspect of the construction of Rimenhild’s subjectivity, which may account in part for the legitimacy of her position within the narrative, can be seen through closer attention to the hagiographic resonances of the romances, an important overlooked detail and a more serious consideration of the structural parallels between Rimenhild’s defence of her virginity against Modi and the virgin martyrs of hagiography.

Kimberly K. Bell has recently revisited the long-standing recognition of Horn’s resemblance to Christ by reading the O manuscript (MS. Laud 108) *King Horn* in its manuscript
She draws out numerous parallels between Horn’s depiction in the romance and the saints’ lives of the earliest version of the South English Legendary (hereafter ESEL), with which King Horn shares the manuscript. Bell, focussed on Horn, presents a typical, uncompelling, and, as we have just seen, incorrect reading of Rimenhild as “primarily serv[ing] to further the martial ambitions of the hero and to solidify his kingdom.” However, of the sixty-seven extant tales in this version of the legendary, eleven are female saints’ lives (not including St. Ursula’s eleven thousand virgins) and nine are virgin martyrs (81%), with seven being virgin martyrs of the oppressed, sexually threatened, tortured but defiant type. This is a much higher percentage than that found in the later major manuscripts, where thirteen out of twenty-two female saints are virgin martyrs (59%). Virgin martyrs are particularly popular in this version of the collection, and so it is perhaps unsurprising that a closer look at the heroines of King Horn and Havelok, which immediately follows the ESEL in the manuscript, in the romance’s manuscript context reveals significant resemblances between the virgin martyrs faced with oppression and marriage against their will and Rimenhild and Goldeboru, as will be seen in the following chapter.

Corinne Saunders and Helen Cooper have briefly noted parallels between romance heroines’ subjection to and opposition of enforced marriage and the fates and actions of the hagiographic heroines, in the romances of King Horn and Beves of Hampton respectively. Cooper sees congruence between the demonstration of the heroine’s choice of hero-husband through her active resistance of forced marriages and the saint’s choice of Christ, rejection of marriage/sex and subsequent suffering. She extends her observations about the legitimacy and

---


217 All citations are from Carl Horstmann, *The Early South English Legendary, or Lives of Saints, I. MS.Laud, 10, in the Bodleian Library, Early English Text Society Original Series* 87 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1887; reprint, Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint Co., 1974). Horstmann dates the collection from 1280–1290 and the romances to 1290 (x; x, n.1) For the ESEL’s independence from/relationship to the other later manuscripts, see vii–xi.

218 Bell, “‘holie mannes lues,’” 261.

219 St. Faith, St. Ursula and the 11,000 virgins, St. Katherine, St. Lucy, St. Agnes, St. Bridget (not oppressed), St. Agatha, St. Scholastica (not oppressed), St. Mary of Egypt (not virgin), St. Mary Magdalene (not virgin), St. Cecilia (in appendix by a later hand).

desirability of female desire in the English romance tradition and will to the realm of hagiography:

Here, as in the romances, the basic narrative of the perfect life requires that the woman should reject her father’s plans for her marriage, or the approaches of various unwanted suitors, to insist on a marriage to the lover who surpasses all other lovers in both beauty and rank, Christ Himself. There is no particular virtue in being put in a convent in accordance with family convenience, nor is the negative wish to avoid the sinfulness of the world enough. The woman must herself make an active choice for Christ, and show the strength of her choice through adversity as great as, or greater than, the romance heroines show in remaining faithful to their own lovers.  

While compelling, the problem with this easy transfer is that it fails to appreciate the complexity of intertextual and intergeneric interaction and consequent production of meaning.

Corinne Saunders, in *Rape and Ravishment*, likewise finds structural and thematic parallels between the romance and hagiographic heroines:

As in hagiographic texts the virgin opposes marriage, so Rimhild opposes marriage to a man she does not love: the contravention of the woman’s will provides the suspense and the romance defends her right to choose. The absence of legal redress is acutely evident, and death is portrayed as the only way to escape undesirable marriage… Whereas the withholding of consent precipitates miraculous rescue in the saints’ lives, in romance the knight’s intervention replaces that of God: in *King Horn*, Rimhild is eventually saved by her true ‘husbonde’ (1047), Horn himself.

In addition, her focus is likewise on the “consistent emphasis on the woman’s will,” in both genres with respect to its relationship to the legal situations within the texts and the role of violence and potential force “underlying the chivalric ethic.” The structural and situational parallels between the forced-marriage of romance and the threatened sexual contact/marriage/torture of hagiography, between the romance heroine saved by her knight and the virgin saved by God, are so clear that it is puzzling that they have not attracted more critical attention. Certainly the hagiographic associations of the male heroes of romance have been well explored.

The literary impact, however, of these associations requires more attention than the observance of structural parallels because such an observance does not answer the questions of whether these hagiographic similarities were deliberately invoked or amplified by the romance writers; if so, how and to what literary effects? In other words, in what ways are the

---

223 For example, Saunders observes that “The aim of male attackers in both hagiography and romance is most often to enforce marriage, the public symbol of possession, rather than simply to rape” (*Rape and Ravishment*, 198).
224 On Horn, see above. On Havelok and Guy, see below.
characterizations and attendant meanings of the romance heroines altered by the inclusion or introduction of hagiographic resonances and motifs?

Rimenhild resembles the virgin martyrs of the ESEL in her defence of her fidelity to Horn as her husband. Like Sts. Faith, Katherine, Lucy, Agnes and Agatha, Rimenhild attempts to defend herself from an unwanted marriage by loudly and publically asserting her unwillingness to forsake her current husband.\(^{225}\) St. Faith declares her unwillingness to Diocletian’s official Dacian because she will never forsake Christ (ll.49-54). St. Katherine refuses the Emperor Maxentius’ marriage proposal by asserting that God is her spouse (163-166). St. Lucy, who will not worship pagan gods, is cast into a brothel, where she proclaims that Christ will protect her because she is married to him: “I-wedded ich was to Ihesu crist (1.91); “Mine spousede louerd Ihesu crist” (1.94). St. Agnes opposes her father’s choice of husband for her, asserting that she is Christ’s spouse (ll.23-32). St. Agatha resists the amorous interest of the duke of Sicily by asserting that highest prince is the one that she loves; he is “Swete and hende and milde: on him is al mi þou3t” (ll.23). Rimenhild’s public and tearful proclamation that she has a husband who is away not only testifies to the existence of the clandestine marriage, but structurally and discursively links her with the virgin martyrs of the ESEL.

The depiction of Rimenhild’s suffering on account of her chosen husband further connects her with the virgin martyrs, who endure all manner of torments for their resistance. It is true that Rimenhild is never tortured or imprisoned, however, the graphic depiction of her physical and emotional pain serve to demonstrate her constancy in her faithfulness to Horn through suffering. This constancy is even to the point of death, as in attempting to kill herself upon hearing the false report of Horn’s death, she demonstrates a willingness to die for her love of her chosen spouse that matches the determination of the virgin martyrs, whose glory is secured by their endurance of that death. Rimenhild’s misrecognition of Horn in this moment has drawn her considerable negative criticism. Jane Tolmie, for example, refers to Rimenhild’s “loss of cognitive abilities.”\(^{226}\) However, given Horn’s demonstrable Christ-like qualities, the inability of Rimenhild to recognize Horn can be seen to carry another register: it may recall Christ’s own unrecognizablity by those who nonetheless love him. But just as only God can protect the virgin martyrs, shield them from torment, empower their triumph over pagans, and ultimately grant them the heavenly crown, only Horn can save Rimenhild and grant her an earthly crown. Her will, like the virgin martyrs’ will, however, must be congruent with his own.

\(^{225}\) See above.
\(^{226}\) Tolmie, “Persuasion,” 210,
hence the exceptional drama of the disguise-test, in which her failure to recognize Horn is also an opportunity for her to demonstrate the strength and power of her will. Like the virgin martyrs, she is willing and desires to die for Horn, and to kill his enemy Modi (who, incidentally, is not Horn’s enemy but his kinsman in the Anglo-Norman), just as the virgin is willing and desires to die for Christ and in the process often vanquishes and destroys God’s enemy, the heathen tyrant.

The riddling test functions to display to the audience, and to Horn, the complexities of volition not unlike those described by Wogan-Browne with respect to the dedicated virgins.227 If their will is not complete, wholly voluntary and uncompelled, then their gift is invalidated, along with the righteous subject-status it confers. As Cooper observes, “[t]here is no particular virtue in being put in a convent in accordance with family convenience.”228 Rimenhild’s will, while attested by the messenger, and witnessed by the audience, must be witnessed by Horn himself. He tests her as Christ tests the virgins. If Horn is mean and manipulative, then he is in good company, as Wogan-Browne notes that Christ is often a cruel bridegroom.229 The suffering is the necessary medium for the virgin’s will to be manifested. Like the virgin, whose power comes from an alignment and gift-exchange with God, the sanctified romance heroine’s power comes from her choice, exchange and alignment with the romance hero, who, aside from God, is the highest patriarchal power in the narrative and who is secularly typologically related to God. Hence, Rimenhild’s suffering is just that, suffering; she endures a passio not unlike that of the simultaneously (worldly) oppressed and (heavenly) empowered virgin martyrs. Her patriarchal world is upside down and wrong, just like the pagan, fallen world of the vitae. That she is disempowered with respect to the disordered world means that, as a corollary, she is empowered and legitimized in the just world, which is witnessed by her restoration and salvation through her wedding, bedding and queenmaking.

Finally, the depiction of Rimenhild as a secular type of virgin martyr can account for the otherwise inexplicable fact that in two of the manuscripts, L and C (Harley and Cambridge-regrettably not Laud 108), she cries tears of blood in Horn’s absence, when she is threatened by marriage to Flkenild: “wo was rymenild of mode/ terres hue wepte of blode” (L, ll.1423–24); “Rymenhild was ful of mode,/ He wep teres o’ blode” (C, ll.1403–4). This detail has been

227 Wogan-Browne, Saints’ Lives and Medieval Women, chapters 2 and 3.
228 Cooper, English Romance in Time, 247.
229 “But although presented as a gentle spouse and supremely courtly lover, Christ can also resort to emotional blackmail and threats of violence at which a pagan might blush” (Wogan-Browne, Saints’ Lives and Medieval Women, 97).
scarcely noticed and little remarked upon. Tears of blood specifically recall the Virgin Mary. Andrew Breeze describes the motif of the virgin’s tears of blood as an “international theme.”230 In demonstrating the strength of the image in insular literature, not only Middle English, but Irish and Welsh, Breeze finds that numerous Middle English lyrics in thirteenth and fourteenth century manuscripts — thus contemporary with King Horn— contain references to Mary’s bloody tears.231 Andrew Lynch in his study of tears in Middle English romance likewise observes that the Virgin Mary is shown weeping bloody tears in response to the crucifixion in Middle English religious lyric and meditative prose.232 Moreover, he remarks that “tears for Christ crucified are clearly a kind of surrogate martyrdom, as Mary’s ‘bloody teern’ in response to Christ’s blood running to her feet indicate.”233 However, while he makes a note of Rimenhild’s tears of blood, he does not make any connection to the Virgin Mary. Instead, he comments only that her tears correspond with Horn’s prophetic dream of her peril: “[t]he weeping summons Horn through the dream back across the sea.”234 In light of concomitant hagiographic resonances in presentation of Rimenhild, it seems likely that these tears are also meant to highlight Rimenhild’s similarity to holy virgins.

The comparison of the Anglo-Norman Roman de Horn with the Middle English King Horn and Horn Childe and the Maiden Rimnild reveals possibilities for reading a female subject through the juxtaposition of representations of desire, gift-exchange, suffering and patience. The Middle English narratives not only present a female subject endorsed by the ideological structures in the romances, but also one that exists in a reciprocal relationship to the male subject; in the case of Rimenild of King Horn, her subjectivity is also guaranteed through the evocation of the virgin-martyr discourse of hagiography. Rimenhild and Rimnild might function to produce Horn’s masculine identity, but Horn likewise produced their feminine identities as chaste, faithful, clever and loyal women, just as worthy of his love as he is of theirs. The stories of Haveloc/k present a similar opportunity for observing the construction of a reciprocally and relationally constructed female subject.

Chapter Two: “Quen and levedi”: Goldeboru’s suffering, sainthood and sovereignty in *Havelok the Dane*

*King Horn* is often discussed along with the Middle English *Havelok the Dane*. Not only do the two poems share a certain amount of thematic similarity, but the only extant copy of *Havelok* is also found beside one of the three copies of *King Horn* in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Miscellaneous 108. The same manuscript also contains the earliest version of the extremely popular collection of saints’ lives known collectively as the *South English Legendary*. In addition to this codicological association, *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane* are two of the earliest extant Middle English romances overall, and the two earliest “Matter of England” romances in Middle English. The two romances share an additional connection, however, in their approach to women and subjectivity: a comparison with their Anglo-Norman analogues reveals that, unlike the transgressive and ultimately displaced women of the earlier Anglo-Norman romances, the Middle English versions present a female subject who is supported by the ideological structures of the romance and is constructed in a reciprocal relationship with the male hero’s subjectivity.

The juxtaposition of *Havelok* with Gaimar’s Haveloc episode in the *Estoire des Engleis* and the anonymous *Lai d’Haveloc* reveals Goldeboru’s position as a dominant female subject. Goldeboru’s status as rightful heir to her father’s land, the representation of her sovereign power, the oppression she experiences under treacherous male authority, her final triumph over her oppressor and her hagiographically reminiscent characterization are structured analogously and in parallel to Havelok’s. In addition, Goldeboru’s eventual identity as queen is reciprocally

235 The motifs of dispossessed and disguised male heir with Christ-like associations whose upward social mobility is helped by the actions of his beloved princess—as well as his marriage or betrothal to her—overcomes evil usurpers to regain his patrimony and restore the world to a benevolent patriarchal order, secured by his accession to the kingship of one or more lands, and his arrangement of marriages between his faithful men and women. See also, Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 161.

constructed with Havelok’s identity as king. He acquires his identity through his relationship not only with a woman, but with a female subject, whose identity is likewise acquired through her relationship with him, a male subject. On the other hand, the Argentilles of both Anglo-Norman narratives, while not as silent and objectified as Rigmel, possess authority and agency in a troubled and limited capacity. Moreover, Argentille’s body and identity produce Haveloc’s new identity as king of England, but her own access to sovereignty or a position of formal political authority is non-existent: she is a conduit for male authority, without wielding any herself. By the end of the narratives, she, like Rigmel, disappears from view as her husband’s new position comes to the fore.

Manuscripts, Texts and Textual Relationships
Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis*, a verse chronicle composed around 1136, exists in four manuscripts, only three of which contain the Haveloc episode; the fourth contains one of the two extant copies of the *Lai d’Haveloc* placed in lieu of Gaimar’s account. My observations will refer to readings in the early-fourteenth-century London British Library Royal 13.A.xxi (*olim* 1146) (manuscript “R”), which Ian Short uses as the base text of his recent edition of the entire *Estoire*.237 The *Lai d’Haveloc*, which was written between 1190 and 1220, has its major source in Gaimar’s account.238 The *Lai* exists in two manuscripts: London, College of Arms, MS Arundel XIV (manuscript “H”), from the later fourteenth century, contains the *Estoire* with the *Lai d’Haveloc* inserted into it. The earlier manuscript, Cologny-Geneva, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, MS 82 (*olim* Cheltenham [Thirlestane House], Phillips 3713) (manuscript “P”) from the late-thirteenth/early-fourteenth century, forms the basis of Alexander Bell’s edition, with readings from H supplied as variants; my observations will be referring to Bell’s edition of P.239

Composed between 1295 and 1310,240 the Middle English *Havelok*, most recently edited by G.V. Smithers, exists in a single manuscript, Oxford Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc.108 (manuscript “L”), situated between the earliest version of the *South English Legendary* and *King

---

Horn. Both texts are in the same hand, identified as early fourteenth-century.\textsuperscript{241} Although four double-sided fragments, copied in the second half of the fourteenth-century (Cambridge University Library MS Add. 4407 [19]) also exist, for the purposes of this project I have chosen to deal only with the complete text.

Like the texts of Horn, the texts of Haveloc/k have an intricate and obscure relationship that is difficult to unravel, despite the fact that, unlike Horn, they have a common origin in the former Danelaw area of Lincolnshire in East Anglia.\textsuperscript{242} Indeed, neither Gaimar’s account nor the Lai can conclusively be seen as the source of the Middle English Havelok. Scholars since the 1950s have suggested variously that the Middle English romance may be derived from Gaimar’s account of Haveloc in his Estoire des Engleis or the independent Lai d’Haveloc which sometimes circulates with the Estoire, some combination of the two, or a lost common source of some subset of the three. This view of Havelok’s indebtedness to the Anglo-Norman predecessors was codified by Havelok’s successive editors, W.W. Skeat, Kenneth Sisam, and G.V. Smithers.\textsuperscript{243} Nevertheless, divergent theories based upon the folkloric and mythological resonances of the Middle English version suggested the independence of the Middle English romance. For example, Edmund Reiss’ investigation of the Norse mythological resonances in Havelok, particularly associations between Grim and Odin, provides some evidence of traceable Norse oral tradition which he uses to support the Middle English poem’s independence on the basis that “mythological elements are unlikely to be late additions to any literary work.”\textsuperscript{244} But while the Norse mythological resonances may bear witness to the tale’s origin in the folkloric tradition of a Norse-settled area of England, they nevertheless cannot stand alone as proof of Havelok’s independent derivation.\textsuperscript{245}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{241} Smithers, Havelok, xi–xvi.
\item \textsuperscript{242} Weiss, Birth of Romance, 20.
\item \textsuperscript{244} Edmund Reiss, “Havelok the Dane and Norse Mythology,” Modern Language Quarterly 27 (1966), 115–24: 123.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
However, two studies engaging issues of orality have built a much stronger case for Havelok’s independence from its extant Anglo-Norman predecessors. Unlike the texts of Horn, there is far more medieval interest in the story of Havelok as history, and so numerous historiographical texts attest to the tale’s circulation. \(^{246}\) Caroline D. Eckhardt and Nancy Mason Bradbury have reexamined the chronicle evidence, showing that these historical texts contain strong evidence of the tale’s oral circulation. This finding is consonant with and supports the poem’s internal evidence that the Middle English *Havelok*, like *King Horn* and *Horn Childe*, is not directly dependent on its Anglo-Norman predecessors. Bradbury notes, for example, that “no one has ever found conclusive verbal parallels between *Havelok the Dane* and the extant versions in Norman French.” \(^{247}\) With detailed attention to oral theory and marks of orality within *Havelok*, Bradbury convincingly demonstrates that the Middle English version, with its apparent inconsistencies of plot and character, is not a “more garbled” version of its Anglo-Norman predecessors, but a “less rationalized” account of a “local legend.” \(^{248}\)

Eckhardt’s identification and analysis of a new reference to the Havelok story in *Castleford’s Chronicle* provides new weight to Bradbury’s argument by demonstrating common details in a subset of Havelok stories. She observes that *Havelok*, Rauf de Bohun’s *Petit Bruit* and *Castleford’s Chronicle* all name Havelok’s father as Birkabein and present his wife’s enemy as being from Cornwall. \(^{249}\) While Havelok’s wife is unnamed in *Castleford’s Chronicle*, both *Havelok* and the *Petit Bruit* also name her Goldeburu. This is significant because in the Anglo-Norman versions of Gaimar’s *Estoire* and the *Lai d’Haveloc*, Haveloc’s father is named Gunter, his wife is Argentille and her enemy is her uncle, a neighbouring king, not a duke or earl from Cornwall. Eckhardt proposes that these three works “all drew upon a shared fund of tradition, rather than being directly linked to each other as literary texts.” \(^{250}\) She, like Bradbury, criticizes the overemphasis on written sources of the Havelok-tale, arguing that

where the material at hand is clearly legendary or traditional, and where external

\(^{246}\) For the most recent comprehensive account of the numerous versions in Middle English and Anglo-Norman of the Havelok legend, see Kleinman, “Havelok and Historiography of East Anglia,” especially 250–251. See also Smithers, *Havelok*, xvi–lvi, for detailed discussion of sources dated up to 1310.

\(^{247}\) Bradbury, “Traditional Origins,” 130. I would also add that, structurally, the English poem is unique. Not only is it considerably longer, but begins in great depth with the story of Goldeboru’s father and her situation, leaving her story aside when she is a grown woman. It only then recounts Havelok’s story from early childhood, until the two characters’ stories intertwine. Moreover, in the Anglo-Norman versions, Haveloc does not know he is of royal birth— he believes himself to be Cuanar, a fisherman’s son—but in the Middle English version he is completely aware of his status as disenfranchised heir, having seen his sisters’ slaughter and having won his life by swearing fealty to Godard.

\(^{248}\) Bradbury, “Traditional Origins,” 139; 117.


evidence confirms that multiple iterations existed ... it is methodologically faulty to assume the similarities among extant literary versions are necessarily due to textual indebtedness between them, if there are not close verbal parallels; or, in the other direction, to assume that differences among extant literary versions must be the product of innovation on the later writer’s part. Instead, both the similarities and the differences could reflect elements drawn from a web of local or regional material culture, communal memory, [or] lost texts.251

Thus, Eckhardt and Bradbury provide compelling cases for the English poem’s independence, and it is this approach to textual relationships between the different versions of Haveloc/k that I find most convincing. The recognition of Havelok as an independent poem has, of course, the same methodological implications for comparison between the different versions that applies to the texts about King Horn; the issues of translation, adaptation and authorial intention are not applicable, even as the tools for such an investigation—juxtaposition, comparison, close-reading—remain. As in the previous chapter, I will be using the texts of Haveloc/k as foils for each other to reveal the differing construction of female subjectivity in each narrative.

Differences between Havelok the Dane and Gaimar’s Estoire des Engleis and the Lai d’Haveloc have been well noted by editors and commentators throughout the last hundred or so years of Havelok scholarship.252 These variations have been analyzed to show, for example, as Judith Weiss does, that Havelok is an expanded, more subtly structured text with detailed and often more complex characters.253 Susan Crane finds that Havelok, in comparison to the Lai, moves beyond the strictly aristocratic concerns to “construct[] an ideal of transcendent and universal social harmony.”254 Melissa Furrow finds greater emphasis on rank and nobility in the Anglo-Norman Lai d’Haveloc and Gaimar’s chronicle than in the Middle English poem.255 However, no sustained analysis focused on the role of women, gender or sexuality has been undertaken to date.

In comparing the three different versions of the story of Havelok, I have found that the Middle English version sets up quite a different Goldeboru than the Anglo-Norman Argentilles. A discussion of Argentille and subjectivity in both the Estoire and the Lai will provide a foundation against which to view the Goldeboru in Havelok. The Middle English romance is undoubtedly more interested in the heroine, her social and legal position as heir and its entailing

252 See Mehl, Middle English Romances Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries, 162–172.
254 Crane, Insular Romance, 45.
formal access to power, the emotional effects of her plight, her role in securing Havelok’s
destiny, her agency, autonomy and initiative. At the same time, there is no hint of her as
subversive or transgressive, and where she is resistant, it is to unjust patriarchal authority, not
patriarchal authority in general.

**Argentille’s Disappearance in Gaimar's Haveloc Narrative and the *Lai d’Haveloc***

Readings of Argentille range from viewing her as the “true protagonist” of the narrative to being
only a “cipher for lawful inheritance.”256 Judith Weiss presents the most positive view: she finds
that Argentille in both Anglo-Norman Haveloc narratives is an example of a woman who, by
“encouraging and manipulating the man[,] actually emerges as stronger and more capable than
he.”257 She observes that Haveloc in both versions is “naïve, ignorant and notably passive,
submitting to the will of others, happy to be told what to do.” Weiss contrasts Argentille with
the hero, finding that she is the one who “takes decisions, instigates action, possesses resource
and initiative: she is the true protagonist of the *Lai d’Haveloc.*”258 This is a more positive view
than Susan Crane’s earlier observations in *Insular Romance,* where she argues that the
Argentille of the *Lai,* while showing “considerable initiative and acumen” compared to Rigmel
in *King Horn,* is nevertheless limited by her social and legal standing. Crane finds that her
“cleverness has no independent value” but functions only to promote Haveloc’s career;
moreover, “like her intelligence, her sexuality is directed only toward perpetuation of the lineal
rights claimed by her class.”259

More recently, however, Ian Short criticizes Weiss for overstating her case. While he
accepts that Gaimar’s presentation of women is “noticeable for its absence of misogyny” and
suggests that the women in his audience must have particularly enjoyed the “prominent roles” of
the women in the *Estoire,* he also finds, following Roberta Krueger, that “they are invariably …
displaced from the centre of narrative action.”260 The first example Short gives is that of
Argentille, whom he describes as a “cipher for lawful inheritance and only secondarily as a
‘humiliated princess’ figure.”261 He acknowledges that she is responsible for the victory over her
uncle Edelsi, but counters Weiss’ description of her as “the true protagonist,” by observing that
“it is clearly Haveloc’s rehabilitation and reinstatement in his rightful heritage that lie at the

---

256 See below.
259 Crane, *Insular Romance,* 46.
ideological heart of the narrative.” As I will demonstrate, Short’s observations are apt: Argentille is a “cipher for lawful inheritance” in both the Lai and the Estoire, and she is certainly displaced from the narratives as they progress. Moreover, the extraordinary agency and initiative she displays have a profound shadow cast on them by the sinister resonance of the trick she uses to save the Danish army. Argentille’s position as her father’s heir in both the Estoire and the Lai is presented solely as the means by which her husband will accede to kingship over the land. There is never any indication of her holding or ruling the land herself, a situation which, as will be seen below, contrasts considerably with the depiction of Goldeboru in Havelok the Dane. Indeed, comparison to the Middle English version, which clearly represents Goldeboru’s fate at the “ideological heart of the narrative,” will reveal just how insightful Short’s comments are.

In Gaimar’s account, it is clear that Argentille’s right to inheritance features little and functions primarily as the means by which Haveloc eventually obtains the kingship over her father’s lands. Unlike Haveloc, who is referred to with the formulaic expression, dreit eir, “rightful heir,” three times (ll.420, 521, 725), Argentille is never described as such. She is her father’s only heir (l.70), but otherwise her inheritance is presented in relation to the men who also lay claim to it. For example, her uncle Edelsi wants to keep the inheritance, l’erité that he desires (l.99). There is no reference to Argentille’s rule, only to her inheritance, which is interesting because Gaimar implies that her mother Orwein was eligible to be regent over her husband’s kingdom: “Li regnes ke Adelbrict teneit/ li unt livré, que guarde en seî,/ car la raîne ert enfermée; / ne mais vint jurs [nen] ad duree” [“Adelbriht’s kingdom was entrusted to the safekeeping of Edelsi because the queen had fallen ill, and she, in fact, survived no more than twenty days”] (ll.87-90; 7). By marrying her beneath her station, Edelsi disinherits her because by law she takes on the status of her husband, and is therefore no longer high-ranking enough to inherit. Thus Edelsi, as regent and closest living relative, can take the land for himself: “Pur la terre A[de]lbrict tolir/ feseit sa nece od lui gisir./ La fille al rei [en] povre lit” [“In order to alienate Adelbriht’s land, he had his niece—a king’s daughter—lie with Cuaran (i.e. Haveloc) in a lowly bed”] (ll.167–9; 11).

---

262 Short, Estoire, xli–xlii.
263 Short points this out (Estoire, 364).
264 This contrasts with the Lai, where in Achebrit surrenders care of his land, wife and child into Edelsi’s hands directly, before any mention of the queen’s illness (ll.229–32).

86
Moreover, the occlusion of Argentille’s importance in matters of inheritance and rulership can be seen in Haveloc and Argentille’s victory over Edelsi: Haveloc demands that Edelsi face attack if he does not return his beloved’s inheritance to her (1.764). When Edelsi’s scouts see the army of corpses, his barons urge him to “rendē [a]la dame son dreit” [“restore the lady to her rightful inheritance”] (1.799; 45). What follows is that “Rendu li fu tut li regné/ dés Hoioland tresk’a Colcestre/. Rei Haveloc la tin[†] sa feste; les homages de ses barons/ reçuz partut ses regions” [“The whole of the kingdom from Holland to Colchester was restored to him, and Haveloc celebrated with festivities, in the course of which he received the homage of his ealdormen from every region of the country”] (ll.804–808; 47). Short’s translation obscures the fact that the pronoun li could in fact refer to Argentille herself; however, even so, it is Haveloc who celebrates and receives homage from his barons from every part of his country, without any mention of Argentille. When Edelsi dies a fortnight later, “[i]l n’out nul eir si dreiturel/ com Haveloc e sa muiller” [“He did not have any heir whose claim was as legitimate as Haveloc’s and his wife’s”] (ll.811–12; 47), and so the nobles decide to give his kingdom to “Haveloc e sä amie” (l.815). Argentille, referred to in second place as Haveloc’s wife and beloved, is not even mentioned by name, despite the fact that the kingdom is her inheritance as Edelsi’s niece. The question of her rule is never raised, and it is clear that no one but her husband or male heir will rule her father’s kingdom.

Similarly, and even more explicitly, in the Lai d’Haveloc Argentille’s position as heir falls into the background. Smithers notes that Haveloc is called “dreit eir” “rightful heir” four times (ll.418, 519, 676–7, 723) and “reproduces from Gaimar the expression eir … dreiturer [“more rightful heirs”] (l.1101) for him and his wife.” Indeed, Argentille is implicitly the heir, but is never explicitly called such. Instead, her future husband’s rule is foregrounded. When Argentille is grown, Edelsi’s barons are described as holding their land from Argentille, but this is in name only: as soon as she is grown and able to bear children, they ask the regent, Argentille’s uncle Edelsi, that he marry her to “tel home …/ Kis maintenist e conseillast” [“such a man as would advise and protect them (my emphasis)”] (ll.293–4; 160). Haveloc and Argentille’s victory over Edelsi shows the same elision of Argentille’s presence and importance as the Estoire. Edelsi’s councillors tell him to “A la dame rende sun dreit/ E face pes ainz ke pis seit” [“restore her rights to the lady and make peace, before matters get any worse”] (ll.1083–4; 168), but he “Al rei Daneis s’est acordez” [“(is) reconciled with the Danish king”] (l.1088;

---

266 Smithers, Haveloc, xlvi. 
168); it is to Haveloc he gives pledges and hostages and to whom he restores the lands held by Achebrit (ll.1089–91). Argentille is last mentioned in the description of Edelsi not having “Il n’ot nul eir si dreiturer/ Cum Aveloc e sa muiller” [“He had no heirs so rightful as Haveloc and his wife”] (ll.1101–2; 168).

In both the Estoire and the Lai, Argentille’s position as heir is never important for her own sake, so much as its contribution to Haveloc’s kingship. She is also displaced from the narratives by their end, eventually referred to only as Haveloc’s amie or muiller. In the vanquishing of her uncle, furthermore, she does not participate in any of the oath-taking, hostages, swearing of fealty or even ceremonially in the feasts and celebrations (Estoire, ll.804–808; Lai, ll.1087–1098). The conclusions of the poems focus exclusively on Haveloc’s reign, conquests and enduring reputation (Estoire, ll.816–819; Lai, ll. 1105–1112), with no mention of Argentille. Her role in securing the victory for Haveloc prompts no narratorial praise or even comment, despite its decisiveness, as it is clear in both texts that without Argentille the Danish army would have lost. Judith Weiss observes that in comparison with Gaimar’s account, the Lai enhances Argentille’s role by “taking every opportunity to mention her presence and her qualities, noting her beauty, her courtly manners, her resource and initiative,” but she fails to note the distinct lack of praise of surrounding Argentille’s most significant action in both narratives, saving the day by advising the Danes to trick her uncle’s army into surrender by propping their dead up on stakes to simulate a larger company. Gaimar and the author of the Lai may be willing to represent Argentille as resourceful and forceful, but they are not eager to praise her for these qualities. Rather, both Gaimar and the author of the Lai seem somewhat uncomfortable with Argentille’s clever initiative and the author of the Lai even seems to use it rather to show Haveloc’s compassion and rightful attitude to his own men.

In the Estoire, Haveloc, recently recognized as king in Denmark, amasses his fleet and they sail to England, where Edelsi refuses to restore Argentille’s inheritance and battle ensues. Many men fall during the day and when night falls, Argentille teaches them a “mescine” [“remedy”] (l.774), which Gaimar admits stopped the battle from resuming and “son regne out sanz greignur contraille” [“was to lead to the kingdom being restored with the minimum of opposition”] (l.776; 45). The “mescine,” however, has negative connotations: the army spends

---

267 Since “Tote la terre li rendi” (l.1091) follows quickly after “Al rei Daneis s’est acordez,” “li” is more clearly referring to Haveloc than Argentille; it was ambiguous in the Estoire because it did not follow any mention of Haveloc himself, merely Edelsi’s concession to “rendê [a] la dame son dreit” (l.799).

268 Weiss, Birth of Romance, 23.

269 Short translates “counter-measure” but the “mescine” is also the word for medicine, and so it loses its nuance. Anglo-Norman Dictionary, s.v. ‘mescine.’ http://www.anglo-norman.net/. [Accessed 18 February 2011].
the night carving stakes and props up their dead with them “ke veirement estait semblant/ k’il fuissent combattanze viis” (“the bodies gave every appearance of actually being alive and ready for combat”) (ll. 782–3; 45). Even at a distance, they cause anyone looking at them to feel their flesh creep and Gaimar specifies that the corpses are “desconfês” (“unshriven”) (1788; 45).

While effective, Argentille’s strategy has hints of necromancy and sorcery about it. These negative connotations are heightened in the *Lai*. Here, the poet seems to be attempting to lay the blame for the deceased Danes on Argentille. Haveloc, who has happily reigned in Denmark for three years, is convinced by Argentille to return to England to reclaim her land. The poet stresses that it is her counsel that causes Haveloc to go: “Argentille li conseilla” (“Argentille advised him”) (l.984; 167); “Li reis li dist k’il [le] fera/ Quan k’ele li conseillera” (“The king said he would do it, since she advised him so”) (ll.989-90; 167). Then, there is greater description of the battle, which is much more disastrous and deadly for the Danish side:

Ent’els fu dure la mellée  
Desi ke vint al avespréé.  
Mult i ot des Daneis oscis  
E des alters assez malmis;  
Il nel poeient mes suffrir  
Quant neire nuit les fist partir.  
Aveloc fu mult irascuz  
Pur ses homes k’il ot perduz;  
Od ses Daneis s’en fust  
Ale s sa navie returnez,  
Si la reïne li suffrist (ll.1049–59).

[“The fierce battle between them lasted til nightfall. Many Danes were slain there, and others were grievously wounded. They had reached the limits of their endurance, when black night made them separate. Haveloc was very angry on account of the men he had lost. He would have retreated with his Danes to his ships, had the queen let him”] (168).

The poet dwells on the destruction and death of the Danish army, representing Haveloc as a loyal and concerned leader, unwilling to sacrifice more of his men for his wife’s ambitions. Argentille’s plan is called an “engine” (“trick”) (l.1060; 168), a word which can be used for magic or sorcery, as well as fraud and deceit.270 The details in the *Lai* are vivid, painting a more terrifying picture than in Gaimar. Not only do the Danes intersperse the dead warriors with the living, but the poet specifies that the dead warriors are arranged with their “haches sur les cols levées” (“axes raised ready at the shoulder”) (11068; 168). The entire English army is affected by the horror: “Tote la char lur herica./ Mult fu hiduse la cumpaigne/ Des morz k’il virent en la

plaigne” [“their flesh crept. Terrifying was the company of the dead they saw in the plain”] (ll. 1074–6; 168).

Argentille is both wise and aggressively resourceful in her devising and advising of the army of corpses, a trick that forces Edelsi’s capitulation, but neither poet makes any attempt to highlight or emphasize these qualities. She is never called wise or clever in either text, even when she wins the battle for her kingdom for Haveloc. Ingenious and effective though Argentille’s advice may be, it remains morally ambiguous—Gaimar emphasizes the unshriven nature of the corpses (l.788) and perhaps for that reason omits praise or particular recognition. Judith Weiss suggests that the omission of the dead warriors trick may be part of the English poet’s desire to diminish her role: “The defeated Godrich is placed in Goldeborw’s charge, and the English barons recognise her as their rightful queen, but these scenes are due more to the poet’s sense of what is appropriate to the ending of the story than to any wish to specially enhance her role.” However, this leaves Weiss with a rather weak argument against an aspect of the English poem that she cannot fail to note, namely that instead of the trick, Goldeboru participates in the victory over Edelsi in a far more formal and sanctioned way. On the contrary, a sustained examination of the English poem reveals that Goldeboru’s role is significantly greater than Argentille’s, and her agency, initiative and actions are unequivocally supported by the narrative. To borrow Short’s phrasing, Goldeboru shares the “ideological heart” of the poem with her husband, not only in that her story occupies a comparable amount of space to his, but also in the fact that her story both starts and ends the poem. She does not disappear from the narrative, nor is Havelok’s legacy privileged over hers. Moreover, she is represented in every way as Havelok’s equal, even to the point of being depicted as a sovereign in her own right. This is emphasized by her being granted comparable hagiographic resonances in her characterization.

“The gest of Hauelok and of Goldeboru”: Parallelism and Goldeboru’s Subjectivity
The unique parallelism with which the Middle English Havelok presents its male and female protagonists has been noted several times, but its implications for Goldeboru’s subjectivity have not. At the very end of the romance, the crystallization of a trend that begins much earlier in

---

272 Weiss, (“Structure and Characterization,” passim) notes some parallelisms. Dieter Mehl notes that “[i]n contrast to the French versions, where Havelok’s story is presented on its own, and Goldeboru’s similar fate is only briefly summarized later, the English poet emphasizes the resemblances by devoting practically the same amount of space to both strands of the narrative [my emphasis]. This contributes to the symmetrical structure of the poem … This doubling of plots is a means of intensifying the drama and underlining its significance” (Thirteenth and Fourteenth
the poem can be seen with the narrator’s characterization of the poem as the “gest ... of Havelok and of Goldeboru”:

Nu haue ye herd þe gest al þoru
Of Hauelok and of Goldeborw;
Hw he weren born, and hw fedde,
And hwou he weren with wronge ledde
In here youþe, with trecherie,
With tresoun, and with felounye,
And hwou þe swikes haüedun tit[h]
Reuen hem þat was here rith,
And hwou he weren wrekên wel,
Haue ich sey[d] you eueril del (ll.2985–2994).

Here the narrator tells us that he has told us how Havelok and Goldeboru were born, raised, how they were wronged in their youth with treachery, treason and felony, how traitors intended to rob them and how they were revenged. There is little hierarchization or differentiation between the two protagonists; Havelok’s name merely appears first. Indeed, the narrator sets them up not only in parallel, but presents them as equals. In contrast, as seen above, the Lai d’Haveloc and Gaimar’s account both end with an exclusive emphasis on Haveloc and refer to Argentille only briefly as “his wife,” despite the fact that it is actually she who is the heir through whom Haveloc gains a kingdom in England (Estoire, ll. 804–818; Lai ll.1085–112). Given the paucity of instances in which Middle English romances are labeled after both their male and female protagonists, these lines are noteworthy on this basis alone,273 but their significance is greatly increased by the fact that these closing remarks codify an approach that can be seen throughout the poem. Throughout the romance, the narrative presents an unprecedentedly balanced focus on both protagonists, their subject and subjected statuses as heir, future ruler, as ward, as oppressed and punished victim, as object and pawn in a forced marriage, as restored noble in private and public spheres, as formally acknowledged and legally supported sovereign, and as lover, spouse and parent.274

---

273 For the inclusion of the heroine’s name in the naming of a romance indicating a “recognition of the leading role she plays alongside the hero” see Helen Cooper, The English Romance in Time, 235.

274 In Engelond, and was þer-inne/ Sixti winter king with winne/ And Goldeboru quen, þat I wene/ So mikel loue was hem bitwene/ Þat al þe weord spak of hem two./ He louede hire and she him so/Þat neyþer oþe[r] mithe be/ For oþer ne no ioie se/ But yf he were to-gidere boþe./ Neuere yete ne weren he woþe./ For here loue was ay newe–/ Neuere yete wordes ne grewe/ Bitwene hem hwar-ôf ne lathe/ Mithe rise ne no wrath./ He geten children hem bitwene/ Sones and douhtres rith fluete./ Hwar-ôf þe sones were kinges alle./ So wolve God it sholde bifalle./ And þe douhtres alle quenes/ Him stondes wel þat god child strenes! (ll.2964–83)

Centuries, 169). Susan Crane observes a “series of parallel passages on the rule and death of the fathers, the trickery and later the trials of their wicked guardians, and the hardships the two children suffer give this work the most handsomely articulated double structure of all the romances of English heroes [my emphasis]” (Insular Romance, 42).
Goldeboru’s importance is highlighted structurally: it is her story that begins the poem and her fate as orphaned ward that sets the precedent for Havelok’s own situation. Verbal parallels reinforce the equivalency. For example, a comparison of their fathers’ confrontation with their imminent deaths, the nature of their worry about their children, their process of finding a guardian and setting up oaths of loyalty to protect their heirs reveals the striking similarity with which the hero and heroine are described. Both Goldeboru and Havelok are described as too young to speak (l.125; l.369) when their fathers are dying. Their adulthood and self-sufficiency are described as their having the ability to ride on horses, with their knights and men beside them (ll.126–7; ll.370–1). They are both referred to as their fathers’ heirs (l.110; l.410). The wardship of them and the land is described to last until they are “of age” (“Til þat she [be] wman of helde” [l.117]; “Til that mi sone of helde be” [l.387]), at which point they will have reached the appropriate social position. In Goldeboru’s case, this is when she is old enough (twelve years old) to choose her husband and marry (ll.192–203) and be “quene” (l.183); in Havelok’s case knighted (l.394) and king (l.381). At that point, the warden is supposed to hand over, bitechen, their inheritance, England and Denmark respectively: “And þanne shulde he engelond/ Al bitechen in-to hire hond” (ll.202–3); “Þanne biteche him þo his Richth,/ Denemarke, and þat þertil longes,/ Casteles and tunes, wodes and wonges” (ll.395–7). In each case, a noble, understood to be “true” by the king (Godrich, l.179; Godard, l.374), is selected and swears upon the liturgical apparatus that he will carry out the king’s wishes (ll.185–209; ll.388–400).275

This parallelism continues throughout the poem. Both are described as “heir” or “rightful heir” a total of six times each. Smithers notes that Goldeboru is described as her father’s “rightful heir” three times (ll.289, 2540, 2770) and “heir” three additional times (ll.110, 1096, 2806); Havelok is described as “rightful heir” once (l.2235) and “heir” five times (ll.410, 607, 1268, 2158, 2302).276 Both are described as the “fairest” (Havelok, l.1111; Goldeboru, l.1053). Their traitorous wardens behave and are described in strikingly similar terms. Godrich and Godard both subject their wards to isolation, imprisonment, poor clothing and bad or no food. They both take possession of the land, obtaining oaths of loyalty from knights and nobles. They are both compared to or referred to as a Judas (Godrich, ll. 319, 1134; Godard, ll. 425, 480), and

275 Her father’s worry and decision making is additionally outlined earlier; compare Goldeboru (ll.106–143) with Havelok (ll. 339–371).
276 Smithers, Havelok, lvii
associated with the devil, either cursed by the narrator to be taken by the devil or compared to Satan.\footnote{Satan: Godrich, ll. 1101, 1135; Godard, l.2512. Devil: Godrich, l.1189; Godard, l.446.}

The descriptions and fates of Goldeboru and Havelok attest not only to the romance author’s skillful use of parallelism, but also to the narrative’s equal investment in both protagonists and in common strategies for building their identities and subjectivities. If Havelok is a subject and agent, and the narrative is concerned with his growth into his adult identity in spite of persecution and an upside-down social order, the same must be observed of Goldeboru, who is likewise persecuted, resistant, tenacious, and who struggles and strategizes in her own way to contribute to the restoration of social order. This contrasts with the Anglo-Norman versions which evoke no parallels or equivalencies between the protagonists’ characters, actions or situations, despite the obvious structural parallels. In those versions, the focus remains steadfastly on Haveloc once he has entered the narrative.

This discrepancy can be clearly seen in the emphasis on and recognition of Goldeboru’s status in contrast to that of Argentille. Smithers is manifestly puzzled by the emphasis on Goldeboru’s status as “rightful heir”:

> The fact that Goldeborw and Havelok are heirs by lawful right is so clamantly obvious as (one might think) hardly to need mentioning. But the author of Hav. underlines it by repetition, and thus implies that he regards it as important…and has emphasized Goldeborw’s right of succession more than Gaimar and the Lai had done.\footnote{Smithers, Havelok, lvii.}

Indeed, he finds this new emphasis on Goldeboru as rightful heir of England to be a reversal of the emphases in Gaimar’s account and the Lai, which only discuss Havelok as rightful heir of Denmark, but he never considers the possibility that Goldeboru’s characterization is strongly affected by it.\footnote{Smithers, Havelok, lv. See above for a longer discussion.}

Instead of examining its literary effects on character development and theme, Smithers is concerned with its meaning for intertextual connections. He takes it as possible evidence that the Middle English author was acquainted with an Anglo-Norman Prose Brut of 1272, in which Goldboru’s claim to the land is (first) made explicit and emphasized: “according to the [AN prose Brut] the crucial fact was that Goldeboru feust dreit heir de ceste terre (hence, in the ME prose Brut, for she was be ryʒt heire of his lande) [Smithier’s emphasis].”\footnote{Smithers, Havelok, xlviii.} However, while this might very well be the case, the fact remains that it has significant consequences for the reading.
of Goldeboru and the structuring of her subjectivity. Where in the Anglo-Norman texts she is the conduit through which Haveloc obtains the kingship of her father’s and uncle’s territories, in the English text, she is emphasized as an heir to the entirety of England, just as Havelok is heir to all of Denmark. In addition, a surprising aspect of the depiction of this status is the portrayal of her as future sovereign in her own right.

A striking and unusual feature of the portrayal of Goldeboru’s character in *Havelok* is the representation of her sovereignty over England. This first appears during her father’s expression of concern for her welfare after he dies. His worry is that she is too young to take care of herself, not that she is female. Moreover, he expresses his would-be happiness,

\[
\begin{align*}
Yif \ shoh \ couþe \ on \ horse \ ride, \\
And \ a \ thousand \ men \ bi \ hire \ side, \\
And \ sho \ were \ comen \ intil \ helde \\
And \ Engelond \ sho \ couþe \ welde, \\
And \ don \ hem \ of \ þar \ hire \ were \ queme, \\
And \ hire \ body \ couþe \ yeme, \\
Ne \ wolde \ me \ neure \ iuene \ like, \\
Ne \ þou \ Ich \ were \ in \ heueneriche" \text{(ll.126–133)}.
\end{align*}
\]

Having already been referred to as his heir (l.110), Goldeboru is here depicted in an almost martial capacity, riding a horse with a thousand men by her side. Her father’s desire for her is not that she be old enough to marry, so that her husband can govern the kingdom, but that she herself attain the age of majority and therefore be able to rule England: “And Engelond sho couþe welde.” Later, when she is grown, Godrich’s anxiety and evil plotting against her also present a picture of Goldeboru ruling:

\[
\begin{align*}
The \ kinges \ douther \ bigan \ thrive \\
And \ wex \ the \ fairest \ wman \ on \ live. \\
of \ alle \ thewes \ was \ she \ wis \\
That \ gode \ weren \ and \ of \ pris. \\
The \ mayden \ Goldeboru \ was \ hoten; \\
For \ hire \ was \ mani \ a \ ter \ igroten. \\
Quanne \ þe \ Erl \ Godrich \ him \ herde \\
Of \ þat \ mayden \ hw \ we[1] \ he \ ferde, \\
Hw \ wis \ sho \ was, \ [h]w \ chaste, \ hw \ fayr; \\
And \ þat \ sho \ was \ þe \ rirhe \ eyr \\
of \ Engelond, \ of \ al \ þe \ rike, \\
Po \ bigan \ Godrich \ to \ sike. \\
And \ seyde \ "Weþer \ she \ sholde \ be \\
Quen \ and \ leuedi \ ouer \ me? \\
Hweþer \ sho \ shoulde \ al \ Engelond \\
And \ me \ and \ mine \ hauen \ in \ hire \ hond? \\
Daþeit \ hwo \ it \ hire \ thaue!
\end{align*}
\]
Without any reference to future marriage, Godrich is angry and resentful that Goldeboru will be “Quen and leuedi ouer [Godrich]” and she who “shoulde al Engelond/ And [Godrich and his people] hauen in hire hond.” This is the very same language that the poet uses to describe Godrich’s own power: “In þat time al Hengelond/ Th’erl Godrich hauede in his hond” (ll.1000–1). Goldeboru’s wisdom, chastity, beauty and status as rightful heir render her threatening to Godrich precisely because they ensure the proper trajectory of her becoming “lady and queen,” and it is this prospect that leads him to scheme to marry her to Havelok in order to disinherit her (ll.286–93). This is in surprising contrast to the Anglo-Norman versions, as seen above, in which it is clear that Argentille’s husband Haveloc, not Argentille herself, will be Edelsi’s competition. In the Lai, what Edelsi finds threatening about Argentille is only her physical maturity that marks her as ready for a husband, not her wisdom, chastity, beauty and status as rightful heir: she is “creue e granz/ e ben poeit aveir enfanz” [“tall, and well-grown and could certainly bear children”] (ll.289–90; 160). It is her ability to bear children that prompts the barons to request Edelsi’s arrangement of her marriage and his subsequent trickery in marrying her to Haveloc (ll.283–342). By contrast, in the English version, no such request is made by the barons, and Godrich does not appear to fear her potential husband’s new sovereignty, so much as Goldeboru’s own.

In addition, a comparison of the oaths made by the guardians in Havelok and the Lai reveals a distinctly greater autonomy for Middle English Goldeboru. When the dying king Achebrit entrusts his brother-in-law Edelsi with his wife, daughter and kingdom, the oath resembles the oath laid out by Goldeboru’s father Athelwold:282

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lai</th>
<th>Havelok</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Premereament le fist jurer,</td>
<td>Þer-on he garte þe erl suere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veant sa gent, en afier</td>
<td>Pat he shokle yemen hire wel,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ke lealmnt la norrireit,</td>
<td>Withuten lack, wituten tel,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E sa terre li gardereit,</td>
<td>Til þat she were tuelf winter hold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tant k’ele fust de tel eage</td>
<td>And of speche were bold,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ke suffrir poreit mariage;</td>
<td>And þat she couþe of curteysye,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

281 No such oath is made in the Estoire (cf. ll.98–104).
282 Note that in the Lai Orwain, Argentille’s mother, is not implied to be a candidate for regency.
There are, however, two significant exceptions. Firstly, in the Middle English, the marriage is to be in consultation with Goldeboru herself, not with her father’s vassals, a point to which I will return later. Secondly, in the Lai Argentille is to be given to Havelok, whereas in the Middle English, he is to be given to her.

The importance of gift-giving and gift-receiving in the construction of agent subjects in opposition to given objects has been much remarked upon in the previous chapter. Goldeboru, as receiver of the gift, is presented as subject, and her potential husband as the object-gift. Argentille, on the other hand, is presented as a gift to the “strongest man,” like Rigmel in the Roman de Horn, who is bestowed on Horn by God. In addition, the unparalleled depiction of Goldeboru on horseback, with a thousand knights, and the language of rulership surrounding her authority reveals that the Middle English poem is representing her as the English sovereign.

With respect to the presentation of Goldeboru’s sovereignty and exercise of governance, the situation has gone largely unremarked. Usually, it is taken for granted that the situation is identical to the Anglo-Norman, and that it goes without saying that the problem is that her future husband’s position is what threatens Godrich. An exception to this is Judith Weiss’ brief remark on Godrich’s “resentment at having to submit to the rule of a girl” (ll. 291-295). Weiss’ focus is on Godrich, but her interpretation of the English poem’s presentation of Goldeboru’s sovereignty does articulate the princess’ political and legal position as ruler of England. At the same time, perhaps because she interprets Goldeborw’s character as diminished from the Anglo-

Norman Argentille’s, Weiss does not remark upon the significance of this or the fact that Godrich seems to fear her power and rule, not her future husband’s.

The presentation of Goldeboru as a ruler, the emphasis on her role as rightful heir and as eventual queen differentiate the Middle English romance’s construction of her subjectivity with respect to legal and formal access to power. A comparison of the respective heroines’ participation in the reclaiming of their territory and restitution of social order further reveals the difference between the Anglo-Norman and Middle English texts’ conceptions of the heroines’ initiative, resourcefulness, action and access to formal authority.

“Quen and levedi”: Goldeboru’s Formal Access to Power
Both Argentilles of the Anglo-Norman narratives and Goldeboru participate in the reconquering of their land from the usurper. However, where Argentille’s actions are met with ambivalence, a surprising lack of narratorial approval, no restitution of a lost position, and her eventual erasure from the narrative, Goldeboru’s are answered with a formal investiture of her rights as queen. When Middle English Havelok finally captures Godrich, he shames him by cutting off his hand and then sends him to Goldeboru, the “quen,” who is very angry, yet orders him guarded and not beaten, on account of his knightly status. Her actions cause “Englishe men ... heye and lawe” to recognize her as the rightful heir, who had wedded and bedded a king, not a scullion.

Þan þe Englishe men þat sawe,  
Þat þei wisten, heye and lawe,  
Þat Goldeboru þat was so fayr  
Was of Engeland rith eyr,  
And þat þe king hire hauede wedded,  
And haueden been samen bedded,  
He comen alle to crie “merci,”  
Vnto þe king at one cri,  
And beden him sone manrede and oth  
Pat he ne sholden, for lef ne loth,  
Neueremore ageyn him go,  
Ne ride, for wel ne for wo (ll.2767–78).

While their response is to turn to the king, not her, to declare their desire to swear fealty and promise never to oppose him, at the same time it can be seen that Havelok pushes for the ir formal recognition of her status as heir and position of queen. Before accepting “manrede” [“homage”] from anyone, the narrative explains that he wants to bring her before them. Six earls go to get her, and she is described as the most courteous person in the whole world. When she arrives, “alle the Engishe men” fall down on their knees, weeping and crying their apology,
regret and admission that England ought to have been hers, and they ought to have been her men. This is a marked difference from Gaimar’s and the Lai’s accounts, as seen earlier.

Continuing the parallelism in the presentation of Havelok and Goldeboru, the recognition of Goldeboru’s position as queen follows the same pattern as Havelok’s recognition as king. Having arrived in Denmark, Havelok and Goldeboru take shelter from attack at the house of a noble and loyal Danish lord, Ubbe. While the couple sleeps, a remarkable flame issues from Havelok’s mouth, lighting up the room and prompting the gathering of Ubbe’s household outside their bedroom. When he turns over in bed revealing his shining cross mark to everyone, “high and low” recognize that they are seeing his “kunrik” (l.2143). At the same time, Havelok’s likeness to the old king, Birkabeyn, confirms his position as his father’s heir. Thus, Havelok’s body reveals his identity as his father’s heir and rightful king of Denmark to his followers. Their immediate reaction is to fall down to his feet and kiss his toes. Ubbe proclaims his desire to offer homage and that Havelok shall be king of Denmark (l.2178). The Danish lord gathers together the men of Denmark (of various ranks) and tells them the whole story, and they all pay homage to Havelok. More men are called throughout the land, and, eventually, when everyone had paid homage, Ubbe knights him: “And the folk of all the lond/ Bitauhte him al in his hond,/ The cunniriche everil del/ And made him king heylike and wel” (ll.2316-2319).

A similar process, complete with verbal resonances, occurs in Goldeboru’s recognition scene. When Havelok sends her the bound Godrich, entrusting her with his keeping and proper treatment, it is then that the Englishmen, “heye and lawe” see and know that “Goldeboru þat was so fayr/ was of Engeland rith eyr” an end rhyme which occurs twice during Havelok’s recognition and proclamation as king (ll.2156–7; ll.2234–5). Havelok’s granting to Goldeboru jurisdiction over the prisoner causes a similar realization in the onlookers: the juxtaposition of her fair body with Godrich’s bound and mutilated body prompts a reading of her body as powerful and sovereign. Havelok, as king, gives Goldeboru the opportunity to act as queen by safeguarding his martial and political victory and his new English sovereignty, which is embodied by Godrich’s failed, captured and mutilated body. The sight of Havelok’s body, now kingly and victorious where it was once churlish and helpless, prompts a new reading of Goldeboru’s body, as her father’s rightful heir—no longer disparaged by a lowly wedding, but confirmed by a lofty wedding and bedding—and Havelok’s rightful queen. Just as Havelok’s body was read by his Danish subjects, Goldeboru’s is read by English subjects.
There is, however, a critical difference: Havelok’s body alone is sufficient to effect his reinstatement, but Goldeboru’s body is not. She is described as “fayr and rightful eyr” before this moment; Godrich saw it and worried about it, and Havelok asserted it. Nevertheless, the negation of her earlier disparagement can only occur through the change in status of Havelok’s body and a reinterpretation of the wedding, in legal and bodily terms. The bed is important precisely because consummation is critical to the legal recognition of marriage in this period.\footnote{Noël Menuge notes that “Godrich’s “violent insistence upon marriage and consummation … is an attempt to ensure legal ratification. This would make the marriage more difficult to annul. This is surely Godrich’s intention; Goldeborough recognises this, and so, probably does the audience” (Wardship in Romance, 90). Menuge cites R. H. Helmholz, Marriage Litigation in Medieval England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 34–7.}

If Havelok had not bedded her, then the wedding could be discounted. Havelok’s body, the very source of Goldeboru’s shame and debasement when read as “peasant,” becomes the means of her absolution and restitution when re-read as “king.”

Havelok’s identity as Danish king thus reproduces Goldeboru’s identity as rightful heir. In turn, Goldeboru’s re-confirmed identity as rightful heir produces Havelok’s identity as English king. Before accepting homage and oaths, however, Havelok wants to ensure Goldeboru’s position as queen. He has six earls bring her before “alle þe Englishe men” (ll.2795–6), who, like the Danish men, fall before her on to their knees. As Ubbe presided over Havelok’s restitution, Havelok presides over Goldeboru’s, wanting to see through the people’s reaction “if þat she aucte quen to be” (l.2788). The English men profess their regret for their unfaithfulness, their acknowledgement of her father’s kunerike, and of her heirdom. Finally, they re-read Godrich’s once-powerful body, now conquered, bound and emasculated by the loss of his hand and his jurisdiction by a woman, who is, just as he feared, “queen and lady over him.” Once a focus of loyalty to “alle the Englis” (ll.254–9), Godrich is re-read as “swike,” “traitor,” and worthy of a traitor’s death by hanging (ll.2806–8).

That it is Havelok who answers Goldeboru’s English subjects, however, reveals the limits of Goldeboru’s authority. While she can safeguard the traitor, and be presented and read as a sign of Havelok’s status and her own, holding queenship as a position in its own right, that position, apparently, does not allow her to acknowledge her subjects herself. They might beg her mercy, but it is Havelok’s that they receive. At the same time, Havelok delays taking oaths from his new men until after Godrich is burned, and it is Goldeboru who directs Havelok’s interaction with his new men: she proclaims that she is avenged on her foe and that it is the time to take “manrede” from everyone:
Thus, she gives the final direction that confirms Havelok’s proper kingship over his English subjects. From earlier lines, it was evident that Havelok intended to do this anyway; yet Goldeboru is still granted a symbolic verbal role in the systematic assertion of her husband’s kingly power, in line with the presentation of the parallelism and equivalency of the two protagonists throughout the poem.

