

Disguise, Transformation, and Revelation
in Middle English Romances and Outlaw Ballads

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Trinity Term 2019

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines forms of disguise, transformation, and revelation in medieval English romances and outlaw ballads. The forms of disguise used by different characters and the consequences of such deceptions are specific to characters' social roles. They reflect medieval English concepts of social rank and gender and the duties and abilities attendant on those positions. This thesis contributes a greater understanding of how motifs of disguise, transformation, and revelation are mobilised to address the social and political anxieties and assumptions regarding gender and rank held by romance and ballad audiences. By comparing the differences in authorial portrayals of disguise-related behaviour between classes and across genders, I uncover the particular, often socially contingent, anxieties invoked by disguise and disguise-perception, and the specific social beliefs infringed or upheld by such behaviour.

Chapter one explores the role of the carnivalesque in medieval English theories of kingship in disguise narratives, and examines kings' marked and remarkable inability to detect others' disguises. Chapter two focuses on women of varying rank, as femaleness constituted a separate social identity in English medieval culture. Disguise narratives that portray women as exceptional perceivers aligns with other, non-literary evidence of women's role in preserving social memory; narratives involving women in disguise intersect with medieval ideas of women as inherently deceitful, and illustrate how women exploit disguise to achieve social agency. Chapter three uses Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* as a case study to explore knightly disguise narratives, and the ethics and theatricality of chivalric disguise culture. Chapter four investigates the yeomen outlaws' failure to appropriate other social roles through disguise as indicative of the attitudes of various authors towards the developing yeoman class, and offers a new understanding of *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Marcus Aurelius, in his *Meditations*, thanked the gods that when he had shown an interest in philosophy, he had not fallen into the folly of studying literature and history, as to do so requires the help of both gods and fortune.ⁱ I can attest that producing this thesis has taken the help of both of these, and a great many others besides.

First and foremost, to Professor Carolyne Larrington. Without your supervision, none of this would have been possible. You gave me guidance whenever I asked for it and confidence in my own abilities as a scholar. Your insight, understanding, and trust have meant the world to me. Secondly, to my parents, to whom I owe everything. Your love and support have known no bounds. Next, to my friends throughout my university years, and particularly to Emily Jackson and Ellie Milnes-Smith, on whom I have leaned the most. And finally, to my teachers at every stage of my education, including those who have mentored me in a non-academic capacity. Above all, a heartfelt thank-you to Professor Ad Putter, my Master's dissertation supervisor, for his encouragement and inspiration; Professor Sharon Alker, who kindled my passion for teaching; and to Professor Roberta Davidson, who made a medievalist out of me. Without her, this thesis would have been about radiology.

To borrow the words of an anonymous medieval scribe who left a colophon scrawled at the end of his manuscript: 'Now I have written the whole thing; for Christ's sake, give me a drink!'

ⁱ Marcus Aurelius, *The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Emperor of Rome, Together with His Speeches and Sayings*, ed. and trans. C. R. Haines (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), I.8, p. 24.

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INTRODUCTION

‘Man is least himself when he talks in his own person.

Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.’¹

Why disguise?

Disguise, much like fiction, offers us the opportunity to temporarily escape ourselves. It allows us to act on desire without fear of repercussion, or to explore an alternate reality in which we can enjoy freedoms only permitted to other social groups. But what do we hope to achieve when we put on a disguise? Are we attempting to deceive others, or discover who they really are? What do we hope to prove or attain by detaching ourselves from those familial attachments and social obligations by which we so frequently define our identities? Does the end justify duplicitous means?

It is a paradox of disguise that it usually reveals more than it conceals. An audience discovers more about the characters of the individuals involved in the disguise encounter, both deceiver and victim, than perhaps would be evident if those individuals met dressed as themselves. In this ironic way, one of the best tools to expose the truth may well be deception. Disguise in literature is frequently employed to unveil character and in medieval romance it most often serves to reaffirm social identity rather than undermine it.

Valerie Hotchkiss writes that ‘[i]dentity is concealed for different reasons, although in general the goal is participating in activities from which the disguised individual would otherwise be excluded. This desire to circumvent societal barriers motivates subterfuges that obscure class, education, trade, or [...] physiological gender’.² While circumventing social barriers is a common motivation for disguise in English romance and outlaw ballads, as this thesis will reveal, the goals in donning a disguise are as diverse as the social positions in

¹ Oscar Wilde, ‘The Critic as Artist’, *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994), 1108–1155, p. 1142.

² Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 10.

which characters find themselves, and the desire to participate in forbidden activities is largely dependent on status. It is difficult to ascribe a general motivation for disguise when one looks at all the medieval English romances and outlaw ballads, and does not confine one's exploration to one profession, rank, or gender alone.

As yet, no scholarly work exists which provides a wide-ranging consideration of disguise in English romances. A more comprehensive exploration of disguise does exist for French romance.³ Studies on disguise in Middle English literature thus far have tended to be restricted to a single social status, gender, or a single text. In her monograph on cross-dressing throughout Western Europe in the Middle Ages, Valerie Hotchkiss considers women disguising themselves as men in literary works within a larger discussion on hagiographical and historical accounts of transvestism, which was undertaken for a variety of purposes and not always intended as disguise. Susan Crane's work provides an excellent examination of chivalric disguise in the fourteenth century; Elizabeth Walsh has written on king-and-subject tales which focus on courtesy lessons, such as *Rauf Coilyear*.⁴ But, like Hotchkiss's book and Crane's chapter, most discussions on disguise narratives in Middle English literature are confined to a section within a larger work examining disguise-tangential material (e.g. transvestism, community outsiders), or, as with Walsh's study, are only article-length. The decision to focus on one particular social group or text is understandable, as disguise is a popular trope of the genre and examples of disguise-encounters are numerous. However, these constraints equally limit the conclusions drawn about disguise to the concerns of a single social status, gender, or moment in medieval social history. This is evident from, for example, Hotchkiss's conclusion that the general goal of

³ *Masques et déguisements dans la littérature médiévale*, ed. Marie-Louise Ollier (Quebec: University of Montreal Press, 1988).

⁴ Susan Crane, 'Knights in Disguise: Identity and Incognito in Fourteenth-Century Chivalry', *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain van d'Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 63–79; Elizabeth Walsh, 'The King in Disguise', *Folklore*, 86.1 (1975), 3–24.

disguise is participation in ‘activities from which the disguised individual would be otherwise excluded’—this is not, for instance, generally the goal of knights who disguise themselves as other knights, or kings concerned to test the loyalty of those around them.⁵

Thus, the objective of this thesis is to examine disguise narratives across English medieval romance and romance-ballads by providing a greater understanding of how a character’s social position plays into the manner, purpose, and success of a disguise. In examining disguise narratives across English medieval romance and romance-ballads, this thesis aims to accomplish a series of objectives. First, to determine how disguise varies by social rank, and how these disguise motifs tap into contemporary social anxieties and concerns about social roles (e.g. kingship, knighthood, gender). Second, to better understand the ethics of disguise: under what circumstances is such a method of deception permissible? When do means justify ends, and when do they not? Third, to trace the relationship between the development of different types of disguise narratives and the recognition of the possibility of social mobility in the wake of the Black Death, the development of the yeoman class, and the expansion of the bourgeoisie. That is, to ascertain whether these disguise narratives and motifs change over time, given the social changes that England underwent during the late Middle Ages.

Some of these disguise themes, such as many of those which relate to kingship, may be more strongly conditioned than those attached to characters of other ranks and social roles, as the anxieties and qualities attendant on kingship (perceptiveness, royal duty versus personal desire) upon which disguise narratives can play did not change greatly over the course of the late Middle Ages. Other roles changed quite significantly due to the aforementioned factors (the Black Death, emergence of the yeoman class, and growth of the

⁵ Hotchkiss, p. 10.

bourgeoisie).⁶ This thesis aims to uncover whether disguise narratives reflect these changes: for example, narratives which question or support the idea that nobility is inherent and cannot be concealed, or—conversely—whether social elevation can be entirely achieved. This sort of anxiety about social mobility and nobility as a quality which can be cultivated rather than one which must be bred in the bone is evident in literary medieval sources. Take, for instance, the conservatism present in the parodic *Tournament of Tottenham*, in which the audience is invited to laugh at a potter and reeve attempting and failing to emulate knights jousting over a young woman, or Malory's *Morte Darthur bel inconnu* tales of Tor, Gareth, and Le Cote Mal Tayle: though these young heroes are originally thought to be from humble backgrounds, their high-minded goals, good manners, fair looks, and physical prowess, ultimately are all revealed to be products of noble patrilineage.⁷ By contrast, the (also late-fifteenth-century) burlesque *Undo Your Door or, The Squire of Low Degree* provides a hero of low birth who accomplishes a seemingly impossible list of feats of arms and chivalry, winning the begrudging respect of his king and ultimately marrying the king's daughter, the princess of Hungary. One of many historical examples of the growing anxiety surrounding issues of social mobility and its implications for the ideology of innate nobility can be seen in *Scrope v. Grosvener*, a legal case in which Geoffrey Chaucer was brought to witness. The families of Scrope and Grosvener both laid claim to the arms of *azure a bend or*, and the need of each of the respective families to prove that their claim to nobility preceded the other, and they were not members of the *nouveau riche*, took the case all the way to court.⁸

⁶ On the growth of the bourgeoisie and its developing tastes in romance and oral tradition, see Derek Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', *Medieval Studies*, 27 (1965) 91–116, pp. 91–93.

⁷ *The Tournament of Tottenham*, in *Sentimental and Humorous Romances*, ed. Erik Kooper, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006), 189–208. Perkyn, the potter, wishes to marry Tyb, the daughter of Rondal the Reeve. Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. P. J. C. Field, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), I, 78–98, 223–288, 360–375.

⁸ Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. 79–80, 232–233.

The relationship between chronology and genre is somewhat complicated, though, with chivalric romances such as the *Prose Merlin* being translated and circulated alongside parodic and burlesque romances (as, for instance, *Undo Your Door*), and tongue-in-cheek romances like *Sir Topas* written well before more serious romances such as *Le Morte Darthur*. Additionally, the dating of the outlaw ballads is especially difficult due to how few copies survive. There are measurable trends in romance over the course of the medieval era.⁹ However, it is social position, more than any other factor, which determines the style and shape of disguise-narratives in these texts. Therefore, I have organised the chapters not chronologically but rather by social rank: kings, knights, yeoman-outlaws—with the exception of women, whose sex supersedes their respective rank in determining how disguise-narratives are put to use. Of course, the motivations for disguise in Middle English romances are usually rooted in the biases, interests, and anxieties of the noble and gentry audiences of romance.¹⁰ Thus the research in this thesis is able to provide valuable insight

⁹ Rosalind Field, 'Romance in England, 1066–1400', *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 152–176, pp. 153–155; Helen Cooper, 'Romance after 1400', *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 690–719, pp. 690, 694.

¹⁰ The precise audience of romance continues to be a matter of discussion, though various works within the genre speak to more noble or, alternatively, more gentry or lower-gentry interests, concerns, and tastes. Pearsall argues for a non-aristocratic audience for the more 'popular' romances of the mid-thirteenth to mid-fourteenth centuries. Pearsall believes that, toward the end of the fourteenth century, 'a new class, an emergent bourgeoisie' showed a taste for well-crafted romances, while fifteenth-century romances reveal two tendencies: the 'tendency to increased sophistication' which was 'evidently directed at a more sophisticated bourgeois audience' than the 'lower or lower-middle-class audience' of the High Middle Ages, and 'the opposite tendency, [...] the regression into oral tradition'. Nicola McDonald considers the romance genre "popular" in its capacity to attract a large and heterogeneous medieval audience'. Phillipa Hardman deems many romances to be literature for youths, while Raluca Radulescu and Cory James Rushton have noted 'evidence of their widespread appeal in their own period (judged not just by number of copies, but through cross-references, evidence of readership and circulation), and the legacy they left in the post-medieval period'. Derek Pearsall, 'Middle English Romance and Its Audiences', *Historical and Editorial Studies in Medieval and Early Modern for Johan Gerritsen*, ed. Mary-Jo Arn and Hanneke Wirtjes, with Hans Jansen (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1985), 37–47, p. 42 and Derek Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', pp. 91–93, 104, 114; Nicola McDonald, 'A Polemical Introduction', *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 1–21, pp. 2, 9–10; Phillipa Hardman, 'Popular Romances and Young Readers', *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2009), 150–164, pp. 150–155, 164; Raluca Radulescu and Cory James Rushton, *A Companion to Popular Romance*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009), pp. 1–8.

into noble and gentry concerns and stereotypes about various social groups, as played out across secular literature.

Definitions of Terms: Disguise, Transformation, Revelation

It is necessary to define disguise, transformation (or, more particularly, transformation as disguise), and revelation as they are used and are to be understood for the purposes of this thesis. Disguise is, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, '[a]ltered fashion of dress and personal appearance intended to conceal the wearer's identity'.¹¹ It requires the *intention* to conceal one's identity. This thesis also considers individuals who exploit others' misidentification or lack of recognition; while their original intent may not have been to disguise themselves and deceive the other party, they do not seek to clarify or correct the other's impression and instead make use of the false identity (or lack of identification) attributed to them.

For the purposes of this thesis, analysis will be restricted to transformation *as disguise*. Transformative disguise can be wrought magically, as when Merlin enchants Uther to appear as Gorlois so that he may enter Tintagel and have sex with Igraine. They can also be a product of time, ageing, and hardships, as with Orfeo's transformed appearance. Orfeo's beard and nails grow long during his absence; his clothes are ragged and unkingly. He knows that he is unrecognisable, and he deliberately takes advantage of his transformation to test his subordinate's loyalty. Thus, characters such as the Lady of Synadowne in *Libeaus Desconus* or Alphonse the werewolf in *William of Palerne*, who have magically altered forms unwillingly thrust upon them and who do not attempt to deceive others through their altered appearances, are not considered. I have avoided Chaucer's *Wife*

¹¹ 'disguise, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2019) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/54410?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=UCevJU&>>.

of Bath's Tale and the Pearl poet's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as well, because it is unclear whether the magically-wrought appearances of the loathly lady and the green knight have any agency over their false appearances or if they, like Alphonse and the Lady of Synadowne, have been cursed to appear as such—and if so, by whom? Chaucer and the Pearl poet are, in these romances, too elusive about the mechanics of the transformations to permit robust inquiry into the nature of these characters' (possible) disguises.

One of the key research questions of this thesis is to discover how disguise narratives and disguise motifs relate to the anxieties of noble and gentry audiences regarding social statuses and social hierarchies. Consequently, characters that possess magical transformative abilities, such as enchantresses, fairies, and other magical beings who did not occupy a recognised social status in historical medieval England, will not be given a chapter of their own. Instead, I consider enchantresses alongside other women, and Nectanabus's and Merlin's magical disguises as they relate primarily to social concerns surrounding kingship.

In this thesis, 'revelation' will be used as the term for the discovery of a person's identity or the unveiling of a disguise. It is not to be understood in any theological sense. Rather, I use it to refer to the scene in a narrative in which identity is revealed. This is mostly a matter for the victim or person penetrating the disguise: they recognise the disguised individual. However, there are also some scenes where the disguise is impenetrable enough, or the victim imperceptive enough (or both), that the disguised person must ultimately abandon the ruse and reveal him- or herself to the victim.

Choice of Textual Corpus

Romances and Outlaw Ballads

Studies of Middle English romance rarely consider them alongside other genres. However, the pairing of romance with the outlaw ballads in this thesis makes sense in many ways, and modern understandings of the two genres would benefit from more comparative studies. Ballads are distinguished from romances by usually being shorter in length; they have some motifs and stock characters which are not found in romance, and often speak to lower gentry and yeoman interests, very often containing more burlesque humour. However, they also share a great number of literary similarities: both take the form of narrative verse (excepting, of course, the rare prose works such as *Le Morte Darthur* and the *Prose Merlin*). Romances such as *King Arthur and King Cornwall*, *Undo Your Door*, *Richard Coeur de Lion*, *Gamelyn*, and *The Fair Lady of Faguell* also seem to make use of the ballad's more rough-and-ready humour, while *A Gest of Robyn Hood* displays the long, interwoven narrative style of romance and shares romance motifs such as: the king incognito, awaiting a marvel or guest before feasting, and tests of hospitality and honesty. *Gamelyn* is a romance featuring lower gentry inheritance concerns, wrestling matches, and kitchen pestle fight scenes; these are more readily comparable to the escapades in the outlaw ballads than to the chivalric or 'Matter of ...' romances. Moreover, the blurring of these generic lines and the treatment of the gentry and yeomanry suggest that both the ballads and the romances under consideration in this thesis were likely enjoyed by a similar fifteenth-century gentry audience.¹² The Paston family, for example, staged a play very similar in plot and phrasing

¹² Michael Johnston discusses several members of the late medieval English gentry who were known to have read romances. Robert Thornton and the Findern family, members of the gentry class, are known to have owned romances. Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 5, 32–33, 93, 128, 159.

to *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* in the late fifteenth century, while John Paston II had a number of romances in his collection.¹³

However, some of the ethical structures and moral lines in the romances and the ballads are highly divergent from one another. *Adam Bell* favours loyalty to family and neighbours over legal ethics or community safety. Across the textual corpus Robin Hood is always treated sympathetically, yet he will happily commit forgery, theft, murder, and in one instance, body desecration; nonetheless he wields strict criteria to determine what he deems appropriate and inappropriate lying. King Mark is treated with contempt when he attempts disguise and forgery, while King Edward is portrayed as clever and sportive when he dresses in a yeoman outlaw's green tunic and terrifies his subjects in town. It is this complexity of shifting moral boundaries in texts consumed by similar audiences which initially fostered my interest in investigating outlaw ballads alongside romances: where did medieval English society (or societies) draw its lines when portraying sympathetic—and unsympathetic—characters engaging in forms of deception?

Disguises and disguise narratives are highly popular in both genres. Much can be uncovered about the relationship between social rank and acceptable levels of deception when characters are granted the freedom of disguise—that is, temporarily detaching their actions and desires from their reputations, social bonds, and status. Unfortunately, the romances provide a limited number of social groups to examine: kings, knights, noblewomen, and enchantresses (who themselves are usually noblewomen). Merlin, of course, stands apart, but the appearances of merchants, churls, palmers, or clergy are fleeting

¹³ Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne: Introduction', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 169–172, p. 169; 'Robyn Hod and the Shryff off Notyngham', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 275–280, esp. pp. 269–270; G. A. Lester, 'The Books of a Fifteenth-Century English Gentleman, Sir John Paston', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 88.2 (1987), 200–217. The similarities, shared interests, and blurred generic lines between the romances and the medieval outlaw ballads are also discussed by Peter Coss in Peter Coss, 'Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances Local Society and Robin Hood', *Past and Present*, 108.1 (1985), 35–79.

and they do not dress in disguise—it is only the nobility who disguise themselves as persons of lower rank, and they do so in order to deceive other nobles. Happily, while much fewer in number than the surviving romances, the outlaw ballads are less discriminating and draw their character stock from a wider range of society—the king and the knight are there, to be sure, but so are merchants, artisans, yeomen, bishops, and of course, the sheriff, each acting with intent to deceive or reacting to those who would deceive them. By considering disguise narratives within both romances and outlaw ballads, this thesis aims to provide a more comprehensive, complex view of disguise narratives across Middle English popular fiction.¹⁴

Time-span

The dates of the texts under consideration in this thesis can be grouped loosely into three categories: those composed (or rendered into English) before the Black Death (mid-thirteenth through mid-fourteenth century), those composed between the end of the fourteenth century and the mid-fifteenth century—that is, roughly during the Black Death and the Hundred Years War—and those written from the Wars of the Roses into the Henrician period, the mid-fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries. The possibility of social mobility—and with it, shifts in how Middle English authors and translators thought about kings, aristocracy, yeomen, and social organisation—became greater with the sudden population decrease and opportunities for social advancement provided by both the Black

¹⁴ Medieval English disguise literature constitutes a large corpus of texts; as this thesis is concerned specifically with disguise motifs and themes in Middle English romances and outlaw ballads from the mid-thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, there are some insular texts with disguise motifs that I have excluded for reasons of language, time period, and/or provenance (e.g. the *Folie Tristan* or the *Gesta Herewardi* and the Scottish romance *Eger and Grime*). There are also, inevitably, other texts which fall within the parameters of this thesis but to which I have elected not to devote particular attention, notably non-Malorian texts which contain narratives of knights in disguise. As I state below in ‘Chapter Summaries’, knights in disguise proliferate in Middle English romance; it is a highly popular trope in the genre. There are simply too many depictions of knights disguising themselves or obscuring their identity to take them all into consideration within the scope of this thesis.

Death and two wars. Take, for instance, the social mobility illustrated by the Chaucer family: Chaucer's father was a vintner; he himself a civil servant. His son was knighted and served as chief butler to four kings, and his granddaughter Alice became the Duchess of Suffolk, a lady of the Order of the Garter, and Margaret of Anjou was released into her keeping. Over four generations the family rose from merchant class to extremely high-ranking nobility.

One of the project's original research aims was to investigate changing trends in the depictions of disguise over the course of the later Middle Ages—prior to, during, and following the huge change in social mobility that was a product of the demographic collapse caused by the Black Death; and the emergence and growth of the gentry and yeoman classes. While some responses to shifting social hierarchies can be seen in yeoman ballads (take, for example, the interest of *The Tale of Gamelyn* in inheritance laws as opposed to the concerns illustrated within *Robin Hood and the Potter*, discussed in chapter four), my research shows that, particularly in chivalric romance, not all types of disguise narratives display a pattern of major changes over time. There is a certain timelessness to stories about the stranger amongst us, of the interloper hiding in plain sight—and, equally, the fear of being found out. Some narratives are very clearly influenced by the era in which they were composed (as I will outline below); yet more of the material demonstrates an independence from historical contexts. The ethics of disguise are tied more closely to social rank and genre. Thus, another of the key points of interest which drew me to this project is the disparate ethics at play in earlier chivalric romances and later burlesque romances (for example, *King Horn* as opposed to *King Arthur and King Cornwall*), between figures of various social ranks and positions, and between ballads and romances, even those contemporary with each other. While kingly figures must rely on equivocation and suggestion to deceive others in order to maintain audience sympathy, women of virtue (Grisandolus, Josian) can lie outright and remain heroines. Robin Hood's men may trick and pretend, but they treat those who

attempt to lie bald-facedly to them with swift and unsparing justice. Because this thesis is interested in part in determining whether disguise motifs and narratives change over time, or over genre as romance evolves and hybridises with burlesque and ballad, I consider a substantial number of romances and outlaw ballads.

There is a longstanding and widespread presence of disguise themes in literature, stretching back to at least classical myth and early Abrahamic tradition.¹⁵ Several of the plots of the romances examined in this thesis derive from these early works: *Sir Orfeo* has its roots in *Orpheus and Eurydice*; the Alexander romances are of course sprang from the life of (and mythology surrounding) Alexander the Great; part of the ‘Grisandolus’ section of the *Prose Merlin* hearkens back to Joseph’s encounter with Potiphar’s wife in the book of Genesis. Recognition and mis-recognition are central in Odysseus’s return home and Oedipus’s tragedy, and are echoed in Rinnild’s recognition of Horn and Degare’s near-wedding to his own mother in *Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild* and *Sir Degare*, respectively.¹⁶ These plots often developed into romances on the continent before they were adapted for medieval English audiences; key differences between the disguise plots and motifs in these earlier continental works and their later English adaptations are noted throughout this thesis. The ballads have a somewhat different set of traditions than the romances, though many of the medieval Robin Hood ballad plotlines derive from the earlier French and Anglo-Norman romances *Eustace li Moine* and *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*. However, while the plots of the texts examined in this thesis derive from these earlier traditions, and motifs of disguise are integral to their plotting, this thesis primarily focusses on an analysis of the medieval meanings of those motifs, especially in relation to social and historical

¹⁵ For a discussion on the different disguise plots of classical literature, and the various types of recognition devices in classical epic, see Terence Cave, *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 1–3, 15–24, and esp. p. 38.

¹⁶ More examples of folkloric disguise narratives which are used in medieval romance can be found in Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*: Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1955–1958), VI.i, pp. 213–214 and IV, pp. 395–406.

contexts; it is particularly concerned with how the meanings and use of disguise, transformation, and revelation relate to English concerns and readers.

The earliest extant Middle English romances were created between c. 1240 and c. 1375.¹⁷ Several of the disguise narratives in the earlier romances (*King Horn* and *Horn Childe and Maiden Rimmild*, *Havelok the Dane*, *Sir Orfeo*) are on the whole more concerned with tales of rightful kings or heirs to the throne who must take back from usurpers what is properly theirs (though in the case of *Floris and Blancheflour*, Floris must venture in disguise to reclaim his future queen). Themes of right by conquest, homecoming, and claiming rightful inheritance/rank equally suffuse early romances *King Alisaunder* and *Alexander A*, *Libeaus Desconus*, *Lay le Freine*, *Sir Beves of Hamtoun*, *Sir Degare*, *Amis and Amiloun* and *William of Palerne*. Earlier versions of *Horn* and *Havelok* can be found in Anglo-Norman texts from the mid- to late-twelfth century; the earliest extant version of the story of *Floris and Blancheflour* is a French text composed c. 1160.¹⁸ It is easy to understand Anglo-Norman nobles' interests in narratives in which the heroes who do not appear to be legitimate kings or heirs (dressed as they are in cloaks of old sailcloth, musicians' weeds, or merchants' clothes) reveal themselves to be the rightful rulers of their respective kingdoms, or (in the case of texts like *Lay le Freine* and *Sir Degare*, legitimate heirs) by heritage and by conquest. The later English renditions of these Anglo-Norman and French-based

¹⁷ Derek Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', p. 91; K. Brunner, 'Middle English Metrical Romances and Their Audience', *Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Professor A. C. Bough*, ed. MacEdward Leach (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 219–226, esp. pp. 220–222.

¹⁸ Rosalind Field, 'The Curious History of the Matter of England', *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), 29–42, p. 30; G. V. Smithers, 'Introduction', *Havelok*, ed. G. V. Smithers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), xi–xciii, pp. xvi–xvii. 'Both Horn and Havelok the Dane belong to a group of poems known as the Matter of England, late medieval romances based in part on the oral folk culture that survived the Norman Conquest', in Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, 'Havelok the Dane: Introduction', *Four Romances of England*, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), 73–84, p. 73. The editors note that '[t]he story of Havelok is first attested in lines 37–818 of Geoffrey Gaimar's Anglo-Norman *Estoire des Engleis* of about 1135–40'. Judith Weiss, 'Thomas and the Earl: Literary and Historical Contexts for the Romance of Horn', *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance*, ed. Rosalind Field (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1999), 1–13, pp. 1–2. Laura Hibbard Loomis, *Medieval Romance in England: A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclic Metrical Romances* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1960), p. 184.

romances surface during the reigns of Henry III and Edward I, in the wake of John's loss of the Angevin empire and throughout Edward's campaigns in Wales and Scotland. These tales of heirs whose lands (and lovers) have been wrenched away by other kings, older relatives, and self-serving advisors, who seek to recapture what they consider theirs, may have seemed particularly pertinent to a late-thirteenth and early fourteenth-century noble audience.¹⁹ Moreover, the disguise episodes present in earlier romances largely involve either men disguising themselves to deceive other men of similar social status, or of women disguising themselves as men of a similar or marginally lower rank as themselves for purposes of safety, (physical) mobility, or inheritance. This reflects a hierarchical society which was fairly stable and did not permit much in the way of social mobility. Thus, the disguises present in the narratives do not reflect anxieties about social mobility; they instead act as plot devices, allowing characters to travel or to display their wit or their physical prowess when they would not be able to do so in their own person.

Texts under consideration in this thesis which fall in the middle of the aforementioned timespan, from the end of the fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century, include *Launfal*, *Apollonius of Tyre*, *Sir Tryamour*, *Generides*, *Gamelyn*, *Sir Gowther*, *Torrent of Portyngale*, the *Alliterative Morte Arthur*, the *Wars of Alexander* (*Alexander C*) and the *Prose Merlin*. Popular themes amongst many of them include maintaining an economic standing appropriate to the rank into which the protagonist has been born, and recognition by loved ones despite poor outward appearances, both of which are particularly suitable to a time of social instability and flux.