In all three texts we can see the operation of the relational construction of gender in that Havelok’s identity derives from his relationship with a woman: his marriage to Argentille/Goldeboru produces his identity as an English king. In the Anglo-Norman texts, however, only Havelok’s identity, as heir, as king, as sovereign is granted narrative attention. Where the Anglo-Norman versions allow Argentille a functional position in the reclaiming of her kingdom through her devising or advising of the trick of the army of corpses, her ingenuity has dark and sorcerous overtones. Moreover, she has no formal legal or political recognition. The land is unambiguously surrendered to her husband and she gradually disappears from view. By the end of both tales, she is just “Haveloc’s wife.” In the Middle English text, on the other hand, both protagonists’ identities as heirs, as king and queen, as sovereigns are meticulously and equivalently constructed, a feature deliberately highlighted through the use of parallelism and verbal resonances. The relational construction of gender and identity thus works reciprocally. Just as his relationship to Goldeboru establishes Havelok’s identity, her relationship to him establishes her identity in turn, as seen through the presentation of her restitution and ascent to formal authority by Havelok’s side as queen.

Despite the fact that the actual situation is no different—Havelok becomes the king of his wife’s father’s territory and she never holds an independent position of rulership—the different representation of Argentille’s/Goldeboru’s political power is significant. As an unmarried woman, Goldeboru is imagined to be ruling England, and her future position of queen
is emphasized. As a married woman, she is called queen, receives Godrich as hostage, gives orders for his treatment, receives apologies and professions of loyalty from "alle the Enlishe men" (ll.2794-5), gives instructions to Havelok about when to take oaths of "manrede" from her English subjects, and declares herself revenged on her enemy. Goldeboru is represented as legally, politically and symbolically critical to Havelok’s kingship. In addition, she appears to hold the position ‘rightful heir’ and ‘queen’ simultaneously in her own right and in relation to Havelok, whose actions and body are functional in re-producing her legal identity as rightful heir and producing her public political identity as queen. A further level of Goldeboru’s character and the operation of the relational construction of gender, however, can be seen through close attention to the text’s manuscript context and a consideration of the effects of Havelok’s Christ-like characterization on his faithful wife.

**Wisdom, Piety, Chastity and Suffering: Goldeboru’s Hagiographic Life**

*Havelok’s* bordering on hagiography in its presentation of the hero has been well noted. For example, Dieter Mehl, among others, notes that the title of *Havelok* in the manuscript is *Vita*, a term rarely used for romances, but common for saints’ lives, and that “[t]he poem certainly resembles the *vitae* of some Saints in that it presents models of human behaviour and provides instruction as well as entertainment, in a more specific sense than can be said of shorter romances.” Moreover, the hagiographic connotations of *Havelok* in light of its manuscript context, specifically the *Early South English Legendary*, have been admirably outlined by Kimberly K. Bell and Julie Nelson Couch in their recent complementary *Parergon* articles. Both demonstrate in different ways and to different ends how a consideration of the manuscript context of *Havelok* brings out new layers of meaning within the text. Bell, focusing on the comparison of Havelok to the royal *vitae* of the *ESEL*, observes,

> Within the context of the Laud manuscript, the multivalent Christological signs inscribed on Havelok’s body and the effect of his body on the characters who view it attest to “God’s active involvement in the affairs of men” just as the miracles associated with the saint-kings’ bodies manifest God’s will on earth. When considered with the saints, Havelok is another figure to be admired and emulated, and he is promoted to the status of a Christ-like saint-king.

Likewise, Couch, focusing on the narrator’s exhortation of affective piety from the poem’s audience, finds that

---


The one infallible authority in the Laud manuscript is spiritual, and it is through the textual practices of affective prayer and visualization that the authority of God is both invoked and validated. Secular power alone is not sufficient, even to secure rightful secular power. Havelok’s rightful, earthly authority is validated not only by the overt association of Havelok with Christ and saintliness, but also, importantly, by the affective, reverential relationship of the narrator and audience to Havelok.

While both scholars build upon the long-established association between Havelok, Christ and hagiographic associations, Goldeboru does not figure in their discussions. Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate, the comparison is enlightening and productive for her character as well. Goldeboru’s wisdom and virtue, while significant in their own right, also interact with the poet’s emphasis on Goldeboru’s will, persecution, threats of physical violence and sexual debasement and seemingly miraculous restoration and redemption through Havelok’s simultaneously royal and Christ-like body. The combination works to produce saint-like associations for Goldeboru. She appears analogous to the hagiographic virgin martyr, who makes a vow of chastity in order to be a bride of Christ, is persecuted by secular patriarchal authority trying to force her into a marriage/sexual contact that would break her vow, suffers, and is redeemed by divine power.

Virgin martyr legends are typically repetitive and predictable in their structures and motifs. Winstead gives a summary description:

The standard plot of virgin martyr legends is fairly straightforward: a beautiful noblewoman defies her family by refusing to marry, declaring that she is the bride of Christ. In consequence, she is dragged before a pagan tribunal, where she is tortured and killed for her faith. Frequently her father, her disgruntled suitor, or both preside over her persecution.

As in the story of Rimenhild, structural parallels between the typical virgin martyr story can certainly be drawn: A beautiful noblewoman defies her guardian by refusing to marry the man he has chosen, swearing she will not marry anyone but Christ/a king or king’s son. Consequently she is threatened with torture and death, and thus forced into marriage. Nevertheless, her body and nobility are protected by and redeemed by God’s design and Christ/her Christ-like husband’s noble nature; her oath of upright sexual conduct is upheld. However, the story of Goldeboru is less obviously reminiscent of virgin martyr tales. I will, as

---

288 For the saint-like romance heroines in medieval English romance, see Winstead, “Pious Laywomen,” Hopkins, “Female Saints and Romance Heroines.”
289 On the virgin martyr legends in Medieval England, see Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs.*
290 Winstead, “Pious Laywomen,” 139.
Bell and Couch have done for the character of Havelok, turn additionally to specific examples in the MS Laud 108 *South English Legendary* for comparison.\textsuperscript{291} Even if a direct textual connection with the specific legends in the *ESEL* is not conclusive, three of the *ESEL* virgin martyr saints—Agnes, Cecilia and Katherine—were widely venerated in the period;\textsuperscript{292} hence, it is not only possible but highly likely that the structural and thematic parallels between Goldeboru’s story and the popular virgin martyr stories would have been perceptible to author and audience.

We have already seen that Goldeboru is beautiful, wise, chaste, and skilled in all worthy things, and that she has developed a noble reputation on account of her virtues. These traits link her not only to other romance heroines, but also to the virgin martyrs of this period and specifically those of the *ESEL*.\textsuperscript{293} St. Faith is “fair and noble” (l.45). St. Ursula, a Breton king’s daughter, is “of noble fame,” “swiþe hene and quoynte/ So fair womman Men nusten non: no so guod in euerech pointe./ Of hir fair-hede and of hire guodnesse: men tokden in eche side, Đat þe word cam into Enguelond” (l.4–8). St. Katherine, likewise, is “of noble kunne” (l.1) and her persecuting emperor finds her “fair and hende” (l.155). St. Lucy is called by her evil judge “a swuch fair wumman” (l.104) when he condemns her to a brothel. St. Agnes is the fairest creature in Rome; a constable’s son falls in love with her, suffers and says he will kill himself if he cannot have her (ll. 8–16). The duke of Sicily desires St. Agatha because she is so beautiful (ll. 3–4). St. Cecilia is of noble kin (l.1).

Like the virgin martyrs of the *ESEL*, there is significant emphasis on Goldeboru’s will in the face of her persecution and forced marriage. Where the *ESEL* often portrays the young women choosing Christ in their youth as their bridegroom, and dramatizes the contravention or attempted contravention of their will, *Havelok* places significant emphasis on the importance of Goldeboru’s will in the matter of her marriage. As seen briefly earlier, her father includes in the oath sworn by Godrich the specification that she be granted the right to choose her husband when she comes of marriageable age at twelve. This requirement coexists with his direction that Godrich give her the strongest and best husband: “Wom-so hire to gode þoucte” (l.187) appears to be the same as “Þe heste ma þat micthe liue,/ Þe beste, fayreste, þe strangest ok” (ll.199–200). Moreover, the narrative emphasizes the boldness, or assuredness of Goldeboru’s speech,

\textsuperscript{291} All citations are from Horstmann, *Early South English Legendary*. All citations refer to line numbers within the individual saint’s life.
\textsuperscript{292} Winstead, “Pious Laywomen,” 139
\textsuperscript{293} Winstead remarks that the beautiful virgin topos overrides female martyr narratives in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, so that even married women martyred in old age are presented as youthful and nubile (*Virgin Martyrs*, 9–10).
her understanding of courtesy and her experience of love. Indeed, she is expected not only to choose whomever seems good to her but to love him (ll.193–96).

Given the later emphasis on her wisdom, it not surprising that there is a conflation between whom she would choose and who would be the best, fairest and strongest. The virgin martyr saints, of course, also choose the best, fairest and strongest bridegroom in the universe. Goldeboru’s situation shows a reverse parallelism with virgin martyr hagiography: in the virgin martyr stories, the saints’ choice of heavenly bridegroom opposes the secular patriarchal authority of a fallen, disordered world; in Havelok, Goldeboru’s choice of the best man is supported by the secular patriarchal authority of an idealized, ordered world. In each, the narrative importance of the woman’s choice is emphasized and its contravention, or attempted contravention, is dramatized.

Goldeboru also resembles the virgin martyrs of the ESEL in the manner and details of her persecution and suffering. Firstly, she is persecuted by the highest secular authority—invariably male—in her region. Goldeboru’s beauty, chastity and virtue call Godrich’s attention to her and simultaneously threaten him; the virgin martyr’s beauty, physical devotion to being Christ’s virgin bride, and steadfastness in Christianity (refusing to worship pagan gods) draw the attention of and are threatening to their spurned suitors/judges, who are often one and the same. Godrich’s spiteful isolation and imprisonment of Goldeboru at Dover and his deprivation of her food and appropriate clothing is strikingly reminiscent of the treatment of the imprisoned and deprived virgins, particularly St. Katherine in the ESEL. Godrich not only claims it is prompted by her pride—a favourite complaint of the virgin persecutors—but Goldeboru, who is in a castle at Dover, is surprisingly depicted as lying in prison:

And therhinne dede hire fede
Pourlike in feble wede.
The castel dede he yemen so
That non ne micte comen hire to
Of hire frend, with to speken,
That hevere micte hire bale wreken.
Of Goldeboru shul we now laten,
That nouth ne blinneth forto graten
Ther sho liggeth in prisoun (ll.326–334).

In the ESEL St. Katherine is stripped, whipped, imprisoned, isolated, and deprived of food and water (ll.167–71). She is explicitly thrown in a “depe prisoun” (l.170), where she lies for twelve days and twelve nights (l.173, 97). Like St. Katherine, whom the emperor calls a “fol wenche” (l.175) and “fol womman” (l.130), Godrich calls Goldeboru “a fol, a therne” (l.302). In addition,
citing the example of Lazarus, the narrator explicitly invokes Jesus to free her and avenge her mistreatment:

Jhesu Crist, þat Lazarun  
To live broucte fro dede-bondes,  
He lese hire wit Hise hondes,  
And leue sho mote him yse  
Heye hangen on galwe-tre  
Þat hire haued in sorwe brouth,  
So as sho ne misdede nouth (ll.331–37).

This may recall the frequent instances of Christ or his angel’s visits to bring succour to the imprisoned devotees. Christ himself visits St. Katherine at the moment of her death, beckoning her to come to heaven (ll. 287–91). Christ’s apostle appears to St. Agatha and treats her wounds (69–78). Like Goldeboru, St. Agatha “In stronge prisone heo was i-do: þar-inne longe heo lay” (l.47).

Just as the virgins in general and St. Katherine in particular are tempted by their persecutors with promises of marriage, high status and earthly pleasures, Godrich appears to tempt Goldeboru, who is described as “fayr and hende” (l.1110) like St. Katherine (l.155). He says he will give to her the fairest man alive (ll.1115–16). Goldeboru immediately understands that Godrich’s offer is a trick and, just as the virgins refuse their marriage offers in terms reminiscent of the temptation, she swears her oath in direct opposition to Godrich’s phrasing:

She answerede and sayde anan,  
“Bi [Iesu] Crist and Seint Iohan,  
Þat hire sholde noman wedde  
Ne noman bringen hire to bedde  
But he were king or kings eyr,  
Were he neuere man so fayr (ll.1112–17).

This vow, which has no equivalent in either Anglo-Norman text, shows Goldeboru’s wisdom and her acute understanding of her social and legal position. Not only would she be shamed by a low marriage from a social and cultural perspective that values the preservation of class and nobility through equality of marriage partners, but she would be disinherited as well. Where the virgins cite their previous obligations to their higher bridegroom as a reason for their refusal, Goldeboru’s oath-swearing is meant to reflect a previously contracted binding obligation to the ideals of her station and an appropriately highly ranked bridegroom.

294 Phillips, Medieval Maidens, 156–58.
Her oath, on the one hand, is functionally powerless in the face of a man like Godrich, who breaks oaths sworn on the liturgical gear; at the same time, its importance as an act of defiance and assertion of her will can be seen in Godrich’s angry, threatened and threatening response. Godrich, like the blustering secular authorities of hagiography, is “swiþe wroth.”

He continues to threaten her with punishment for her defiance and for wanting to be “queen and lady.” The emphasis on her bodily punishment, wedding and bedding with the “cokes knave” (l.1129), draws attention to the physicality of her nobility and status, even as it parallels the obsession with physicality and sexuality in the torments of the virgins. Furthermore, despite the appearance of powerlessness, Goldeboru’s oath is, like the virgin martyrs’, ultimately vindicated. She neither marries nor brings to her bed any man but a king’s heir. Her steadfastness and conviction in the protection of her body from what is practically physical contamination through sexual contact with a lowly man recalls the misogynous martyr saints, who defiantly defend their virginity and choice to be brides of Christ rather than be polluted by sexual contact, oftentimes with a lowly (in the spiritual sense) pagan.

Furthermore, the specific physical punishments with which Godrich threatens her immediately before the wedding are reminiscent of the virgin martyr’s physical torments, particularly the final threat of burning (ll.1163)—not applied to Havelok—which is often applied to virgin martyrs in the ESEL, eg. St. Agatha (l.88), St. Lucy (l.141), St. Agnes (ll.109–110). Knowing she cannot withstand the punishments, Goldeboru longs to die: “Goldeboru gret and yaf hire ille; /She wolde ben ded bi hire wille” (ll.1130–31). Nevertheless, she resigns herself to her fate:

Sho was adrad for he so þrette,
And durste nouth þe spusing lette,
But þey hire likede swiþe ille,
Pouthe it was Godes wille—
God þat makes to growen þe korn,
Formede hire wimman to be born (ll.1164–69).

The attribution of her situation to God’s will further links her to the world of hagiography, where worldly suffering must be endured as part of divine design in order for subsequent triumph and salvation. Indeed, the emphasis on her emotional suffering is unique to the Middle English version. Goldboru’s piety and resignation to God’s will in the face of adversity links her to the virgin martyrs, whose suffering and trust in God ensure their salvation.

295 Eg. The emperor in St. Katherine’s tale is “so wroth” (l.221).
296 Winstead, Virgin Martyrs, 108.
At the same time, it must be noted that Goldeboru’s interpretation of her situation as part of God’s will is entirely incorrect and produces an interesting moment of resistance to medieval patriarchy. The naturalization of women’s fate, to be threatened, oppressed, and objectified is represented as completely contrary to the way things are supposed to be. This is true for her specific case, in that the forced and disparaged marriage directly contradicts her father’s plans for her. It is also true for generalized circumstances, as seen through the idealized reign of her father: he not only defended the fatherless, but maidens and widows, specifically their sexual virtue (ll.75–86). Unlike the growth of corn, there is nothing ‘natural’ about Goldeboru’s situation; it is represented as ‘unnatural’ in that it is the result of treachery and deceit. Moreover, Havelok, a man, is similarly threatened by the same lord and his abuse of power. Being a woman has nothing to do with his mistreatment, either at the hands of his old enemy Godard, or at the hands of his new enemy Godrich. Thus, the poet seems to use Goldeboru’s thoughts to interrogate the functioning of sex difference and gender in patriarchal society, and it is through Goldeboru’s crisis that gender comes to the fore in the power-dynamics of this romance. We can see this as a powerful moment of resistance to medieval misogynistic discourses that value the controlling and governing of women for their own good.

What is important in this moment is not Goldeboru’s correct understanding of God’s will, so much as her faith-governed action of sublimating her own will to what she perceives to be God’s will, and consequently of accepting Havelok as her husband. Romance heroines devoted to their superior bridegrooms and higher ideals often take drastic action to defend their bodies. Rimenhild’s attempted suicide in *King Horn* and Josiane’s killing of Earl Miles in *Bevis of Hampton* are but two examples. The narrator’s inclusion of a moment of Goldeboru’s interiority, revealing her motive to be driven by piety, recuperates Goldeboru’s actions in the face of her oath, which by all outward appearances she has broken. Again, the narrative uses the motifs and themes of hagiography, but in their inverse. Unlike the martyrs who uphold their oaths and stand fast in the face of all punishments and threats through their trust in Christ, Goldeboru gives in to Godrich’s threats through her trust in God and consequently appears to break her oath. Her faith, however, still protects her because, like the oaths and promises of the virgins, her oath is vindicated by God’s divine will made manifest through an angel.

Goldeboru’s angel visit is perhaps the most obvious link she has to the world of virgin martyr hagiography, but has not so far drawn critical attention. It is extremely unusual: angel appearances in the Middle English romances are rare, and usually occur in romances that have been observed to blur the boundaries between hagiography and romance much more overtly.
than does *Havelok*. Using Gerald Bordman’s *Motif-Index of English Metrical Romances*, I counted only eighteen different romances out of a total of eighty-two romances surveyed by Bordman that have angel appearances, approximately 21.9%. Of those, nine have more than one angel appearance (11%); in total, there are only thirty-six appearances of angels in the corpus of eighty-two texts.\(^2\) The great majority of these appearances are to men, chiefly to the romance hero. Goldeboru’s angel is the only one that appears to a woman to inform her of her husband’s nobility and of God’s plan for their future. In the *ESEL*, on the other hand, the majority of virgin martyr tales include at least one angel appearance to the saint in which the angel tells her not to be afraid, that God will protect her, and informs her of her future as a martyr and assured place in heaven. For example, in the legend of St. Ursula and her 11,000 virgins, there are two angel appearances, both of which console the distraught, persecuted saint and impart knowledge of the future, causing her joy. First an angel appears to her to give her a strategy to delay her unwanted marriage for three years: find ten virgins, and have them find a thousand virgins each. Then, “‘aftur þe þridde þere/ I-spoused to beon in godes lawe—: And ne haue þerof no fere’” (ll.41–2). Ursula is elated at the angel’s news (l.43) and accepts the marriage proposal. Her betrothed converts on account of love for her. Once the company is assembled, they depart on a ship and when they arrive in the city of Cologne, “To Damoysele ourse, þe kynges dou3hter: an Aungel cam þere” (l.75). The angel tells her that the whole company will be martyred in Cologne, and “Glad was þat Mayde for þis word!” (l.79).

A similar pattern occurs with St. Katherine. The night before she is to meet the fifty philosophers, an angel shows up and tells Katherine not to be afraid, and again imparts knowledge of the future—that she will lead the philosophers to Christendom and herself find martyrdom. Again, Katherine has great joy (ll.83–6, 94): “An Aungel to þis maide cam: and bad hire of noþing drede./ And seide heo scholden þoru hire reson: a-fonge martyrdom./ Do þat Maide i-herde þis: gret Ioie to hire heo nam.” St. Lucy is also visited by angels (ll.40–8), this time in her sleep. They warn her about the future, that she should stay a maiden, and that she

will join them in heavenly bliss. Angels also visit and physically aid imprisoned and tortured saints Agnes (l.69–72) and Agatha (ll.73–76).

In hagiography, the angel visit is necessarily a prelude to the moment of the saint’s vindication and triumph over her adversity, culminating in her death and assumption into heaven. Goldeboru’s angel visit shows the same pattern. After an extraordinarily warm welcome and impromptu marriage feast in Grimsby, the couple goes to bed for the first time. Havelok is joyful, having enjoyed the feast and the drink, but Goldeboru is sorrowful that she has been married below her rank. In her acute moment of crisis, her physical shaming through her first and fateful lying in bed with her lowly husband, her sexual debasement and torment are averted through a manifestation of divine will.

Immediately, in a moment reminiscent of hagiography, or even of the annunciation, Goldeboru finally sees the shining cross-mark on Havelok’s shoulder and an angel voice confirms her interpretation. Like the virgin saints, the angel speaks to Goldeboru to bring her comfort, news of the future and confirm God’s will, and she is immediately joyful.

Of an angel she herde a uoyz:
“Goldeborw, lat þi sorwe be!
For Haueol, þat haueþ spuset þe,
Hi [is] kings sone and kings eyr—
Þat bikenneth þat croiz so fayr.
Jt bikenneth more—þat he shal
Denemark hauen and Englond al.
He shal ben king strong and stark
Of Englond and Denemark—
Þat shal þu wit þin eyne sen,
And þo[u] shalt quen and leuedi ben.”
Thanne she havede herd the stevene
Of the angel uth of hevene,
She was so sle sithes blithe
That she ne mithe hire joie mythe,
But Havelok some anon she kiste (ll.1274-1288).

The sequence plays out quite differently in both Anglo-Norman versions, in which there is no angel, and Argentille has a dream that is far less empowering for her than either the Middle English angel’s prophecy or Havelok’s dream. In Havelok, the angel’s prophecy includes Goldeboru both as witness and participant: she will see him come to the thrones of England and Denmark and she herself has a divine destiny as “lady and queen,” just as her father planned and Godrich feared. When she joyfully kisses Havelok to awaken him, he narrates his own dream, which is essentially a visual representation of the divine prophecy given to Goldeboru. Havelok’s dream includes his taking England in his hand and handing it to her, a literal visualization of Godrich’s fear that she will hold all England in her hand.

In the Anglo-Norman versions, Argentille barely takes part in her own dream, and certainly not in any prophetic way. She merely is present beside Haveloc and threatened, like he is, by wild beasts. She is at a loss to explain the dream and when she wakes, she is frightened by the light emitted from Haveloc’s mouth, being unable to read the signs correctly or independently. Argentille erroneously interprets that he is on fire and wakes her husband in misguided fear, in direct contrast to Goldeboru, who wakes him with a kiss of joy. In the Anglo-Norman texts, Haveloc’s completely incorrect interpretation of the dream functions more to reveal how ignorant he is than to highlight Argentille’s special visionary abilities. Argentille has the presence of mind to doubt his lame interpretation in the Lai, but in doing so, she goes against her husband’s judgment. Moreover, she must be taken by her steward to a hermit, who can give her the correct interpretation. She is represented neither as powerful nor insightful, but at the mercy of her fear and Haveloc’s and the hermit’s interpretative abilities. In suggesting that they go to Grimsby after her dream, Argentille of the Estoire is attempting to minimize her shame, and Argentille of the Lai is merely following the hermit’s instructions, rather than reasoning the solution herself.

The Middle English version, on the other hand, emphasizes Goldeboru’s wisdom, legitimized by her virtue and a manifestation of divine will. Not only does she read the situation more or less correctly before the angel confirms it, but when Havelok awakes, he is stumped by the meaning of his dream and asks Goldeboru what she thinks. She uses her new knowledge to interpret the dream correctly for him, and then she provides lengthy, effective and wise advice.
for their future actions, essentially laying the plans for the manifestation of the dream/prophecy in reality:

“But do nou als I wile rathe:
Nim in wit li[þ] to Denemark baþe,
And do þou nouth on frest þis fare—
Lith and selthe felawes are—
For schal Ich neuere bliþe be
Til I with eyen Denemark se,
For Ich woth þat al þe lond
Shalt þou hauen in þin hon[d].
Prey Grimes sones alle þre
Þat he wenden forth with þe;
J wot he wilcn þe nouth werne—
With þe wende shulen he yerne,
For he louen þe hertelike.
Þou might tel he aren quike,
Hwore-so he o worde aren;
Þere ship þou do hem swiþe yaren,
And loke þat þou dwelle nouth—
Dwelling haueth ofte scaþe wrouth!” (ll.1336–1353).

Havelok’s response is to follow her advice completely, beginning with asking his foster-brothers to join them. Argentille, in neither text, offers such advice. In addition, Goldeboru’s wise advice to her husband in the wake of an angel visit is strongly reminiscent of the married virgin martyrs St. Ursula and St. Cecilia, both of whom advise their unwanted husbands to convert to Christianity and remain celibate. As a result of heeding them, their husbands share their martyrdom and triumph. In the legend of Cecilia, there is an explicit connection between her husband Valerian’s prayer for success in converting his brother and his following of his wife’s advice. He does what she “red” and then the angel validates it, saying that because he did what she advised so readily, then Christ will grant soon what he seeks: “And for þou dest, Valerian, Cecilie red so sone,/ What þou be-sekest of my lord, he wille þe graunte sone” (ll.79–80).

Where the virgin saints of the ESEL win the crown of martyrdom as Christ’s bride by patiently but defiantly enduring their fates, Goldeboru similarly wins the redemption of her shame, the restitution of her patrimony and earthly joy as Havelok’s wife and queen through her patience. Just as the virgin martyrs suffer on account of their will to marry no one but Christ, Goldeboru suffers over her will to marry no one but a king or king’s son. Godrich’s physical threats recall virgin martyr narratives and God consistently protects her will: Goldeboru’s oath is never broken. She suffers emotional torment, but is shielded from real harm because she conforms to God’s will, or what she perceives to be God’s will. She is wrong about the reasons,
but *right* about the action. By patiently enduring her fate, she is divinely revealed to be untainted, and is eventually restored to her rightful place by God’s agent, Havelok.

Finally, Havelok’s own Christ-like identity further anchors the structural parallels between Goldeboru and the virgin martyrs. The construction of Goldeboru’s hagiographic *passio* depends not only on the parallels of torment and divine intervention, but the identity of her eventual bridegroom, to whom she unwittingly swore an unbroken oath. Havelok’s Christ-like body and destiny can be seen to produce Goldeboru’s saint-like body and destiny, especially in light of the reciprocally relational construction of their identities as king and queen of Denmark and England that can be seen in their victory over Godard and Godrich and restitution of social order at the end of the poem.

Argentille, of both the *Estoire* and the *Lai*, does not have secular authority to wield or a saint-like biography to inhabit. She has no political identity; her position as heir is not emphasized, granting her secular authority. Her wisdom and cleverness are not guaranteed and authorized by a *passio* and a relationship with a Christ-like husband. Instead, her husband’s identity, while it cannot exist without her, does not work to produce her as a subject in turn. Instead it erases her.

By contrast, in the Middle English poem, Goldeboru occupies the “ideological heart of the narrative” — indeed, she shares it evenly with Havelok. In sum, there are three compelling and unique aspects to Goldeboru in the Middle English text, all of which are absent from the earlier Anglo-Norman versions, and which support the reading of her as a female subject guaranteed by dominant discourses of sovereignty and hagiographic femininity. Firstly, she is placed on equal and parallel footing with the hero, including being represented as a sovereign ruler in her own right. Her status as rightful heir is emphasized. Moreover, her eventual formal and legal recognition as queen demonstrates her active participation in political authority. Secondly, hagiographic resonances mark the portrayal of her treatment at the hands of her oppressor Godric, her suffering in the face of a forced marriage and the resolution of her ‘lost’ bodily and moral integrity. These elements dialogue with Havelok’s own Christ-like imagery to produce her, like Rimenhild, as a secular variant of the virgin martyr paradigm. Thirdly, the result of these two narrative strategies produces striking results in the construction of her gendered subjectivity as mutually interdependent with Havelok’s, rather than simply constructive of his identity. To this point, female subjects have only been seen in the later, Middle English versions of *Horn* and *Havelok*; the following chapter; however, will reveal that
two aspects of female subjectivity observed so far—a hagiographic subtext and mutual construction of identity—are also operational in an unlikely late Anglo-Norman romance, *Gui de Warewic*, whose “courted non-entit[y]” Felice is not nearly as passive or objectified as romance criticism has usually found her to be. Moreover, the greater number of surviving versions of the romance of Guy in both Anglo-Norman and Middle English, as well as their convoluted translational relationship, offers unique opportunities to chart the change and development of a female subject over time and across languages.

---

Chapter Three: Countess of Warwick: Felice's Penitence, Piety and Praise in *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick*

Introduction: What’s at stake in the story of Felice?

The romances of *Gui de Warewic* and *Guy of Warwick* bring us to the first stereotypical courted romance female figure, adored on a pedestal, the impetus for male chivalric prowess and debilitating love sickness. Felice, daughter of the earl of Warwick, refuses the seneschal’s son Guy until he is the best knight in the world. Proud and stationary in the first half, pious and stationary in the second, Judith Weiss comments that Felice is “far less forthcoming” than the earlier Anglo-Norman romance heroines of *Horn, Boeve, or Ipomedon.* Of Felice’s character in general, Weiss summarizes: “Felice provides Gui with fashionable amatory laments, a spur to his initial adventures and thus his fame, and an heir, but otherwise has no existence or interest.” However justifiable Weiss’ dismissal of Felice as an uninteresting and underdeveloped character may be from a modern point of view, it was clearly not the perception of medieval audiences. The story, despite its “overwhelmingly masculine world,” seems to have owed some of its popularity to the figure of Felice, who, in the non-romance versions, featured prominently and may, as Martha Driver has recently shown, have been taken up as a role-model and exemplar in the fifteenth century by the women of the Beauchamp family connected to the earldom of Warwick. Perhaps owing to her passivity and piety, as well as her role as ancestress, Felice remained a celebrated figure in the world of late medieval England, where attitudes to gender and women’s agency were becoming gradually restrictive and increasingly conservative.

Felice, beloved by Gui/y from a distance, raises questions common to the interpretation of women in courtly romance. As already observed, recent feminist work on courtly love has

---

303 Driver, “Representing Women in *Guy.*”
deconstructed the illusive nature of the power of the “courtly lady,” who, “reputed to have ultimate control over her suitor’s well-being, his life and even his death, actually derives little power, authority or material gain from this glorified position.” For Felice, like other worshipped women who resist their suitors in romance, “passive acquiescence is the preferred behaviour” and her actions and options are completely circumscribed by Gui/y who, demanding her love, resents her until she assents to his will. Indeed, the “standard courtly paradigm” outlined by E. Jane Burns fits Gui/y precisely, containing the “putatively reversed gender hierarchy” of the suppliant love-sick man, the presentation of his beloved’s body as the sole cure, and refined courtship through a combination of martial and rhetorical prowess. Certainly, it is possible to read Felice as a courtly lady with illusory power that masks her position as an object exchanged between men. Judith Weiss holds her up as a premier example of the “courted nonentities” that replace the wooing women of Anglo-Norman romance in the thirteenth century. Does she really have, in Weiss’s words, “no existence or interest” to speak of outside of her role in constructing Gui/y’s identity? Kim M. Phillips, however, acknowledging the feminist critical trend interpreting courtly women as unempowered objects of desire, offers a resistant reading:

Guy of Warwick allows a female character into the active, privileged and powerful position of learnedness…Felice also possesses a degree of power and authority over her aspiring lover, Guy, which is entirely conventional within courtly literature, and also seen in the romances of Ipomedon and the Squire of Low Degree … Guy eventually wins her heart through his prowess, but it is she who has set the terms.

Phillips further suggests a valuable emendation to feminist assessments of women in courtly medieval literature, namely that “through the articulation of the possibility of such power, romances offer a space in which women can be imagined by medieval readers as agents of authority.” Certainly, it must be observed that Felice by the end of the romance does actually occupy a position of relative power as Countess of Warwick after Gui/y’s departure and her father’s death. In most of the versions, she is granted significant praise for her pious works at home, which are hardly small achievements, namely building or restoring churches and

310 Phillips, Medieval Maidens, 88.
311 Phillips, Medieval Maidens, 89.
monasteries and bridges, as well as feeding the poor and clothing prisoners. Indeed, her social, political and economic position appears to exceed any that we see the heroines of the Horn and Havelok romances actually execute. At the same time, such a position is produced by constraints on Felice’s agency and autonomy: it is Gui/y’s absence that enables her position, and his choices that direct the course of her life from his departure onwards, including prompting her own life-long piety. The romance does not refrain from telling us that she performs such beneficences so that God will keep Gui/y safe and so that she can fulfill her desire of seeing him one more time. Her active subjectivity is rooted in her performance of wifely duty, with all of her actions centered on her husband. What is to be made of her apparently contradictory positions? Moreover, are there other pressures giving rise to her unprecedented formal power in her earldom and her considerable reputation, beyond Gui/y’s absence and her performance of wifely duty?

In her list of things that Felice gives Gui, Judith Weiss fails to include the fact that Felice is also the putative source of his sin and need for redemption: Guy tells Felice specifically that he committed great sins for her, “Pur vus ai fait maint grant pecché” (l.7674). Gui/y is not a typical romance: its strong hagiographical resonances must be taken into account in the analysis of Felice. A consideration of the romance’s broader project of interrogating chivalry and its nature as a hagiographically-influenced romance produces compelling possibilities for reading Felice’s subject-formation and its broader implications for female subjectivity in romance. Finally, of course, there is the question of how the different versions of the romance construct the character of Felice and present her subjectivity. Certainly, a fair amount of research has been done on how depictions of Guy change over the different Middle English versions of Guy. As Guy is increasingly idealized, what happens to Felice? The small amount of research that has addressed this question has not taken into account the importance of the specificities of manuscript tradition of Gui and its complex relationship to the Middle English versions. As a result, the investigations are methodologically flawed and the usefulness of their observations is

312 For detailed analyses of this, see below.
313 For detailed analyses of this, see below.
limited. Moreover, a consideration of Felice across the different Anglo-Norman and Middle English romance versions of Guy of Warwick has yet to be undertaken.

Texts, Manuscripts and Comparative Methodology

Engineered to be a bestseller romance with a little bit of everything, the Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic*, composed anonymously in the Warwickshire area in the early thirteenth century, was widely popular; a remarkable number of extant manuscripts testify to at least two versions in verse; it was then translated into Middle English at least five times, as well as adapted into an Anglo-French prose romance in the fifteenth century. The story’s popularity was not limited to romance: a variety of versions of the Guy legend exist from the medieval period and onward, from numerous Latin chronicles and didactic texts in the fourteenth century, to Lydgate’s *Guy of Warwick*, the Rous Rolls and the Beauchamp Pageants in the fifteenth century, and various printed editions and chapbooks of the early modern period.

*Gui de Warewic* and its Middle English descendents present new challenges for this comparative study of female subjectivity in romance. As will be seen, the specificities of the versions and manuscripts of *Gui* and the particular closeness of the Anglo-Norman and Middle English versions, demand a different analytical approach than that taken in the earlier chapters. In those, I compared the Middle English stories of *King Horn* and *Havelok* to their Anglo-Norman predecessors or analogues in order to examine the shape of the heroines’ subjectivity in the respective poems. Because the Middle English *King Horn*, *Horn Childe* and *Havelok the Dane* have no conclusive genetic relationship to their Anglo-Norman analogues, they cannot be

---

316 See below.
317 The mass appeal of *Gui de Warewic* on account of its borrowing and redeployment of common romance motifs and themes has been well noted. For a recent reassessment of the nature and implications of *Gui* and its Middle English descendents as ‘popular,’ see Rosalind Field, “From *Gui* to *Guy*: The Fashioning of a Popular Romance,” in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, eds. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 44–60.
318 Judith Weiss gives a date of sometime before 1210, possibly before 1204 (Weiss, Boeve and *Gui*, 12–14). See also, Ewert, *Gui*, xv–xix.
319 Ewert divides the fifteen manuscripts and fragments known to him at the time into two different redactions, which he labels α and β in his stemma (xvi).
320 Updating Julius Zupitza’s identification of four redactions, Alison Wiggins finds there to be five redactions and one unidentified redaction. That is to say, the Anglo-Norman text was translated at least five times into Middle English, and while the initial translated text is considered to be lost, one or more manuscript witnesses testifies to its existence (Wiggins, “Manuscripts and Texts of *Guy*,” 61–80). See Julius Zupitza, *The Romance of Guy of Warwick: The Second or 15th-century Version, edited from the paper ms. Ff. 2.38. in the University Library, Cambridge*, Early English Text Society e.s. 25, 26 (London: Trübner, 1875–6; reprint Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), v–xv.
conceptualized as translations, and so the comparative methodology was reasonably uncomplicated because these were clearly independent versions of the same story. The Middle English romances of *Guy of Warwick*, by contrast, are certainly translated from Anglo-Norman exemplars, the text of *Gui* being remarkably stable as it undergoes linguistic transformation. The exceptionally close relationship between Guy of Warwick and its Anglo-Norman sources—it is in fact one of the very closest translations of a Middle English romance—complicates my methodology considerably because the construction of gender and subjectivity in the Middle English texts of *Guy* depends directly upon the constructions in the Anglo-Norman texts. Further complicating this situation and considerably exacerbating the difficulty of the comparative process is the complicated and diverse manuscript tradition of *Gui*.

Ivana Djordjević has recently resurrected Alfred Ewert and Maldwyn Mills’ observations about the relationship of the Middle English *Guy* manuscripts to their Anglo-Norman predecessors. She explains, following Ewert and Mills, the forgotten fact that there is not one but two versions of the Anglo-Norman romance. There are a total of six fragments and ten extant manuscripts of *Gui*. Fifteen of these were known to the text’s only editor, Alfred Ewert, whose 1934 edition of the text remains the standard and sole version that has received extensive scholarly treatment. Ewert discovered that the manuscripts showed two separate versions of the romance, an earlier redaction α, and a later, re-worked one β. He chose to print only the earlier, taken primarily from the E manuscript [London, British Library, Additional MS 38662], dated to the second quarter of the thirteenth century, but with variants from two other α redaction manuscripts, F [Cologny-Geneva, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana 168, formerly Phillips MS 8345] and M [Cologny-Geneva, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, MS 67], as well

---

323 While the changes made to the texts do reveal changes in taste, interest and priorities, as Rosalind Field succinctly observes, “it must be stressed that they are slight in comparison with the thousands of lines that are virtually unchanged” (“From *Gui* to *Guy*,” 57).


325 See For a recent re-examination of the sixteen extant manuscripts and fragments of the Anglo-Norman romance, see Marianne Ailes, “*Gui de Warewic* in its Manuscript Context,” in *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, eds. Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 12–26: 15. Ewert was not aware of a single text manuscript from the fourteenth century now known as “B,” found in the Beinecke library at Yale.

326 As Ivana Djordjević comments, “If the Middle English *Guy* is often reductively identified with a single manuscript, the Anglo-Norman *Gui* is even more reductively identified with Alfred Ewert’s edition, an edition not ideally suited to the study of textual relations between the Anglo-Norman and Middle English versions” (“Guy as a Translation,” 29).

as C [Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 50] as a representative of the later β version. Studies of the “Anglo-Norman Gui de Warewic” are, more accurately, studies of Gui de Warewic, the α version, as represented by the E manuscript, edited and amended by Alfred Ewert. Thus, taking the Anglo-Norman Gui into account can only solve some problems of identification and interpretation of changes to the Middle English versions of Guy, of which there are five identifiable redactions. These redactions are:

Redaction 1/A, couplets:
2. Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 107/176, c.1470, single text, ll. 1–7444 [Caius]
3. London, British Library, Sloane MS 1044 (item 248) fourteenth-century, single-folio fragment, ll.1–216 (equivalent to Caius ll.7315-98) [Sloane]

Redaction 2/ B (Guy) and C (Reinbroun), stanzas:

Redaction 3/D, couplets:
1. Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales MS 572 and London, British Library, Additional MS 14408, early fourteenth century, eight vellum bifolia used for bookbinding [NLW/BL]

Redaction 4/ E, couplets:
1. Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38 (formerly More MS 690), late fifteenth century/early sixteenth century, ll.1–11,976 [CUL]
2. Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 107/176, c.1470, single text, ll. 7445–8218, 8810–10,231 (ll.8219—8809, 10,232–11,095 are not identified with any redaction) [Caius]

While appreciating the important work done on identifying and mapping the relationship of the redactions, I will be working with manuscript witnesses rather than redactions. I will be

---

328 Ivana Djordjević comments on the problematic nature of Ewert’s textual variants, observing that they are neither as comprehensive nor systematic as he promised in his headnote, and indeed “often confuse more than they enlighten.” Djordjević, “Guy of Warwick as a Translation,” 29
referring to the texts by the short titles based primarily on the manuscript title, placed in square brackets above.  

Maldwyn Mills’ work on the relationships between Anglo-Norman manuscripts of Gui and Middle English manuscripts of Guy summarizes their complex relationship. Mills writes,

On the whole the earlier M.E. couplet versions are more often to be related to this second redaction than the first, but their detailed affiliation is often complicated by eclectic tendencies in their translators … [T]hose of A [Auchinleck Couplet version, lines 123–7306] and C [Cambridge Caius College MS 107], although close to this redaction for much of their length, draw upon a text of the first version for quite substantial passages.”

Ivana Djordjević tackles the implications of this complex situation in her study of the Middle English versions of Guy of Warwick as translations. She notes that Mills’ work has been “rarely taken into account” and that Ewert’s own observation on the close relationship between the fourteenth-century Middle English versions and a neglected Anglo-Norman manuscript of Gui “has gone largely unnoticed.” This manuscript, Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Aug. 87. 4, known by its manuscript siglum “G” [hereafter G], was identified by Ewert to belong to the β redaction and as such did not form the basis of his edition, nor feature prominently in his notes and variants. Djordjević proceeds to demonstrate in detail how a comparison of the Auchinleck couplet text of Guy to Ewert’s edition of the E manuscript can result in faulty conclusions about the interventions of the Middle English translator. For instance, in her sample passage in which Guy approaches a Saracen emperor (Gui, ll.3879–3928; Auchinleck, ll. 3871–3928), most of the additions, omissions and changes were already present in the G version and so owe nothing to the translation and adaptation process of the Middle English composer. She also provides a cautionary tale about the eight-line misogynist rant by Guy which reached the Auchinleck manuscript version through a version of G, and could

----


333 The manuscript is now available online thanks to the Wolfenbüttel Digital Library: http://diglib.hab.de/mss/87-4-aug-2f/start.htm. I am grateful to Elizabeth Watkins for informing me of this.

334 See Ailes, “Gui in Manuscript Context,” 14–5; Ewert, Gui, xii.

legitimately have been assumed to demonstrate the Middle English author’s misogyny had it not also been present in the C version, which Ewert did include in his notes to the text.

Mills and Djordjević focus primarily on the early Middle English couplet versions’ relationship with the G manuscript. As will become clear over the course of my discussion, lines and passages from the Stanzaic Guy and the fifteenth-century versions of Guy, the Caius

---

337 Indeed, Mills concluded that the stanzaic Auchinleck text derives from a version of the Anglo-Norman α redaction close to the E manuscript that forms the basis of Ewert’s text, or close to the least-reworked of the beta redaction texts, C, which most frequently features in Ewert’s notes. While this may be true in general, I have found an important example that demonstrates a dependence on the G manuscript and refutes one of Mills’ translational process arguments, thereby further complicating the situation. Compare Ewert’s text to the Auchinleck manuscript Stanzaic Guy and a transcription of the corresponding lines in G:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanzaic Guy (st.9)</th>
<th>G, fol. 51va</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felice answerd o'gain: ‘Fader’ quagh hye ‘ichil he sain Wh' words fre &amp; hende, Fader,’ quagh sche ‘ichil ful fayn Tel þe at wordestvain, Bi him þat schop mankenede, Opon sir Gij, hāt gentil kni þ, Ywis, mi loue is alle a lý, In warld where þat he wende; &amp; bot he spouse me, at o word, Y no kepe neuer take lof[r]d, Day wijbothen ende.’</td>
<td>Sire dist ele ieo vus dirri Cum en corage pense lai Ne vus en peist si le vus di Par amour ieo vus empri Sire tant aim ieo de bon coe V'n vosre laueu chiualer Gy de Warewic et si ne lai Iammes autre n'aurai.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mills argues that the sequence of rhyme words used in the Auchinleck text was borrowed whole from Amis and Amiloun II. 121-6. While this may be true, his observation that “the material taken over has compressed what was originally two distinct occasions in E into one (as in AA, with E7464-6 completely squeezed out as a result)” (Mills, "Techniques of Translation," 227) is incorrect. As my transcription of the G manuscript shows, it is likely that an exemplar close to G lay behind these lines, since it is the sole one to agree with the stanzaic Auchinleck text in having Felice respond to her father immediately. Of the Middle English manuscripts, Caius and CUL both have the three-day delay. Of the Anglo-Norman, at least E and C do as well. Mills finds in the stanzaic Auchinleck lines a discontinuity of character that supports his idea that the translational process has “squeezed out” lines from the source: “the heroine now seems to be clearing her throat at somewhat excessive length, giving a (nervous?) hiccup in the middle of doing so, and starting again from the beginning. None of which is really like her at all” (227). His assessment, like his account of the borrowing from Amis and Amiloun, may not be entirely wrong, but its implications have certainly changed. With respect to the fifteenth-century couplet versions, represented by CUL and Caius, Mills does not comment on their relationship to G. Djordjević asserts that “unexpected readings from G crop up in CUL with some regularity,” (Djordjević, “Guy of Warwick as a Translation,” 36) but provides only two small examples (Djordjević, “Guy of Warwick as a Translation,” 35, n. 21; 36, n. 26); she does not advocate for the kind of realignment of textual relationships that she does for the Auchinleck manuscript. In a more recent article on place names in the Anglo-Norman and Middle English versions of Guy, she observes a few new connections between CUL and G that have to do with reduction of Guiy’s fight with Amorant: the excision of “decorative toponyms” (Djordjević, “Saracens and Other Saxons,” 31), the presence of the toponym “Tyre,” lack of details about the location of the combat and the moving of the giant’s birthplace from Ethiopia (in the E text) to Ynde (Djordjević, “Saracens and Other Saxons,” 31-2, 41.) Djordjević also finds that these details are shared by the Caius manuscript, but other than a general acknowledgement of some textual affinities based on small details and place names, Djordjević does not discuss the relationship between CUL and G at any great length, nor describe it as having any larger significance for the Anglo-Norman and Middle English manuscript relationships. All transcriptions from the G manuscript are my own, based upon the digitized manuscript. Wolfenbüttel Digital Library. http://diglib.hab.de/wdb.php?dir=msa/874-874-2f [Accessed March–April 2011]
and CUL versions, can be seen to derive from some version close to G. As Djordjević demonstrates of the Auchinleck Guy, small and slight differences that appear to have been made by the Middle English translators of all of these versions can, in fact, be found to derive from some version of the Anglo-Norman Gui represented in the G manuscript. Additionally, given that there are a total of sixteen manuscripts and fragments, the possibility that differences in the Middle English versions can be accounted for through variants in the Anglo-Norman manuscript tradition looms large. Obviously, an examination of all sixteen manuscripts and fragments, and all five manuscripts and fragments of the Middle English Guy lies beyond the scope of this project. However, a sort of broad-spectrum analysis across the primary, full length manuscript versions known to be related can indicate some sense of the range of variation and put into relief trends in the respective manuscript witnesses. This process allows us to see potential changes and alterations in the later versions more clearly and in context with other patterns and trends within each text, setting the stage for more informed hypotheses with respect to discerning and interpreting genuine adaptations undertaken by the creators of each version. However, a comprehensive and detailed assessment of gender and subjectivity in the earlier version is an essential first step, because later variations, in Anglo-Norman and Middle English, depend to a greater or lesser degree upon it.

This chapter will first provide an analysis of gender and subjectivity in what can be described as the earlier version and main (in the sense that it has become the “Anglo-Norman Gui” for modern scholars) text of Gui, that represented by Alfred Ewert’s edition. This will be followed by an analysis of the change and development of the construction of gender and subjectivity in the Gui/y romance tradition over time through a comparative study of Ewert’s text of Gui, the Anglo-Norman version of Gui most closely related to the Middle English versions—that found in the G manuscript—and the three extant full-length versions of the Middle English Guy, found in the Auchinleck, Caius and Cambridge University Library manuscripts. In the course of this discussion, I hope to demonstrate how Felice’s subjectivity in the earlier of the two Anglo-Norman versions of Gui is crucially affected by the text’s nature as a deliberate criticism of knighthood and its worldly priorities: the hagiographic subtext is not merely a veneer to make Gui more conventionally heroic, but rather attempts to present him as a new kind of hero. Felice, like Gui, has a biography of sin and redemption that is rooted in her position within chivalric and courtly ideology which also presents as a scapegoat for male violence and sin within the precepts of that system, as its putative guardian. The Middle English versions, on the other hand, preserve the position of Guy’s martial deeds as sinful but try to
mitigate the anti-hero aspects of both Guy and Felice in the first half of the romance by extending both protagonists’ worthiness backwards to the very beginning of the romance. This dilutes the power of Guy’s about-face in his conversion, although not denying the need for penance. Felice, in particular, undergoes the most dramatic revision, being exonerated from her early refusal of Guy and at least partly exculpated from her role in causing Guy to sin. Some aspects of this trend can also be seen in the later Anglo-Norman version of *Gui*, which, like the later Middle English versions, has probable connections with the Beauchamp family, who held the earldom of Warwick in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.

**Gender and Subjectivity in Alfred Ewert’s edition of *Gui***

Coming late in the tradition, *Gui* borrows heavily from earlier insular romances, particularly *Horn, Boeve de Haumtone*, the Haveloc story in Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis, Ipomedon, Amis e Amilun* and *Waldef*, as well as romance texts circulating in twelfth-century England, such as Chretien’s *Erec et Enide, Yvain* and Thomas’ *Tristan*, deploying and redeploying familiar motifs in different ways. The poet also draws simultaneously on hagiography and on stories of wife-abandoning knights, St. Alexis, and Guillaume in the *Moniage Guillaume*. *Gui*’s unique combination of hagiography and romance may have contributed to its long-lasting success, but it also results in a rather unusual romance narrative and a rather unusual romance hero whose career differs significantly from that of contemporary heroes. *Gui*’s intertextual relationship with numerous romances allows it to revise and rework scenes, motifs, and themes in ways that reveal intentional and responsive approaches to many aspects of insular romance narratives – including gender and subjectivity – that are additionally coloured by the text’s increased exemplary and didactic nature.

David Klausner has provided the most extensive discussion of *Gui*’s borrowing from the legend of St. Alexis. He observes that “the original purpose of the legend has been almost

---

338 On the possible context of the Caius manuscript as also fifteenth-century Warwickshire and connected to the Beauchamp family, see Wiggins, “A Makeover Story,” 491–3.
340 See below.
341 Judith Weiss observes, “[*Gui*’s insular predecessors] provide him with popular story motifs such as the heroine being the sole heir to her father’s kingdom, rings as signs of fidelity and tokens of recognition, faithful male friendship, and the hero as the sole volunteer to fight enemy champions. But the poet has consciously varied his use of some of these: the heiress is not the feisty wooing woman of *Boeve* or *Horn*; recognition by ring is achieved only after the hero’s death; and though it is important for the conclusion of the romance that he beget an heir, he himself shows not the slightest interest in the fate of his son and the future of his lineage. This is related to the poet’s use of another cluster of stories which depict their protagonists withdrawing from most worldly concerns, leaving their wives, but continuing to fight for good causes: St. Alexis, and Guillaume in the *Moniage Guillaume*. *Gui*’s discovery that, as Helen Cooper puts it, “chivalry is not enough,” is what marks this romance firmly out from its Anglo-Norman predecessors” (*Boeve and Gui*, 14–15).
entirely lost, and a completely new didactic structure has arisen around the figure of Guy.” At the beginning of the romance, Gui occupies the position of chivalric, courtly lover-knight, now common to the francophone romance tradition after several decades of romancing; through the course of his story, the author rewrites the model of the romance hero to one that includes a more overtly Christian and godly destiny. Chivalry, secular glory and worldly success are, as Helen Cooper observes, “not enough.” The overly proud and never-content courtly lady is also rewritten in the person of Felice to become a woman praised for her self-sacrificing, pious and patient support of the hero. Gui’s ostensible agenda of rejecting secular chivalric priorities and replacing them with religious ones crucially affects how gender and subjectivity can be read within the romance. The reworking of both male and female romance subjectivities in the second half of the romance is clearly done through, on the one hand, a rejection of the familiar romance motifs and values that are deployed in the first half of the romance, and on the other, an adoption of hagiographic motifs and concerns.

This observation depends, of course, on whether Gui’s repudiation of his chivalric behaviour is to be taken seriously and his need for penance as acute as he professes, causing at least to some extent the second half to be an indictment of the behaviours in the first. While some critics such as Helen Cooper (writing about the Guy story in general) accept this assessment, there is a considerable resistance to such a reading in current Gui and Guy scholarship, primarily due to the observation of incongruities, contradictions and superficiality of Gui/y’s piety throughout the romance. In this vein, scholars such as Paul Price, William Calin, Neil Cartlidge and Maldwyn Mills have mounted evidence against the reading of Gui’s conversion as sincere and of reading the text as offering up any kind of serious interrogation of chivalry. Neil Cartlidge’s assessment is typical and has been well received: “The romance stresses the incompatibility of married life and adventure not in order to assert either a religious

342 David Klausner, “Didacticism and Drama in Guy of Warwick,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* n.s. 6 (1975), 103–19.
344 “Like so many penitential romances, it is structured as a diptych, and makes the parallelism of the two parts unusually explicit … The romance, in other words, replays the chivalric quest of its first half as penitential pilgrimage in its second half, overwriting secular adventures undertaken for honour and one’s lady with spiritual seeking and with deeds of prowess performed anonymously and for the sake of God (Cooper, *English Romance in Time*, 92).
ideal or a basic hostility towards marriage, but simply to justify the hero’s continued addiction to the courses of individual endeavour.”

In her study of Middle English penitential romances, Andrea Hopkins asks of Guy: “Is it really serious and didactic? Can it really have been composed by a clerical author, whose objectives and motives can be supposed to have been very different from those of most romance authors?”

In answering these questions, Hopkins follows Susan Crane’s observation that “piety enriches and broadens the importance of heroic action, but in so doing it becomes in some ways merely an attribute of secular heroism,”

taking the approach that the “motif of penitence…enables Guy to alter his way of life and behaviour in specific ways without necessitating the rejection of all the values of knighthood.”

Susan Crane, in her detailed discussion of religious romances in her book Insular Romance, concludes that “hagiographic romances” do not actually solve the problem presented in Gui of the incompatibility between worldly and godly priorities, but rather support value systems different from hagiography, consequently still drawing criticism and denouncement from ecclesiastical authorities.

Most recently, Judith Weiss finds that hagiographic, penitent and pilgrim themes are exploited by the author of Gui, but rather than truly alter the trajectory of the romance towards hagiography, they superficially “heighten Gui’s moral standing and … lend the romance some dramatic gestures” at the expense of “textual cohesion” and “narrative plausibility.” In short, she concludes that saintly flavouring creates significant contradictions in the narrative: “it does not bother him [the composer of Gui] that his hero is not especially saintly. The striking gesture is all.”

It is certainly true that in some places the author attempts to strong-arm the narrative into a hagiographic paradigm at the expense of coherence, most memorably in Gui’s epiphany where he claims to have destroyed cities and burned abbeys, acts of destruction he has not actually perpetrated. However, the fact that Gui’s hagiographic biography does not integrate

346 Cartlidge, Medieval Marriage, 104. In the introduction to her translation of Gui, Judith Weiss quotes Cartlidge’s combined summary of Gui and Guy as “apt”: Weiss, Boeve and Gui, 17.
349 Hopkins, Sinful Knights, 78.
352 Weiss, “Pilgrimage and Sainthood in Gui,” 56.
very well into the romance narrative does not mean the authorial effort to critique chivalry and the overly worldly romance hero was not genuine. Modern popular culture provides plenty of examples of texts in which the audience’s enjoyment of the characters, events and imagery far override any of their potential disappointments over lack of narrative coherence. George Lucas’ *Star Wars* is a case in point. There is no reason to expect that medieval audiences were more discriminating in their expectations of textual coherence than modern ones. Taking the text at face value may in fact, get us closer to comprehending its intended place in the late Anglo-Norman romance tradition, and have a better chance of understanding and appreciating what the author was trying to do—even if he failed by leaving plot holes that even the worst of romance-writers could be ashamed of—and what the audience was confronted with and impressed by.

Simon Gaunt describes how intertextual resonances of other genres can be drawn in to contest the values of romance. He finds that the *Queste del Saint Graal* “attempts to reorientate romance away from secular towards spiritual concerns” through the marginalization of Lancelot and triumph of Galahad, and notes that it specifically attempts its contestation of romance through the medium of romance. He comments that, “[t]his may … compromise the force of its attack, but it is striking that the horizon of expectations of another vernacular genre—hagiography—is called into play to enhance the critique of romance.” It is certainly possible that a similar process is being undertaken by the author of Gui in his use of the legend of St. Alexis: whether or not *Gui* succeeds in re-orienting the values of romance, what is clear is that borrowing from hagiography, interrogating chivalry and privileging God are entwined concerns of the author of *Gui*. He uses the hagiographic resonances to develop and support his didactic purposes in his creation of a penitent, pilgrim knight. This hero-construction differs significantly from the earlier Anglo-Norman (and eventually early Middle English) romance heroes, like Horn or Havelock, who are depicted as Christ-figures, not penitent saints. Moreover, Andrea

---


354 *Star Wars* movies feature as “Number One” on McGarrigle’s list and “Number Four” and “Number One” on Blum’s list.

Hopkins observes that Gui/y differs significantly from other penitent romance heroes in that he removes himself completely from the world, unlike Sir Gowther, Ysumbras or Roberd of Cisyle, who all returned to their pre-penance lives. She comments, “[f]or Guy such a return is not possible, and the end of the romance resembles that of a saint’s life more closely than do the endings of Sir Gowther, Sir Ysumbras, and Roberd of Cisyle.” There is something persistently different about the presentation of Gui/Guy and his relationship to chivalry.

I am not, by any means, suggesting that is grounds for proposing the existence of any kind of ‘hagiographic’ or ‘didactic’ sub-genre for romance. There has been a great deal of debate about the use of hagiography in romance, both Anglo-Norman and Middle English, and whether such overtly didactic romances constitute a separate genre of ‘exemplary’ or ‘hagiographic’ romance, Gui/Guy being noted as a particularly problematic text to place should such a sub-genre be said to exist. It is not my intention to enter into generic hairsplitting. As far as I am concerned, the skepticism with which the separate genre advocacy has been greeted is merited, particularly since setting up a dichotomy between entertainment and didacticism is a false one when it comes to medieval romance in general, and there is little evidence to suggest that hagiography and romance were so divided in the minds of their medieval audiences.

Rather, I am advocating taking seriously the romance’s conceit that Gui’s behaviour before his marriage to Felice is truly sinful, and that, rather than merely adding a veneer of Christianity, the romance attempts to show a genuine corrective to chivalric and courtly priorities by critiquing both the violent and amorous aspects of romance masculinity. Furthermore, I suggest that it is by taking these factors into account the ambiguous position of Felice and the romance’s critique of romance femininity will be most productively investigated.

Gui’s drawing upon hagiography to criticize the chivalric and courtly values of romance can be seen through the narrative’s interrogation and critique of the relational construction of gender in romance. In the first half, the romance and its construction of gender appears similar to other romances; Gui’s masculine subjectivity and identity derive from his relationship with Felice. In the second half, the values and structures which gave rise to Gui’s martial identity are re-examined, rejected and rewritten. Moreover, the tension with hagiography, and its influence on the course ofGui/y’s identity-formation, supplies the conditions for Felice’s own subject-

356 Hopkins, Sinful Knights, 115.
357 For a comprehensive account of this debate, see Hopkins, Sinful Knights, 12–20.
358 Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, ‘Bet...to...rede on holy seyntes lyves...’: Romance and Hagiography Again,” in Readings in Medieval English Romance, edited by Carol M. Meale (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1994), 83–98.
formation: as the cause of his sin, as blameworthy, she is recognized as a subject and as such is granted her own penitential journey and hagiographically-informed identity as a noble and worthy woman at the end of the poem.

Gui becomes a renowned knight for love of Felice in the first half of the romance. She is the direct cause of the establishment of his martial reputation and adult identity as a knight, and then, by marriage, the future earl of Warwick. It is directly through her—through her initial request that he become a knight, then her subsequent deferral of Gui’s love and requests for greater demonstrations of prowess—that his heroic subjectivity is constructed. Felice’s ultimate consent to be Gui’s wife guarantees his heroic identity by marking his superiority over her rejected suitors. Both the Anglo-Norman and Middle English narratives stress at length Felice’s remarkable beauty, her education, and wisdom, but they do so in order to set up the key fact that it is on account of these qualities that many men of rank (dukes, counts, barons, earls, etc.) constantly seek her hand in marriage, all of whom she refuses. Like Rigmel in Roman de Horn, her beauty, education, wisdom and her rank are only important in so far as they make her desirable to other men, whose inability to obtain her consent marks their inferiority to the hero. Her consent to marry Gui/y, therefore, concretizes a hierarchy of masculinity with Gui at the top.

The relational construction of gender, as in the Roman de Horn, appears to work one way, with Gui/y’s superior warrior subjectivity constructed through his relationship with Felice, with little space left for her own subjectivity/identity. In the marriage negotiations, male bonds take priority. Despite the fact that Felice does get the opportunity to tell Gui/y that she will marry him, her consent is not what concretizes their betrothal. Rather, her father Rohault offers Felice to Gui, with no hint to Gui of her choice or consent in the marriage, and when Gui accepts, Felice’s father takes it as an indication that Guy loves him above all other men because he is willing to take his daughter when he already had refused beautiful and higher ranking women. The focus of his joy is on the establishment of their homosocial bond made manifest through Felice’s transacted body. Felice is effectively objectified.

In the first half of the romance, her desire for Gui/y, or rather, lack thereof, never has the formative force for her subjectivity as it does in the ‘wooing women’ narratives. Compared to the Roman de Horn and Boeve, Gui is hardly interested in Felice’s own opinion on the presumptuous vaslet who shows up begging for her love. The Middle English version shows

---

359 See below.
Indeed, her resistance functions more to build Gui’s character and give him an opportunity to express his desires and opinions than it ever does her own. Like Rigmel in *Roman de Horn*, her main value is as a commodity that is desired and exchanged, used or abandoned by men. And yet, it is Felice who is the putative source of Gui’s sin and his need for redemption, placing Felice at the heart of the narrative’s structures of meaning, a position that lays bare the paradoxical position of women in chivalric ideology and its misogynistic potential for scapegoating Felice, and women in general, for male violence and the inadequacies of chivalry.

Rosalind Field stresses how far *Gui* departs from the norms of historical romance produced in England in the second half of the twelfth century. He has an “unremarkable childhood,” with both of his parents surviving. His adult life is unmarked by betrayal by family or friends, and his land and wife are never threatened. Finally, his “exile-and-return” adventure is neither exile nor return (in a dynastic sense). In the world of just earls and noble stewards, with no obvious external or internal strife, *Gui* appears to be a great exception in failing to present a disordered world that must be set to rights. But does it? If we concede to the author of *Gui* his apparent attempt to criticize and re-work masculine romance subjectivity, then we do not have to look very far for a source of disorder. Maldwyn Mills observes that structurally Felice stands in the same place as the German Emperor in *Bevis of Hampton/Boeve* and the Saracens in *Roman de Horn* and *King Horn* because “it is she and no one else who is the direct cause of his exile,” but more than that, Felice is the cause of social disorder. Felice’s position in *Gui* brings to light the problematic paradox inherent in romance’s construction of femininity as both powerless and powerful. As Gayle Rubin and a host of medieval scholars, such as Sarah Kay and Simon Gaunt have observed, as gifts exchanged between men, women can be reduced to symbols of the resulting male relationships. But when the female gaze and female consent and desire are necessary to affirm male prowess and male superiority within those structures of exchange, they are also placed in a position of unusual power within the symbolic

360 See below.
361 “From *Gui* to *Guy*,” 47. Likewise, Judith Weiss observes, Gui “is a hero unlike most of his Anglo-Norman predecessors in that he does not conquer large amounts of land in exile abroad, he does not return to defend and re-conquer his patrimony, and from [line] 7565 onwards, he abjures marriage, love, family and land” (*Boeve* and *Gui*, 15).
362 Mills, “Structure and Meaning,” 63–4. Mills’ observations are made of the Middle English versions, but the observation holds true for the Anglo-Norman ones as well.
363 See above, Introduction, Chapter One.
order. As acting, speaking, thinking symbols, their dissent can constitute a serious threat to the system.

Felice’s refusal of her high-ranking suitors threatens the structures of male exchange, and thereby the construction of male relationships. The future of Earl Rohault’s land is at stake, jeopardized by Felice’s refusal to choose her father’s successor, with whom her father will establish a close bond through the exchanging of Felice. If the exchange of women functions to secure male relationships and concretize male hierarchies, then their continued circulation is necessary for society to function. The misogynous woman, especially the misogynous heiress, then, becomes a powerful threat. In Gui, however, Felice is not only a threat to the future stability of the earldom, but, more importantly to Gui’s biography, she is a threat to men’s souls as a locus of male desire for the worldly pleasures of sexual gratification, wealth and power. The romance presents Gui, having fallen prey to his desire, as subjected to Felice, while Felice is subject to no one (even her father has to beg her to take a husband) and God is ignored entirely. Gui’s romance priorities are misaligned, privileging worldly success over spiritual virtue, lust of a woman over love of God. Key to that misalignment is Felice.

Gui’s sudden and immediate realization of his need for penance (often referred to as his ‘epiphany’ in Gui/y scholarship) is a criticism not only of his own earlier behaviour, but of his knightly colleagues whose secular priorities—love of a woman, personal glory—led them to use their martial prowess for their own ends rather than for God. But Gui’s epiphany can also be seen as a criticism of the women through whom courtly ideology is maintained. Through the bestowal of their favour, women keep the chivalric machine working, acting as constant evaluators of men’s actions and affirming and reaffirming hierarchies of masculinity and power. Felice upholds the chivalric system as much as Guy does, and so equally bears the blame for the sins it provokes. Indeed, Gui’s granting of half penitential credit to Felice suggests that he considers her half responsible for his situation. His promise concords with the overarching interrogation of the chivalric, courtly ethos in the romance, in that women are implicated in

---

Rubin comments sardonically, “[i]t would be in the interests of the smooth and continuous operation of such a system [i.e. the exchange of women] if the woman in question did not have too many ideas of her own about whom she might like to sleep with” (“Traffic in Women,” 182). Gaunt, likewise, observes, “Romance elevates women as signs of value within a masculine exchange economy, but this poses problems for writers of romance…[W]omen are not ordinary signs in that they are producers of signs themselves and decoders of signs both as readers and as characters within texts. If the possession of a woman is a sign of male prestige and status, women should be drawn inexorably towards the right man, the hero. The heroine must read the signs he produces correctly so that she can become one of them. But if women are fickle, voraciously sensual and lacking in judgement, as the misogynistic tradition of the Church fathers suggests, or passive objects of exchange, as in the feudal model of marriage, how can they be relied upon to behave properly?” (Gender and Genre, 113–4).
men’s deeds of glory insofar as they are the ones who putatively demand such deeds. Indeed, *Gui* goes so far as to represent women’s love as the root cause of male violence, rather than as its corollary, when women’s love for a hero is born out of her observation of his martial prowess. In romances such as *Boeve* and *Roman de Horn*, women’s love of a man is caused by the man’s demonstrated value. It is ultimately reactive. Rigmel violates this order by preemptively choosing Horn, but her assessment is based on substantial evidence and is ultimately correct. *Gui* operates within the same ideology, but with the polarities and, consequently, the emphases reversed. Women, helpful to aspiring heroes in inspiring them to glory in a positive view of romance heroism, become detrimental to aspiring heroes in a negative view of romance heroism: the glory to which the women inspire them has been reevaluated as a false glory. Under these circumstances, women’s love can be scapegoated as the cause of male violence and the lynchpin of the corrupt system that turns men away from God.

It must be observed that Felice is, in fact, a very good reader of romance, her decisions obviously drawing on earlier stories: she will be disparaged if she marries below her station (*Haveloc*); if she marries Gui when he is still untried, then she may have married a coward (Horn’s advice to Rigmel in *Roman de Horn*); if she marries him before he is at the height of his reputation, he will lose his reputation and blame her (*Erec et Enide*); if she sends him off to continue performing deeds of prowess at tournaments after they are married, he might forget his promise to return (*Yvain*). By the rules of Anglo-Norman romance, Felice behaves wisely: Gui is unproven, untried and beneath her. If she is overreaching when she asks Gui to be the best knight in the world, then she is still responding to the very real problem of the incompatibility of marriage and a knight’s reputation so adeptly examined by Chrétien’s *Yvain* and *Erec et Enide*. In addition, we can hardly fail to note that she never sought Gui’s love, for which Rigmel, for example, is harshly criticized by her chosen heroes. Moreover, by the tenets of canon law, she is entirely within her rights to continue to say no to Gui and every other suitor who comes calling. She is, in every sense, playing by the rules. So why is she so blamed by the narrative? Why does Gui give her half of his penitential credit, as if to imply that she needs it too? If we move beyond the Gui-centred perspective that she caused him to sin by being too proud and not acquiescing earlier and consider seriously that the narrative is attempting a genuine critique of chivalry, then her fault, her sin, is exactly that: playing by the rules. The

---

365 Andrea Hopkins also observes “the speech with which Felice dispatches Guy abroad for a second time…is almost certainly an allusion to the central problem of *Erec et Enide*” (*Sinful Knights*, 85).
chief flaw Felice has is the same as Guy’s: they are too invested in a chivalric system that causes people to sin, namely, women to be prideful and men to give into lust and desire for secular glory. Both of them are exemplary participants in a flawed system.

In the second half of Gui, we can see the romance interrogating and critiquing the relational construction of gender in romance by realigning the system’s priorities and by drawing upon hagiography. Instead of men receiving their identity from women, whose gaze is so constitutive of their enabled subjectivity, they ought to be receiving it from God himself. As W.R.J. Barron observes of the Middle English romance, Felice is the living symbol of the worldly values he is abandoning: in casting her away, Gui casts away his old identity. Or, in other words, in casting her away, Gui rejects the relational construction of gender and identity in romance and attempts to substitute for it a construction of gender and identity familiar to hagiography, where agency, authority, subjectivity derive from the protagonist’s relationship to God. At the same time, Gui’s reorientation towards hagiography can only exist as a basis for the critique of romance, rather than truly replace it. As Simon Gaunt observed of the Queste del Saint Graal, that romance is the medium through which its critique is formed, which is a necessary component of that critique. In a sense, for hagiography’s triumph to be meaningful, its conquered opponent, romance, must remain visible. Felice is the pivot around which the contest between romance and hagiography revolves and around which Gui’s competing identities are constructed, and so the relational construction of gender continues to operate through the second half of the romance, this time with God included in the hierarchy of male exchange.

Gui’s epiphany and departure can be seen as a transaction between himself and God, once again with Felice as a commodity. The language of his regret, while he does focus on the deaths he has caused, also reveals that his exchange with God has been flawed. God has done him great honour, greater than to any other knight, but he laments that he never did anything for God. Furthermore, he reveals that the real transaction has been between him and God—God gave him the great honour that he achieved abroad, and so to God he must repay his debt. Revealing that he has failed in his exchange with God, he gives Felice to God as part of his penance. His statement, “ore m’en irrai/ E a Deu vus comanderai” (ll.7683–4) [“Now I’m going, and I commend you to God”], may be a poetic way of saying goodbye, but its literal meaning is, in fact, one of handing over, entrusting, commending to God. This is part of his penitential

sacrifice—that he gives to God the creature he loves most, in whom he found “everything he wished,” is a crucial part of his penitential program, and, having given her to God, he takes care never to claim her again. Gui’s return to Warwick at the end of his life is defined by his staying unrecognized during his visit to Felice, refusing any living moment as her husband until his last breath. This not only establishes the strength of his self-control, but belies the symbolic importance of Felice as living, accessible, even close-by, but voluntarily rejected: Felice has to be living in order for his absence to be penitentially meaningful. It is not only through his own labour and suffering, but also at Felice’s expense and through her suffering that Gui purchases his new identity.

Furthermore, it is Felice who is the guarantor of Gui’s new penitent identity. On the one hand, she is the guardian of his renounced social identity that must still be visible for his penitential quest to have meaning: she bears his child for his continuing legacy and performs charitable works at home in Warwick—building churches, abbeys, bridges, feeding and clothing the poor—praying that God will someday let her see him again, living or dead. Her almsgiving to the poor and to pilgrims is explicitly “Que Deus guarist sun seignur Gui” [“so that God might protect her husband Gui”] (l.11390). On the other hand, it is she who presides over and witnesses his saintly death, sending for the bishops and abbots of the kingdom who come to honour his body, and defending and ensuring the burial of his body at the hermitage. Despite his best efforts, Gui can never quite escape into hagiography, and the dialogism of gender-construction in romance cannot be entirely superseded.

Nevertheless, the Anglo-Norman poem is all about correcting the folie of courtly love’s structures, and in the end, perhaps by accident, the invoked hagiographic paradigm does seem to shift the loved/hated-powerless/powerful subjectivity of the courtly lady into one that does allow for legitimated agency, initiative and power, even if it is through her husband. Felice may function, like Rigmel, to secure Guy’s place in male hierarchies, cementing his superiority over all other suitors and his relationship with her own father, but the narrative contests and reconfigures that value system through Guy’s abandonment of his wife and lands in favour of a superior goal of honouring his relationship with God. Perhaps an unintended casualty is the structural importance of women between men, and by extension, the construction of a female subjectivity that supports and reflects male subjectivity unreciprocally: she is, despite appearances, recognized as a subject and as such is granted her own penitential journey.
Felice’s Subjectivity
Felice madeGui become a knight, participating and contributing to his heroic destiny, without his successful martial identity having much of an impact on her own identity. However, by leaving, Gui has a profound impact on Felice’s identity: he makes Felice become a pious, praiseworthy, good-working woman by giving her an avenue to expiate her own sins. Gui’s hagiographic conversion drags Felice along with him, giving her access to a patient and self-sacrificing female subject position, which may indeed have been drawn from contemporary hagiography, as will be described below.

The most developed of Felice’s expressions of desire for Gui/y in all versions of the romance is her aggressive argument to convince him to stay. Here she demonstrates the strength of her love for Gui/y, and appears as an active, desiring subject, attempting to preserve her marriage and worldly joy with the man she clearly has come to love profoundly. Her actions, however, are frustrated, and she is powerless to keep him in her life. Unlike the wife in the legend of St. Alexis,368 she is not easily converted to his plan to abandon his marriage for his penitential goals. Here, there is no option for mutual chastity and holiness through virginity. Felice is a married, pregnant woman, desperate to keep her husband. In the Anglo-Norman versions, E and G, Gui harshly repudiates her and commands her not to complain, or risk losing his love. On the one hand, this is cruel; on the other hand, it fits the narrative’s purpose of forcing a reordering of priorities from the secular to the heavenly through penance. Passive endurance of suffering is one such avenue. So too, as Felice herself points out, is charity work and prayer. By giving her half the share of his penitential credit, Gui is in a way making sure she deserves it by forcing upon her a life of endurance.369 Notably, none of the Gui/ys tell Felice to carry out the penance through the charity work she suggests to him. This is clearly her decision and her initiative, though the narrative remains silent on how she moves from resentment and pain to joining his penitential cause. Her active and desiring subjectivity, bent on preserving her worldly joys, is frustrated and contained by Gui’s ultimatum that she keep quiet.

Her confrontation with her desire for suicide and its consequences shows perhaps the beginnings of her movement towards her own penitential and hagiographically resonant biography. Entwined concerns for sin (i.e., killing her unborn child) and Gui/y himself (i.e., his reputation, and even his life, assuming that her father would attempt some kind of vengeance for

368 See Klausner, “Didacticism and Drama,” 107.
369 Notably, the Middle English Guys are far less harsh in their orders. No threats of losing his love accompany his instructions to hold herself together and not mourn him. Her role in his sin lessened, as will be seen below, and his enforced penance through quiet endurance is likewise lessened.
her death) stop her hand and prevent her from privileging the world over God: by killing herself, she would be giving in to her misery at losing her earthly joys and thereby valuing her secular priorities over heavenly ones. All five of the narratives dwell on Felice’s pain, during her confrontation with Gui/y and afterwards; she faints, she cries, she threatens to die, she tears her hair, she bleeds. All of these details function to show the depth of her grief, which sets the stage for her own penitential, hagiographic, indeed, even heroic subjectivity. Her decision to continue living is shown to be all the more difficult, all the more of a herculean effort, in the face of her pain. If she did not love Gui/y, then she could not suffer for his loss, and her endurance and patience would not mean anything: her continued life, bearing her child, following her husband, and even undertaking her own penitential journey would lack depth and substance in the absence of the context that constructs those actions as choices, acts of rightly directed will, not to mention brave, strong, resilient and, in every sense of the word, patient. Choosing to stay alive, she proves that her concern for God’s laws, her soul and for Gui/y are her highest priorities, and this combination of concerns fuels her own penitential deeds at home in Warwick.

Just as Gui is transformed, or rather, transforms himself through a realignment of his priorities and lifelong penance, achieving a saint-like life, so too does Felice transform herself through penance by following Gui’s directions and her own original suggestions for penance, good works at home. Indeed, there is even the possibility that a hagiographic paradigm underlies rewritten female romance subjectivity in the presentation of Felice in the second half of the romance as the patient, pious wife and active benefactor in her community, in a way that is analogous to the way St. Alexis underlies Gui. Felice’s acts of charity resonate with deeds of the non-virginal, house-holding female saints whose vitae were on the rise in production and popularity during the time of Gui’s production.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the predominance of the virgin martyr saint shifted as prominent models of female holiness in hagiography began to include penitent harlots, married women and widows. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne observes that during this period new models of female piety and sanctity developed as the number of ‘honorary virginities’ increased. She comments that “the extension of virginity to a socio-economically indispensible audience of married and widowed women helps maintain the status of professional virginity as a relevant and powerful ideal in the laicization of thirteenth-century spirituality.” While the hagiographic biographies through which these models are expounded are primarily the

370 Wogan-Browne, Saints Lives and Medieval Women, 124.
repentant-harlot saints, whose imagery is connected with anchoritic enclosure, Wogan-Browne also observes the increasing prominence of the householding female saints Martha and Elizabeth.³⁷¹ Martha as hostess providing hospitality to Christ particularly resonates with Felice, providing hospitality for her pilgrim husband, whose unrecognizability is a motif which, as Weiss notes, has specific Christ-like associations.³⁷² Furthermore, Felice’s comparison to an abbess particularly links her with models of female sanctity that foreground the founding and support of religious houses, almsgiving and charity: an anonymous bystander (his anonymity testifying to the widespread nature of his perspective), tells Gui shortly before he returns to Warwick for the last time that “unc abesse,/ Ne nule femme que né esteit,/ Tantes almosnes ne feseit,/ De frères pester e faire abbeies,/ De faire chakees e veıês;/ Que Deu li doinst veer icel jur/ Qu’ele puest Gui, sun seignur;/ Vif u mort uncore trouver,/ De co ne fine de Deu preier” [“no abbess, nor any woman born, gave so many alms, to feed poor brethren and build abbeys, to make roads and paths. She never stopped praying God that He would let her see the day when she could again find her lord Gui, alive or dead”] (ll.10842–10850; 218). Indeed, after Gui’s self-imposed exile, Felice’s almsgiving (food to the poor, clothes for prisoners) and charitable public works for churches and abbeys, as well as her refraining from outward enjoyment of life (ll.8975–86, ll.10829–50), earns her narratorial praise that rewrites her earlier renown for her beauty: “De bunté n’ad el mund sa per,/ Ne que tant face a preiser‖ [“There was no one in the world her equal for goodness nor so deserving of praise”] (ll.8977–8); 196) echoes and supersedes the narrator’s earlier assertion that “Tant bele ne fud a icel jur;/ K i totes teres dunques cerchast/ Une tant bele n’i trovast” [“no one was so beautiful at that time, nor would a search of many lands find one so beautiful”] (ll.78–80; 198). While Wogan-Browne bases her observation on analyses of hagiographies that post-date the composition of Gui,³⁷³ the source materials and antecedents of these Anglo-Norman hagiographies pre-date Gui: the pre-conquest English abbesses’ hagiographies have twelfth-century Latin sources³⁷⁴ and those of the householding female saints have numerous Latin predecessors, being biblical saints. That Gui presents Felice’s good works in terms reminiscent of the accomplishments of non-virgin-martyr female saints during the very middle of the period in which female hagiographies were in the process of being reworked for lay-women’s imitation suggests that hagiography of female saints

³⁷¹ Wogan-Browne, Saints Lives and Medieval Women, 143–5.
³⁷² Weiss, Gui and Boeve, 17
³⁷³ Wogan-Browne (Saints Lives and Medieval Women) discusses primarily the female legendary of Nicholas Bozon (144–147), and the Anglo-Norman pre-conquest virgin abbess lives composed in the mid-thirteenth century (204–222).
³⁷⁴ Wogan-Browne, Saints Lives and Medieval Women, 205–5.
was perhaps not too far from the mind of the composer of *Gui* as he constructed the reformed Felice of the second half of the romance.

The tension with hagiography, and its influence on the course of Gui/y’s identity-formation, further carves out space for Felice’s own subject-formation. Through her penance, Felice achieves a measure of her own independence and her own public identity that, just as Gui’s identity is constructed in relation to her, is guaranteed through her continued relationship with Gui during his absence. She is a countess, the only secular authority present in Warwick after her father’s death; she is active in the community and clearly exercises strong leadership and socio-economic presence. The cost to her of achieving this empowered subjectivity is the abnegation of her own will to her husband’s and, moreover, his own physical absence; in his name, however, she is allowed to, and praised for it, accomplishing a great deal. In destabilizing and reorienting the values of romance, *Gui* seems to shift the significance of Felice (and by extension, female subjectivity in romance) somewhat, expanding her role in establishing Gui’s male chivalric identity to include her own substantive identity as countess and de facto ruler of Warwick upon her father’s death, as secular and ecclesiastical patroness, and as a model of lay piety.

At the end of the Gui section of the romance, after everyone else leaves the hermitage and chapel in which Gui is buried, Felice stays “E dit que ja d’iloec n’en partira;/ Tant cum ele vivre purra,/ Tut dis servîr i voldra/ Pur sun seignur qui tant ama./ E ele si fist verraiement,/ Car mult i servi bonement,/ Grandes almosnes i feseit,/ Tant cum ele i viveit‖ [“and said that she would never leave; as long as she lived, she would always serve there for the sake of her husband whom she loved so much. And so she did, indeed, for she served there most willingly: she bestowed generous alms as long as he lived there] (ll.11613-20; Weiss, 227). She dies shortly after, exactly fifty days (the length of their marital bliss) after Gui’s death and is buried beside him. Felice participates in Gui’s heavenly victory: the narrator asserts that they are in heaven, in the company of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and then connects this thought in his exhortation to the audience: “E issi nus doinst Deu servîr/ Ke en sa glorie puissum venir‖ [“and thus may God grant us so to serve Him so that we may come to his His glory”] (ll.11631-2; 227). In case we had any doubt about the exemplary nature of the romance and its function as something of a behavioural guide, the narrator makes it explicit. The action that is to be imitated is serving God, and it is rhetorically linked as analogous to Felice’s pious serving at Gui’s tomb. That the poet uses *servîr* three times in only eighteen lines—twice to describe Felice’s actions, once in the exhortation—highlights this connection. It is probably no accident that the lines “Tut
dis servir i voldra/ Pur sun seignur qui tant ama./ E ele si fist verraîemment,/ Car mult i servi bonement” could, out of context, describe a pious woman serving God, “Pur sun seignur qui tant ama” easily having the double meaning of referring to Christ. To be sure, Gui talks about serving God during his epiphany, but the image the narrator leaves us with is that of Felice lovingly and piously serving for the sake of her lord, and an exhortation that we likewise serve God.

**Translation and Transformation in the Middle English Versions of Guy of Warwick**

A variety of studies over several decades of romance scholarship have considered the relationship between the Anglo-Norman *Gui*—by which I mean Alfred Ewert’s edition of *Gui*—and the various Middle English versions, particularly the Auchinleck text. Much of the focus has been on how the Middle English redactor/translator (both terms are used) altered the text to fit its new linguistic and socio-cultural context. This has resulted in numerous studies observing the change in the portrayal of Guy as more straightforwardly heroic and exemplary in the later, fifteenth-century texts witnessed in the Caius manuscript and CUL manuscript. In her recent study of the Middle English manuscript witnesses of *Guy of Warwick*, Alison Wiggins provides a concise characterization of the unique character of these two fifteenth-century manuscripts of *Guy*:

> Ultimately, the prominent interest displayed in the Auchinleck and Anglo-Norman versions in interrogating Guy’s failings in order to present an examination of chivalry, is weakened and partly phased out in [Cambridge University Library Ff.2.38] in favour of a more straightforwardly honorific version of knighthood. This shift towards a more idealized version of chivalry could be described as characteristic of the fifteenth-century versions and, if anything, is even more obvious in the Caius *Guy of Warwick*.  

The change in depictions of Felice in these texts has received less attention. Velma Richmond in her monumental study *The Legend of Guy of Warwick* includes some brief comments on representation of Felice in the Auchinleck and Caius texts; more work has been done on Felice in the CUL text by Richmond and more recently by Martha Driver. Both Richmond and Driver have found that the later texts smooth out the presentation of Felice to be, like Guy, more praiseworthy and exemplary, focusing on the depiction of her as a pious, devoted and industrious wife. These observations depend upon the condition that “specific adaptations can be confidently assigned to the Middle English redactors,” as Wiggins, among others, has held to

---


be possible. Serious problems with the arguments arise, however, when the process of comparison is scrutinized more closely and the complications of the Anglo-Norman manuscript tradition mentioned earlier are taken more comprehensively into account. As described at the beginning of this chapter, comparing the Middle English versions of *Guy* to Alfred Ewert’s edition of *Gui* is inadequate. Still worse is the comparison of the fifteenth-century versions of *Guy* to the fourteenth-century Auchinleck text.

Martha Driver’s observations on Felice and women in CUL text offer a window into the pitfalls of a deficient comparative approach. While her argument holds well for the non-romance versions of the legend she considers (Rous Rolls, Beauchamp Pageants, Lydgate), unfortunately, her observations on the CUL text demonstrate the danger in trying to make conclusions about the intentions of the Middle English redactor without reference to the appropriate textual predecessor. Driver compares the CUL text to the Auchinleck manuscript *Guy*, leading her to find alterations in the presentation of Felice that seemingly accord with her argument, but do not prove anything other than the fact that the translator/redactor of the CUL text produced a version with readings closer to the Anglo-Norman text than did the Auchinleck. Consequently, it is unsurprising that she finds “[t]his shift [in Felice’s character] is most apparent in the non-romance versions of her story in which authors like Lydgate and Rous select aspects of Felice’s character in order to present a figure acceptable to their patrons,” because the changes she observes in Felice’s character in the CUL text actually go back to the Anglo-Norman text edited by Ewert (E) and cannot be said to be innovations of the Middle English redactor at all.

For example, in both the Anglo-Norman and CUL text, Felice notices the returning Guy as an especially poor pilgrim and singles him out for special treatment at dinner and invites him to come back each day. There is nothing unique about the CUL version in this respect, as Driver suggests there is. Moreover, the CUL text does not “expand[] upon earlier descriptions of Felice as feeding poor men” because the abbeys, bridges and causeways she builds (CUL, ll.9989-90) derive directly from the Anglo-Norman (ll.8,975-86; 10,842-50). Driver also contends that CUL’s ‘change’ in depiction of the rejected emperor’s daughter whom Guy nearly marries instead of Felice represents “a telling emendation that seems to suggest a subtle change in perception about appropriate female conduct” because “the would-be bride is more

---

378 Driver, “Representing Women in Guy,” 150.
379 Driver, “Representing Women in Guy,” 142.
restrained”380 than she is in the Auchinleck manuscript edition. Driver compares CUL ll.3893–96 to Auchinleck couplet ll.3851–57; if Driver had compared it to the Anglo-Norman text of Ewert’s edition ll.4257–62, she would have realized that the innovation was in fact simply part of the source.

Similar interpretative errors occur owing to a lack of attention to the Anglo-Norman text represented in the G manuscript. In general, the revision of Guy and Felice’s characters is connected to and interpreted in the context of the fifteenth-century Beauchamp family patronage of the legend of Guy for their own social prestige and political interests.381 For example, Wiggins connects the “adjustments” to the Caius and CUL texts to their fifteenth-century Warwickshire context:

These texts are indicative of the direct impact that the figure of Richard Beauchamp and the cult of Guy of Warwick had upon the romance; the revival and reconceptualization of Guy as a chivalric hero in these later manuscripts represents a distinctive phase in its reception.382

I have found evidence in the G manuscript of Gui, however, that places a number of the CUL text’s important ‘fifteenth-century’ innovations over a hundred years earlier, in an Anglo-Norman literary context. The evidence both troubles Wiggins’ model of a “distinctive phase in reception,” as well as many of the observations made by other scholars in earlier studies, as will be discussed below. As Ivana Djordjević has pointed out, while “we tend to identify the passage from French to English as the one significant rupture in the otherwise smooth progression from text to text” with respect to the Guy tradition in England from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, “this is not necessarily an accurate perception.”383 Rather, as evidence from the G manuscript shows, we are dealing with a continuum of textual change in which language is one factor among many.

As I will demonstrate throughout the rest of this chapter, the trend over time is indeed towards a presentation of a more heroic Gui/y and more praiseworthy and noble Felice, and as such accords with the most recent assessments of the change in priorities and characterization of Guy and Felice in the later Middle English versions.384 However, as my study is the first to be broadly comparative and take into account the considerable implications that the G manuscript

380 Driver, “Representing Women in Guy,” 150.
of *Gui* has for the study of the Middle English *versions*, the nuances of and contexts of such developments are found to be quite different. The break between the ‘early’ versions of *Gui/y* and the fifteenth-century versions of *Guy* suggested by Wiggins is, in fact, inaccurate. The Auchinleck manuscript texts are already presenting a version of *Guy* that is much *less* invested in “interrogating Guy’s failings in order to present an examination of chivalry” than the Anglo-Norman versions, both those represented by Ewert’s edition and that found in the G manuscript.

Several scholars have already noted that Guy’s character is revised to be more noble and heroic in the later Middle English versions preserved in CUL and Caius. To this I will add that the Stanzaic *Guy* in the Auchinleck manuscript shows the roots of such developments in the recasting of the nature of Guy’s sin and his need for penance. Felice’s nobility and culpability are likewise recast, not only in the CUL version as Martha Driver argues, but in the Caius and Auchinleck texts as well. There are three key areas in which this recasting is especially visible. Firstly, the presentation of Felice in all three Middle English versions is altered from her first introduction to be less sinful and more noble. The references to pride so important in the characterization of Felice in the Anglo-Norman versions do not survive the transition to English in either of the two versions which preserve the beginning. Furthermore, Felice’s actions in refusing Guy in the Auchinleck and Caius texts are justified and defended. Secondly, in all three Middle English versions, Felice’s role in Guy’s sin is reimagined in the passages presenting his epiphany and departure. Finally, Felice’s subsequent presentation as a good countess and noble benefactress is heightened in the Caius and CUL texts, as is the conceptualization of her participation in Guy’s holy triumph.

Starting with the initial description of Felice, in which the E text establishes Felice’s pride, it is clear that the characterization does not make it through to the Middle English versions. The opening is missing in the Auchinleck manuscript, the NLW/BL fragments, and the Sloane fragment. Caius is derived from some version between G and E, based on the physical description and her fields of knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Li quens Roalt ou t a nun; Mult par estet noble barun. Une fille aveit de sa moiller; Sa grant belé ne puis cunter: Pur la plus belé l’ant choisie. Ore est mien que l’un vus die Un petit de sa grant belé:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caius</td>
<td>That Erle Rohaude hyght, He was a nobull man and a wyght. A doghtur he had of hys wyue, For the fairest men chosen hir y-wys. That y you telle, soothe it is. Of hir beaute; for that ys skylle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUL</td>
<td>Syr Roholde, for soothe, he hyght: He was a nobull man and a wyght. A doghtur he had be hys cowntes, There might no man telle her feyrenes. Lysten to me: telle y wyll Of hir beaute; for that ys skylle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G, fol.1va[^385]</td>
<td>Li Quens Rohaud ot a nun; Mulf feuz riche et noble baron Vne fille ot de sa muiller Sa grant beute ne pus cunter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[^385]: The text is in two columns: “a” or “b” identifies the column in addition to the folio. I have silently expanded abbreviations.
Where in G and E Felice has a proud disposition (de fier corage, fere de corage) because she is so wise (and beautiful, in G), in Caius she is “of grete corage” and in CUL she is “of grete prys.” Of course there is no way to tell if there was once an Anglo-Norman version in which her pride is omitted, but it is at least safe to say that in the extant Middle English versions, her pride is not mentioned. At the same time, she refuses her suitors on account of her beauty (in G) and this reading is retained in the Caius version, where in E it is on account of her nobility and in
CUL on account of her goodness. CUL thus shows the most positive representation of Felice’s refusal. If it were not for the G manuscript, it would be impossible to know that the lines about Felice being gentle as a moulted falcon found in Caius actually derive from an Anglo-Norman source, as seen in the ends of the fragmentary lines in the G manuscript. The mistake could easily be made that the Caius translator added these lines as part of a change in conceptions of femininity, leading to the dulcification of Felice in an attempt to represent her as more straightforwardly praiseworthy and exemplary. Conversely, it could be read as an added moment of ironic humour, given her later harshness. Nevertheless, whatever modifying process might be seen, it is already present in the late thirteenth/early fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman version.

One of the most significant differences in the portrayal of Felice in the Auchinleck and Caius versions can be found in her two initial refusals of Guy. Both passages show unique readings that considerably alter the perception of Felice’s refusal. Unfortunately this entire section is lacking in G, so there is no way to tell if the changes arose then. In the first passage, Guy has just confessed his overwhelming, sickness-inducing, life-threatening love for Felice. She rebukes his request as foolish and dangerous, and threatens him with the various forms of punishment and death that her father would inflict upon him if she were to tell him about his behaviour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>Auchinleck</th>
<th>Caius</th>
<th>CUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felice la bele respundi: &lt;&lt; Dune estes vus iço Gui?</td>
<td>Felice þe feir answerd þo: ‚Artow þis Gij, so mot þou go, be steward sone Sward?</td>
<td>Felice to him answerde thoo, ‚Tell me, Guye, if þy bee so</td>
<td>The mayde lokyd on Gye full grymme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiz estes al seneschal Sequeart;</td>
<td>Ich wene þou art a fole musard When þou of loue me hast bissau;</td>
<td>The Stywardis sone that hight Syarwarde, I hold you for a fole musarde, Now thou haste of loue besought, To fole-hardy thou art in thought,</td>
<td>And wele wrothely answeryd hym: ‘Art thou not Sequeardes sone Gye? Who made the so folshyde Forto assay me of loue?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mult vus tienc ore a musart, Quant d’amur m’avez requis; Trop estes cestes hardis.</td>
<td>When þou of loue bisechist me,</td>
<td>Tho artought of wikked scole, Whiles y am thy brors Daughter by name;</td>
<td>And þy þys my fadur telel vnto, For þys word ys harde, To hys inne soone he farde.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En votre conage poi me preiz, Quant vus d’amur me requerez;</td>
<td>Wele þou holdest me for a fole; Pou art ytau3 to a lijer scole.</td>
<td>Or þouthetakes for a fole. Tho art taught of wikked scole,</td>
<td>Whan þou me of loue besocht me, And that y shulde thy lemman bee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mult me tenez ore a fole, Nuriz estes en mal escole; Dune sui jo fille vostre seignur? Mulf me faites grant deshonur.</td>
<td>Þou art ytau3 to a lijer scole.</td>
<td>Whan þou me of loue besocht me, And that y shulde thy lemman bee.</td>
<td>Ne þryve þo of loue me besechist me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quant me requerez de folie, Que jo seis vostre amie; Ne troiay home qui tant me requoit,</td>
<td>Þou art ytau3 to a lijer scole.</td>
<td>Whan þou me of loue besocht me, And that y shulde thy lemman bee.</td>
<td>Ne þryve þo of loue me besechist me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nul du, cunte ne barrun; Se ore amasse un garson. Que mis hom es este deit.</td>
<td>Þou art ytau3 to a lijer scole.</td>
<td>Whan þou me of loue besocht me, And that y shulde thy lemman bee.</td>
<td>Ne þryve þo of loue me besechist me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma beket an mal serret; Se jo ore tel amasse</td>
<td>Þou art ytau3 to a lijer scole.</td>
<td>Whan þou me of loue besocht me, And that y shulde thy lemman bee.</td>
<td>Ne þryve þo of loue me besechist me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E tanz gentilz homes refusasse,</td>
<td>Þou art ytau3 to a lijer scole.</td>
<td>Whan þou me of loue besocht me, And that y shulde thy lemman bee.</td>
<td>Ne þryve þo of loue me besechist me,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

389 I have checked Ewert’s notes, and the C manuscript online: none of these changes are present. Ivana Djordjević has informed me that the text of B is very close to that of E (personal communication, 7 Dec. 2011).

390 CUL clearly shows an affinity with the E text, if much abbreviated, and so I include it in the table in order to highlight further the uniqueness of the approaches taken in the Auchinleck and Caius texts.
Ducx e cuntes e baruns —
Ne sunt plus rices desqu’as munz,
Qui sur totes me desirant,
Ki unques des oilz ne me virent.

Desparatee trop serreie,
Ma vie mais n’en amereie.

Trop grant folie, Gui, pensastes,
Quant vus de amur a mei parlastes;
Car par la fei que dei ma mere,
Se jol vois dire a mu n pere,
Des menbres te fareit desfaire,
E a chevals trestuit detraire,
Par qui seront chastiez
De faire itel deshonur
A la fille lu seignur'
Alez d’ici, tost levez,
Gardez que mes n’I repairez!>>
(ll.333–372)

& so mani grete lordinges forsoke.
Eris, dukes of pe best
In pis world & pe richest
Me haue desired, apli3.
But neuer of me hadde si3.
Pat wer gret dehounour to me;
All to lop mi lif me schald be;
All to fol-e-hardi jue were
When joune of loue bisou3 est here.

Bi mi trewe, y schal pe swere,
Schal y mi fader pe tiding bere
Doun worpest tohewen ojer fordo —
Bi pe be warned ojer mo —
Ojer wip wilde hors toodrawe
For hi foly, & bat wer lawe;
& ojer schul be warned bi hi dede
& her lordinges be more dede;
Go hepon’ sche syd’ & vp arise
& cum nammore in mi purpris.’

(ll.377–414)

That art my man, and shaldest bee.
Euyll were my beaute besette on the,
Yf y a grome loudde and toke,
And so many faire knyghtis forsoke.
Eris, Dukes, of all the beste,
And of all the worlde the richest
Ouere all men desired me a plighte,
Sache as on me neuere had a sighte;
Dispreised to moche y shal bee
To lee altheim and take the!
All to grete hardiship thou thoughtest,
Whan thou of loue me besoughtest.

By my moder soule y the swere,
And y to my fader this tyding ber,
To slee the or the uttely fordo,
(Бy the shull be warned other moo)
Or with wilde hors all to-drawe,
For thy folie that were lawe.
Goo hense swathe! vp arise,
And come nomore here in this wise!
(ll. 377–411)

(ll. 216–236)

While Anglo-Norman Felice of the E text claims that Guy, being the seneschal’s son, must value her little by asking for her love and does her great dishonour in asking her for such folly, the Middle English Felices of the Auchinleck and Caius texts make no statement about his valuing or not of her, and represent the “michel shame” Guy is perpetrating as being done to her father. Neither uses a rhetorical question. Instead both state unequivocally that his behaviour is wrong, emphasizing it in the next line through the verb missede, which has no equivalent in the Anglo-Norman. Additionally, both emphasize Guy’s low rank by adding that he will be her vassal in the future and referring to him as a grome.

E text Felice foregrounds the legal implications of their potential liaison, saying that she would be disparagee trop serreie and never enjoy life again. Marrying below her rank is serious business, as it could cause her to lose her inheritance—as indeed, it almost does Argentille and Goldeboru in the Anglo-Norman and Middle English versions of Havelok. Both Auchinleck and Caius Felice instead stress the ideological implications of the potential union by expressing the result in terms of their own honour. In the Auchinleck manuscript, Felice claims that it is her acceptance of Guy that would be a dishonour to her, and consequently her life would be entirely hateful to her. This version has lost the technical, legal implications of disparage. Guy’s current action as an offence against her father, rather than her, is additionally stressed in her final lines. In Caius, Felice claims that if she were to accept him in lieu of all her high-ranking suitors, she would be devalued, “dispreised,” a term which is closer in meaning to the Anglo-Norman. In the Anglo-Norman, Felice says that if she were to tell her father, he would have Gui drawn and quartered, and that this would serve as a warning for those who do such dishonour to their lord’s daughter. The dishonour, thus, is still hers. In the Auchinleck and Caius, both Felices stress the
The Middle English Felices of Auchinleck and Caius, however, are not impressed, replying:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Auchinleck</th>
<th>Caius</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felice þe feir answerd þo,</td>
<td>Felice the faire answerd thereto:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Damesel’ sche seyd ‘whi seistow so?’</td>
<td>‘Avoide, damesell, why seist thou so?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>þou art to blame also y se</td>
<td>So thou shuld not rede me;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No þing þermdid no paiestow me.</td>
<td>Thou art to blame forsothe y telle the.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oft þou hast yherd in speche</td>
<td>Thou hast ofte herde this speche,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>þat we no schal no man biseche,</td>
<td>That we shulde noman biseche,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ac þen schul biseche wيمن</td>
<td>But they shuld biseche women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In þe feirest maner þat þai can &amp; fond to speden þif þai may,</td>
<td>On the feairest manere that they kan,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boþe bi niþkes &amp; bi day.’</td>
<td>And assaye yf they speden may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ll.617–626)</td>
<td>Either by nyghte or by day.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ll.617–626)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

legal aspect of such a punishment. Auchinleck Felice additionally asserts that it would teach others to have more fear of their lord.

Felice’s speech in both of these Middle English versions is much more concerned with and aware of her position ‘between men,’ and of the fact that the primary relationship and lines of allegiance are lord-vassal, and consequently Guy’s transgression is first and foremost of that relationship. She portrays her dishonour as secondary and more in her own conduct than his actions. But of course, if Guy’s dishonour is to her father rather than to her, then her conduct in accepting him, rather than simply facilitating her disparagement and consequent misery, becomes a transgression of patriarchal authority and is likewise a dishonour to her father. Her conduct, therefore, takes on slightly different importance in this framework that is more acutely concerned with male relationships, and its significance is accordingly highlighted the next time Guy approaches her. Acknowledging that he comes against her will, Gui/y claims, among other things, that he wants to die for her if she won’t accept him, and promptly faints. Felice tells her handmaiden to lift him up in her arms and while doing so, the girl exclaims:
There seems to be a very strong ideological urge behind the addition of this comment (lacking in CUL), whenever it occurred, to regulate male-female interaction and, in doing so, the addition rewrites Felice’s character in the first half of the romance by presenting her behaviour as appropriate. Rather than being a woman who is too proud for all men, Felice becomes a cautious woman, attempting to play by the rules of appropriate, gendered, social conduct. In the Caius manuscript at least (because the beginning of the Auchinleck text is lost), this portrayal is consonant with the absence of any reference to Felice’s pride.

The Caius and Auchinleck Felices present their reasons of refusal in terms of general social expectations circulated orally and repeated frequently: “Oft þou hast yherd in speche,” “Thou hast ofte herde this speche.” The repetition of the syntax and the verb, with the reversal of the subject and the object, reinforces the opposition, making it clear that there is little room for negotiation of the ordered paradigm “men schul biseche wimen.” This rebuke is perhaps not surprisingly absent from numerous other versions of the romance. In the Anglo-Norman, the maiden’s comment goes hand in hand with the incipient pity Felice experiences, and helps to soften Felice’s resolve and leads her to take pity on Guy, as she ought. Certainly the CUL version implies this when Felice speaks to Guy immediately following the woman’s comments (ll.333-346). Appropriately facilitating pity is how this comment is generally read, and while in the Auchinleck manuscript references to Felice’s growing pity are absent (ll.8975–86, ll.10829–50), references to pity are present in the Caius manuscript (ll. 601–06). Felice’s rebuke in the Middle English versions seems at first completely incongruous and forced. Nothing the handmaiden says suggests that she is saying that Felice should “biseche” Guy. In fact, Felice’s opinion that men should woo women in the fairest manner that they can, by night and by day, seems—given Guy’s extreme claims of not being able to live without her—to argue for her acceptance of Guy, rather than against it. In these Middle English versions of Guy, however, the maiden’s outburst has a different function, allowing Felice to justify and defend her behaviour.

391 This addition is not present in any of the AN manuscripts as far as I can tell, which is to say, it is not in E. Ewert says nothing about it in his notes, it is not in C, and this whole section is lost in G. However, given the closeness with which the Middle English texts tend to translate the Anglo-Norman, I would be very surprised if, were the lost pages to appear magically someday, that no kernel of this addition would be present. I would like to check the B manuscript, which was unknown to Ewert. Ivana Djordjević has observed that its readings accord with both the first and second redaction (personal communication, 7 Dec. 2011). At any rate, since I am not trying to argue that the Middle English translator is intentionally adapting Felice’s character this way, so much as observing that in the Middle English permutation of the Guy story, this is how it reads. When and where the innovation occurred is less important than the fact that we can see it did and can say with reasonable certitude that it is either a late, second version Anglo-Norman addition or an early Middle English addition.

392 “Felice la bele l’ad regardé, / Mult grant pitié li en prist;/ A une pucele dist/ Qu’ele entre ses braz le preist,/ E en veie d’iloec le meist‖ (ll.568–72).
in refusing Guy. This is an opportunity she is never granted in the Anglo-Norman E version, where she is presented as too proud, pitiless and at fault for refusing Gui. Outright rejection or delay of love based on mismatched rank is an argument that works well enough for Anglo-Norman and Middle English Horn and Bevis among others, but Anglo-Norman Felice is never presented as laudable in her abstinence as they are. The Middle English Felices, however, couch their initial refusal on account of their fathers’ honour. Then in this second refusal, they appeal to generally held ideals about male and female conduct to justify their continued refusal at that point, as well as their gradual acceptance in the future. Voicing the opinion that men should seek women in the fairest manner that they can, Felice is all to well aware of the fact that Guy hasn’t actually done anything for her, so much as begged her desperately: in offering him a program of action to become worthy of her she can be seen to be practicing what she preaches.

The Auchinleck and Caius Felices’ articulation of gendered ideals wherein appropriate female conduct in love is passive in contrast to male conduct, which is active, serves an additional function in the narrative: it invites intertextual dialogue with the earlier wooing women of the Middle English romance tradition, such as Rimenhild, Rimmild and Josiane. The Auchinleck manuscript contains the later of the Middle English Horn romances, Horn Childe and the Maiden Rimmild. Maldwyn Mills has remarked upon the numerous verbal resonances between Horn Childe and the Stanzaic Guy. While it is now clear that the Stanzaic Guy is an entirely separate text, the fact that the stories are connected verbally and in the same manuscript suggests the likelihood that when reading Felice’s rebuke to her handmaiden in Guy medieval audiences might well recall the unprecedented harshness with which Rimmild’s father treats such behaviour in the Horn story. Horn is nearly killed and Rimmild herself beaten bloody on account of a rumour of her seduction that, in her father’s estimation at least, seems guaranteed to be true through Rimmild’s gift to Horn of a valuable horse. As I discussed above, both of them are blamed for betrayal, in contrast to the other versions where Horn alone bears the blame. Women’s forward conduct with men in the Auchinleck text of Horn Childe receives new significance and sharp punishment at the same time that Auchinleck Felice is shown openly criticizing women who should presume to “biseche” men. In The English Romance in Time, Helen Cooper suggests that medieval insular romances presented an uncriticized, endorsed and celebrated female desire. These moments of warning present in the Auchinleck and Caius

manuscripts illustrate the danger of generalization. If in *King Horn* the endorsement of Rimenhild’s desire of Horn is guaranteed through intertextual allusions to virgin martyr hagiographies, in these *Guy* texts the opposed behaviours of restraint and passivity are advocated. When *Guy* is read in conjunction with *Horn Child*, the reality that harsh punishment for women’s behavioural transgressions reaches even into the world of romance is brought to bear on the situation and Felice appears well justified in protecting herself against such a fate.

The Caius and Auchinleck texts show an additional difference in the presentation of Felice’s subjectivity that they share uniquely with the G text. When Guy returns from his adventures on the Continent and, having achieved some victories, comes home to claim Felice’s love, she defers her agreement once more, claiming that if she married him now, he would not need to continue to increase his prowess and reputation, and that she would be doing wrong (mesferei) or have much guilt/blame, if he were to lose his reputation because of her.
De faire est vostre volenté;
Altre de vus n’ava
m’amur,
Tant cum viverai a nul jur.”
(ll.1055-1082)

Þat vnder heuen þi beter no be,
Mi loue ichil þan grau nti þe.”
(ll.1131–1160)

My loue ne shall thou haue ellis neuere the moo.
(ll.1115–1164)

For the first time, in three of the manuscripts Felice is allowed to step into position of a desiring subject, a role hitherto reserved for Gui/y, as she declares her love for Gui/y over all others and declares her intention to call him her beloved (mon ami, mi leman). In the Auchinleck, this is accompanied by the omission of the lines in E, G and Caius in which she promises to abdicate herself to his wille or voluntee, a statement that has clear sexual overtones: he will be able to do with her sexually whatever he likes. In the CUL, no additional expression of love exists, and the sexual innuendo is changed to “All the whyle y am on lyue,/ Wyll y be thy wed dyd wyue.”

Felice’s additional expression of love for Guy and the absence of abandonment to his will links the Auchlinleck couplet text with a similar trend in the Stanzaic Guy, visible during the marriage negotiation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Puis a sa amie parler alad, Tote sa vie mustré lui ad: Cum riches reis e empereurs Offert li ont mult granz honurs, E cum eu aine des puceles, Des filles as princes que mult sunt beles; Mais nule amer ne voleit Altre de lui, ne ja n’amereit. Sire Gui, fait ele, vostre merci! E jo verraie ment le vus di Que mult ai requise esté De plus riches del regné, Mais amer nule ne veole Ne a nul jur mes ne fereie; A vus me doins, si me ortre. Vostre plaisir facez de mei. Guy de joie l’en ad beisé; Onc de rien restoit si le. De felice son congie prist En ioye et en baudur vesquist. (ll. 7432–7450)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G, fol.51rb</td>
<td>Pus a Felice sen va B tot son estre li mustra Cum riches roys et emperors Offert li ont granz honurs, B cum feu aimee des puceles Filles as ducs qui erent beles Mes nule amer ne voudraie Fors vus bele ne iames ne fraye En esposaille en la ley de Vus aim ieo en verite Felice li dist vostre merci B ieo seirement vus di Que a vus me doins et otrouy Caeo que vus plent facez de moy De ioye laz Guy bayse Onc de ryen restoit si le De felice son congie prist En ioye et en baudur vesquist. (ll. 7321–7330)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanzaic</td>
<td>On a day sir Gij gan fond &amp; feir Felice he tokt bi hond, &amp; seyd to þat bird so bliþe: ‘Icham,’ he seyd, ‘þu rch godes sond Won þe prisi in mani lord Of kniȝtes strong &amp; stiþe, &amp; me is boden gret anour, Kings douhter &amp; emperour To haue to mi wiæ. Ac, swete Felice,’ he seyd þan, ‘Y no schal neuer spouse wiman Whiles þou art oliue.’ Þan answerd þat swete wiȝt, &amp; seyd oȝain to him ful riȝt: ‘Bi him þat schope mankinne, Icham desired day &amp; niȝt Of erl, baroun, &amp; mani a kniȝt. For noþing wil þai blinne. Ac Gij,’ sche seyd, hende &amp; fre, Al mi loue is layd on þe: Our loue schal neuertvinne, &amp; bot ich haue þe to make Oper lord nyl nontake, For al his warld to winne.’ (St. 5–6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caius</td>
<td>Guy to his lemman is than goo, All his lyf he told hir thoo. ‘Syr,’ sche seyde, ‘gramercye!’ I yow sey, sekerlye: For me þer hath be prayer Of kynge and dewke ferre and nere. Of them all wolde y noge. For on you was all my thought.’ ‘Syr,’ sche seyd, ‘gromeceye!’ I yow sey, sekerlye: For me þer hath be prayer Of kynge and dewke ferre and nere. Of them all wolde y noge. For on you was all my thought.’ He tolde Felyece all his wylle and lyfe, And howe he was beyd rychye wyfe, Kyngys doughtur and emperowre, And with hur moche honowre: “Of them all wolde y noge. For on you was all my thought.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUL</td>
<td>He tolde Felyce all yhis wylle and lyfe, And howe he was beyd rychye wyfe, Kyngys doughtur and emperowre, And with hur moche honowre: “Of them all wolde y noge. For on you was all my thought.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Felice finally accepts Guy in the Stanzaic Guy, she alone of the Felices states “Al mi loue is layd on the: our loue shal neuer twinne.” At the same time, in contrast to all the other versions, she does not give herself to him, saying “Vostre plaisir facez de mei” (E), “Ceo que vus plent facez de moy” (G), “To thy wille y shall always be” (Caius), or “I am yowrys … to do
wyth me at yowre wylle‖ (CUL). In her statement to Guy and to her father, Stanzaic Felice asserts that if she does not have Guy, she will never take another lord. The other Felices, to be sure, say to their father that they will never take another man if they cannot have Gui/y, but they do not say it to Guy himself. Instead, when speaking to Gui/y, as we can see, their language is of submission. CUL Felice even reverses the gender roles in her speech to her father, saying that if Guy will not have her, she will never be wedded: “Sertys, but yf he haue me,/ Weddyd schall y neuyr bee‖ (ll.7031–2). The Auchinleck Guy, across the couplet and stanzaic texts, seems to be making innovations in order to strengthen the theme of love on her part, while at the same time resisting her abdication of agency, 395 in contrast to the Caius and G manuscripts, as well as the CUL, 396 where a slight strengthening of Felice’s love for Guy is visible. Of course, there is always the possibility that an Anglo-Norman variant lies behind these changes, but it is still clear that the Auchinleck text reads this way in comparison with all of the other versions.

The lines in which Guy tells Felice of his adventures and his honours abroad also reveal an ideological link between the Auchinleck couplet text and the Stanzaic Guy with respect to the privileging of male bonds seen in the Auchinleck and Caius manuscript in Felice’s foregrounding of her father’s honour and aggressive adherence to gendered behavioural rules. Where Anglo-Norman Gui in both the E and G texts is beloved by the puceses and filles of high ranking men, Stanzaic Guy is offered the women, in apposition to “great honour”: “& me is boden gret anour,/ Kinges douhter & emperour/ To haue to mi wiue‖ (st.5). The women’s evaluation of Guy is not important: it is their father’s estimation of his worth that he brags about. That they are offered as wives and that Guy rejects them as wives is also significant. In the Anglo-Norman, Gui says that he didn’t want to love them in return. The interaction and failed transaction is represented as between Gui and the rejected maidens. By contrast, in the Stanzaic Guy, the interaction and transaction is only represented as between Guy and their fathers, the kings and emperors who offered them. Marriage, inheritance and Guy’s future status are what is significant, rather than the more personal, courtly prestige of the besotted beautiful women, whose love signifies the strength of his reputation and prowess. In the Stanzaic Guy, the women’s beauty is not even mentioned because it is their rank, which is actually much higher in the Middle English, that is important. The same lines exist in CUL, nearly word for word: And,

395 To her father, she not only expresses her choice of him as husband, but in another unprecedented declaration of love, says, “Bi him þat schop mankende,/ Opon sir Giȝ, þat gentil kniȝt./ Y-wis, mi loue is alle alȝt (st.9).
396 Felice says to her father lines that have no direct equivalent elsewhere: “Hyt ys Giȝe, the nobull knight,/That y haue louyd wyth all my myght‖ (ll.729–30).
how he was bedyn rych wyfe,/ Kyngys doghtur and emperowre,/ And wyth hur moche honowre‖ (ll.6992–4); this may indicate that a common Anglo-Norman source lies behind this difference. Regardless, we can see the privileging of male bonds and hierarchies over the opinions of the women and the interaction of the potential lovers.

Remarkably stable across all versions is the interaction between Gui/y and Felice’s father. In all versions, he asks Gui/y why he has not taken a wife yet, and Gui/y responds that he will only accept the one woman whom he loves. Felice’s father then offers him lordship over all his land to Gui/y, at which point Gui/y admits that he would rather have Felice with only her shirt than the daughters of various emperors. Only in CUL does Rohauld mention that Felice herself wants Guy, or rather, that she wants to be Guy’s;\textsuperscript{397} in the other versions, it appears completely irrelevant to their conversation that the marriage is something that she wants, rather than a transaction desired by the two men. Her objectification is clearest in Caius, where Rohauld says, “Guy take hir; y yiue her the” and he responds, “This is a faire yifte sikirly” (17373; 1.7376). In the Stanzaic Guy, Felice’s objectification is somewhat less overt. Her father asks Guy “To wiue wiltow hir vnderstonde?” (st.12) as opposed to the “I give her to you” of the other versions, where the syntax is immutable: her father is the subject of the sentence, Guy the indirect object, the recipient, and Felice is the object passed between them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>G, foL52ra</th>
<th>Caius</th>
<th>CUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jo la vus doins, si la pernez (1.7505)</td>
<td>Jeo la vus dorray, si vus voulez</td>
<td>Guy, take hir:y yiue her the (1.7373)</td>
<td>I geue hur the wyth herte free. (1.7063)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

His future father-in-law’s joy at Gui/y’s acceptance, however, in every version affirms the primacy of male bonds when he states some version of “now I know you love me more than any one else because you’ve consented to marry my daughter.” Rohauld never mentions the joy it will bring Felice, but concentrates on what Gui/y’s acceptance of his offer means for their relationship, namely that Gui/y values their friendship more than any prospective higher-ranking alliance.