Following the ravages of the Black Death (1348–1362, with intermittent outbreaks up through the fifteenth century), in which an estimated forty to fifty percent of England's

¹⁹ Cf. Field, 'Romance in England, 1066–1400', pp. 153–155.

population died, the social hierarchy of England underwent significant changes.²⁰ The loss of half to two-thirds of the population led to a marked degree of enhanced social mobility previously unafforded to English subjects. The population dip contributed directly to the rise of the wage economy in the countryside.²¹ The uncoupling of many individuals' ties to estates under remaining feudal structures occurred concomitantly with their subsequent movement from country to town. This movement to cities was brought about by, and subsequently led to a greater, demand for goods and services; this demand and the movement to cities from the country allowed former peasant farmers the opportunity to become artisans and merchants. The rise of a cash economy went hand-in-hand with the rise of the gentry, while cash-poor aristocrats who had relied on receiving revenues from estates found themselves lacking the manpower and resources to keep those estates running.²² Many aristocrats saw participation in the Hundred Years War, and with it the possibility of winning ransoms from captured French aristocrats, a solution to their monetary problems. But raising men to take to France cost money, and between the ravages of the Black Death and the lives lost in the Hundred Years War, the aristocracy found themselves lacking both the funds to pay for military expeditions and suitable matches for their offspring—ones who had both pedigree and wealth. Marrying into the bourgeois ranks for their wealth was a practical solution that led to increased permeability between the social groups.²³ It is likely that the popularity of disguise narratives in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries reflects this social change, insofar as these narratives usually seek to reassure their audiences that nobility is an inherent quality that cannot be successfully concealed by feigning a lower-

²⁰ Edward Miller and John Hatcher, *Medieval England: Rural Society and Economic Change 1086–1348* (London: Longman, 1978), p. 147.

²¹ David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360–1430* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 26–31, 48.

²² Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity*, pp. 26–31, 48.

²³ Carolyne Larrington, *Brothers and Sisters in Medieval European Literature* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2015), p. 52.

class background (a theme present in earlier romances as well) and, more to the point, that those who have apparently improved their social station are only pretending to be what they are not, and will never truly fit into courtly society. Chivalric romance narratives such as ‘The Tale of Gareth’ as well as lower-brow romances and outlaw ballads such as *A Gest of Robyn Hode* reflect these themes: Gareth’s kitchen-boy disguise cannot hide his royal bloodline, and though Robin may be given a royal allowance and enter the court at King Edward’s invitation, he fails to thrive and soon returns to Barnesdale forest.

Other key social changes in the fifteenth century are the continued growth of the gentry class and more specifically, the emergence of yeomanry as a distinct intermediate social group, positioned between the gentry and husbandmen-artisan classes. These changes are reflected in the disguise-narratives of both romances and ballads. Parodic and burlesque romances and outlaw ballads show a developing taste for heroes who display a looser sense of acceptable duplicity and more middling-rank values, interests, and concerns than their more aristocratic predecessors. That these texts should target more middle-rank tenets and matters, and be less confined to the interests of a long-standing aristocracy, is not surprising given the social mobility of the era and the emergence and growth of yeoman and gentry classes who both owned and featured in these new romances and ballads.²⁴ Regarding the changing ethics evident in these late-medieval texts, authors and redactors writing in the fifteenth century cast a more critical, even sceptical, eye on the idealised form of chivalry that they inherited from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Knighthood was changing as the fourteenth century gave way to the fifteenth, becoming the domain of the courtier and politician; chivalry was on the way out.²⁵ Take, for example, Geoffrey Chaucer’s depiction of a knight as a crusader, and in the next generation, the knight’s squire, who is more courtier

²⁴ Cf. My discussion on the contents of John Paston II’s library, above.

²⁵ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 200, 206, 237; Richard Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 120, 123, 150–154.

than warrior. Chaucer's own knighted son Thomas, distinguished himself as a courtier, politician, and an estate manager and not through feats of arms and chivalry.²⁶ The changing nature of chivalry and how knighthood was socially defined (e.g. from the warriors of the Crusades and the Hundred Years War developing into courtiers and members of the gentry largely concerned with estate management) impacted romances' depictions of knighthood: later texts' critiques of late-medieval chivalry take the form of parody and burlesque, or, for Malory, in the form of a nostalgic 'hearkening back' to the chivalry of previous generations.

In the latter half of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century we see the form of romance shift significantly as well. Burlesque and parodic forms of romance, like *Undo Your Door* and *King Arthur and King Cornwall* are composed, and romance is blended with the outlaw ballad in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*. While 'rymes of Robin Hood' and other outlaws had existed since at least 1377, when Langland mentioned them in *Piers Plowman*, the surviving fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century outlaw ballads of *Robin Hood and the Monk*, *Robin Hood and the Potter*, and *Adam Bell, Clim o' the Clough, and William of Cloudesley* deal with a very different set of yeoman- and lower-gentry values and concerns than those explored in, for example, the fourteenth-century *Tale of Gamelyn*, and Chaucer's *Yeoman and Canon's Yeoman*, are not the aspiring social climbers with inflated opinions of their positions that these later ballad yeoman are portrayed as.²⁷ Cleverness, trickery, and the (in)ability to mimic other social groups and ranks rule the day, while in *Gamelyn* the eponymous hero's chief concern is the unfairness of primogeniture inheritance laws. Middle English romances change as well: they increase in length and incorporate chronicle and travel literature traditions. Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* becomes

²⁶ Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life*, p. 450. See also Albert C. Baugh, 'Kirk's Life Records of Thomas Chaucer', *PMLA*, 47.2 (1932), 461–515.

²⁷ William Langland, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman, together with Vita de Dowel, Dobet, et Dobest, Secundum Wit et Resoun*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, EETS (London: Trübner, 1886), Passus V, ll. 401–402.

a last hurrah for the high chivalric romances of earlier times, as the generic form adapts near the end of the fifteenth century to fit new tastes. Take, for example, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, which signal a new kind of hybridisation of romance with other literary aims, whether allegorical or pastoral. Of course, such change was not instantaneous nor was it catholic: the high chivalric romance *Amadis of Gaul* was translated into English in the 1590s.²⁸ However, even the end of Malory's book acknowledges the death of the old form of chivalry: by the end of the Battle of Camlann, nearly all of Arthur's knights are dead, and those who remain soon give up their errantry and take up holy orders. Caxton's preface to *Le Morte Darthur* speaks of 'the noble actes of chyvalrye' as deeds of the literary past, speaking of the end of the fifteenth century as a time when Arthurian chivalric romance was falling out of fashion and chronicles 'make of hym no mencyon ne remember hym noo thyng, ne of his knyghtes'.²⁹

Disguise-narratives which stem from audience anxieties about the king's ability to perceive the dishonest and disingenuous people who surrounded and advised him, on the other hand, never seem to go out of fashion, for the pressures of courtly preferment remain a constant. These concerns remain at the forefront of the texts considered in this thesis from the mid-thirteenth through the early sixteenth centuries. Other disguise narratives more closely reflect the anxieties or interests of their time. Texts written during the Wars of the Roses show a shift in thinking about social organisation and aristocracy. Malory's Lancelot is treated sympathetically when he chooses to disguise himself as Kay, while, in the thirteenth-century French source material, Lancelot dresses in Kay's armour by accident, thereby maintaining his integrity. And Orfeo's equivocations to maintain his beggar's persona follow a burgeoning interest in casuistry, both inside and outside religious and

²⁸ Helen Moore, 'Romance: *Amadis de Gaule* and John Barclay's *Argenis*', *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose 1500–1640*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 56–73, p. 56.

²⁹ William Caxton, 'Prologue to "Le Morte Darthur"', *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. P. J. C. Field, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), II, 854–857, pp. 855, 856.

university settings: under what circumstances is it ethically acceptable to lie?³⁰ This thesis investigates whether there are any noticeable changes in means-ends justification for deception across genre, social rank, and era. The changes in the ethics surrounding disguise could be more genre-related or period-related; this will become evident as the thesis unfolds.

Methodology

In addition to using literary criticism to approach the romances and outlaw ballads, I also favour a socio-historical model. As evident in the section immediately above, social history shares a close relationship with the creation, performance, and reception of literature. Literature can respond to specific political or historical events, or to general anxieties and cultural beliefs of a specific period, social rank, or region. Romances can be created, adapted, and refashioned to cater to specific aristocratic or gentry tastes, and thus provide valuable evidence through which to gain insight into the generational as well as the day-to-day concerns of the social groups that comprised their audiences. For example, Michael Johnston points out that, looking at the late medieval period,

romance underwrote the gentry's emergence, reassuring such readers that they belonged to the upper echelons of society. In this vein, the gentry romances can be placed alongside other social practices that likewise assured the gentry of local preeminence: their adoption of coats of arms; their employment in service to the crown on the county level as sheriffs, escheators, coroners, JPs, Knights of the Shire, or tax collectors; their use of social titles (knight, esquire, gentleman); and their function as local luminaries in the running of manorial courts.³¹

Just so, romances can, like tax records, court documents, and the issuing of coats of arms, be used to improve our understanding of social history as much as our understanding of them can be improved through approaching them using a social-historical model.

³⁰ Emily Corran, *Lying and Perjury in Medieval Practical Thought: A Study in the History of Casuistry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 20–25, 44.

³¹ Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry in Late Medieval England*, p. 15.

Due to the socio-historical interests of this thesis, I have used a variety of methodologies that draw on (in addition to previous literary analyses of the texts) historical events, social and political theories, and some pertinent aspects of English legal culture to contextualise these disguise narratives. Chapter one uses traditional historical contextualisation and political theory to analyse depictions of kings in disguise and kings' marked inability, generally, to perceive disguise. Chapter two's analysis of women and disguise incorporates theories of medieval memory culture, medical knowledge (or rather, beliefs), and gender theory. The single-text case study of knights and disguise in chapter three, by contrast, uses a more strictly literary methodology of close reading and comparison of the text with its source materials.³² Chapter four uses historical contextualisation to consider how Robin Hood ballads reflect the changing status of yeomen and the emergence of a distinct yeoman class. It compares the ballads to earlier outlaw romances and compares the ethical structures present in the ballads with those put forward by chivalric romance. Finally, I make use of a recent archaeological discovery in Yorkshire combined with local medieval folklore to elucidate the significance of a heretofore largely misunderstood moment of disguise and ritualistic violence in *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*.

Chapter summaries

How disguise operates is largely determined by the individuals' social status. They reflect certain beliefs and anxieties associated with those social positions. Therefore, the following chapters each focus on a particular rank or status-defined group: kings, women, knights, and yeomen outlaws.

³² For a thorough and exemplary social history reading of *Le Morte Darthur*, see Raluca Radulescu, *The Gentry Context for Malory's Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), as well as Hyonjin Kim, *The Knight without the Sword: A Social Landscape of Malorian Chivalry* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000).

Chapter one examines kings in disguise and kings encountering disguised individuals. King-in-disguise narratives confront questions such as: what distinguishes the true king from other claimants? What can happen when an anointed king behaves inappropriately? And a concern particularly relevant to English subjects who frequently faced an absentee king—one in France or on Crusade: *where* is the king? The chapter considers two of the primary motives for kingly disguise: disguise for investigative purposes and as a form of carnivalesque release, with particular attention paid to *A Gest of Robyn Hode* and the burlesque romance *King Arthur and King Cornwall*. It then looks at the ethics of physical deception (disguise) compared with verbal deception (lying, equivocation) and incidental transformations as disguise, examining Orfeo in the eponymous romances, Nectanabus the sorcerer-king in the Alexander romances, and the sympathetic magic inherent in the animal skins worn by rightful king William of Palerne. Finally, the chapter investigates the popular motif of kings as characters who are significantly less able than other characters to detect disguise. This royal imperceptiveness plays upon audience anxieties surrounding the king's ability to detect traitors and the deceitful machinations of self-interested advisors. Attention is also paid to the mechanics of detecting magically-wrought disguise, with a close examination of the *Prose Merlin*.

Chapter two considers women's relationships to disguise. These women fit within a variety of social ranks: queens, enchantresses, noblewomen, beggars, and merchants' wives. However, insofar as female characters are depicted disguising themselves and recognising others in disguise, it seems that considerations of gender trump those of social status. Consequently, I treat womanhood as its own social status in my analysis. Mirroring the final section of the previous chapter, the first section of this chapter examines disguise

recognition as a largely gendered ability, particularly object-triggered recognition.³³ I consider the unique historical roles that women had particularly as memory keepers, drawing on the work of Mary Carruthers and relying on a methodology of cultural memory studies. I also consider materiality in romance recognition scenes which rely on the presence of mnemonic objects. I then turn to women who disguise themselves, and as with chapter one, considers the texts alongside particularly historical phenomena. Characters under discussion include Josian's numerous disguises in *Beves of Hamtoun*, Grisandolus as knight in the *Prose Merlin*, and in the 1505 ballad *Adam Bell, Clim o' the Clough, and William of Cloudesley*, an elderly woman whose charade as a person with a disability allows her to spy on her neighbours while taking advantage of their charity. Female magic and body doubles are also discussed in this chapter.

Knights in disguise proliferate in Middle English romance; it is a highly popular trope in the genre. There are simply too many depictions of knights disguising themselves or obscuring their identity to take them all into consideration within the scope of this thesis. Therefore, chapter three provides a single-text case study of disguised knights: Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. There are two reasons why I have chosen this text to serve as a case study for knights in disguise. First, its format of multiple shorter narratives which each highlight different knights as their protagonists; this provides several examples of disguised knights, each with different motivations, considerations of individual character, and narrative outcomes. Secondly, as Malory adapts several earlier works from previous centuries, his version of the Arthurian legend provides disguise narratives which are at once representative of popular texts throughout the high and late medieval eras. Also, looking at Malory's editorial changes compared with earlier source materials gives insight into

³³ Some of the research findings presented in this section have been published in Mikayla Hunter, 'Memory, Gender, and Recognition in *Le Morte Darthur*', *Journal of the International Arthurian Society*, 6.1 (2018), 3–24.

knightly disguise narratives in the late fifteenth century specifically—a period in which, as mentioned above, the romance genre was reaching the end of its popularity and knighthood as a profession rather than a gentry social status was dying out.

This chapter is organised by individual tales within *Le Morte Darthur*, applying to each Frederic Jameson's theories on the Other as the revealed ally in unknown knight narratives, and illustrating the knights'—and Arthur's—preoccupation with theatricality, the relationship between performativity and identity, and attention to face: honour and reputation. I look at disguise within 'Balyn' and 'Arthur and Accolon', two of the earlier books of *Le Morte Darthur* which both end in the deaths of Arthur's knights as they fight unwittingly against other members of their fellowship—in Balyn's case, his own brother. I argue that the series of disguises undertaken by Lancelot in the 'Book of Sir Lancelot du Lac' and the 'Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere' reflect his increased distancing of himself from the Round Table. Finally, I consider 'The Tale of Gareth' as a coming-of-age narrative in which Gareth's overindulgence in theatricality and disguise reveal a lingering childishness.

The final chapter looks at yeomen outlaws in disguise. It enters an ongoing conversation within the field of Robin Hood studies regarding the social position of yeomen.³⁴ The expansion of yeomanry as a unique social rank in the later part of the medieval period has predominantly been studied in linguistic and legal contexts. This chapter looks at the matter from a literary perspective, in the ballads of *Robin Hood and the Potter*, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, and *A Gest of Robyn Hode*. These ballads depict Robin

³⁴ See, for example, J. C. Holt, 'The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood', *Past and Present*, 18.1 (1960), 89–110, pp. 89–99; R. H. Hilton, 'The Origins of Robin Hood', *Past and Present*, 14 (1958), 30–44, p. 41; Maurice Keen, 'Robin Hood: A Peasant Hero', *History Today*, 41.10 (1958), 20–25; Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. xvii; Richard Almond and A. J. Pollard, 'The Yeomanry of Robin Hood and Social Terminology in Fifteenth-Century England', *Past & Present*, 170 (2001), 52–77, pp. 52–53; Colin Richmond, 'An Outlaw and Some Peasants: The Possible Significance of Robin Hood', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 37 (1993), 90–101, pp. 99–101.

and Little John in a series of disguises which essentially show the yeomen trying—and failing—to fit in with other social groups: merchants, artisans, and courtiers. I explore questions about the performativity of social roles within the ballads of *Robin Hood and the Potter*, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, and *A Gest of Robyn Hode* and how that performativity relates to the growing social mobility discussed above.

The chapter culminates in a close reading of *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*. The single extant manuscript survives in the Percy Folio. While the copy dates from the mid-seventeenth century, it shares the plot and similar phrasing to the play ‘Robyn Hod and the Shryff off Notyngham’, which was produced by the Paston family in 1475.³⁵ Helen Phillips notes that the text is ‘linguistically indicative of medieval origin’, and has argued persuasively for its inclusion in the medieval corpus of Robin Hood poems.³⁶ Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren agree that it ‘may well date from the fifteenth century’ with little change to its present form, and Francis Child and D. C. Fowler consider it to be ‘one of the earliest Robin Hood ballads’.³⁷ The ballad provides what has thus far proven to be one of the most puzzling disguise narratives in both medieval English ballads and romance, involving a horse hide cloak, ritualistic desecration of a body, and exchanging clothes with a corpse. Ultimately we will see how the switch to a different genre and an historically later context than many of the aforementioned romances shows how the motif of disguise is adapted in new hybridizing genre models, as I draw together my findings in the conclusion of this thesis.

³⁵ ‘Robyn Hod and the Shryff off Notyngham’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, pp. 269–270.

³⁶ Helen Phillips, ‘Review of *Early Rymes of Robin Hood: An Edition of the Texts, ca. 1425–1600*, ed. by Thomas H. Ohlgren and Lister M. Matheson’, *Speculum*, 92.3 (2017), 871–873, p. 873.

³⁷ Knight and Ohlgren, ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne: Introduction’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, p. 169; Francis Child, ‘118: Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne’, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. (New York: Dover, 1965), III, pp. 89–91; D. C. Fowler, ‘Ballads’, *The Manual of Writings in Middle English 1050–1550*, ed. A. D. Hartung, et al., 11 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1980), VI, 1753–1808, p. 1782.

CHAPTER ONE

KINGLY DESIRE AND IMPERCEPTION

To assume a disguise is actively to assume another identity, however temporarily. The paradox of this act is that a character's behaviour whilst in disguise often reveals more about his or her true nature than the behaviour he exhibits openly. Kings both in medieval romances and outlaw ballads are in a unique position because the strict pervasive ideology surrounding their political role shapes their public personas and actions. To be a good king is to place the interests of the realm ahead of one's own desires. Thus it is through depicting kings in non-kingly disguise that authors are able to highlight their individual personalities and private desires—and the problems that can arise when a king's public and private identities are discordant (though, of course, kings can and do adopt disguises for other reasons, such as personal safety. These other reasons will be discussed later in the chapter).

A king's identity in medieval society—and here I am talking mainly about England—was wedded to his political role, and to his adherence to the duties of kingship. The king was held to be the arbiter of justice, dispensing fair punishment and reward and ensuring good laws were created and observed.¹ It is a position that was mutually beneficial to king and subject:

people came to expect that royal justice would really be more fair and impartial than they could have gotten from the decisions of lords of the manors to whom they might take their cases [...] Any medieval king, who would be judged himself on the basis of how well he kept the peace and defended the realm, had substantial motivation to keep his people satisfied

¹ Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum*, III.ii.1, fol. 267r in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–1450*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 484. Burns writes that, while *De regimine principum* was not specifically written for, or by, an English author, it is representative of medieval political ideas that extended to England. 'Giles' blend of the traditional "Mirror of Princes" style with maxims from Cicero and Isidore, the new Aristotelian ethical and political teaching, and a smattering of Roman law, swept the board. It enjoyed wide circulation in Latin among the learned, was translated into all the major vernaculars of western Europe, and, even more significantly, it penetrated into the libraries of men in government', J. H. Burns, *Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–1450*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 483–84.

and loyal. Settling their disputes fairly was a means of insuring both, while, of course, promoting his own status, power, and wealth at the same time.²

Subjects often looked to the king for relief for other ills as well, from poverty and poor quality of life through royal almsgiving, to use of taxes for the public good such as founding schools (as with Henry VI and the foundation of Eton and King's College, Cambridge) and town defence, to the belief that the king could cure ailments, particularly scrofula, with the mere touch of his hands.³

Equally, the king was expected to devote himself to securing and enhancing the safety and prosperity of the realm, and to choose his actions accordingly. This included defending against invasion and foreign enemies, promoting peace within the realm, and having a good justification for engaging in foreign wars and promoting peace within the realm.⁴ Take, for instance, Arthur's battle with the emperor of Rome in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*: Arthur is portrayed willingly and skilfully engaging in battle with the emperor of Rome when the emperor threatens Britain's independence by demanding fealty and tribute from Arthur. However, when considering the opportunity to continue pressing on to Jerusalem, Arthur as a good king declines, choosing to return to Logres instead of pursuing foreign and unnecessary battles.⁵ What is considered 'good justification' for engaging in

² Henry A. Myers, *Medieval Kingship* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), p. 187. Robert Rouse has discussed a different motif from the one I will be discussing in this chapter, the 'motif of the safety of the King's roads', as a means by which authors demonstrated good kings as those who created and enforced laws so well that merchants and travellers could walk through the kingdom unmolested. Motifs involving kingly characters are often reflective of concepts of good—or bad—medieval rulership. Robert Rouse, 'The Peace of the Roads: Authority and Auctoritas in Medieval Romance', *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: Boydell, 2008), 115–128, p. 116.

³ Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London: Routledge, 1973), pp. 51–91, especially 65–69 and 90–91. Bloch's work has been criticised by Frank Barlow, who argues for kings' ability to cure a variety of diseases and ailments. Frank Barlow, 'The King's Evil', *The English Historical Review*, 95.374 (1980), 3–27, pp. 17, 24–25. Sometimes this ability was used as part of legitimising political rhetoric, such as the miracle tale of a family refusing to allow the 'usurper' Richard III to touch their scrofula-suffering daughter, instead bringing her to the tomb of Henry VI to be healed. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–1580* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 164.

⁴ Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum*, defending the realm, III.ii.8: 1556, fol. 279v; keeping peace, III.ii.1: 1556, fol. 266v, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought*, ed. J. H. Burns, p. 484.

⁵ Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. P. J. C. Field, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), I, pp. 145–53, 186–89; Meg Roland, 'Arthur and the Turks', *Arthuriana*, 16.4 (2006), 29–42, p. 30.

foreign wars is, of course, period-dependent. This view in *Le Morte Darthur*, that a refusal to go on Crusade is the marker of a good king, is particularly reflective of the text's fifteenth-century date; such a refusal would not have been considered an indication of a good king in the thirteenth century. Territorial expansion was considered a strong justification for war, as was winning back territory that had been previously lost. English magnates had investments in the Hundred Years War, and Henry VI was deposed in part because of his lack of enthusiasm for continuing to engage in it. Richard II as well was viewed unfavourably in part due to his reluctance to ramp up English engagement in the Hundred Years War. But even the ideas of territorial expansion and reclamation were not always considered 'just' causes for war: in the 1390s, for instance, the Church voiced concern about the justification of Christian kings fighting one another.⁶

Keeping peace within the realm required the good treatment of loyal barons, ensuring their continued loyalty and support through acts of generosity and taking their counsel into consideration.⁷ Equally, the king had to be shrewd and powerful, able to 'prevent sedition amongst his magnates' as well as among 'royal officials whose interests were pitted against the interests of the great landholders'.⁸ Also crucial to the stability of the kingdom was the king's capacity to ensure secure succession through the begetting of a legitimate and undisputed heir. This duty is two-fold. First, the king must keep a close eye

⁶ John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 254; Nigel Saul, 'Richard II, King of England', *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 23 May 2019, <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-II-king-of-England>>.

⁷ John of Salisbury, *Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis Policratici; sive, De Nugis Curialium et Vestigiis Philosophorum, Libri VII*, ed. Clemens C. I. Webb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909), IV.vi.28–30. Andrew Lynch notes a change between Geoffrey of Monmouth's and Wace's views on peace as a mere interlude between wars, and the value Lazamon places on peace in the realm. Gawain's speech on the joys of peace, for instance, which follows the arrival of unfriendly Roman messengers in Arthur's court, reflects a new development in thinking that peace is better than war—earlier views held peace to be the indication of a weak king. Andrew Lynch, "'Blisse wes on londe": The Feeling of Peace in Lazamon's *Brut*', *Emotions and War: Medieval to Romantic Literature*, ed. Stephanie Downes, Andrew Lynch, and Katrina O'Loughlin (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), 42–59, pp. 42–3, 48–51.

⁸ *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought*, p. 484, on Giles of Rome, III.ii.15:1556, fol. 290v; John Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 68.

on his household, ensuring the fidelity and fertility of his queen.⁹ Secondly, he must protect the safety of his person and not place himself in unnecessarily dangerous situations, such as going to fight in person in foreign wars or undertaking knightly but un-kingly adventures.¹⁰ This is particularly important when the succession is not secured, for example, when the heir is young, incompetent, disputed, or non-existent.

Most importantly, as ‘both a cult figure and a ruler’ the king needed to secure public support for his rule.¹¹ Generosity to loyal subjects, public appearances and formal processions, and dispensing justice all contributed to building a rapport with subjects and garnering their respect. Moreover, as many contemporaries believed the king to be ‘divinely ordained to exercise power on earth’ and the embodiment of his people,¹² it was desirable for the king to display charisma, a sense of celebrity and eminence. Without the ability to win the support of his people, a king might not only find himself unable to execute his will, but find himself deposed, as a tyrant was not considered by many to be a true king.¹³

However, while the ideology of kingship provided a model of behaviour for English kings that, in theory, should result in a peaceful and politically stable realm, in practice their subjects frequently found themselves faced with absent, incompetent, unpopular, or self-serving leaders, sometimes with questionable claims to the throne. Questions such as ‘What distinguishes the true king from other claimants?’, ‘What can happen when an anointed king behaves in an unkingly or unpopular way?’, or simply ‘*Where* is the king?’ were at stake for the people commissioning, writing, and consuming romances, from thirteenth-century

⁹ Peggy McCracken has examined the motif of the adulterous queen in medieval romance and historical succession anxieties in-depth in Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

¹⁰ For example, kings and those close in line to the throne participating in tournaments, where crippling or ‘fatal tourneying casualties’ were high, like the head injuries sustained by Robert de Clermont, the brother of Philip III of France, in 1279 which ‘left him largely incapacitated for the rest of his life’. Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 83–101, especially p. 87.

¹¹ Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, p. 67; cf. Giles of Rome, III.ii.36: 1556, fol. 326v in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought*, p. 484–485.

¹² Myers, p. 247; John of Salisbury, IV.i.4.

¹³ Myers, p. 247. John of Salisbury, IV.i.1,5; IV.ii.6–7, VII.xvii.336–339.

French sources to the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English authors and audiences reinterpreting them.

For a great part of the Angevin rule, the English people were confronted with absentee kings and the myriad issues which arose from that. The Plantagenet kings by and large spent their lives away from their kingdom, preferring to live in France. Henry II's 'inability to manage his own family' resulted in his sons and wife fleeing court and placing themselves politically and physically under Louis VII's sphere of influence, entrenching the kingdom in war and threatening England with a potential succession crisis.¹⁴ Richard I 'notoriously spent only six months of a ten-year reign in England' and while his chivalric spirit was approved of by contemporaries, his passions—against his father, for war, and in marriage—were heavily taxing, both literally and figuratively, upon his subjects.¹⁵ His crusading campaigns and subsequent two-year foreign imprisonment and ransom were economically draining.¹⁶ Moreover, whether motivated by political or amorous desires, his decision to covertly marry Berengaria of Navarre instead of Alice, sister of King Philip Augustus of France, to whom he had been betrothed, fuelled a war between Richard and Philip—who had previously been Richard's ally.¹⁷ John, incompetent, un-chivalric, ill-liked by his barons, and who held 'a record of treachery', lost almost all the crown's lands in France, abused his authority to the point at which England was temporarily placed under interdict, and offended and mistreated his barons so much that they revolted against him, culminating in the barons' demands as formulated in Magna Carta in 1215.¹⁸

Later kings such as Henry III, Edward II, and Henry VI, provoked anxieties that the king was heavily influenced by shrewd, dominating magnates who induced violent power

¹⁴ Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, pp. 34–35.

¹⁵ John Gillingham, *Richard I* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. viii; Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, pp. 44–45.

¹⁶ Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, pp. 41–47.

¹⁷ Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, pp. 42–43.