The couplet Auchinleck text and its partner the Stanzaic Guy stand out from the other Gui/y texts in their combination of greater attention and expression of Felice’s feelings towards Guy, an absence of her submission to Guy and a lessening of her overt objectification in the

\textsuperscript{397}“Sche wyll be yowrys y vndurstande /I geue hur the wyth herte free/ and lorde of my londe schalt þou bee” (ll.7062–4).
marriage transaction between her father and Guy. At the same time, as will be soon seen, the Stanzaic Guy also stands out against all of the other versions in the radical diminishment of Felice’s good works and laudable activity after Guy’s departure. There are a number of possible reasons for this difference, but one that appears relevant here is the possibility that her retention of agency disqualifies her from the same level of penitential work and consequent community presence and substantial praise experienced by the other Felices. She still feeds men for the sake of Guy’s soul, but she does not build abbeys and churches and bridges (see below). While the amplification of Felice’s autonomy and reduction of her charity at first glance seem paradoxical, this can potentially be seen to follow logically, if we can see the other Felices’ legitimacy to perform such acts of charity as rooted in their complete and utter devotion to Guy and sublimation of their will to his.

The trend of rewriting Felice to be a more straightforwardly praiseworthy and exemplary woman in the first half of the romance has so far been seen predominantly in the Auchinleck and Caius Middle English versions of Guy and is present, if less developed, in CUL. As of yet, it has little precedent in the G manuscript, aside from the presence of the comment about Felice being as gentle as a moulded falcon. However, the presentation of Guy’s epiphany and his subsequent discussion with Felice before his departure reveals a fundamental shift in the conceptualization of Guy’s sin and Felice’s role in causing it, which has consequences for the construction of Felice’s subjectivity. A small difference between the G text and the E text may indicate the beginning of such a trend, which would accord with other differences in the G manuscript that likewise present Felice in a better light, particularly her presentation at the very end of the Gui portion of the romance.398 During Gui’s epiphany scene, both E and G specify that Guy regrets that he killed men and wrought destruction (captured cities and towers in E, destroyed many places in G), and exerted his body for the sake of a woman whom he loved399 and for whom he endured so much, but he never did so for his creator, who had given him so much honour. He decides he will put himself in God’s service and change his whole life, but it is not clear what he means until he speaks to Felice. His words to her are different: he reminds her of the suffering he endured for her. He repeats, in both versions, over and over again to Felice that he did his acts of killing and destruction “pur vus” [“for you”]. In E, there is a greater emphasis on the men he killed, and the specific mention of “francs hommes” [“noble men”], in

398 See below.
399 “Pur une femme qu’il tant amat/ Pur qui tant mals duré ad;/ Mais unc pur sun criatur;/ Qui fai[t] li ad si grant honur” (E:7585–8) and “Et tot pour une qu’il ama;/ Tant malm endure a;/ Mes tant p[ur] Die[us] son creat[ur] Que fet li auoit tant hon[ur]” (G: fol. 52va)
whose death he locates his sins that must be expiated. In G, his sins seem to be more general: he did “maus” [“bad deeds”] and he did not serve God, but instead served Felice. The more general approach to sin in the G manuscript and the lack of emphasis on his killing of men, with no mention of their nobility, is something that the G text has in common with the Middle English versions. It seems to show the beginnings of the re-writing of Guy as more noble in the Middle English versions and may work in tandem with a loosening of the connection between Felice herself and Guy’s sins: in the E text, Guy tells Felice specifically that he committed great sins for her (“Pur vus ai fait maint grant pecché” [l.7674]), but no such line exists in the G text. Rather, the discourse of sin surrounds his deeds and his lack of service to God, but is never explicitly connected with Felice.

With respect to the Anglo-Norman E text and the Middle English Stanzaic Guy, David Klausner observes that a dichotomy between earthly love of a woman and love of God characterizes the thoughts of the Guy of the Auchinleck Stanzaic Guy, in contrast to the Anglo-Norman, where he finds greater emphasis on Gui’s bloodshed rather than misdirected love. 400 Klausner comments on the thematic significance of this difference and its consequences for Guy’s characterization:

Guy here is an exceptionally successful figure—the common man who has through his own merit worked his way to the height of earthly glory, to the position he has long desired. In his battles he has never been on the side of what the audience would recognize as the wrong, yet it is pointed out through his repentance that these deeds of bloodshed cannot truly be accounted good works. Guy must recognize the insufficiency of his past life… The audience too must realize that there are good deeds and good deeds; that those which Guy has done in the winning of Felice are not those which will win him the kingdom of heaven. 401

If Guy’s “life of a sinner” is now only in a “limited sense” 402 in the Stanzaic Guy, what has happened to Felice, who in Anglo-Norman E text is directly connected to his sins? In his epiphany, Middle English Guy is distraught because God gave him so much honour and he never did anything good in return for him, and because he had also killed many men wrongly; however, the specific juxtaposition of Felice and his sins does not exist (“Pur une femme qu’il

400 [E] “Gui’s thoughts concentrate on the evil he has done, and there is less emphasis on his lack of good deeds for God’s sake than in the English romance. He speaks only briefly of the “servise” (7594) that he owes God, and returns to the thoughts of his victims…The thoughts of the English Guy [of the Stanzaic Guy] in contrast are organized around the distinction between the earthly love of a woman which he bears towards Felice, and which has heretofore been his primary motivation, and the love of Christ which he has neglected.” (Klausner, “Didactics and Drama,” 112).
Indeed, Felice herself is not mentioned at all. Rather, Guy’s crisis is depicted solely as a failed exchange with God: God did him great honour, but he did nothing for God. This is congruent with the increased emphasis on male exchange and male bonds already witnessed in the Auchinleck and Stanzaic Guy texts. Later, when Guy reveals his crisis and decision to Felice, he specifies that since he first saw her he was so bound by love of her that he never did anything good, but killed many men with grisly wounds. The line in the E text, “Pur vus ai fait maint grant pecché” (l.7674), has no corresponding English sentiment. Klausner, while admiringly noting the dichotomy of the “theme of the two loves, secular and sacred” that structures the entire section of Guy’s epiphany and departure, does not, in fact, interrogate the impact that the juxtaposition of “Ac for þi loue ich haue al wrouȝt: For his loue dede y neuer nouȝt” has on Felice’s characterization. Guy’s actions were not carried out for Felice herself, but so that he could obtain her love; this desire bound him and misdirected his actions, but it is not blameable on Felice as much as on himself, because it was Guy’s own desire that led him to fail in his exchange with God. Instead, justified in her refusals of Guy, more active and expressive in her
love for him, but less implicated in his sinful life, Felice emerges as a more positive and noble character, even as if she slips from view later in the Stanzaic Guy’s narrative.

The Caius version shows a remarkable departure from the earlier texts in the presentation of Guy’s epiphany. Here, it is only Guy’s failed exchange with God that is represented as problem. There is no mention of killing, destruction, or sin, nor is there any mention of Felice:

Guy bethoughte him anone right
That god him had so moche honour doo
In all londes that he come to,
That he come neuere in noo fighte
Bot he was holde the best knyghte,
And neuer for his creatour,
That had doon him so grete honour.
Sore to sighe he beganne,
And in his mynde bethoughte him anone
That all his lif he wolde chaunge tho,
And in goddis seruyse he wolde him do (ll.7398–7408).

This trend persists in his conversations with Felice. He tells Felice that since he fell in love with her, he had been “in grete sorowe,” but does not lay the blame on her explicitly. Guy does, however, specify that he “wrought moche sorowe and woo” for Felice, but he does not characterize his deeds for her as sins per se or blame her for his actions. Rather, when Guy tells her that “wrought sorrow and woe for her,” he follows it with,

And if y had doon so well,
Withoute more the haluen dell
Hadde for goddes loue wroughte,
That in so moche honour had me broughte,
In heuen, for sothe, y were,
In blisse for euere angellis fere.
And for him did y neuere nought (ll.7412–25).

His actions are not the problem themselves (indeed, he describes them as “doon so well,” but who they were done for: the juxtaposition of deeds for her versus deeds for God overshadows any implication that she made him sin, or indeed, that he did sin in any way other than to fail in the service he owed to God. “Sorowe and woo” stand in for the host of offences listed in E, G and the Stanzaic Guy.

The characterization of Felice herself also changes significantly in Caius. Many of Felice’s lines are cut, particularly her suspicion that Guy has married another woman and claims that she will die or kill herself in his absence, as well as her suggestions that Guy perform
charity works at home. The lack of her protest and suspicion during her parting with Guy also presents a more unproblematically good Felice, who was never described as proud and, like Auchinleck Felice, defended and justified her treatment of Guy.

In the CUL text, which is the closest to E and G of all the Middle English versions, while Guy does think on Felice in his epiphany itself, he contrasts his actions for be loue of pat maye (l.7139) to his lack of actions for God. It is a subtle difference, but one that finds a parallel in Stanzaic Guy’s statement of his being bound by love of Felice and juxtaposition of love of Felice versus love of God. When Guy articulates his thoughts to Felice, CUL Guy, like Caius Guy, claims that he was in sorrow since he first knew her, adding that there was probably no knight who endured so much sorrow in a fight as he did for her. Still he juxtaposes “all y dud, my lemman free, for to wynn the loue of thee” to what he might have done in God’s service, and never states that he committed sins for her. Like the Stanzaic Guy, his fault is prioritizing trying to win Felice’s love over serving God. That his sins are his fault alone is even made explicit: he states, “I haue done mekyll schame: God hath leyde on me þe blame.” He admits that he has not been “ware and wyse” and shows new concern for Felice's fate, entwined with his: “Had y bene warre and wyse/ And spendyd hyt in goddys seruyse,/ Halfen dele my trauayle,/ Of heuyn schulde we neuer haue fayle (ll.7171–4). Guy's perceptive acceptance of blame, his greater concern for Felice and her fate in heaven recur later in the romance, near the end of his life. In an unprecedented move, with her role in his sin diminished, Guy asks Felice for forgiveness before he dies, an act which has significant consequences for her subjectivity, as will be seen.

David Klausner observed that the Stanzaic Guy’s restructuring of Guy’s epiphany and departure around the dichotomy of secular versus sacred love both has broader thematic effects on the narrative and alters the characterization of Guy with respect to the nature of this sin. I would like to add that such a trend is present in the later Middle English versions as well, and that its effect on the narrative is manifold. Firstly, it constructs Guy’s transgression as a failed exchange with God, rather than dwelling on his acts that, although not witnessed in the narrative, are certainly sinful in and of themselves. This shift is consonant with the privileging of male relationships and male exchanges witnessed to different degrees across the three Middle

---

403 CUL Felice, like Stanzaic Guy Felice, E Felice (7188) and G Felice (109) raises her suspicions of his love of another woman. Where E Felice claims that she won’t live after Gui leaves (“Plus ne viverai, sacez de fi,” 7659), Stanzaic Felice claims Guy is destroying her with his speech (27.5) and threatens to kill herself (27.11-12). CUL Felice says that it would be better for her to kill herself if he leaves (“When y wyll wende me froo? Bettur hyt were me for to sloo,” ll. 7209-10).
English versions. Moreover, it works in tandem with the trend of Guy's own sins being reduced, particularly in the earlier two versions.\textsuperscript{404} Secondly, by characterizing the cause of Guy's misdirected behaviour as his passion for Felice, rather than Felice herself, the Middle English versions continue the trend of revising Felice's character to be more noble. In the epiphany scene itself, not one of the Middle English versions shows Guy coming to quite the same conclusion as do his Anglo-Norman counterparts about having done his deeds for Felice herself as opposed to God, and only CUL Guy mentions Felice at all. While she is not entirely blameless, having caused him sorrow and woe in all three Middle English versions, her role in causing Guy's sin is significantly reduced, fundamentally shifting aspects of the relational construction of gender within the narrative in line with the already observed trend of amplifying the importance of male bonds and male exchange. Felice's evaluative eye is already less important to Guy's identity than her father's or those of the high-ranking men who offered Guy their daughters as wives. The all-but-outright removal of her blame for Guy's sin results in her being less of an agent in Guy's knighthood and its attendant sins, producing her as a less formative force on Guy's martial identity, hence diminishing her position as a supporter and enforcer of the chivalric and courtly values that are being interrogated with Guy's change of heart. This not only places limitations on the degree to which Felice can be considered a sinner, but also results in her likewise being less of a formative force on Guy's penitential, hagiographically-inspired identity. On the one hand, this results in her having less of a need for her own penitential journey. In the Stanzaic Guy, this may be another factor contributing to her erasure—she is pushed towards irrelevancy. In the Caius and CUL texts, on the other hand, this does not negate her charitable works so much as alter their meaning: indeed, her acts of charity garner more nobility and praise in these texts, perhaps because they are themselves less enjoined upon her by a need for penitence and testify instead to her devotion to her husband, in which their motivation is rooted (having pledged herself to Guy in Caius text and abdicated her will to her husband in CUL). On the other hand, the lessening of Felice's role in causing Guy's sin and redemption also means that her persistent absence from Guy is no longer required for his penance, which itself now makes less of an indictment of the values of romance in foregrounding Guy's misplaced priorities over his more egregious sins (particularly the killing

\textsuperscript{404} In the Stanzaic Guy references to killing are lessened and there is no mention of destruction of religious buildings. In the Caius version, there are no references to any acts of violence, only 'sorrow and woe.' CUL follows the Anglo-Norman more closely and so keeps most of the references to killing and destruction. Nevertheless, the same move towards juxtaposing love of Felice and love of God highlights that his main sin is not prioritizing God, which, as Klausner observed, allows him to be an "exceptionally successful figure" who lived the "life of a sinner" only in a "limited sense" ("Didacticism and Drama," 115).
of noble men), and in the case of the Caius manuscript, in omitting any specific mention of them at all. Romance has gained back some of the ground previously lost to hagiography, and accordingly asserts itself in the couple’s reunion and return, however brief, to marital space with a final embrace and kiss.405

“In all the world ys none here pere”: Felice’s Praise and Piety in the Later Middle English Versions of Guy

After Gui/y’s departure, Felice is mentioned only rarely. She appears three times: after her son’s birth, during Gui/y’s visit to Warwick in disguise when he receives alms from her, and finally, when she receives the ring from the messenger betokening Gui/y’s impending death and then journeys to the hermitage to witness his death and preside over his burial. She is discussed once: when Gui/y first returns to England and hears a report of the threat posed by Danish King Anlaf’s giant-champion, Colbrond, he asks news about Rohauld, Herault and Felice from an anonymous bystander. An additional mention can be found in the CUL manuscript, when King Athelstan sends to Felice for Guy’s armour that she had dutifully kept in prime condition so that Guy could use it in his fight against Colbrond.

It is in these passages that the Stanzaic Guy parts ways with the other Middle English versions in its amplification of Felice’s goodness. The cumulative detail suggests either that the pressure of turning one romance into three leads to the elision of Felice’s character or that these differences are indicative of a deliberate revisionary agenda on the part of the Middle English adaptor/translator to downplay Felice’s role. The Stanzaic Guy completely removes any mention of Reinbroun’s birth and capture by pirates, which does not occur until the Reinbroun romance itself, in which Felice is not even mentioned. This results in the first of the descriptions of Felice’s almsgiving and charity work being completely removed. In Guy’s questioning of the anonymous bystander, Guy does not even ask about Felice, and the bystander reports only that she is a good and noble woman, and details of her charity work are absent. The passage describing Felice’s giving of alms to an unrecognizable pilgrim Guy recuperates only a few details of her good works. Finally, after Guy’s death, all of the details of her religious service are lacking. She remains behind at the hermitage and dies, but her devotional actions are absent, just as the details of her secular and ecclesiastical benefactions were absent earlier in the romance. All in all, Felice of the Stanzaic Guy is significantly less visible and active than her counterparts.

405 See below.
Examining the initial description of Felice after Gui/y’s departure, it is clear each version includes different details about her charitable deeds. G adds to the description in E that Felice also built churches, in addition to restoring and furnishing churches and abbeys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>G, fol. 62va</th>
<th>Caius</th>
<th>CUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De la dame voil ore parler.</td>
<td>De autre chose voil parler</td>
<td>Speke we now of this storye</td>
<td>Off he lady wyll y telle,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La femme Gui, la bonne moiller;</td>
<td>De felice sa bone maillier</td>
<td>Of Gyys wyfe, that trewe ladye.</td>
<td>Of Gyys wife, and nothynge dwelle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De bunte n’ad el mund sa per,</td>
<td>De sa brute nul nester</td>
<td>In all the world ys none here pere,</td>
<td>Of charyt: her was none harm make,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ne que tant de bien feseit</td>
<td>Ne que tant de bien feseit</td>
<td>So trew and so good in all manere.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puis que sun seignur en exil ala,</td>
<td>Puis que Gui en exil ala</td>
<td>Sehen that sir Gye went a-weye</td>
<td>Sychen hur londe he say dad take</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unques puis par veir ne fina</td>
<td>Jour ne nuit ne fina</td>
<td>She blan nether nyght ne daye</td>
<td>Halowse to seke mony oon:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De povres pestre, de musters apester</td>
<td>Des esglises fere et redrescer</td>
<td>Power to fede, andchurches to make.</td>
<td>He neuyr stynte, or he had done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E povres abeies restorer,</td>
<td>Et poures prestes amenender</td>
<td>And abbeyes to helpe for crystys sake,</td>
<td>Abbeye: churches sche dud make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De chalcees faire, de redrescer punct</td>
<td>Abbeyes chaueses et pouyz</td>
<td>Weves to make, &amp; breygis that were broke,</td>
<td>At that tymne for Gyys sake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Souvent dona hemeis as prisuns;</td>
<td>Et mult grant bien fist a prisuns</td>
<td>And men that were in preson faste stoke.</td>
<td>An pore men both clothe and fede Mony, sythe pat Gye fro pe londe yede.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja par deduit que hom li feist,</td>
<td>Onc per duedat quale ne le vist</td>
<td>Nother for game, myrth, nor for glee</td>
<td>Neuyn for game that was done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pur rien rire ne la vist.</td>
<td>Pus que Gui de li partist</td>
<td>Wold she sawe that men miȝt see.</td>
<td>Loghe sche, sythe pat Gye was gone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Iceste dame un fiz aveit, | De au tre chose voil parler | That lady had a child ful fayer: | That lady had some free: |
| Tant bel enfant al ju r n’esteit; | De sa bonte nusteit | Of all her lond he shuld have bene eyre. | A feynernighty noman see. |
| A grant honur le leverent, | Ne que tant de bien feseit | They crystyned hym, withoute blame. | They cysyned hym Reynbrowne, |
| A Heralt fui le emfes livré, | Pus que Gui de li partist | And clespydhyt Reynbrown be name. | To Harrowde bey delvyrde he chylde. |
| Cum sis peres l’out comandé. | Ne que tant de bien feseit | The child was to herawd brought. | As Gye bade the lady mylde. |

(ll.8975-92)  
(ll.62vb)  
(ll.8654-8671)  
(ll.8397-8414)

Caius Felice shows some interesting innovations, describing Felice as “so trew and so good in all manere.” The text makes explicit that she works her charity for Christ’s sake, rather than specifying, as CUL does, that she does it for Guy’s sake. In addition, the description of Reynbrowne as heir to Warwick is new, with the telling phrase that it is her lond, not only emphasizing her role in her son’s inheritance, but also that the work she is doing is on her land, underlining her position as land-holder and administrator in Guy’s absence. At the same time, the plan to have Herawd rear Reynbrown is represented as her plan, not Gui/y’s commandment, a difference that fits with the strategic abbreviation of their parting scene.  

---

406 Driver notes that Lydgate’s Guy emphasizes Felice’s noble lineage and descent through the female line in the presentation of Reinbrun’s birth (142–3), but does not note the similar emphasis in the CUL text. She connects this with Margaret Beauchamp’s husband John Talbot’s wish to inherit Warwick through his wife (“Representing Women in Guy,”150).

407 See above. On deliberate abbreviation in Caius, see Wiggins, “A Makeover Story”.

159
this change works to produce Felice’s autonomy in this section of the Caius manuscript as greater than all of the other versions.

CUL Felice’s good works are also amplified. In addition to G and Caius Felices’ construction of churches, CUL Felice also builds abbeys. At the same time, there is no mention in CUL of secular building, such as the roads and bridges in E, G, and Caius. She feeds and clothes poor men, but there is no mention of prisoners. Finally, she does these things explicitly for Gyes sake. This is possibly a deliberate change on the part of the CUL translator, as it recalls an additional unique line in her advice to Guy before his parting: “Abbeeyes, sire, let thou make,/ And so schall y for thy sake” [my emphasis] (ll.7213-4). This difference highlights her devotion to his soul.

Later in the romance, when Guy returns to England, he hears of the threat by Colbrond and asks about Herrawd (Herault) and Earl Rohold (Rohault). Upon hearing from an anonymous bystander of Herrawd’s absence and Rohold’s death, he asks about Rohold’s daughter, the countess.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>G, fol. 75vb</th>
<th>Stanzaic</th>
<th>Caius</th>
<th>CUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| E cil respunt que unc abbesse,  
Né nule femme que né estet,  
Tantes almossnes ne feseit,  
De frères pestre e faire abbey,  
De faire chalicee e veies;  
Que Deu li doinst veer icel jur  
Qu’ele peust Gui, san seignur,  
Vif u mort unoretroyer,  
De co ne fine de Deu preier. (ll. 10842-50) |
| Que fet sa fille la countesse  
Plus cottoyse nule abbesse  
Ne nule femme que soif nee  
Nax tant aumones donece  
Cum ele ad fete a null jor  
Que Dieus li doint son seignur  
Vif ou mort reisissiter  
De coo ne fine Dieus prier  
De pite ad droe Gui plore  
Fare Dampnedeius ad mult loc. |
| ’& where is þerl Rohaut of pris?’  
& þai answerd, ‘dede he is,  
A gode while is go sipe;  
& Felixis, his dohter, is his air:  
So gode a leuedi no so faire.  
Y-wis, non olive. (st.237) |
| What doth hys dow3ter the countas?  
He syed, ‘she doth get almesse.  
No man ne woman in that contree  
That doth more good for charyte  
To pore freys and pore abbey,  
And to helpe bryggis and brokyn ways,  
And pray to god, as he well maye,  
Lette her abyd that daye  
That she may see her lord so dere  
Quyke or dedde may þe fynde:  
He is euyr in hur mynde. (ll. 9985-9994) |

The most dramatic difference is clearly visible in the Stanzaic Guy. Here, as noted above, Guy does not even ask about Felice himself, but the anonymous bystanders add her in to the news about his father. She is his heir, and the most beautiful and good lady alive, but there is no mention of charity work or prayers for Guy or her devotion by keeping him in her thoughts. Only G mentions Felice’s courtesy or piety explicitly, but otherwise the passage is not greatly different from E, except for the omission of lines describing building work again.

408 Not in G. fol. 53r.
In the Caius version, the man’s reply is expanded and the sense changed slightly: there is increased emphasis on her charity, as well as the addition of her praying for Guy night and day, a tirelessness also present in the previous passage with a direct equivalent in G. Moreover, where Anglo-Norman Felice is compared to all women and abbesses who have ever been born in both E and G, Caius Felice is compared to women and men. Her beneficence is not found to be exceptional only against standards of female behaviour, but male behaviour as well, ranking her above both men and women “in that country.”

A slight difference is visible in CUL as well. Here the bystanders describe Felice as the best of all women ever alive, who has performed more beneficent works in such a space of time than any woman who has ever been born. She performs the same secular and ecclesiastical building as Felice in the E text, but her prayer, like in the Caius manuscript, is more explicit. In general, this passage functions to present to Gui/y evidence of his wife’s goodness in his absence, and, with the exception of the Stanzaic Guy, to make an explicit connection between her works of pious charity, described earlier in the romance, and her devotion to Gui/y, which is represented as inseparable from her devotion to God, to whom she prays that she may see Gui/y again, living or dead. Gui/y, having erroneously privileged his love for Felice over his love for God, seems to have to substitute one for the other. Felice’s devotion, on the other hand, combines the two. Her devotion to Gui/y is represented as continuous with her devotion to God.

This connected devotion is expanded in the scene where Gui/y returns home to Warwick to receive hospitality from Felice while unrecognizable as an old pilgrim, a section which is absent in the Caius text due to a break in the manuscript. Here the connection between her charitable feeding of the poor and her devotion to Gui/y’s soul is made: she prays that God will save her husband’s soul, recalling her initial suggestion to Gui/y that he perform works of charity and have people pray for his soul as a means of forgiveness for his sins and salvation.
The Stanzaic Guy here recuperates the lost details about Felice’s charitable works by expanding the description of her almsgiving for Guy’s sake and emphasis on her prayers to God, as well as the Virgin Mary. In addition to saving Guy, she asks God to help him in his need, and she prays and gives alms “night and day.” I suspect that the reason for this addition lies in the earlier removal of the section in which Reynbroun is introduced, presumably because his story was separated out as its own romance in this manuscript. As mentioned briefly above, in Reynbroun, Felice is not even named, much less described with praise for her almsgiving and prayer. Notably, no references to her secular or religious building work are included; instead, Stanzaic Guy Felice’s charity works consists solely of prayer and alms.

Except for this addition, the Stanzaic Guy text clearly follows E fairly closely. As in E, Gui’y’s physical appearance prompts Felice’s pity, just as his fainting wretchedly once did during their courtship. In these two versions, Felice’s attention to Gui’y is presented as a simple reaction of pity: she takes special care towards him because he is so wretched, sending him wine and mulberry wine/beer from her own table in gold cups, bidding him to return every day for...
food and drink. Guy, as in E and G, but not in CUL, is very afraid of being recognized, but this time the narrator adds “Ac þer was non so wise of siʒt:/Pat him þer knowe miʒt‖ (st.280). This difference goes hand in hand with the final lines of this section, which do not repeat his fear of being recognized as an explanation for his thanking of Felice; instead, the lines blandly report that he had other plans that he did not want to tell her about.

CUL shows a remarkable closeness to the G manuscript in this passage, and indeed throughout the end of Guy’s part of the romance, which to my knowledge has not been noticed before. In both CUL and G, the details of the feast are somewhat different than they are in the Stanzaic Guy. In both the G text and CUL, the details of the feast differ from those of E text and the Stanzaic Guy. Though Guy is part of the company of men receiving alms, and sits in front of Felice, as he does in the other versions, in these two manuscripts her special attention to him is not due to his especially wretched appearance, but the fact that when she looks at him, he reminds her of her husband Guy. Here her reaction is represented as one of insight and intuition. She tells a squire to take to “that pilgrim‖ [tel peleryn; þat pylgryme] plenty of bread and wine. The attendant carries out her orders, bringing Guy, once again described as the “pilgrim,” the food and drink. As in the other versions, the countess tells Guy to return every day to receive her hospitality, but in G and CUL she also requests that he come to speak with her after he has finished eating. This conversation appears to occur directly between the two of them because his acceptance and thank you are in direct speech, referring to her as “vus” and “ye” respectively. Combined with Felice’s remembrance of Guy upon looking at him, and the persistence of his label “the pilgrim,” her request seems to imply her possible recognition, a direct contrast to the Stanzaic Guy’s assertion that there was no one “so wise of sight‖ there who could recognize him.

This passage has been remarked upon by those scholars interpreting differences between the CUL and earlier Anglo-Norman and Middle English versions of Guy as deriving from the CUL text’s late date and different socio-cultural milieu. Velma Richmond, for example, observes of the CUL text that “Felice’s major role is worthy wife, here altered by several realistic touches and mitigation of asceticism,” notably Felice’s possible recognition of Guy and her attempt to find him after his departure (see below). Concerning these details, she comments that “these alterations create a scene of greater human emotion and reduce doubts about why

those who love Guy so consistently do not recognize him or even recall him.\textsuperscript{410} Martha Driver likewise comments very briefly on the possible recognition as an addition that alters the characterization of Felice along the trajectory she observes in other fifteenth-century Beauchamp-produced Guy texts, the amplification of her presentation as pious wife and mother.\textsuperscript{411} Certainly the CUL text reads as Richmond and Driver suggest; however, the alterations are neither Middle English nor fifteenth-century-Beauchamp-influenced, though a Beauchamp family context itself is not out of the question.\textsuperscript{412}

The possibility of Felice’s recognition of Guy is strengthened after Guy’s departure, where in both G and CUL, Felice wonders where he is and sends the attendant out to find him:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>G, fol. 82rb</th>
<th>Stanzaic</th>
<th>CUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quant la contesse out mange E la grandetable urent oste, A l’anz qu’il pot, de la sale ist, Hors de la cite mult tost se mist. Envers Arderne dreit s’en ala, A un saint hermite qu’il conui ja, Qui loinz en la forest manect, Cele part, s’il puet, irra tu t</td>
<td>Quant assez eurent mange Et les tables sont ooste, Le peleryn de la sale sen ist, Hors de la ville son chemin prist, Vers Ardenetost sen va a un hermite qu'il conost la Loiz in la forest manet Qui sainte vytenet Encontre Warwic la cite Kibbeclieu est appele</td>
<td>When þe grace were y-seyd, &amp; þe bordes adun kyld, Out of toon he went his way, Into a forest wenden he gan, To an hermite he knewe er þan, &amp; to speke him ȝif he may, &amp; when he þide comen was, Pe gode hermite þurth Godes grace Was dede &amp; loken in clay.</td>
<td>When þat he byd had eton all And he bordys let downe fals, The pilygryn þen, þeþer he came, Of þat towe hys wye he name Besydes Warwykke he can To an emyte, þat he knewe or þan, On a ryuere side his hows he hadde (A full holy lyfe he there ladd) Besydes Warwike, þat was hys, That Gibecliff clewed vs. But he hermyte þen dedde wes: No man leyng here nas, dredeles; And Gec hym beloght anon, That þro þens wolde he neyver gone: Thens on þe neuyr he go noide, But seyg god þere he wolde. The contiis seyde þen aþur mete: ‘Where ys þe pilygryn? Ys he forȝete? Then seyde a knyȝt, þat was þull berde: ‘Owte of þe towne y sawe hym wende.’ Then soght he was in a lytull stownde, But nowhere he myght be townde. In the hermitage Gij ys leuynge And þere he leuynge þat yuȝe hys Perylysh he was olie. Wþ a prest he spac of þat çuntre Pat dede him seruise ich day, &amp; of his sines gan schrieue. (st. 282–283)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li hermits morz esteit, Nul home vivant n’i avice, Qui donc se purpensa Ke avant d’iloc ne s’en irra, Mais tu t dis, tan cum il vivera, Quant il parvint a l’hermitage, Dreit. La forêt, Qui tant ert loinz in cel Quant il parvint a l’hermitage,</td>
<td>A vn prestr he spac of þat çuntre Pat wald he neuer þennes gon Pershiles he war olue, Wþ a prest he spac of þat çuntre Pat dede him seruise ich day, &amp; of his sines gan schrieue.</td>
<td>To speke him</td>
<td>Pat dede him seruise ich day, &amp; of his sines gan schrieue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li hermits morz esteit, Nul home vivant n’i avice, Qui donc se purpensa Ke avant d’iloc ne s’en irra, Mais tu t dis, tan cum il vivera, Quant il parvint a l’hermitage, Dreit. La forêt, Qui tant ert loinz in cel Quant il parvint a l’hermitage,</td>
<td>A vn prestr he spac of þat çuntre Pat wald he neuer þennes gon Pershiles he war olue, Wþ a prest he spac of þat çuntre Pat dede him seruise ich day, &amp; of his sines gan schrieue.</td>
<td>To speke him</td>
<td>Pat dede him seruise ich day, &amp; of his sines gan schrieue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qui a chascu ne feste a li veneit En coste Warwick la celle/ Kibbeclieu est appele</td>
<td>El ouyit la confession De ses pecchez li fist pardon Mult demeine seinte vye Dieu servir ia nobile.</td>
<td>The cowntas seyde then aftur mete: ‘Where ys þe pilygryn? Ys he forȝete? Then seyde a knyȝt, þat was þull berde: ‘Owte of þe towne y sawe hym wende.’ Then soght he was in a lytull stownde, But nowhere he myght be townde. In the hermitage Gij ys leuynge And þere he leuynge þat yuȝe hys Perylysh he was olie. Wþ a prest he spac of þat çuntre Pat dede him seruise ich day, &amp; of his sines gan schrieue. (st. 282–283)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{410} Richmond, Legend of Guy, 113.

\textsuperscript{411} Driver, “Representing Women,” 141–2.

\textsuperscript{412} See below.
That Gybbeclif clepyd ys are of greatest significance. These two lines in the Middle English have received much in the way of commentary as a supposed Middle English innovation. Gybbeclif is the pre-sixteenth century name for a hermitage close to Warwick on the Avon river; in the late fifteenth century the name began to change to Guy’s Cliffe under the influence of the popularity of the Guy legend. Kibbeclyue is an alternative spelling for the same place. The presence of place names ‘Kibbeclyue’ and the Avon river (“Auene”), as well as the description of the hermitage’s location as “a coste de Warewik” in the G manuscript clearly (in some version) lie directly behind the lines in CUL that specify the hermit’s house on a riverside, beside Warwick and called Gybbeclif. The importance of this small detail lies in the fact that it considerably alters the prevailing narrative about the development of the Guy romances in the fifteenth century.

John Frankis describes “the cult of Guy’s hermitage” in the fifteenth-century romances as a “factor that clearly distinguishes the earlier versions of the romance both in Anglo-Norman and in Middle English (Anglo-Norman Gui and the Auchenleck text) from the later versions (the Prose Guy and the Middle English text in [CUL]).” Frankis notes that the hermitage location is vague in the Anglo-Norman Gui, being far away in the forest of Arderne, and vaguer still in the Middle English version present in the Auchenleck manuscript. He suggests that the description of the hermitage as close to Warwick in the Anglo-French Prose Guy and particularly the specification of the hermitage’s location by name ‘Gybbeclif’ in the CUL text are evidence that not only bears witness to the growth of the cult of Guy’s hermitage in the fifteenth century, but can be used to date the texts as well. He specifically links these details to the acquisition of the hermitage’s land in the early 1420s by Richard Beauchamp (d.1439) and the commencement of the construction of a chantry chapel there in 1423. He writes:

413 The Dictionary of National Biography writes that “[t]wo miles from Warwick is a rock overlooking the Avon, which was until the fifteenth century known as ‘Kibbeclyue’ or ‘Gibbeclyve.’ This spot Earl Richard seems to have identified, in accord with some vague local tradition, with the hermitage where Guy in the legend died, although the romance describes the cell as in the woods of Arden. The place, ‘Kibbeclyue,’ has long been known as Guy’s Cliffe. There Earl Richard erected a chantry or chapel for the repose of the souls of the legendary Guy and others of his ancestors, and provided endowment for the maintenance of two priests (1422–3).” Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 23 (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1890), 387. The Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum gives more information on the unique spelling: “The hermitage where Guy died is no further described in the French than as lying at some distance from Warwick in the middle of the woods of ‘Arden.’… Guy’s Cliff cannot be said to answer this description as it stands upon the Avon barely two miles away from Warwick. It is called Kibbeclyve in the Kenilworth Register in Harley MS 3650 (5, 12) where it is only mentioned with reference to the mill.” Harry Leigh Douglas Ward and John Alexander Herbert, Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum, vol. 1 (London: British Museum. Dept. of Manuscripts, 1883), 482.

Precisely how and when the Gibcliff cave came to be associated with Guy is unknown, but the belief was presumably established before Earl Richard built his chapel there. This revival of interest in the legendary ancestor of the earls of Warwick, specifically localized in the Guy’s Cliffe hermitage and manifest in Earl Richard’s chapel of 1423, is reflected in both the Prose Guy and the later Middle English Guy of Warwick, and it provides a terminus a quo for the composition of both of these works since there is no evidence that the cult of Guy’s hermitage existed for any length of time before the building of the chapel [my emphasis].”

This theory has been very influential in the conceptualization of the development of Guy narratives in the fifteenth century, as witnessed by its frequent citation.

Unless one wants to contest the dating of the G manuscript as late thirteenth-/early fourteenth-century, it is conclusive that the association of the Kibbecliue site by the Avon river, close to Warwick, with Guy’s legend and thereby the ‘cult of Guy’s hermitage’ occurred over a hundred years before the start of the building of the Beauchamp chapel on the site.

Frankis’ dating the composition of both the CUL text and the Anglo-French Prose Guy as after 1423 because of the hermitage’s location and name is therefore no longer possible. In more general terms, the discussion of the growth of the cult of Guy’s hermitage as a fifteenth-century,...
Beauchamp-derived development needs to be reexamined, as does the interpretation of certain ‘changes’ to the CUL text as fifteenth-century Beauchamp-influenced adaptations.

There are a number of other significant details in the CUL text that have been interpreted as fifteenth-century innovations that can also be found in the G text. For example, Richmond comments, “[p]ersonal family relationships are of great importance. The husband’s concern for his wife increases,”418 citing Guy’s inquiry to the angel about the fates of his wife and son. This is actually also present in G:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G fol.82vb</th>
<th>CUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atant sen est · G· esueille</td>
<td>And Gye awaketh anon right:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delangle vist la clarte.</td>
<td>He sawe þe angell feyre and bright.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pus li dist od moy parlez</td>
<td>Sythen he seyde: ‘speke wyth me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamy Dieus nel me celez</td>
<td>Goddys frende, now prey y the.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ou ert ma muiller et mon fis</td>
<td>Where schall my sone be and my wife bo?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pour voyr · G· en parays.</td>
<td>‘In paradyse þey schull be,’ he seyde þo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandez aly ensement</td>
<td>Hastyly aftur hur þou sende</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que ele mourra hastiument.</td>
<td>And bydde hur, þat sche to þe wende.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedenz · XL· iors mourra</td>
<td>The xl. Day heraftur, syr Gye,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lavint notre dame serra.</td>
<td>Sche schall be wyth owre lady.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et · G· respond en dormant</td>
<td>‘As god wolde, so mote hyt bee.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quant Dieus le veut ieo le grant.</td>
<td>(ll.10,565–76)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The entourage that accompanies Felice to the hermitage and witnesses her reunion with Guy, a detail that Alison Wiggins cites as one of five main additions that link the CUL text to a fifteenth-century Beauchamp environment,419 likewise occurs in G. Wiggins finds that the added detail of the “Erlys barons and abbottys tho/ Archebyschopes and byschoppes also”(10,653-4) “creates a more official and more publically witnessed scene at the hermitage than is presented in Gui or any of the other Middle English versions.”420 However, the lines cited by Wiggins find a close parallel in “Contes barons et abbez/ Erceveskes i sont mandez” (fol.83vb).

418 Richmond, Legend of Guy, 114.
419 These are Guy’s knighting scene (387-422); King Athelstan’s sending of men to retrieve Guy’s armour from Felice before his fight with Colbrond (10,158); the naming of the hermitage in which Guy dies as “Gybbeclyf” (10,530); the motif of the half ring that Guy sends as a token of recognition to Felice (following Driver) (10,583); and Felice’s expanded entourage when she arrives immediately before Guy’s death (10,653–54). Wiggins, “Manuscripts and Texts of Guy,” 70–1.
In addition, the Stanzaic Guy also includes an expanded entourage. Felice rides out “Wip kniȝtes & wiþ leuedis hende” and “wiþ al þe best of þat cite,” a line that clearly echoes the Anglo-Norman E text “od tud le plus de la cite” (l.11,553). The difference is that both G and CUL seem to suggest that this group of officials enter the hermitage with Felice, creating “a more official and more publically witnessed scene” indeed, but one which is not a fifteenth-century, English innovation.

As we have already seen, Felice’s final reunion with Gui in the E text involves a continued denial of worldly pleasure, even to Gui’s last breath. He defines his penitent identity—specifically through physical and emotional absence from her by which he achieves his denial of any return to marital pleasure—and at her expense. He never grants her any final physical or emotional comfort other than the most basic thing that she prayed for, to see him again, alive or dead; at the same time, she refrains from offering or requesting any such comfort. This sequence is followed closely by the Auchinleck stanzaic Guy. As in E, as soon as Felice cries out, Guy opens his eyes, dies and St. Michael, this time with a specified number of 1007 angels, takes his soul up to heaven while singing.

Felice’s reunion with Guy in both the Caius and the CUL manuscripts is quite different. In both, Felice enters and immediately lies down beside Guy’s body, then lets out a wondrously high cry that causes him to open his eyes. He looks on her a final time and they share a final kiss. As we can see, these differences derive from a version close to G, where the detail of the sequence is likewise unique.
visnee
En haut donc letto un cri
Que sire - G ses euz oertli
Et sur felice regarda
Per ses mains la prist si la cola
Son chief sur li ad escowe
Et douxemen l’az bayse
Mes nis vn mot ne parla
A donc - G se desun.
Quant l’alme del cors isit
Sei nte Michel la seysit
Cu m vne colu mbe laz portee
A Dieus en haut laz liuare
Od grant ioye et haut chant
Od Gloria in excelsis chantant.

Sche wept & made doleful cri
Wip a ful reweful steuen.
Sir Gij loked on hir þare:
His soule fram þe bodi gan fare.
A thousand angels & seuen
Vnder-fenge þe soule of Gij,
& bar it wip gret molodi
Into þe blis of heuen.
(st. 293)

lay ther bye.
Redwy she cryed ther for the nonys,
And he lokyd on her ony:
He kissed her fayre & curtesly;
With that he dyed hastlye.
There dyed the noble knyȝt sir Gye:
Sevnt Mighell was ther ful redye
And bare hys soule to heuyn lyȝt,
And presentyd hit to the heuyn kyng;
There shall he be withowte ending.
(ll.10,932–48)

sche sce,
Wondryly high sche caste vp a crye.
Wyþ a ful reweful steuen.
Sir Gij loked on hir þare:
His soule fram þe bodi gan fare.
A thousand angels & seuen
Vnder-fenge þe soule of Gij,
& bar it wip gret molodi
Into þe blis of heuen.
(ll.11,552–68)

In these versions, their kiss and embrace reasserts their identity as a married couple, and in
Caius and CUL Felice asserts her identity as Gui/y’s wife, laying down beside him, claiming the
physical and emotional comfort of his living body. In G and CUL the narrative suggests a
moment of wordless communication in the detail that Gui/y did not speak even a single word,
although the scene is expanded in CUL. They lie ‘head to head’ and ‘sweetly’ kiss each other.
The tenderness and affection is depicted as reciprocal: Felice is granted the agency to bestow a
final physical expression of love, a narrative endorsement of her role as devoted and loving
wife.

Moreover, the CUL version shows a remarkable addition. When Guy raises his hands up
to Felice, CUL specifies that he does so as a request for forgiveness for all of the sorrow he
caused Felice to undergo for his sake. In doing so, he recognizes Felice as a subject from whom
he ought to ask forgiveness, and as a subject capable of granting forgiveness. CUL Felice is the
only one who is recognized by Guy as having been wronged by him. For the first time, it seems,
Felice is not represented as (at least somewhat) justifiably suffering for Guy’s sake in
reciprocity for the hardship she caused him in the first half of the romance. Begging for her
forgiveness, CUL Guy continues the trend of taking more responsibility for his own actions that
was introduced in scene of his departure when he stated, “I haue done mekyll schame: God hath leyde on me þe blame.” In CUL, Guy acknowledges Felice as a victim of his actions, rather than casting her as partially culpable for them, and acknowledges and takes responsibility for the suffering he caused Felice through his life-long absence.

Guy’s request for forgiveness from Felice may be an innovation on the part of the redactor of the CUL text, as the passage otherwise follows the G text extremely closely, down to the unique and idiosyncratic details about Guy’s soul being taken to heaven in the form of a white dove by St. Michael and the title of the song chanted by the chorus of angels.\footnote{421}{The innovation of these details has also been connected to a fifteenth-century Beauchamp Warwickshire context. Velma Richmond simultaneously connects the details of the white dove and angel’s song to the specified location of the hermitage and its place name Gybbeclyf. She finds these details concordant with fifteenth-century didacticism and preoccupation about the soul’s fate after death witnessed through the increased number of chantries, particularly that of Guy’s Cliffe built in the mid-fifteenth century by the Beauchamp family. Richmond, \textit{Legend of Guy}, 117. Whatever the socio-cultural and/or literary pressures informing these differences, they can no longer be perceived as belonging to the fifteenth century.}

Unfortunately, there is no way to tell. The Caius manuscript presents a somewhat similar scene, but otherwise follows the E text, suggesting that a different exemplar lay behind it, especially since this section has been identified by Wiggins as belonging to an unidentified redaction.\footnote{422}{Wiggins, “Manuscripts and Texts of \textit{Guy},” 65, n.12.}

The variety across extant versions is just large enough that the possibility of lost, intermediate versions is all too possible, making firm conclusions impossible.

As we have already seen, the final scene of the Anglo-Norman E text of the romance, or at least of the Gui section of the romance (before the adventures of his son Reinbroun are recounted), contains important details about Felice’s devotional actions after Gui’s death; these are implicitly connected to the narrator’s prayer and exhortation for audience members and readers to serve God. The other versions, however, each present a different closing, a fact which has significant thematic effect on the texts.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{E} & \textbf{G, fol.84rb} & \textbf{Caius} & \textbf{CUL} \\
\hline
Quant le cors fu enterré, & Quant le cors feu enterré & As sone as he was berryped & When he body was leyde in \\
Trestuit d’ilœc s’en sont & Toz sen sont remue & there & grounde; \\
ald; & Fors la Contesse quest & Thens hey wente in a lytull & Thens hey wente in a łytull \\
Chascun s’en vas a & demorece & stownde. & stownde. \\
contre, & Car la jour de son ce & But þe lady gentill and & But þe cowteas sche leyved \\
Fors la dame, qui est & Tant cum ele vivra & free: & there; \\
demorece & Iloec Deus servir voudra & Styll ther wold she bee. & Fro þens on lyue go wolde sche \\
Et que ja d’ilœc n’en & Ne vesqui que - XL - iours & Froþens wold she not & nere; \\
parten;a; & Apres G en grant dolors & fare & Fro þat place neuyr sche go \\
Tant cum ele vivra & Pres de ly feu entere & While she leyvd neuyr-
En vn sarcu byen ouere & En vn sarcu byen ouere & -mare, \\
Ensemble est la & Ensemble est la compagnie & But servyd God with good \\
compaignie & Od nostre dame scint e & prayer \\
Od nostre dame scint e & Ou nas serom & For Gye, her lord, that was \\
marie & Ou nas serom & so dere; \\
E ele si fist vernaient, & Stanzic \textit{Guy} & And so she dyd, withoat \\
Ca mult i servir bonement, & When þai hadde birid & fayle; \\
Grandes almoynes i feueit, & his bodi, anon & For Gye, her lord, that was \\
& & so dere; \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}
Tant cum ele i vivate  
Apres co gueres ne vesqui,  
Hastivement sa vie fini,  
Cum en l’estorie avom tres,  
E ben fait a creer, pur verité,  
Qu’ele après la mort sun seignur  
Morut al cinquantine jur;  
Aventures beles li t buntez en li  
Cum vus avez ici oi.  
E Deu le gueredun li rendi,  
Sure totes riens Deu honura  
Fei e lalté tu t dis ama,  
Cum il sa vie en ben feni,  
Ore avez, seignurs, de Gui,  
En sa glorie puissum server  
E issi nus doinst Deu;  
Marie;  
De Nostre Dame, sa compagnie  
Ensemble sunt en la Sevelie fu a grant honur;  
Amur,  
Aprés li se fist mettre par Morut al cinquantime jur;  
seignur  
Qu’ele aprés la mort sun verité,  
E ben fait a crere, pu r trové,  
Cum en l’estorie avoms  
Hastivement sa vie feni,  
Apres co gueres ne vesqui,  
Tant cum ele i viveit.  
Amen.

communément  
Dieus le nus doint omnipotent.

hende.  
& was birid hir lord by;  
& now hau er togider in compayne  
In ioie hau neuer schal ende.  
[...st.298 about Sir Tirritaking Gij’s body to Lorain....]

Nygth and day with gre travelye  
In godlys serupe se ȝȝt  
and daye,  
All that tym that she ther laye  
Euer she dyd almes deede,  
And god a-quyte well her mede;  
And euer she bad god besly  
That she myȝt dye after hym hastily.  
She dyed at the forty daye  
After Gye, as I yow seye.  
She was beryed hastily  
Ryght there be her lord sir Gye.  
To-gedry be they in company  
In blysse: I hope to oure lady,  
Jesus graunt vs so to do,  
That we may come hym to.  
Lordynys, now have ye herd  
Of Gye of Warewyke, how  
he fard,  
And how he led hys long lyfe  
In bateyle and in stryfe,  
But euer he lovyd hevyn  
In blysse: I hope to oure lady,  
Jesus graunt vs so to do,  
That we may come hym to.

Now haue ȝe herd,  
lordines, of Gij,  
But in histime was so hardi,  
& holde hende & fre,  
& euer he loued treuhe & ȝȝt,  
& seued God wip al his mig,  
But sit in trinite,  
& perfore at his ending day  
He went to be ioie ȝat lasteȝy,  
& euer more schal be.  
Now God leue ous to line so,  
But we may ȝat ioie com to.  
Amen, par charte.  
(st.297–299)

Now lordynys, ye haue harde  
of Goe  
Of Warwykk, bu was wondur hardy,  
And also of feyre Felyce, hys wife,  
That he moste louyd of women on lyce,  
In what maner hey partyd in twoo  
And how hey loued 423 then alsoo  
And how hey drekke god almyghty;  
Every synfull schulde so with right.  
As ye haue herde me rede or hys  
Ther lyfes 424 bu now endy  
versus Jesus Criste al weldynge  
That art god and crowned kynge  
(In trynyte bu hast be radur fre  
And all knytt in oon persones thre),  
We the bescheche loued and style,  
That buo vs grawnt borow by wylle  
To be also safe as vs Gown  
Of Warwykk, bat bolde baroun.  
To Mary mylde prey we for hym,  
That schet wyll helpe euery sinfull man,  
That god forgeue vu owre synnes all,  
That we al day behy yn yfalle,  
And that owre sowles we mote hym sende.  
When we owte of hys worlde schull wende.  
(II.11,612–42)
In the Stanzaic *Guy*, details of Felice’s service are absent. She remains behind at the hermitage and dies, but her devotional actions are absent, just as the details of her secular and ecclesiastical constructions were absent earlier in the romance. Combined with the removal of the scene of Reinbrun’s birth to the Reinbrun romance that follows, in which Felice is not even mentioned, it becomes evident that Felice of the stanzaic romance is significantly less visible and active than her counterparts.

Caius follows E relatively closely, except in a few interesting details: Felice serves God at Guy’s burial place until her death, and this is syntactically connected to the narrator’s prayer that he and his audience may so serve and be so rewarded. Caius Felice’s determination to stay and her dedication and energy in prayer are expanded. There is additional description of her noble character, as well as God’s direct response to her prayer. Moreover, Caius is the only version in which Felice is represented as praying to follow Guy in death. On the one hand, such an action is deeply anti-feminist: Felice is so devoted to her husband, so dependent upon him for her identity, that she desires to follow him in death. As in the Anglo-Norman versions, at Guy’s return to Warwick prior to their marriage she had explicitly abandoned her will to his. Her following of him in death is something of a literalization of this earlier profession. On the other hand, the innovation that Felice “bad god besyly” to die recuperates a measure of agency for Felice in her death. In the other versions, Guy merely reports to her through a messenger that she will follow him in death shortly; the narrative portrays neither her reactions to, nor emotions about, this prophecy. At least in the Caius version she is represented as actively pursuing such a fate. Looking back at her pre-marital promise to Guy, we can see a similar trend. In the Anglo-Norman E text, Felice says “A vus me doins, si me ottrei,/ vostre plaisir facez de mei” [“I give and promise myself to you; do what you please with me”] (ll.7445-46; 178). In the Middle English Caius version, Felice says, “Bot the, to whom y yive me/To thy will e y shall always bee” (ll.7329–30). Both Felices objectify themselves by treating themselves as gifts to Gui. They are simultaneously subject and object. But where Anglo-Norman Felice abandons herself to object-status in saying “vostre plaisir facez de mei,” Caius Felice reserves a sense of herself as a subject; she is still the subject in the sentence, and her promise is more active, requiring a continued performance.\(^{425}\)

\(^{425}\) This is a change from the earlier, extremely close translation where Caius more or less reproduces what is in the Anglo-Norman: Compare “My loue than y shall graunte the,/ For to doo with me thi wille” (1160-1) to “De mei l’amur vus ert granté,/ De faire ent vostre volenté” (ll.1079-80) [“I will give you my love, to do with as you please” [Weiss, 108]]. It is ambiguous whether the ‘ent’ refers to the love or to Felice herself.
CUL closely follows G in the reworked ending. Both Felices stay behind, serve God at Gui/y’s burial place and then die forty days after and are buried in the same tomb. The narrator then closes this section of the romance, addressing the lords in his audience, saying “now you have heard of Guy from Warwick, who was hardy, and of his wife Felice.” Gui/y alone is held up as an exemplar in E, the Stanzaic Guy and Caius. By contrast, the G manuscript, like CUL, holds up both Gui and Felice as the subject of the story and, by extension, as examples for the audience. This is an important development in the presentation and reception of the romance. The story is about both Guy and Felice, at least in the formalized colophon, highlighting her importance to the narrative and placing her subjectivity in apposition to Gui/y’s.

Where G describes Felice as “Que tant feu a son vouler” [“who was so much at his will”], CUL has “the woman he loved most in his life.” G foregrounds Felice’s act of submission to Gui’s will, and in doing so portrays Felice’s subservience to Guy as a desirable example. On the other hand, CUL foregrounds Guy’s action in loving her. It is tempting to become enthusiastic about this development from a gender-critical, feminist point of view and connect it to Martha Driver’s discussion of the revised depiction of Felice in the fifteenth-century Middle English non-romance versions of Guy. However, comparing this colophon to the close of Havelok, we can see the dramatic difference in the conceptualization of the female protagonists’ subjectivity between the romances: Goldeboru and Havelok are on equal footing, but in both G and CUL, Felice is an afterthought, represented only in relation to Gui/y, whose deeds and devotion occupy the bulk of the section. Moreover, by the time the prayer to God, the Trinity and Mary has begun, Felice is forgotten. Both Anglo-Norman and Middle English narrators pray for their audiences and themselves to be “safe like Guy.”

The acknowledgement of Felice’s importance to the overall romance as a worthy exemplary figure resurfaces in what can reasonably be called a mini-epilogue that occurs after the colophon but before the section on Reinbroun starts. Here Sir Terri, Gui/y’s lifelong friend, has begged and been granted Gui/y’s body by King Athelston (and presumably Felice’s as well, though this is never specified). In CUL, unlike the other Middle English versions and the Anglo-Norman E text, when Terri brings Gui/y’s body to Lorraine, he also builds an abbey that is incomparable in its richness:

> For Gyes sowle and for hys wyfe,  
> That he loued, as hys lyfe.  
> Hys loue so he quytt hym all.

---

426 See above, chapter two.
The Abbey standeth and euer schall
For to prey for gode syr Gye,
That god on hys sowle haue mercy
And that god schylde from woo
Hys sowle; and owres alsoo!
Of Gye an endynge y muste make:
To Cryste, crowned kynge, y hym betake
And to hys modur also now ryght,
That they vs brynge to þat blys bright. (ll.10,775–86)

The focus is again on Guy, with Felice defined by Guy’s love for her, but at least in this version of the romance she is mentioned. Both Wiggins and Zupitza remark on the strangeness and lack of source for this passage and suggest that some tampering or addition by the scribe is the likely cause of it. An examination of G fol. 85ra, however, solves the mystery:

Car vne abbeye i fist fere
Ni ad plus bele en la terre.
Pur lalme · G· et sa muiller.
Felice la bele od le vys cler
Pour tant le fist quil les ama
Vncore esta et toz iors fra.
Labbeye pour voir vus di
Et toz iors prierent pour Gy
Que Dieus li met en bon repos
Lalme de ly et de nos. Amen.
Ore lerrom de · G· atant
A dampnedieus le comanc
Et a sa mere ensement
Si nus defendent de tourment
A M E N.

These two end sections, the colophon and epilogue, highlight Felice’s narrative importance and participation in Gui/y’s spiritual victory in a way that is consonant with her amplified role at the end of the Gui/y section of the narrative. These include, as we have seen, her increased perceptiveness and agency in seeking out the ‘anonymous’ pilgrim Gui/y upon his return, Gui/y’s direct questioning of the angel about his wife and son’s fate and the angel’s specific reply that Felice will be with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Felice’s larger entourage at Kibbecliue/ Gybbeclyf, and the couple’s final farewell and kiss. Cumulatively, these differences suggest that the patterns observed by Martha Driver, of greater narrative emphasis on Felice’s position as a pious and devoted wife that increases Felice’s laudability and presents her as a model ancestress

for Beauchamp women in the fifteenth century, actually began as early as the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century.

The connections between G and CUL, thus far not taken into account by scholars, also shed some light on what differences might be genuine adaptations by the CUL redactor or fifteenth-century translator. In addition to Guy’s begging of forgiveness from Felice, the presence of Felice’s half-ring, a motif that Driver finds links this portrayal to fifteenth-century Beauchamp patronage, has neither a precedent in E, G, nor in Caius, the other fifteenth-century version of Guy, but does have analogues in the Rous Rolls and Beauchamp pageants, both fifteenth-century adaptations of the Guy legend for Beauchamp patrons. Thus it also becomes a likelier candidate for being a genuine fifteenth-century addition. Likewise, the unique details of Guy’s armour noted by Wiggins, his arming scene, as well as Felice’s role in caring for Guy’s armour in his absence, have no precedent in G or the Caius manuscript. When the historical detail about the preoccupation with Guy’s armour by the Earls of Warwick in the fourteenth century, including Earl Thomas Beauchamp’s bequeathing of supposed sword and coat of mail to his son Thomas in 1369 are taken into account, it becomes reasonable to suggests that these details in the CUL may in fact date to a later stage of the narrative’s development in the late fourteenth century, or are unique to the fifteenth-century CUL version.

Djordjević, building on Mills, has admirably demonstrated the importance of taking the G manuscript into account when examining the fourteenth-century Middle English couplet versions of Guy of Warwick, and to a lesser extent, the fifteenth-century versions. This comparative study builds on this approach, showing the crucial role that Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Aug. 87. 4 has to play in our understanding of textual change over time and across languages. Without the G manuscript, an insightful examination of the development of the presentation of Felice would not be possible. In addition to short readings (comprised of individual lines, or place names), significant and lengthy passages from some version of the Anglo-Norman Gui close to that preserved in the G manuscript lie behind supposed innovations in the Middle English versions, particularly that preserved in the CUL manuscript. Some of these lengthy passages considerably revise certain long-held ideas about the reception and revision of the Guy legend in the fifteenth century, particularly with respect to revision of

---

428 To be fair, the section in which it would be found has been identified by Wiggins as belonging to an unidentified redaction of Guy (“Manuscripts and Texts of Guy,” 65).
429 Carol Fewster, Traditionality and Genre in Middle English Romance (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), 111.
430 See above, discussion of Djordjević, “Guy of Warwick as a Translation”; Djordjević, “Saracens and Other Saxons.”
Felice’s character in connection with a fifteenth-century Beauchamp context. The appearance of the description of the location of the hermitage and naming of the hermitage in the CUL manuscript in the Guy romance, as well as the connected differences in the presentation of Felice, can no longer be connected with the early- to mid-fifteenth-century building activity at the Gibbeclyf site by the Beauchamp family as part of their multi-faceted patronage of the Guy story as their ancestral legend. However, a late thirteenth-/early fourteenth-century Warwickshire, Beauchamp family context remains a possibility for the details themselves, as there is no reason to suggest that some version of the G manuscript was not in Warwick in this period and that the development of these innovations did not occur along similar motivations presumed for its fifteenth-century context.

As Carol Fewster and Emma Mason, among others, have detailed, evidence of Beauchamp patronage of the Guy legend begins in the 1270s when William de Beauchamp IV named his heir ‘Guy’ shortly after succeeding his maternal uncle to the earldom of Warwick in 1268. Lacking continuity with the previous Earls of Warwick and their families, he “used the romance to forge this link” by calling his son after the romance hero. Mason remarks: “In changing their patterns of nomenclature, the Beauchamps indicated that they truly identified with the honour to which they had fortuitously succeeded. Guy’s Tower was added to Warwick Castle and fusion with the allegedly heroic past was completed when the relics of Earl Guy (1298-1315) were proudly displayed as those of the legendary hero.” At the same time, we know that a copy of the romance was present at Warwick during the same period because a copy of Gui was one of the forty-some books given to Bordesley Abbey by Earl Guy de Beauchamp in 1305. It is likely that it is to this earlier phase of Beauchamp activity that the G manuscript innovations of the “cult of Guy’s hermitage” belong, since the manuscript is dated precisely to this period. All in all, evidence from the G manuscript considerably revises certain long-held tenets about the reception and revision of the Guy legend, including the portrayal of his wife Felice, in the fifteenth century.

As we will see in the following chapter, the gradual exculpation and amplification of Felice’s character continues in the Irish Life of Guy of Warwick, culminating in a Felice who is

---

434 Mason, “Baronial Propaganda,” 33. Fewster remarks that “the books might conceivably have been in English, though listed in French” (Traditionality and Genre, 161, n. 19). This strikes me as unlikely given the Warwickshire details in the G manuscript. See also M. Blaess, “L’abbaye de Bordesley et les livres de Guy de Beauchamp,” Romania 78 (1957), 511–18.
noble and good from her first introduction, not implicated in Guy’s sins at all and even more active in her community. An examination of the presentation of Sisian (Josiane) in the *Irish Life of Bevis of Hampton* in comparison to its Middle English source material reveals that this trend is not unique to the Irish translation of *Guy*. Increasing agency and visibility and narrative endorsement of the female subject appears to be a priority in the adaptation of Middle English romance to its new context in Hiberno-Norman Ireland.
Part Two: Romance in Ireland

Interlude: Romance and Rómánsaíochta in Hiberno-Norman Ireland

Having examined romance’s construction of female subjectivity and gender in England, in both Anglo-Norman and Middle English romances, and how those constructions changed across literary traditions and time in the multi-cultural, linguistically stratified world of post-conquest England, I move my investigation across the Irish Sea to examine how this genre, so preoccupied with gender and identity, is taken up by another multi-cultural, multi-lingual society with quite a different relationship to its own Norman invasion of 1169. This stage of my inquiry will examine four texts in detail, two Irish translations of Middle English romances and two original Irish Gaelic rómansaíochta, “romantic tales,” a category of late medieval and early modern Irish prose texts showing a convoluted relationship to medieval insular romance. While the case can certainly be made that romance as a genre or mode existed in the Irish literary tradition well before the introduction of translations of Middle English romance, with

435 A detailed discussion of this group as a genre opens chapter six.
436 Texts that dramatize the exchange of women, courtship, heterosexual love, against a background of male adventure and prowess certainly exist in early medieval Ireland, as the native Gaelic genre classification of literary texts reveals. For a description of the Old Irish textual groups as witnessed by medieval Irish tale-lists which have
respect to the specific, historically situated literary form of medieval romance, its history begins quite late, with the mid-fifteenth-century appearance of translated romance and romance-influenced texts, rómánsaíochta.

In chapter five, I examine the two earlier romance texts that were translated from English into Irish, *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton*. Following F.N. Robinson, the texts’ only editor, I will refer to them as *Irish Life of Guy* and the *Irish Life of Bevis*; neither tale is titled in the manuscript. Both have a single manuscript witness in Trinity College Dublin 1298 (formerly H.2.7). They sit side by side in the manuscript and were at least copied, if not composed, by a scribe named Uilleam or Iollan Mac an Leagha. Mac an Leagha was associated with the Gaelicized Hiberno-Norman family of the Butlers, the upper branches of which were the Earls of Ormond from the late twelfth century onwards, and had the seat of their power at Kilkenny from 1392 onwards.

In the final chapter, I treat two rómánsaíochta, *Eachtra Airt Meic Cuind ocus Tochmarc Delbchaime Ingine Morgain* [“The Adventures of Art Son of Conn and the Courtship of Delbchaem daughter of Morgan”] (hereafter *Eachtra Airt*), and the *Compert Mongáin ocus Serc Duibe Lacha do Mongán* [“The Conception of Mongán and Dubh Lacha’s Love for Mongán”] (hereafter *Serc Duibe Lacha*) and place them in the context of earlier, pre-Norman, Irish literature, to whose literary tradition they clearly belong. *Eachtra Airt* and *Serc Duibe Lacha* are

437 F.N. Robinson, ed. and trans. “The Irish Lives of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton.” *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 6 (1908), 9–105; 273–338; 9–23; 105–180; 298–320. All quotations are from this edition. The texts and translations are discrete sections, with the translations following the texts, so the page numbers will be separated by a semi-colon whenever both are cited.


None of these four texts has received a great deal of critical attention. Most recently, the Irish Life of Bevis of Hampton has been the subject of Erich Poppe’s interest in translation strategies, along with—to a much lesser extent—the Irish Life of Guy of Warwick, and Velma Richmond includes a short section on the Irish Life of Guy of Warwick in her broad study of Guy of Warwick.\footnote{Erich Poppe, “The Early Modern Irish Version of Beves of Hampton,” Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies 23 (1992), 77–98; Erich Poppe, “Codes of Conduct and Honour in Stair Bibuis,” in Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in Honour of Próinséas Ni Chatháin, eds. Michael Richter and Jean-Michel Picard (Dublin: Four Courts, 2002), 200–210; Erich Poppe, “Narrative Structure of Medieval Irish Adaptations: The Case of Guy and Beues,” in Medieval Celtic Literature and Society, ed. Helen Fulton (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), 205–229; Erich Poppe and Regine Reck, “Rewriting Bevis in Wales and Ireland,” in Bevis of Hampton in the Literary Tradition, eds. Ivana Djordjević and Jennifer Fellows (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 37–50.} With respect to women, gender and subjectivity, however, there has been no systematic investigation of which I am aware, although Poppe does comment on one apparent change to Sisian (Josiane)’s presentation in the Irish Life of Bevis, and Velma Richmond presents a brief reading of Felice’s character in the Irish Life of Guy.\footnote{Poppe and Reck, “Rewriting Bevis,” 46–7; Richmond, Legend of Guy, 146–7.}

Neither Eachtra Airt nor Serc Duibe Lacha has received much in the way of critical attention. As the Irish Lives of Bevis and Guy, they have both only been edited and translated once. The Eachtra Airt is better known thanks to the inclusion of Best’s translation in Cross and Slover’s Ancient Irish Tales and Myles Dillon’s sanitized summary in his Early Irish Literature.\footnote{Tom Peete Cross and Clark Harris Slover, eds., Ancient Irish Tales (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1969) 491–502. Myles Dillon, Early Irish Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948; reprinted 1994 by Four Courts Press, Dublin), 112–116.} The Eachtra Airt has been the subject of only one article-length study by Brendan O Hehir, in which he suggests a description of a Christian revision of the sovereignty-goddess theme.\footnote{Brendan O Hehir, “The Christian Revision of Eachtra Aird Meic Cuind Ocus Tochnmarc Delbchaime Ingine Morgain” in Celtic folklore and Christianity: Studies in Memory of William W. Heist, edited by Patrick K. Ford, 159–179 (Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin, 1983).} The Serc Duibe Lacha has only been discussed at length by Joseph Nagy, whose study takes up roughly half of his article “In Defence of Rómánsaiocht,”\footnote{Joseph Nagy, “In Defence of Rómánsaiocht,” Ériu 38 (1987), 9–26: 13–14.} in which he demonstrates...
the tale’s connection to and place within the wider Mongán tradition. Like many of the romantic tales, they have been mined for Indo-European and/or Celtic mythic resonances whenever they have been noticed.\footnote{For example, see Best, \textit{Eachtra Airt}, 149; Tomás Ó Broin, “The Classical Source of ‘The Conception of Mongán,’” \textit{Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie} 28 (1961), 262–271; Proinsias Mac Cana, “Mongán mac Fiachna and the \textit{Innram Brain},” \textit{Ériu} 23 (1972):102–42; 126–31; O Hehir, “Christian Revision of \textit{Eachtra Aird Meic Cuind},” passim.} However, once mythological criticism has been abandoned, gender, sexuality and subjectivity can be seen at the heart of these tales.

A survey of studies of gender in medieval Irish literature reveals two key observations. First of all, such studies are few and far between; secondly, they are focused on early Irish texts and early (pre-Norman) medieval Ireland.\footnote{Hollo, “Later Medieval Ireland,” 110. As Hollo observes, “the critical tendency to view later versions of Old and Middle Irish tales as inferior to their precursors has greatly hindered the understanding of the prose literature of the period [1200–1600]...This tendency has often been paired with a prejudice against tales newly composed or translated during this period, on account of what is perceived as their foreignness or decadence (often represented as one and the same thing). In order to write a comprehensive literary history of this period, a great deal of basic textual and critical work remains to be accomplished” (Hollo, “Later Medieval Ireland,” 114).} Given that the tide of academic interest has only recently begun to turn towards an interest in gender and sexuality in medieval Ireland, it is unsurprising that the early literature has been the first to benefit from such lines of inquiry. Old Irish and early Middle Irish texts sit at the very beginning of medieval Irish scholarship and consequently have been studied more thoroughly. The state of the research on the literature of later medieval Ireland, particularly the traditionally disparaged and neglected translated romances and \textit{rómánsaíochta}, despite being the “major generic innovation of this period [1200–1600],” is quite different.\footnote{For a survey of academic attitudes to ‘romantic tales,’ see Nagy, “In Defence.” See also Hollo, “Later Medieval Ireland.”} Perceived foreign influence, such as that from medieval romance, was a strong factor in the romantic tales’ early dismissal as overly decadent, poorer cousins of early Irish saga, and the consequent lack of attention they received as literary creations or cultural texts.\footnote{Kaarina Hollo provides a description of the transmission process. See “Later Medieval Ireland,” 122–3.}

These texts present an opportunity to investigate concepts of gender and subjectivity particular to the mixed Gaelic and Hiberno-Norman world of late medieval Ireland. Sitting between the earlier saga tradition and the foreign romance material as it was transmitted in Ireland, these texts can be conceptualized as hybrid or syncretic.\footnote{For example, see Best, \textit{Eachtra Airt}, 149; Tomás Ó Broin, “The Classical Source of ‘The Conception of Mongán,’” \textit{Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie} 28 (1961), 262–271; Proinsias Mac Cana, “Mongán mac Fiachna and the \textit{Innram Brain},” \textit{Ériu} 23 (1972):102–42; 126–31; O Hehir, “Christian Revision of \textit{Eachtra Aird Meic Cuind},” passim.} The motifs, styles and concerns of medieval romance blend with the vibrant, long-standing legendary material of the medieval Irish secular narrative tradition. In addition, the altered political, social and religious
circumstances of post-Norman, post-church reform Ireland produced Irish literary texts of a different character than the saga material of the early Irish literary tradition. 453

Cultural exchange is fundamental to the development of both the translated romances and the rómánsaíochta: motifs and story patterns from medieval romance brought along concepts of gender and sexuality when they migrated and mixed into the medieval Irish literary tradition. The issue of syncretism and hybridisation is, however, a complicating factor in the analysis of gender and subjectivity in the translations of Middle English romance and the rómánsaíochta as it necessitates not only an awareness of how the medieval genre of romance with its attendant ideological baggage was received and adapted, but also of the early Irish literary tradition and its constructions of gender and subjectivity, as the source material for the rómánsaíochta and the literary context of the translations. As I discussed in the Introduction, Sarah Sheehan has observed of early Irish literature a lack of definitive gender categories, little evidence of the abstract conceptualization of gender into “manly” and “womanly,” and that “[m]ore often, saga discourse reveals its conception of gender in the intersection with other, more concrete concepts and categories such as authority, social status, ethnicity, or tribal affiliation.” 454

At the same time, gender categories have been observed to become more fixed and regulated over time. Sheehan observes that the later, Book of Leinster version of Taín Bó Cuailgne (recension II) from the twelfth century loses the “space for irony and play in the representation of femininity and masculinity” found in the Lébor na hUidre version dated to the ninth century (recension I). 455 Likewise, Ann Dooley finds that the late twelfth-/early-thirteenth Acallam na Senórach shows the “cycle of Finn and the Fenians … being quarried by ecclesiastical reform authors to display all the right social mores,” and as such witnessing the rise of a “more amenable paradigm of feminine sweetness and decorum” to take the place of the earlier, formidable and ambiguous women of early Irish saga. 456

454 Sheehan, “Gender and Sexuality,” 194–5
455 Sheehan, “Gender and Sexuality,” 163.
456 “The Patrician clerical author of the Acallam as we have it, is on the one hand asserting the primacy of his heroes and his narrative, but he is also giving notice: women of the caliber of Medb, the wayward, promiscuous, amoral queen of Connacht of the older generation of the saga, will no longer be as welcome on this new literary stage, where the cycle of Finn and the Fenians is now being quarried by ecclesiastical reform authors to display all the right social mores. Another, more amenable paradigm of feminine sweetness and decorum is taking her place” (Ann Dooley, Playing the Hero: Reading the Irish saga Táin Bó Cúailnge [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006], 183–4).
Certainly the social and cultural changes in the twelfth century in Ireland, provoked, among other factors, by aggressive ecclesiastical reform and the coming of the Anglo-Normans, are directly related to this increased regulation of gender, sexuality and their literary representations, but the influence is neither uniform nor complete. We need to be cautious of assuming a coherent or stable system, particularly in this period of change and hybridization, where competing ideologies of gender may be reflected, refracted or rejected to different degrees in different social and literary contexts. Close attention to the specific texts under investigation, a careful theoretical approach open to describing the unexpected, as well as a comparison to similar Old and Middle Irish texts and their representation of gender and subjectivity is necessary.

The complexity of the social context in which both the translated romances and rómánsaíochta were produced is a further complicating factor for the reading of gender and subjectivity in these texts. As such, some background on the complex social and political situation, as well as the unique position of women in the mixed Hiberno-Norman/Gaelic society, is necessary. All four of the Irish texts under discussion here belong to the hybridized society of the Hiberno-Norman lands beyond the Pale, where the first Norman lords, their families, households and retinues settled. In addition to fighting the Gaelic Irish, they also lived, worked, traded, intermarried, fostered their children and made political and social connections with the local Gaelic population, despite the best efforts of the English crown to prevent such fraternization. The English crown eventually outlawed such practices in the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366 to very little effect. These Gaelic-speaking, culturally assimilated Hiberno-Norman are the so-called “middle nation,” the “degenerate English” perceived as English by the Irish and Irish by the English of England and the Pale. As early as the mid-fourteenth century these culturally hybrid groups were attempting to advance a new geographically based sense of identity. In contrast to the ethnic terms Gael and Gall (foreigner), the term Érennach (Irish)

---

457 Rather than following the typical retroactive labelling of the Normans settled in Ireland as ‘Anglo-Irish,’ I will use the term ‘Hiberno-Norman,’ which, on analogy with ‘Anglo-Norman’ denotes more accurately a Norman population settled in a new area, and becoming culturally distinct over time. For uses of ‘Anglo-Irish’ see Robin Frame, Britain and Ireland 1170–1450 (London and Rio Grande, OH: Hambledon Press, 1998), 192, n.5. He admits that the term ‘Anglo-Irish’ is an anachronism, but persists in applying it to the “descendants of the twelfth-century invaders,” principally the ruling families whose land and political interests were concentrated in Ireland, even if they still had some lands in England, as, for example, the Butlers, which will be important to his chapter. He observes that in the fourteenth century they “formed a distinct political community apart from both the English and the Irish.” He also observes that, according to the Irish, the ‘Anglo-Irish’/Hiberno-Normans called themselves a ‘middle nation.’ See also Nicholls, Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland.

begins to appear, used by Gaelic-speaking Hiberno-Norman lords like Gerald, Earl of Desmond, known by his Gaelic name Gearóid Iarla, asserting a new, composite society of Gaelic and Hiberno-Norman.459

The nature of cultural interaction in Ireland between the Gaelic Irish and the Anglo-Norman settlers seems to have been of a different character from the interaction between the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans, and so the subsequent production of historiographical and romance texts is visibly different. The settlers, like those of the Norman conquest of England, had acculturated quickly, but where the Anglo-Normans in England were soon patronizing the stories of their adopted home and its Anglo-Saxon and Danish heroes in their own language, Anglo-Norman, the settlers in Ireland did not, as far as the manuscript evidence testifies, produce similar texts. Few Hiberno-Norman texts survive and there is little evidence that many were produced. There are a few examples, such as the Song of Dermot and the Earl, also known as The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland, which recounts the story of Diarmat Mac Murrough and Strongbow, the coming of the Normans to Ireland and their settlement through a combination of political and dynastic alliances, inheritance and violent conquest.460 But unlike the flowering of the Anglo-Norman “Matter of Britain” poems in England about Arthur and his knights, there are no romances in Hiberno-Norman about Gaelic heroes from the distant past like Cuchulainn, Finn Mac Cumall, or Conall Cernach. Nor are there any romances about more recent Gaelic heroes, like Brian Boruma, to correspond to the “Matter of England” romances such as Horn, Haveloc, Gui and Boeve. These type of texts do not appear in English either, when English replaced Anglo-Norman among the Hiberno-Norman population.461

459 Joseph Th. Leerssen, Mere Irish and Fíor Gael: Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, its Development and Literary Expression Prior to the Nineteenth Century (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing 1986) 190. Leerssen observes that Gearóid Iarla, while acting as the English king’s justiciar in Ireland in 1367, uses the term in a Gaelic poem (he was himself a poet in the Irish language), in which he asserts his loyalty to the Gaelic lords, despite being compelled to enforce the English king’s anti-Gaelic measures. He comments that “[t]he terminology is especially interesting in its use of the term Éireannach: the idea is that Desmond swears by a country which is possessed co-jointly by the Gaels and by Goill [‘foreigner’] like himself, and he brings these two groups… together under the term Éireannach, derived from the country they both inhabit, and defined against yet another group: the Saxons with their king in London, those of the neighbouring island.”


461 Marc Caball writes “[t]he passing of the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366 underlines the progressive hibernicisation of the Anglo-Norman settlers. Ironically, while the Statutes were written in Norman French, they make no mention of this language. English had by now displaced French, which survived merely in the form of a historicised legal jargon” (“Later Medieval Ireland: Poetry,” 88). See also Bliss and Long, “Literature in Norman French and English,” 712–714.
There is no evidence for English text production in Ireland until the fourteenth century, when the vernacular’s rise was underway in England and English-language romances began to appear there. Still, while English replaced Anglo-Norman among the Hiberno-Normans in Ireland—who at this point are better termed ‘Hiberno-English’—still no poetry commemorating the deeds of their adopted ancestors arises in English. This is probably owing to the persistent conflict and antagonism between the Gaelic, the Hiberno-Norman and the non-assimilated Hiberno-Norman and English settlers of the Pale. Indeed, one of the earliest English texts produced in Ireland commemorates the violent deeds of at least one contemporary Hiberno-English lord against the Gaelic Irish. By the time Hiberno-Normans/Hiberno-English began to patronize texts commemorating Gaelic heroes in the manner of the “Matter of Britain” and “Matter of England” sort, the texts were all in Early Modern Irish—these are the rómansaíochta. They were produced by Gaelic-speaking, Gaelic (or perhaps even Gaelicized) scribes and scholars—descendants and inheritors of a robust and dynamic Gaelic literary tradition (indeed, the oldest vernacular literature in Europe)—for their Gaelic-speaking, Hiberno-Norman/Hiberno-English patrons’ consumption.

The Irish translations of Middle English romances, the rómansaíochta and their manuscripts are the product of a hybridized society of a different character than the one that produced Anglo-Norman and English romances from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. The decline in manuscript evidence and production in Ireland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which created a hundred and fifty year gap in manuscript evidence after the coming of the Anglo-Normans, makes it impossible to study the literature of the early period of settlement. By the time manuscript evidence resumes, it is the early fourteenth century: text production generally—and romance production specifically—in English is just gaining momentum in England and English is outweighing Anglo-Norman among the Hiberno-Norman population and the English of the Pale in Ireland. These factors, combined with the fact that no translations into Gaelic from Anglo-Norman or French are extant nor known to have existed, suggest that the

463 Terence Dolan writes “[r]elations between the natives and settlers are featured in a poem dedicated to praising the activities of a knight called Sir Pers of Birmingham, who died in 1308 and was buried in the Franciscan priory in Kildare. There is nothing of the mildness of Franciscan thought in this work. Sir Pers hunted and slaughtered the Irish like a hunter killing hares (‘To yrishmen he was fo./ hat wel wide whare./Euere he rode aboute/ Witþ strenþ to hunt ham vte, As hunter dop þe hare,’162, st.9). The poet is particularly impressed when he uses trickery, by abusing the code of hospitality at a feast, to assassinate the Irish King O’Connor and his kin” (Terence Dolan, “Writing in Ireland,” in The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature, ed. David Wallace [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 208–228; 219).
464 Henry and Marsh-Micheli, “Manuscripts and Illuminations,” 783.
greatest period of borrowing and translation from foreign material in Ireland occurred after the establishment of English as language of text production in England and that it was thus primarily through English sources that medieval romance directly interacted with Gaelic literature in Ireland.

While it is clear that the Anglo-Norman settlement did open up greater access to texts and traditions from England and the continent, the process by which this happened is unclear, and the evidence is patchy.\(^{465}\) The Early Modern Irish translations/adaptations\(^ {466}\) of insular romances provide a unique opportunity of investigating this process of hybridisation at the level of individual texts. Of great interest and value for their own sake, the Irish versions of the Middle English *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick* will also provide a useful backdrop to and points of comparison for my reading of gender in the two *róánsaiochta*. The famous list of the books in the library of Gerald, Earl of Kildare, made in 1526, shows that Anglo-Norman texts, including romances and *chansons de geste*, were certainly owned and used in Ireland, but they do not seem to have made much impact on the Gaelic literary tradition, perhaps due to a circulation limited to the English-and-French speaking Hiberno-Normans and the more recently settled English of the Pale.\(^ {467}\) Because these texts’ movement into the Irish literary tradition is unattested, their impact on the development of Irish narrative is difficult and perhaps even impossible to assess.\(^ {468}\) For example, attempts to interpret fourteenth-century Gaelic love poetry

\(^{465}\) Kaarina Hollo provides a description of the process of transmission: “As the references to ‘continental influence’ and the French *romans d’aventure* above [quoted from Murphy’s *Ossianic Lore*] indicate, the Romantic tale is seen as related to medieval romance as commonly understood in the greater European context… There can be no doubt that tales from continental and English sources were known and disseminated by various means in Ireland during this period. The houses of the Anglo-Norman patrons of Gaelic poetry and learning would have been the foci of such cultural exchange, providing opportunities for both oral and written transmission and performance of such material. Tendencies already present within the Irish literary tradition—particularly the interest in foreign material already exemplified by the translations and adaptations from Latin narrative sources in the Middle Irish period and the expansion of the stylistic and compositional repertoire of Irish literati attendant upon the creation of these works—coincided with the opportunities represented by the influx of foreign material during our period to produce the literature which we are considering here under the rubric of the Romantic tale” (Hollo, “Later Medieval Ireland,” 122–3).

\(^{466}\) On the creative process and issue of translation versus adaptation, see Poppe, “Irish Version of Beves,” 79: “The approach was thus a creative one, adapting the source for the new audience’s benefit, and was not intended to reproduce it as accurately as possible in a different language. Therefore it is more appropriate to speak of ‘adaptations’ rather than ‘translations’ and of ‘redactors’ rather than ‘translators.’” See also, Poppe and Reck, “Rewriting Bevis”; Poppe, “Codes of Conduct”; Poppe, “Medieval Irish Adaptations.”

\(^{467}\) Bliss and Long, “Literature in Norman French and English,” 736. Why these were not translated is unclear, but perhaps a likely hypothesis is that there was no need for translation into Irish until the acculturation of the Hiberno-Normans had reached a certain level (certainly it seems that the Gaelic Irish had no interest in the literature of the new foreigners), and by that point, English and Gaelic were their primary languages, not Anglo-Norman.

as showing French cultural influence of *amor courtois* have more or less failed to prove their case.\(^{469}\)

The situation is quite different with respect to the influence of the Middle English romance tradition. Only a few translations of Middle English romances into Gaelic are extant: with the exception of one very late Arthurian Grail romance, there are only two, the translations of the Middle English *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton*.\(^{470}\) However, at least one *románsaíocht*, *Stair Nuadat Find Femin*, seems to have been modeled on such Gaelic translation of English romances.\(^{471}\) Moreover, that these texts date from the mid-to-late fifteenth century, around the same time that *rómAisialochta* begin to appear, suggests that they are indicative of larger cultural processes of interaction between English and Irish literature.

If it can be taken as axiomatic that gender in text is related to gender in reality, then these changes in social realities for women in Ireland must have had some effect on the representations of women, gender and sexuality in medieval Irish narrative of this period. Indeed, the unique position in the hybrid Hiberno-Norman/Gaelic society is an important factor to consider in the interpretation of these literary texts. Katherine Simms writes:

> A very interesting situation grew up in Ireland as a result of the Norman invasion of 1169, and the partial conquest and colonization which followed. For something like four centuries thereafter two communities existed side by side on the island, each with its own legal system, and gradually each society came to know, and be influenced by, the customs and practice prevailing in the neighbouring culture. One of the sharpest and most enduring contrasts between them concerned the treatment of women.\(^{472}\)

Simms goes on to describe the differences of position on women, property, marriage and legal guardianship between Gaelic Brehon law and the English Common law, followed by the Hiberno-Norman settlers. Some of the most striking include the inability of Gaelic Irish women to own land, contrasted to the Hiberno-Norman woman’s possibility of being an heiress in the

---


\(^{471}\) Erich Poppe discusses the possibility of *Stair Nuadat Find Femin* [“The History of Fair Nuadat of Femin”] being a romance modeled on the translations of Middle English romance (Erich Poppe, “*Stair Nuadat Find Femin: Eine irische Romane*?” *Zeitschrift für Celtsche Philologie* 49–50 [1997], 749–59).

case of a lack of surviving sons. At the same time, when they married, Gaelic Irish women always maintained some control over their own moveable property, which they could own, but Hiberno-Norman women surrendered their property, moveable and landed, to their husbands entirely. Simms notes that “the effect was to introduce completely new set of social pressures into Ireland,” particularly with respect to the new political importance of the heiress. The complicated situation resulting from intermarriage is described at length by Gillian Kenny, who details problems experienced by Gaelic and Hiberno-Norman women marrying into the other cultural group, as well as cases of Hiberno-Norman and Gaelic men and women opting for one or the other legal systems as it suited their agendas.

At the same time, the Church’s marriage reforms of the twelfth and thirteenth century affected this changing landscape of women’s legal rights. The necessity of the consent of both parties entering the marriage changed, at least on paper, the position of women with respect to marriage law, a significant development considering that, as Gillian Kenny observes of both the Hiberno-Norman and Gaelic Irish societies in later medieval Ireland, “a woman’s marital status defined her legal rights, economic power and her social standing as well as any political power she might possess.” But at the same time as the canonists were promulgating the principle that “no woman should be coupled to anyone except by her free will,” they were also codifying the impediments to marriage, including, in addition to lack of consent by parties of sufficient age (twelve for girls, fourteen for boys), the existence of a living spouse, one of the parties having taken religious vows or holy orders, and consanguinity. These impediments could and often were mobilized as excuses for ending marriages within canon law which stipulated that the only legitimate means of dissolving a marriage were an annulment or the death of a spouse. Divorce, common under Gaelic Brehon law, was legal neither under canon

---

477 Kenny, Anglo-Irish and Gaelic Women, 9.
480 Kenny, Anglo-Irish and Gaelic Women, 102.
law, nor under English common law, which was considerably more in line with church doctrine.\footnote{On the Anglo-Norman marriage customs being more acceptable to the Church than the Irish customs, see Bart Jaski, “Marriage Laws in Ireland and on the Continent in the Early Middle Ages,” in The Fragility of Her Sex? Medieval Irish Women in their European Context, C.E. Meek and M.K. Simms, eds., (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), 16–42; 16–17, 42.}

These developments affected the lives of Hiberno-Norman and Gaelic women in different ways. Simms summarizes under both systems the laws concerning legal guardianship of women and their limited rights in property left them exposed to exploitation. Among the Anglo-Irish, orphaned heiresses were literally bought and sold as regards their marriage prospects, so that their lands might be added to their husbands’ estates. For the Irish chiefs, marriage brought, not an increase in property, but an alliance with some powerful family, and a guarantee of military aid. If the balance of power became altered, unoffending wives were ruthlessly divorced to make way for a new alliance.\footnote{Simms, “Women in Norman Ireland,” 17.}

Evidence from the ecclesiastical court registers of Armagh reveals that Gaelic wives most often came to the court contesting their unlawful dismissal by their husbands, whereas the Hiberno-Norman women more often initiated separations.\footnote{Simms, “Women in Norman Ireland,” 15–16.} The introduction of Anglo-Norman property and inheritance laws produced a situation in which marriage was even more of a business proposition, and so despite the canon law’s requirement of consent, forced or coerced marriages, childhood betrothals and child marriages became more common.\footnote{Simms, “Women in Norman Ireland,” 17.} That the ecclesiastical courts, who had claimed the right to try all matrimonial disputes, were so involved in defending women against the “inadequacies of secular law,”\footnote{Simms, “Women in Norman Ireland,” 17.} reveals that the importance of women’s consent was a matter of contestation between secular practice and ecclesiastical law. As my subsequent readings of translated romances and románsaíochta will show, these factors affect the representations of women, femininity and female subjectivity in different ways.
F.N. Robinson determined that both the *Irish Life of Guy* and the *Irish Life of Bevis* derive from lost English exemplars and this has been borne out by later scholars’ work on the texts.\(^{486}\) The significant differences between the Irish versions and their closest English predecessors suggest, as Robinson pointed out early on, that several versions intervene between the extant Middle English romances and the Irish translation.\(^{487}\) Methodologically, of course, this then has serious implications for studies of translation and adaptation through comparison with the Middle English versions.\(^{488}\) As Erich Poppe astutely observes, “[t]he fact that the immediate source of the Irish text is unknown aggravates the methodological problems for the analysis of the translation on the level of contents. Its formal and stylistic integration into the vernacular textual culture is much easier to show, as is the introduction of some concepts which originate in the Irish tradition.”\(^{489}\) Poppe’s collection of articles on translation practices in the *Irish Bevis* and the *Irish Guy* covers the “formal and stylistic integration into the vernacular textual culture” and there is no necessity to repeat his work here.\(^{490}\) The nature of his language-focused interest in the Irish versions makes it more reasonable for Poppe to acknowledge this problem briefly and move on with his work: in a footnote, he writes that “[d]oubts about the content of the putative English source of the Irish text therefore remain, and this has methodological repercussions for the comparison of the English and Irish versions.”\(^{491}\) He does not specify what the “repercussions” are, perhaps shying away from the fact that conclusions about the Irish redactor’s innovations, particularly with respect to content change, could be completely wrong.


\(^{488}\) Poppe’s resistance to the terms ‘translation’ and ‘translator’ is well merited. He employs ‘adaptation’ and ‘redactor’ instead (See “Irish Version of Beves,” 79). But, as Djordjević points out, the terminology of “‘translators’...’authors’, ‘redactors’, ‘scribes’, ‘revisers’, ‘remanieurs’, ‘copyists’, or whatever we may decide to call them... is ours and to that extent confusing, imposing clear-cut categories on a situation where such categorial boundaries were fluid, if not entirely nonexistent” (Djordjević, “Guy as a Translation,” 28). Since a genetic relationship clearly exists between the Irish versions and the Middle English versions, I will persist in calling the texts ‘translations’ and the producer of the Irish text the ‘translator.’

\(^{489}\) Poppe, “Codes of Conduct,” 201.

\(^{490}\) See above, n. 9

\(^{491}\) Poppe, “Medieval Irish Adaptations,” 207, n.10.
(i.e., the changes might originate in a lost Middle English version), but unless new Middle English versions come to light, it will be impossible to know. Given my content-based interest and awareness of how unaccounted manuscripts can radically change analyses of socio-culturally influenced adaptations to the new text (as seen in the previous chapter), I will not be following Poppe’s path of examining only the closest Middle English manuscripts,\textsuperscript{492} rather I will use the same broad spectrum analysis I employed in my study of the Middle English versions of \textit{Guy}. That is to say, I will be taking into account all of the main Middle English versions of \textit{Guy} and \textit{Bevis}, and where appropriate, the Anglo-Norman, in order to get a sense of the range of possibilities that could lie behind the production of the Irish text.

Despite the fact that it is difficult to tell which features of the story were changed by the Irish translator and which derive from the lost Middle English exemplars, taking into account the range of variation—while still paying close attention to the closest exemplar—can suggest some likely innovations. As Djordjević remarks of the Middle English versions and their relationship to the Anglo-Norman; even “if we cannot establish direct transmission between entire manuscripts we can do this for individual passages, sometimes of considerable length.”\textsuperscript{493} Taking into account a wider range of Middle English manuscripts allows for a greater chance of finding the closest passage to that which underlies the Irish passage. It is true that even in the closest instances of translation, the Middle English and Irish texts are nowhere near as close as the Anglo-Norman and Middle English. Keeping a broad base of comparison also allows greater visibility of persistent choices and trends in the Irish text. For example, the absence of any references to Sisian kissing Bevis in several passages in the \textit{Irish Life of Bevis} juxtaposed with the presence of kisses in those same passages in every extant Middle English makes it much more reasonable to conclude that the absence of kissing in the Irish text was a choice made by the translator, rather than simply absent in the source-text.\textsuperscript{494} Finally, even when no clear changes or trends present themselves, comparison of the Irish text with the variety of Middle English predecessors is nonetheless productive for examining the construction of femininity and subjectivity in the Irish romances.

Before proceeding to analyze the Irish texts’ unique construction of gender and subjectivity through extensive comparison with their Middle English predecessors, it is helpful

\textsuperscript{492} Poppe writes, “Irish Version of Beves,” 80, “This [i.e., that the \textit{Irish Bevis} has been determined by Jennifer Fellows to be closest to Cambridge University Library Ff.2.38 and Manchester, Chetham’s Library, MS 8009] conveniently limits the number of extant Middle English texts with which a comparison will be fruitful.”

\textsuperscript{493} Djordjević, “\textit{Guy as a Translation},” 27.

\textsuperscript{494} See below.
to outline how these texts came to Ireland and to describe the circumstances under which they may have been translated. There are strong connections between the CUL manuscript of *Guy of Warwick* and the Irish manuscript Trinity College Library H.2.7, which contains, like CUL, a copy of both *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick*. Both the CUL versions of *Guy* and *Bevis* have been determined to be either the closest or one of the two versions closest to the Irish translations. With respect to *Guy*, several unique textual details link the CUL *Guy* to the *Irish Life of Guy*. Velma Richmond observes the shared detail of Felice taking care of Guy’s armour that he uses in the fight with Colbrond.\textsuperscript{495} Martha Driver observes that the token of the half-ring given by Felice to Guy upon their parting, and then returned to Felice by Guy before his death, is likewise uniquely shared between the CUL text and the Irish.\textsuperscript{496} To these observations, I can add my own observation that the image of Guy’s soul as a dove likewise occurs in both CUL and the Irish version.\textsuperscript{497} With respect to *Bevis*, the *Irish Life of Bevis* has been observed by Jennifer Fellows in her monumental 1980 dissertation to have its closest exemplars in the CUL and Manchester [Manchester, Chetham’s Library, MS 8009] manuscripts of *Bevis of Hampton*.\textsuperscript{498} Poppe has focused on the Manchester manuscript as a potential exemplar,\textsuperscript{499} but more extensive comparison with CUL and the earlier manuscript versions of *Bevis* will be undertaken for the first time here.

The prevailing theory of how the story of Guy travelled to Ireland is through the connection between the Beauchamp family and the Talbot family. John Talbot, First earl of Shrewsbury (d.1453), was married to Margaret Beauchamp, Richard Beauchamp’s oldest daughter by his first marriage, through whom Talbot hoped to become the next earl of Warwick.\textsuperscript{500} Both husband and wife actively patronized the production of Guy texts. Margaret Beauchamp was Lydgate’s patron, for whom Lydgate produced his poetry on Guy.\textsuperscript{501} John

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{495} Richmond, *The Legend of Guy*, 148.
\item \textsuperscript{496} Driver, “Representing Women in the Stories of Guy,” 136–139. Driver uses the detail of the half-ring in the Irish text and its potential Beauchamp connection through John Talbot, as well as the CUL *Guy’s* Beauchamp connection to suggest that the half-ring is a marker of Beauchamp-produced *Guy* texts.
\item \textsuperscript{497} See below.
\item \textsuperscript{499} Poppe, “Irish Version of Beves”; Poppe, “Medieval Irish Adaptations,”; Poppe, “Codes of Conduct.” In my opinion, the markers of affiliation to these two manuscripts are approximately equal and include small details such as the specification of three pigeons that Saber’s son Terry was eating for dinner when he meets Beves on the way to Brademund’s court, and Beves’ request for arms and combat outside the city walls when captured there.
\item \textsuperscript{501} Driver, “Representing Women in Stories of Guy,” 133.
\end{itemize}
Talbot presented Margaret of Anjou with a manuscript of the Anglo-French prose version of Guy, *Le Rommant de Gui de Warewic e Herolt d’Ardenne*, on the occasion of her marriage to Henry VI.\(^{502}\) As Conlon, the editor of *Le Rommant*, points out, John Talbot was Lieutenant or Justiciar of Ireland several times between 1414 and his death in 1453. Conlon notes that it is a “remarkable coincidence that during these years [1414-1449, during which John Talbot was intermittently Lieutenant or Justiciar of Ireland and his brother was Archbishop of Dublin] *Guy of Warwick* was translated into Irish.”\(^{503}\) In a footnote, Conlon builds on Robinson’s observation that the name of Guy’s father-in-law in the Irish text is “Risderd” or Richard, rather than Rohault, noting that “the only historical Earl of Warwick to bear this name [was] Richard de Beauchamp (1382-1439), Talbot’s father in law,”\(^{504}\) thus implying that the change was in fact made deliberately to parallel Talbot’s own situation, in that he, like Guy, had a father-in-law named Richard who was earl of Warwick. Martha Driver follows both Robinson and Conlon, writing: “In the Irish text, the Earl of Warwick, Guy’s father-in-law, is called ‘Richard of Warwick,’ perhaps a nod to Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick and father of Margaret.”\(^{505}\) Richmond follows Conlon in supposing a Beauchamp connection through John Talbot. She writes, furthermore, that “John Talbot had the incentive and materials for a Celtic [sic.] prose version.”\(^{506}\) But did he?

What Conlon, Richmond and Driver fail to note is the socio-political situation of Ireland in the late Middle Ages, where patronizing Irish manuscripts would certainly have been congruent with the spirit, if not the law, of the Statutes of Kilkenny. These attempted to stop the acculturation of the Hiberno-Normans by outlawing speaking in Irish, marriage or fosterage with the Irish, and making alliances with the Irish.\(^{507}\) While the statutes proved ineffective for the Hiberno-Norman lords and their families who had been settled in Ireland for nearly two centuries, John Talbot himself was an Englishman. Born in 1387 in England, he was an English hero of the Hundred Years War and spent his life in service of the English crown in France and Ireland. His father-in-law Richard Beauchamp was responsible for the education of Henry VI, and John himself was escort for Henry VI’s wife Marguerite of Anjou.\(^{508}\) Moreover, his time in

\(^{502}\) Conlon, *Le Rommant*, 17


\(^{504}\) He was the Thirteenth Earl of Warwick, the same earl who founded the chantry at Gybbecliff in 1422.


\(^{506}\) Richmond, *Legend of Guy*, 145.


Ireland was spent primarily fighting Gaelic Irish ‘enemies,’ with whom he needed a translator to communicate.\textsuperscript{509} Talbot is hardly a likely candidate for commissioning the translation of English texts into Irish, or Irish manuscripts in general. Talbot was a newcomer to Ireland, and his principal familial, social and political ties were in England. It is unlikely that he could speak, read or understand Irish, especially at a time when associating with the Gaelic Irish could, and did, bring charges of treason. During Talbot’s forty-year feud with James Butler, Fourth earl of Ormond, for supremacy in Hiberno-Norman government, accusations of cooperating with the Irish were flung back and forth between the two men as evidence of the other’s unsuitability for government. \textsuperscript{510}

Why Talbot would commission an Irish manuscript of \textit{Guy} is therefore entirely unclear, given the troubled political and cultural associations Gaelic had for Hiberno-Norman and English lords. Moreover, if we take into account the fact that Mac an Leagha produced the Book of Carrick for Edmund Mac Richard Butler (the nephew of James Butler, who often acted on his uncle’s behalf in his absence\textsuperscript{511}) then we have the even unlikelier situation that Mac an Leagha would have been working for both the Butlers of Ormond and the Talbots, who had been feuding since 1414. So, why would Mac an Leagha produce a translation of an English text praising the family of John Talbot, his patrons’ long-time enemy? In addition, if Uilleam Mac an Leagha is in fact not only the scribe of the texts but also the translator, as Gordon Quin and Erich Poppe think,\textsuperscript{512} then the dates of the texts’ production and John Talbot’s life do not coincide at all: Talbot died in 1453, but Mac an Leagha’s productions of \textit{Guy} and \textit{Bevis} have been dated to the last quarter of the fifteenth century on the basis of another text that is beside them in the manuscript and has been determined to have been authored or at least copied by Mac an Leagha, \textit{Stair Ercuil ocus a Bás}. Certainly \textit{Stair Ercuil}, a Gaelic translation of Caxton’s printing of the English translation of Raoul Lefèvre’s \textit{Recueil des histoires de Troyes}, had to be produced after Caxton’s edition, c. 1474. Of course, if Mac an Leagha is not the translator, but

\textsuperscript{509} Art Cosgrove, “Emergence of the Pale,” 554.
\textsuperscript{511} Henry and Marsh-Micheli, “Manuscripts and Illuminations,”. 802–805. Mac an Leagha appears to have worked on B.L. Additional MS 30512 for Edmund Mac Richard Butler, nephew of James, Fourth Earl of Ormond, known as the “White Earl,” who himself commissioned a manuscript known as the “Book of the White Earl.” B.L. Additional MS 30512 was identified as the “Book of Carrick” by Robin Flower on account of the similarities in their history. The “Book of the White Earl” was given along with the “Book of Carrick” by Edmund Mac Richard Butler to Thomas FitzGerald of Desmond in 1462.
\textsuperscript{512} The theory that Mac an Leagha is the composer, not just the scribe, is Gordon Quin’s, put forward in the introduction of his edition of another text produced by Mac an Leagha. See Gordon Quin, ed. and trans., \textit{Stair Ercuil ocus a Bás, The Life and Death of Hercules}, Irish Texts Society 17 (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1939). Erich Poppe has taken up Quin’s theory in his studies of the \textit{Irish Guy and Bevis} (see below).
only the copyist, then it is possible that the exemplar copied by Mac an Leagha was produced during Talbot’s lifetime. Regardless, we are still left with the question of why an Irish version of Guy exists that seems to promote the interests of an English family with strong hostilities to Gaelic Ireland.513

One event, however, in the mid-fifteenth century makes this situation possible, even probable. In 1444 John Talbot and James Butler, in an effort to end their families’ feud, married Talbot’s son John to Butler’s daughter Elizabeth. Having been one of the first Hiberno-Norman families to settle, and having intermarried with the Gaelic nobility, the Butler family, particularly in its lower branches, could certainly be described as Gaelicized; James Butler himself spoke Irish,514 patronized at least one Irish manuscript,515 had Irish praise poetry addressed to him,516 was one of the first, if not the very first, Hiberno-Norman lord to employ a Gaelic brehon.517 He even illegally appointed Gaelic lords to the Irish parliament when he was Lieutenant of Ireland in the 1440s.518 As mentioned above, Talbot commissioned and presented an Anglo-French version of Guy of Warwick for Margaret of Anjou on the occasion of her marriage to Henry VI sometime between 1445-7. Martha Driver also observes that “[s]everal surviving manuscripts show that Talbot was adept at manipulating contemporary book culture, both to please his patrons and to increase his own prestige,” citing in particular his gift to Margaret of Anjou.519 It is conceivable that Talbot could have commissioned and presented a manuscript including Guy of Warwick for Elizabeth Butler, his new daughter-in-law, taking care to highlight the prestige of his own current situation, by having a Richard, earl of Warwick as Guy’s father-in-law. It seems likely, given the English aversion to Irish connections and Talbot’s commitment and ties to the English throne, that if any such a marriage-gift manuscript existed, it would have been in English. Such a manuscript could have been a copy or related to a

514 Henry and Marsh-Micheli, “Manuscripts and Illuminations,” 801.
517 Henry and Marsh-Micheli, “Manuscripts and Illuminations,” 553–5; 801. Nicholls, Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland, 47–48. From the beginning of the Norman settlement, the Irish continued to use their own law system, Brehon law. English common law applied only to the Hiberno-English settlers under the English crown. A mixed system, March law, also developed. Both Brehon law and March law were prohibited by the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366, probably to no effect.
518 Cosgrove, “The Emergence of the Pale,” 549; Nicholls, Gaelic and Gaelicized Ireland, 48.
519 Driver, “Representing Women in Guy,” 151. See also Conlon, Le Rommant, 13, 16–26; Frankis, “Taste and Patronage,” 80–82, 84.
copy of CUL, since the *Irish Guy* shares a number of unique details with the CUL manuscript.\textsuperscript{520} CUL has itself a close association with Warwickshire and the Beauchamp family; moreover, CUL includes a copy of *Bevis of Hampton* that is also one of the two candidates for being the closest Middle English version to the *Irish Life of Bevis*. James Butler, on the other hand, spoke Irish and had himself commissioned an Irish manuscript. He, or indeed his daughter Elizabeth or nephew Edmund—who managed the Butler lands after his uncle’s death while his cousins, James’ sons, became absentee landlords embroiled in English politics on the Lancastrian side—\textsuperscript{521}—would have had much more incentive to commission an Irish translation of *Guy*. If Elizabeth or Edmund were responsible for the commission of the translation, then the dates would also coincide with the extant manuscript witness and its scribe and possible translator Mac an Leagha. In short, a gift from John Talbot to his new daughter-in-law or her father would certainly explain how an English exemplar with Beauchamp ties would have made it into the Butler family, to be translated into Irish and copied by Uilleam Mac an Leagha a few decades later.\textsuperscript{522}

**Felice in the *Irish Life of Guy of Warwick***

I have already demonstrated how the different Middle English versions, with varying strategies and to different degrees, mitigate Anglo-Norman Felice’s pride and culpability in the first half of the romance and amplify her goodness and praise in the second half. Irish Felice’s character fares even better in the Irish version than the Middle English. As Velma Bourgeois Richmond observes:

> [d]evotion, quiet determination, and direct action typify the role of woman as well as man in the *Irish Life of Sir Guy*. This Felice is less haughty and fierce; she does not “lay bare her love” until just before marrying Guy, but there is no doubt about her intention. An opening description differs markedly; she is “comely and beautiful,” but the emphasis is upon her character, not physical charms. Felice has “handiwork and knowledge.” Specifically, she knows embroidery, a skill not attributed to any other Felice. A “great teacher” has instructed her in the “gentle arts,” but these are not listed, though by the age of seventeen her knowledge exceeded his. Most cogent is a list of her qualities, the cause of her fame that makes nobles love and long for her: “knowledge, knowledge, knowledge.”

\textsuperscript{520} See above.
\textsuperscript{521} Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland*, 168.
\textsuperscript{522} Less likely, but certainly possible, is that Joan Beauchamp, Richard Beauchamp, the Thirteenth earl of Warwick’s first cousin, brought a version of the English romances to Ireland when she married James Butler, Fourteenth earl of Ormond in 1414. However, the energetic patronage of the Guy legend by John Talbot and Margaret Beauchamp, and the later fifteenth-century appearance of the half-ring material suggest that they are the more likely sources of the English version that traveled to Ireland.
dignity and honor, piety, gentleness and discretion, purity, wisdom and prudence.” The ideal of womanhood finds perfect expression in the role of devoted wife.\textsuperscript{523} Richmond’s description is apt, however brief, and I want to expand upon some of her points and add some of my own. As I will demonstrate in greater detail below, comparison of the \textit{Irish Life of Guy} to the earlier Anglo-Norman and Middle English versions reveals that the trends observable over time in the Middle English versions are still active in construction of Felice. Her nobility and goodness in the first half of the story and her role as pious wife and benefactor continue to increase, while her role in causing or catalyzing Guy’s sins is further reduced. Felice’s participation in Guy’s saintly biography is even more complete, and she, like Guy in the Irish romance, becomes more of a pious behavioural exemplar. These changes are facilitated by the presentation of Felice as parallel with and equal to Guy with a concomitant trend reducing the operational force of the relational construction of gender. In contrast to the Middle English and Anglo-Norman romances, both Guy’s and Felice’s identities are structured more in relation to patriarchal and ecclesiastical authority than in relation to each other. “Separate but equal” characterizes the construction of Guy and Felice’s gender and identity throughout the Irish romance.

The introductory description of Felice in the Irish version represents a considerable departure from the relatively stable passage in the Anglo-Norman and Middle English versions (see above). As in the Middle English versions, references to her pride are entirely absent. Additionally, Felice is not described here as rejecting any suitors on account of pride, beauty, nobility or any other attribute. She is simply superlatively beautiful and wiser at the age of seventeen than her learned teacher. Where her beauty and education alone cause her fame in the Middle English versions, in the Irish version her fame is generated additionally by her dignity, honour, piety, gentleness, discretion, purity, and prudence.\textsuperscript{524} This string of abstract nouns sets up her later action in rebuffing Guy as part of her prudence, purity and discretion.

In the same vein, Guy’s description is also different. In lieu of recounting his favour by the court on account of his generosity and beauty, the Irish narrative details his virtues, prowess and fame.\textsuperscript{525} The extended description of his martial prowess justifies, to some extent, the love that everyone, particularly Felice’s maidens, feels for Guy. Additionally, it makes his request for Felice’s love somewhat less egregious: the prowess she asks for has been foreshadowed in his

\begin{footnotes}
\item[523] Richmond, \textit{Legend of Guy} 149.
\item[524] For the full passage in Irish and in translation, see below.
\item[525] e.g. compare CUL II.110–143.
\end{footnotes}
superior position over all the warriors in England before he has even been knighted. The
description of Guy’s piety has no precedent in Middle English versions.

There is also a striking parallelism in the account of Guy and Felice. Both Felice and
Guy are described as worthy of their father, surpassing all others of their sex and age-group in
their respective feminine and masculine virtues, a quality that causes their fame to spread
widely, for Felice, throughout the whole world, while for Guy, throughout the country and
nearby provinces. Compare:

Felice:
& ro bui ingen cruthach, caemhaluinid a dingmala aigi .i. Feilis a h-ainm-sidhe, & ni
roibhi ina h-ainsir ben dob ferr delbh & denuim, modh & munudh, druine &
dethbes, na’ningin-sin. Do cuiredh immorro ardmaigistir dia munud annsna h-
eldhnaibh sàera, & nir cian arum disi co melladh a maigistir i n-gach ealathain, co
tuic in maigistir slat a muinti di budhein iarna sharugdh di i n-gach egna a cinn a secht
m-bliadhna dec do sinrud. Co clos fon uili domhun a dethclú itir egna & ordan &
einech, etir cradbhudh & ciunus & cunnlacht, itir gloine & gais & glicus, gur bo lán
da serc & da sígradh uaisli & ardmaithi na cruinne co comcoitcenn (24).

[He had a comely and beautiful daughter worthy of himself, Felice by name, and there
was not in her time a woman who was better in form and figure, in handiwork and
knowledge, in embroidery and noble manners, than that maiden. A great teacher
was set to instruct her in the gentle arts, and it was not long afterwards that she surpassed
her master in every art, so that the master gave her the rod of his instruction after being
outstripped by her in every kind of knowledge even at the end of her seventeenth year.
Her fair fame spread throughout all the world for knowledge, dignity and honor,
for piety, gentleness and discretion, for purity, wisdom and prudence, until the
princes and nobles of the whole earth were filled with love and longing for her (106)].

Guy:
Ro bui mac a dingmala agan sdbard-sin, Gyi a ailm-side, & ro sháráigh na h-uili macu
a ainsiri ar mét ar maisi ar macantacht, ar nos ar nert ar nidechus, ar uail ar
aichnedh ar arachtus, gur ba lan na cricia co comlán & na cennacha comfocuiss dia
chú & dia alludh, & gach inadh ina cluineadadh Gyi cluithighi aonaig & ibhns &
oirectais ar fedh & ar fiarlaidh crichisaerauisli Saxan, do freagadh iat & do-beradh
buaidh gacha buidhni co barr uile. & do sharuighedh lucht gacha lamaigh co lanabeil, &
do-beredh alma & othra minca dona h-eqlaibh & do-beredh dercinna & dethcealta
do deblienaibh Dé, & ro annluiccedh na maibh gan murmur gan mainnechtnaighi, & do-
beredh fisrugudh don lucht no bidh a carcair & a cumgach, & do nidh na h-uili obuir
trocuire d’iar-mol in eglus ina aimsir, & ro bui co daingen, duthrachtach isin creidem
cathoilicda (24–5).

[“That steward had a son worthy of himself, Guy by name; and he surpassed all the
young men of his time in size, beauty and gentleness, in courtesy, strength and
prowess, in pride, spirit and courage, so that the whole country and the
neighbouring provinces were full of his fame and his praise. And everywhere that
Guy heard of games at fair or festival or assembly throughout the length and breadth of
the free and noble English land, he entered them and won the victory of every company, surpassing all, and defeated the men utterly at every kind of feat. And he gave alms and frequent offerings to the churches, and gave gifts and clothing to God's poor, and buried the dead without murmur and without negligence, and visited the people who were in prison and in bonds, and performed all the works of mercy which the church praised in his time, and he was strong and zealous in the Catholic faith”] (105).

Having no precedent in the Middle English versions, the parallelism of these two passages constructs the two protagonists as worthy and equal matches for each other, but also is congruent with the diminished role of gender-based dialogism in the construction of their identities. As we will see, identity is still constructed relationally, but the participants have changed.

Such parallelism is not limited to the opening and closing of the Guy section of the Irish romance. In their marriage negotiation with each other, as well as their words to Felice’s father, who acts as a go-between for the actual arrangement, the equality of Guy and Felice is once again underscored. When Guy tells Felice that he could have easily obtained a wife with more money and higher rank than her, she responds in kind, saying that she could have married a much more powerful man. In both cases, each presents the love they bear the other as the motivation for refusing their better-ranked marriage prospects:


[“Then Sir Guy went to Felice, the earl's daughter. Sir Guy said: “Felice,” said he, “it would have been easy for me to get for a wife a lady whose wealth and patrimony was greater than thine, and I refused them all for love of thee.” Felice said: “Sir Guy,” said she, “it would have been easy for me to marry a king, or a prince, or an emir, or a duke, or an earl, if my love had not been kept for thee. And I should never have had a man or a husband, if thou hadst not returned alive.” Sweet was that speech to Guy, for the lady had not laid bare her love to Sir Guy up to this time”] (159).

Earl Richard uses parallel language to speak to each of them. He asks Guy what keeps him without a wife, and he asks Felice what keeps her unmarried, and then if they will be pleased with the other as a spouse. The two of them use parallel language in their answers: they both tell the earl that they have loved a woman/man since they were young, and if they do not get that
While the parallelism functions to underscore their suitability as a match, it also reveals their equality and access to social power. For all of Guy’s worldly victory and renown, both are clearly subject to the earl, Felice’s father, for the brokering of their marriage. The pivotal role played by fathers and patriarchal authority in general will be seen in greater detail below, partly in reference to the innovation seen here, namely that the earl speaks to Guy first, before speaking to Felice. This is a feature in which the Irish stands alone in the insular Guy tradition.

The equality of the lovers is thematically underlined by the final description of Guy and Felice at the close of the Guy section of the narrative, a passage which has its closest exemplar in CUL. Just as in CUL, the narrator sums up the text in a sort of colophon after Felice’s death: “iar m-breith buidhi doib o demhun γ o domun, γ atait a cuirp a bus isna talmannaibh coitcenna coleicc, γ atait a n-anmanna ar nimh idir ainglibh” (“after they (my emphasis) had won the victory of the devil and the world, and their bodies are still resting in the same ground and their
souls are in heaven among the angels”] (100; 175). While the Middle English, as we have already seen, includes Felice in the colophon, it does so in a marginalizing way (CUL ll.10724–48). The Irish, on the other hand, makes them equals and presents Guy’s triumph as their common victory over worldliness and evil. While the English does mentions that “þey dreeded god almyght,” the language of heavenly victory focuses on Guy, like whom the narrator prays to be “safe” in heaven. In the Irish, both Felice and Guy win a “victory of the world and the devil” and both are in heaven.

The stress on equality and equivalency likely owes something to the Irish literary tradition. Taken in the context of Irish wooing tales, such as, for example, the Wooing of Emer, in which Emer similarly requires that Cú Chulainn perform extraordinary feats of prowess before she assents to marry him, Felice’s request is completely reasonable and expected. Moreover, an intertextual connection with the Wooing of Emer is even likely. The elaborate description of Felice recalls that of Emer, albeit much expanded, and Guy himself is described as Cú Chulainn-like in his battle-fury, which resembles remarkably Cú Chulainn’s riastarta. In the Wooing of Emer, when the young Cú Chulainn approaches Emer to woo her, they verbally spar and she responds to Cú Chulainn’s boasts about his achievements in a way much the same as Felice responds to Guy’s early victories: “‘At maithi na comrama móethmacáim,’ ol in ingen, ‘acht nád ránac co nert n-erred béos,’” [“‘Those are the good triumphs of a tender youth,’ said the maiden, ‘but you have not yet attained the strength of a

---

526 I am modifying Robinson’s translation, which reads as follows: “after they had won the victory of the world and the devil, and their bodies are still resting in the land of the monastery and their souls are in heaven with the angels,” (175).