¹⁸ Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, p. 88.

struggles within their courts.¹⁹ Moreover, the mental health issues and general incompetency of Henry VI and the tyrannical grip of Richard II raised questions about what authority a bad king should wield and whether or not deposition was, in extreme circumstances, correct and moral action.²⁰ During the deposition of Richard II and the reign of Henry IV, and through the tumultuous era of the Wars of the Roses, when succession disputes and greed for the crown threw the kingdom into civil war, debates about what constituted a legitimate and appropriate king affected the entire realm.

John Gillingham rightly asserts that ‘the most important component of Angevin government was the king himself. His personal character still counted for more than any other single factor—as is obvious from the contrast between the reigns of Richard and John’.²¹ It is a truism that is applicable to every medieval English reign, not just those of the Angevin era. The philosophy of the king’s two bodies, discussed by Ernst Kantorowicz, helped both to account and allow for incongruities between the king’s personal behaviour and the political role he was expected to perform. The philosophy of the king’s two bodies, in brief, maintained that the king was viewed as possessing two consubstantial identities, or bodies: his body natural and body politic. The body natural refers to the king’s personal, individual self, which has desires, can make wrong choices, and which is fallible; the body politic refers to the king’s state position, ‘his royal Estate and Dignity’ which persists after the death of his body natural and is assumed by the new king when he ascends the throne.²²

¹⁹ On Edward II: C. Warren Hollister, Robert C. Stacey, and Robin Chapman Stacey, *The Making of England to 1399* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), pp. 310–20; on Henry III: Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, p. 108–115 and Hollister, pp. 259–67, 274–78; on Henry VI: John Gillingham, *The Wars of the Roses: Peace and Conflict in 15th Century England* (London: Phoenix Press, 1981), pp. 59–63.

²⁰ On Henry VI: Gillingham, *Wars of the Roses*, p. 59, 75; on Richard II and Henry IV: Hollister, pp. 352–57.

²¹ Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, p. 67.

²² Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), quotation used by Kantorowicz, p. 9, originally from Edmund Plowden, ‘A Report of the Opinions of divers of the Judges and others learned in the Law named in a Case depending in the Court of the *Dutchy of Lancaster*, wherein [men] appear concerning the Estate and Degree of the said Court, and of the Lands [of the] *Dutchy*, as well as of the Person of the present Queen in the Relation to the *Dutchy* [of the] Kings that have heretofore inherited the *Dutchy*’, *The commentaries, or reports of Edmund Plowden, Of the Middle-Temple, Esq; An Apprentice of the Common Law [...]* (London: Catherine Lintot and Samuel Richardson, 1761), p. 213. Though critiqued

The closer the desires and actions of a king's personal self match the behaviour required of his political self, the better ruler he is, the fewer wrong choices he is likely to make, and the more likely it is that the realm will prosper. My analysis of my chosen texts in this chapter will bear out this proposition.

The chapter will cover two subtypes of kingly disguise, the role of equivocation in maintaining disguise, transformation as disguise, and disguise-blindness. First I will address straightforward narratives in which the king disguises himself. There are two subtypes to be found in the kingly disguise narratives in the texts considered in this chapter. One: when a king assumes a disguise for investigative purposes, as when Arthur in *King Arthur and King Cornwall* disguises himself as a palmer to infiltrate the lands of King Cornwall and spy on his famed round table. This sub-type of disguise is little used in English romances but is popular in Scottish romances such as *Rauf Coilyear*.²³ This depiction of the king as investigator thematises the king's omnipresence: it holds within it an ideological message that demonstrating loyalty to the king is important because he may have eyes and ears everywhere.

That paranoia is not foregrounded in English romances in the same way. The English romances treat investigative disguise differently than their Scottish contemporaries: as a motive—or excuse—for kings to suspend their political identities. Therefore I will treat these narrative moments in conjunction with the second subtype: when the king dons a disguise to achieve release from his political duties and persona—the carnivalesque release. This concept proposes that, by allowing a sanctioned period of the year, such as a holiday,

by many for some of the methodology and its implication of a clear concept of a nation-state in the medieval era, Kantorowicz's book remains a 'remarkably vital' work on medieval political philosophy (Stephen Greenblatt, 'Introduction: Fifty Years of the King's Two Bodies', *Representations*, 106 (2009), 63–66, p. 63). With respect to depictions of kingly behaviour, idealised or otherwise, in romance literature, Kantorowicz's broad argument for a medieval concept of kings' distinct yet consubstantial political and personal identities still holds true.

²³ On the investigation of common subjects and the accompanying 'courtesy lesson' in *Rauf Coilyear* and other medieval popular fiction, see Elizabeth Walsh, 'The King in Disguise', *Folklore*, 86.1 (1975), 3–24, pp. 8, 15–16.

in which people are able to break codes of social conduct and vent their pent-up desires, anxieties, and frustrations, they will be more accepting of their social positions and obligations for the remainder of the year. Thus, as Chris Humphrey explains,

[f]estive occasions on which the boundaries of everyday behaviour were overstepped can therefore be seen, ironically, as a means through which unequal relations of power and opportunity—patriarchy, lordship, oligarchy—were perpetuated in the cultures where feasts of misrule occurs.²⁴

It is a concept which ‘relies upon the self-conscious decision of individuals to perform in ways which are somehow contrary to social expectations’, and has generally been understood to act as a ‘safety-valve’.²⁵ While carnival appears to have been much more formalised—and ritualised—on the Continent, nevertheless it was still an understood and accepted practice in medieval England.²⁶ Humphrey identifies at least eight different celebrations (including Christmas, which ran from the feast of St Thomas on 21 December to Epiphany on 6 January) that ‘may be considered under the heading of misrule in medieval England’, though he prefers the terms ‘misrule’ and ‘carnavalesque’ to ‘carnival’ as ‘there is not the evidence for Shrovetide plays and celebrations or anything like the scale that is found on the continent’.²⁷ This lack of evidence could be due to the destruction of Catholic documents during the Reformation, or this lack could be because formalised Carnival never existed in medieval England; it is impossible to be certain.²⁸

The dissonance between the political persona of the king and his personal identity evident in both of these concepts is foregrounded in king-in-disguise narratives in English

²⁴ Chris Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 11–12. Humphrey criticises and builds upon Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on the carnivalesque, examining its practise in medieval England specifically. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1968), especially pp. 260, 273–75.

²⁵ Humphrey, pp. 41, 11.

²⁶ Humphrey, p. 11.

²⁷ Humphrey, pp. 3, 4–5.

²⁸ Cf. Clifford Davidson, ‘Carnival, Lent and Drama’, *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 36 (1997) 123–42, pp. 123–4 and Alexandra F. Johnston, ‘The Continental Connection: A Reconsideration’, *The Stage as Mirror*, ed. Alan E. Knight (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1998), 7–24, p. 21.

medieval romances and outlaw ballads. The adoption of disguise is a method by which an author may most clearly show a king separating his personal identity from his political one, due to his position as a highly public figure. Disguise, in both these genres, offers the king escape, an opportunity to pursue his own desires rather than remaining confined to the actions and motivations required of his political role. Paradoxically, it is through abandoning, however temporarily, his official position that a good king demonstrates the qualities that make him a good king—or demonstrates that he lacks those qualities. Thus, it is through disguise that truth is revealed. It also affords the author the opportunity to show that the king embodies those qualities of ideal rulership by continuing to exhibit them whilst in disguise or by his choosing only a temporary release and willing return. Or an author may undermine the king's authority and the audience's respect for him by proving that he does not in fact inherently possess kingly qualities. With these possibilities in mind, I examine below the motif of kings assuming disguises in various romance texts in light of medieval English philosophies concerned with kingship and social (dis)order.

Disguise as Release for Exploration of Personal Desire

As Helen Cooper has noted in her work on other motifs in medieval and early modern romances, very little research has been done on the king-in-disguise motif in medieval romances and ballads.²⁹ I have found this particularly true for English medieval literature. Cooper herself did not include an examination of it in her research on romance motifs. Rachel Snell has examined the king-in-disguise motif in a number of king-and-subject ballads of late medieval Scotland, concluding that

such stories appeal to the fantasy that even the most ordinary and humdrum of lives can be touched and transfigured by a brush with royalty. They also echo a more egalitarian desire: that, beneath all his pomp and ceremony, the

²⁹ Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 433, n. 14.

king should be ‘one of us’—someone, moreover, who is as capable of being touched and transfigured by the encounter as is his subject.³⁰

This demand for royal transfiguration and egalitarian desire, at least insofar as the interactions between disguised king and deceived subject are concerned, do not appear to have resonated as much with contemporary English authors. The fascination with rulers disguising themselves to venture out amongst their subjects seems to be rather an early modern English literary trope than a medieval one, despite kings like Edward III providing contemporary real-life examples of such behaviour.³¹ There are no stories similar to Henry V moving amongst his soldiers on the eve of battle, nor any medieval English version of ‘Alfred and the cakes’ in a romance or ballad form of which I am aware.³²

Rather, employing disguise to mislead subjects and allies is repeatedly portrayed as a highly transgressive action, and usually functions to reflect poorly on the morality of the transgressor (the king) or to scrutinise the morality of the person being deceived. The act is frequently used to depict a king as cowardly or immoral, such as Nectanabus, Mark, or Uther.³³ If a sympathetic king is portrayed appearing in disguise before a subject, the disguise is often involuntary, as when Arthur is forced by Sir Damas to assume false arms in his fight against Accolon in *Le Morte Darthur*, and the adventure does not end well: Accolon dies and Arthur loses Excalibur’s scabbard, which ‘ys worth ten of the swerde; for

³⁰ Rachel Snell, ‘The Undercover King’, *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. by Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows, and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 133–54, p. 135. The king-and-subject narrative usually takes the following form: the king incognito meets with one of his subjects and, seeing that his subject does not recognise him, tests his subject’s hospitality and loyalty to the crown. In a humorous moment, the king himself receives a courtesy lesson from his subject. The subject is ultimately rewarded for his loyalty with wealth and improved social status.

³¹ Caroline Shenton, ‘Edward III and the Symbol of the Leopard,’ *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England*, ed. Peter Coss and Maurice Keen (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), 69–81, p. 79. Edward III appeared at the January 1334 Dunstable tournament disguised as ‘Monsiuer Lyonel’.

³² William Shakespeare, *The Life of Henry the Fifth*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. S. Greenblatt, et al. (London: Norton, 1997), 1454–1521, IV.i.36–286; ‘A Gest of Robyn Hode’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 90–148, ll. 1481–96, 1685–88. For further discussion of the early modern fascination with incognito rulers, see Kevin Quarmby, *The Disguised Ruler in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), and Anne Barton, ‘The King Disguised: Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and the Comical History’, *Essays: Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 207–233, p. 208, 212–213.

³³ Discussed below.

whyles ye have the scawberde uppon you ye shall lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded'.³⁴

In medieval English romances and ballads, it is usually enemies or outsiders who are intended as victims of the royal disguise. This is true of future kings, such as Floris in *Floris and Blancheflour* and Horn in *King Horn* and *Horne Childe and Maiden Rinnilde*, as well as established kings like Arthur in *King Arthur and King Cornwall*—each is depicted assuming a disguise in order to enter enemy territory. Horn's final disguise in *King Horn* and *Horn Childe* enables him to overthrow the usurpers; William of Palerne first wears the skin of a bear and then of a hart to escape Greek invasion and elope with the otherwise-betrothed Melior in *William of Palerne*.³⁵ Even Edward in *A Gest of Robyn Hode* first assumes disguise in order to mislead outlawed and wanted men (Robin and Sir Richard). He is then enabled to walk incognito amongst his subjects in the town only because he has temporarily aligned himself with the outlaws through donning their green 'livery'.³⁶

In English romance and outlaw ballads, disguise is a strategy by which a king may indulge in personal desires that may be in sharp contrast to his political aims. Disguise is frequently used as a physical indication that the king has decided to set aside his political role and act in a personal capacity. As a visual marker of a king setting aside his social identity, disguise is employed by the authors of *Sir Orfeo*, *Alexander A*, *The Wars of Alexander*, *King Arthur and King Cornwall*, *Le Morte Darthur*, and *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, among others. Morgan Dickson identifies knightly disguise as allowing 'the hero to separate completely the self, the interior, from the position he occupies in society', a separation that

³⁴ Malory, pp. 106–117, 44.

³⁵ *Floris und Blancheflur*, ed. Emil Hausknecht (Berlin: Weidman, 1885), ll. 354, 700–709; 'King Horn', *King Horn, Floriz and Blancheflur, The Assumption of Our Lady*, ed. J. Rawson Lumby [1866] and George H. McKnight [1998], EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1–69, ll. 1131–1136 (Cambridge University MS Gg. 4. 27. 2); *Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild* ed. M. Mills (Heidelberg: C. Winter Universitätsverlag, 1988), ll. 889–94; 'King Arthur and King Cornwall', *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 422–436, ll. 3–4, 28; William, *William of Palerne*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, EETS (London: Trübner, 1867), ll. 2585–2612.

³⁶ 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1685–88.

can allow for ‘the development or definition of the self’; similarly, kings’ disguises reflect separation of personal and social identity and enable authors to reveal truths about the king’s essential character.³⁷ Unlike the implication of many narratives involving knightly disguise, the temporary release from the king’s social role does not effect personal change. When the king removes his disguise and resumes his political role, he does not behave differently because of his disguise adventure, nor do the members of his court view him differently for it. Rather, the use of the disguise narrative to explore the kingly pursuit of personal as opposed to political desires functions to speak to some of the issues surrounding medieval kingship discussed above.

The author of the fifteenth-century *A Gest of Robyn Hode* presents both subtypes of kingly disguise discussed above: disguise assumed for investigative purposes and for personal release. He also demonstrates the most traditional and positive view of kingly disguise as carnivalesque release. The king’s two disguises, first when meeting Robin Hood and then when entering the town incognito, have a positive outcome for all involved. The author’s tone throughout the encounter is one of merriment and jest: the meeting results neither in arrests, nor the royally decreed decapitation of Sir Richard at the Lee, who has allied himself with Robin, nor in a fight between the outlaws and the king’s company, but rather in a fine dinner, an archery contest, and a light-hearted excursion into the town. Disguise in the *Gest* also signals the king’s separation of his actual person from his official role, and with each successive disguise he adopts, the more his personal identity supersedes his social one. Each new disguise corresponds with a new fitt of the ballad, and each unlocks a more personal, less politically driven desire of the king. Edward initially disguises himself as a monk as part of a scheme to locate Robin Hood and Sir Richard, who have flouted the

³⁷ Morgan Dickson, ‘Verbal and Visual Disguise: Society and Identity in Some Twelfth-Century Texts’, *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation* ed. Judith Weiss, J. Fellows, and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 41–54, p. 48.

sheriff's demands and evaded the king's men. This disguise is ostensibly for the purpose of investigation, but it also has elements of personal motivation. On one hand, Edward's decision to enter the forest and seek out Robin and Sir Richard demonstrates his commitment to seeing justice upheld, an integral part of his political duty as king. However, leading up to the moment when he disguises himself as a monk, Edward talks eagerly of his desire to 'se good Robyn' arrested with his own eyes and 'the knyghtes hede' separated from Richard's body.³⁸ This language speaks more to Edward wishing to satisfy his personal anger with Robin and Sir Richard for continually eluding his and the sheriff's men rather than simply ensuring the law is upheld.

Edward's second disguise, changing from monk's habit into outlaw's 'grene cloth', cues the reader that a deeper separation of the king's personal identity from his official one is underway.³⁹ Whereas the seventh fitt focuses on his first disguise, which stems from motives part political and part personal, the eighth fitt begins at the moment when the king stops speaking of Robin as coming to live at court—a request which both resolves the legal manhunt and grows from the king's personal wish to spend more time in Robin's company—and he starts upon a new adventure entirely outside the bounds of office and motivated by the personal amusement it will provide. While the king is in outlaws' garb, he is shown laughing 'full fast' at the confused people of Nottingham and engaging in pleasurable activities: an archery 'game', singing, and drinking.⁴⁰ These are all activities that the king could perhaps easily engage in without needing a disguise, but he does not; when the disguise is cast off and the king returns to court, his actions and speech become solemn once more. Because of the necessities and duties entailed by the king's body politic, Edward cannot enjoy play in the full-throated way he can in the forest. Court is not the place

³⁸ 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1467, 1437.

³⁹ 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1669.

⁴⁰ 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1717, 1702.

for Robin's sense of play: that of joyful misrule. Robin laments the lack of archery tournaments at court and claims 'Yf I dwele lenger with the kynge,/ Sorowe wyll me sloo'. In lamenting the lack of archery tournaments, Robin here is showing his un-courtly, non-aristocratic background: archery in the early and mid-fifteenth century was the sport of the lower gentry.⁴¹

When Robin asks the king for leave to depart, Edward, dressed again in the robes of his social identity, speaks in confining, contractual terms:

'Yf it be so,' than sayd our kynge,
 'It may no better be,
 Seven nyght I gyve the leve,
 No lengre, to dwell fro me.'⁴²

Edward is not an indulgent king, but one who regularly places duty above desire. His court as well is a place of daily business and moderation, not wild enjoyment as is Robin's court. Unfortunately, the text does not elaborate much on courtly life under Edward, other than to note that Robin feels himself to be unsuited for it. He spends his money far too quickly and finds court life stifling and boring. It is impossible to tell whether the poet viewed courts generally as staid places, or if Edward's court specifically is dull. It could very well be that it is only through Robin's uncultured eyes that court life is wanting, and that Edward's moderation and dutifulness are praiseworthy attributes in a king, valued by courtiers and townsfolk, but unappreciated by outlawed yeomen. However it may be, in this text, disguise

⁴¹ Though archery was practiced by knights and nobles throughout the medieval period, it is in the late fifteenth century that archery largely transitioned from a soldier's or yeoman's weapon into a courtly pastime. In the 1340s, an archer was paid the same wage as a master craftsman, 6d per diem. By 1424, archers were expected to prove that they could afford to provide their own sword and buckler, uniform, and horse in addition to their own arrows; fines were introduced for archers who merely hired or borrowed their mounts. By the sixteenth century, archery was considered a suitable royal pastime whilst concurrently used as a military weapon, though with rapidly decreasing military reputation as artillery and firearms improved. Whilst *A Gest of Robyn Hode* was first printed in the early sixteenth century, most scholars agree that the poem dates to the early or mid-fifteenth century. Robert Hardy, *Longbow: A Social and Military History* (Sparkford, Somerset: Haynes, 2010), pp. 79, 121, 130, 135, 143; Erik Roth, *With a Bended Bow: Archery in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2012), p. 217–223. On the dates of the *Gest*, see Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, 'A Gest of Robyn Hode: Introduction', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 80–89, pp. 80–81.

⁴² 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1751–2, 1769–72.

functions in order to facilitate a temporary period of misrule. Humphrey argues that each instance of misrule should be treated on a case-by-case basis rather than presuming all representations of misrule function either as ‘a safety-valve, and the status quo is restored after a period of temporary inversion’, or as ‘the expression of class antagonism or gender politics’.⁴³ This particular text treats the king’s disguises and the transgressions associated with misrule as a kind of good madness, a healthy—and, importantly, temporary—release, from which the king can return refreshed to the business of court and his royal duties.

The three locations—greenwood, town, and court—foreground play, pleasure, and the carnivalesque in three different modes. The town becomes a middle space between the sobriety of the court and the misrule of the greenwood. The court views play as separate from the everyday, something which is only accessed outside the confines of the court, and only temporarily. Robin does not wish or need to participate in a carnivalesque release from his everyday life, because the greenwood is a different social space from that of the town and court: it already incorporates elements of topsy-turvy play in the quotidian routine.

While Edward may marvel that Robin’s ‘men are more at his byddyng/ Then my men be at myn’, Barnesdale forest is not a parallel to Edward’s civilised England, but very much an inversion of it.⁴⁴ The king’s use of disguise demarcates the difference between the two. For the king, disguise facilitates his temporary release. Disguise defines his actions for the day as a step outside reality, as festive, temporary play—and even whilst in his disguised roles, he still fulfils the functions of king, first seeking to mete out justice and then, through enjoying and partaking in the outlaws’ activities, thus securing the merry men’s loyalty and support through a public, festive appearance. For Robin, this lifestyle represents an everyday reality, one he views as permanent and sustainable. Robin has no need for release, for a

⁴³ Humphrey, p. 20.

⁴⁴ ‘A Gest of Robyn Hode’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1563–64.

‘safety-valve’, because he exists in a social space where carnival is normative. *Dulce est desipere in loco*—it is sweet to play the fool on occasion—but Robin lives the fool’s life every day.⁴⁵ Thus when Edward and Robin’s roles are reversed and Robin goes to court, he does not treat his clothing as disguise, as temporary and playful, but rather as an intended-as-permanent integration into court culture. However, stepping outside one’s normal social position, whether Edward’s or Robin’s, seems to require some kind of sacrifice of the former identity if it is to be sustained. King Edward possesses the wisdom to treat inversion as temporary release, as a game, and so needs sacrifice nothing. Robin balks at the sacrifices required. Entering court in a committed transition, Robin gives up the freedoms and indulgences that are normative to the idyllic greenwood social space in exchange for things valued in the court’s—and medieval audiences’—social space: wealth, the king’s favour, and the opportunity for social advancement within the courtly sphere. Unhappy in his new state, he must then reverse the process to effect permanent change back. Alternately demonstrating the balance Edward achieves through temporary play, and the sacrifices and unhappiness Robin faces in attempting to leave behind permanently the social model—whether his or Edward’s—paints Edward as the wise man and Robin as the fool, making the case for the audience’s own acceptance of the existing social structure and realisation that carnivalesque release can only be temporary.

As a burlesque heroic romance, *King Arthur and King Cornwall*, on the surface at least, takes a light-hearted approach to the king-in-disguise motif, as in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*. However, it also demonstrates greater censure of the adventuring king, one who prefers partaking in actions befitting a knight to being bound by and responsibly performing the duties of his office. Drawing absolute conclusions about the author’s views of the

⁴⁵ Horace, *Odes and Episodes*, ed. and trans. Niall Rudd, Loeb Classical Library (London: Harvard University Press, 2004), IV.xii.28, 250–253, p. 252.

acceptability of Arthur's disguise adventure is somewhat difficult, due to the state of the manuscript. It survives in a unique, heavily damaged copy in the Percy Folio, though Thomas Hahn suggests a late-fifteenth-century composition date.⁴⁶ The seventeenth-century manuscript exists in fragments, missing its beginning, ending, and sizeable middle sections.⁴⁷ However, enough of the romance remains that the content of the missing parts can be surmised. Arthur and Gawain, hearing that King Cornwall possesses 'one of the fairest Round Tables/ that ever you see with your eye', decide to take a few knights to infiltrate Cornwall's castle 'clad in palmers weede' so that they may lay eyes upon the famed table.⁴⁸ Cornwall, however, suspects their true identities, and in a game of cat-and-mouse, insults Arthur over dinner and brags of having an affair with Guinevere. The situation quickly escalates into a deadly fight in which Arthur and his knights kill King Cornwall and—presumably—escape back to Little Brittany with Cornwall's magical treasures, his daughter, and his 'sprite', Burlow Beanie.

While Arthur's disguised expedition is ultimately successful, the air of frivolity that the king and his knights assume clashes with the clear seriousness of the situation. The author uses disguise to show the king pursuing non-kingly pursuits, doing what he *wants*, not what he ought, to do. The actions he undertakes whilst in disguise are inappropriate to his kingly role and in fact threaten his reign and kingdom. He provokes and engages unnecessarily in military adventurism, risks his life when he has no heir, and comes back with a knowledge of Guinevere's infidelity that anticipates the Arthurian corpus's intertextual understanding of how his reign will eventually end.

⁴⁶ Thomas Hahn, 'King Arthur and King Cornwall: Introduction', *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 419–432, p. 420.

⁴⁷ I have consulted the manuscript, London, British Library MS Additional 27879 (Percy Folio), and have deferred to Thomas Hahn's editorial decisions where the scribal forms are unclear or the manuscript is badly damaged. 'King Arthur and King Cornwall', *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, pp. 422–436.

⁴⁸ 'King Arthur and King Cornwall', *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ll. 3–4, 28.

The author makes clear that the king's place is in his kingdom, operating as a royal pater-familias and not adventuring in foreign lands (in a way reminiscent of the Plantagenet kings and Henry V's French campaigning). He does this firstly by providing verbal and physical evidence of Guinevere's adultery. This is an act which other English Arthurian authors, by contrast, tend to shy away from discussing explicitly, only alluding fleetingly to the sexual nature of her relationship with Lancelot or other knights. It is here first hinted at when Guinevere volunteers knowledge of Cornwall's hall and possessions, challenging Arthur and Gawain by remarking, 'I know where a Round Table is, thou noble King,/ Is worth thy Round Table and other such three', and then encouraging Arthur to leave the kingdom. Then her adulterous affair is revealed by King Cornwall, who boasts to Arthur of a seven-year-long affair with the queen.⁴⁹ Arthur's cuckolding is finally verified by the appearance of Cornwall and Guinevere's daughter, whose existence counterpoints Arthur's own heirless state.⁵⁰ While Edward's disguised excursion in the *Gest* proves and indeed temporarily strengthens the questionable loyalty of his subjects, here Arthur's excursion reveals treason within his own household, knowledge that perhaps he and the kingdom were better off without. Contemporary audiences would have been aware of the end of the Arthurian legend, that Arthur will be required to act on the publicised affair of Guinevere and Lancelot and the subsequent battles. The author uses the disguise narrative to comment on the danger of absenteeism, of a king too ready to leave his kingdom for adventure and not attentive enough to his affairs at home.

Like Edward's initial disguise in the *Gest*, Arthur's decision to disguise himself and his knights as palmers and to travel to Cornwall's land has a primary investigative purpose. Yet his venture into Cornwall retains a sense of festivity and holiday. Arthur assumes his

⁴⁹ 'King Arthur and King Cornwall', *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ll. 7–8, 91–100.

⁵⁰ 'King Arthur and King Cornwall', *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, l. 93, and likely another mention in the final missing half-page, when Gawain and Arthur abscond with all of the treasures previously mentioned by Cornwall.

disguise the moment he leaves his kingdom and the author does not mention him removing it throughout the duration of his adventures—he must remove it only when he returns to Little Britain to resume his duties of kingship. However, while Edward’s venture into the forest was primarily duty-driven, intent on catching wanted men, Arthur’s expedition is comically unnecessary. The motivation is to investigate the claim that someone else possesses the best round table. Hahn remarks that

Arthur's founding of a *round* table in order to prevent squabbling among his knights about rank [...] is mentioned first in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History*. Guenevere's demur from Arthur's claim to Gawain here is peculiarly ironic, since it initiates the plot of *Cornwall* by starting a squabble over the ranking of round tables themselves.⁵¹

The irony is no doubt intentional, humourously pointing out the irrelevancy and gratuitous nature of Arthur’s quest. Intertextually—and *King Arthur and King Cornwall* is no exception—Arthur is not uncritically portrayed as a great king, though Malory works hard to suppress that traditional aspect to his character. He is, more often than not, a do-nothing king (a *roi fainéant*, as Chrétien de Troyes so aptly illustrates in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* when Arthur does little to prevent Meleagaunt kidnapping the queen). In *King Arthur and King Cornwall*, Arthur’s decision to go off on adventure is a marker of a broader state of affairs, of Arthur’s poor kingship and lack of masculinity and Cornwall’s abundance of both. He privileges adventures over his wife and fails to impregnate her. He brags to Gawain that he has ‘one of the fairest Round Tables/ That ever you see with your eye’, but his adventure itself is a search for a bigger round table than his own, which Cornwall is said to possess: a Freudian implication that Arthur’s manhood falls short of the mark.⁵² In parallel with the beginning of the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* and *Perlesvaus*, even Arthur’s knights and queen grumble about the poor state of his court. In the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, Gaynor upbraids

⁵¹ Thomas Hahn, ‘King Arthur and King Cornwall’, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, p. 422, n. 3.

⁵² ‘King Arthur and King Cornwall’, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ll. 3–4.