528 Both women are superior in their physical form (delbh & denum crottha), their skill in embroidery (druine), their intelligence (gais) and their chastity (gloine; gensa). While different rhythmic and assonantal patterns are a dictating force in each list, it is still noteworthy that some synonymous form of búaid ngotha, búaid mbindiusa “the gift of voice, the gift of sweet speech” is not present in the description of Felice. Compare the passage quoted above to the description of Emer: is sí congab na sé búaída fuirri i. búaíd erotha, búaíd ngotha, búaíd mbindiusa, búaíd ndruine, búaíd ngaise, búaíd ngensa (Van Hamel, Compert Con Culainn:23), “it is she who possessed the six gifts, that is the gift of voice, the gift of sweet speech, the gift of embroidery, the gift of intelligence, the gift of chastity” (Joanne Findon’s translation, A Woman’s Word’s: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle [Toronto:University of Toronto Press, 1997], 161.)

529 “Dala Gy i dano nír miadh & nír maísi & nír moraignedh lasi cath aga cothugudh & aga cumnmail ina agaid, & ro eirigh a luindi leoghain, & a neim natrach, & a cruas curadh, & a mím miledh & a airsighch erradh, gr eirigh a lon irgaile uas a anail, & do cuir a c ñis in cath, & ro bris fur na Lumbardachaibh co lanalma & ar na h-Alminnechaidh co h-urhím, & do cuir a n-áirt isin n-irgalain-sín” (44). [“As for Guy, then, it was not credit, or fame, or honor in his eyes that a battle should be fought and maintained against him; and his lion’s wrath, and his serpent’s venom, and his soldier’s strength and his warrior’s spirit and his champion’s ardor awoke, and his flame of battle rose upon his breath, and he staked his fame on the fight, and he brought defeat upon the Lombards full bravely, and upon the Germans full swiftly, and made a slaughter of them in that battle”] (124).

530 Van Hamel, Compert Con Culainn, 28.
Emer then lists a series of three difficult feats he must perform before she will agree to marry him. He agrees to perform them, and their verbal marriage contract is made, understood to be contingent upon his success. As Joanne Findon observes, their equality “in verbal skill and mental acuity” is stressed by Cú Chulainn as a primary reason for them to marry, but the entire exchange between them is about establishing their equality, and has direct bearing on the type of marriage they will have: early Irish law recognized several grades of marriage, the most prestigious being a “union of joint property” where both members of the couple contribute equally to the marriage property. Findon sees this marriage arrangement as underlying the stress on equality between Emer and Cú Chulainn. A similar ideology of equality between marriage partners seems also to be present in the Irish Guy.

When Guy approaches Felice for the final time, he has achieved the superlative level of prowess and renown required of him by Felice. This marks him as now worthy of her whose “fair fame spread throughout all the world”; Guy’s fame, which at the beginning was limited to the “country and neighbouring provinces” (106), now likewise covers the entire world. As Guy’s language in his epiphany and at his departure will corroborate, Felice’s requirement that Guy be the best knight in the world should not be seen as a matter of overweening pride, but a worthy and rightful desire for equality.

In the parallelism of presentation, Guy and Felice of the Irish version resemble Havelok and Goldeboru, whose parallel descriptions, mutual subjection to patriarchal authority (in their case, evil, power-hungry regents), and mutual triumph at the end of the romance, reveal a similarity in the construction of their subjectivity, which is borne out in the apparent mutuality of the relational construction of their gender and identity. As I discussed above, such relational construction of gender and identity is clearly represented in the Anglo-Norman and Middle English romances of Guy: Felice functions to structure Guy’s identity as a knight and then earl of Warwick, and, in turn, his identity as her absent husband guarantees her identity as the active and productive countess of Warwick. As is the case with Goldeboru in Havelok, Felice has a public identity that is dependent on the hero and the hero’s identity is dependent on her. Where the earlier Middle English and Anglo-Norman Guy narratives reveal a mutuality of construction, they do not stress the equality of the protagonists through verbal parallels and repetition as the

---

531 Findon’s translation, A Woman’s Words, 48.
532 Findon, A Woman’s Words, 50.
533 Findon, A Woman’s Words, 49. The financial equality is connected to equality of rank, skill, wisdom, beauty etc. as easily seen in the “Pillow Talk” episode of the Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailgne.
Irish *Guy* and Middle English *Havelok* do. Nevertheless, a further factor distinguishes the Irish *Guy* as unique in its approach to gender construction: where the parallelism in *Havelok* works in tandem with the relational construction of identity, in the Irish *Guy* it does not. Rather, it occurs with a gradual erosion of gender-based relational construction of identity visible in the Middle English and Anglo-Norman romances. Numerous moments where Guy’s identity had in the earlier versions changed and developed in relation to Felice or was mediated by Felice are absent. The reciprocal is true for Felice.

**The Erosion of the Relational Construction of Gender**

When Guy approaches Felice for the first time in the Irish version, her response differs considerably from that in the earlier Middle English and Anglo-Norman versions. Unlike the Auchinleck and Caius versions, Felice perceives Guy’s impertinence as an insult to herself by describing the fall in social position and loss of legal rights she would suffer if she were to accept him. While she does tell him that she is desired by other men who are more highly ranked than him, she never directly juxtaposes Guy with those men to hypothesize the consequences for her identity, as she does in the Anglo-Norman, Caius and Auchinleck texts. Her own status and identity is thus articulated in such a way that it is less contingent upon his status and identity. Compare:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Auchinleck</th>
<th>Caius</th>
<th>CUL</th>
<th>Irish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felice: “Ye Stewart’s son Sequward, I see ye are a fool, I thought ye held me as your lady; never did man that so vilely as ye do me; when ye love me beseech me, I hold ye as a fool; ye besought me for a fool; ye are a fool to a lower school, &amp; I say ye lords doth utter biname; Pan doth o’er him well with shame, When ye do of love be-jest me Pat y schold þi leman be. No fond ye neuer man me so missede, No me so of love be, Nay yer kan’ no baroun, Bot þou þat art a garson, &amp; art mi man, &amp; man schalt be. Yuel were mi fairhed sett on be.”</td>
<td>Felice to him answered, “Tell me, Guy, if ye bee so bold, ye hold me for a fool, I hold ye for a fool made; None of love I shalde thy leman be. Ne fonde ye neuer man me so missede, No me so of love be, Nay yer kan’ no baroun, Bot þou þat art a garson, &amp; art mi man, &amp; man schalt be.”</td>
<td>The mayde lokyd on Gye full grymme And wele worthely answered hym: “Art thou not Sequwardes sone Gye? Who made the so folehardy Forto assaye me of love? Be Jesu, that syttith ab oue, And y pys my fadur telle, For þys worde he wyll the sloo, For to assaye me of loue?”</td>
<td>Do raidh Feilis: “Is ainmduid, amnaireach, ecord tosaich h’uraghail, a Gyi”, ar-si,”uir is tron in tår &amp; in tarcaisn tugaísi form-sa i, m’iaraigh-d’i do bhancheile led bogbhriathraib begnairachda, uair ni fuil mac righ usail, na duice daimhneh, detharrachta, na iarla usail, urruna, na triath toicthech, tromhalmaich a ni-ariur na h-Eorpa, nach tug gradh adhbal dam-sa in met ata a n-oghacht no a n-aentuna dibh, &amp; ni tugus caimain a gradha d’aimhneach acu; &amp; a fir mo ficaird &amp; mo fritholma, is ecir do saili-si misi d’aghail do bainseicí.” Adubait Feilis: “A Gyi,” ar-si, “fágaibh co fír ghabh, is cóir do bhaile mhé, &amp; bidh fo pein t’ama ort gant ead m-a bhr co críidh do báis.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Felice answered: “It is...”]
It is possible, of course, that since CUL does not contain these lines of Felice in this section of the romance, an English source close to CUL dictated their absence in the Irish version. However, Felice’s conjecture is present later on in CUL when she tells Guy that she will love him if he becomes a knight. This sentiment is still absent from Irish Felice’s speech:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CUL</th>
<th>Irish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felyce on Gye began to loke</td>
<td>Do glacc in righan ar laim é, &amp; adubairt: “A Ġyi,” ar-si,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And in hur armes hym vp toke.</td>
<td>“ni thiar-sa mo gradh d’fhir acht do ridiri co m-buaidh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Gye,” sche seyde, “be nowe stylle.</td>
<td>crotha &amp; caemhennmus, co m-buaidh n-indsgni &amp; n-urlabra, co m-buaidh n-einigh &amp; n-engnama, co m-buaidh n-gnima &amp; n-gaiscidh, &amp; Gidhbe ro beth nur sin ro faidfhan-si lais”(27).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here me, yf hyt be yowre wyle.</td>
<td>[The lady seized him by the hand and said: “O Ġay,” said she, “I will not give my love to any man except to a knight surpassing in form and in fair figure, surpassing in speech and eloquence, surpassing in honor and wisdom, surpassing in deeds and in feats of war. And if there were anyone like that, I would give myself to him”] (109).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knyghtys and erlys y haue forsake,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That wolde me to wyfe take.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And y loued now a yong knaue,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How schulde y my worschyp save?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When þou art dubbed a knyght</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And proued well in euery fyght,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then, for sothe, hyght y the,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That þou schalt haue þe loue of me.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(II.353–364)</td>
<td>(ll. 377–414)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is, however unlikely, the possibility that the Irish text’s Middle English exemplar contained a reading close to CUL for the first passage and a reading close to Auchinleck or Caius for the second passage, as the Auchinleck and Caius do not repeat the hypothesis here
Nevertheless, it remains that Irish Felice never articulates her potential relationship with Guy in these comparative terms. Moreover, these two passages also show Guy’s identity to be less contingent upon her than in the Middle English versions. The lack of any juxtaposition between Guy and Felice’s rejected suitors works to disentangle Guy’s identity formation from his relationship with Felice: in the earlier versions of Guy Felice’s rejection of her other suitors and acceptance of Guy marks him as their superior in an ideology of courtly love in which a woman’s love or choice of a man is supposed to be based upon his worth as exemplified by his martial prowess.

The comparison between Guy and Felice’s rejected suitors is an aspect so minimally represented in the Irish that it seems logical to conjecture that it was ‘lost in translation’, that is, that the Irish translator, unaware of the rejected suitor’s ideological importance, failed to include them. During Guy’s first approach, as we have just seen, Felice does not reject the suitors. She says “‘& ni tugusa cumain a gradha d’aenduine acu’” [“‘and I have not granted the return of his love to any man of them’”] (26; 107–8). She has not accepted any of them, but neither has she rejected them. Hence, she cannot make the conjecture that the Felices of the Anglo-Norman, Caius and Auchinleck do, i.e., “my beauty would be wasted if I took you as a husband, and forsook all of them,” as we know from the beginning of those versions, she has already done so, as the texts tell us “she did not want to have any of them.” In the Irish version, when Felice makes this conjecture, as we have just seen, she still does not set up a comparison between Guy and her other suitors (26; 108). Finally, in the Irish version the reference to Felice’s rejection of the higher ranking men is absent from the first description of her. In addition to further removing any hint of pride at this point in her characterization, Felice’s

534

(Auchinleck, ll.663–74; Caius, ll.663–72).
rejection of the suitors cannot function to establish Guy’s superiority over the higher ranked men.

In the earlier versions of *Guy*, Felice’s articulation of her position “between men”—in this case as a contested object between opposing suitors—is an action by which she mediates and establishes the male relationships that have profound consequences for Guy’s identity. In the case of the rejected suitors, Felice places Guy in a hierarchical relationship in which he is ranked above the other men because she has accepted him as her husband. Another male-male relationship that Felice not only structures but is acutely concerned with in the Middle English versions is the vassal-lord relationship that Guy has with her father. It is her position as his lord’s daughter that makes his approach so offensive and is the justification for her threats of violence and death to him, which she represents as perfectly lawful. In the Middle English Caius and Auchinleck versions, as discussed above, there is even an amplified focus on Guy’s transgression of the lord-vassal relationship that seems to function as one of the elements in a general trend to justify Felice’s rejection of Guy. In CUL, the lord-vassal relationship is still articulated clearly by Felice. However, this too is lacking in the Irish version. Unlike all of the other versions, when Guy attempts to woo her, Irish Felice does not articulate Guy’s position as the son of her father’s steward as the background to her perception of his approach as an insult. Moreover, when she threatens him with death, it is not in the context of male relationships by appealing to her father: she threatens him on her own behalf. This key element of the lord-vassal relationship is only residually present in the Irish version: Felice later threatens him on her father’s behalf, but her threats have none of the language of concern for social transgression. Mismatched rank, independent of lord-vassal relationships or legal complications, is her only justification for rejecting Guy.

The cumulative effect of the absences of Felice’s articulations of her position “between men,” both with respect to her rejected suitors and her father to whom Guy owes allegiance, is that his prowess and rank seem less relative, less contingent on circumstance and context and situation within male hierarchical and vertical bonds mediated by the exchange of women, than they do in the Anglo-Norman or Middle English versions. Guy’s relationship with Felice thus plays less of a formative role in his identity. At the same time, that Felice similarly does not

---

536 “Togaibh Gyí,” ar-sí, “ina shuidhi & cuinnaih re t’ucht e & re t’fórmna”; & do rinde in cumul sin. & ro eirigh Gyí asa neoll iaruin, & ro aigill in righan arís, & ro diult si dó, & do rindi bagair air a h-ucht a h-athar & adubairt co fuigedh sé bas ar son a connaídh (27). [“Raise Guy,” said she, “to a sitting-posture, and support him against thy bosom and thy shoulder.” And the damsel did so. And Guy rose then from his swoon, and again addressed the lady; and she refused him, and threatened him on her father’s part, and told him that he would meet his death because he had addressed her] (109).
articulate how her own reputation would be affected if she were to accept Guy in the face of her rejection of higher ranked men suggests that Guy is less formative in the construction of Felice’s own identity.

The decrease in the mutuality of identity construction between Guy and Felice in the Irish version is also seen in its unique presentation of Guy’s epiphany and its effects (or rather lack of effect) on the characterization of Felice. That Irish Felice is less of a formative force on Guy’s identity is most clearly seen in the complete absence of the connection between her demands and Guy’s sins during his epiphany. Guy spends the day hunting, as he does in the Middle English and Anglo-Norman versions, but his path to reflection on his relationship to God is different. Instead of feeling happy and lucky and consequently reflecting on the honour that God has given him and that he had not appropriately reciprocated, fear of God and worry about his sins preoccupies him and prevents him from feeling the expected joy. He sends messengers to a priest, John de Alcino, because “ro ba menmarc lais a lesugudh asa oige” [“it was his desire to make amends for his youth”] (83; 160). His epiphany is expressed as a confession, and his words have no reference at all to Felice or love of a woman.537

‘Uair is imdha mo pecaidh, uair co rimthar gainem mura & fér faithchi & duilli feda & relt a an aigher ni dingentur rim na rocumdach a torcair lem do dhainibh & d’anmannab indigtach do gradh in t-saeghail-so d’faghail alluidh & ardnósai dam-fein do cur mo clua os cáich, & gideth nír marbus aenduine ar gradh Di’ (83).

[“For many are my sins; for until the sands of the sea are counted, and the grass of the field, and the leaves of the forest, and the stars of the sky, there will not be made a count or an estimate of the men and the innocent lives that fell at my hands because of my love for this world, to get myself honor and high repute, and to put my fame above everyone; and yet I never killed a man from love of God”] (160).

In the Irish version, Guy is exclusively concerned with the men he has killed, the motive for which he represents as “my love for this world, to get myself honor and high repute, and to put my fame above everyone” rather than “for the love of that maye” (CUL, l.7139). Felice and Guy’s love for her do not figure in his confession of guilt to the priest. Guy’s estimation of his sins follows the trajectory of the trend in the Middle English Guy romances which downplay Felice’s culpability in Guy’s sin. Recall that the Middle English romances instead contrast Guy’s misplaced priority of love for Felice as greater than love for God (see above). In a sense, Felice is metonymic for the world in these Middle English versions, and so the Irish replacement of Felice with ‘the world’ makes logical sense. However, it is significant that the focalization of

537 Unique to the Irish text is the introduction of the priest, John de Alcino, and Guy’s expression of guilt as a confession. For the source of this and its wider implications for the text, see below.
the cause of Guy’s sins on Felice is still to some extent present in the Middle English versions, but completely absent in the Irish.

While the substitution of “love of the world” for “love of Felice” is consonant with the increased piety of the atmosphere of the Irish version where religious concerns are heightened, such a substitution still functions both to exculpate Felice and to erase from view her role in Guy’s martial achievement. Were this a romance in which martial prowess is unproblematically celebrated as the primary masculine virtue and the woman has an integral function in the establishment of the knight’s martial identity, such as is the case with King Horn or Bevis of Hampton, then such an erasure would seem to diminish the woman’s importance and value in the narrative. Since, however, all of the romances of Guy problematize the worthiness and value of martial prowess when it is pursued at the expense of piety, the exclusion of Felice from Guy’s epiphany effectively exculpates her entirely from causing Guy’s sinful-ness, even as it also represents her as irrelevant to Guy’s self-formation.

The lack of blame continues in Guy’s description of his need to depart on his penitential journey. Irish Guy tells Felice he killed many men for love of her, but he does not characterize that action as a sin per se. Instead, he says that “& da mad do grad Dia do denuind sin do beth se buidech dim” [“and if it had been for the love of God that I had done it, He would be satisfied with me”] (84; 161) This follows his earlier regret that “gideth nír märbus aenduine ar gradh Di” [“I never killed a man from love of God”] (83; 160). The action of killing is not the sin; the sin is his misplaced motive, which he never attributes to Felice. In the Middle English versions, by contrast, while the emphasis is changed to foreground Guy’s failed exchange with God, the connection between Felice’s demands and Guy’s misdeeds and consequent misery and sorrow is still residually visible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Auchinleck</th>
<th>Caius</th>
<th>CUL</th>
<th>Irish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| "Sephen ye pe seye first wiþ ayn
("Allas þe while," y may sayn) Pi louse me hæl so y-bound, Pat neuer sephe[n nede y gode; Bot in wer schadde mannes blode Wiþ mani a griseli wunde. Now may me rewæ al mi liue. That euer was y boræ o wien, Wayle-way þat stounde! (st.24)." | "Lemman," he seide, "y schall the tile, And shewe th my hertes wille. Sith that y first loued the In græt sorowe y haue bee: Than y haue for the doo Wrought moche sorowe and woo" (ll. 7413–7418). | "Lemman," he seyde,"stande style, Andy schall telle þe all my wylle. Syt[h þe tyne, þat þe þe knewe, For þe my sorow was euyr newe. I wene, ther was neyr knyght, That had so moche sorowe in fyght For none, as y haue had for the, Farre in many a dyuers cuntre I haue many a man slane, Abbeys brente and cytees tane: All þat euyr y haue wroght, Syth furste þat þe þe thoȝht, And all y ad, my lemman free, For to wynne the loye of thee. And all, þat euer y wanne þere, I haue geyn hyt knyþa and squyere. Had þe bene warre and wyse And spended hyt in godlys seruyse" | "& A Heilis," ar-se, “nî lia retha do-cítú sa firmamint na duine torchair lem-sa ar do gradh-sa; & da mad do grad Dia do denuind sin do beth se buidech dim; & do gên foghuaði do Dia festi-a" (84). ["And Felice," said he, “not more numerous are the starsthou seest in the firmament than the men who have fallen at my hands because of my love for thee; and if it had been for the love of God that I had done it, He would be satisfied with me; and now I will do service unto God” (161)]." |
By contrast, Guy’s anger, misery and regret are not present in the Irish version. He does not claim that he has been in sorrow since he first met Felice, nor does he characterize his killing of men—all references to burning abbeys and cities are gone—as “moche sorowe and woo,” nor does he regret the day he was born. Furthermore, he does not tell her that he will give her half the share of all the good deeds he will do (Auchinleck, ll.26.10-11; Caius, ll.7429-30; CUL, ll.7183-4). As we have seen, in the Middle English versions, Guy’s granting of penitential credit to Felice is in part due to the fact that she is half responsible for his sins.

In the Anglo-Norman and Middle English versions, Felice upholds the chivalric system as Guy does, and so bears the blame for the sins it provokes, even if that blame is mitigated in the Middle English versions. Irish Guy, however, is not only not resentful towards Felice for causing his sins; he does not overtly link her to his sins at all, which he has instead characterized as “gradh in t-saeghail-so d’faghail alluidh & ardnósa dam-fein do cur mo clua os cách” [“my love for this world, to get myself honor and high repute, and to put my fame above everyone”] (83;160). In the summary sentence concluding the section, his departure is characterized as “Conidh amlaidh-sin do cuir Gyi in saegal de” [“Thus did Guy put away the world”] (85;162) underscoring his sin as worldliness, an estimation that is later upheld by the final praise of Guy and Felice as two people who “m-breith buidhi doib o demhun & o domun,” [“won a victory over the world and the devil”] (100; 175). Felice is represented as neither the source of Guy’s sinful knighthood, nor the means through which penance can be won. It is his separation from the world that characterizes his new penitent identity, not his separation from her. Thus, the dilution of the relational construction of gender in the Irish Guy has profound consequences for the characterization of Felice. The gradual shift in characterization of Felice witnessed in the Middle English versions has culminated in an Irish Felice who is no longer represented as at all blameworthy in her actions. Her identity as good, pious, noble, and wise is constant from her first introduction to the end of the tale.

In light of this development, it is unsurprising that Irish Felice shows more agency than her Middle English or Anglo-Norman counterparts with respect to her activities in Warwick, and that she is praised by the text for doing so. The Irish version amplifies details of her carrying out her own initial suggestions of building and charitable works to Guy at his departure. Her suggestion is expanded in the Irish, from building abbeys and having churchmen

538 Robinson translates, “thus did Guy put himself away from the world.”
pray for him to “dena-sa mainistreacha ‖ tempuill ‖ sephel ‖ droicchid ‖ oibrecha spirealta archena, ‖ dena tegh n-aidhedh do bochtuibh in Coimdhe, ‖ dena comnaighi festa,” [“build monasteries and temples and chapels and bridges and other spiritual works, and make a house of hospitality for the Lord’s poor, and still abide here’’’] (84; 161). While Guy, disregarding this, runs off to the Holy Land and adventures across Europe, Felice stays home, bears their child, and builds “mainistreacha ‖ sepeil ‖ dethoibrecha le ar anmain Gyio Berbuic” [“monasteries and chapels and other good works for the soul of Guy of Warwick” (90; 166)].

The Irish avoids mention of her misery, leaving out the detail that “[n]euyr for game, that was done./ Loghe she, sythe þat Gye was gone” (CUL, ll. 8407-8408). A significant difference in the Irish is the addition of Felice’s construction of the chapel and monastery around the oratory in which Guy died and was buried, and her death thirty days after the completion of the monastery (100; 175). In the Middle English, Felice refuses to leave Guy’s tomb and after forty days, dies and is buried with him. Richmond describes the significance: “[o]nly the Irish life contains these details about religious foundation [after Guy’s death]; they characterize a strong independent woman, the devoted wife whose active piety extends to another community.” Consequently, not only is Felice’s characterization as noble and praiseworthy improved through the removal of her blame for Guy’s sins, but this is increased through her additional works of charity. Her greater wisdom at the beginning of the poem—she outstripped her learned master who gave her his “rod of instruction”—has remained a stable feature of her profile in the Irish romance. To her greater wisdom than her predecessors, we can thus add Irish Felice’s agency, initiative and activity, as well as her goodness and praiseworthiness. This is a pattern that will also be visible with Sisian (Josiane) of the Irish Life of Bevis of Hampton.

Felice’s increased nobility and goodness have a price, however, for the removal of blame for Guy’s sins can only come with the removal of the ideological force of her approval and opinion of Guy and, more generally, women’s approval and opinion of men. As will become apparent in the subsequent section, women’s choices and voices with respect to marriage arrangements are systematically reduced as their fathers’ will and desire for a powerful son-in-law take the discursive foreground. Despite her greater agency, initiative, autonomy with respect

---

539 CUL. II.7122–7217.
540 Cf. CUL II.8396–8406: “Off þe lady now wyll y telle,/ Of Gyes wife, and nothynge dwelle,/ Of charyte þer was none hur make/ Halowse to seke mony oon:/ He neuyr stynte, or he had done/ Abbeyse, churchys sche dud make/ At that tyme for Gyes sake,/ And pore men bothe clothe and fede,/ Mony, sythe that Gye fio þe londe yede.”
541 Eg. CUL. II.10715–10720.
542 Richmond, Legend of Guy, 148.
to initially refusing Guy, and a lessening of her discursive representation as an object of exchange between men, Felice’s otherwise relatively empowered subjectivity suffers in this respect: she is much more objectified as a gift exchanged between Guy and her father, who privileges his own and Guy’s opinions and desires above those of his daughter. When Felice is given to Guy by her father, the transaction is the culmination of a long line of attempted exchanges of similarly objectified women whose high-ranking fathers attempt to secure Guy as their successor through their daughters’ disposal. The process of Felice’s disenfranchisement in this aspect of her subjectivity is symptomatic of the restructuring of the mode of identity-construction to one oriented to the relationship between fathers and other forms of patriarchal authority, such as priests and teachers, and individuals who are lower-ranked with respect to age or social standing, such as Guy and Felice themselves.

In considering the literary effects of a reorienting of the mode of identity construction away from a relational construction of gender, Guy and Felice of the Irish Gu

y can be usefully juxtaposed with Havelok and Goldeboru, for whom parallelism and equality likewise characterize the discursive construction of their subjectivity. Havelok and Goldeboru, both deprived of their social status and public identity, together rebuild their standing as their fathers’ heirs, but also reconfigure and guarantee their new positions as king and queen of England and Denmark. On the other hand, Irish Guy and Felice have independent reputations and public identities before they even meet, and the parallelism of their description underlines this. The result is that each has less of a formative influence on the other’s identity. Like the stress on equivalency, this pattern may likewise derive from the earlier Irish literary tradition.

Independent identity-formation does, for example, concur with that found in The Wooing of Emer. Joanne Findon remarks upon how self-aware and self-contained Emer is. Findon also remarks that “[i]t is also significant that Emer is not described physically in this text by the hero or anyone else; the only descriptions we find are those in which she describes herself... Emer presents a self-portrait which she creates and controls” (48–9).

[“I was reared indeed,” she said, “with the qualities of old Irish stock in restraining great beauty, in the honour of chastity, in queenly bearing, in beautiful appearance. So that one

543 Findon, A Woman’s Words, 46–49. Findon also remarks that “[i]t is also significant that Emer is not described physically in this text by the hero or anyone else; the only descriptions we find are those in which she describes herself... Emer presents a self-portrait which she creates and controls” (48–9).

544 Van Hamel, Compert Con Culainn, 30.
evaluates every noble, beautiful appearance among the glorious troops of women using me as a model].\textsuperscript{545}

Findon remarks on this passage that

Emer presents herself here as complete and whole, with nothing lacking. In this she stands in marked contrast to the hero, who, despite his illustrious upbringing, has yet to prove himself and realize his full heroic potential. She has become what she will be; he is still in the state of becoming.\textsuperscript{546}

I would argue, on the other hand, that Cú Chulainn’s identity is not quite in as much flux as Findon suggests. While he does further develop his martial (and amorous) identity over the course of the narrative, he is already so renowned as a warrior by the time he goes to seek Emer that the very purpose for his seeking a wife is the fact that the Ulstermen are concerned that he will die before giving them the benefit of his superior warrior descendents, and because they are worried that he will seduce their wives and daughters.\textsuperscript{547} Moreover, with respect to the relational construction of gender, it is clear that Cú Chulainn’s identity is not primarily formed in relation to his future wife, as the romance heroes’ are, but in relation to his martial opponents, which do include women, some of whom are also sexual partners. In this particular text, it is Cú Chulainn’s warrior-woman lover Uathach who gives him the trick to compel her mother, Scáthach, into giving him a thorough warrior training and prophecy of his future:\textsuperscript{548} he must beat Scáthach in combat and lay his sword between her breasts as he asks his requests in a single breath. It is Scáthach who constructs his identity in a prophecy, including his life-span, his unending martial victory, and his belovedness by women.\textsuperscript{549} What finally bestows upon Cú Chulainn his new status as a married man is not Emer herself (though she does protect herself for him), but the defeat of her father and his warriors and King Conchobor himself, who has the right of \textit{ius prima nocte}. A way around this right has to be found on account of Cú Chulainn’s uncontrollable rage, as it is specified that he kill anyone who slept with his wife.\textsuperscript{550} Cú Chulainn’s superior martial abilities make him able to compel an exception to the king’s rule and privilege, but it is through the counsel of the men of Ulster that disaster is averted: they agree that Emer only spend the night in Conchobor’s bed if Fergus, Cú Chulainn’s foster father, and Cathbad the druid also sleep in the bed to protect Cú Chulainn’s honour. This is a comic

\textsuperscript{545} Findon’s translation, \textit{A Woman’s Words}, 48.
\textsuperscript{546} Findon, \textit{A Woman’s Words}, 28.
\textsuperscript{547} Van Hamel, \textit{Compert Con Culainn}, 21–2.
\textsuperscript{549} Van Hamel, \textit{Compert Con Culainn}, 57–60.
\textsuperscript{550} Van Hamel, \textit{Compert Con Culainn}, 64–5
scene to be sure, but one that underscores the importance of patriarchal authority and male community in the regulation of sexuality and mediation of identity-formation.

Similarly, in the *Irish Guy*, the primary agent of Guy’s identity creation is not represented as Felice, or women at all, but other, higher-ranking (at least for the time being) men. This pattern holds true for Felice as well, in the sense that her identity is likewise formed in relation to high-ranking representatives of patriarchal authority. Perhaps a clue to the essential role played by patriarchal authority in identity-construction can be seen in the first few lines of the romance, in which both Felice and Guy are described as “worthy of their fathers.” This simple phrase encapsulates an important ideological difference between the Middle English Guy narratives and the Irish one, as it is in relation to the paternal authority over them that Guy and Felice’s identity is primarily established and evaluated. But paternal authority is only one aspect of patriarchal authority that structures their gendered subjectivity. In the first half of the romance, secular male authority, namely high-ranking powerful men, evaluate Guy as he performs in tournaments and on the battlefield. It is through their approval that his identity as a superior warrior and worthy of their own level of rank and power is established. These are the emperors, kings, dukes and earls who, after their estimation of Guy’s worth, offer Guy their daughters in marriage and thereby succession to their land and position after their deaths. It is their opinions that functionally establish Guy’s reputation, not Felice’s. Likewise, the formative influence on Guy’s hagiographic identity is not Felice, but ecclesiastical patriarchal authority in the person of his priest-confessor John de Alcino. Finally, it is not Felice’s relationship with Guy that is foregrounded in the definition of her identity or social position, but her relationship to her father and her teacher.

The Irish text amplifies considerably the thematic importance of the men who offer their daughters to Guy as wives, not only by increasing their number, but by privileging male opinions by gradually erasing the women’s voices and perspectives from view. The first tournament for a woman occurs just after Guy leaves England for the first time. He and his companions arrive in Normandy where an innkeeper tells them:

“Ingen alaind, aentumha ata agan imper, & ni h-ail le fer acht an té berus gell gaisgidhe & gnimechta na cruinne co comcoicteinn, & is doigh leisin n-impiri nach fuil deichnemhar laech lancalma isin domun nach coiscfeth fein ina aenar. & tangadur anois mic righ na h-Espaine & na h-Afraice & na Greige & na Frainge & na Sisaile & na Hungaire & na Fuardacha & na Deolainne & na cethra treabh Lochlann & in domun uili archena co

---

551 See above.
cathair an imperi cum na giustala-sin, & is do dul cuici atait cuingedha curadhcúisecha na catrach-so ac corughudha n-arm & a n-ilfaebur” (29).

[“The emperor has a fair, unmarried daughter, and she will be pleased with no man but him who bears the palm of valor and deeds of arms in the whole world; and the emperor believes that there are not ten valiant knights in the world whom he could not conquer singly. And now the sons of the king of Spain, and of Africa, and of Greece, of France, of Sicily, of Hungary, of Fuardacht, and of Deolann and of the four tribes of Lochlann, and of all the world besides, have come to the city of the Emperor to this jousting; and it is to go against him that the hardy warriors of this city are preparing their arms and their many weapons”] (110).

This represents a dramatic departure from all of the previous versions: in the Anglo-Norman (E, ll. 745–7 and G, fo12v) the emperor’s daughter holds the tournament, promising various prizes and her love to whoever wins it. Marriage and inheritance are not mentioned, and the presence of the emperor’s son suggests that she is no heiress. In Middle English Caius (ll.803–5) and CUL (ll.513-516), the daughter of the emperor likewise calls the tournament, presumably—but this is not stated explicitly—because she wants to marry the best knight and so she is offering herself as one of the prizes (Caius, ll.834-6; CUL ll.535-6). Accordingly, in Caius, Gaier, the emperor’s son in the Anglo-Norman, is not identified as such. In the CUL, Gaier’s identity remains intact, but since no inheritance is mentioned along with the daughter, there is no contradiction. In the Auchinleck (ll.805), it is the emperor who orders the tournament, and the daughter is certainly a prize (l.835), effectively erasing the woman’s choice or agency in the matter of her impending marriage. There is no mention of inheritance or the emperor’s son.

The Irish presents a combination of the preceding versions, with some contradictory innovations. The emperor’s daughter’s choice to marry none but “him who bears the palm of valor and deeds of arms in the whole world” is made explicit and seems to prefigure Felice’s own desire for Guy to win the same prize. In this, the Irish resembles the Caius and CUL. At the same time, it is clearly implied that the emperor ordered the tournament, since it is the emperor himself who will be fighting the candidates. It is by vanquishing (but presumably not killing) the emperor that a knight may win his daughter in marriage and also the empire after his death. This results in two obvious and problematic contradictions: the emperor’s son remains a fixture in the tournament, thus defying usual inheritance patterns, and the emperor himself never actually appears in the tournament for Guy to fight. It seems as if the romance convention of the

552 “& co déimin ní ba fer dámsa co brach thú, acht muna beruir gell gaiscidh & gnimechta o ridiribh na cruinne co comlan” (34). [“and in truth thou shalt never be my husband unless thou win the prize of bravery and prowess from the knights of the whole world”(115)]. That Felice’s choice echoes the emperor’s daughter’s exactly may be seen to corroborate the validity and virtue of Felice’s request.
heiress as a prize to be won along with her land, and the Irish convention of combat against the maiden’s family, particularly the woman’s father, are both exerting such pressure on this moment in the Irish Guy that textual coherence suffers. The combat against the father is diluted in its danger and made courtly by means of the tournament, and conflict between parent and child (i.e., father and daughter) is erased. The daughter’s choice and her father’s choice are represented as one and the same, even as the necessary bestowal of identity through martial victory is preserved through the addition of the emperor’s primary participation in the tournament, albeit the fact that this latter feature is never textually realized. Nevertheless, some element of the woman’s agency is retained in the choice of potential marriage to Guy: when Guy wins the tournament, the emperor’s daughter sends a messenger to Guy, saying that he is her choice of husband if he is not already married (32; 113). This translates some version of the Middle English, where the daughter sends him his prizes and grants him her love, if he does not already have a “fairer leman” (Auchinleck ll.1001-1012, Caius, ll.1000-1012) or “nodur darlynge” (CUL, ll.683–690).

The next two tournaments in the Irish romance—both ones in which a father desires to bestow his daughter and heir upon the best knight—exist exclusively in the Irish version and seem to be genuine additions. These show, along with Felice’s marriage to Guy, the gradual movement away from an interest or emphasis on women’s desire of the best warrior to a lord’s desire to have the best successor. In the first of these additional tournaments, this one in Brittany, it is the father, Earl Birri of Brittany, who offers his daughter to Guy when he wins, even though the daughter has expressed her choice to marry no one but the best warrior in the world:

Dala Iarla o Birri immorro, do cuir techta co Sir Gyi le dá cursun glegeala gnimurrlama, & ro thairg a ingen mur mnaí dó gun a uili maithus le, & adubairt nach roíbi sa cruinde co comlan fer rob ferr leis do beth aga ingin na Sir Gyi (33).

[“As for the Earl of Birri, moreover, he sent messengers to Sir Guy with two horses, pure white and swift in action; and he offered Guy his daughter as wife with all his possessions besides; and he said there was no man in the whole world whom he would rather have marry his daughter than Sir Guy”] (115).

553 For example, Tochmarc Emire, Táin Bó Fráech, Eachtra Airt.

554 F. N. Robinson remarks that the Irish Guy “contains every episode of importance in the English and has several additional incidents besides. Such are the fight between Guy and the duke of Lombardy (Chapter 4); the three days’ tourney in Brittany (Chapter 5); and the tournament in Normandy (Chapter 7). In all these cases the English has nothing to correspond except general statements that Guy fought in Normandy, Brittany, France and Spain” (Irish Lives of Bevis and Guy, 14)
The woman’s choice of husband has been replaced by her father’s choice of son-in-law, and the woman becomes an object of exchange. Just as the emperor’s daughter’s words prefigure Felice’s, Earl Birri’s prefigure Felice’s father’s, wherein Felice is likewise represented as the object of male exchange, as I will discuss below.

In the second additional tournament, this one in Normandy for the daughter of the King of France, the woman’s choice is completely erased even as the father’s choice is portrayed with far more gravity than the women’s: it is an oath sworn to God.

Likewise, when Guy wins the tournament, the daughter remains an agency-less and voice-less object of exchange: “Do thairg ri Frangc a ingen mur bancheile do Gyi, & ro diult Gyi sin” [“The King of France offered his daughter to Guy as wife, and Guy refused her”] (35; 116).

The final instance in which a powerful man offers Guy his heiress-daughter in marriage occurs when the Emperor of the Greeks in Constantinople is threatened by a Saracen sultan and needs Guy’s protection. In the now-expected pattern, he offers her and his land and sovereignty to Guy, who refuses her, but agrees to help (52; 132). This more or less follows the Middle English versions, except that Middle English Guy never actually refuses the Greek emperor’s daughter (Auchinleck ll. 2887-94, Caius, ll. 2887-90, CUL ll. 2801-8). However, the Middle English versions all present the daughter of the Greek emperor as having something of a relationship with Guy, welcoming him to her room, playing chess with him and being kissed by Guy (Auchinleck ll. 3187-3192, Caius ll. 3187-3191, CUL ll. 3045-3056). In the two versions that include a narrowly avoided marriage with her (Caius omits this section), she is shown to be deeply disappointed when he delays their marriage (Auchinleck, ll. 4221-32, CUL ll. 3983-86). In the Irish version, on the other hand, she never actually directly appears, much less speaks to
Guy (63–4; 141–2). Her choice, like that of the daughter of the King of France, is completely irrelevant; she is nothing but an object of exchange between her father and Guy.

The gradual displacement of women’s voices and choices in favour of male endorsement of Guy’s knightly prowess continues in the betrothal and marriage of Guy and Felice. First of all, all references to Felice’s love of Guy are removed until his return to England after becoming the best knight in the world. Secondly, the Irish version changes the order in which the earl of Warwick speaks to the couple. In the Anglo-Norman and Middle English versions without exception, Earl Rohault, often accompanied by his wife, speaks to Felice first before asking Guy if he will have her. In these versions, Felice’s choice is privileged by her father, even if the superiority of male bonds is eventually asserted in the negotiation between Guy and the earl. In the Irish version, the earl’s choice of son-in-law takes complete priority: the now-familiar sequence of the emperor, earl, king, etc. estimating Guy’s worth and attempting to secure him as a male heir by marriage is replicated, and this time is finally successful. Despite the lessening of the presentation of Felice between men earlier, and the apparent independence and autonomy of her dealing with suitors, she is ultimately exchanged by her father, whose choice of son-in-law happens to accord with her choice of husband. Ultimately it is men’s estimation of Guy, not women’s, that functions to build Guy’s martial identity as the supreme example of masculinity.

This pattern continues in Guy’s new identity as penitent knight and pseudo-saint. In the amplification of piety throughout the text, the translator does not shy away from the sinfulness of Guy’s early life. As already seen in Guy’s epiphany scene, Guy’s sins are stressed. His penance for his “love of the world” can hardly be considered a pious veneer that merely extends his secular heroism. Rather, his penitential journey assumes greater prominence in the text alongside a general increase in piety and attention to theology. This, among other factors, has consequences for the relational construction of gender in the text. We have already seen the lessening of Felice’s role in his hagiographic conversion, but the role of John de Alcino reveals that Guy’s new hagiographic identity is granted by the patriarchal authority of the Church, rather than obtained in relation to Guy’s absence from Felice, his wife.

Unique to the Irish version of Guy is Guy’s epiphany expressed as a confession to a priest named John de Alcino, who proceeds to give him a lengthy list of actions to perform to atone for his sins. Robinson determined early on that this theologically-minded addition is an

\[555\] See above.
\[556\] “But the Irish, as compared with the English, is particularly insistent on works of piety and charity” (Robinson, Irish Lives of Bevis and Guy 15). See also Richmond, Legend of Guy, 147–8.
abbreviation of material from the Middle English *Speculum Gy de Warewyke*, a reworking of Alcuin’s *Liber de virtutibus et vitis*, written for Guido of Tours, which Robinson notes had become associated with Guy of Warwick by the early thirteenth century. The earliest copy is dated to the early fourteenth century, in the Auchinleck manuscript, which of course, also includes the three separate-but-related Guy romances. Robinson hypothesized that the weaving in of material from the *Speculum* most likely occurred in the Middle English source because “the combination in question would have been more naturally made by an Englishman than by a foreigner.” Given the general amount of greater piety in the *Irish Guy* and the English trend to exculpate Guy as well as Felice, I find Robinson’s assumption problematic. There is no reason to exclude the possibility that the Irish translator made the combination of the two texts. Indeed, the combination is so eminently logical that it seems an inevitable development in the Guy tradition. While this would require some version of the *Speculum* to have made it to Ireland or for the author of the Irish Guy to have become acquainted with it in England, neither of these possibilities is particularly unlikely. Indeed, the addition of John de Alcino as Guy’s confessor not only seems natural within the heightened religiosity of the Irish text, but also works in tandem with the wider trend of the reduction of the operational force of the relational construction of gender: that John de Alcino presides over the formation of Guy’s new identity can be seen in their first words to each other. When Guy meets John de Alcino, his first words are “‘A athar naemtha cuirim cumairei m’anma ort’ [‘O holy father, I put the charge of my soul upon thee’] (83; 160) and then he confesses his sins.

Guy places John de Alcino in the position of presiding over his eternal soul, and the priest does just that: unlike every other version of Guy, Guy himself does not come to the conclusion that if he had done half of what he did for Felice for God then he would be a saint, or at least be in heaven. In the Irish text, the priest is the one to interpret Guy’s previous life and tell this conclusion to him: “‘Dia n-dernta a trian-sin ar gradh Dia, ro ba buidech Dia dit, & do maithfedh do pecud duit’ [‘If thou hadst done a third of that for the love of God, God would be satisfied with thee and would forgive thee thy sin’]” (83; 160). John de Alcino then proceeds to direct Guy’s new life: he tells him to follow the ten commandments, love God above all else, avoid the seven deadly sins, be merciful, humble, prayerful, and compassionate (83; 160). It is the priest as representative of ecclesiastical authority who causes Guy to undertake the drastic actions for atonement that he does. Indeed, Guy receives the idea from him to perform the same

deeds for God that he did “for the love of this world,” from the priest and consequently his new pilgrim identity is formed in relation to God as mediated through the Church.

Patriarchal authority also structures Felice’s identity. Recall that at the very beginning of the narrative, she is described as “worthy of her father,” just as Guy is. Indeed, her identity as daughter of the earl of Warwick asserts itself consistently throughout the narrative, even after her marriage and right up until just after the birth of Roighnebron (90; 166), after which she is called “cunnedais” [countess] or “regain” or “banntigerna” [lady], titles of ranks that she holds or inherited through her father; alternatively, she is simply called “Felice.” The phrase “daughter of the earl” or “daughter of the earl of Warwick” is found no less than twelve times in the Irish version, often where no corresponding description or epithet occurs in the English versions: in CUL she is called daughter of the earl three times (l. 25, l. 186, l. 4005), in Caius only once (l. 27) and never in the Auchinleck texts. Patriarchal authority is thus a much greater determining force in Felice’s identity in the Irish version than in the others. Indeed, her place as her father’s daughter outshadows her identity as Guy’s wife and Reinbrun’s mother. She is never even called “Guy’s wife.”

Another way in which secular patriarchal authority structures Felice’s identity can be seen in the way in which her position as a woman of superior knowledge is established, namely that it is literally given to her by her exceptionally learned male teacher. Her superior wisdom, much embelishment from preceding versions, is demonstrated by her surpassing of her “ardmaigistir” [“great teacher”] in “in gach ealathain” [“in every art”] and “in gach egna a cinn” [“in every kind of knowledge”] so that “co tucc in maigistir slat a muinti di budhein” (24) [“so that the master gave her the rod of his instruction”] (24; 105). Just as John de Alcino presides over the construction of Guy’s new penitent pilgrim identity, the unnamed ardmaigistir presides over the establishment of Felice’s characterization as wise and learned.

Finally, the end of the Guy section of the romance shows a clear movement away from relationally constructed gender identity. Where in the Middle English and Anglo-Norman versions Guy sends word to Felice through the messenger that he is dying and that she should prepare herself because she will not die long after him, the messenger from Irish Guy makes no mention of her death to Felice. Rather, Felice presides over the building and establishment of the monastery and has her own, albeit implied, foreshadowing of her death.

559 I used an electronic search function to determine this, using the electronic text supplied by the CELT project, www.ucc.ie/celt.
560 Eg. CUL, ll.10607–10640.
& tug Feilis bethugudh don mainistir-sin co fuin an betha, & ro ordaigh deich sacairt fichet do beth ag serbís co sraithd annsa mainistir-sin. Dala Feilisi iar-sin ro ullumigh si hi fein, & fuair bás a cinn deich la fichet tar eis na mainistreach-sin do crichnugudh.

(100).

[“Felice supported that monastery till the end of her life, and commanded thirty priests to be constantly at service in that monastery. As for Felice, after that she made herself ready, and she died at the end of thirty days from the completion of the monastery”]

(175).

Instead of her lifespan being represented as inexorably tied to his, she has an independent death, governed by her own program of religious service and independent relationship with God and the Church.

Finally, in the last meeting of Guy and Felice, it is Guy’s superiority relative to other men that is foregrounded, in lieu of the reunion and farewell of husband and wife. Compare this scene to the other versions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>G 83va</th>
<th>Auchinleck</th>
<th>Cais</th>
<th>CUL</th>
<th>Irish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cum ele en l’emaitage entra, Le cors sun seignur esgarda, En halte voiz leva un cruiz, E il ses oilz en overi;</td>
<td>A tant est la contesse encre Le cors son seignur a visnee En haut donc itta un cri Que sire G ses euz outri Et sur felice regarda Per ses mains la prist si la cola Son chief sur li ad escole Es doucement laz bayse Mes nis un mot ne parla A donce G se desaia. Quant l’alme del cors issit Seint Michel la scysit Cum une columbe laz portee A Dieus en haut laz livre Od grant joye et haut chant Od Gloria in excelsis chantant.</td>
<td>&amp; in she went wel euen. When þat sche seic he hir lورد sir Gij. Sche wept &amp; made dibleful cri Wþ a ful reweful steuen. Sir Gij loked on hir þare: His soule fram þe bōdi gan fare. A þousand angels &amp; seuen Vnder-serf þe soule of Gij, &amp; bar it wiþ g ret mocked &amp; bar it wiþ g ret mocked &amp; bar it wil get mocked into þe blis of heuen. (st.293)</td>
<td>She anse &amp; went in Ryþ derly: Her lوردys body she lay þer lyhe. Redly she cried þer for the nonys, And he loked on her nonys. He kissed her fayre &amp; curtesly: With that he dyed hastylye. There dyed the noble knyþ þyr Gye: Seint Mighell was þer ful redey And bare þys soule to hevyn þeþ. And presented hit to the hevyn kyng; There shal he be withowte ending. (ll.10932–10948)</td>
<td>The cowntas lyþt downe in grete hye And, hur lوردys body when sche sье. Wondurly hau highe caste vþ þa crye. Wyþ þat hys eyen openyd þyr Gye: Vþ þat he loked anon ryþt. And clepyd Felyce, as he myght, &amp; he heþe þe þe bôhe þe hys hynds. Before þat þe, as sche stondys, In tokenyng hur mercy forto crye Of þe þoone, sche daf him dyrè. Hede to hede þere lay they tho: Swetyly eryþer kissyd other also. But oon worde Gye þere ne speke, And þe gnoþ þen fro hyms bekre. When þat hyms sowl þe hys sowl þo, Seint Mighell anon hyt hente: As a whyte downe, he toke hyþ þere. To god in heuén he daf hyþ þere. Wyþ hau t chant &amp; curoys: ‘Gloria in excelsys’ þey seyde amonge. (ll.10649–10674)</td>
<td>&amp; ro sporch in rigan co rechaitcuantach &amp; roger iar n-aitnith Sir Gyi di. Ro fhedi Gyi fur in righain, &amp; do craþ sà cosa cuigi in tan-sin, &amp; tug se builì uada dbbh co prap, &amp; do ben se cloch don urlar ag faghail na h-annus, &amp; atà feidim moirseis ar h-imar ar bara, &amp; do chumnaic Feilis cuimailus coim gleghil ag tiacht as bel Sir Gyi &amp; ag dul sius a flatrhmunus Dia. Conidh amaid-sin fuair Feilis a h-àcì on dulaman, uair ro iaradh si ar Dia builì da siul &amp; da radarc d’faicsin do Gyi sul nach scaradh a anm ris. (99)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In every version besides the Irish, Guy is referred to as Felice’s “lord,” highlighting their marital relationship. In three of the versions, Guy and Felice embrace and kiss. In the other two, it is the sight of Felice that precipitates Guy’s death. In its details, the Irish seems closest to the Auchinleck, but for the detail of the white dove, which links it to CUL. What is clear is that the final feat of strength that he performs, kicking the rock, is an Irish addition and works to establish Guy’s superior strength compared to other men: in his final death-throes, he is still stronger than seven men. This action far overshadows his reunion with Felice, so privileged in three of the other versions. His relationship with her is less important to his characterization than his superiority over other warriors. At the same time, Felice’s relationship to God takes precedence over her relationship to Guy. Of course, the most important relationship for both Guy and Felice in this moment is their relationship to God. That Guy’s soul goes up to heaven, or is taken up to heaven by one or many angels, is constant throughout the tradition. The Irish does not alter this substantively. However, what is added in the Irish is an explicit description of Felice’s relationship to God. Not only does the Irish text specify that she saw Guy’s soul in the shape of a dove going up to heaven, there is the additional line, “Conidh amlaidh-sin fuair Feilis a h-ìtci on duileman, uair ro iaradh si ar Dia builli da suil & da radarc d'faicsin do Gyi sul nach scaradh a anum ris” [“So that it is thus that Felice obtained her prayer from the Lord, for she besought God that she might have a look at Guy with her eyes and with her sight before his soul should depart from him”] (99; 175). Her successful interaction with God, who granted her prayer, gets more narrative space than her reaction to actually seeing Guy for the last time.

A final detail of the text clinches Guy and Felice’s independence of each other with respect to identity. After her death, the Irish text says “& ro h-anlaicedh a n-aentuma re Sir Gyi hi” (100). Robinson translates aentuma as “alone” [“she was buried alone beside Sir Guy”] (175). However, “alone” is not the primary sense of aentuma. Rather it is “unmarried,” “celibate” or in its substantive form, “an unmarried state, celibacy (but not necessarily virginity).”561 Indeed, it stands out in comparison with the other usage of the word in the text, where it occurs five times in reference to young, unmarried men and women. Four times it refers to the young unmarried daughters of lords whose fathers try to offer them to Guy as wives, including Felice. Once it is used of Felice’s besotted suitors, along with its syntactically implied synonym ógacht, meaning “chastity or virginity.” Aentuma can be used to mean “widowed,” so

it is possible that the phrase means “she was buried as a widow beside Sir Guy,” but the fact that the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* quotes the phrase as a confusing and undetermined figurative usage of *aentuma*\(^{562}\) suggests that its sense in this passage is not so straightforward. Given the fact that Felice’s marriage lasted only forty days and that she spends the majority of her life apart from Guy, as a (presumably) celibate woman alone in Warwick serving God, and that the semantic force of *aentuma* within the text is in its meaning of “unmarried,” it seems logical to conclude that it refers not to her being buried alone or apart from Guy, so much as highlights her celibate and functionally unmarried life. After Guy’s departure, in all versions of the romance, she is in every sense a woman who is *alone*, and it seems more likely that the Irish text is highlighting this fact, rather than trying to include more details about her burial. At any rate, even if we do take *aentuma* as “alone” with no other spiritual or social sense, it remains that she is buried by herself, beside Sir Guy, rather than buried in the same tomb with him, as she is in all of the Middle English versions and both Anglo-Norman. The either physical or social separation of Felice from Guy highlights their independence from each other with respect to identity-construction. Their growth and establishment as adult members of their community occurs, for the most part, along their own separate trajectories rather than through mutual development.

Felice and Guy’s subjectivity is thus structured similarly in the Irish *Guy*. Equality of rank, power, ability and reputation mark their characterization. Felice’s culpability has been all but removed, allowing her to remain a constant force of goodness and piety within the text. Secular and ecclesiastical patriarchal authorities govern identity formation far more than any interactive gender dialogue.

**Sisian in the Irish Life of Bevis of Hampton**
The *Irish Life of Bevis* is only a small fragment of the entire romance, covering the material up to Sisian’s defence of herself against Earl Miles before she is married to Bevis. Even in its brevity, however, it reveals some interesting adaptations. The *Irish Life of Bevis* shows some of the same trends as the *Irish Life of Guy*. Like Felice and Guy, both Sisian and Bevis become more noble and exemplary. Sisian, like Felice, becomes an even more unproblematically positive character than she is in the Middle English, and her wisdom, virtue, authority and agency are increased far beyond the previous versions of the romance. That the text is only a

\(^{562}\) “*oentama*” s.v. *Dictionary of the Irish Language*: “ro hannlaicedh a n-aentuma re Sir Gy i hi `she was buried alone beside (? apart from) Sir G. ’”
small fragment and yet still shows such a strong pattern is striking. The relational construction of gender, however, unlike in the Irish Guy, is not fundamentally altered. Unlike Irish Felice, Sisian is even more of a formative force on Bevis’ identity, even if she herself (after her departure from her father’s court) has nothing in the way of the formal or public authority that Felice has by the end of her story.

Sisian makes her first appearance after Bevis’ “Christmas Day Battle,” an incident unique to the Middle English versions of Bevis and their descendents. The formulaic description of her that immediately follows the description of her father King Ermin is omitted. It is present in all of the versions of the Middle English Bevis that preserve the section, suggesting that it fell prey to the Irish redactor’s penchant for omission. At the same time, its absence suggests that the Irish composer was not interested in including the details of her physical appearance or superior beauty. Of greater interest to the Irish composer seems to have been Sisian’s wisdom, agency, authority and virtue, all of which are amplified throughout the narrative (such as it survives), starting with the passages in which Sisian first interacts with Bevis and intervenes for him in his father’s court.

In the Irish version of the Christmas Day episode, Felice’s two-stage intervention between her father’s wrath and Bevis is summarized and altered in its details. On the one hand, her initiative and agency in the Middle English version are preserved, but on the other, her open contradiction of her father is removed and Sisian’s role becomes that of sweet-talker and peacemaker between Bevis and her father. In the Irish version, King Ermin never threatens to kill Bevis for killing his knights and so Sisian never steps in to tell her father to let Bevis tell his side of the story (31–2), nor does she approach Bevis to offer to be his guarantor at court (33–4). Rather, Bevis is summoned to explain himself, but refuses to go; his eyes flaming in wrath recall

---

564 Eugen Kölbìng, ed., The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun Edited from Six Manuscripts and the Old Printed Copy, with Introduction, Notes and Glossary, Early English Text Society, 46, 48, 65 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. for the EETS, 1885–94). Kölbìng’s edition uniquely includes up to all eight manuscript and paper versions of Bevis on a single page, printing at the top of the page, the Auchinleck text (his ‘class 1’ text) followed by variations from manuscripts ESNC (his ‘class 2’ text, labeled y), and at the bottom of the page, a reconstructed text according to M and O (his ‘class 3’ text, labeled x), with variants from O and L when M represents the x text, and variants from M and L when O represents the x text (vi–viii). The manuscripts are Auchinleck [A], Caius College, Cambridge, Gonville and Caius 175 [E], Duke of Sutherland (now Egerton 2862) [S], Royal Library, Naples, XIII, B 29 [N], University Library, Cambridge Ff. 2.38 [C], Chetham Library, no. 8009, Manchester [M], Douce fragments, No. 19. [L], Oxford, Bodleian Library, Printed Text [O]. Because I am trying to be broadly comparative, rather than citing individual manuscript line numbers, I will be citing page numbers from Kölbìng’s edition and specify manuscript by sigla where appropriate. For the description of Felice in A,E,S,N,C and M,O, see Kölbìng, Sir Beues of Hamtoun, 24.
Cú Chulainn’s battle-fury. Sisian intervenes, saying she will go to Bevis’ chamber to calm his wrath and convince him to come to her father:

Adubaírt Sisian, ingen Ermín, có rachadh féin d'agallaim Bibus, & do cuaid có n-dróing móir d'uisalmnaib maraen ria, & ro aigill si Bibus do briathraibh blasta, binngloracha. & do thurn sin ferg Bibus, & tainic leisín righain a cenn in righ, & ro innis d'Ermin in t-adhbur trin ar marbh se na ridiri (278–9).

[“Sisian, the daughter of Ermin, said that she would go to talk with Bevis; and she went, accompanied by a great company of noble ladies, and addressed Bevis in gentle, sweet-voiced words. And that stopped Bevis’s wrath, and he came to the king with the princess, and told Ermin the reason why he had slain the knights”] (303).

She arrives with a company of ladies and diffuses his anger, an action which resembles the women sent to calm the young Cú Chulainn’s rage upon his return to Emain Macha in the Táin Bó Cúailgne.\(^{565}\) It is possible that one of the motivations behind this change was the perception that it would be inappropriate for a daughter to openly contradict her father in court: Sisian appears more decorous and obedient than her Middle English ancestors. Moreover, her arrival with a great company of ladies hints at a greater anxiety about social behaviour, sexuality and male-female interaction. All details of Middle English Josiane kissing Bevis and comforting him while convincing him to see her father are absent in the Irish version, as is a subsequent passage in which, after Bevis’ acquittal by the king, she tends his recently received wounds at her father’s request. In the wound-tending scene, the different Middle English manuscript versions contain different details, but she tends his wounds in all versions, and in both the C and M manuscripts, she kisses him frequently (35–6). This passage is absent in the Irish version. It is possible that the details of kissing and healing and the separate scene of Josiane taking him to a room to tend him are omitted as part of a general trend towards abbreviation; however, it is just as likely that the redactor found it unseemly for an unmarried woman to be kissing a man or tending his wounds alone with him in a chamber. The anxiety seems to be particularly directed towards her kisses, which are lacking from all passages in the Irish until their betrothal.

Another incident in which Josiane intervenes on Bevis’ behalf at court immediately follows his vanquishing of a boar that was terrorizing the countryside. The Irish version has marks of abbreviation and adaptations that affect the presentation of Sisian as more wise, more virtuous and possessing greater authority at court. The two times Josian gazes at Bevis, sighs and laments and prays for his love (37; 42) are collapsed into a single expression, which

---

constructs her as less pagan (and therefore more virtuous), more self-aware and insightful, less sexually motivated and more independently-minded:

Do bi Sisian in tan-sin ar barr a grianain & do cunnaic si Bibus ag dul do comruic risin pest remi, & adubairt Sisian: “Is truag mo chuit de sin,” ar-si, “tair is t’ ú fé is annsa lium d’féruibh in talman, & ní fiu lium scela do innsin duit ar romét moígrecha & mo maithusa fein, & nach fes damh cred i h’uaíslí-si na h’athairdecht. & Gideth da marbha in cullach thú, do gebh bas co bithurrúm dod’ cumáidh, a Bibus,” ar-si (279).

[“Sisian was in the top of her sunny chamber at that time, and she saw Bevis going out to fight the virulent beast, and Sisian said: “Hard is my share in that,” said she, “for thou art the man who is dearest to me of all the men in the world, and it is not fitting for me to tell thee my story because of the vast extent of my heritage and my wealth, and I do not know what thy rank is or thy patrimony. And yet, if the boar kills thee, Bevis, I will seek death at once because of sorrow for thee,” said she” ](303–4).

Unlike the Middle English Josianes, Sisian does not dwell on her desire to kiss him or wish to be his lover (37), nor does she call on or pray to “Mahoun,” say that she would give the whole world to be his wife, or claim that she will die if he does not love her (42). Instead, she addresses Bevis himself (rhetorically, of course, since he is out of earshot), articulates her desire for him in the formulaic Irish phrase “man who is dearest to her in the whole world,” expresses exactly why she cannot tell him about her love—they have a discrepancy in rank—and she says that she will die of sorrow, a noble tradition for Irish heroines when their beloved dies,\(^{566}\) if he is killed.

The end of the boar battle sequence sees what is a completely new addition to Sisian’s character. The lines have no precedent in any of the Middle English versions (43) or the Anglo-Norman version (ll.485–94). When Bevis is attacked by twelve forest-guarding knights after killing the boar, he kills six of the twelve, but the rest escape to the king:

Ro bui Sisian, ingen Ermin, ac feithem in comhraic-sin aga dhenum, & do cuaidh si mur a roibha h’athair & ro innis do mur do fhelladur ridiri cóimeda na furaisi ar Bibus & mur do marb se seisí dib le boidh bic do crann sleghi, & do shaer sin Bibus .i. in lethscel do gab Sisian do (280).

[“Sisian, Ermin’s daughter, was watching the battle while it was fought, and she went to her father and told him how the knights who kept the forest had played Bevis false, and how he had killed six of them with a small piece of a spear-shaft. And that set Bevis free, namely the excuse that Sisian made for him”] (304).\(^{567}\)

---

\(^{566}\) For a full discussion of deaths of grief in Irish literature, see Kristen Mills, “Chapter Two: Perilous Grief,” in “Grief, Gender and Mourning in Medieval North Atlantic Literature,” (Ph.D. diss. University of Toronto, forthcoming). My thanks to Kristen Mills for an advance look at her work.

\(^{567}\) In this sequence, the Irish is closest to Middle English manuscripts M and O, which follow the extant Anglo-Norman manuscript, in which no evil steward of King Ermin and twenty-four knights accompany the enemy
Here, Sisian acts not only as a witness to Bevis’ bravery and prowess, but actually testifies for him and saves him from punishment, possibly from death, and the narrator highlights this explicitly. This addition may have its roots in a combination of the earlier, omitted section of the Christmas Day battle, in which Josiane suggests to her father to let Bevis tell his side of the tale when Ermin threatens to kill him, and a later one, in which Josiane describes Bevis’ valiant fight against the foresters (and in some Middle English manuscripts (A,S,N,C) Ermin’s evil steward and twenty-four knights) to her father as evidence for why he should make Bevis a knight (44–5). Sisian certainly acts here, as Middle English Josiane did after the Christmas Day incident, as Bevis’ “warante” in front of her father, but she does so in a way that contradicts the enemy foresters, not her own father. Moreover, her report of Bevis defending himself has precedent in her later speech advocating for his knighthood. It is easy to see how this new action of Sisian’s could have been developed out of those two as a means of preserving her intervention on Bevis’ behalf, but without any implication that she is going against her father’s judgment. Nevertheless, despite its possible seeds in the Middle English versions, it remains that only the Irish version contains this report of Sisian’s and emphasizes that she saves him from punishment. Her authority at court thus appears greater in this version than the others, a trend which continues in the following section.

Another new passage follows almost immediately that also amplifies Sisian’s insight and self-awareness, demonstrates her wisdom and shows her to be more formative in Bevis’ martial identity than Josiane is in Bevis’. Bramon (Brademund), the evil king of Damascus, shows up demanding Josiane as his wife. As Erich Poppe notes, of all of the other versions of Bevis of Hampton from northwestern medieval Europe, all of which pre-date the Irish, the Irish is the only one to include a moment where her father asks her if she wants to marry Bramon and the reasons for her choice. In the other versions, it is her father who refuses Bramon/Brademond, suggesting that it was the translator of the Irish text who made this addition, rather than it being a result of the lost Middle English version. That she declines with reasons that speak directly to

---


569 Erich Poppe also notes this, but his only comment is the Irish translator “thought it conceivable” that an aristocratic Irish woman might have a say in her marriage (“Irish Version of Beves,” 92).
the problems of the absentee English landlords also supports the likelihood that this is an original Irish addition:

Is ann-sin ro fiarfaigh Ermin do Shisian nar cet le a tabaírt do Brámon i. do rí na Damaisci; adubairt Sisian nar cheat. “Crédh in t-adhbur?” ar in rígh. “Is é is adbur dam,” ar-si, “.i. curob me is oigri ort-sa, & da fághtha bas comad e in féin do beth agum-sa do beth na rígh isin crich-so tar h'éis, & damad e Bramon ro ba ferceile dam ni h-annsa crich-so do anfhadh sé acht a císcain do breith leis ina thir fein & an tir-so do cur a tarcaíse tre gan rí do beth a comnadh innti; & is é sin in t-adhbur nach cet lium mo thabairt do Bramon” (280-1).

[“Then Ermin asked Sisian whether she would consent to be given to Bramon the King of Damascus; Sisian answered that she would not. “What is the reason?” said the king. “This is my reason,” said she; “because I am thy heir, and if thou shouldst die, the man who was my husband would be king in this land after thee; and if it should be Bramon who was my husband, he would not remain in this land, but would carry his tribute into his own land, and this land would be put to shame because there would be no king dwelling in it; and that is the reason I will not consent to be given to Bramon”] (305).

The analogy can easily be made between the land with a non-resident foreign king who takes tribute to his own land, and the English-owned lands with their absentee lords living in England and delegating the day-to-day functioning to their representatives, while taking the profits of the territories to England to support their participation in the civil war, and at the same time leaving their Irish lands vulnerable to attack.\(^\text{570}\) Again, Sisian demonstrates her considerable grasp of her own social position relative to a potential suitor and makes a responsible decision based upon it. Her father certainly seems to trust her, because he asks her specifically what to do about Bramon; in the Middle English versions, he asks his assembly of knights, and she jumps in with her comment “were Bevis a knight, he would defend you” and then recounts how she saw him defend himself alone against his attackers, who differ depending on the manuscript (44–5) (see below). The king then declares he will make Bevis a knight and banner-bearer (in A,S,N,C) or head of the army (in M and O). While it is clear that Josiane is advocating for Bevis’ knighthood in the Middle English versions, she never actually tells her father to make him knight, or to give

\(^{570}\) See Kevin Down, “Colonial Society and Economy,” in A New History of Ireland, vol. II: Medieval Ireland 1169–1534, ed. Art Cosgrove (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, reprint 2008), 439–491: 462–63. Specifically on Irish women and absentee landlords, Down comments that “[t]he tendency towards absenteeism was encouraged by the failure of the male line of many noble families and the consequent division of their Irish estates between heiresses. These were usually married to English lords who were more interested in their substantial lands in England than in Irish estates which were difficult to run” (463). Down also gives the example of the Irish estates of Lady Elizabeth de Burgh in the mid-fourteenth century, which, having no resident lord, were open to attack by Gaelic Irish or Hiberno-English. Down observes that “buying off the enemy,” in this case a man named Richard Tobin, was the solution, but that “it is likely that the energetic presence of a great lord would have been much more effective” (463).
him a significant position in the army. Sisian, on the other hand, does both, and her description of the fight with the boar and the foresters is something of a subsidiary comment.

Adubairt an rig: “Cred ele do denum?” ar-se. “Do dennir co maith,” ar-si “i. dena-sa ridiri do Bibus o Hamtuir, & budh moídi leis a menmá é, & tabur cennus do sluáigh dó, & cuir romud a tosuch catha e, & dom doigh si do dena se gnim greannmur gaiscidh, uar do cunnac-sa e ac marbadh in cullaigh neime & an t-seisir ridiri le fedh laime do crann sleghi” (281).

[“The king said: “What else is to be done?” said he. “Thou shalt do bravely” said she: “make a knight of Bevis of Hampton, and his courage would be the greater for it; and give him the leadership of thy army, and send him before thee into the front of battle, and in my opinion he will do a bold deed of bravery, for I saw him kill the virulent boar and the six knights with a hand breadth of a spear-shaft’”] (305).

Her confident assessment that Bevis’s courage will be greater and her “opinion” that he will perform “gnim greannmur gaiscidh” [“a bold deed of bravery”] are unique to the Irish, and are, of course, proven to be true in his battle against Bramon: he kills hundreds, fights and captures Bramon and brings him in chains to King Ermin.

Another important development in Sisian’s character can be seen in this section, unique to the Irish and one of the Middle English versions. While in every version Josiane/Sisian gives Bevis the horse Arundel after he is knighted, the other objects she gives him differ. Only the Middle English manuscript O and the Irish version show her giving him his famous sword Morgelai. This is an important development as it makes her participation in the production of Bevis’ martial victory even more complete. In the earlier Middle English manuscripts (A, S, N), Josiane only gives him his horse, though she brings him a banner and mail shirt for use in the battle. In C, Josiane brings him the banner and hauberk and his own sword Morgelay and gives him the horse. In these four Middle English manuscripts, he rides out to fight the boar with a spear and a sword (37), and does not have to defend himself with only a piece of wood from his spear-shaft (40-3). During the fight, the sword is even called “Morgelai” (41), and when Josiane makes her report about how he defended himself against the evil steward and his knights and foresters, she includes the name of his sword (44). In the other manuscripts, M and O, Josiane brings him a hauberk, a helmet, the sword Morgelai and then gives him the horse. O follows M in its details except for the fact that instead of it being his sword Morgelai that she gives him, it is a sword Morgelai. The former (M) implies that Bevis already owned the sword, and she merely brought it to him. The latter (O), rather, implies that she gave him the sword as a gift. It is this reading that is closest to the Irish, which follows O and M in earlier details regarding
Bevis’ sword. These two Middle English manuscripts follow the Anglo-Norman most closely: no evil steward and twenty-four knights accompany the enemy foresters, and Bevis defends himself and kills half of them with a piece of a spear because he had left his sword behind when he cut off the boar’s head.

The Irish version seems to be following a version of the Middle English close to manuscripts M and O: when Bevis fights the foresters after killing the boar, he has only a piece of his spear-shaft, but in this version is no mention of him having a sword at all for the boar-fight itself. Consequently, in M, O and the Irish version, no mention of the sword Morgelai occurs either in the fight or in Josiane/Sisian’s report; rather Bevis first obtains Morgelai after he is knighted. This too follows the Anglo-Norman, however: Hermin, Josiane’s father, girds the sword Murgeleie on Boeve. It is unclear at this point in the Anglo-Norman whether the sword was already Boeve’s or a gift from Hermin (ll. 503-60). The ambiguity of whether it was Bevis’ own sword or a gift can be seen in M and O showing the two different readings (his sword (M), a sword (O)), but it is here that the switch from Hermin to Josiane takes place, and it is O’s reading that shows the first development of Josiane’s gift of the sword Morgelai to Bevis. This important change appears to have happened at the Middle English level, but its rarity is nonetheless significant in the reading of Sisian’s character as a markedly more active agent in Bevis’ identity-construction. Moreover, it is further developed in the Irish version, as after Sisian’s first attempt to woo Bevis’ fails and she insults him, Bevis gives her back both the horse and the sword. In all of the Middle English versions, he gives her back only the horse (54). In the Anglo-Norman version, he keeps the sword, now clearly a gift from her father, saying that he paid enough for it when he won a kingdom for King Hermin.571

The scene in which Sisian woos Bevis shows a number of differences from the Middle English versions that accord with the earlier alterations to Sisian’s character: her pagan exclamations and prayers are removed and the sexually driven language in her wooing of Bevis is removed. Instead of wanting him to “do his will” with her, she wants to be his wife. Her words in the Irish version have no expression of sexual desire or desire to engage in sexual relations. She tells him that he is her “choice of a husband and [her] first love of the men of the world, and it is [him] whom [she] desire[s] to have with [her] as [her] companion” (306),572 but she does not tell him to “do his will with her,” which implies sexual intercourse (53; A,S,N,C),

571 Stimming, Boeve, ll.713–15.
572 “A Sir Bibuis, ‘ar-si, ‘n í fuars fein re t’agallaim tú co ruig i so, uair is tu mo rogha nuachair & mo cetgnadh d’erubh an betha, & is tú is ail lium do beth mar ceile agum” (282).
or tell him that she wants him as her lover, naked in nothing but a shirt (53). As in their earlier interactions, all references to kissing are absent in the Irish version. Again, Sisian also does not say that she will die if he does not love her, as Josiane does in all the Middle English versions (52–3). Bevis, for his part, is much less rude and makes a more eloquent and reasonable refusal. He does not proclaim that he does not want her over and over again (52–3; A,S,N,C). He refuses based upon their mis-matched rank, saying “‘nì fuil inme na ardflaithus agum-sa,’ ar-sé, ‘acht mina faghair le nert mo loinne é, & is uime-sin nach dingmala duit-si misi mur fir’” (282) [“I have no wealth or kingdom... unless I win it by virtue of my strength; and it is for that reason I am not worthy to be your husband”] (282; 306). This line may have its roots in a version close to manuscripts S and N, in which Bevis says “I have no more y in stond,/ Neither here ne in my herde,/ But y wynne with dynt of sworde” (52). The contrast with Brademond and nameless kings, dukes and sultans shows his reasoning to be that he has nothing at all compared to those higher ranking men, who would happily take her as a wife. The specific details of wealth and kingdom, as well as the sense of it being “not fitting” are unique to the Irish and accord with the emphasis on equality in the *Irish Life of Guy*. Another addition shows Sisian’s fierceness and perhaps foreshadows her treatment of Earl Miles. On top of insulting him, Sisian tells Bevis she will have him killed if he does not leave her. This has no precedent in the Middle English versions, nor the Anglo-Norman, but does recall Irish Felice’s threats against Guy’s life, which she makes on her own behalf, not her father’s as she does in the Middle English and Anglo-Norman.

The characterization of Sisian and Bevis’ reconciliation is likewise altered to foreground marriage and avoid any suggestion of sexual contact. Middle English Josiane says she will become Christian in order to become Bevis’ beloved, but there is no explicit mention of marriage. Rather, she says that she will become Christian for his love/for love of him, and he agrees to love her on that condition (57). Irish Sisian, however, says “‘da madh ail let misi do posadh, do gebuind baistedh & do creidfinn don Dia da creidi-si’” [“if it were your desire to marry me, I would be baptized and would believe in the God in whom thou believest”] (282–3; 306). Moreover, in the Middle English, when the two spying knights become aware of the lovers’ kiss, they go to King Ermin and tell him that Bevis has slept with his daughter. In the Irish, their first kiss seals their betrothal, but it is their “posadh” [“betrothal”], not the kiss, that motivates the evil knights to report to Ermin (283; 307). Moreover, it is the betrothal alone that is the offence they report and for which they tell the king to kill Bevis. Presumably it is the
making of a marriage transaction without her father’s consent that is the offence here, not the kiss per se, and there is no hint of sexual transgression.

Robinson translates “posad” as “betrothal,” but in fact the word has a variety of meanings, including marriage and, within the text, Bevis’ and Sisian’s agreement is actually treated as a marriage (307). This is an interesting change that has so far gone unnoticed in the few comparisons between the Irish Bevis and the Middle English versions. Moreover, it is expressed twice, with great emphasis on Sisian’s chastity. Instead of one meeting with the Patriarch of Jerusalem in which the patriarch tells Bevis that he should only marry a virgin, the Irish Bevis has two such meetings. First, he meets the patriarch or pope of India, who offers him a kingdom and his choice of wife in the land, to which Bevis responds that “co roibi ingen do righ paganta a cert aigi” [“the daughter of a pagan king was his legal wife”] (289; 312). The patriarch’s answer is that “ma bí, nar dilus do-san ben ele do beth a aigi, minar truaill si a h-ógacht le paganach; ma rindi, nar coir do-san a beth a aigi” [“if she was, it would not be right for him to have another woman unless his wife had given herself first to a pagan, and if so, that it would not be right for him to have his wife”] (289; 312). Immediately after his departure, Bevis arrives in Rhodes, where he gets an offer of a kingdom, presumably with a wife, from the Prior of Rhodes, to which he responds, that “ingen do ri paganta do beth a aigi,” [“the daughter of a pagan king was his lawful wife”] (289; 312) and then “dob inann fregra tuc an prior & patriarca” [“the same answer was given to him by the prior and the patriarch”] (289; 312-313). Not only is this moment duplicated in the Irish text, but Sisian is understood to be his wife already, following the new church teachings that consent of both parties is all that is required to make a marriage. Unless she commits adultery, he ought to stay with her. In the Middle English version, he is told that he should not marry her if she is not a virgin (98).

These are two rather different statements, and the comparison reveals the Irish text’s concern for adultery and marital fidelity as opposed to merely sexual purity. Perhaps we can also see a vague presence of the issue of sexual contamination, in that the Irish specifically says that he should not have another woman, unless she gave herself to a pagan first. Would giving herself to a Christian first make her lack of fidelity and presumably virginity any better? The text is unclear, but the specification is interesting. The treatment of Bevis and Sisian’s partnership as a marriage is in concordance with the earlier removal of sexual language and

574 Compare Kölbing, Beues of Hamtoun, 97–98
575 For an account of the marriage reform in Ireland see Cosgrove, “Marriage in Medieval Ireland.”
kissing and explicit emphasis on marriage in Sisian’s expressions of desire for Bevis. On the one hand, their negotiation may have been interpreted or mistaken for a marriage in light of the newer church laws governing marriage that stipulated that the couple’s consent alone could form a marriage. There is ample evidence from medieval Ireland that marriages were in fact undertaken in private, with nothing but the consent of the couple to make them official. On the other hand, in light of the accompanying trends in revision, it seems more likely that the translator deliberately presented their interaction as a private marriage in order to ennoble Sisian’s actions in wooing Bevis, as well as justify her continued fidelity to him in light of her subsequent marriage to Ybor that is brokered by her father. It also presents Sisian’s continued love and devotion to Bevis as additionally noble in being within matrimonial bonds. Her defence of her body becomes a defence of her marriage vows as well as her virginity, and her constancy is that of marital fidelity, rather than unsanctioned love and desire.

Irish Sisian is, in fact, especially adept at preserving herself from and defending herself against unwanted marriage and sexual contact. Like her Middle English and Anglo-Norman predecessors, she is faced with not one but two forced marriages. The first is to King Ybor, to whom her father gives her after sending Bevis to his death at Bramon’s court and lying to her that Bevis has returned to England and married the Emperor’s daughter there. Sisian, like Josiane of all the Middle English manuscripts realizes that something is wrong, and the Irish texts specifies that she knew her father was lying (290; 313). As in the Anglo-Norman and Middle English manuscripts C and M (l77), she makes a magic girdle to preserve her virginity. When Bevis, seven years later, finally arrives to rescue her, he is disguised as a palmer like Horn to ascertain her faithfulness, and she, like Felice, is bestowing alms to the poor in his name. The Irish text makes some dramatic changes to this sequence that have no precedent or analogue in other versions. First, drama and suspense is added to the sequence through the addition of Sisian’s exclamation, “‘A Bibus,’ ar-si, ‘is truagh lium a fhad atái, & tairnice buadha mo cresa, & is ecin dam toil Yboir do denum buddhdesta’” [“O Bevis,’ said she, ‘it is a pity for me that thou art so far away, and the virtues of my girdle have departed, and it is necessary for me now to do Ybor’s will’”] (291;314)]. Her increased despair and danger is also presumably to

577 The Irish includes the additional details that Ermin lies to Sisian by saying that he tried to keep Bibus by offering him lands, but that he refused him and that “Fós ní h-intaebha na daíne coinhigche, uair is triall cum a n-inaidh féin do nid fa deoigh” [“men of foreign parts are not to be trusted, for in the end they set out for their own country” (289–90; 313)]. Like Sisian’s earlier comment that Bramon would take tribute to his own country and her land would be in shame because there would be no king in it, this statement seems to have direct application/source in the practices of English absentee lords.
evoke the audience’s sympathy for her plight. In the Middle English versions, her lament includes her desire to see him again and, in manuscript A and C her complaint that both he and his god are false, in M her prayer to Christ to help her (103). Secondly, in every version of the Middle English and the Anglo-Norman, once Josiane recognizes Bevis, she has to remind him of his promise to marry her and says he needs to take her away with him to his land. He protests that the patriarch of Jerusalem told him to marry a virgin and that she can hardly be a virgin since he has been married for seven years. She responds by telling him to take her with him and, if he finds her not a virgin, then he can send her away with nothing but her shirt. He agrees to take her with him only on that condition (107–108). In the Irish text, this conversation is omitted and, in contrast to the Middle English Josianes, Bevis never questions Sisian’s virginity and she never has to beg him to take her with him under such a cruel condition. He “ro innis firinde gach énní di’” (“told her the truth about everything”) (292; 315) but she never has to explain herself. Instead, she tells him her elaborate plans for their escape.

The Irish text seems interested in increasing Sisian’s activity and agency by making the escape plan Sisian’s (292; 315), not Boniface’s (her chamberlain), as it is in all of the Middle English versions (108–9), as well as the and Anglo-Norman, Welsh and Old Norse–Icelandic. She tells Bevis to ride out of the city and pretend to be a messenger from the King of Babylon, Ybor’s brother, reporting that his lands have been captured and requesting aid, so that Ybor will leave immediately with his army and they can escape. She then drugs the knight whom her husband has left in charge of the city and who has a seeing-stone, and the text emphasizes “[c]onidh amlaidh-sin fuair Sisian uainges imthechta” (“thus did Sisian find an opportunity of escape”) (292; 315).

After their successful escape from Ybor’s city, the Irish text makes another striking alteration to what is otherwise a stable textual tradition. In all of the Middle English versions and the Anglo-Norman, while on the road, Josiane becomes hungry and begs Bevis to find them some food by hunting. Bevis leaves Boniface behind to guard Josiane while he is gone. Two lions attack Boniface, kill him and his horse and eat him. In the Middle English versions, they cannot harm Josiane because she is a king’s daughter and virgin; in the Anglo-Norman, they can harm her but not kill her because she is a king’s daughter. When Bevis returns, she takes advantage of her invulnerability to hold on to one lion while he fights the other and he reproaches her, telling her to let go of the lion. In the Anglo-Norman, he even threatens to kill

578 See Stimming, Boeve de Haumtone; Sanders, Bevers saga; Watkin, Bown de Hamtwn.
579 See Kölbing, Beues of Hamtoun, 115; Stimming, Boeve, ll.1652–1740.
her himself if she does not. His reasoning is that he will be shamed if he fights only one lion while a woman holds the other one (115-6). It is only in the Irish version that Sisian actually helps Bevis deal with the lions. Rather than calling to him for help, she yells a warning to him, telling him to flee because he has a fast horse (316), even though she does not appear to have any magical invulnerability to the lions. When she holds one lion by the front paw, it stays with her without struggling. This is perhaps a remnant of her magical invulnerability, though none is specified in the Irish. Bevis proceeds to kill the first lion while she holds the other one. It is presumably because the lion was so docile that she asks protection for the lion, and it is over this that Bevis disagrees with her and tells her to let it go. Specifically, the text says that he threatened her, “ro bagair,” it is not clear how or with what, and bacraid can simply mean “speak threateningly.”580 Certainly he never argues with her about her participation in the fight, or refuses her help because she is a woman. Given the preponderance of female warriors in the medieval Irish literary tradition, it is possible that the Irish translator felt that her participation in the fight was reasonable and that a more logical reason for Bevis to insist she release the lion was that she requested amnesty for it. She does, after all, request the same for Escopart later, and proves herself strong enough in a fight when she kills her second forced husband, Earl Milis (Miles).

The sequence in which Sisian defends herself against Earl Milis, who attempts to sleep with her against her will in Bevis’ absence, is very close to the Middle English. In the Irish, as in the Middle English, she attempts to delay sexual contact by asserting no man will touch her until he has married her, and in M, Josiane pretends to be willing to marry him “If thou wilt me spouse & wed,/ I wyl go wyth the to bed!” (147). The Irish shifts this slightly, having Sisian try to trick him into overconfidence by falsely professing love for him: “‘Is tu-sa mo rogha-sa d’eruïbh in talman da fagaind posta tu; & ni bia fer nemposta agum dom deoin co brach” [“‘Thou art my choice of the men of the world, if I should get thee as husband; but never shall a man who is not my husband enjoy my favour with my consent’”] (296; 319). This is the same strategy employed by Dubh Lacha, Mongán’s wife, in the Serc Duibhe Lacha, discussed in the following chapter. Sisian, like Josiane, feigns maidenly modesty to get Milis to agree to let no one else into their marriage chamber.581 Then, while he is taking off his clothes, Sisian finds a cord, knits it and strangles him with it (in the Middle English, she uses variously her girdle or a curtain from the bed). Her words to his men who find out her deed the next day are somewhat

581 Compare 296–7, 319 to Kölbing, Beues of Hamtoun, 148.
different. Her quip that his head will never ache again (150) is changed to a joke that he will never ask them for food again, but more significant is her assertion that “uair is marb e digail m'esanora-sa, & do-berim do m'breithir curob ferr lium bás d'faghail na beth mur mnai don iarla’” [“he is dead in revenge for my insult and I pledge my word that I chose rather to die than to be the earl’s wife’”] (297; 319). In the Middle English, Josiane does not proclaim that she has killed him, or make any reference to revenge or insults to her honour, or say that she has chosen to die instead of marry the earl. Rather, she declares that Miles will never harm women again.\(^{582}\) Again, Sisian demonstrates her acute knowledge of herself and her situation. Finally, the priest who hears her confession is presented as Sisian’s request, suggesting that the delay in burning her that saves her life in the Middle English by allowing Bevis to arrive, is actually Sisian’s deliberate delaying tactic.\(^{583}\)

The *Irish Life of Bevis* does not show the same ideological shift in the destabilization of the relational construction of gender that has been observed in the *Irish Life of Guy*; however, in its revision of Sisian it does accord with the greater agency, authority and nobility granted to Felice. The trend is strong, consistent and appears to originate in the Irish translation, rather than in some lost Middle English version. The dramatic revision of Sisian also reveals greater anxiety about sexuality and marital fidelity than the Middle English sources, a trend which can also be seen in the original Irish *rómanaíochta* in comparison to earlier Irish literary tradition.

However, the stark diminishment of agency, voice, authority and autonomy of the female protagonists of the *Eachtra Airt* and *Serc Duibe-Lacha* marks the texts as breaking both from the trends of Irish translated romance and the early Irish literary tradition. The passivity and objectification of Delbchaem and Dubh Lacha is all the more striking in light of the presentation of Felice and Sisian’s active subjectivity evident in the *Irish Lives of Bevis of Hampton and Guy of Warwick*.

---

\(^{582}\) e.g. “Schel he neuer eft wimman spille” (A, l. 151).

\(^{583}\) Compare 297, 320 to Kölbing, *Beues of Hamtoun*, 152.
The study of gender and sexuality in rómánsáíocht is first complicated by the fact that, as scholars have already observed, the category itself is deeply problematic. 584 Rómánsáíocht itself is a modern academic term 585 applied to a diverse body of Irish prose narratives from later medieval and early modern Ireland, composed in Early Modern Irish. Their linguistic nature is significant as it marks the text themselves, however old their story patterns might be, as belonging firmly to period after the linguistic transition from Middle to Early Modern Irish, sometime around 1200 C.E. 586 The texts firmly post-date the Anglo-Norman conquest and the socio-cultural changes that ensued. Therefore, the earliest of the Romantic tales represent significant cultural artefacts from this period of change and hybridisation. 587

Rómánsáíochta have been variously defined by Gerard Murphy, 588 Alan Bruford 589 and Joseph Nagy 590 and later scholars have tended to pick one of these definitions. Máire Ní

---

585 Máire Ní Mhaonaigh notes that the term was not yet in use in Douglas Hyde’s day, and if it is unlikely that he, in the 1890’s was not thinking the group of texts as a genre, it is even less likely that people before him did. She writes: “It is doubtful, however, whether Hyde’s choice of GF [Giolla an Fhuigha] and ECRI [Eachtra Cloinne Righ na h-Ioruaidhe] as tales for inclusion in the first volume of the newly established Irish Texts Society was determined by their both belonging to the genre of the sgéalta rómánsáíochta, a term not in use in his day. In fact, he regarded them as ‘specimens of two different classes of tales’ primarily ‘of interest to folklorists, and which on account of the good and idiomatic language in which they are couched, will offer a moderately easy reading-book to students.’” Máire Ni Mhaonaigh, A New Introduction to Giolla an Fhiuigha (The Lad of Ferula) and Eachtra Cloinne Righ na h-Ioruaidhe (Adventures of the Children of the King of Norway), Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Series 8 (Dublin: Eolo Press, 1998), 1.
587 As Kaarina Hollo notes, “the introduction of Norman French and English and their associated literatures into the Irish cultural milieu, and the hybridization of culture that followed, had a significant impact upon Irish prose literature” (“Later Medieval Ireland,” 110.)
588 Gerard Murphy, The Ossianic Lore and Romantic Tales of Medieval Ireland (Dublin: Colm O Lochlainn, 1955), 39–40. For Murphy’s definition, see below.
589 Bruford, Gaelic Folktales and Medieval Romances, 1, 5; Alan Bruford, “Eachtra Chonaill Gulban,” Béaloideas 31 (1963), 1–50: 1. For Bruford’s definitions, see below.
590 Nagy defines the romantic tales as “[n]arratives…preserved in manuscripts from between the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries. These lengthy texts…are characterized by a formulaic prose style and convoluted plots that unfold across a geography of egregious proportions…unbelievable and equipped with some of the more dated
Mhaonaigh’s in her more recent discussion of rómánsaíochta, follows Alan Bruford’s definition from Gaelic Folktales and Medieval Romances, namely “all the late medieval and later romances found in Irish manuscripts from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries and the related folk-tales’ distinguishing late romantic tales ‘roughly speaking from after the invasion of Cromwell’ from earlier material.” Erich Poppe chooses Bruford’s other definition: “all original prose hero-tales written in Gaelic from the late twelfth to the early nineteenth centuries which were not intended to be read principally as history or allegory.” Kaarina Hollo, on the other hand, while she recognizes its “limited usefulness” goes back to Gerard Murphy’s definition:

> When scholars speak of the Romantic tales of Early Modern Irish they are thinking mainly of a group of tales whose main traits are the prevalence of magic and the piling of unbelievable incident on incident. They are akin in this respect to the wonder-tales of native folklore... They resemble French thirteenth-century romans d’aventure in so far as knightly adventures in distant lands, and the winning of wives, are normal features in them... [T]he sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may be looked upon as the period in which they enjoyed their greatest popularity.

The first of the problems of definition becomes clear: the chronological boundaries suggested in the definitions range from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries, with little consistency in subsequent scholars’ choice of definition.

The tales’ content also remains contested. Murphy includes tales of both Irish and non-Irish heroes, but groups Arthurian tales and Fenian tales separately, despite the fact that the Fenian tales have “non-native” elements too. It seems likely, as Nagy points out, that at least one of the reasons for this separation lies in Murphy’s ideological agenda of separating out and privileging ‘genuine’ Irish material. Bruford, on the other hand, includes “all original prose hero-tales,” including Arthurian, Fenian, King cycle, Ulster cycle and Mythological cycle-based stories. He claims that “the differences are superficial; all these stories are told in exactly the same style and contain the same types of incident.” Hollo, meanwhile, separates out the Ulster cycle tales of this period, the fiangheacht “Fenian tales,” as well as the Arthurian tales,
which she places under “Translations and Adaptations,” even though there is only one proven translation of an Arthurian romance, all the rest being original Irish tales based in an Arthurian context. One important observation that can be made in light of all of these definitions is that the tales drew extensively on the earlier medieval Irish prose tradition and legendary material, and that despite their differences, the Romantic tales are still in many ways the direct descendents of early and middle Irish saga.

There does, at least, appear to be a general consensus on the prose style of the tales as formulaic and rambling as well as displaying the “‘highly ornamental and florid’” style, typical of prose texts from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. Also, their function as entertainment, and the likelihood of their being performed, that is, read aloud to an audience is generally agreed upon. Moreover, influence from foreign literature, primarily medieval romances, is widely acknowledged. At the same time, the tales are predominantly viewed as analogous to continental romance, but somehow different. Alan Bruford, as quoted above, is the only critic to call the tales ‘romances’ plain and simple and this terminology did not catch on. Rather, the nature of the genre’s relationship to continental and insular romance,

599 For example, Alan Bruford’s observes that “[i]n the fifteenth century a Gaelic story-teller had the experience of some seven hundred years of romancing behind him, and scribes were still busy copying tales from the earliest periods into manuscripts for their masters: it is not surprising that…older models has more influence on the style and content of the romances than anything from abroad.” Bruford, Gaelic Folk-tales, 1.
601 See Murphy, Ossianic Lore, 31; Bruford, Gaelic Folk-tales, 1; Bruford, “Eachtra Chonaill,” 1 (I take “not intended to be read principally as history or allegory” to mean, at least in some respects, that he constructs the definition of “Romantic tales” to include but not be limited to the function of entertainment). Nagy’s focus on the “Romantic tales” “folk” elements, popular nature and oral performance implies an entertainment function; see “In Defence,” especially 9–13. Likewise, Hollo’s following of Murphy’s definition and her references to oral performance implies an acceptance of the tales’ entertainment function; see, “Later Medieval Ireland,” 122-3.
603 Murphy sees continental material as influencing the development of the romantic tales in the undefined way of “enriching Irish storytelling” in the fifteenth century, prior to the tales’ development in his view (Ossianic Lore, 34–5) and influencing the tales’ popularity: “such tales were not highly thought of till continental influence had begun to exercise its main effect on Irish storytelling in the late fifteenth century” (Ossianic Lore, 45–6). Nagy observes that “[o]nce again, the romantic tale or the Early modern Irish style of storytelling is seen as a doorway to the outside world, a host to foreign imports, if not actually a foreign import itself” (“In Defence,” 14.). Bruford observes that “[t]he subject-matter of the Romantic tales is partly drawn from the international romances of chivalry” (“Eachtra Chonaill Gubhan, “2). See also, Bruford, Gaelic Folk-tales, 5.
604 Nagy makes no reference to rómánsaiocht as “romances.” Kaarina Hollo implies a fundamental difference when she refers to medieval romance as “a genre described by one scholar as ‘the shape-shifter par excellence among medieval genres, a protean form that refuses to settle into neat boundaries prescribed by modern critics’” and extends the sense of that assessment to the Romantic tales, suggesting that “[p]erhaps it is no surprise, then, that we have difficulty in defining the parameters of the Irish genre most closely related to romance” (Hollo, “Later Medieval Ireland, “122; quoting Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, “The Shape of Romance in Medieval France,” in The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance, edited by Roberta Krueger [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press], 13–28:13). Moreover, Erich Poppe would not have had the impulse or need to prove Stair Nuadat Find Femin’s identity as an “Irish romance,” if such a distinction did not remain entrenched in the critical literature. See Poppe, “Stair Nuadat Find Femin.”
and to the Irish translations of insular romances remains relatively obscure, an issue to which I will return below.

Part of the problem of defining rómánsaíocht likely stems from the fact that it is a modern categorical term. Unlike Old French ‘romanz’ or Middle English ‘romaunce,’ whose definitions are still remarkably fraught, rómánsaíocht is not a term that was applied to the tales by their creators and audiences, nor is it likely that the group of tales was conceived of as a single genre before the twentieth century. Joseph Nagy’s suggestion that “[p]erhaps, in the course of such a re-examination (or, in effect, an initial examination since this material has never been properly investigated), the term ‘romantic tale’ imposed upon these texts by latter-day scholarly readers, will prove meaningless, and we will find a body of story far less homogenous than scholars have suspected,” may prove correct, but the situation is still too early to tell. For the meantime, having presented the range of definitions, I will refrain from choosing one definition, and instead observe that the Early Modern Irish prose entertainment texts of later medieval Ireland, whether or not we call them rómánsaíochta (though for now I will persist), have certain characteristics of style and content which differentiate them from the Early and Middle Irish saga literature, and that these characteristics derive, at least in part, from the influence of wider European literary trends, particularly medieval romance, catalyzed by the Anglo-Norman invasion and settlement. Furthermore, given the greatly problematic nature of categorization, I will suggest that any study of individual tales take into account manuscripts and likely period of composition as significant contextual considerations, perhaps even more significant than questions of genre.

Nevertheless, the romantic nature of rómánsaíochta speaks to their importance for the study of gender in post-Norman medieval Ireland. As I observed earlier, the genre of romance is intimately concerned with gender, as studies of gender and genre in medieval romance consistently indicate. Medieval Irish rómánsaíochta have yet to benefit from the “gender and genre” criticism current in Middle English and Old French literature, as both gender and romance have yet to be examined critically in this body of tales. Rather, there is a distinct

605 See n. 151.
absence of theorization of romance as a genre with respect to the rómánsaíochta, aside from cursory definitions about noble heroes, adventure and wife-winning. 608 Attempts to theorize the genre more completely, at the level of themes and structures, to which gender and sexuality are essential, are absent. While, I suspect that the explicit and implicit distinctions between European ‘romance’ and Irish ‘romantic tales’ are rather artificial and have more to do with the ideologies of the category-makers than the tale-tellers, unfortunately, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, even without a detailed redefinition of category of the Irish romantic tales, the necessity of beginning to theorize the romance part of the romantic tales is clear, and it is here that an analysis of gender in these tales becomes particularly significant, not just in its own right, but for our wider understanding of this category of tales, however we may define it.

In an attempt to address this disparity, I will be examining women, gender and sexuality in two rómánsaíochta, the Eachtra Airt Meic Cuind ocus Tochmarc Delbchaime Inigne Morgain “The Adventures of Art Son of Conn and the Courtship of Delbchaem daughter of Morgan” (Eachtra Airt) and the Compert Mongáin ocus Serc Duibe-Lacha do Mongán “The Conception of Mongán and Mongán’s Love for Dubh Lacha” (Serc Duibe Lacha). Both texts are situated at the beginning of this genre, which, broadly speaking, stretches from the late Middle Ages to the early modern period. As observed above, both texts are also found in the Book of Fermoy, commissioned by David Mór Roche in the mid-fifteenth century. The Roches arrived in Ireland early from a Flemish settlement in Pembrokeshire, Wales, established in the early twelfth century. 609 One of their ancestors, a Flemish knight, Richard Fitz Godebert accompanied Dermot Mac Murrough in his return from exile in 1167. 610 His brother Robert Fitz Godebert was settled in the Wexford area by his lord, Maurice de Prendergast, another Fleming from Pembrokeshire, Wales, whom Strongbow had granted land sufficient to support ten knights as an inducement to return to Ireland. Robert’s sons took the name “de la Roche” from Roche

---

608 Two exceptions are Erich Poppe’s discussion of the possibility of Stair Nuadat Fínd Femin “The History of Fair Nuadat of Femin” as a romance modeled on the translations of Middle English romance (“Stair Nuadat Fínd Femin”) and a one-line comment of Kaarina Hollo’s about considering romantic tales as mode rather than a genre (“Later Medieval Ireland,” 123). Moreover, even Poppe’s discussion of the nature of romance is limited to the figure of the hero and basic observations about the narrative being structured around the hero’s initial displacement (751), his attempts to control his environment (754), his place at the mercy of chance (755–6), and active versus passive heroism (756).


Castle in Wales, and from them the Roches of Wexford and of Fermoy are descended. Like many other settlers in the south and west, the Roches intermarried with the surrounding Gaelic population and adopted their language and traditions, such as fostering and the patronage of Gaelic poets, despite the best efforts of legislation such as the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366. They used Brehon law and the mixed legal tradition known as March law, imposed Gaelic exactions on their tenants, refused to abstain from private war and refused homages and rents to the English crown. After the Gaelic resurgence in the fourteenth century and the formation of the Pale in the mid-fifteenth century, the Norman settlers beyond the Pale were no longer under effective control of the English crown, and gaelicization, which had continued unchecked even under English control, had no more formal opponents for the time being. It is around this time that David Mór Roche commissioned his manuscript.

The core of the manuscript, pages 17–216, distinguished by a similarity of scribal hands, is the section patronised by David Mór Roche. The pages contain a mix of secular and religious prose, as well as a fair number of panegyric poems and eulogies for both men and women connected by blood, marriage or ancestry to Roche family, poetry by Gearóid Iarla, the Third Earl of Desmond, and a list of Roche lands and rights. We can guess that David Mór Roche was invested in proclaiming his family’s legitimacy as Gaelic lords through the fact that one of the poems in his praise says “Geirr go labhairt an lia fail” (“It is short until the Lia Fail speaks”). In addition, it is perhaps unsurprising to find in the poetry so many mentions of, or dedications to, women, particularly Gaelic women, as wives and mothers of men of Hiberno-Norman descent. Gillian Kenny lays out the politically charged significance of Gaelic wives to Hiberno-Norman families: “[b]y taking an Irish wife many of the early settlers were pursuing…the legitimatization of the succession to their conquered lands by any heirs they might have and the sanction of the pre-existing families to their intrusion.” In the Book of Fermoy most of the women who are mentioned as dedicatees of poems or quatrains or joint dedicatees with their husbands are of Gaelic descent, particularly Ó Briains and Mac Carthys, but there are a few of

611 Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, 148.
615 Todd, *Descriptive Catalogue “Book of Fermoy,”* 40. In Irish legend, the Lia Fáil, or “Stone of Destiny,” proclaims the rightful king of Ireland by producing a loud shriek.
Hiberno-Norman descent. 617 Mothers of Roche men and other honourees are mentioned fairly frequently, and in such cases, they are always of Gaelic descent. Given the attention to women in the praise poetry, it seems unlikely that this manuscript was intended for men alone, and so presuming that women were in the audience of its readings, or if they were literate, used the manuscript themselves, seems logical. 618

Given that the tales are side by side in the manuscript and are the only two texts in the manuscript to begin with feacht n-aen, which might be productively translated “once upon a time,” 619 we might infer that the manuscript compilers understood some kind of similarity or connection between the texts, be it generic, thematic, or of some other sort. 620 Despite the late date of the manuscript and the modernity of the language, both tales have been aggressively appropriated to earlier periods on the basis of similar titles’ existence in the medieval Irish tale lists and a general presumption about the conservatism of the Irish literary tradition. 621 Nevertheless, I will be considering the tales as fifteenth-century texts.

With comparative reference to earlier saga literature, I will demonstrate that the rómánsaíocht reveal a greater regulation of gender and sexuality than that visible in the earlier Irish tradition. Female subjectivity and agency are more circumscribed, and femininity is more regulated by discourses of a narrowly defined normative sexuality, centering on chastity and marital fidelity. In the examination and juxtaposition of the primary female figures of both texts, I will demonstrate that the texts encode an ideology of gender that allows little space for female subjectivity, a situation not surprising in itself, perhaps, but remarkable in its contrast to both the earlier medieval Irish literary tradition of saga narrative, and the contemporary Irish translations of medieval romances. With respect to agency, possibilities for self-determination are exceptionally limited. In contrast to the women of early Irish saga and of European romances as they were known in Ireland, the female characters in these texts are allowed no

618 In fact, the great attention given to Eithne’s education in “The Nurture of the House of the Two Milk Vessels,” extant, like Eachtra Airt and Serc Duibe Lacha only in this manuscript, might suggest that women’s education was a probability if not a great likelihood in this family. See M.E. Dobbs, ed. and trans., “Altromh Tighi Da Medar” Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie 18 (1930), 189–230.
621 For example, Alfred Nutt writes of Serc Duibe Lacha that: “In its present form, the story is probably little, if any, older than the MS. which has preserved it.... But, as I have so frequently pointed out, the fact than an Irish story was re-written in the thirteenth or fourteenth century by no means implies that it may not preserve the structure and incidents of a pre-eleventh-century tale without almost absolute fidelity. In so far as a presumption exists, it favours the retention of the older tale in essentials if not in accidents. We may therefore apply ourselves to the consideration of the Book of Fermoy story without any prejudice based upon its comparatively late date.” Meyer and Nutt, Voyage of Bran, vol. 2, 11.
legitimate choice or participation in the negotiation of their marriage or other sexual relationships. Moreover, there is a marked lack of narrative attention to female desire, either with respect to the women’s gaze on a male beloved, or a direct articulation of desire by the character herself or the narrator, which also contrasts with the situation presented in early Irish saga and medieval romances. Subjectivity and agency are limited to adherence to a sexual discourse of marital fidelity and chastity.

**Exchanging Women: Desire, Gaze and Subjectivity**

*Eachtra Airt* recounts the disastrous marriage of Conn of the Hundred Battles to an adulterous and exiled *Túatha Dé Danann* woman Bécuma from the síd “fairy” world, the Land of Promise. She pretends to be the virtuous *Túatha Dé Delbchaem* from a different síd, the Land of Wonders and demands that Conn exile his son Art as a condition of the marriage. Conn grants her request, to the dismay of his people and the detriment of his land, which consequently produces no corn and no milk. At the advice of his druids, Conn attempts to rectify the infertility by seeking the son of a sinless couple from the Land of Wonders for a blood sacrifice, but the enterprise is only partially successful thanks to the intervention of the boy’s mother, Rigru Roisclethan. She substitutes a magical cow for her son, restoring two-thirds of Ireland’s productivity. Rigru tells Conn to send Bécuma away, but he remains powerless to do so. Meanwhile, Art, having returned to Tara in his father’s absence, plays *fidchell*, a game which resembles chess, with Bécuma. When she wins by cheating, she imposes on Art the quest for the real Delbchaem. After a series of complicated and dangerous adventures, Art vanquishes Delbchaem’s warrior parents and brings her back to Ireland as his bride, where her impending arrival at Tara forces Bécuma’s final departure.

*Serc Duibe Lacha* begins by recounting Mongán’s birth as a result of a transaction made between his human father Fiachna, the king of Ulster, and his supernatural father Manannán mac Lir: Fiachna exchanges one night with his wife for a magical hound to save his warriors from the Norwegian king’s injurious sheep. The tale then quickly chronicles Mongán’s fosterage in the Land of Promise with his real father Manannán, his marriage to Dubh Lacha in partial compensation for his father’s death at the hands of her father, his ascension to the kingship of Ulster, and the avenging of his father’s death. Most of the narrative concerns Mongán’s accidental loss of Dubh Lacha to Brandubh, the king of Leinster, as a result of his imprudent bargaining for magical cows, and Mongán’s wily attempts to visit her through shape-shifting. Meanwhile, Dubh Lacha cleverly avoids Brandubh’s advances. Eventually Mongán
uses Brandubh’s lust against him and tricks him into exchanging Dubh Lacha for a women who appears to be Ibhell, wife of the king of Connacht’s son, Aed. In reality, she is the hideous mill-hag Cuimne, magically shape-shifted by Mongán, who has disguised himself as Aed. The story ends with Brandubh’s sexual humiliation at having slept with an ugly woman, when his men find them together in bed the next morning.

A few preliminary observations can be made at this point. First, both stories are primarily concerned with the negotiation, establishment and preservation of marriage and/or sexual relationships, marking gender and sexuality as significant structural and thematic forces. Second, from the presence of otherworldly female adversaries, such as Delbchaem’s warrior mother Coinchend and the otherwordly hag who contests the king of Norway, it is clear that some ambiguities of gender categories observed by Sarah Sheehan in the earlier Irish tradition have persisted. At the same time, as I will demonstrate below, there is an increased regulation of gender and sexuality, an emphasis on marital fidelity, and a circumscription of female subjectivity and agency.

At the outset, it can be observed that the female characters in the texts are subjected to different social expectations and allowed differential access to power. This is particularly visible in _Serc Duibe Lacha_ wherein women are traded and exchanged like livestock and, indeed, for livestock, without their consent or even without their knowledge: Manannán appears to Mongán’s mother as her husband Fiachna. Dubh Lacha is betrothed at birth to Mongán, bestowed upon him in restitution for his father’s death, lost to Brandubh, and traded back to Mongán. Likewise, in _Eachtra Airt_, Delbchaem is the object of Art’s quest, analogous to the object for which Art sent Bécuma on a quest, the “flesc miledh”, [“warrior’s wand”] that Cú Roí mac Daire used to conquer Ireland and the whole world. The verbal parallel reinforces this equivalency:

Art to Bécuma:
“Ocus geis fort,” ar sé, “i. da caithe tú biadh Eirind nogo faghbha tú an flesc miledh do bí a laim Chonrigh meic Daire a gabail for(la)mus na hEireann γ an domain mhoir nogo tugair let hí (da)mh-sa conuigi so” (162).

[“And _geis_ on thee,” said he, “if thou eat food in Ireland until thou procure the warrior’s wand which Cúrói son of Dare had in his hand when taking possession of Ireland and the great world, and fetch it (lit. bring it with you) to me here”] (163).

Bécuma to Art:

---

gan biadh na hEireann do chaithemh duit nogo tuga tu let Delbcaem ingin Morgain” (162).

[“thou shalt not eat food in Ireland (lit. Irish food) until thou bring with you Delbchaem, the daughter of Morgan”] (162-163).

When he arrives, even though it involves the death of both of her parents, Delbchaem tacitly accepts her fated marriage to Art. 623

The only women who negotiate their own sexual relationships are Cuimne the mill hag, who does so in a limited, equivocal fashion, not caring whether she sleeps with Brandubh or Mongán, and Bécuma, the adulteress. Both of these women’s bodies are represented as undesirable and socially outcast on account of their respective hideousness and moral contamination. 624 Bécuma, who shows the greatest amount of agency and initiative in choosing a partner, also has a freedom of movement that contrasts with Dubh Lacha’s controlled movements from man to man, and Delbchaem’s stationary existence in her bower, and her constant accompaniment during journeys. The enabling condition of Bécuma’s freedom of choice and movement is precisely her status as social outcast; Bécuma, as will soon be seen, is represented as evil and a contamination upon human and Túatha Dé societies.

The denial of female agency effected through Mongán’s mother’s ignorance and Delbchaem and Dubh Lacha’s silent, foreordained acceptance of sexual and marital relationships contrasts considerably with the early Irish saga tradition. A starting place for this observation is the earlier version of the story of Mongán’s birth, the *Compert Mongáin* “The Conception of Mongán,” the earliest manuscript witness of which is *Lebor na hUidre*. 625 In this earlier text, both the terms of the exchange and the negotiators are different. While Fiachna is fighting with his friend Aedán mac Gabráin in Scotland against the Saxons, Manannán appears to Fiachna’s wife at home in Ireland, where he asks the queen herself for a tryst and she refuses: “Asbert in ben ní bói isin bith di sétaib nó máinib ara n-dénad ní ben mebul d’inchaib a céli” [“The woman said there were not in the world possessions or treasures for which she would do anything to disgrace her husband’s honour”] (42; 44). When he asks her if she would do it to

---

623 References to their marriage being prophesized occur throughout his quest. The otherworldly Creide Finlaidn refers to his arrival on her island and his arrival at the house of the hags with the bath of lead being foreordained (164; 165). The narrator tells us that Art’s wooing of Delbchaem was foretold (168;169), and, when his arrival is announced to her, Delbchaem herself says they have been preparing for him for a long time (168;169).

624 When Brandubh tries to woo her, she says “‘Ní túgha nuachuir le ns-sa, cibé agaibh fer bias agum’” [“‘I have no choice of bridegroom, whichever of you will be husband to me’”] (69; 83).

625 Meyer, “*Compert Mongáin, ‘The Conception of Mongán,’*” 42–45. All quotations and translations are from this edition.
save her husband’s life, she responds that “má atceth i n-gúais ní bad decming, a chobair dí dí neoch bad chumacht” [“(I)f she were to see him in danger and difficulty, she would help him with all that lay in her might”] (42; 44). Manannán then reveals to her that Fiachna will meet a man in battle who will kill him, unless she sleeps with him. She will conceive his famous son, Mongán, and, in exchange, Manannán himself will save her husband’s life, kill the warrior and tell Fiachna what happened. When Fiachna finally returns home, she suffers no dishonour. Rather, he is grateful: “atlugestar a céle a n-dogéni friss, ocus addámir sí a imthechta uli” [“he thanked his wife for what she had done for him, and she confessed all her adventures”] (43; 45).

The unnamed queen in this text negotiates directly with Manannán, enters into the adulterous sexual encounter knowingly, having decided upon the stakes of it herself. The end clearly justifies the means, and her loyalty to her husband is rewarded with his thanks and with the remarkable and famous boy-child. Manannán’s explicit statement in Serc Duibe Lacha, “rachad-sa ad’ richt-sa ann indus ná ba heisindracaide do ben-sa’” [“(a)nd I shall go in thy shape so that thy wife shall not be defiled by it”] (or more literally, “so that there be no unworthiness upon your wife”) (60; 72) is unparalleled. The anxiety about the dishonour of adultery is unique to Serc Duibe Lacha. While Alfred Nutt notes these differences between the accounts, he does not elaborate on their implications, commenting only that “in the eleventh-century tale the amorous god appeals to the wife, in the fourteenth-century tale to the husband. The wife only yields under menace of danger to her husband; the husband is easier going.”

Given the general chattel-like exchange of women in the two later texts, such a difference is striking. A brief look at marriage and sexual negotiations in other early Irish texts reveals that the lack of women’s agency in Eachtra Airt and Serc Duibe Lacha is unusual.

Women’s active participation and sometime initiative in the establishment of marriages and sexual relationships in the early Irish tradition has often been observed. Joanne Findon, for example, finds the silent, objectified Étain of the Tochmarc Étain to be somewhat atypical in the wider context of tochmarca “wooing tales.” Numerous texts include women who are active participants in the negotiations of their own legitimate sexual arrangements with their partners, for example Findabair in the Táin bó Fraích “The Cattle-Raid of Fraech,” Albe in the

626 Nevertheless, the credit for the child is granted to Fiachna in his patronymic Mongán mac Fiachna, and she is nameless in both versions.
627 “eisinnracus” in Dictionary of the Irish Language.
629 Such behaviour has traditionally been interpreted mythologically as typical of a sovereignty-goddess figure. For an excellent critique of the “‘sovereignty goddess’ stereotyping of women” see Findon, A Woman’s Words, 8–12.
630 Findon, A Woman’s Words, 31.

Even texts showing more overt clerical influence, such as version III of the Tochmarc Emire “The Wooing of Emer,” and the Acallam na Senórach “Tales of the Elders of Ireland,” allow wooing or wooed women to participate and speak their mind on the matter of their sexual relationships. In fact, even in the Tochmarc Étáin, Étáin is not always passive. In the Egerton 1782 version of the second part of the tale involving Eochaid Airem and his brother Aillil, she appears to Eochaid, professes that she has loved him since childhood on account of his reputation, and demands a bride-price before becoming his wife. A similar moment also occurs in the Étáin section of the beginning of the Togail Bruidne Da Derga. Moreover, space for negotiation is not confined to one category of female being: Findabair, Albe, Achtán and Emer are all human women, whereas Cáer and Aillenn are otherworldly women.

One might also observe that an aspect of Deirdre’s tragedy in Longes mac nUislenn stems from a lack of choice or consent to be Concobor’s concubine, and that the mutually loving relationship with Naoisiu, however ultimately destructive, is a result of her choice and desire,


which once removed again, is the impetus for her suicide.\textsuperscript{635} Similarly, Findabair’s negotiation of her relationship with Fraech in the \textit{Táin Bó Fraích} (although it is never finally established) contrasts with her treatment as chattel by her mother Medb in both recensions of the \textit{Táin bó Cúailgne}, which ultimately results in her death of shame.\textsuperscript{636} In the \textit{Tochmarc Becfola}, the occasionally negative, occasionally ambiguous Becfola arranges her relationship with Diarmait, attempts a relationship with her stepson, and finally successfully negotiates with her new lover Flann, without any of the defamation heaped upon Bécuma.\textsuperscript{637}

If we turn to the Irish translations of the Middle English verse romances \textit{Guy of Warwick} and \textit{Bevis of Hampton} we see a similar contrast between the active negotiations of the romance women and passive acceptance of the \textit{rómánsaíocht} women. As already observed above, in the Irish \textit{Guy of Warwick}, Felice acts a great deal like Emer in the \textit{Tochmarc Emire}. When Guy approaches her for marriage, she tells him

“A Gyi,” ar-si, “ni thiur-sa mò gradh d’fìr acht do rìdiri co m-buaidh crotha γ caemdhemnusa, co m-buaidh n-indsgni γ n-urlabra, co m-buaidh n-einigh γ n-engnama, co m-buaidh n-gnima γ n-gaiscidh. γ Gidhbe ro beth mur sin ro fàidhfinn-sì lais” (27).

[“O Gyi,’ she said, ‘I will not give my love to any man except to a knight surpassing in form and in fair figure, surpassing in speech and eloquence, surpassing in honor and wisdom, surpassing in deeds and in feats of war. And if there were anyone like that, I would give myself to him’”] (109).

Delbchaem in \textit{Eachtra Airt} demands no such demonstration, and while it is true that Art has already proven his abilities by conquering the monsters and obstacles to get to her, her lack of choice and lack of agency in establishing the relationship is still remarkable. Dubh-Lacha, as we know, has no such opportunity with Mongán.