Arthur, telling him: ‘your court beginneth to spill/ Of doughty knightes all bydene;/ Sir, your honour beginnes to fall’, and counsels him to begin hosting tournaments to keep the knights engaged, for there is little to do at Arthur’s court.⁵³ Similarly, in *King Arthur and King Cornwall*, Cornwall has the child that Arthur does not, and with Arthur’s queen, no less, when Arthur and Guinevere have no legitimate child of their own; in the sprite Burlew Beanie, Cornwall shows that his court holds marvels that Arthur’s cannot match. Even Cornwall’s horse can ride three times farther than Arthur’s, and there is a missing folio in which Cornwall boasts of more ways in which Arthur’s court falls short of his own.⁵⁴

Furthermore, to ensure that Arthur’s deadly fight with Cornwall is understood as an unnecessary and avoidable danger, and is not excused by Cornwall’s affair with the queen or his insults to Arthur and his knights during the dinner, the author includes a key episode between Arthur’s departure from Little Brittany and his arrival in Cornwall that is unfortunately badly damaged and missing a fragment. Arthur and his men, coming upon a battle between two parties, join in the fray despite not being (it appears from what remains of the manuscript) allied to or affiliated with either party. What remains to us of Arthur’s initial reaction when he first sees the battle (“Now, by my faith," saies noble King Arthur,/ [...] well mett”), indicates an eagerness to engage in any ‘battle new sett’ that promises martial excitement with little thought to the situation, the relative ethical position of the two opponents, or potential consequences.⁵⁵ Arthur is too quick to engage in foreign battles and espionage, too ready to put the lives of his men and his own at risk. Thus, while the narrative (presumably) ends happily, with enemy vanquished and treasures amassed, the audience is left with a sense of a surface-level joy only temporarily sustained and ultimately undone by

⁵³ *The Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, in *King Arthur’s Death*, ed. Larry D. Benson and Edward E. Foster, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), 9–128, ll. 23–25.

⁵⁴ ‘King Arthur and King Cornwall’, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ll. 91–102, 105–116; missing folio between l. 116 and l. 117.

⁵⁵ ‘King Arthur and King Cornwall’, *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ll. 36–37, 35.

kingly folly. It is as if the happy ending were the mask, and the inevitable tragedy of Arthur's kingdom the festering truth behind it.

The authors of the chivalric romances display darker views of kings assuming disguise, and they treat king-in-disguise narratives with a decidedly less festive tone. While disguise still marks the moment when a king sets aside his political role, his body politic, in favour of temporary release and pursuit of personal desires, these authors use the king-in-disguise motif to demonstrate the questionable morality of those kings in employing deceitful practices, and they highlight the transgressive nature of a king choosing to pursue personal rather than politically appropriate aims.

Malory takes the most disapproving stance on this in *Le Morte Darthur*. Uther's resorting to disguise at the height of his consuming desire for Igraine has always been part of the Arthurian legend, but the figure of a king embroiling his people in civil war for his own personal desires seems to have struck a chord with those Arthurian authors writing in the later part of the Hundred Years' War and during the Wars of the Roses; Arthur's conception, involving Uther's magically disguised encounter with Igraine, is not included in many earlier Arthurian romances.⁵⁶ This disapproving position is especially marked in Malory, who writes critically of Uther as behaving 'oute of mesure', as being 'wonderly wrothe', and 'seke for angre and for love of fayre Igrayne'.⁵⁷ This contrasts with the translator of the *Prose Merlin*, who, though acknowledging the gravity of the situation, speaks of Uther's passion in less judgemental terms: as causing him 'gref' and illness.⁵⁸ Indeed, while not condoning the behaviour, the translator of the *Prose Merlin* treats Uther

⁵⁶ The authors of the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* and *Alliterative Morte Arthur* both chose to set their narratives at the end of Arthur's reign; the authors of the Gawain romances, e.g. *Carle of Carlisle*, *Marriage of Sir Gawain*, set their romances in the middle of Arthur's reign, and do not refer back to Arthur's conception. While these narratives do not need to include the circumstances of his conception, it is notable that these earlier authors preferred to write Arthurian works that did not warrant its inclusion.

⁵⁷ Malory, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁸ *Merlin, or, The Early History of King Arthur: A Prose Romance*, ed. H. B. Wheatley, W. E. Mead, J. Stuart-Glennie, and D. W. Nash, EETS (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1865), p. 75 (henceforth cited in short form as *Prose Merlin*).

in disguise acting upon his own ‘hertes desire’ somewhat sympathetically, while Malory seems generally to have viewed the practice of kings donning disguises as unseemly.⁵⁹ By beginning his text at the kindling of Uther’s lust for Igraine, rather than with the conception of Merlin as in his Vulgate source material, Malory foregrounds the pursuit of personal desire leading to civil strife as a main theme of the text.⁶⁰ Uther’s deception has serious repercussions: while his temporary sexual satisfaction, made possible through disguise, coincides with the end of the civil war and the conception of Arthur, it comes at a disastrous price. Arthur’s legitimacy will be cast into doubt and the beginning of his reign is marked by mistrust and civil war as the local kings are divided over his right to rule. Uther’s decision to resort to visual deception to sleep with Igraine, allowing the urges of his body natural to supersede the concerns of the body politic, illustrates the height of his disregard for the restraint required in royal office and his lack of control over his personal desires.

The only king within *Le Morte Darthur* other than Uther who is shown employing the art of disguise is the even more unsavoury Mark. Whereas Uther demonstrates poor kingship by allowing his desires to overwhelm him at one crucial moment of his otherwise largely unnarrated kingship, Mark repeatedly displays total disregard of all the tenets of chivalry. For instance, angered at hearing of Tristan’s acceptance into the Round Table, he disguises himself as a plain knight and sets out for England to slay Tristan, and it is while wearing this disguise that he murders Bersules, who had been accompanying him. Bersules advises Mark on the best course of rational and honourable behaviour as king and knight;

⁵⁹ *Prose Merlin*, p. 75.

⁶⁰ Ralph Norris contends that Malory did have access to the *Prose Merlin* and the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* in addition to his Vulgate source material, and Malory’s decision to begin his narrative ‘at a point that corresponds to roughly two-thirds of the way into the standard edition of the *Prose Merlin*’ was deliberate. Norris suggests that Malory was perhaps influenced by the *mise-en-page* of Hardyng’s *Chronicle*—specifically, that ‘[t]he first appearance of Arthur’s name in Hardyng is in a marginal rubric that becomes the title of Chapter 72 in the printed edition. This is the same point in the story at which Malory begins his version, deep into his first major source’. Ralph Norris, *Malory’s Library: The Sources of the Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), pp. 13–17, quote p. 17. See also P. J. C. Field, *Malory: Texts and Sources* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001) p. 107.

Mark kills him in a passion when his personal ire and jealousy of Tristan overwhelm his judgement.⁶¹ Mark's disguise functions rather to display the extent of his cowardice than to effect a temporary renunciation of his formal role in pursuit of personal desires, but then one of the defining aspects of Mark's character in Malory's text is his clear inability to separate his immediate emotional impulses from his royal actions. Moreover, the episode does not produce the effects of the release and restoration typical of the carnivalesque narrative: Malory never identifies the point at which Mark removes his disguise, and thus does not formally signal Mark's resumption of his social identity, as if to denote that Mark never clearly and fully separates his two bodies and acts appropriately, out of concern for his kingdom rather than himself. There is no point at which Mark returns to behaving like a 'proper' king; the last time he is mentioned is in the 'Healing of Sir Urry', when he has murdered Tristan. Thus it is evident that Malory regards disguise, when employed by kings, with opprobrium; it is a key motif in his repertoire for criticising a bad king.

Three Kings Transformed

Nectanebus, the Sorcerer-King

Much like the kings above, who use disguise to temporarily divest themselves of their royal duties and indulge their personal appetites, Nectanebus, the king of Egypt in the Alexander romances, uses disguise to escape his responsibilities. However, Nectanebus's disguises transgress further and are more various than even Uther's and Mark's: he permanently abandons his position and his kingdom in pursuit of personal wish-fulfilment.

Nectanebus appears in the *Wars of Alexander (Alexander C)*, *Alexander Fragment A*, and *King Alisaunder* romances. The *Alexander B*, also called *Alexander and Dindimus*, focuses on events later in Alexander's life, and does not include Nectanebus and

⁶¹ Malory, pp. 454–470.

Alexander's conception. *King Alisaunder* is based on Thomas of Kent's *Roman de Toute Chevalerie*, and the single transformative disguise which the sorcerer Neptabanus uses is similar to the first disguise he uses in the *Wars of Alexander* and *Alexander A*, while the latter two romances also depict Nectanebus transforming himself into other disguises. Therefore I will focus on Nectanebus's disguises in the *Wars of Alexander* and *Alexander A*. The poets of these two romances both use Leo of Naples's translation of the Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Historia de Preliis Alexandri Magni*, as their source material.⁶²

In both the *Wars of Alexander* and *Alexander A*, the first disguise Nectanebus uses correlates with his cowardly abandonment of his people and his office in an attempt to save his own life when faced with impending foreign invasion. As *Alexander A* relates:

Be beurn for a barbour blive let send,
His berd-heire and his hedde hett hee to schave;
Hee cast of his knightweede and clopes hym neew
With white sendal in syght, seemely too knowe.⁶³

He seeks asylum in the kingdom of Macedon (which he has chosen because of the rumours he has heard of the queen's beauty) and attempts to sleep with Queen Olympias by employing a series of magically effected disguises. First he presents himself as the 'grete god Amon' with 'silvern hornes' and 'ishape as a sheepe, shinand bright', then 'as a dragoun', and finally, again as Amon, but this time, as Nectanebus describes it, 'mich liche to mee by mark of my face'.⁶⁴

⁶² *Alexander A* uses the I² recension of the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*; the *Wars of Alexander* makes use of the I^{3a} recension of the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*, 'a late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century interpolated version of the *Nativitas et Victoria Alexandri Magni* which is in turn a mid-tenth-century translation of the δ* recension of the Pseudo-Callisthenes', which was composed 'at some date after 200 B.C., and possibly much later'. Hoyt N. Duggan, 'The Source of the Middle English *The Wars of Alexander*', *Speculum*, 51.4 (1976), 624–636, p. 624; George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, ed. D. J. A. Ross (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 9. See Leo of Naples, *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*, in *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo*, ed. Friedrich Pfister (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1913), pp. 44–131. The *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII* of Paulus Orosius also serves as source material for *Alexander A*; however, the section which involves Nectanebus disguising himself to seduce Olympias is derived from the Pseudo-Callisthenes. Cary, pp. 9–11, 48, and 57.

⁶³ 'Alexander A', *The Gestes of King Alexander of Macedon: Two Middle-English Alliterative Fragments: Alexander A and Alexander B*, ed. Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929), 125–170, ll. 542–45.

⁶⁴ 'Alexander A', *The Gestes of King Alexander of Macedon*, ll. 727, 728, 732, 765, 767. Nectanebus is shown

The portrayal of Nectanebus as a sorcerer-king, his initial disguised flight from Egypt, and his disguise-transformation into an erotic ram deity are not pure figments of the English editor's or even the French source text author's imagination, but rather are a medieval rationalisation of a blend of history and mythology. Nakhthorhebyt II (in Greek, Nectanebo II, r. 360–342 BCE) was the last native pharaoh of Egypt. When his kingdom was invaded by the Persian Artaxerxes III in 343–342 BCE, Nakhthorhebyt's armies were defeated and he ultimately fled to Nubia.⁶⁵ Nakhthorhebyt II was a particularly devout pharaoh. He showed great enthusiasm for a number of Egyptian deity cults and devoted much of his reign to constructing and restoring temples.⁶⁶

One of the major deities within the Egyptian pantheon was Amon (sometimes spelt Ammon or Amun), who was, long before Nakhthorhebyt II's time, conflated with the Kushite ram-headed deity Khnum and then, due to the association of rams with virility, with the Egyptian fertility god Min, to become Amon-Min.⁶⁷ When Alexander the Great invaded Egypt in 332 BCE, his invasion was largely viewed positively, and the oracle at the Siwa Oasis pronounced him the son of Amon, in keeping with Greek rumours of Zeus's paternity and the Egyptian belief that pharaohs were themselves divine.⁶⁸ Alexander later had coins issued which depicted him with the ram horns of Amon-Min to promote the belief in his semi-divinity.⁶⁹ It is easy to see, then, the leap made by the Pseudo-Callisthenes author who

in similar disguise in *The Wars of Alexander*. In *King Alisaunder*, the sorcerer Neptabanus transforms himself to appear as Jupiter-Amon. *The Wars of Alexander*, ed. Hoyt N. Duggan and T. Turville-Petre, EETS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); *Kyng Alisaunder*, ed. G. V. Smithers, EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1952).

⁶⁵ Karol Myśliwiec, *The Twilight of Ancient Egypt: First Millennium B.C.E.*, trans. David Lorton (London: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 163, 169, 177; Nicolas-Christophe Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt*, trans. Ian Shaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 379–381.

⁶⁶ Grimal, p. 379; Myśliwiec, pp. 171–6.

⁶⁷ George Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 13–22, 85–86; Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt: 3000 BCE to 395 CE*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 16–20, 247.

⁶⁸ Ian Worthington, *Alexander the Great: Man and God* (Routledge, 2004), pp. 113–121; Myśliwiec, p. 178.

⁶⁹ Karsten Dahmen, *The Legend of Alexander the Great on Greek and Roman Coins* (Taylor & Francis, 2007), pp. 10–11.

invents an occultist King Nectanebus of Egypt who flees, not to Nubia but to Macedon, who seduces Olympias of Macedon in the guise of a ram deity and, in doing so, fathers Alexander the Great.⁷⁰

That Alexander in the romance tradition is conceived not by Amon himself but by a sorcerer-king pretending to divinity undermines the pagan elements of the traditional myth of Alexander's conception (a myth begun by the Oracle at Siwa Oasis and supported and promoted by Alexander himself).⁷¹ By only providing the audience with a pretend version of Amon, the narrative allows for a more Christian interpretation of Alexander's patrilineage: that the non-Abrahamic god is possibly not real and certainly does not father one of the Nine Worthies.⁷²

Nectanebus's first two disguise-transformations as Amon and a dragon in the *Wars of Alexander* and *Alexander A* are much the same as they appear in the source material, and serve to dupe both Olympias and her husband, Philip, into believing that she has slept with Amon.⁷³ The final disguise-transformation as Amon in *Alexander A* is not found in the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*.⁷⁴ The description of this final transformation as a hybrid semblance of Amon and Nectanebus (that is, as Amon, but 'mich liche to mee [Nectanebus] by mark of my face') undoes what the first two transformations achieve.⁷⁵ That is, it undermines Olympias's credibility as a good, otherwise-devoted wife truly duped into thinking she is copulating with a god. While Philip remains convinced in his belief that Nectanebus is the god Amon in dragon form, and thus is not culpable for his easy acceptance

⁷⁰ B. E. Perry, 'The Egyptian Legend of Nectanebus', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 97 (1966), 327–333, pp. 327, 330–332; Cary, p. 47.

⁷¹ Dahmen, pp. 10–11.

⁷² If Amon does exist in the redactor's mind, he is either uninterested in a mortal taking his form in pursuit of personal pleasure rather than veneration, or lacks the divine power to intercede or punish Nectanebus for his irreverence.

⁷³ See note 62, above.

⁷⁴ Leo of Naples, *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*, in *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo*, ed. Friedrich Pfister (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1913), pp. 44–131.

⁷⁵ 'Alexander A', *The Gestes of King Alexander of Macedon*, ll. 767.

of cuckoldry, Olympias's final view of Nectanebus in Amon's form, but with his own face introduces an element of doubt into Olympias's innocence. Nectanebus sheds enough of his disguise to be recognisable, or at least to evoke suspicion, while maintaining enough of Amon's appearance for Olympias to maintain plausible deniability. In maintaining the Pseudo-Callisthenes's and *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*'s casting of Nectanebus as Alexander's father and magically disguised sorcerer-king instead of the god Amon himself, as it is in earlier traditions, the redactor of *Alexander A* gives Alexander's conception an Arthurian element. And yet, while Arthur is legitimate royal issue—he is conceived when Igraine is already a widow, by the king, and is born in wedlock—Alexander is not. Nectanebus's seduction of Olympias, born of a double motivation of unkingly cowardice and lust, affects the conception of the hero in a way that speaks to both the conception of Christ and to many Greek heroes, but rationalises the mythological elements through the disguise motif. His disguised seduction is catalytic: due to the questionable nature of Alexander's birth, Alexander must prove his right to the Macedonian crown through right of conquest, ultimately resulting in Alexander's patricide and his subsequent campaigns.

Orfeo and the Royal Art of Equivocation

Unlike Nectanebus, Orfeo is an entirely sympathetic character; thus the text of *Sir Orfeo* goes to considerable effort to reassure the reader about the provisions he makes for his kingdom when he embarks on his journey into the wilderness. As R. H. Nicholson has remarked,

I can think of no other medieval English romance (except, perhaps, tales of the death of Arthur, and then for very different reasons) where a king's departure is so much an issue. For the most part kings simply get up and leave, making minimal arrangements, if any, for the administration of their lands. But here the poet at some relative length represents Orfeo's action as no dereliction from regnal duty: Orfeo prudently arranges for the continuance

of his good rule and even provides for the succession of the next king upon his death.⁷⁶

In depicting Orfeo's renunciation of his kingly life, the poet largely regards Orfeo's personal identity as separate from his royal one. The time in the narrative in which he is in disguise as a harper correlates precisely with the period during which Orfeo isolates himself, acting more in his own personal grief for his lost queen than in the interests of his kingdom. Of course, his motives are not entirely self-serving—a stolen queen is both an embarrassment and a threat to the crown—but as McCracken has pointed out, due to their restricted political role, queens were to a degree viewed as replaceable, especially if they were, as Heurodis appears to be, barren.⁷⁷ Nicholson believes that Orfeo's passion for his queen 'justifies for us Orfeo's later rejection of his kingly life'.⁷⁸ Whether or not his passion 'justifies' his abdication is debatable; but clearly Nicholson also sees Orfeo's rescue mission as a matter primarily of passion rather than politics. Even Orfeo's choice of disguise, as a harper, reflects this emphasis on Orfeo setting aside his social identity in favour of his personal one: it is a costume which reflects an artistic pursuit he has practised out of personal interest and enjoyment. His disguise cues the reader into viewing this quest as an adventure undertaken more for his passion for Heurodis than for the benefit of his realm. He abandons his royal self in favour of his personal self, in keeping with the political theory of the king's two bodies, and in giving up his royal self, assumes an identity of a significantly lower social rank: a pilgrim musician.

Accidental or unintentional disguises—that is, when a king is mistaken for a simple knight or for someone other than his royal self by another character, and who does not then announce his royal identity—are not as common for kings in English romances as are

⁷⁶ R. H. Nicholson, 'Sir Orfeo: A "Kynges Noote"', *The Review of English Studies*, 36.142 (1985), 61–79, p. 165.

⁷⁷ McCracken, p. 43.

⁷⁸ Nicholson, pp. 165, 168.

intentional disguises. Orfeo does not actively disguise his appearance upon returning from the Otherworld, aside from the pilgrim's attire he dons prior to leaving his own kingdom; yet his steward, who knew of his king's pilgrim disguise prior to Orfeo's initial departure, does not recognise him. His travels in the wilderness have changed his appearance, rather than his own efforts: 'his here of his berd, blac and rowe,/ to his girdel-stede was growe'.⁷⁹ However, Orfeo quickly takes advantage of his steward's confusion and intensifies the deception with his equivocation. The poet claims that Orfeo had intended to discover if his steward has been true to him, but there is more at work here than what the narrative voice makes explicit. This final section of the romance—Orfeo's return to his kingdom—functions as a king-and-subject narrative. Thus Orfeo's disguised appearance plays on audience anxiety that the king's eyes and ears are everywhere; one may never know who might be testing one's loyalty to the sovereign and should thus always be on guard. More than this, Orfeo's method of maintaining his steward's misidentification—namely, through verbal equivocation—proves the latter, in fact, to be a man of nobility, morality, and cleverness.

The poets of *Sir Orfeo*, *King Horn*, and *Horn Childe*, and *A Gest of Robyn Hode* all favour ambiguous phrasing as a mark of superior cleverness in a ruler and regard it as a more sympathetic form of verbal trickery as it is a less active attempt at deception. So, upon returning to his kingdom, Orfeo engages in similarly ambiguous phrasing with his steward, introducing himself as 'an harpoure of hethenisse', which is truthful, in the sense that he is a harper and has just come from the Other World, but his intent is to deceive.⁸⁰ This exchange and the dialogue that follows it allows the sly cleverness of Orfeo and the simple honesty of the steward to throw each other's qualities into relief. It is important to note Orfeo's shift

⁷⁹ *Sir Orfeo*, ed. Alan Bliss (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), ll. 265–6. I use the Auchinleck version of the romance unless otherwise specified.

⁸⁰ *Sir Orfeo*, ed. Alan Bliss, l. 513.

from ambiguous phrasing to outright lie in order to reinforce his disguise. Orfeo tells his steward he

[...] founde in a dale
with lyouns a man totorn smale,
and wolves him frete with teth so scharp.
Bi him y fond this ich harp;
wele ten yere it is y-go.⁸¹

This marks the first lie Orfeo has told his steward, following previous comments that were technically truthful but deliberately misleading. The deliberate falsehood proves the catalyst for his loyal steward's emotional outburst that convinces Orfeo of the man's integrity and moves Orfeo to abandon his ruse and admit his identity. The text's climactic moment of truth is revealed through a reaction to its purest lie.

In both *King Horn* and *Horn Childe*, the respective poets use deceptively ambiguous phrasing to insinuate that a false or unworthy person would not possess the cunning indicative of Horn's royal blood. In *Horn Childe*, infiltrating the court dressed in beggar's array, Horn tells Wikard quite truthfully, "Of beggers mo þan sexti/ [...] maister am Y". Indeed, as rightful king, he is master of all the beggars in the kingdom.⁸² Wikard, the unworthy traitor, does not parse the true meaning of Horn's statement, allowing Horn to infiltrate the castle and avenge himself upon Wikard. In *King Horn*, Horn is depicted using artful wording after infiltrating Fickenhild's stronghold, making riddles about a horn cup to unobtrusively attract Rimenhild's attention.⁸³ Fickenhild, as an unworthy suitor, is not clever enough to perceive Horn's identity and the significance of his statements, and thus he is caught unaware when Horn signals his men to ambush the wedding party.

⁸¹ *Sir Orfeo*, ed. Alan Bliss, ll. 537–41.

⁸² *Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild*, l. 937.

⁸³ 'King Horn', *Four Romances of England*, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), 17–72, ll. 1115–1168.

In *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, the disguised king Edward is characterised more by the honesty of his word than by his cleverness, and his one deceptive turn of phrase, ‘it falleth not for myn ordre’, appears more like humorous wit on his part than cunning:

‘It falleth not for myn ordre,’ sayd our kynge,
 ‘Robyn, by thy leve,
 For to smyte no good yeman,
 for doute I sholde hym greve.’⁸⁴

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Robin, having lost an archery contest with Edward in which the terms of the contest were that the winner must deliver a blow to the loser, demands that the king hit him. Edward, disguised as an abbot, knows that the strength of his blow will give him away as one who fights rather than one who prays, and attempts to sidestep the responsibility of delivering the blow through a pun on the word ‘ordre’, rather than by explicitly lying about his identity. In this moment, the poet shows Edward’s intelligence, which, combined with the outlaws’ continued acceptance of his abbot’s disguise, serves to shine a light on the sheriff’s poor abilities of discernment rather than the king’s, as until this point in the text the outlaws have successfully eluded and outwitted the sheriff and his men.

It seems, however, that *Sir Orfeo* in particular is invested in kings being men of their word, in oral contracts and verbal play. Throughout the narrative, the author uses Orfeo’s disguise as a plot device through which to present four modes of verbal play: equivocation, omission, lying, and speech acts. In disguise as a palmer-minstrel, both before the fairy king and his steward, Orfeo is able to use these four modes of speech to showcase his wit, prudence, and principled nature. The equivocation Orfeo engages in, like that of Horn and Edward, serves to display Orfeo’s wit, and his decision to appear in disguise and lie through omission about his true identity protects the safety of his person and, by extension, his kingdom as he temporarily abandons his throne and ventures into hostile territory. Through

⁸⁴ ‘A Gest of Robyn Hode’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1621–4.

the equivocation and omission he engages with his steward especially, Orfeo is shown to be a clever king, and also a prudent one to not immediately trust the loyalty of the steward upon returning to his kingdom (even if such suspicions prove unfounded).

Orfeo's lie to his steward, when considered alongside his insistence on the fairy king's adherence to his promise, shows a clear separation between the morality attendant upon everyday speech and the strict ethical implication of formal speech acts.⁸⁵ Orfeo views lying as a king's prerogative, a justifiable evil; but a king's oath must be his bond: he must not break a promise or give one with the intent of later renegeing on his word. It is, after all, on the grounds that a king must uphold his oaths and promises (and rash boons) regardless of consequences and personal loss, that Orfeo is able to corner the fairy king into releasing Heurodis from his court. He pleases the fairy king so well with his harping that the king tells him:

Menstrel, me likeþ wl þi gle.
Now aske of me what it be,
Largelich ichil þe pay:
Now speke, & tow miȝt asay.⁸⁶

When the fairy king balks at Orfeo's request for 'Þat ich leuedi, briȝt on ble,/ Þat slepeþ vnder þe ympe-tre', Orfeo reminds him of the relationship between kingship and lying:

'O, Sir!' he seyð, 'Gentil King!
Ȝete were it a wele fouler þing
To here a lesing of þi mouþe:
So, Sir, as as ȝe seyð nouþe
What ich wold aski haue y schold,
& nedes þou most þi word hold'.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ A speech act is a performative sentence, wherein the speech itself is the act: 'I swear', 'I name thee', et cetera. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), esp. pp. 10–15.

⁸⁶ *Sir Orfeo*, ed. Alan Bliss, ll. 449–452.

⁸⁷ *Sir Orfeo*, ed. Alan Bliss, ll. 455–456, 463–468. This quotation comes from the Auchinleck version, which dates to the 1330s. The late fifteenth-century Ashmole 61 version of *Sir Orfeo* replaces 'þi' with 'a kyngys': 'But nedys a kyngys word mot hold'—emphasising the necessity for a king in particular to adhere to his word. 'Sir Orfeo', *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffelton, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 386–399, l. 455.

When it comes to determining the ethics of deception—disguise, equivocation, omission, lying—for Orfeo, the ends justify the means: a casuistical attitude toward deceit that had gained particular traction in the previous century, even outside theological and university settings.⁸⁸ Indeed, the author uses disguise, equivocation, and omission to characterise Orfeo as a clever and prudent king, despite his temporary abandonment of his kingdom in order to rescue his wife himself. Then, though the king spends most of the narrative acting as if he were not a king, the author shows Orfeo to be a man of principles with a distinct code of ethics by pairing his insistence on the sanctity of a king's promise with his lack of compunction in delivering a common lie to his own loyal subject.

William of Palerne and Transformative Second Skins

Young foundling William spends most of his eponymous romance unaware that he is the heir, and later the true king, of Apulia, but he nevertheless is already rightfully king when he and his sweetheart Melior elope from Rome, fleeing Melior's betrothed: Partenedon, the son of the Emperor of Greece (William's father has died, though William is not yet aware of his royal parentage). Following the guidance of Alexandrine, Melior's loyal and magic-wielding handmaiden, the couple escape from Rome by hiding in bearskins, which Alexandrine procures from the kitchens. They flee through the forest, aided by William's werewolf companion, Alphonse (himself the rightful king of Spain, cursed into werewolf form by his stepmother). When Melior's father, the Emperor of Rome, learns of their bearskin disguises, the lovers cast them off and put on deerskins. They come to rest in a queen's garden in Palermo—that of William's own mother, though he does not know it. The queen, looking out her window at the deer, sees human skin peeking through the gaping

⁸⁸ Emily Corran, *Lying and Perjury in Medieval Practical Thought: A Study in the History of Casuistry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 20–25, 44.

stitches of the hides, and so she herself dresses in deerskin and enters the garden to meet with them. She invites them into her castle, where they are given human clothes again. William and his mother are reunited and William goes on to defeat in battle the man who was waging war against William's mother for control over Palermo. Finally, he aids Alphonse in defeating Alphonse's stepmother and demanding a reversal of the werewolf curse.

These animal skin disguises must entail some powers of transformation, as William and Melior take on the shapes of the bears and deer when dressed in their skins: while a human may reasonably fit in a bear suit, the deerskins are a different matter. Moreover, it is only through the gaping stitches that the queen can tell that what she sees are not actually real deer. The audience may infer a certain amount of therianthrope slippage: the fleeing lovers gaining the 'boldness' of bears, or the swiftness commonly associated with deer, though this is not made explicit in the text.⁸⁹ These moderately transformative disguises are contrasted with the earlier and full transformation of Alphonse into a werewolf. His stepmother's curse transforms his body thoroughly: no male human form can be detected by peeking through the seams. His nobility of character is the only indication that communicates through his wolf's body and skin, hinting at the human identity he used to have. Thus William and Melior are spared the ignominy of complete exile from society (as Alphonse must endure as a wild animal), and instead exist only temporarily as fugitives and asylum seekers.