Sisian (Josian) in \textit{Bevis of Hampton} is a wooing woman—like Deirdre, Becfola, Cáer\textsuperscript{638} and Ailenn she approaches her chosen beloved Bevis. Like the otherworkly Ailenn in the


\textsuperscript{637} Máire Bhreathnach, ed. and trans. “A New Edition of \textit{Tochmarc Becfhola}” \textit{Ériu} 35 (1984): 59–91. All quotations are from this edition. The only overt criticism of Becfola is Diarmait’s comment upon her departure in Version 1, “‘Nós léicidh uaibh,’ or Diarmait, ‘a n-archdò, ar ni feas ciå théit no ciå fluidchaid’” (“‘Let her go,’ said Diarmait, ‘the evil one, for one knows not whether she goes nor whence she came’”) (76; 80). Moreover, this comment is not present in Version 2. “Urchod,” a late form of “airchôt” refers to a harmful or malignant being, but not evil in the strictest sense. See “airchôt” s.v. \textit{Dictionary of the Irish Language}.

\textsuperscript{638} Sheehan, \textit{Gender and Sexuality}, 23: “Aislinge Óenguso thus concludes by dramatizing Cáer’s power and consent, but elides the agency suggested in her initial, tantalizing dream-visits to Óengus by transmuting her into an object of pursuit and courtship. Although the tale functions mainly to demonstrate Óengus’ passion and ingenuity
Acallam na Senórach, who must renounce her false and druidical beliefs before Patrick will give her to Áed,\(^639\) Sisian, being a Saracen, must convert to Christianity before Bevis will consent to marry her, but marry her he does upon her instigation (281–3; 305–7). Even more striking is Sisian’s refusal of consent to marry her first suitor Bramon (280–1; 305) which, as already discussed, is unique among the versions of Bevis. Moreover, the details of her reasons speak directly to the complex social situation and Hiberno–Norman inheritance patterns that I discussed above.

This quick survey is not to argue that women are never treated like objects in earlier Irish literature, but rather to observe that the exclusion of women’s active participation in sexual and marriage negotiations in Eachtra Airt and Serc Duibhe Lacha is different and speaks to a different construction of femininity, one in which agency is relatively more circumscribed. Joanne Findon observes that the description of Delbchaem in Eachtra Airt resembles Emer’s in Tochmarc Emer rather remarkably, but that “Delbchaem’s attributes do not include the gifts of voice and sweet speech;” it seems likely that this difference is indicative of wider cultural trends present at the time of Eachtra Airt’s composition.\(^640\)

Given the church’s emphasis on consent in this period, and the particular contestation around women’s consent, it is surprising to find that Eachtra Airt and Serc Duibe Lacha completely evade the issue, especially in light of the fact that the translator/adaptor of Bevis of Hampton added in a passage concerning Sisian’s consent, most likely in response to the current reform. Clearly the author(s) of Eachtra Airt and Serc Duibe Lacha did not share the Bevis writer’s concern for church policy, and felt it acceptable to represent marriages as arranged, either by parents or fate, a practice which echoes the current marriage situation in Hiberno-Norman Ireland, where female inheritance laws went hand in hand with marital coercion.

Indeed, it is clear that marriage is used as a political and economic tool in Serc Duibe Lacha. Dubh Lacha is first betrothed to Mongán in their fathers’ attempts to make peace (73; 61). Then when Dubh Lacha’s father violates that peace (73; 61), we can assume that the deal is broken, as it must be remade later. When Mongán returns from the otherworld, the men of

---

\(^{639}\) Stokes, Acallamh na Senórach, ll.7826–7831; Dooley and Roe, Tales of the Elders, 217

\(^{640}\) Findon A Woman’s Words, 36. Compare, “Eachtra Airt: Et ba halaind an ingin sin, eter cruth γ χειλ β γαις γ γες, γ γενυς, γ γορδαρκς,” (168) [“Fair was the maiden both in shape and intelligence, in wisdom and embroidery, in chastity and nobility” (169)] to “is sí congab na sé báda fuairt i. báda crótha, báda ngotha, báda mbhndiusa, báda ndngiùir, báda ngaisi, báda ngensa” (23) [“it is she who possessed the six gifts, that is the gift of the lovely shape, the gift of voice, the gift of sweet speech, the gift of embroidery, the gift of intelligence, the gift of chastity” (Findon’s translation, A Woman’s Words, 161)].
Ulster make peace among themselves and Mongán is given half of Ulster and Dubh Lacha as his wife as a settlement (74;61). Peace treaties and property are brokered through Dubh Lacha and her position as heiress. Likewise in Eachtra Airt, Art, having won Delbchaem by killing her parents in combat, takes possession of the Land of Wonders, its wealth and its people. While he does give Delbchaem the alienable moveable property of gold and silver, presumably as some kind of bride-gift, the rest becomes his property (170; 171). Again, she is an heiress whose inheritance becomes her husband’s property. This pattern is common in English and Anglo-Norman and French romances, not surprisingly, since property laws and marriage laws combined to give rise to the real social position of the heiress. This is not the position generally held by Gaelic heroines in saga literature. But what is particularly surprising is the fact that in the continental and insular romances, and their translations into Irish, such heiresses often have a measure of say in their marriage negotiations, as they do in Bevis and Guy, but in these two Irish rómánsaíochta neither woman participates in the bargaining, nor voices her consent.

The visibility of female subjectivity and desire is also limited within the rómánsaíochta narratives. The desiring female gaze on the male body and verbal articulations of female desire common in the earlier saga literature are almost entirely absent from Eachtra Airt and Serc Duibe Lacha, while the male gaze and male desire remain. Using feminist theory of the gaze, Sarah Sheehan outlines the gender implications of the female gaze on the male body in early Irish literature, narrative moments in which the subject/object alignment with male/female is troubled and reversed.\(^641\) She discusses three texts, the Táin Bó Cúailgne “The Cattle-Raid of Cooley” recension I, the Táin Bó Fraích and Longes mac nUislenn “The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu,” in which female gazing opens up narrative space for the articulation of female desire and female construction of the male body, conferring, if momentarily, subject status on the woman who gazes. The astonished Connacht women staring at Cú Chulainn’s beauty, Finnabair and Derdriu gazing at and articulating their desire for their beloved: such moments are absent from Serc Duibe Lacha and Eachtra Airt. At the same time, we do have the implication of Conn’s desirous stare at Bécuma\(^642\) and his agreeing to banish his son if she will stay with him, Art looking at Delbchaem in her tower,\(^643\) Brandubh’s desire for Dubh Lacha and later for

---

\(^641\) Sarah Sheehan, “Atchíu fer find: Male Beauty and the Gaze in Early Irish Saga,” 41\(^{st}\) International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI. 4 May 2006. I am grateful to Sarah Sheehan for a copy of this paper.

\(^642\) The long description of Bécuma’s physical appearance, focusing on her beauty, immediately precedes her meeting with Conn (152; 153).

\(^643\) There is no specific mention of Art looking at Delbchaem, but the text strongly implies this. Art arrives at the stronghold, and there is a description of the stronghold, followed by a description of Delbchaem in her tower, suggesting that Art can see her. Her description is similar to that of Bécuma, as O Hehir notes, both have a cloak of
Cuimne/Ibhell on account of their outstanding beauty, Mongán’s love sickness and that of Mac an Daimh, Mongán’s attendant whose wife accompanied Dubh Lacha to Leinster, complaining on account of his wife’s absence and lack of sexual contact. Male desire and male gazing upon female beauty is thus very much present in these texts, as it is in the earlier saga tradition and contemporary romance tradition.

To extend Sheehan’s discussion of female gazing and female desire, I would add that numerous other saga texts contain descriptions of female gazing and/or articulations of female desire for their beloved. Going back to the Old and Middle Irish texts discussed in the previous section, Tochmarc Ailbe, Aislinge Óenguso, Egerton 1782 Tochmarc Étain, the narrative of Áed and Aillenn Acallam na Senórach, Tochmarc Emire, Scéla Éogain in so γ Cormaic, Tochmarc Becfola, and the Étain section of Togail Bruidne Da Derga all include the female lover’s description in her own words of her love and desire for her lover, often with implied or directly described desirous gazing. Even in the Tochmarc Emire, in which gazing may be being problematized as discordant with chaste behaviour, the female perspective in the text is still granted significant narrative space by Emer’s sister Fíal’s description of the arriving Cú Chulainn, and Emer’s description of her desire for Cú Chulainn in her defiance of Lugaid’s attempt to woo her.

In the translated romances, Sisian and Felice both express their desire for their beloved hero. Sisian spends time gazing at Bevis’ beauty and prowess from her window, exclaiming her desire. She tells him “‘is tu mo rogha nuachair γ mo cetgradh d’feruibh an betha, γ is tú is ail green, yellow hair, grey eyes, snow-white body (“Christian Revision,”171), but while O Hehir sees this as proof that they are representative of the same goddess (171), I think it is more likely a strategy for juxtaposing the similarity of their outward beauty with the difference of their inward moral quality.

Joanne Findon observes “Emer’s emphasis on chastity or restraint is especially clear in her phrase dercaid nad décesenach (the one who looks but does not gaze)... This recalls her behaviour earlier, when Emer, hearing the approach of the chariot, does not look up but asks one of her companions to see who is coming. Her older sister Fíal (who, as we later learn, has already slept with a man and is thus not a suitable mate for Cú Chulainn) is the one who describes the hero and his chariot in detail as he approaches. It is only when he arrives and greets Emer that she raises her eyes and looks upon him. It is possible that we have here a reference to some standard of female behaviour in regard to ‘gazing’... This emphasis on discretion, chastity and self-containment does raise the possibility of clerical influence on the reshaping of female imagery here. The suggestion that Emer’s sister Fíal is an unsuitable mate for the hero because she has slept with another man only adds to the impression that the inviolate status of the woman is being exalted in this section of the tale. Thus it would be unwise to accept too readily the idea that Emer’s self-contained imagery is based on some native Irish concept of woman’s self worth; it may be a matter of clerical propaganda” (A Woman’s Words 47).

Do bi Sisian in tan-sín ar barr a grianain γ do cunnaic si Bibus ag dul do comruc risin pest nemi, γ adubairt Sisian: “Is truag mo chuit de sin,” ar-si, “uair is tú fer is annsa lium d’feruibh in talman, γ ni fuil lium scéala do innsin duit ar róim éit m’oigrechta γ mo maithusa fein, γ nach féis damh crid h’uaisli-si na h’athairdecht. γ Gideth da marbha in cullach thú, do gebh bas co bithirlum do’d cumaidh, a Bibuis,” ar-si (279).
lium do beth mar ceile agum’’ [‘‘thou art my choice of husband and my first love of the men in the world, and it is thou whom I desire to have with me as my companion’’] (281; 306). Felice, like Emer, does not directly gaze on Guy, rather the text describes the court women falling in love with him and her handmaiden discusses his desirability (27; 108). At the same time, Felice does articulate her love for Gyi and her choice of him for a husband to her father (82; 160).

The closest moment to a female gaze in the rómánsaíochta is a similar instance of the female attendant describing the wooer to her lady in Eachtra Airt. Delbchaem’s maid reports that “‘Tainic enoglach don baile aniugh γ ni hfil isin domun ænoglach is aille delb na ‘s ferr tuarusebail na sé’’” [“‘A warrior has come to the stead today, and there is not in the world a warrior fairer in form, or of better repute’’”] (168; 169). What differentiates this moment from that in the Tochmarc Emire or Guy of Warwick is that Delbchaem never articulates her love for Art or her choice of him for a husband, as Emer and Felice do.

It is perhaps unsurprising that women’s gaze and desire are omitted in the Serc Duibe Lacha and Eachtra Airt; in other texts these moments and articulations often precede the sexual negotiations in which women take part. The narratives’ foreclosure of their participation in sexual agency is consonant with the silence regarding their desire. Their wants and choices are irrelevant to the narrative and so remain, for the most part, unvoiced. Three times do we get references to women’s choices or desires in love and one is duplicitous and the other two are equivocal. Dubh Lacha sneakily manages to dupe Brandubh into delaying sexual intercourse for a year by feigning love:


[Sisian was in the top of her sunny chamber at that time, and she saw Bevis going out to fight the virulent beast, and Sisian said, “Hard is my share in that,” said she, “for thou art the man who is dearest to me of all the men in the world, and it is not fitting for me to tell thee my story because of the vast extent of my heritage and my wealth, and I do not know what thy rank is or thy patrimony. And yet if the boar kills thee, Beves, I will seek death at once because of sorrow for thee” (303–4)].

648 “Agus tug an banntracht serc síradhbul do Gyi asa gnimartaibh” (25). [“And the women conceived a very strong love for Gay because of his deeds” (107)].
[“Dost thou know, O king of Leinster, that the men and one half of Ulster would fall for my sake, except I had already given love to thee? And by my word! I shall not go with thee until thou grant me the sentence of my own lips.” “What is the sentence?” said the king of Leinster. “Thy word to fulfill it!” saith she. “The king of Leinster gave his word, with the exception of his being left… “Then,” said Dubh-Lacha, “I desire that until the end of one year we be not brought for one night into the same house with me, that thou shouldst not sit in the same chair with me, but sit in a chair over against me, for I fear the exceeding great love which I have bestowed upon thee, that thou mayst hate me, and that I may not again be acceptable to my own husband; for if we are a-court ing each other during this coming year, our love will not recede”] (75–6).

Despite the clearly false nature of her declared love, she articulates truth when she describes the difficult situation in which her husband has placed her and her dependence on male desire—she needs to maintain one man’s desire or find herself abandoned. On the surface level she declares her choice for Brandubh and her strategy to keep him interested, but on a deeper level, she articulates her greater concern that should she yield or be forced to yield, her husband will no longer want her. The idea that too much love of a woman breeds hate in the man is interesting, and her use of it as a believable excuse suggests that this most duplicitous of speeches might have carried real moral overtones.

The other two articulations of female desire are completely equivocal, and these, with Dubh Lacha’s duplicity combine to suggest the well-known medieval misogynistic attitude that women’s words and women’s desires are fickle, deceitful and opportunistic. Cuimne, as we know, does not care whether she sleeps with Brandubh or Mongán. Likewise, Bécuma, despite harbouring love for Art, is perfectly happy to trade him for his father who is already king. Even though Dubh Lacha is faithful to her husband, the text suggests that even a good and faithful wife can lie convincingly when she has to.

In addition to the lack of agency exhibited by the women in establishing their sexual relationships, and the dearth of narrative attention to their thoughts and feelings, the Eachtra Airt and Serc Duibe Lacha also break with the earlier Irish tradition in their acute anxiety surrounding women’s sexual conduct and the linking of female subjectivity with adherence to chastity and marital fidelity. The female characters who perform this code of behaviour correctly are granted certain avenues for agency and can be seen as subjects. Through juxtaposing Bécuma the adulteress with the primary chaste female figures of both texts, I will demonstrate how these texts construct a restrictive model of femininity, wherein legitimacy of

---

649 Brandubh’s assertion that a king is better than a king’s son (69; 82) seems to be applicable to Bécuma’s choice here.
feminine agency is entirely dependent on an adherence to the ideal of chastity and marital fidelity.

I have attempted, for the most part, to limit my use of the term ‘femininity’ until now because of the ambiguity of gender categories observed by Sheehan with respect to early Irish saga. However, the increased discrepancy between male and female agency already observed, as well as the sex-based behavioural expectations and their accompanying advantages visible in Eachtra Airt and Serc Duibe Lacha, as seen below, suggests that these texts are dealing with more rigid gendered categories than earlier medieval Irish literature. These texts thus provide further evidence of Sheehan’s and Dooley’s observations about the gradual increase in the regulation of gendered categories over time, and the emergence of “a more amenable paradigm of feminine sweetness and decorum.”

Sex, Marital Fidelity and Subjectivity

In reading the figure of Bécuma, the adulterous woman emerges as a threat to masculinity and to social order. Her body can be characterized in Kristevan terms as abject, a physical source of moral contamination that brings social disruption and infertility. As Kristeva writes “[i]t is thus not of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite….[A]bjection… is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady.” Bécuma, it will be seen, is all these things. She is banished from the Land of Promise for the transgression, imarbus, of adultery with Gaidiar, son of Manannán. Manannán and the council of the Túatha Dé decide that they should not burn her, because her “cin” (“guilt”), might adhere to the land or to themselves. They send her to Ireland because—the text explains—the Túatha Dé hate the sons of Míl (humans) for driving them out of Ireland. The adulterous woman’s body is understood as a source of sin and contamination, and therefore a fitting infliction on the hated people.

When Bécuma meets Conn, she pretends to be Delbchaem, daughter of Morgan, apparently intending to lie her way into Art’s bed. Conn tells her that he has no wife, and she reconsiders, asking him whether she should sleep with him or Art. He tells her to make her own

---

650 See above.
651 Dooley, Playing the Hero, 183–4.
653 Literally imarbus means sin or transgression, especially applied to the Fall of Adam and Eve. See “imarbus” in Dictionary of the Irish Language.
654 “cin” also means sin, crime, offence, fault, and often has legal connotations. See “cin” s.v. Dictionary of the Irish Language.
choice, and she declares: “‘Is e mo rogha,’ ar an ingin, ‘nach fæmhann tusa mise, mo thogha tochmairc damh a nEirinn’” [“This is my choice,” said the maiden, “since thou dost not accept me; let me have my choice of courtship in Ireland”] (154; 155). When the king responds, “‘Ní faicim-si do lochtaibh ort ni rí súd choír t’obadh ach muna fuilid a fólach innat’” [“I see no defects in thee for which it were right to refuse thee, unless they are concealed in thee’”] (154; 155), two things become evident. Firstly, the king’s ability to judge her character is revealed to be deeply flawed, even as his own words explain the crux of the problem, imbuing the moment with a certain amount of dramatic irony. Secondly, the validity of Bécuma’s choice is completely undermined: having a “locht,” [“defect” or “fault, (physical) blemish”] is a basis upon which “rogha,” [“choice”] ought to be denied.655

Bécuma asks Conn for a breath fein “her own judgment,” the condition upon which she will become his consort. He agrees, not yet knowing what it is, and “doronsat ænta iarsin .i. Cond γ an ingin γ naisgis far a ráir do denam” [“(t)hey made a union, Conn and the maiden, and she bound him to do her will’”] (154; 155). Conn thus commits a great kingly faux-pas: he abdicates his agency to a woman, having placed his desire for her above the good of his kingdom. Even as the blame is laid on Bécuma’s adulterous body and false speech, the text belies the king’s faulty performance of both kingship and masculinity.

The men of Ireland consider Art’s banishment to be a “olc mór” [“great wrong”] and there is no grain or milk in Ireland while Bécuma and Conn are together. This is in direct contrast to Conn’s previous nine-year marriage to Eithne Taebfhada, during which time Conn’s subjects harvested the grain three times a year.656 Eithne is described as a “banchele” [“helpmate”], and it is clear that the prosperity is linked in a large part to her excellence. After her death, the text informs us that “Ocus ni noibh ní a n-easbaidh Éirenn an tan sin ach madh æn-ní rígh Éirenn gan bancéile a dingbhala do fághbhail dó tar eis a mhna” [“There was nothing lacking to Ireland at that time but one thing only, that the king of Ireland should not have found a helpmate worthy of him in her stead’”] (150; 151). Eithne’s role as the king’s companion and wife, however active or passive it might be, is represented by the text as crucial to the functioning of society, a connection that becomes even clearer when Conn marries an unworthy woman and the crops fail.


656 This is a common Irish topos of agricultural fertility that denotes a good king’s reign.
The druids figure out quickly that the problem is Conn’s wife’s “corbaidh” [“an act of polluting; corruption”]. The Túatha Dé’s worry that Bécuma’s sin would afflict the land or themselves was correct. They successfully sent Ireland a blight in the form of a sinful, beautiful woman. Bécuma’s adultery works on many levels. On the one hand, her body carries and transfers pollution, and despite its beauty, renders her monstrous. On the other hand, her adultery both renders her speech invalid and is consonant with the bad judgment she displays.

The long process of rectifying the blight upon the land takes up the rest of the text. At first, the druids suggest a solution of sacrificing the “mac lanamhna nemcholaidhe” [“son of the sinless couple”] and mixing his blood with the soil of Tara. This is apparently some kind of sympathetic magic, as “nemcholaidhe” is not so much “sinless” as not “of the body; corporeal; sensuous; sensual; carnal.” The couple never had sexual intercourse except when the boy was conceived, and their own parents had done the same. The root adjective, “colnaide,” is applied to Bécuma by Rigru Rosclethan, the wife of the sinless couple, highlighting their direct moral opposition (160; 161). Evidently, the carnally-derived blight can only be removed by its direct opposite—sexual purity, a value whose link with femininity and legitimate female agency can be seen through a closer consideration of the sinless boy’s mother, Rigru Roisclethan, and Art’s new sexually inviolate wife, Delbchaem herself.

Rigru Roisclethan is, by definition, a sinless woman. If Bécuma’s subjectivity is impossible on account of her corrupt sexuality, Rigru’s is guaranteed by her exceptionally chaste sexuality. When hearing of Ireland’s plight, the son of the sinless couple, Segda Saerlabraid, agrees to go with Conn, who has lied and told him that his bathing in the water of Ireland will cure the land. Just as the boy is about to be sacrificed, Rigru shows up and, from her arrival to her departure, she commands the assembly: she orders the druids to sacrifice instead the cow she has brought; she proves the druids’ general lack of clairvoyance through her superior interpretation of bird signs, then she orders their deaths by hanging.

She commands the king “‘Leig uat an mnái colaídh cóirpe fuil agad i. Bécuma Cneisgel ingin Eogain Inbir ben Labradha Luathlam-ar-cloidheamh, γ is tre imarbus rodicuruidh hi Tír Tairngaire’” [“‘Put away this sinful [lit. carnal, polluted] woman away from thee, even Bécuma Cneisgel, daughter of Eogan Infir and wife of Labraid Luathlam-ar-claideb, for it is through her transgression she has been driven out of the Land of Promise’”] (160, 162; 161, 163). This virtuous woman is the first

658 See “colnaide” in Dictionary of the Irish Language.
659 See below.
660 The text remains silent as to whether this command is actually carried out.
person in the text to identify Bécuma by her real name and explain her presence in Ireland. Conn admits the wisdom of her command, but, nevertheless, is still bound to Bécuma’s will: “Is comairle coir sin,” ar cond, “da mbeith a secnadh agum, γ o nach fuil, deaghrunaigh oraind” [“That is good counsel,” said Conn, ‘if I could put her away; but since I cannot, give us good advice’”] (162; 163). Rigru responds by prophesizing the future shape of the blight—considerably lessened due to the sacrifice of the cow—: only a third of the grain and milk will be lacking to Ireland while Bécuma stays with Conn (162; 163). Being an otherworldly being, Rigru’s goodness is not limited by the constraints of human nature; her virtue and its attendant remarkable power are fantastic exceptions, unavailable to human women. At the same time, it can be seen that, just like Bécuma, she is subjected to the same values of femininity as human women and the fairy women, such as Delbchaem, who enter into the human world and become bound by human rules.

Examining Delbchaem, it is evident that she is held up as an ideal of femininity. Significantly, she is described in terms similar to Bécuma, but instead of a contrast between her outer beauty and hidden fault, her inner goodness is described. Compare:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bécuma</th>
<th>Delbchaem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is amhlaid do bi an ingin γ brat uaine ændatha uimpe cona cimais derghsnáithi dergoir γ leine do sroll derg re geilchneas, γ da mhealsa findruine uimpe γ folt mæth buidhe fuirre γ rosg glás ana cind γ ded dathalaind γ bél tana derg γ dá hfabra dubha γ lamha dírgha datháille, γ corp sneachtaighi sithgel aice, γ gluine corra ceindbeca γ troi[gh]thi tana tóghaighi co mban na crotha γ ndenta γ ndátha γ ndruineachais γ ba hailaind eidighach an ingin sin. i. ingin Eogain Indbir. Ac mæn-í nírbha dingbhala dochum airdrhí Eireann ben arna hindarba trina mgním fein. (152)</td>
<td>Brat uaine ændatha uimpe, γ dealg oír isin brat osa bruinde, γ folt fírálaind forordha fuirre. Da fabra dubha dorchaíde le rosc glas ruithenta ana cind; corp sneachtaighi sithgel aice. Et ba hailaind an ingin sin, eter cruth γ chéil γ gais γ gres γ genus γ ordarcus. (168).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Thus was the maiden. She had a green cloak of one colour about her, with a fringe of red thread of red gold, and a red satin smock against her white skin, and sandals of findruine on her, and soft, yellow hair, and a grey eye in her head, and lovely-coloured teeth, and thin red lips, black eyebrows, arms straight and faire of hue, a snowy white body, small round knees, and slender choice feet, with excellence |

[“She had a green cloak of one hue about her, with a gold pin in it over her breast and long, fair very golden hair. She had dark-black eyebrows, and flashing grey eyes in her head, and a snowy-white body. Fair was the maiden both in shape and intelligence, wisdom and embroidery, in chastity and nobility”] (169).
of shape and form, and complexion, and accomplishments. Fair was the attire of that maiden, even Eogan Inbír’s daughter. One thing only, however: a woman was not worthy of the high-king of Ireland who was banished for her own misdeed”] (153).

Unlike Bécuma, Debchaem does not speak to Art directly until they arrive in Ireland, after they are effectively married. Instead, she identifies Art to her handmaiden immediately upon his arrival, so that the woman can bring Art into the bower for protection against her warrior mother (168; 169). Delbchaem, apparently having accepted her foreordained fate to be Art’s wife, also reveals that she has been waiting and preparing for him. Art fights and kills her mother, and that night sleeps with Delbchaem, during which, the text informs us “[d]o loighsit an oldhche sin co subhach somenmnach γ dun uile for a comus o beg co mor” [“They lay down merry and in good spirits, the whole stronghold in their power (my emphasis), from small to weak”] (168; 169). The text’s inclusion of her in the power over the household seems somewhat incongruous with the lack of agency and subjectivity displayed by Delbchaem herself; nevertheless, it is evident that she is seen to participate, at least nominally, in the power over the household, recalling perhaps Eithne’s significance to Conn’s rule. Her father, Morgan, arrives the next morning, challenges Art and loses. Art then takes hostages of Morgan’s people, collects all the gold and silver of the land and gives it to Delbchaem, presumably as a sort of bride-gift or dower. They set out with the stewards and overseers and hostages, and when they arrive in Ireland, Delbchaem tells Art to “[i]mighsi,’ ar sí, ‘co Temhraig γ abair re Bécuma ingin Eogain na fuirighedh a Temraigh ach imthiged asti co hobann γ corob ok in sen da fuagartar di Temraig d’fagail” [“Hasten to Tara, and tell to Bécuma daughter of Eogan that she abide not there, but to depart at once, for its a bad hap if she be commanded to leave Tara”] (170; 171). Art does so immediately, while the rest of the company remain behind. He then orders “mhnai cholaid” [“sinful woman”] to leave Tara, and this time it works (172; 173). Delbchaem’s presence and advice appear to make the difference that allows Art to succeed where his father failed, having been unable to follow Rigru’s similar command. This moment also recalls Bécuma’s invalid breath, “judgement” that caused Conn to send Art away. Here a chaste woman’s command brings Art home and restores the social order. Like Rigru, Delbchaem’s agency and speech are

661 Delbchaem’s mother is monstrous female warrior who had put to death all of Delbchaem’s previous suitors because of a prophecy that she would die if her daughter was ever successfully wooed.
seen as legitimate and that legitimacy derives from her sexual purity. They command the partial and final antidotes to Bécuma’s contamination precisely because they have a social power drawn from being exemplary performers of a gender model that inscribes chastity and marital fidelity as the most significant feminine values.

Delbchaem has no choice in being Art’s fated bride, the range of her power is limited and her possibilities of behaviour are narrowly constrained, but she still has an important role to play as Art’s banchele “helpmate” in facilitating a new period of prosperity. Eachtra Airt represents women’s sexual behaviour and gender performance as critical to the functioning and productivity of society and constructs the chaste woman as a pivotal and central figure.

Similar patterns can be detected in the Serc Duibe Lacha. Differences have already been observed between the Lebor na hUidre version of the Compert Mongáin and Serc Duibe Lacha, where Fiachra’s wife no longer knowingly commits adultery with Manannán to save her husband’s life, but is tricked into the sexual encounter, arranged by her husband. Dubh Lacha, Mongán’s wife, also carefully avoids the dishonour of adultery and in the process emerges as the wisest and noblest figure in the text, despite her chattel-like status. When Brandubh, the king of Leinster, shows up in Ulster to claim something in return for the 150 white red-eared cows and their calves which he gave Mongán on the condition of their making a pact of “friendship without refusal,” Mongán reveals his terrible bargaining skills, and Dubh Lacha immediately takes control of the situation, telling Mongán pointedly that he should give her because “oir is búaite bladh ‘ná sæghal” [“honour is more lasting than life”] (63; 75). She plays Brandubh perfectly, pretending to be in love with him in order to entice him into granting her “breth mo beóil féin damh” [“judgement of [her] own lips”] (63; 75), the postponement of sexual contact for a year (62–3; 75–6).

The word “breth” [“judgment”] is used by both Dubh Lacha and Brandubh and is the exact same word used in Eachtra Airt when Bécuma demands that Conn send his son away. But where Bécuma’s judgement is faulty on account of her adultery, Dubh Lacha’s is worth a great deal. She succeeds in buying her husband enough time to get her back from Brandubh without bloodshed or loss of honour to Mongán or the men of Ulster. Her cleverness stands out all the more next to Mongán’s blunder. When Brandubh tries to request something of her, she correctly establishes the boundaries of the request, “Dogébthar. A n-é/cms do beith agum co tían bliadhain, ní fuil agum athchuinghi iarfas tú, nach tiubér duit hí” [“It shall be granted. Except they being with me till the year is ended, there is nothing what thou mayst ask which I will not grant thee”] (67; 80). She is also able to recognize Mongán when he appears magically shape-
shifted into the form a cleric to sneak into Leinster, and she consistently guards her husband’s honour by not escaping and by inciting him to action. She tells Mac an Daimh when he shows up on reconnaissance, "‘Ticedh Mongán cucam, ar sí, γ atá rígh Laighen ar særchúairt Laighen γ atá Ceibhín Cochlach gilla carbaid an rígh am’ farradh-sa γ bith ag a rádh a rium élodh do dénam γ co ticfadh féin leam γ is écrúaidh a n-dénann Mongán’" ["‘Let Mongan come to me,’ said she, ‘for the king of Leinster is on a journey around Leinster, and Ceibhín Cochlach, the attendant of the king’s chariot is with me and keeps telling me to escape, and that he himself would come with me. And Mongan behaves in a weak manner’"] (66; 80). Like Delbchaem, her words instigate the situation’s resolution at the hands of her husband. Her agency is limited to maintaining her sexual fidelity to her husband, but in such a range, her actions are legitimate and effective, and she is allowed a certain amount of informal power over her own body and over the men she manipulates.

The strength of the anxiety surrounding chastity and adultery and the abjection of the adulterous woman’s body represent a departure from the more open sexuality in the earlier literature. 662 If we look briefly at a number of early Irish texts, we will see that, as in Compert Mongáin, women’s sexual conduct is not confined to chastity. In the earliest version of Compert Concobuir, Ness chooses to sleep with the druid Cathbad because of his prophecy that any son begotten at that time would rule over Ireland. 663 In the later version, the shadow of adultery hangs over his conception, 664 and in the Scela Conchobuir, Ness is still considered a desirable bride—so desirable, in fact, that she marries the king of Ulster, Fergus mac Roich, and tricks him into giving up the throne to her son. 665 Likewise in the Scéla Éogain in so γ Cormaic Achtán, Olc Aiche’s daughter, bears Art son of Conn’s only son Cormac by sleeping with Art on the advice of her father and his prophecy that Art will have no other children, except with


664 Meyer, “Anecdota from the Stowe Ms.,” 180.

her, and that his descendents through her will be kings of Ireland till doomsday. Neither of these birth stories reveal any concern for the kind of chastity and self-containment upon which Emer prides herself, an emphasis which Joanne Findon associates with a more intrusive clerical agenda; rather, like Emer’s older sister Fíal, who had previously had a sexual relationship, they sleep with men without being married, and while this is a point of criticism from Cú Chulainn’s point of view, it is by no means depicted as an overwhelming source of dishonour. Perhaps in the case of Ness and Achtán, the end justifies the means, as in the earlier *Compert Mongáin*, or perhaps the prophetically and/or fatherly sanctioning excused the encounter. Fíal has no such excuses and yet, while she is not considered an ideal bride, she is not considered shameless. Likewise in the *Compert Con Chulainn*, even though there is a worry of incest about her pregnancy, Deichtine is not denounced as a corrupt or sinful woman. While her inner sense of shame causes the loss of the baby, there are no social repercussions for her, nor does her husband reject her.667

*Tocmarcha*, wooing tales, reveal a similar pattern. In the *Tochmarc Becfola*, Becfola’s attempted seduction of her husband Diarmaid’s foster-son, and her arrangement with her new chosen man Flann while still married to Diarmaid, although not represented particularly positively, are not denounced.668 In the *Táin Bó Flidais*, Flidais’ adulterous desire for Fergus mac Roich prompts the plot. Her choice of Fergus eventually leads to her husband’s death in battle, and her marriage to Fergus, with whom she stays with for the rest of her life, and there is no overt criticism of her or of her pursuit of Fergus by sending him messengers every week.669

Another interesting moment of uncriticized adultery is the little known and little discussed *Aithed Emere la Tuir n-Glesta mac ríg Lochlann* “The Elopement of Emer with Tuir Glesta, Son of the King of Norway.” In this tale from the Stowe Manuscript, Emer, Cú Chulainn’s wife, sees Tuir Glesta when Cú Chulainn is away hunting birds and falls in love with him. She goes off with him, and when the news reaches Cú Chulainn, he challenges Tuir to combat, wins and takes Emer back.670 Philip O’Leary’s assessment that “the inescapable conclusion to be drawn from a study of the early literature is that the honour of women was conceived of primarily as sexual” and that there is an “equation of female honour with chastity or fidelity” is perhaps too

---

670 Meyer, “*Anecdota from the Stowe MS,***” 184–5.
strong an assertion.\footnote{Phillip O'Leary, “The Honour of Women in Early Irish Literature,” Ériu 38 (1987), 27–44: 35.} That there is a cultural concern for chastity and sexual purity is clear in the Tochmarc Emire and the Compert ConChulainn, among other texts, but the concern is neither uniform nor absolute in its judgment. Part of the problem in O’Leary’s argument may be his use of substantially later texts, such as the Echtra Cormaic i Tír Tairngirt\footnote{O’Leary, “Honour of Women,” 36.} and Eachtra Airt, alongside the early texts, suggesting a false sense of coherence.\footnote{Eachtra Airt’s stricter code of sexual conduct has been noticed briefly before by Brendan O Hehir. He observes in that Bécuma’s banishment for adultery is “quite out of the ordinary [in comparison with the canon of Old Irish stories],” and that “attitudes have hardened remarkably in this story, with new morality introduced among the Tuatha De Danand [sic.]” (“Christian Revision,” 163). He compares the text briefly with The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn and the Only Jealousy of Emer, where in Labraid, Bécuma’s husband in Eachtra Airt, and Labraid’s wife, there named Lí Ban, assist Fand in her adultery with Cú Chulainn, and he proceeds to comment “[t]he strict marital code enforced by among the Tuatha De Danand of the Land of Promise in Eachtra Airt is an import from medieval Christian Ireland. Nothing like it controlled the behaviour of either mortals or gods in the pagan ethos. So too is the episode of the sinless parents. The definition of “sin” as sexual intercourse is close to the parish-priest morality of a more recent Ireland. The idea of reproduction by one sexual union per generation is a monastic fantasy” (164). O Hehir sees Bécuma’s banishment for adultery as a “distortion and reversal of her motive in the underlying older story” (164), which he suggests is the sovereignty narrative in which marriage to a goddess legitimizes a king’s rule. O Hehir’s focus on stripping away the Christianity to reveal the older story, and his desire to prove that the first half of the text is “a late and entirely Christian invention” whose “motivation is anti-pagan, and specifically seeks to discredit the belief that a king’s prosperous reign depends upon the favour of a goddess-queen” (179) leads him to miss the text’s careful construction of a moral message about the social importance of appropriate sexual conduct. In addition, he fails to recognize the real significance of Bécuma’s status as an adulteress and the sinless couple’s thematic importance. O Hehir posits that the crops fail for Conn when he reigns with Bécuma because his rule ended with the death of Ethne, his previous wife/goddess-consort, and that Bécuma is not the correct sovereignty goddess for him (168). The text, however, tells us quite clearly why the crops failed, and it has nothing to do with the divinely-ordained end of Conn’s rule; Bécuma herself is a source of contamination, and the son of the sinless couple is one possible antidote; the other is her banishment, which is only finally effected through the arrival of Delbchaem’s chaste body.} It appears unlikely, then, that the approach to women’s sexual conduct in the rómánsaíochta derives from the early Irish literary tradition. However, chastity and marital fidelity are of paramount importance in the Irish Lives of Bevis and Guy.

The Irish Life of Bevis shares a remarkable number of plot points with Eachtra Airt and Serc Duibe Lacha but the execution of those moments is quite different. Like Eachtra Airt, it begins with a king taking an unworthy wife from a foreign kingdom, whose presence and body are a threat to the king and kingdom. However, instead of bearing a sort of miasma from a previous adultery that cripples the land’s fertility, Bevis’ mother is the victim of a May-December marriage made against her will. A combination of observation of her own physical superiority with respect to youth and beauty, and her prior love for the son of the Emperor of Germany, leads her to trick her husband into the woods to get ambushed and killed by her lover, so that he can marry her and take the rule of the country by force. Her body contributes to the country’s peril, in that her glimpsing of herself in the bath is the immediate impetus for her
treachery, but she herself is not represented as bearing a moral contamination that magically affects the land. She is directly responsible for the king’s death, not for the slow erosion of his masculinity and agency and quiet disappearance from the text as in Eachtra Airt (273–275; 298–300). Similarly, Bevis’ exile, like Art’s is the result of king’s wife, in this case also his mother, but instead of an unexplained condition of the marriage, her motive is to have him removed as a threat to her new husband’s rule. Her wickedness is more direct and more visible than Bécuma’s and yet she is not subjected to quite the same moral denunciation.

She is called “cruducisech-sin” [“hard-spirited”] (273; 298) and “drochben celgach, mailisech” [“wicked false malicious woman”] (274; 299) but not “colaidh” [“sinful” or “polluted”] and there is no discussion of her “locht” [“fault” or “defect”], or of her deed being “imarbus” [“transgression”]. In other words, she is not represented as embodying moral depravity, so much as engaging in a wicked act. Moreover, her loyalty to the German emperor is absolute, and her love for him is emphasized in the Irish version: “γ ὔ amlaidh ro bui an ingen-sin, γ ro gradh adbulmor aici do mac an imper Almaindigh .i. Para a aimn-sidhe, γ do bidh seisin di-si mur sin” [“and it was thus with that maiden: she felt strong, passionate love for the son of the German Emperor, Para by name, and he felt the same toward her”] (273; 298). She calls him her “cheile comain-si γ mo cetgradh d’feruibh in talman” [“beloved companion and first love of all the men in the world”] (273; 298). The feelings are mutual, because he stays without a wife for years “gan bancheile fós dom’ serc-si & dom’ sirgradh” [“because of his love and longing for (her)”] (274; 298). Unlike the Middle English versions, where she emphasizes her sexual disappointment and desire to be kissed and have bliss with the younger man (4–5), in the Irish version, Bevis’ mother describes her dissatisfaction in terms of the couple’s bodily inequality (she is young and beautiful, he is old, scarred and wounded) and the enduring mutual love between her and the German emperor (273–274; 298). As observed in the previous chapter, equality of both partners features as a prominent concern in the Irish Life of Guy, a feature which it shares with early Irish saga texts. Bevis’ mother is, perhaps surprisingly, a somewhat more sympathetic character in the Irish, even if she is just as evil. As in Eachtra Airt, the restitution of rightful rule by the next generation and the hero’s marriage to a good woman, who is the opposite of the adulterous (step)mother, takes up significant subsequent narrative space.

In terms of chastity and sexual fidelity in the primary relationship, that of Bevis and Sisian, the Irish does show increased emphasis on the need for that fidelity, but, as already seen,
represents it as marital chastity, not loyalty to a betrothed. At the same time, it can be seen that in both cases, as in the *Eachtra Airt* and *Serc Duibe Lacha*, the heroine’s legitimacy is still guaranteed by her sexual inviolateness. This is quite different than the situation visible in early Irish saga, where different texts reveal different levels of concern for chastity, and women remain desirable even after they have borne children from previous informal sexual unions.

Sisian cannot simply divorce Ybor in order to marry Bevis; she must keep herself sexually pure through a magic girdle, despite the fact that it is a marriage which her father advocated and to which she consented (290; 303). Likewise, when Dubh Lacha is legitimately traded away from Mongán, she cannot participate in sexual intercourse with Brandubh, lest she be undesirable to her husband afterwards, should he ever get her back. When Sisian is abducted by Earl Miles and forced to marry him against her will, her strategy for avoiding intercourse with him is at first rather similar to Dubh Lacha’s. She pretends to be in love with him in order to get him to agree to conditions which will postpone their sexual union. However, Sisian’s ultimate solution is not to wait for Bevis or Asgobard to come to her rescue; instead, she hangs him with a rope on her wedding night, an act which recalls the Old Testament heroine Judith. Dubh Lacha’s solution, on the one hand, displays considerably less agency. On the other hand, we might also observe that Sisian, who woos Bevis herself, intervenes for him in her father’s court and defends herself from two unwanted marriages is far more of an active heroine than Dubh Lacha (or Delbchaem, for that matter). Indeed, as observed in the previous chapter, the Irish texts even considerably increase Sisian’s activity and agency. Such additions stand out even more in comparison with the relatively constrained agency of the women in the two *rómánsaíochta*, and in light of similar additions in the *Irish Life of Guy*.

On the matter of chastity and marital fidelity, the *Irish Life of Guy* may take Felice’s faithfulness for granted, but that does not negate its critical narrative importance. The only moment of doubt is Felice’s contemplation of suicide at his departure, which would be directly disobeying his instructions to bear his child, name him Roighnebron and keep his sword for the boy. Her reason for not killing herself is slightly different in the Irish and could show an emphasis on loyalty to her husband. Rather than staying alive primarily for her unborn child, whom it would be a sin to kill, as she does in the Middle English, she refrains from falling on Guy’s sword because he would then be blamed for her death. The Middle English contains both reasons, but Guy’s culpability is something of an afterthought. The Irish translator/adaptor completely leaves out the unborn child and focuses on her avoidance of betraying and indicting her husband.
The translated romances thus share with the rómánsaíocht a conception of chastity and marital fidelity as integral to the construction of femininity. Such a uniformity of concern cannot be observed in the earlier Irish saga material, and so we might surmise that the dissemination of continental and insular literature, particularly romances—in which the concept of chastity and marital fidelity as integral to the construction of femininity is widely present— Influenced this configuration of femininity in the rómánsaíocht. Surprisingly, in Eachtra Airt and Serc Duibe Lacha, while sexual inviolateness guarantees legitimate agency for some female characters, their degree and range of agency is relatively more circumscribed than is the case for the romance women, whose activity is amplified in the Irish translations. The Book of Fermoy texts, therefore, on balance, offer a more restrictive model of femininity than the translations from Middle English.

Both Sarah Sheehan and Ann Dooley have observed a gradual increase in the regulation of gendered categories over time, and the emergence of “a more amenable paradigm of feminine sweetness and decorum.” This examination of women, gender and sexuality in the Eachtra Airt and the Serc Duibe Lacha both provides further evidence for such a trend and presents a preliminary delineation of this additionally regulated femininity as it existed in late medieval Irish rómánsaíocht from fifteenth-century Fermoy. Compared to earlier Irish saga literature, these two rómánsaíocht reveal a more sharply defined code of femininity, structured around marital fidelity and chastity. Female subjectivity and agency are more circumscribed: women’s choices, voices and desires are less visible, and female agency is limited and guaranteed by sexual purity. In Eachtra Airt and Serc Duibe Lacha, female subjectivity is more restricted than those of the women of fifteenth-century Irish translations of Middle English romances.

Unfortunately, the underlying reasons for this will have to remain obscure for the time being. Future work on the rómánsaíocht will help to determine if such patterns are limited to these two tales, or if these tales are representative of their literary genre/group. In addition, further attention to both the social and literary context of the tales will help to illuminate the complex processes through which the tales developed, as well as the ways in which the tales might have interacted with their audiences.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the absence of female subjects in medieval romance is not due to an absence in the texts themselves, but rather to limitations in the theoretical paradigms that have been used to analyze gendered and sexed subjectivity. An indebtedness to psychoanalysis in these paradigms has resulted in readings that—albeit often despite their avowed intentions—necessarily operate in terms of a sex/gender binary, relegating men to the position of subjects, and women to that of the other, lack, or object. As a result, female subjectivity was only defined as a resistance to being othered or objectified, and so was always transgressive or subversive, never dominant; but in some cases, as we have seen, medieval romances do represent women as dominant female subjects who are invested in the ideologies that enable them.

Comparing the Rigmel, Rimenhild and Rimmild of the Horn romances demonstrated that while Rigmel suffers objectification and erasure, Rimenhild and Rimmild are bona fide subjects, inhabiting a narrative world lacking in misogynistic outbursts, mockery and ironic undermining of their thoughts and actions. Both enter into gift-exchanges with Horn, and successfully negotiate their marriage with Horn, in contrast to Rigmel, whose agency in the establishment of her relationship with Horn is persistently undercut. They also actively contribute to Horn’s identity-formation and the restoration of social order, in contrast to Rigmel’s powerlessness and passivity. Rimenhild’s subjectivity stands out as additionally informed by an intertextuality with virgin martyr legends. These hagiographic resonances cast her desire, her suffering, and her patience as valuable, even heroic. Her agency, unlike that of the virgin martyrs, is not rooted in God, but is rooted in Horn, whose identity she helped to create. Moreover, while both Rimenhild and Rimmild have mutually constructed identities with Horn, her final social position as queen speaks to a more formal and official conceptualization of that identity.

Possibilities of formal access to authority and sovereignty are seen in the story of Goldeboru, who shares the romance equally with Havelok. The consistent parallelism in the presentation of Havelok and Goldeboru speaks to the fact that her subjectivity is not conceptualized in a substantially different way than his. This strongly contrasts with the presentation of Argentille in Gaimar’s Estoire des Engleis and in the Lai d’Haveloc, who
excercises considerable agency in her victory over Edelsi and in claiming back her ancestral lands; however, as little more than a conduit for passing sovereignty to her husband, this deed is not directly for her benefit, but for Haveloc’s. Moreover, the sinister resonances of the army of corpses trick belies a profound narrative discomfort with her activity and initiative. This is not at all the case in the Middle English narrative, where Goldeboru is endorsed as the rightful heir and queen of her land; her actions and counsel, directed at her own goals of vengeance and the restoration of her birthright, simultaneously serve her interests and Havelok’s. Finally, both Goldeboru and Havelok assist one other in the restoration of their stolen lands and identities. The reciprocity of the relational construction of gender is additionally visible in the bodily nature of the guarantee each spouse offers for the other’s identity: Goldeboru’s miraculous dream prompts the restoration of Havelok as Danish king, and his kingly body prompts the restoration of Goldeboru’s queenly body and formal position as queen and lady over her English subjects; their marriage produces both of them as king and queen of England. Hagiographic resonances mark both Havelok and Goldeboru, whose characterization, like Rimenhild’s, is informed by virgin martyr discourse, producing her as a secular type of a bride of Christ. Notably, where Rimenhild is rescued by Horn, both Goldeboru and Havelok find victory and safety through a combination of God’s aid and their own agency.

The Anglo-Norman versions of Gui present both Gui and Felice as initially transgressive subjects, whose redemption is found through different forms of penance. These versions of the romance appear to be exceptionally oppressive to Felice, whose agency and presence in the narrative is extremely limited. However, the combination of Guy’s absence and Felice’s piety and charity produce her as Countess of Warwick, holding a social, political and economic position that exceeds anything that is actually seen to be executed by Rimenhild or Goldeboru within their respective romances. The Anglo-Norman Gui is the earliest romance in this study to present a female subject, strongly suggesting that the presence or absence of female subjectivity is not a matter of language or literary tradition, so much as time. Moreover, Gui’s relationship with hagiography is strongly operational in the production of that subjectivity. In light of the fact that the subjectivities of the later, Middle English female protagonists Rimenhild and Goldeboru are likewise resonant of hagiographic virgin subjectivities, my hypothesis is that the invocation of the discourse of hagiographic virginity is one of the strategies used by both Anglo-Norman and Middle English romance writers interested in justifying and guaranteeing the legitimacy and worthiness of their active female subjects. This is a possibility I plan to explore
further in future research, as it draws out new connections between three productive lines of inquiry that have yet to be tied together.

In *Saints Lives and Medieval Women’s Literary Culture*, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne describes how the discourses of virginity, drawn in large part from virgin martyr legends, could be appropriated by and applied to non-virgins, non-martyrs, to enact empowering honourary virginities for female saints and laywomen.676 Karen Winstead and Andrea Hopkins have examined how hagiographic motifs and images are used in the presentation of female protagonists of the Middle English pious romances of calumniated and persecuted laywomen, such as *Emaré, Octavian, Le Bone Florence of Rome, The King of Tars, the Earl of Tolous.*677 Julie Nelson Couch and Kimberly Bell have revisited the issue of Horn and Havelok’s saint-like and Christ-like bodies by reading the romances’ in their manuscript context of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108.678 However, the presentation of more secular romance heroines, such as Rimenhild, Goldeboru and Felice had not yet been observed to contain hagiographic resonances, despite the fact that their husbands have all been found to have Christ-like or saint-like characteristics. In my examination of the construction of these characters’ subjectivities in the various versions of their stories, I have found that virgin martyr legends inform and inflect the Middle English stories of Rimenhild and Goldeboru. Rimenhild’s choice of Horn as husband and suffering on his behalf is cast as analogous to the virgin martyr’s choice of and suffering for her bridegroom Christ. Similarly, Goldeboru’s persecution, suffering, patience, faith and redemption resembles elements of the virgin martyr’s *passio*. The characterization of Felice of the Anglo-Norman *Gui* seems to draw upon the legends of householding and charitable saints, whose access to virginity was symbolic and honourary, rather than literal. I believe the expansion of access to the empowering symbolic economy of virginity in thirteenth century England may underlie the later Anglo-Norman and Middle English romance writers’ ability and motivation to draw in such hagiographic elements in their construction of their female protagonists. This is something I would like to explore further with reference to the patterns of interconnections between hagiography and romance recently examined by Winstead, Hopkins, Bell and Couch.

---

677 Hopkins, “Female Saints and Romance Heroines”; Winstead, “Pious Laywomen.”
The romance of *Gui* also presented new methodological challenges, being the irrefutable source of the Middle English romances of *Guy of Warwick*, but at the same time existing in two versions and numerous manuscripts, none of which directly underlie any of the extant versions of the Middle English *Guy*. My study of the underexamined Wolfenbüttel manuscript of *Gui*, “G,” in comparison with the Auchinleck, Caius and Cambridge University Library versions of *Guy*, granted a closer look at the complexity of the Gui/y romance’s textual change over time, as well as problematized the prevailing narrative of *Guy’s* reception and revision in fifteenth-century Warwickshire. Felice certainly gains additional praise and prestige in later Middle English revisions of the romance, just as *Guy* does; however, some of those developments can be seen as early as the late thirteenth-/early fourteenth-century text witnessed in G. In its gradual erasure of Felice, the Auchinleck manuscript’s Stanzaic *Guy* bears witness to the fact that lines of textual development over time do not necessarily show a coherent pattern. The amplifications of Felice’s character found in G are lacking in the Stanzaic *Guy*; an overemphasis on the Auchinleck manuscript versions of *Guy* combined with an omission of the G manuscript has led to a false perception of uniquely fifteenth-century, Middle English interest in the revision of Felice.

The Irish translation of *Guy* follows the same trajectory of the ever-increasing exculpation and praiseworthy presentation of Felice in the Middle English *Guy* romances, culminating in her figuration as co-victor over “the world and the devil” with *Guy*. Parallelism strongly marks the presentation of *Guy* and Felice; however, the relational construction of gender and subjectivity is eroded and replaced by the construction of gender and subjectivity in relation to secular and religious patriarchal authority. The *Irish Life of Bevis* does not show the same realignment of gender construction, but does present the same trend in the amplification of Sisian’s agency, authority and nobility. At the same time, the revision of Sisian belies a greater concern for sexuality and marital fidelity than the Middle English sources, a trend that links it to Eachtra Airt and *Serc Duibe-Lacha*. The two original Irish rómánsaoíchta present a stark diminishment of agency, voice, authority and autonomy of the female protagonists in comparison with similar texts of the early Irish saga tradition. Symbolically central to the functioning of society, the chaste women Delbchaem and Dubh Lacha are not completely without agency, but the scope of their narratively endorsed action is extremely limited and focused around the maintenance of their husband’s position as king of his territory: Dubh Lacha accomplishes this through her exceptional and enduring marital fidelity, Delbchaem by being an embodiment of chastity.
The limited discussion of the *Irish Life of Bevis of Hampton* points to another direction for future research. On the one hand, it is evident that a detailed examination of the many versions of the Middle English *Bevis*, on the model of my examination of *Guy*, is called for. On the other hand, the potential for the productive expansion of this field of inquiry to include Old Norse becomes visible. My preliminary work on the Stockholm Perg. 4:o NR 6 (manuscript “B”) version of the Old Norse *Bevers saga* has revealed issues of women and gender a key point of cultural negotiation in the translation of the Anglo-Norman *Boeve* into Old Norse-Icelandic. While Josivena’s (Josiane’s) characterization bears marks of a censoring trend, I have also found that Josivena’s wooing of Bevers and her consistent and faithful choice of him as her husband is amplified, along with a general concern for women’s choice and consent in marriage and its attendant symbolic implications for male honour. A compelling prospect for future research is a comparison of Josiane’s subjectivity across the Anglo-Norman, Middle English, Medieval Irish and Old Norse Bevis romances.

In closing, I want to present a few theoretical observations that have developed out of this project. I have delineated the existence of dominant female subjects in the majority of the romances under examination; however, as evidenced by the silenced and occluded Rigmel and Argentille who precede them, and by the gradual revision of Felice’s character over the different versions, these female subjects can be seen to emerge and develop over time. While only further research can substantiate this suggestion, for the moment I want to observe that the narrative constructions of Riminhild’s, Goldeboru’s, Felice’s and the variety of other romance heroines’ subjectivity and agency, as dominant, are not simply a matter of reversing discourse and speaking back, as in Foucault’s example of homosexuality, which “began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturality’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.” Rather, these female subjects appear to be a matter of speaking *within*, of mobilizing and combining complementary discourses to model new subject-positions that fit within existing ideological structures, even as they simultaneously push against the boundaries, imagining new possibilities. There is no radical resistance, or even complicitous resistance. Stevie Meriel Schmiedel, advocating for a Deleuzian solution to the problems posed by feminist psychoanalytic theory,

---

679 These observations were presented at the International Colloquium on the *Riddarasögur*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, October 2010 (Giselle Gos, “*Með öllum alhuga ok høversku, ‘with great care and courtesy’: Translating Gender and Genre in Bevers saga.*” International Colloquium on the *Riddarasögur*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, 16 October 2010.)

quotes a compelling passage from Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* which I believe speaks directly to this situation: “History is made only by those who oppose history (or by those who insert themselves into it, or even reshape it). *This is not done for provocation* but happens because the punctual system they found ready-made, or themselves invented, must have allowed this operation: free the line and the diagonal, draw the line instead of plotting a point” (my emphasis).\(^{681}\) I believe my future application of discourse analysis to medieval romance texts will be meaningfully enhanced by a deeper engagement with Deleuze and Guattari’s approach to discourse and subjectivity.

Unlike the majority of Foucauldian discourses, medieval insular romance has no institutional grounding, no state apparatuses to anchor it. A Deleuzian approach would allow us to model romance discourses as contiguous, overlapping and multiple, engaging certain clusters of language, images, motifs, loosely arrayed under a horizon of expectations. An individual text, as a *bricolage* of aspects of romance discourse, its own assemblage, may have its own centre, but as a *genre*, my hypothesis is that romance is better modeled as a cluster of rhizomatic discourses, rather than as ideology. Romance can be seen as a playing field, with a common language, set of images and themes that are open to diverse uses, open to *bricolage*, and can be combined with and can intersect with other discourses—such as hagiographic discourses—which may have more or less institutional grounding or ideological allegiance.

Mercenary, organic and adaptive, like organisms adapting to their changing environments, romances are bounded by the limits of their abilities to fit the needs of their environment: in this case, the desires, tastes and needs of medieval readers. Such a model of romance as a decentered assemblage with the potential for combination and recombination has better potential to account for the radically different models of female subjectivity than an ideological model. For example, the contradictory subject-positions found in medieval Irish romance could, in this approach, be interpreted as being the result of their manuscripts having been produced in different locations, by different families, and by different authors, who obviously responded to the intense cultural hybridity of Hiberno-Norman Ireland in diverse ways—combining different meanings and values from medieval romance and from Irish saga to produce new texts. The texts of the Roches of Fermoy show female subjects getting the worst of both literary traditions and worlds: symbolically central, and tied to kingship, these wives of kings are at the same time tied to restrictive ideologies of chastity and male exchange. The

translated texts produced for the Butler family show the opposite: expectations influenced by strong women of the early Irish saga tradition find Felice and Josian to be too restricted and their roles are thus amplified and reconfigured to suit different literary and gender expectations. Whatever future research may reveal, I think it is clear from the range of female subjects described in this study that we cannot treat romance as a hegemonic formation, saying ‘romance does this’ or ‘romance does that,’ or ‘romance has only female objects’; but we can say that this mobilization of romance discourse, subtended by and producing these ideologies, constructs these subject positions. Similarly, I began this thesis by describing how a model of subjectivity derived from psychoanalysis is stuck in a gender binary that will not be able to account for the complexity of gender and subjectivity visible in twelfth-to-fifteenth century England and Ireland. At this point, I would like to conclude that a psychoanalytic model of subjectivity cannot account for the multiplicity of subject positions present in such a decentered discourse as insular romance. I would like to push towards an approach to gender and subjectivity that allows for the description of a multiplicity of subject-positions, in which masculine and feminine, male and female, are attributes of the body and behaviours—that are neither reduced to a positive/negative binary nor tied together in male-masculine, female-feminine associations—that intersect and interact with other attributes, such as class, religion, race, and access to holiness, that are just as embodied as sex and just as disembodied as gender.
Works Cited


Blaess, M. “L’abbaye de Bordesley et les livres de Guy de Beauchamp.” Romania 78 (1957): 511–18.


Cadden, Joan. Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Sex, and Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.


Meyer, Kuno, ed. and trans. “Compert Mongáin ocus Serc Duibe Lacha do Mongán, ‘The Conception of Mongán and Dubh Lacha’s Love for Mongán.’” In The Voyage of Bran Son of Ferbal to the Land of the Living: An Old Irish Saga Now First Edited, with Translation, Notes,


Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn. ‘Bet...to...rede on holy seyntes lyves...’: Romance and Hagiography Again. ” In Readings in Medieval English Romance, edited by Carol M. Meale, 83–98. Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1994.