The text is a fairly faithful translation from the French, and yet in *Guillaume de Palerme*, both animal disguises are given to the lovers—the bearskins provided by Alexandrine, the deerskins by werewolf-Alphonse. In the English version, William and

⁸⁹ *William of Palerme*, for boldness of bears: ll. 1686–87, 1692–1694, 2269; for swiftness of deer: ll. 2726, 2601–2602, 2803. See also Kate Watkins Tibbals, 'Elements of Magic in the Romance of William of Palerme', *Modern Philology*, 1.3 (1904), 355–371, p. 359.

Melior make their own deerskin disguises when their bearskins can no longer serve them. This complicates Alexandrine's position as Melior's handmaiden.

In the French version, Alexandrine's deceitful means are justified by her lady's happy, moral end. As with other crafty Alexandrine-type figures in other romances (Lynnet, Lunete, Brengwain, etc.), all is regarded fair in love [and war] so long as the lady concocting and performing the deceptive acts to bring the lovers to a happy end remains separate from the lady idealised as paramour.⁹⁰ As long as their aim is for the benefit of their mistresses (or, in the case of Lynnet of Malory's 'Tale of Gareth', her sister), these maidens can overstep the bounds of honest conduct and social propriety. This impropriety can, at times, extend beyond encouraging disguised encounters. J. M. Sullivan discusses the critical counsel, and what at times seems impudence, of lady-in-waiting Lunete toward Queen Laudine in Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvein*. Comparing Chrétien's text to Hartmann's German redaction, he supplies evidence that 'Lunete as adviser is considerably more deceptive, less clearly altruistic, and more subtly drawn, while Laudine, her counselee, is more suspicious of, and manipulative toward, her adviser'.⁹¹ While German romances reduce or condemn these maidens' crafty but improper behaviour (as Sullivan suggests), and Chrétien creates a lively give-and-take relationship between queen and maiden, in *Guillaume de Palerme* the crafty Alexandrine acts as both mediator and facilitator for the lovers' behaviour. The clever maiden can be imperfect so that the lady can remain an embodiment of feminine perfection, however that perfection is conceived by the author or redactor. The author or redactor is able to displace cunning and a knowledge of magic from the lady onto her maid: Alexandrine concocts the plan to clothe William and Melior in bearskins and also procures

⁹⁰ Note that all of these women are white Europeans. Josian's and Floripas's Saracen identity permit them to display bold, violent, deceitful moments and still remain desirable. Cf. Jacqueline de Weever, *Sheba's Daughters: Whitening and Demonizing the Saracen Woman in Medieval French Epic* (London: Garland, 1998), 8–9, 33–34, 79, 120.

⁹¹ J. M. Sullivan, 'The Lady Lunete: Literary Conventions of Counsel and the Criticism of Counsel in Chrétien's *Yvain* and Hartmann's *Iwein*', *Neophilologus*, 85.3 (2001), 335–354, p. 339.

the transformative skins; Brengwain brings aboard the love potion which was originally intended for Isolde and King Mark, and later, offers to trick Mark into believing Isolde is a virgin by taking Isolde's place in Mark's bed on their wedding night; in 'The Tale of Gareth', Lynnet animates a suit of armour to prevent Gareth and her sister, Lionesse, from engaging in premarital sex. behaviour comes under scrutiny.

In *William of Palerne*, the English translator removes this clean delineation between imperfect maiden and perfect lady, figuratively and literally sullyng both the lady's and the king's hands in order to more closely parallel William's social ascent from foundling to recognised king with his increasing self-sufficiency. Randy Schiff has noted how William's and Melior's animal disguises portray their (and, I would argue, particularly William's) social rise:

In leaving the bearskins, the lovers also leave behind the kitchen: dressing themselves in creatures drawn from the very woods in which they move, they now travel on all fours, a signal of their fuller animality. Now become-deer, the lovers of *Guillaume* and *William* ironically ascend in status in the animalized, aristocratic allegory, attaining the summit of the symbolic hierarchy of Western European venery.⁹²

Just so, William's first disguise (the bearskin) must be provided for him, as someone who is dependent on others' shrewdness and goodwill. The second disguise he is able to provide for himself, though he must still rely on his werewolf companion for aid in hunting the deer and on his queen mother to ascend from the status of pseudo-deer to assuming a full and undisguised human identity. Finally, back in his human form as he defeats the king of Spain in battle, William is able to affect transformation for Alphonse: he demands that the queen of Spain reverse her curse upon her stepson and return him to human form. Though Walter Skeat finds the disguise portion of the narrative 'tedious, and one wonders why the disguises were kept on so long', he acknowledges that the disguises 'form the true groundwork of the

⁹² Randy P. Schiff, 'Cross-Channel Becomings-Animal: Primal Courtliness in *Guillame de Palerne* and *William of Palerne*', *Exemplaria*, 21.4 (2009), 418–438, p. 432.

story’; Lawrence Warner agrees that ‘it is clear that the translator approached this portion of his source with gusto’.⁹³ Aside from the entertainment value of animal disguises and transformations, of magic and pursuit, it is evident why the translator lingers on this disguise sequence: it functions as an allegorical representation of William’s transition from vulnerable foundling child, to independent young man, and finally to a king who is able to provide and affect positive change for others.

The previous section outlined a common reason why kings are often depicted adopting disguise: as a form of carnivalesque release, a means of depicting a king’s pursuit of private desires. This section has established that exploring the problems that can arise when a king’s public and private identities are discordant is not, however, the only interest authors have when incorporating kingly disguise as a plot device. The parodic assumption of a divine pagan identity, verbal equivocation, and animal disguise are all varieties of different kinds of royal disguise that may be adopted for an equally various number of reasons apart from those outlined in the previous section. Royal disguises can be undertaken for personal desires and illustrations of character while simultaneously transforming a non-Christian myth to be compatible with Christian beliefs of a single extant deity. They can provide a means by which to outline a casuistical analysis of acceptable and unacceptable verbal deceit. And they can be adopted for the king’s (or heir’s) personal safety and protection while concurrently providing a visual representation of a young man’s personal growth from a foundling dependant into a self-sufficient king.

⁹³ Walter W. Skeat, ‘Introduction to *William of Palerne*’, *William of Palerne*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, EETS (London: Trübner, 1867), i–xxv, p. v; Lawrence Warner, ‘Langland and the Problem of *William of Palerne*’, *Viator*, 37 (2006), 397–415, p. 403.

Royal Perceptiveness

For all their apparent familiarity with the art of disguise, kings in the romances are surprisingly blind to it in others. That the king should not perceive the adultery and other forms of treachery around him is central to many romance plots; the manifestation of this gullibility as almost literal blindness to the disguises of others is not narratively essential, and yet it happens frequently. Horn in *Horn Childe* cannot recognise his best friend Wiard in his rags; Apollonius cannot recognise his wife though she knows him immediately. King Philip's imperceptiveness in *Alexander A* and *The Wars of Alexander* is perhaps excusable, as Nectanebus is using enchantment to change his appearance into something non-human, but then the steward acting as king *de facto* in Orfeo's absence in *Sir Orfeo* is taken in by Orfeo's minstrel pose and wild appearance and the king in *Robin Hood and the Monk* hands his seal to a notorious outlaw without batting an eyelid.

Particularly striking is the presence of this disguise-blindness motif in Arthurian, and particularly later Arthurian, romances. While myriad knights fail to recognise each other within their armour or behind their false devices or colours, the tendency to be thoroughly taken in by false appearances seems a particular tendency of and problem for kings. Just like other knights, they are deceived by false devices and visage-shielding helmets, but they seem slower to penetrate non-chivalric disguises than their followers. The frequency with which the motif is employed by late Arthurian English authors suggests a complexity of purpose and significance, as the subtle subtexts of these encounters become more apparent with comparison. This blindness seems to affect both Arthur and Mark—the good king and the ridiculous king—above other kings, while Uther and Cornwall (in *King Arthur and King Cornwall*)—the conniving and sinister kings, respectively—prove themselves to be shrewder and more perceptive than most of the text's rulers.

It is, I think, a motif that indirectly, or semi-covertly, plays with the late medieval anxiety about flatterers and false friends, particularly regarding political pragmatics. This anxiety becomes particular pressing—and visible in literature—in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The person who is able to exert the most influence over the king is often the one who is most able to stroke his vanity: the counsellor who appears to have the king's best interests at heart and hides a secret, self-serving agenda. The primary example would be Edward II's favouritism towards Piers Gaveston and Hugh Despenser caused violent rifts within the baronage, but powerful magnates struggling for undue control of the king and realm already scarred the reign of Henry III; and in the early thirteenth century, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Philip Augustus' influences on Richard I, John, and their brothers led to wars in the reigns of Henry II and Richard I.⁹⁴ John of Salisbury believed the dangers presented by kings falling prey to flatterers that he devotes nearly all the third book of *Policraticus* to warning kings against flatterers and of the need for wisdom and clear perception when continually surrounded by potentially deceitful courtiers.⁹⁵ The dangers of false flattery is an enduring anxiety, but becomes especially visible in fourteenth to sixteenth century secular literature, from Chaucer's 'Nun's Priest's Tale' to Skelton's 'Magnificence'.⁹⁶

The English *Prose Merlin* is an especially good text for a case study of royal perception of false appearances. First, that it is a mid-fifteenth century English translation of a mid-thirteenth century French text speaks to the enduring relevance of the text and its themes and motifs to medieval readers insofar as it reflects the interests of early as well as later authors, publishers, and readers; great editorial changes and adaptations were not required. Second, the text is rife with instances of kings and knights encountering a

⁹⁴ On Edward II: Hollister, pp. 310–20; on Henry III: Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, p. 108–115 and Hollister, pp. 259–67, 274–78; on the Plantagenets: Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, pp. 12, 16.

⁹⁵ John of Salisbury, III.ii–viii, x–xii.

⁹⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Nun's Priest's Tale', *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 253–261; John Skelton, *Magnificence*, ed. Paula Neuss (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980).

disguised figure; the motif of the disguise-blind king motif is integral to the text and provides a large number of similar narrative episodes. Thus patterns and deviations can be demonstrated. These disguised figures are almost all the *same* character: Merlin. While Merlin's semi-supernatural parentage could be argued to affect the ability of kings to recognise him, his disguises are easily detectable by ordinary men. The recurrence of one character cast as the deceiver in most of the disguise encounters reduces variables of characterisation: the relative perceptiveness of the characters is made the focus, and their (im)perceptiveness cannot be attributed to variations in the rank or personal character of the disguised. The *Prose Merlin's* narrative covers the reigns of four successive kings, from Merlin's childhood under the rule of Vortigern through the volatile years of Arthur's early rule. It also introduces several others as secondary and tertiary characters and involves a substantial interlude in which Merlin assists the emperor of Rome.

The disguise encounters are presented as a number of similarly structured narrative episodes, and those narratives imitate those in other texts involving non-magical persons.⁹⁷ This structure of variations on a theme made it ideal for a close examination of the comparative qualities and behaviours of characters depicted encountering a disguised figure. The theme of a lack of perceptive ability amongst kings comes across more strongly in the English *Prose Merlin* than it does in its French source, the Vulgate *Estoire de Merlin*, showing it to be a topic of particular interest to the translator. O. D. Macrae-Gibson claims that 'so mechanical a translator has no claim to the title "author", and cannot be seen as expressing any opinion of his own'.⁹⁸ This is not true. In comparing the two texts it is evident

⁹⁷ Literal disguise blindness affecting kings can be found in *Generides*, *Apollonius of Tyre*, and *Alexander A*, amongst others. *Generydes, a Romance in Seven-Line Stanzas*, ed. W. A. Wright, EETS (London: Trübner, 1973), ll. 957–59; *Die alt-und mittelenglischen Apollonius-Bruchstücke, Studien und Texte zur englischen Philologie*, ed. J. Raith, 3 vols. (Munich: M. Huber, 1956), III, 78–84, ll. 35–6; 'Alexander A', *The Gestes of King Alexander of Macedon*, ll. 725–70.

⁹⁸ O. D. Macrae-Gibson, 'Review of Malory's *Morte Darthur*', *The Review of English Studies*, 28.112 (1977), 453–454, p. 454.

that, in an otherwise fairly faithful translation of the Vulgate *Estoire*, the English translator has made a number of small editorial changes to reduce the moments in which kings are shown discovering the disguised Merlin's identity themselves. The translator increases the imagery of obscured vision and hidden items and heightens the presence of sensory language, demonstrating that the visual is inferior to the auditory in trustworthiness. The text thus exemplifies the particularly royal phenomenon of disguise-blindness in medieval English romance and ballads; rulers who are noticeably slower than other members of their court to perceive false appearances.

In choosing to retain all of the moments in which Merlin assumes a disguise and yet at the same time noticeably deviating from a near-direct translation of his source with regard to perceptual phrasing and sensory language, the translator addresses the anxieties of an audience dependent on kings possessing shrewd perception for continued political stability. The *Prose Merlin* highlights both the necessity for cunning yet devoted counsellors and the dangers rulers present to themselves and their kingdoms when their lack of guile is coupled with naïveté. At the same time, it criticises the king whose shrewdness manifests itself as a willingness to beguile others.

Though the translator of the *Prose Merlin* rarely redacts material from his Vulgate source, two of the instances in which substantial material is omitted are moments when Merlin is presenting a disguised version of himself to kings. The first is when Merlin appears in two alternating semblances to young Prince Uther and his brother King Pendragon. The prince and king, speaking to each other of the serving boy and gentleman that each respectively met on the road, marvel at the boy's and man's knowledge and they attempt to introduce the disguised Merlin to each other. In the Vulgate, a comedic scene ensues in which Merlin switches back and forth between disguises as the brothers separately and repeatedly enter and exit the royal tent in which he is standing. Eventually the brothers find

an opportunity to compare accounts, and ultimately reason out for themselves that the two figures must be one and the same person. By contrast, the English translator removes this conversation between Pendragon and Uther and the multiple entries and exits. Instead he has Merlin reveal himself as the young men take a passive role of simply marvelling. In doing so, the translator diminishes the young royals' perceptive abilities, while amplifying Merlin's magical prowess.

The second moment of redaction occurs during what Rupert Pickens refers to as the 'Merlin as a bird-catcher' scene: Arthur's first encounter with Merlin in disguise.⁹⁹ Unlike the Pendragon and Uther episode where the editorial changes enhance the perceptiveness of the two kings in relation to the source, here the translator retains the king's bafflement at the counterfeit appearance. Thus in comparison with the source text, the English translator's choices operate to emphasise the theme of false appearances and hidden truths. In this episode, kings Arthur, Ban, and Bors are out riding when they see a lowborn man hunting birds. The man solicits Arthur to accept his birds as a gift, and then enters into dialogue with Arthur, reproaching the king for burying treasure instead of distributing that wealth amongst his subjects. The three kings express astonishment at the man's knowledge of what they believed to be secret, and at the incongruity between his wise words and simple form, exclaiming, 'What devell! Who hath tolde this cherll?'.¹⁰⁰ Ulfin, overhearing the exchange, recognises Merlin immediately and draws him aside to speak with him.¹⁰¹ Bretel, who also recognises Merlin, joins them, and together the two knights reveal Merlin's identity to the three kings. Ulfin and Bretel's instant recognition of Merlin in the bird-catcher episode, present in both French and English texts, throws the three kings' lack of perception into

⁹⁹ *The Story of Merlin*, in *Lancelot-Grail: the Old French Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. Rupert T. Pickens, 5 vols. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), I, p. 233; *Estoire de Merlin*, in *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer, 7 vols. (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1908–1916), II, pp. 122–125.

¹⁰⁰ *Prose Merlin*, p. 169.

¹⁰¹ *Prose Merlin*, p. 169.

relief. Their recognition proves that Merlin's disguise is not impenetrable, nor is the ability to see past it only for those who have encountered him in disguised form before. Ulfin wonders aloud at the kings' poor powers of perception, remarking: 'I sey for that ye knowe hym not so wele as I wolde that ye dide. For ye se somme two tymes or thre, and yet ye ne knowe hym not, and therof I merveyle'.¹⁰² Bretel, who has not participated in any of Merlin's disguised adventures as Ulfin has, is equally quick to apprehend the truth of the bird-catcher's identity, for 'whan he [Bretel] hadde herde hem awhile speke, he perceyved that it was Merlin and began to lawgh undir his mantell right harde'.¹⁰³

In the Vulgate, the dialogue is entrenched in the language of economic exchange. By contrast, the English translator removes about half of Merlin's admonition of Arthur for hoarding treasure rather than distributing it amongst his subjects. Moreover, he replaces Ulfin's description of Merlin as 'a man to whom wealth means very little' with 'the man that *hath hym [Arthur] tolde* of the grete richesse unther the erthe', emphasising Merlin's knowledge rather than his disdain for worldly wealth.¹⁰⁴ The effect is that the translator shifts the tone of the passage away from a lesson on the 'honor' and 'preu' accrued through displays of generosity and largesse, away from the king-subject economic relationship, and instead accentuates the kings' failed attempt at concealment (of the treasure) and their beguiling by and subsequent astonishment at Merlin assuming and successfully maintaining a false guise.¹⁰⁵ The translator contemporises his thirteenth-century French source for a fifteenth-century English audience, one which is more anxious about the dangers presented by an imperceptive and foolish king than by an ungenerous one.

¹⁰² *Prose Merlin*, p. 169.

¹⁰³ *Prose Merlin*, p. 169.

¹⁰⁴ 'Et sacies quil a hui a tel parle a qui il est moult petit de nul auoir tant soit ore grant de sor terre'. *Estoire de Merlin*, in *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, p. 123, ll. 11–12; translation from *Lancelot-Grail*, p. 234; *Prose Merlin*, p. 169, emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁵ *Estoire de Merlin*, in *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, p. 122, l. 38.

In addition to these larger changes, the translator makes more frequent reference to the imagery of hidden things, a stylistic choice that promotes the idea that much of the world is not as it seems and that encourages the audience to look beyond the immediately visible in the text. For instance, in the bird-catcher episode, the kings and Merlin are speaking of *buried* treasure, and Bretel, who perceives the truth of Merlin's disguise, is described as laughing 'undir his mantell'.¹⁰⁶ Incidentally, it is worth noting that the author replaces one of Merlin's birds with a goose, an animal that, according to Isidore of Seville, was considered a bird of prudence, keeping watch at night and warning others of intruders with its noise, a more thematically appropriate gift than the Vulgate's two ducks, a fowl noted for its constancy and believed to have poison-repelling properties.¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere in the text, scenes are described from Gawain's perspective as he peers out from behind foliage or fails to see a man shouting below from his position on the battlements; more hidden treasure is revealed, meetings are requested to take place in the thickest, darkest patches of forest, and Merlin twice is depicted disguising himself as a blind man. The text's recurring themes of concealment, perception, and revelation exposes larger philosophical questions of the fallibility of human vision and in what ways such a fallibility in kings presents particular dangers to the stability of the realm.

This sustained interest in concealment and perspicacity leads to a larger philosophical discussion of sight versus hearing in the *Prose Merlin* as (un)reliable modes of perception. The translator expands the sensory language used in the effective detection of false semblances, particularly regarding sound, both in this episode and throughout the text. The *Prose Merlin* privileges the credibility of auditory experiences and is quick to discredit sight as a tool of accurate perception. The knights shown as repeatedly and swiftly

¹⁰⁶ *Prose Merlin*, p. 169.

¹⁰⁷ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* [electronic resource], ed. and trans. S. Barney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), XII.vii.51.

apprehending the underlying state of affairs, distinguishing counterfeit from true are very clearly portrayed as preferring hearing and verbal exchange to what their eyes perceive. This is how Ulfin and Bretel are able to determine the identity of the bird-catcher: while the kings are remarking on the churl's rude appearance, it is Ulfin and Bretel's attention to Merlin's speech that betrays his true identity. We are told that 'after Ulfin a while hadde listened [...] than he began to smyle and wiste wele it was Merlin', and Bretel 'hadde wele herde that [which] Merlin hadde seide, and also that Vlfin hadde seyde to hym, that better semed a cherll than eny that was in the worlde. And whan he hadde herde hem awhile speke, he perceyved that it was Merlin'.¹⁰⁸ Gawain, too, is shown on multiple occasions as relying upon sound over sight. In fact, Merlin's last meeting with Gawain, and one of the last moments in the text, is a completely auditory experience. The air becomes filled with an obscuring mist, such that a double-layer of non-visibility exists: Gawain can no longer see even the false dwarf semblance that has been forced upon him. All possibility of potentially misleading sight is removed, and Merlin's final words speak repeatedly of 'trouthe', a 'trouthe' that is not complicated by visibility.¹⁰⁹

The kings in the *Prose Merlin* frequently fail to corroborate what they see with by considering what they hear. They place too much weight on the readily visible, the tangible, rather than on the aural. In fact, the only moment in this text in which a king detects a figure in disguise before a member of his court does is when he cannot see Merlin at all. Uther, listening to a bewildered Ulfin describe the unusual demands of 'a man right olde and feble', smiles with the realisation that the man in question is Merlin in disguise, a quick show of wit that Merlin later remarks upon, telling Ulfin with admiration, 'The kynge is sone perceiving'.¹¹⁰ This conforms to the text's recurrent theme of obscured vision leading to

¹⁰⁸ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 168, 169.

¹⁰⁹ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 692–94.

¹¹⁰ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 72–3. Doo of Cardoel, a minor character and not a king, similarly uncovers Merlin's identity without ever setting eyes upon him. After listening to 'tidinges [that] ronne vp and down', Doo

greater understanding. This is a concept not altogether surprising to find in a text written for a medieval audience; its auditors would have been familiar with the philosophy of the temporality and seductive qualities of earthly, tangible things and the greater value of the spiritual, and used to listening attentively more frequently than processing the written word.

Moments when obscured vision leads to greater comprehension are not limited within this text to disguise encounters, though. King Leodegan, who has kept the wife of his forgiving and faithful steward Cleodalis locked in a tower for the past five years, is convinced that, given the opportunity, Cleodalis will turn against him. However, when the opportunity does arise—Cleodalis sees Leodegan knocked off his horse in battle—Cleodalis remains loyal to Leodegan despite his king's trespasses and helps the king onto the steward's own horse. Leodegan only 'saugh the trouthe of his stiwarde' (that is, his loyalty) and recognises his own actions as abhorrent when, having been knocked off his horse, his vision is literally obscured by the 'derke nyght', the thick forest, and his helm.¹¹¹ This kingly inability to recognise a good subject when he sees him is echoed in Arthur's failure to recognise the true worth of Avadain, a knight of great prowess trapped in a dwarf's body.¹¹² It is the inverse of what the author's medieval audience would have known was to come, a foreshadowing of the Round Table's intertextually inevitable end: Arthur failing to recognise a traitor who appears fair on the surface—whether Morgan le Fay, Lancelot or Guinevere in different textual traditions. His readiness to accept a surface-level understanding of situations and subjects puts his person and kingdom in danger.

Kings' relationships with disguise in the text mostly seem to be founded on issues of wise action, a combination of maturity and virtue. Arthur is a good king, but the *Prose*

'thought well in his herte who this knyght myght be [...] Than thought doo a-noon what he was and gan to smylen', p. 302.

¹¹¹ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 347–48.

¹¹² Cf. Mikayla Hunter, 'Evadeam, Gawain, Merlin: Penitential Transformation and Unseen Truth in the 'Dwarf Knight' Section of the Vulgate Cycle', *Arthuriana*, 29.4 (2019) [forthcoming].

Merlin is set at the point in his reign when he is still young and naïve. The knights and counsellors who aid him in unveiling various deceits are almost all older, survivors from Uther's reign, and worldly-wise, or, in the case of Gawain, exhibit a wisdom and suspicion of others beyond his years. Even kings Ban and Bors, older kings who are duped a few times themselves by Merlin's false forms, are quicker than Arthur to catch on to Merlin's penultimate disguise as a blind, crowned harper.¹¹³ It is an indication of Arthur entering a more mature phase of his reign that one of his final acts in the text is to adhere to the terms of the boon Arthur granted Merlin (to carry the king's banner into battle) despite his messenger-boy appearance, and without need for another person to counsel him on the matter.

Uther, in contrast, is a foil to Arthur, demonstrating the equal dangers of a knight who is *too* worldly. While he is taken in by Merlin's disguises as an innocent child, as an adult, he displays great shrewdness, but fewer ethics. His quick cunning allows him to detect an interloper amongst the ranks of his foot soldiers, but his willingness to participate himself in a deceitful machination against one of his subjects is morally beyond the pale; his transgressions against Igraine and her husband throw the kingdom into civil war both during his reign and the reign of his son.

A king needs to exercise a healthy degree of suspicion of those around him, or at the very least to surround himself with loyal men who possess some scepticism. In the *Prose Merlin* Arthur has surrounded himself with such men. In contrast to the heroic Lancelot-like figures glorified in other Arthurian romances, who seem trustingly to expect the same standard of chivalric behaviour from others that they themselves practise, these men exhibit a continual state of suspicion that, unlike their too-trusting sovereign, indicate a preparedness for treachery from other knights. They are early companions in Arthur's

¹¹³ *Prose Merlin*, p. 622.

kingship, former retainers of Uther who are older and more experienced than their new king; or, like Gawain, young men who grew up observing the machinations and intrigues of a pre-Arthurian court. Because of their backgrounds, they exhibit a continued state of suspicion and wariness at the motives of other knights. This preparedness allows them, through the course of the text, to prevent or put an end to treacherous behaviour before the consequences result in personal or political tragedy. For example, Gawain customarily wears a coat of double mail under his robes ‘Nought for that he thought to do eny vilonye ne treson. But for he douted euer that debate sholde a-rise amonge his felowes [...] or eny treson where-of ther were I-nowe in the londe’.¹¹⁴ Later, whilst traveling, ‘Gawein and Elizer, thei wolde not slepe, but were euer in susspecion of the saisnes [Saxons] that were so many in the londe’.¹¹⁵ Backing an heir who is from effectively an unknown background, Arthur’s early knights must be on the lookout for men who intend Arthur harm. Knights who join his fellowship later in his reign do not need to exhibit such circumspection, as most contentious parties have been subdued and are acting on the principles of the Round Table. The *Prose Merlin*, however, is an Arthur *enfance* narrative, and his early companions must help him into an effective kingship, one which is as concerned with the pragmatics of dealing with human fallibility as it is with promoting ideals of chivalry. Arthur’s early counsellors—Merlin and Arthur’s first generation of knights—need to aid the young, naïve Arthur in growing into a good and effective king by surrounding him with loyal men who can see clearly: who are watchful, wary, and continually looking beneath surfaces.

Arthur is not alone in his royal naïvety, though he is by far the most overly-trusting. Neither Arthur, Gonnore’s husband, nor King Leodegan, father to both the royal and ‘false’ Gonnore, recognise that the royal Gonnore has been replaced with her half-sister, while

¹¹⁴ *Prose Merlin*, p. 454.

¹¹⁵ *Prose Merlin*, p. 539.

Leodegan's steward Cleodalis (husband to the false Gonnore's mother) realises immediately that the two women must have exchanged places. It is only after Merlin intercedes that King Leodegan checks the crown birthmark on Gonnore to ensure that the false Gonnore has not taken her place. Neither do the two kings take any precautions going forward to prevent such an exchange happening a second time (which of course it does).¹¹⁶

The anxiety about an unsuspecting king falling prey to unperceived treachery is not one that comes to full disastrous fruition in Arthur's court in this text. However, within the *Prose Merlin*, the placement of the Grisandolus interlude in the middle of the narrative (discussed below, and again more fully in chapter two) heightens that anxiety by providing an example of the depths to which Arthur's kingdom could sink if the king were to fail to outgrow his overly trusting naïveté before Merlin and his cunning-yet-loyal older knights are no longer around to serve him.

In the Grisandolus interlude, Merlin travels away from Arthur's kingdom to Rome, where he aids the exceptionally imperceptive emperor Julius Caesar and meets Grisandolus, a woman disguised as a knight and, moreover, the best knight in Caesar's court. At the time of Merlin's arrival, the emperor is shown to have been exercising a blind trust in his court and household that has painted him the fool and spun his empire into chaos. This is a risk Arthur runs, so the audience infers, if he does not learn greater shrewdness. In his trust of his lustful wife and his failure to perceive that her twelve waiting women are actually her lovers in disguise, Caesar has exposed his empire to a succession crisis through the possibility that any heir born to his empress is potentially false. Caesar's inability to see past appearance and to discern the true nature of affairs has left his court lacking proper knights; indeed, his best knight is a woman. His people, as beggars, literally walk on top of undetected money, while the social order is crumbling, with squires slapping their knights

¹¹⁶ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 451–452, 463–468.

and women running wild. Caesar's literal and figurative blindness also makes him susceptible to unwise proclamations and dangerous offers, culminating in what nearly becomes a coup-de-grâce for his empire: Grisandolus almost inherits half of his lands due to the Emperor's inability to detect her disguise and his need to rely on others to uncover Merlin's.

In effect, what the English *Prose Merlin* offers through its heightened imagery of untrustworthy appearances and hidden value, through its reworking of disguise-encounter scenes in an otherwise quite faithful translation, is a view of kingship that demands keen attention particularly to what people say, a realisation that appearances can be deceptive, and a somewhat suspicious nature for true political stability to be assured.

Conclusion

The English romance and outlaw ballad poets composing and translating after the deposition of Richard II and during the Wars of the Roses were writing in eras of political upheaval, in which ideas of rightful and legitimate kingship were very much in debate. The interests of many of the poets discussed above regarding kings in disguise are thus unlike those of contemporary romance authors in Scotland and later, early modern English authors. These Scottish and early modern English authors delighted in the concept of the investigative king and capitalised on anxieties about an inquisitive monarchy whose eyes and ears could be anywhere. Rather, the late medieval English authors use the concept of the king's two bodies—his social and personal selves—coupled with the sense of social release disguise affords to probe contemporary anxieties about the essence of good and worthy kingship. Examining the king as risk-taker, as naïve or dangerously imperceptive, and as unable to control his desires or willing to allow them to supersede the behaviour demanded of his position, these texts use the fantasy of temporary release from the

constraints of public office that a disguise can provide in order to portray the varying types of kingly behaviour that might threaten or buttress social order.

Temporary suspension of the king's body politic in favour of the pursuit of personal desires, while a popular form of disguise narrative, is not the only reason medieval authors deployed king *incognito* motifs. As seen in *Sir Orfeo*, *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, and *King Horn*, disguise can function as a plot device through which to explore different modes of verbal play and the ethics and implications of character attendant to these modes. A king's word must be his bond, and so equivocation provides a morally unproblematic way to showcase a king's sharp wit, both to maintain his disguise and in testing the degree of treachery or danger in the person they are attempting to deceive. The animal disguises incorporated into *William of Palerne* lend a magical quality to the lovers' escape and, as William's and Melior's disguises progress through an animal hierarchy, provide a visual representation of the heir's ascent to the throne.

Despite their evident proclivity for adopting disguises themselves in many romances, across the genre, kings are consistently characterised as inept at detecting others in disguise. This is particularly noticeable in Arthurian romance, where royal naïveté and moral goodness seem to go hand-in-hand—as do shrewdness and fewer compunctions about strictly ethical royal behaviour. When it comes to deceitful individuals, it appears that the general attitude amongst medieval English authors and redactors was that it takes one to know one. Through disguise motifs, these narratives address anxieties surrounding a king's ability to perceive false counsel, false friends, and treasonous plots. While probity is a quality admired in kings in romance, an overly-trusting nature is a threat to the stability of the realm. It is imperative, then, that kings surround themselves with counsellors who mistrust appearances, who continuously display and counsel wariness, and serve to protect

the king others' deceitful machinations as well as from his own short-sightedness and gullibility.

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN, DISGUISE, AND DESIRABILITY

Encountering Disguise¹

If kings in medieval secular literature are notable for their inability to perceive disguises, then women are overwhelmingly notable for the opposite. While there are some examples of women in the English romances and ballads actively assuming a disguise, their most common role in disguise-encounters is to recognise the disguised hero. There are at least twice as many depictions of women encountering a disguised person as there are depictions of women adopting a disguise themselves. In the medieval English romances women are often the first characters to detect a disguise, suggesting a gendered view of perceptiveness.² There are three types of narratives in the romances and ballads in which the woman is presented with a person in disguise often after a long absence: those in which the woman recognises the person in disguise with the aid of a ‘token of recognition’ (this is the most common narrative of the three); those in which the woman accurately perceives the identity of the person in disguise without the aid of a visual cue (the second most common narrative); and those rarer occasions on which the woman is taken in by the disguise.

Recognition Aided by Mnemonic Tokens

Medieval memory culture is influential in shaping many disguise-recognition episodes in romance. The frequent employment of the ‘token of recognition’ motif in many of these narratives provides evidence of this. That is, the woman in question does not at first recognise the hero—what Bruce Loudon calls ‘delayed’ recognition; an object triggers her

¹ The research in this section has been published in: Mikayla Hunter, ‘Memory, Gender, and Recognition in *Le Morte Darthur*’, *Journal of the International Arthurian Society*, 6.1 (2018), 3–24.

² There are so few women in the medieval English outlaw ballads that it is difficult to compare the two genres.

recognition, most often a ring exchanged earlier between the lovers.³ These recognition tokens operate as what Elisabeth van Houts refers to as ‘pegs for memory’.⁴ Memories of people or events were often linked to, or imprinted upon, objects; seeing those objects could then trigger the recollection of the memories with which they were associated. The frequent presence of these objects in romance recognition scenes points to these women’s perspicacity as a matter more of recollection than perception.

The romance of *Sir Isumbras* provides a good example of the use of mnemonic objects in recognition scenes. It also demonstrates the endurance of this recognition motif and concept of object-as-mnemonic through the late Middle Ages and into the early modern period. The text was composed prior to 1320. The surviving manuscripts show a continued rather than revived interest in the text. The nine manuscripts date from the mid-fourteenth century Gray’s Inn manuscript and late fourteenth century Oxford, University College MS 142 to the 1564 transcript in MS Douce 261 and include six manuscripts produced throughout the fifteenth century. Moreover, the provenances of these manuscripts range from southwest Sussex up into northern Yorkshire, suggesting a widespread and continuous interest in the text.⁵

About midway through the text, the wife of Sir Isumbras, about to be forcibly taken from him by the sultan, slips him a ring as a ‘token’ by which to remember, and presumably find, her.⁶ The sultan then gives Isumbras a bag of gold in exchange for his wife. Later,

³ Loudon identifies six subtypes: immediate, delayed (‘recognition occurs, but later in the same scene’), postponed (‘recognition does not occur until a later scene’), reversed (‘another character does the testing’); shared (in which ‘both characters, protagonist and the other family members, are *ignorant* of each other’s identities’), and that in which ‘the protagonist is fully cognizant of other family members’ identities when he encounters them, but he refrains from disclosing his own identity, while he tests and probes them’. Bruce Loudon, ‘Is There Early Recognition between Penelope and Odysseus?: Book 19 in the Larger Context of the *Odyssey*’, *College Literature*, 38.2 (2011), 76–100, p. 79.

⁴ Elisabeth van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900-1200* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999), pp. 93–120, particularly p. 93.

⁵ Harriet Hudson, ‘Introduction to *Sir Isumbras*’, *Four Middle English Romances*, ed. Harriet Hudson, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006), 5–9, pp. 5, 8.

⁶ In the Cotton manuscript she breaks the ring, each of them keeping a half of it. ‘Sir Isumbras’, *Six Middle English Romances*, ed. Madwyn Mills (London: Dent, 1982), 125–147, ll. 322–324, 683–684.

Isumbras encounters his wife whilst he is in the guise of a palmer. In the Cotton manuscript of *Sir Isumbras* (c. 1446–60), the ring is produced as a mnemonic for Isumbras's wife.⁷ Other versions lack the Cotton manuscript's continuity. Their transcribers conflate the ring with the sultan's 'red clothe' filled with gold given to Isumbras when he first parted with his wife in this recognition scene.⁸ However, the importance of including a recognition token and the inclusion of a mnemonic performance by the wife remains consistent. Seeing the gold, she experiences a strong emotional response followed by recognition of the object and recollection of the hero:

Sone when sche it sawe with syght,
 In swonyng the lady fell doune ryght,
 For sche it are hade sene.
 Sche kyste it ofte and seyde, 'Alas,
 This gold owyth Syr Isombras,
 That my lord was wonte to be.'
 And sche it to that knyght tolde,
 How sche was for that gold solde
 Many a dey before.
 'When ye may that palmer se,
 Byde hym come speke with me;
 After hym me longeth sore.'⁹

As in other female recognition scenes in the romances, this is followed by the hero's affirmation of his identity.

The palmer was brought into the halle.
 The quen to counsyll dyd hym calle
 And askyd hym, for Godys ore,
 If he were ever gentyll man,
 And how he that gold wanne. [...]
 With sorowfull hert and syghyng sore,
 He gaff hyr an ansuere
 And on his kneys hym sette [...]
 Than sche kyssyd his face,
 And seyde, 'Welcom, Syr Isombrace!'

⁷ 'Sir Isumbras', *Six Middle English Romances*, ll. 679–702.

⁸ 'Sir Isumbras', *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffelton, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), 39–59, l. 647; 'Sir Isumbras', *Four Middle English Romances*, ed. Harriet Hudson, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006) 5–38, ll. 620–650 (uses Gonville and Caius manuscript as base text).

⁹ 'Sir Isumbras', *Codex Ashmole 61*, ll. 673–84.

For joy thei were wepand.¹⁰

Considering, then, that in the multiple recopyings of the manuscript the mnemonic object retains its relevance and that it is necessary, in these recopyings, to include *a* visual cue for the queen rather than *specifically* the ring, it is clear that it is the memory imprinted upon the object (and often the performativity that accompanies this imprinting), and not necessarily the emotionality of the object alone that is essential to her perceptiveness.

Object-driven recognition in the medieval period was heavily gender-associated. With the exception of *Amis and Amiloun*, object-triggered recognition in English romance is exclusively the domain of women.¹¹ Anne Lester has discussed medieval women's association with the care and keeping of relics and the cultivation of the association of those objects with memories of lost male spouses and relatives. She points out how 'crusaders sent relics and reliquaries [...] specifically to their spouses or female kin'; these objects would then 'encode memories' of the absent crusaders.¹² Often these 'objects were anchored to texts—charters, letters, necrologies and lections—that affirmed the connection between relics and crusaders and that inscribed and informed their continued collective memory'.¹³ Of course, many of these romances were composed when increasing literacy enabled text to encode memory without the aid of a mnemonic object and objects were losing much of their relevance in official capacities. However, as Michael Clanchy has found, objects continued to be used occasionally (though not favoured) in oath-taking and proof-of-identity issues at least into the early fourteenth century.¹⁴ Personal possessions certainly carried—and

¹⁰ 'Sir Isumbras', *Codex Ashmole 61*, ll. 685-702.

¹¹ Indeed, the presence of the cup as memory object in *Amis and Amiloun* and the emotional performances surrounding the recognition scene could support Sheila Delany's argument for coded queer union in *Amis and Amiloun*, discussed below. Sheila Delany, 'A, A and B: Coding Same-Sex Union in *Amis and Amiloun*', *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 63–81, pp. 68–75.

¹² Anne E. Lester, 'What Remains: Women, Relics and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade', *Journal of Medieval History*, 40 (2014), 311–328, pp. 313, 327.

¹³ Lester, 'What Remains', p. 322.

¹⁴ Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 41–43, 256–262.

continue to carry—emotional if not legal relevance; encoding a memory of one’s spouse upon, for instance, a wedding ring is more likely and more common than encoding it on the marriage contract.

Almost without exception, the disguised person is someone with whom the woman shares a strong emotional, social, and sometimes sexual, bond—usually the woman’s beloved or husband.¹⁵ This female identification role extends beyond the confines of romance, or even contemporary secular literature. Women, far more than men, were tasked with remembering (and, by extension, identifying) family and near-kin relations, both in the legal courts and in commemorating those lost to the community. Bronach Kane has discussed the ‘social representations of gender [...] prevalent in witness testimony’, arguing that a ‘fusion of emotional and biological factors produced a gender-based social representation of female memory’ that resulted in female witnesses being ‘preferred in specific types of suits, indicating that women’s memory was valued in certain juridical contexts’, specifically ‘suits that required memories of births, and proof of sexual activity’.¹⁶ P. J. P. Goldberg also noted that in marriage and defamation litigation women deponents were ‘used in preference to men’, particularly in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries—when many of these romances were composed.¹⁷

Sue Niebrzydowski notes that in a 1365 York trial regarding the legitimacy of Alice de Rouclif’s marriage to John Marrays on the grounds that Alice was possibly underage at the time of marriage, women were overwhelmingly more likely to reference objects as

¹⁵ Woman’s husband at the time of the disguise or transformation encounter: Apollonius in *Apollonius of Tyre*; Isumbras in *Sir Isumbras*; husband by the end of the text: Havelok in *Havelok the Dane*; Horn in *Horne Childe and Maiden Rinnild* and in *King Horn*; Torrent in *Torrent of Portyngale*; Uther in *Le Morte Darthur* and the *Prose Merlin*; the squire in *Undo Your Door*; lover: Alexander with Queen Candace in *Kyng Alisaunder*; Tristan in *Sir Tristrem* and *Le Morte Darthur*; exceptions: the crippled crone in *Adam Bell, Clim o’ the Clough, and William of Cloudesley*; a demon in *Sir Gowther* and *The History of the Holy Grail*; Isolde’s mother in *Le Morte Darthur* and *Sir Tristrem*.

¹⁶ Bronach Kane, ‘Social Representations of Memory and Gender in Later Medieval England’, *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 46.4 (2012), 544–558, pp. 553, 555, 557.

¹⁷ P. J. P. Goldberg, ‘Gender and Matrimonial Litigation in the Church Courts in the Later Middle Ages: The Evidence of the Court of York’, *Gender & History*, 19.1 (2007), 43–59, p. 49.

memory pegs for the event, whereas ‘male testimony repeatedly used the Church year as a memorial marker’.¹⁸ In fact, ‘only one female witness connected Alice’s birth with a national event’, whereas other ‘testators remembered seeing the cradle in which Alice slept’ or other objects present at the birth such as a ‘gift of a prayer script’.¹⁹ Drawing on Becky R. Lee’s work on ‘proofs-of-age in Chancery records’ that ‘even amongst the nobility only 106 out of 1,019 Chancery records mention postpartum purification’, Niebrzydowski concludes that ‘attendance at one of these [purification] celebrations was more likely to become embedded in a woman’s memory’ than a man’s and finds that ‘it is female memory of childbirth that provides the most persuasive evidence’ in *Rouclif v. Marrays*.²⁰ From this case study and studies of similar trial records, she concludes that ‘in the medieval period, the preservation and transmission of [...] family history as evoked by objects and persons within a household, was, as suggested by Matthew Innes, a role carried out by women’.²¹

The gendered association of object-anchored memory and of women as superior witnesses in cases centring around questions of identity (including, in the case of *Rouclif v. Marrays*, age and birth as aspects of identity) is also displayed in the romances when one considers the choice of memory objects in recognition scenes. Van Houts argues that, historically, jewellery and swords in particular were favoured for commemoration of absent or lost husbands and male relatives—the self-same objects which most frequently appear as mnemonic ‘pegs’ in these romances.²² The type of object selected in each romance is usually appropriate to the nature of the relationship between the disguised (or lost/transformed

¹⁸ Sue Niebrzydowski, ‘From Bedroom to Courtroom: Home and the Memory of Childbirth in a Fourteenth-Century Marriage Dispute’, *Home Cultures*, 6.2 (2009), 123–134, p. 130.

¹⁹ Niebrzydowski, p. 130. Becky R. Lee, ‘Men’s Recollections of a Women’s Rite: Medieval English Men’s Recollections Regarding the Rite of Purification of Women after Childbirth’, *Gender and History*, 14.2 (2002), 24–42, p. 226.

²⁰ Niebrzydowski, p. 130; 125.

²¹ Niebrzydowski, p. 124; Matthew Innes, ‘Keeping it in the Family: Women and Aristocratic Memory, 700–1200’, *Medieval Memories: Men, Women and the Past, 700–1300*, ed. Elisabeth van Houts (London: Longman, 2001), 17–35, esp. pp. 23–31.

²² van Houts, jewellery, pp. 108–9; swords, pp. 109–110. These items were valuable; the money invested in them may have contributed to their treasured status.

person, as in the case of le Freine) and the perceiver. Rings as recognition tokens, for example, appear in *Torrent of Portyngale* (c. 1400; MS c. 15^{ex}), *King Horn* (c. 13^{ex}; MSS 1300-1340), *Horn Childe and Maiden Rimmild* (c. 1320; MS c. 1330), and *The History of the Holy Grail* (c. 1420; MS 15th century) in addition to *Sir Isumbras*. They generally denote an erotic relationship between the two characters—a sexual or pseudo-sexual bond as between spouses and lovers, including chaste paramours.²³ This is in keeping with some evidence of contemporary uses of rings found outside of romances. Take, for instance, the illumination of a man giving a ring to a woman in front of a witness in Chantilly Musée Condé MS 388, a book containing several illuminations of courtly scenes, primarily courtship scenes. Another example is the exchange of a ring love token discussed in a letter from Richard Calle to Margery Paston in 1469, regarding a man posing as a messenger from Margery, likely employed by those who sought to expose their secret romance:

He [the messenger] told me John Threscher come to hym in your name, and seide that ye sent hym to my ladde for a letter or a token weche I shulde have sent you, but he truste hym not; he wold not delyver hym noon. After that he brought hym a ryng, seyng that ye sent it hym, comaundyng hym that he schulde delyver the letter or token to hym, weche I conceyve sethen be my ladde it was not be your sendyng, it was be my mastres and Sir Jamys a vys.²⁴

Rings were likely favoured as mnemonic tokens because of their small size and portability. Their high monetary value also likely made them more valued as keepsakes.

Robin Hood and the Potter incorporates the gift of a ring into an erotic disguise encounter. Robin, dressed as a potter, seduces the sheriff's wife. The next morning

He toke leffe of the screffys wyffe,
And thankyd her of all thyng:
'Dam, for mey loffe and ye well thys were,

²³ I discuss the role of affect in recognition later in this section.

²⁴ Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 388, fol. 13r, 'A Man Giving a Ring to a Woman', vellum. 1475. Bridgeman Group. <<https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en-GB/asset/185144/french-school-15th-century/ms-388-1475-fol-13r-a-man-giving-a-ring-to-a-woman-vellum>>; 'To Margery Paston from Richard Calle, 1469', *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Davis, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), II.861, 498–500, p. 499.

Y geffe yow here a golde ryng.²⁵

While the author does not explicitly state that the two committed adultery, the gift of the ring, with its connotation as a lovers' token, leaves no doubt in the audience's mind what took place between Robin and the sheriff's wife. In an outlaw ballad this episode is, of course, a parody of noble courting rituals, and the ring thus represents less emotional commitment than its romance equivalent. It seems to operate more like a sexual calling card, much as Absolon's offer of a ring to Alisoun in the 'Miller's Tale' is intended as a (presumptuous) claim on Alisoun's affections rather than a symbol of a mutually shared emotional bond—and, as those affections are unreciprocated, it is not accepted.²⁶ This ballad is a later work than most under discussion here (c. 1500).²⁷ It also has been recognized as structurally and thematically complex but stylistically 'simple' and 'a much less skilful work of literary composition' than others of its ilk.²⁸ As the romance genre evolved and lent motifs to other genres, as with this ballad, it is entirely possible that this ballad's author included the ring as a common romance motif but did not recognise that in romance, the ring functions like Chekhov's gun: an exchange of tokens scene traditionally needed to be tied to an accompanying recognition scene. Analysis of this particular disguise-and-token scene is frustrated by the ambiguity of the reaction of the sheriff's wife to her husband's discovery of Robin's true identity. When her husband reveals that Robin has once again outwitted him, the sheriff's wife 'toke op a lowde lawhyng'.²⁹ The wife's reaction makes clear her lack of spousal sympathy, but in displacing the recognition scene onto the sheriff (rather than his

²⁵ 'Robin Hood and the Potter', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 57–79, ll. 238–241.

²⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Miller's Tale', *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 68–77, ll. 3792–97.

²⁷ Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, 'Robin Hood and the Potter: Introduction', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 57–79, p. 57.

²⁸ Knight and Ohlgren, 'Robin Hood and the Potter: Introduction', pp. 57–58; R. B. Dobson and James Taylor, 'Robin Hood and the Potter (Child 121)', *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, ed. R. B. Dobson and James Taylor (London: Sutton Publishing, 1989), 123–125, p. 124.

²⁹ 'Robin Hood and the Potter', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, l. 302.

wife, as would be typical in the romance genre), the ballad draws a veil over whether or not she was aware that the potter she took under her roof was Robin, and thus over the extent of her spousal deviousness. Did she originally believe she was entertaining a mere potter, or did she recognise Robin and deliberately choose him as a lover knowing him to be her husband's nemesis? The ballad remains ambiguous.

Marhault's sword fragment in the Tristan cycle similarly operates as a revelatory device; it is similarly appropriate to the nature of the relationship between Isolde's mother and the disguised hero.³⁰ Tristan has been masquerading as Tramtryste in the hostile kingdom of Ireland shortly after he has killed the brother of the queen in combat when

The quene behelde his swerde as hit lay uppon his bedde, and than at unhappis the quene drew oute his swerde and behylde hit a longe whyle. And bothe they thought hit a passynge fayre swerde, but within a foote and an halff of the poynte there was a grete pyese thereof outebrokyng of the edge. And whan the quene had aspyed that gappe in the swerde she remembirde hir of a pyese of a swerde that was founde in the brayne-panne of Sir Marhalte that was hir brothir.

'Alas!' than seyde she unto hir doughter La Beale Isode, 'this is the same traytoure knyght that slewe my brothir, thyne eme.'³¹

Swords, historically and in the romances—especially Arthurian romances—are valuable objects frequently associated with masculine lineage.³² The inheritance of a sword from father or other paternal figure to son is a key motif in the Perceval cycle and present in other moments in Arthurian romances, such as Arthur's gift of swords to Gawain and Gueheriet.³³ As Marhault was the queen's brother, a ring—closely associated with erotic love—would not be appropriate. As it is through her male family member that the queen and Tristan are connected, a sword is an appropriate 'peg' on which to imprint her memory of the

³⁰ Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. P. J. C. Field, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), I, p. 300; 'Sir Tristrem', *Lancelot of the Laik and Sir Tristrem*, ed. Alan Lupack TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994) 143–277, ll. 1085–1098. In *Sir Tristrem*, Marhalte—here spelt Moraunt—is Isolde's brother.

³¹ Malory, p. 306.

³² van Houts, pp. 109–110.

³³ *Merlin, or, The Early History of King Arthur: A Prose Romance*, ed. H. B. Wheatley, W. E. Mead, J. Stuart-Glennie, and D. W. Nash, EETS (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1865), p. 374. Henceforth cited in short form as *Prose Merlin*.

circumstances and people surrounding Marhault's death. Moreover, the queen is shown preserving the sword fragment much as the historical women in Lester's research kept memory tokens of their male relatives: in a 'cofyre', similar to a reliquary. The nature of the object itself evokes a relic—'the pyese of the swerde that was pulde oute of Sir Marhaltys brayne-panne aftir that he was dede'—a fragmentary object connected directly to his death and to his physical materiality, much like a splinter of the true cross or the piece of St Thomas Becket's skull at Canterbury.³⁴

The choice of a textile as the recognition token in *Lay le Freine* further evinces the link between the material nature of a recognition token and the relationship between perceiver and disguised individual. Le Freine is given up as a baby and raised in a convent unaware of her parentage. Later in life, having left the convent, she is unwittingly present at the wedding of her twin sister and selflessly lays down the blanket she was once swaddled with on the wedding bed as a gift. Her mother, 'whan [...] that mantyll seighe,/ Sche wel neighe swoned oway', and when she awakens, cries out to her daughter in recognition.³⁵ This is a transformation rather than a disguise, but the mechanisms of recognition remain the same. As a baby, le Freine is in fact left with two tokens: 'And this the mantyll, and this the ring/ You gaf me of yore as a love-tokening'.³⁶ The ring seems to have been included due to its popularity as a recognition token specifically associated with 'love', whether between lovers or child and parent. However, the author's focus is on the blanket and it is the blanket alone that actually functions as a recognition token. Unlike the gender-neutral ring, a blanket is a feminine object, insofar as women were primarily associated with textile making and embellishment, but more so as this blanket is a baby blanket, and thus invokes

³⁴ Malory, p. 306.

³⁵ 'Lay le Freine', *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 61–87, ll. 371–2. This part of the poem is, in fact, not in the manuscript, but rather is a nineteenth-century editorial 'reconstitution' of what the missing Middle English version might have been based on Marie de France's version of the lay.

³⁶ 'Lay le Freine', *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ll. 397–8.

the mother-daughter relationship and so is more appropriate than the ring as the mnemonic token in this narrative.

Le Freine's mother swoons twice upon recognising the blanket and her daughter; displays of overwhelming emotion are present in many other romances' recognition moments as well, particularly fainting and weeping.³⁷ In her research on medieval memory culture, Mary Carruthers has discussed the medieval belief of the importance of emotional accompaniment to memory retention and recall, pain as well as affection, sometimes referred to in medieval works on memory as *passio* or *affectio animi*. As Carruthers explains:

The word which Aristotle uses to classify the memorial phantasm is *pathos*, translated by William of Moerbeke as *passio*: the *pathos* is what a sense perception causes in the soul as a kind of image, the having of which we call a memory. Since it is a physical change or "affect," a phantasm is also an "affection" or *passio*.³⁸

Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Assisi, and Thomas of Celano all discuss the role of affect in memory recall; Carruthers summarises their points, saying, '*Affectus* in this description is the agent by means of which rumination and memorization take place; in other words, remembering is an activity in which the emotions must be engaged in order for it to occur at all.'³⁹ It is appropriate, then, that almost without exception the disguised person is the woman's beloved, child, or husband. As mentioned above, they share a strong emotional, and usually erotic, bond. In these recognition scenes, with or without the presence of recognition tokens, the hero appearing in front of his beloved and her nearly-wedded

³⁷ 'Lay le Freine', *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ll. 385-8.

³⁸ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 85.

³⁹ The mother's gloves and father's sword in *Sir Degare* function similarly: the clothing representing the maternal link, and the sword representing the paternal link. James Simpson discusses the 'deeply shameful, incestuous love' and incest avoidance anxiety present in *Sir Degare*, noting that the stipulation that Sir Degare must not wed a woman *unless* his mother's gloves fit his intended bride suggest that 'seeking mother and wife provisionally amount to the same thing'. James Simpson, 'Unthinking Thought', *Thinking Medieval Romance*, ed. Katherine C. Little and Nicola McDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 37-52, pp. 46-48.

³⁹ Carruthers, p. 217. For more information on medieval philosophy regarding the connection between memory and affection, see also Carruthers, pp. 69, 75, and 87.

husband (always the romance's primary antagonist) is a test of her loyalty as much as it is a mechanism by which the hero can launch a dramatic surprise attack against those inside the castle. Her ability to recognise him despite his disguise is a testament to the strength of her affection for him. She is proven to have kept her love for him alive through his absence, as the strength of that emotion allows her to access memories of him so strong that they allow her to penetrate his altered appearance.

In the later thirteenth-century *King Horn*, Rimenhild gives Horn a ring 'for my luvē thu hit were' with instructions to 'loke theran/ And thenke upon thi lemman' if he finds himself in need of courage.⁴⁰ The author demonstrates the ring's effectiveness as a mnemonic token in a poignant moment in the battlefield, well before it is brought into play at the climactic moment of disguise revelation:

The Sarazins he smatte
That his blod hatte;
At evreche dunte
The heved of wente;
Tho gunne the hundes gone
Abute Horn a lone:
He lokede on the ringe,
And thoghte on Rimenilde;
He slogh ther on haste
On hundred bi the laste,
Ne mighte noman telle
That folc that he gan quelle.⁴¹

This tender moment of solitude and recollection that the author inserts in the midst of the heat and noise of battle establishes the ring as an object imbued with emotional significance private to Horn and Rimenhild. It moreover demonstrates the strength of Horn's affections for Rimenhild, such that the ring can trigger a memory of her so strong as to leave the hero 'a lone' even in the middle of battle. Thus when he returns to the kingdom in disguise and presents Rimenhild with the ring by dropping it into her 'cuppe white', the scene becomes

⁴⁰ 'King Horn', *Four Romances of England*, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake and Eve Salisbury, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), 17–72, ll. 573, 579–80.

⁴¹ 'King Horn', *Four Romances of England*, ll. 611–622.

a test of Rimenhild's enduring affections for Horn through her ability to recollect him.⁴² The centrality of the ring as testing device of Rimenhild's emotional fidelity to Horn is made clear from the moment Horn enters the kingdom. A palmer he meets informs him that Rimenhild has married another, suggesting a breach in her faithfulness to Horn. However, this news is immediately undercut by the palmer informing Horn that

Ne mighte heo adrighe
 That heo ne weop with ighe.
Heo sede that heo nolde
Ben ispused with golde.
 Heo hadde on husbonde
 Thegh he were ut of londe.⁴³

Rimenhild's specific refusal of a gold wedding ring as a synecdoche of her unwillingness to marry King Mody strengthens the connection between Horn's ring and her emotional fidelity to him. Later, when Rimenhild first spies the ring, she is filled with 'dradde'—not that Horn might have come back to discover her marriage to King Mody—but that he might be 'isterve'.⁴⁴ Her fidelity is finally proven when, overcome with grief at the sight of the ring, she

[...] feol on hire bedde,
 Ther heo knif hudde,
 To sle with king lothe
 And hureselve bothe.⁴⁵

While she fails to recognize Horn in his palmer's guise, her recollection triggered by the sight of the token serves as proof of her emotional fidelity. When these tokens are viewed as objects imprinted with both memories *and* emotions, one can better understand Troilus's despairing response to seeing the brooch he gave Criseyde upon Diomedes's cloak:

Ful sodeynly his herte gan to colde,
 As he that on the coler fond withinne
 A broch that he Criseyde yaf that morwe
 Thar she from Troie moste nedes twynne,

⁴² 'King Horn', *Four Romances of England*, l. 1142.

⁴³ 'King Horn', *Four Romances of England*, ll. 1045–50 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁴ 'King Horn', *Four Romances of England*, ll. 1178, 1179 (in Laud MS, 'ded').

⁴⁵ 'King Horn', *Four Romances of England*, ll. 1207–1210.

In remembraunce of hym and of his sorwe.⁴⁶

The re-gifting of the brooch confirms, quite clearly to Troilus, the transference of Criseyde's affection from himself to Diomedes.

Recognition without Tokens

Women's perceptive abilities are not exclusively dependent upon object-anchored memory. Archistrata in *Apollonius of Tyre* recognises her husband after a fourteen-year absence while he fails to recognise her in her priestess's robes ('sche knew him wel, he hire nouȝt'); Queen Candace, suspecting her visitor is not who he claims to be, recalls an 'ymage' (a metal statue) that she had commissioned out of her love for Alexander in his likeness some time previously, and immediately discerns that the man before her is Alexander, even though he has come to her disguised as Antigon (one of Alexander's noblemen).⁴⁷ Women's authority as witnesses has biblical precedence, notably in the Passion, Burial, and Resurrection. While men participate in the Passion and Burial, wetting Christ's lips with a wine-soaked sponge or carrying the body to the tomb, the women watch the proceedings, and when the tomb is discovered to be empty, it is the women who first see the risen Christ and who carry knowledge of his resurrection to the disciples.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Troilus and Criseyde', *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 473–585, ll. 1659–1663.

⁴⁷ Though Candace has never met Alexander before, she has declared her love for him via letter, and then commissioned a 'metal ȝeters' to make a statue of him. Her amour lointain provides the necessary emotional connection to recall his graven image and allow accurate recognition. *Kyng Alisaunder*, ed. G.V. Smithers, EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), ll. 6648–6677, 6718–6733, 7606–7687 (Lincoln's Inn manuscript). I have included the moment in *Apollonius of Tyre* in which Archistrata appears in front of her husband, Apollonius, as a priestess, and he fails to recognise her. However, due to the damage sustained to the manuscript, the text is ambiguous as to whether or not she is merely disguised as a priestess for her own safety after Denyse and Strangulion have orchestrated a coup, or if she has actually become a priestess after her ejection from her position as empress. *Die alt-und mittelenglischen Apollonius-Bruchstücke, Studien und Texte zur englischen Philologie*, ed. J. Raith, 3 vols. (Munich: M. Huber, 1956), III, 78–84, l. 36.

⁴⁸ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Matthew 27:55–56, 27:61, 28:1–9; Mark 15:40–41, 16:1–14; Luke 24:1–10; John 20: 1–2, 10–18. The unknown Lollard

Women's limited mobility in romance means that female characters are more likely to be confronted by a disguised person returning to the community than men are to be confronted with women in disguise. The knight rides out of court, or the young heir is cast out in usurpation, and returns to his lands after many adventures; the woman remains behind, confined and surrounded by those who know her well. But arguing that women only perceive more disguises than men because of this limited mobility fails to take into account the number of instances in which a man in a similar situation fails to recognise a person he knows well. As mentioned above, Apollonius, returning to his family, fails to recognise his wife, though she recognises him immediately. In the previous chapter, I outlined a number of scenes in which kings fail to recognise other individuals in disguise. Men are consistently depicted as less perceptive than women. *Amis and Amiloun* confirms this: the romance follows the pattern of the revelation narrative with the 'token of recognition' motif, with Amis queerly placed in the usually female role. The emotional performances of Amis and Amiloun are similar to those of the women in the aforementioned romances: they weep and swoon at their initial separation, and Amis weeps and swoons again at their reunion. Amis gives Amiloun one of a matching set of golden cups (evocative of loving-cups) at their departure, and the object features prominently in their reunion. These elements—the narrative pattern, the token motif, the emotional performances—match those found in the majority of female-male disguised reunions discussed in the texts above. However, there is a key difference: even when presented with the cup, Amis does not successfully recognise the now leprous beggar Amiloun. Even at his wife's suggestion that the man before him is

author of Wycliffite Sermon 65, uncomfortable with Mary Magdalene's privilege of being the first to witness the risen Christ, wrote in the late fourteenth century:

Pis gospel telliþ hou Crist apperide to Mary Maudelen, for Crist wolde þat womman kynde hadde þis priuylegie bifore man þat he shewide hym aftir his dep raþere to womman þan to man, for wymmen ben freele as water and taken sunnere prynte of bileue.

'Sermon 65', *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Anne Hudson, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), III, 199–203, p. 199.

Amiloun, Amis refuses to entertain the possibility that it is his long-lost friend. Amiloun's devoted nephew Amoraunt must declare his uncle's identity to Amis. Amis presents as feminine but not female; queer in his emotional performance, queer in his earlier presentation of remembrance tokens, but ultimately masculine in his imperceptions.⁴⁹

Failure to Recognise Another Person

The few narratives in which the woman fails to recognise a person in disguise, far from undermining this pattern of presenting women as social memory keepers or more perceptive than men, in fact strengthen it. Igraine in Arthurian romances and the Duchess of Austria in *Sir Gowther* are both raped by individuals disguised as their respective husbands and fail to detect the disguise until their rapists reveal themselves. However, these are supernatural disguises: Merlin enchants King Uther to look like Igraine's husband, and in *Sir Gowther* a devil takes on the duke's form.⁵⁰ The authors use the supernatural aspect of the disguises to excuse the women from not fulfilling their duty of familial recognition properly—or else leave their degree of culpability for adulterous sexual activity deliberately ambiguous.

Malory achieves this exoneration largely through silence: during Uther's infiltration of the castle and rape of Igraine, the audience is not privy to Igraine's point of view. Her thoughts are only introduced after Uther has left and she is told of the death of her husband. She 'merveilled who that myghte be that laye with her in lykenes of her lord. So she mourned pryvely and held hir pees'.⁵¹ Her emotional reactions—first marvelling, then mourning—establish her blamelessness. The encounter, therefore, becomes as much a testament to Igraine's fidelity to Gorlois as to the power of Merlin's magic: he can disguise

⁴⁹ Delany, pp. 68–75.

⁵⁰ Malory, pp. 3–4; *Prose Merlin*, pp. 69–70; 'Sir Gowther', *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 263–307, ll. 66–81.

⁵¹ Malory, p. 4.

a man so well that a woman cannot distinguish him from her own husband. The narrative's delay of the truth test that generally accompanies a disguise encounter further solidifies her blamelessness, as she is reluctant to tell Uther, now her husband, of the child's paternity. If she had suspected Uther she would have been more willing to divulge the puzzling circumstances of Arthur's conception. Furthermore, the emotional force of her reaction ('the quene made grete joye') following Uther's revelation that he is, in fact 'the fader of her child' proves her integrity.⁵²

Raluca Radulescu and Margaret Robson discuss in depth the ambiguity created by the author of *Sir Gowther* surrounding the Duchess of Austria's failure to recognise a devil in disguise. They note that her prayer 'to God and Maré mylde/ Schuld gyffe hur grace to have a chyld,/ On what maner scho ne roghth' suggests a willingness to turn a blind eye to the devil's true identity.⁵³ Margaret Robson agrees with Radulescu that the scene 'points to paternity and its abuse(s), as well as its large-scale consequences', but holds the scene to be more applicable to a general gentry and noble audience—and especially female audience—than concerned particularly with the royal house.⁵⁴ Robson concludes that

The narrative is not explicit, in fact it is positively cagey as to whether or not the lady was aware that the man was not her husband; but I would suggest that it implies that she was aware. We know that her husband had declared his intention of wasting no more time on her, we know that she is desperate for a child by any means, and we know that she is outside the court [...] she is not being deceived, but is allowing herself to appear to be deceived for her own ends.⁵⁵

⁵² Malory, p. 5.

⁵³ 'Sir Gowther', *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ll. 64-66. Radulescu has discussed the political implications of the duchess's rape and subsequent attempt to disguise the extramarital conception from her husband. She points out that Queen Margaret of Anjou, after eight years of marriage without producing an heir, conceived just before her husband, Henry VI, entered a catatonic state, sparking 'frequent' rumours about her adultery—though Radulescu notes that most of the rumours were in fact indirect Yorkist criticism of the king. Raluca Radulescu, 'Pious Middle English Romances Turned Political: Reading Sir Isumbras, Sir Gowther, and Robert of Sicily in Fifteenth-Century England', *Viator*, 41.2 (2010), 333-359, p. 351.

⁵⁴ Radulescu, 'Pious Middle English Romances Turned Political', p. 351; Margaret Robson, 'Animal Magic: Moral Regeneration in Sir Gowther', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 22 (1992), 140-153, pp. 141-143.

⁵⁵ Robson, p. 141.

Robson's argument for the duchess 'not being deceived' but 'allowing herself to appear to be deceived' is strong, but as *Sir Gowther* is a romance deeply concerned with questions of both piety and penitence, I am more inclined to believe the author leaves her degree of culpability ambiguous to open up audience interpretation and debate: do desire and desperation necessarily equate to a willingness to sin? If one's prayers to the Virgin Mary are answered by a devil, does that indicate a fault in the duchess or is the intent to draw a parallel between her piety and suffering and Job's? Perhaps the incorporation of the 'rash boon' motif functions less as political or social commentary, but rather as folkloric warning against hasty promises and ill-considered speech acts. The lack of affection between the duke and his wife is notable: if the ability to correctly identify an individual is proportionally bound to the strength of affection between the intended victim and the disguised person, then it is unsurprising that a woman deprived of her husband's affection should fail to distinguish a false representation of him from the real man. This is not to say that the author is necessarily concerned with the duchess's entrapment in a loveless marriage. As with many romances, the text is, however, concerned about the legitimacy of children.⁵⁶ A duke who does not fulfil his matrimonial duties or leaves his wife emotionally unsatisfied exposes himself to possibilities of cuckoldry and illegitimate heirs—in the case of *Sir Gowther*, an heir whose fiendish patrilineage leads to the destruction and terrorisation of his inherited land and people.

Undo Your Door supports the argument that women's perceptiveness is tied both to the role of emotion in memory and of feminine roles in preserving the memories of others. The author of this parodic romance, also parodies the motif of the woman remembering and

⁵⁶ See, for example, Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

identifying a lost loved one.⁵⁷ In this narrative, a treacherous steward overhears an amorous conversation between a lowly squire and the Princess of Hungary. He reports them to the king. The steward then attacks the squire but is killed in the process. Under the king's instruction, the squire leaves. The princess, believing the dead steward to be the squire, weeps over and kisses his corpse daily for seven years until finally the squire returns and the king reveals the identity of the corpse. They are wed, the squire is made king, and they live happily until the end of their days.

The princess' mourning and commemoration of the dead, a traditional role for women with origins in antiquity, is made ridiculous in its exaggeration.⁵⁸ She confines herself to her room, renounces all pleasurable activities, and in kissing the embalmed steward daily, does repeatedly to a corpse what she would not do whilst she believed the squire to be alive.⁵⁹ Her failure to correctly identify the steward in squire's clothing extends the parody; it also attests to the social distance between her and the squire, as her affection is not strong enough to trigger accurate recognition. While social distance need not inhibit emotion—as evinced by the *amour lointain* experienced for Sir Gawain by several maidens in the intertextual Arthurian canon—it does apparently inhibit recognition.

These disguise-recognition narratives suggest a gendered view of perceptiveness relating to identity. Women are consistently depicted as more skilled at identity perception than men. This is supported by historical evidence of women placed in legal and social roles as memory-keepers of identities. The commonality of the token of recognition motif and emotional performance, when viewed in light of contemporary concepts of memory

⁵⁷ On other ways in which the text 'manipulates generic convention to destabilize our expectations of just about everything', see Nicola McDonald, 'Desire Out of Order and *Undo Your Door*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 4 (2012), pp. 247–275.

⁵⁸ Innes, p. 29.

⁵⁹ 'The Squire of Low Degree,' *Sentimental and Humorous Romances*, ed. Erik Kooper, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), 135–159, ll. 87–152, 684–858. For more on humour and romance parody in *Undo Your Door*, especially the economic humour undermining traditional love dialogue, see K. S. Kiernan, '"Undo Your Door" and the Order of Chivalry' *Studies in Philology*, 70.4 (1973), 345–366, pp. 351–56.

retention, implies that these moments of disguise revelation are primarily acts of recollection, stimulated by emotion. These motifs suggest that it is perhaps social belief that women's emotional intensity facilitates better memory retention, and thus identification. Or, perhaps these narratives illustrate the self-perpetuating notion that women are more perceptive than men, because women were expected and trained to take on the emotional labour of social perception.

Disguised Women

Whereas men often dress to disguise their station and to permit movement between courts (e.g. as male merchants, minstrels, or unidentifiable knights, women more often choose to disguise themselves in more extreme fashion: as men, animals, diseased social outcasts) even transforming themselves into rocks. A noblewoman dressed as a merchant's daughter is no safer from threat of rape or abduction for the apparent change in status. To be a healthy woman is to be sexually vulnerable, and it is because of this vulnerability that, for women in romance, unlike their male counterparts, choices of disguise are not so much class-conscious but rather focus rather on disguising health and sexual attractiveness. For medieval women of all social ranks, 'sexual violence was a common problem across medieval Europe', and this anxiety is reflected in the disguises assigned to female characters in contemporary romance.⁶⁰ However, the romance authors favour dramatic irony in these disguise narratives; to the audience, aware of the women's true identities from the start, the woman's disguise operates to spotlight that which the woman is attempting to hide from other characters.

⁶⁰ Jacqueline Murray, 'Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages', *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (London: Garland, 1996), 123–152, p. 135.

Feigned Leprosy

Sir Beves of Hamtoun, a romance of ‘extraordinarily widespread cross-cultural appeal’, often reverses the roles common to romance heroes and heroines: while Beves remains in confined spaces at court and in prison, the heroine, Josian, travels widely, earning money, killing an unwanted husband, and seeking out her paramour.⁶¹ Yet as Myra Seaman has pointed out, scholarship on *Beves of Hamtoun* has largely side-lined Josian; indeed only a handful of articles have made her their primary focus.⁶² In current scholarship, her disguises of leper and minstrel—particularly that of the minstrel—have largely focused on the practicalities of safety and agency that such disguises lend the cross-dressing women of the romances.⁶³ Overlooked, however, are the strong sexual implications of Josian’s disguises, even when juxtaposed with her virtuous motivations. The tension between Josian’s purity and the promiscuity implied by some of her disguises plays to the male gaze. The erotic implications of her disguises coupled with her bold, sometimes violent actions, are ameliorated by virtuous intentions, which make her character both arousing and unthreatening to a male readership.

Composed around the 1330s, the text found in the Auchinleck Manuscript is the earliest and most complete of the seven English versions of *Beves of Hamtoun*.⁶⁴ It is notable for its significant additions to, and, to borrow Ivana Djordjović’s words, ‘bold rewritings’ of its Anglo-Norman antecedents.⁶⁵ It shows greater interest in Josian than the other

⁶¹ Fellows points to ‘the diversity of the versions in which it [*Beves of Hamtoun*] survived’, and surmises that ‘in its sheer longevity it is probably unequalled by any other medieval vernacular text’. Jennifer Fellows, ‘Introduction’, *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, ed. Jennifer Fellows, 2 vols., EETS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), I, xv–xciii, p. xv.

⁶² Myra Seaman, ‘Engendering Genre in Middle English Romance: Performing the Feminine in “Sir Beves of Hamtoun”’, *Studies in Philology*, 98.1 (2001), 49–75, pp. 54–56.

⁶³ Seaman, pp. 54–56.

⁶⁴ A discussion and stemmatic of the *Beves of Hamtoun* manuscripts can be found in Eugen Kölbing and Carl Schmirgel, ‘Introduction’, *The Romance of Sir Beves of Hamtoun*, ed. Eugen Kölbing and Carl Schmirgel, EETS (London: K. Paul Trench, Trübner, 1885, 1886, 1894), vii–xliii, pp. xxxvii–xli.

⁶⁵ Ivana Djordjović, ‘From Boeve to Bevis: The Translator at Work’, *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2008), 67–79, p. 67.

surviving English and Anglo-Norman manuscripts, significantly expanding her role. This includes lengthening and even adding scenes in which she is disguised. Thus it is this version of the text that is primarily under examination below.

Josian disguises herself as a leper, a palmer, and a minstrel. Josian's first disguise is only found in the Auchinleck text. Kidnapped by the traitorous giant Ascopard, Josian is taken to King Yvor—the Saracen king who, earlier in the text, forced Josian into a non-consensual (though never consummated) marriage to the earl Miles. Knowing she is to be brought before King Yvor, Josian uses a herb she finds in the forest to disguise herself as a leper.⁶⁶

Leprosy is not an image that, to the modern reader, immediately brings to mind thoughts of sexual enticement and promiscuity. But to a medieval audience, the sexual implications of Josian's disguise would have been clear. Carole Rawcliffe has shown that, from at least the late twelfth century well throughout the fifteenth, leprosy was associated with lechery and believed by many to be a sexually transmitted disease, incubating in the wombs of promiscuous women.⁶⁷ The disease also carried strong associations with repentance and Job-like or even Christ-like suffering. Mary Magdalen was considered the patron saint of lepers, both due to her role as a healer and her 'association with the ritually impure'.⁶⁸ In the *Testament of Cresseid*, after Diomedes loses interest in Cresseid,

[...] scho walkit up and doun,
 And sum men sayis, into the court, commoun.
 [...] And be with fleschelic lust sa maculait,
 And go amang the Greikis air and lait
 Sa giglotlike takand [her] foull plesance'

⁶⁶ *The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, ed. Eugen Kölbing and Carl Schmirgel, EETS (London: K. Paul Trench, Trübner, 1885, 1886, 1894), ll. 3677–3700. All line numbers henceforth will refer to those in the Auchinleck version as edited by Kölbing and Schmirgel unless otherwise specified.

⁶⁷ Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), p. 6, 10, 47, 78, 84–85; Joan Cadden, 'Western Medicine and Natural Philosophy', *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (London: Garland, 1996), 51–80, p. 67.

⁶⁸ Rawcliffe, p. 120.

and soon becomes ‘destitute/ Of all comfort and consolatioun,/ Richt privelie, but fellowschip or refute’.⁶⁹ Despairing at how low she has fallen, Cresseid blasphemes against the gods, blaming them for her misfortunes and misery. For her blasphemy, the gods punish Cresseid with leprosy, and she lives out the remainder of her days in misery and social isolation, performing penance.⁷⁰ The implications of a leper disguise—promiscuity, separation from the Christian community, and the ability to arouse Christian pathos—echo the Orientalist assumptions of Josian’s character that would already be in the minds of a white Christian medieval audience: that, as a recently converted Saracen woman in the romance genre, Josian would act in an erotic and perhaps even morally transgressive manner.⁷¹ In choosing the leper’s disguise, she makes herself into a different kind of ‘other’, one that repels King Yvor and ensures his rejection of her as a desirable woman, causing her physical ejection from his court. The leper’s disguise, though itself repulsive, hints at a promiscuous past that, while fabricated by Josian, nevertheless still casts a shadow of the proto-odalisque about her: as an exotically bold and erotically-minded woman. This is in keeping with contemporary depictions of other Saracen women in romance, as discussed by Jacqueline de Weever and Melissa Furrow, which capitalised on Orientalist notions of Saracens as possessing greater sexual appetites than Christians.⁷²

⁶⁹ Robert Henryson, ‘The Testament of Cresseid’, *The Testament of Cresseid and Seven Fables*, ed. Seamus Heaney (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 2–46, ll. 76–83, 92–94.

⁷⁰ Robert Henryson, ll. 71–84, 124–140, 274–343. Cf. Tory Vandeventer Pearman, *Women and Disability in Medieval Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 99, 101–103.

⁷¹ Jacqueline de Weever discusses two types of Saracen woman represented in Western medieval romance: the ‘white’ Saracen, portrayed as exotically desirable and characterised by her typically French physical attributes including white skin, and the ‘black’ Saracen, who was depicted as giant in size, grotesque, and terrifying to encounter in battle. Jacqueline de Weever, *Sheba’s Daughters: Whitening and Demonizing the Saracen Woman in Medieval French Epic* (London: Garland, 1998), p. 54.

⁷² For medieval Orientalism, see de Weever, p. 141; cf. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 41. De Weever also argues against the fifteenth-century date suggested by Kevin Brownlee in Kevin Brownlee, ‘Cultural Comparison: Crusade as Construct in Late Medieval France,’ *L’Esprit Créateur*, 32 (1992), 13–24. Melissa Furrow, ‘Ascopard’s Betrayal’, *Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition*, ed. Jennifer Fellows (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2008), 145–160, p. 153.

In the Tristan cycle, Tristan disguises himself as a leper at King Mark's court in order to continue his affair with Queen Isolde. He is successful in hiding his identity, but the choice of a leper's costume, like all well-crafted lies, carries in it an element of truth: unlike Josian, Tristan is, in fact a sexual sinner, insofar as he has committed adultery with Isolde.⁷³ Josian's leper's disguise fails—or more accurately, is never intended—as a traditional disguise: it does not hide Josian's name, but rather her character. That is, the disguise presents Josian as a version of herself which is promiscuous, diseased, and undesirable. When King Yvor asks Ascopard, 'Who is þis *wimman*, þow hast me brouzt?', the answer is immediately supplied: 'What,' a seide, 'knowest hire nouzt?/ 3he is Iosiane, þe quene'.⁷⁴ In leaving no pause between wonder and the revelation of Josian's social identity—atypical of romance disguise narratives—the redactor indicates that the point of Josian's disguise is not to hide her identity, but to remove the desirable elements of her sexuality: her beauty and fidelity. By dressing for the king as she is *not*—unattractively promiscuous, repulsive, unhealthy—the redactor emphasises to the readership what she *is*: the ideal of beauty, health, and fidelity.

Male Impersonation and Transvestism

Josian's second and third disguises are assumed within a few lines of each other. Beves's uncle, Saber, along with twenty of his palmer knights, kills the giant Ascopard and escapes Yvor's kingdom with Josian by dressing her as another palmer knight.⁷⁵ But Saber soon falls ill, and Josian assumes the guise of a minstrel in order to earn a living for them

⁷³ Bérout, 'Le Roman de Tristan', *Tristan et Iseut: Les poèmes français, la saga norroise*, ed. Daniel Lacroix and Philippe Walter (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2013), 23–227, adultery, e.g. ll. 569–572, 589–598; disguised as leper, ll. 3607–4268, esp. ll. 4197–4216 (Isolde's ambiguous oath).

⁷⁴ *Beves of Hamtoun*, ll. 3691–3693.

⁷⁵ *Beves of Hamtoun*, ll. 3889–3896.

both while they seek out the lost Beves.⁷⁶ The other six English versions of *Beves* include Josian's palmer disguise, but the minstrel disguise is unique to the Auchinleck text.

The minstrel disguise is a trope used in several romances, for both male and female characters. Sir Tristan, Nicolette in *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and Sir Orfeo are a few examples; Lewis Thorpe traces the motif back to Geoffrey of Monmouth's Badulf entering York in disguise.⁷⁷ It is an eminently practical disguise motif. First, it is a disguise that does not detract from the individual's nobility, but rather provides an opportunity for the hero or heroine to showcase courtly musicianship skills. The disguise does not hide but rather reveals one of Josian's desirable qualities: her courtly education and capacity to perform music.

Secondly, minstrelsy is a profession that allows for, even necessitates, movement between courts and kingdoms—ideal for romance storytelling.⁷⁸ Masculine identity permits greater agency and movement than feminine identity: women presenting as feminine in medieval popular literature are often depicted in confined spaces such as castles or courts.⁷⁹ The mobility and agency afforded to characters presenting a male identity creates greater opportunity for adventure while enabling the character to maintain an appearance of social

⁷⁶ *Beves of Hamtoun*, ll. 3905–16. The text does not directly state that Josian's minstrel disguise is a *male* minstrel disguise, and there were a small number of female musicians in Western Europe in the early fourteenth century. Sandy Bardsley has found seven female names in the Paris minstrel guild lists from 1341, alongside 30 male names. However, other thirteenth-century French texts like the *Beves of Hamtoun* source text that incorporate the heroine disguised as minstrel motif specify transvestism. Sandy Bardsley, *Women's Roles in the Middle Ages* (London: Greenwood Press, 2007), p. 171.

⁷⁷ Lewis Thorpe, 'Introduction', in Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 9–47, p. 29; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 213. Further examples of the minstrel disguise motif are discussed by Sarah Roche-Mahdi in her introduction to *Silence*. Sarah Roche-Mahdi, 'Introduction', in Heldris de Cornuaille, *Silence*, ed. Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing, Mich.: Colleagues Press, 1992), xi–xxxiv, p. xvii.

⁷⁸ Silvère Menegaldo, *Le jongleur dans la littérature narrative des XII^e et XIII^e siècles: du personnage au masque* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), p. 497.

⁷⁹ Caroline Jewers, 'The Non-Existent Knight: Adventure in "Le Roman de Silence"', *Arthuriana*, 7.2 (1997), 87–110, pp. 87, 91. Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 220.

propriety that would not be possible if presenting as female.⁸⁰ For practical reasons, it is easy to understand why it is common to depict women dressing as men, but not men disguised as women. Scholarship in the past few decades has tended to attribute more progressive, feminist subtexts to these narratives of cross-dressing women than is perhaps warranted, focusing on literary and historical women's 'donning of men's clothes as a deliberate attempt by the women to break free of a male dominated society'.⁸¹ Rather, as I will argue, cross-dressing in English romances supports Pauline and Galenic thought that woman is inferior to man and that femininity is a disadvantage to be overcome in pursuit of morality.⁸² A moral life is not primarily a goal for women in romance (or indeed for most characters in the genre), but for most heroines (Isolde and Guinevere aside), maintaining one's sexual virtue certainly is. Women in romance who disguise themselves as men usually do so to maintain their virtue; it is a choice of disguise which signals their concern for maintaining chastity outside the bounds of marriage in particular. At the same time, a woman dressed in men's clothing produces an erotic image of the character that plays to the desiring male gaze.

There are fewer examples of female cross-dressing narratives in English romance than in French romance. Cross-dressing appears in *Beves of Hamtoun*, as palmer-knight and as minstrel, briefly in the fourteenth-century *William of Palerne* as a comedic interlude, and forms the plot base for a substantial section of the translated *Prose Merlin*.⁸³

⁸⁰ Helen Cooper discusses the English preference for more active heroines than found in French romance: 'The romance texts provide overwhelming evidence for a belief in the desirability of active female desire and for the exploration of women's subjectivity. These attitudes to women are most characteristic of insular writings, in both Anglo-Norman and English'. Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 219.

⁸¹ Sandra Lowerre (Bochum), "'To Rise Beyond Their Sex: Female Cross-Dressing Saints in Caxton's *Vitas Patrum*", *Riddles, Knights and Cross-Dressing Saints*, ed. Thomas Honegger (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 55–94, p. 56. Lowerre is also critical of these progressive interpretations.

⁸² Murray, p. 127.

⁸³ In *William of Palerne*, Melior's maid Alexandrine dons menswear to sneak into the kitchens and procure bearskins for Melior and William. *William of Palerne*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, EETS (London: Trübner, 1867), ll. 1704–1715. Cross-dressing in *Beves of Hamtoun* and the *Prose Merlin* is discussed below.

Gender confusion and gender fluidity were not outside medieval understandings of gender, and it would be naïve to approach medieval texts with an expectation that gender was only presented as a binary. However, to fourteenth-century and fifteenth-century English audiences a cross-dressing woman would offer conflicting implications. On one hand, transvestism carried virtuous connotations. Despite transvestism being explicitly forbidden in Deuteronomy 22:5 ('A woman shall not wear a man's apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the LORD your God'), transvestite holy women throughout Europe were venerated from at least the eleventh well into the sixteenth centuries.⁸⁴ Valerie Hotchkiss has found accounts of thirty-four cross-dressed holy women in the medieval period.⁸⁵ While, she says, '[t]he variety of responses to female transvestism clearly indicates that there were no universal notions of gender behavior as either biological or cultural in the Middle Ages', Hotchkiss notes that 'there was indeed a general view that male behavior and male characteristics (for men or women) were superior to female', a view based in the writings of St Paul.⁸⁶ With few exceptions, such as Hildegard of Bingen's writings, women in the medieval era were largely characterised, like Eve, as inherently lustful and prone to deceit, with insatiable (usually carnal) desires. Men, by contrast, were more rational, reasonable, measured—more perfect.⁸⁷ Because of this, in several hagiographical and continental romance narratives, 'recognition of holiness is earned primarily through the denial of womanhood'—that is as much to say, holy transvestite women were lauded for their attempts to reject or overcome what many medieval contemporaries considered a biological predisposition toward vice.⁸⁸ Women

⁸⁴ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, Deuteronomy 22:5; Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 15–16.

⁸⁵ Hotchkiss, p. 13.

⁸⁶ Hotchkiss, p. 126.

⁸⁷ Joyce E. Salisbury, 'Gendered Sexuality', *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (London: Garland, 1996), 81–102, pp. 86–86, 93.

⁸⁸ Hotchkiss, p. 13; Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 92.

transvestites, particularly holy women, were frequently portrayed or viewed as more virtuous than other women because they, to borrow the words of Lady Macbeth, ‘unsexed’ themselves, overcoming the greater weaknesses and vices of the female gender by becoming a kind of honorary men. As Hotchkiss explains, ‘[s]ymbolically, these women overcame their sexual vulnerability and, by extension, frailty only through male impersonation’.⁸⁹

Corinne Saunders has rightly remarked on how the Auchinleck redactor’s characterisation of Josian as ‘distinguished from the rest of her sex’ primarily due to ‘her learning and actions’ creates a ‘parallel with lives of holy women’, and the holy deaths she, Beves, and Arondel share seem to be ‘a final assertion of spiritual virtue that takes the narrative into the realm of hagiography’.⁹⁰ *Beves of Hamtoun* incorporates elements of the hagiographical regarding Josian’s admirable qualities, but remains firmly within the romance genre: her narrative arc centres around her marriage, and her trials remain her separation from Beves and tests of her fidelity to him. Neither is *Beves of Hamtoun* amongst the penitential romances, the most hagiographical subgenre of romance, with themes of transgression and redemption, such as are found in *Sir Gowther* or *Robert of Cisyle*. Different-gender disguises in *Beves of Hamtoun* do not function as part of the redemptive cycle, but rather are employed as a means for the heroine to prove her devotion to maintaining marital fidelity and, in the case of her minstrel disguise, her determination to care for her husband’s kin—desirable qualities in a wife. Male identity grants the woman greater personal sexual security, which is a primary source of anxiety and grief for Josian.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Hotchkiss, p. 18. One popular, less hagiographical, tale was that of Pope Joan, a woman ‘sometimes called *Johannes Anglicus* and described as of English descent. Said to have thrived in the 9th century, but possibly a 13th-century invention, this woman disguised herself as a man in order to study with her lover, became a leading scholar and eventually pope’. Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Hannah Priest, ‘Cross Dressing’, *Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles c. 450–1450*, ed. Gale Owen-Crocker, Elizabeth Coatsworth, and Maria Hayward (Boston: Brill, 2012), 156–158, p. 157.

⁹⁰ Corinne Saunders, ‘Gender, Virtue, and Wisdom in *Sir Bevis of Hampton*’, *Sir Bevis of Hampton in Literary Tradition*, ed. Jennifer Fellows and Ivana Djordjević (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), 161–175, p. 174.

⁹¹ This is complicated in the *Prose Merlin*: while Grisandolus acts with no sexual interest and rejects traditionally ‘feminine’ ways throughout most of her narrative, that same androgyny or masculine femininity

In the Auchinleck text, Josian is portrayed as determined to defend her sexual integrity by any means necessary, including magic, lies, trickery, and murder. Her body is desired by many, yet accessible only to the hero.

Similarly, Grisandolus incorporates elements of the hagiographical in her decision to ‘unsex’ herself, but her motivations for doing so are distinctly earthly. Grisandolus performs knightly identity—jousting, traveling, seeking—and shares the desires most romance knights have at court—favour, increased fortune. But for her, femininity is an obstacle to achieving that. Her assumed manhood is only a temporary suspension of her femininity, with an end-goal of attaining an appropriate sexual position in society—wife to a man of high status. Like transvestite saints, she wishes to retain her virtue, but unlike them, to retain it only insofar as her virginity is a commodity to be exchanged for a noble marital status.

A highly faithful translation of the thirteenth-century French *Estoire de Merlin*, the *Prose Merlin* avoids the philosophical questions of Nature versus Nurture found in the also thirteenth-century French *Silence*, which follows the childhood and young adulthood of a person biologically assigned female who spends her childhood as a male, her youth questioning her gender, and ultimately enters adulthood and marriage as a woman. The *Prose Merlin*, by contrast, focuses largely on the inherent deceitfulness of women and the absurdist humour of a woman masquerading as a man who nevertheless bests the other (male) knights in the empire. The narrative remains focused on the humour of paradox and misrule in an empire where nothing is as it seems: a stag who is a man, handmaids who are male lovers, a woman who is simultaneously the truest and falsest knight in the empire. In glossing over the questions the plot raises about nature, nurture, and gender, the translator

is viewed by other characters in the text (viz. the Potiphar’s wife figure of the Empress and later the emperor/king) as alluring.

and the original author keep the audience's focus on the female knight's self-imposed chastity and her ultimate return to her sexual role in society.

Unlike the erasure of feminine sexuality achieved in hagiographical rhetoric, in romance a heroine's virtuousness proven through defensive cross-dressing has a distinct sexual component. Josian is at a moment in her life of sexual opportunity, as she is no longer a virgin and is separated from her husband. By temporarily assuming a masculine identity while she is out in the world and seeking her husband, she demonstrates fidelity to him and a lack of interest in seeking out adulterous sexual gratification. In other romances featuring cross-dressed women, such as *Silence* and the *Prose Merlin*, the heroine spends a significant portion of the text masquerading as a man, and in the interim between childhood and marriage. Her adult singlehood is transmuted into what Silvère Menegaldo calls a period of 'sexual hesitation'.⁹² The period in which she is not under male protection and thus is at sexual risk but which is also a period of sexual opportunity on her part is safely contained from social moral opprobrium. Her lack of sexual interest and sexual initiative makes her more desirable particularly in contrast with the only other woman in the romance: the empress, a prototypical Potiphar's wife figure. The empress, 'the moste lecherouse woman of all Rome' is set up as a sexual foil to Grisandolus/Avenable, who is 'the beste maiden and the trewest withynne [Rome]'.⁹³ With twelve lovers and a husband, she still remains

⁹² Menegaldo, p. 519. Menegaldo has explored the motif of a woman disguising herself as a male minstrel in French and Anglo-Norman romance of the twelfth through fourteenth centuries in depth. These same romances formed the base texts for English romances. Examining depictions of the cross-dressed female minstrel in French medieval romances, Menegaldo sees in transvestite disguises this 'sorte d'hésitation sexuelle' (a sort of sexual hesitation) insofar as:

Travestie en *jogleor*, l'heroïne tend à adopter une identité masculine, sans toutefois devenir tout à fait un homme, comme si le statut de ménestrel impliquait une sorte d'androgynie, peut-être due [...] au fait de porter les cheveux coupés courts et des vêtements masculins (pp. 527–8).

Dressed as a minstrel, the heroine tends to adopt a male identity, without quite becoming a man, as if the status of the minstrel implied a sort of androgyny, perhaps due [...] to wearing short hair and masculine clothing.

⁹³ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 224, 235.

sexually unsatisfied, seeking further sexual services from Grisandolus as well. As hypersexuality, infidelity, and deceitfulness as the character marks of negative femininity, Grisandolus/Avenable's 'unsexed' disguise makes her the sexually ideal woman: safe, virtuous, and trustworthy—and yet desirable. That which is presented as sexual hesitation is, in truth, sexually charged.

Grisandolus, like the gender-queer Silence in the French *Roman de Silence*, seems to remain in an androgynous and asexual limbo whilst performing as a knight. Drawing attention to the parallels between the 'chaste female in male dress' in the French narratives *Silence* and *Grisandole* and the 'blameless' saints Marina and Eugenia ('as opposed to the "reformed prostitute" type'), Sarah Roche-Mahdi regrets that, in contrast to transvestite saints, 'Silence's reward for her loyalty, purity and perseverance is an all-too-earthly crown'.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, it is an ending that is appropriate for the genre. That kind of reward—sainthood, or heavenly blessing—is on offer for penitential romances, like *Sir Gowther*, not this sub-type of narrative. Helderis transforms the conversation of women's abilities into a secular context. Jewers suggests that Helderis of Cornwall uses 'temporary subversion of the ideal of masculine knightly adventure' to 'explore exemplary femininity in role reversal'; that Silence, by temporarily stepping into the role of a man, 'represents a type of secular sainthood, combining virtue and duty in a severe personal test destined to reap a material rather than spiritual reward'.⁹⁵ The narrative of Grisandolus, however, though similar to *Silance* in many ways, is not a subversion of the knightly adventure; she fulfils the knightly adventure arc. The androgynous limbo, the 'sexual hesitation', provided by masculine disguise enables the female protagonist to follow the romance hero's path in what Stephen Knight calls the 'knight-alone' structure, in which 'an unmarried hero [...]

⁹⁴ Roche-Mahdi, pp. xvi. See also Lowerre (Bochum), pp. 55–56, 66, 73, 88.

⁹⁵ Jewers, pp. 96, 97.

wins his way to a wealthy life and so establishes both a family and his own honour'.⁹⁶ The romance hero's journey in the traditional quest narrative, whether knight-alone or family-based, takes him from an inappropriate social position (often associated with emergent adulthood) and temporarily removes him from society so that he may achieve that which allows him to return to court and take up an appropriate, respected social position (cf. *Sir Launfal*, 'The Tale of Sir Gareth', *King Horn*, *Beves of Hamtoun*, and *Sir Gowther*, to name but a few), Grisandolus goes from a position of few marital prospects—when her rank deserves more—and removes her from her (gendered) place in society so that she may ultimately return to achieve a more appropriate sexual-social—i.e. marital—state: as a wife, and as empress/queen: as a wife above all wives. The paradoxical tension between portraying Grisandolus as romance heroine, sexual and desirable, while invoking comparison to virtuous transvestite saints and 'honorary manhood' is best summed up by Merlin: the woman who most denies her femininity, who 'chaunged into the fourme of a man, and hadde take anothis habite than hir owne', is the one deemed 'the beste maiden and the trewest withynne youre reame', yet she is still considered 'disceyaunt' for 'by woman is many a man disceyved'.⁹⁷

However, while these cross-dressed heroines, French and English alike, act with no sexual interest and reject traditionally 'feminine' ways throughout much of their narratives, that same masculine femininity is viewed by other characters in the text (viz. the empress and later the emperor/king) as alluring—and is intended to be alluring to a contemporary male audience as well. Thus, male impersonation does not remove a romance heroine's sexual appeal. Rather, it can enhance it. The end goal of Josian's disguises is to maintain her sexual integrity for Beves; for Grisandolus, to preserve her noble status and marriage-

⁹⁶ Stephen Knight, 'The Social Function of the Middle English Romances', *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History*, ed. David Aers (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), 99–122, p. 104.

⁹⁷ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 235–6.

worthy maidenhood; not, as in transvestite saints' hagiographical accounts, to renounce her sexuality. Josian's minstrel disguise and Grisandolus's knightly attire permit a male audience to envision these women in clothes that display their bodies in an erotic fashion without compromising their alluring aura of sexual fidelity and unavailability.⁹⁸ Cross-dressing in the medieval era did not only have saintly associations, but also associations with prostitution. Henry Knighton's chronicle, composed in five volumes dating from 1352 to 1396, writes of a group of forty to fifty women who, in 1348, would appear at tournaments dressed in men's clothes—specifically, 'as though they were a company of players', 'wantonly' displaying their bodies:

Illis diebus ortus est rumor et ingens clamor in populo eo quod ubi hastiludia prosquebantur, quasi in quolibet loco dominarum cohors affuit, quasi comes interludii in diuerso et mirabili apparatu uirili, ad numerum quandoque quasi .xl. quandoque .l. dominarum, de speciosioribus et pulcrioribus, non melioribus tocius regni, in tunicis partitis scilicet una parte/ de una secta, et altera de alia secta, cum capuciis breuibus et liripiis ad modum cordarum circa capud aduolutis, et 3onis argento uel auro bene cicumstipatis in extranverso uentris sub umbilico habentes cultellos quos daggerios wlgaliter dicunt, in powchiis desuper impositis. Et sic procedebant in electis dextrariis uel aliis equis bene comptis de loco ad locum hastiludiorum. Et tali modo expendebant et deuastabant bona sua, et corpora sua ludibriis et scuriosis lasciuiis uexitabant, ut rumor populi personabat.

In those days a rumour arose and great excitement amongst the people because, when tournaments where held, at almost every place a troop of ladies would appear, as though they were a company of players, dressed in men's clothes of striking richness and variety, to the number of forty or sometimes fifty such damsels, all very eye-catching and beautiful, though hardly of the kingdom's better sort. They were dressed in parti-coloured tunics, of one colour on one side and a different one on the other, with short hoods, and liripipes (sic) wound about their heads like strings, with belts of gold and silver clasped about them, and even with the kind of knives commonly called daggers slung low across their bellies, in pouches. And thus they paraded themselves at tournaments on fine chargers and other well-arranged horses, and consumed and spent their substance, and wantonly and with disgraceful lubricity displayed their bodies, as the rumour ran.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Discussed below.

⁹⁹ Henry Knighton, *Knighton's Chronicle 1337–1396*, ed. and trans. by G. H. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 92–95.

In addition to Knighton's criticism of one group of 'hardly [...] the kingdom's better sort' of *speciosior* 'eye-catching' women, Judith Bennett and Shannon McSheffrey's study on cross-dressing in the medieval English sex trade points to a sexual subculture in fourteenth to sixteenth century London that capitalised on the eroticism and the perceived exoticism of transvestite women.¹⁰⁰

The fourteenth century was a time when English and French fashion saw men's clothes rapidly rising to—and above—the knee.¹⁰¹ 'Gradually, the tunic was replaced in the male wardrobe in the 14th century', Mary Hayward writes, 'by the doublet, pourpoint or gipon'.¹⁰² By the mid-fifteenth century, when the *Prose Merlin* was translated, courtly men's fashion included doublets that 'just covered the hips'.¹⁰³ A woman such as Josian dressed in men's clothing at the time that the Auchinleck manuscript was written, or Grisandolus when the *Prose Merlin* was translated, would have been revealing considerably more of her bodily form than would have been socially acceptable for a noble woman. As Bennett and McSheffrey explain regarding one of their transvestite court cases, 'When Joan White made merry in her master's house and danced in men's clothes, part of her delectability was simply disguise itself—the erotic pleasure of a covering that only half-hid (and thereby accentuated) her actual body underneath.'¹⁰⁴ But: Josian's socially approved intentions—to earn money to care for her husband's kin and guarantee her sexual safety

¹⁰⁰ Judith Bennett and Shannon McSheffrey, 'Early, Erotic and Alien: Women Dressed as Men in Late Medieval London', *History Workshop Journal*, 77.1 (2014), pp. 1–25.

¹⁰¹ C. Willet and Phyllis Cunnington have discussed the changes in men's clothes at the beginning of the fourteenth century, including the emergence of the cote-hardie, which unlike the tunics and super-tunics of the thirteenth century, was low-necked and close-fitting. C. Willet Cunnington and Phyllis Cunnington, *Handbook of Medieval English Costume* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), pp. 56–59, 70–73. Cf. Robin Netherton, 'Cotehardie', *Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles c. 450–1450*, ed. Gale Owen-Crocker, Elizabeth Coatsworth, and Maria Hayward (Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 150–151.

¹⁰² Maria Hayward, 'Tunic', *Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles c. 450–1450*, ed. Gale Owen-Crocker, Elizabeth Coatsworth, and Maria Hayward (Boston: Brill, 2012), p. 607; Lisa Monnas, 'Pourpoint', *Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles c. 450–1450*, ed. Gale Owen-Crocker, Elizabeth Coatsworth, and Maria Hayward (Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 432–434.

¹⁰³ Maria Hayward, 'Doublet', *Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles c. 450–1450*, ed. Gale Owen-Crocker, Elizabeth Coatsworth, and Maria Hayward (Boston: Brill, 2012), 169–170, p. 169.

¹⁰⁴ Bennett and McSheffrey, p. 13.

whilst seeking her husband—counteract the revealingness of her disguise with an alluringly safe sense of and propriety. With hypersexuality, infidelity, and deceitfulness as the character marks of negative femininity in romance, Josian’s false leper, palmer knight, and queer minstrel disguises, like Grisandolus’s knightly disguise, confirm her as the sexually ideal woman: safe, virtuous, and trustworthy—and yet desirable.

The medieval English perception of transvestism as ‘exotic’ seems to have a few possible origins. Bennett and McSheffrey suggest a tendency to blame what was considered moral deviancy on foreigners, and do not consider that the desire for cross-dressed women in brothels could be as ‘English’ as it was Flemish, Dutch, Italian, or Portuguese. On the other hand, several of the court records detailing prostitution cases involving cross-dressed women mention that the women described themselves as foreign, though whether that was, indeed, the case or whether this was a sales tactic capitalising on the already established perceived exoticism of transvestism is impossible to discern. *Beves of Hamtoun* is a text that delights in exoticism, juxtaposing images of wealth and wonders of the Near East with Beves’s cold, harsh Western family. Josian’s willingness to cross-dress and ‘win her sustenance’ lends an erotic frisson of gender confusion to her character, strengthening the exotic ‘otherness’ she already possesses due to her Saracen origin and atypically bold character.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ As part of her minstrel disguise, Josian uses an ointment to darken her skin—a motif present across all of the surviving English manuscripts of *Beves of Hamtoun*. This motif is used in other romances in which a woman disguises herself as a male minstrel, e.g. *Silence* and *Aucassin et Nicolette*. This re-pigmentation of Josian’s normally white skin does remind the audience of her foreign Saracen origin while at the same time suggesting that most of her foreignness, her ‘other-ness’, is something that can be washed away. Intriguingly, Josian’s natural colouring is described in several of the manuscripts as white and red, while her pigmented skin in her minstrel disguise is described in the manuscripts as yellow (or pale) and green. White and red were common pigments used by illuminators to depict living, healthy skin, and yellow ochre, grey, grey-brown, and green (or a mixing of azurite and yellow ochre) dead, old, choleric, or sickly skin, and sometimes to form a darker base for shadowing under the white and pink/red pigments of the living. Nancy Turner, “‘Incarnation’ Illuminated: Painting the flesh”, *Colour: The Art and Science of Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. Stella Panayotova, Deirdre Jackson, and Paolo Riccardi (London: Brepols, Harvey Miller, 2016), 271–304, p. 277.

Like Josian, Grisandolus has elements of otherness about her character: this section of the *Prose Merlin* is set as a ‘Matter of Rome’ narrative, set during the fictional overlapping of the reigns of Julius Caesar and King Arthur. Grisandolus is thus a foreigner in time as well as place. Grisandolus’s character also has a greater element of the gender-queer about her than Josian: her knight’s disguise requires hyper-masculine action as well as dress, and she maintains the act for the greater part of the narrative; Josian’s minstrel disguise, by comparison, is significantly shorter-lived both in the narrative and in the number of lines devoted to her disguise. A character such as Grisandolus could ignite a gender-queer frisson for contemporary audiences, one that was, as demonstrated above and in the example following, associated with London brothels and other sexual encounters. Nor was the eroticism of gender queerness limited to female transvestism. In 1394, a few decades between the English translations of *Beves of Hamtoun* and the *Prose Merlin*, Eleanor Rykener was arrested for prostitution in London and, upon examination, was identified as ‘John Rykener, calling [himself] Eleanor, having been detected in women’s clothing’ (‘Johannes Rykener, se Elianoram nominans veste muliebri detectus’), and Katherine French sees in the interrogation transcript ‘considerable fluidity of sexuality and sexual behavior’.¹⁰⁶ Carolyn Dinshaw is correctly hesitant to grant the court as much open-mindedness about the difference between gender identity and biological genitalia as French does; however, the demonstrable view of the understanding of gender by at least some medieval English persons as performative as much as it was physical corroborates medieval hagiographical concepts of the ability of a woman to ‘unsex’ herself and become a sort of honorary man through masculine dress and behaviour.

¹⁰⁶ Dinshaw, pp. 100–112. The interrogation of John/Eleanor Rykener, in Latin and translated into English, appears in Sheila Lindenbaum, ‘The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London’, ed. David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1.4 (1995), 459–486, pp. 461–462; Katherine L. French, ‘Genders and Material Culture’, *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 197–212, pp. 203–204.

As Grisandolus takes on adventures in hope of achieving a social rank befitting her noble birth—which is, of course, ultimately as a nobly-wed woman, a woman of high social rank—the reader (or listener), invited to view the heroine as an erotic and alluringly unattainable prize due to her masculine disguise, becomes his own sort of questing knight.¹⁰⁷ The text invites the audience to participate in their own quest narrative, with the heroine as the prize to be achieved. Her hunting scenes in pursuit of the magical stag invite the audience to draw a parallel with a man’s amorous pursuit of a woman.¹⁰⁸ The audience is invited to sympathise with the emperor, weighed down as he is by an undesirable wife; struggling to maintain a kingdom more earthly than Arthur’s; with deception around every corner and money and good knights comically out of reach. Yet, like him, they lust after the provocatively dressed but virtuously motivated elusive heroine, and feel satisfaction at her capture. In this respect, Merlin’s arc and Grisandolus’s complement each other. He appears as he is not, a stag and an old wild forest man; and he is caught by a knight who is not a knight, as Grisandolus disguises herself as a man and ultimately is rewarded as a prize to a man who is not the narrative’s hero.¹⁰⁹

The Crafty Old Woman

The women of the outlaw ballads are, save the queen, all deceitful in some capacity, though there is only one who employs disguise. These deceptions are a sharp departure from

¹⁰⁷ Noble virginity was a commodity traded for noble wifehood; Grisandolus must retain her virginity while proving her nobility. The virtuous yet bold and physically revealing nature of her disguise, however, gives Grisandolus a queer erotic edge over regular noble virgin maidens.

¹⁰⁸ Though of course, the audience need not be heterosexual (though the text was produced in a heavily heteropatriarchal society): one of the joys of fiction is that one can imagine oneself in the role a character unlike oneself—including dissimilarities in gender and orientation.

¹⁰⁹ The *Prose Merlin* was translated into English in the mid-fifteenth century, only a short time after Jeanne d’Arc’s (d. 1431) attacks on the English whilst wearing men’s armour, and her ultimate conviction of heresy, a court case that based much of its argument on her cross-dressing (French, p. 203). It is possible also to see in ‘Merlin and Grisandolus’ a critique of the Continent, in which Arthur’s kingdom represents stability and natural order, and the farcical upside-down nature of the Emperor of Rome’s kingdom (including a female knight) representative—to the audience of the English translation—of France.

those of the female deceptions of the romances. Their motives are not to ensure sexual safety or autonomy, nor do they employ their deceits to play to the male gaze. Rather, the feminine deceptions of the outlaw ballads make play with the anxieties of one of the central themes of the genre: hospitality and betrayal of the guest-host relationship therein. The Prioress of Kyrkely in *A Gest of Robyn Hode* exsanguinates Robin whilst he is in her medical care; the sheriff's wife in *Robin Hood and the Potter* invites Robin into their home, leading him to break socially accepted hospitality conventions.¹¹⁰ The single episode of female disguise is no exception. The 'old wyfe' in *Adam Bell, Clim o' the Clough, and William of Cloudesley*, who lives in the Cloudesley household pretending to be a disabled beggar woman, receives their charity for 'more then seven yere', until the night outlawed William sneaks back into Carlisle to visit his wife, Alice.¹¹¹ Then

Up she rose, and walked full styl,
Evel mote she spede therefoore!
For she had not set no fote on ground
In seven yere before.¹¹²

Judas-like, she then proceeds to the hall of justice, where she betrays William's presence to the sheriff in exchange for 'a ryght good goune,/ of scarlat' before returning to the Cloudesley home as if nothing were amiss.¹¹³ Her sloth and greed call up the image of the false beggars amongst the fair field of folk in *Piers Plowman* who 'leyde here legges aliri', feigning disability to escape honest toil for their bread.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 90–148, ll. 1801–1820; 'Robin Hood and the Potter', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 156.

¹¹¹ 'Adam Bell, Clim o' the Clough, and William Cloudesley', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 241–267, l. 60.

¹¹² 'Adam Bell, Clim o' the Clough, and William Cloudesley', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 61–64.

¹¹³ 'Adam Bell, Clim o' the Clough, and William Cloudesley', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 73–74.

¹¹⁴ Langland, William, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman, together with Vita de Dowel, Dobet, et Dobest, Secundum Wit et Resoun*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, EETS (London: Trübner, 1886), Passus VI, l. 125.

Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren read the ballad's cast of female characters—the old woman, Alice, and the queen, who, in the third fitt, is conned by William into using her bridal boon to intercede between William and the king's justice—as 'a triad of wife, crone, and queen, projections of the male imagination (or anxiety) when dealing with the female'.¹¹⁵ This analysis of the female triad mistakes the nature of the feminine roles at work in the ballad. Unlike in the romances discussed earlier in this section, in which women's sexuality plays an important role in their actions and portrayals, sexuality is not at stake in the depictions of women in *Adam Bell*. It is easy to fall into the trap of seeing a familiar pattern—three women—and assume that this must be another example of the traditional feminine triad of maiden-mother-crone, without pausing to consider if the characters' roles in the narrative are at all related to women's sexuality.¹¹⁶ Knight and Ohlgren's substitution of 'queen' for maiden is an odd and forced one; 'queen' is not a sexual reproductive status but a social rank. They are, however, each members of three vastly different economic groups, each with an associated level of cunning and deception, an economically-based motivation to improve or maintain social position—that is, the lower the status, the greater the motive and thus the greater willingness to commit or be wary of higher degrees of deception and to breach social contracts/expectations. Rather, the triad is a triad of deceit: the accomplice, betrayer, and dupe.

Alice, as accomplice, commits no active deceptions of her own, but assists William in his endeavours, first hiding him in their home and then, in a moment of humour and dramatic tension, helping defend him from the townsfolk: 'Fayre Alice followed him as a

¹¹⁵ William's wife Alice, the old beggar woman, and the queen who appears in the third and final fitt. Knight and Ohlgren, 'Adam Bell, Clim o' the Clough, and William Cloudesley: Introduction', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, p. 236.

¹¹⁶ For the triad of mother-maiden-crone, see C. G. Jung and C. Kerényi, *Science of Mythology: Essays on the Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), pp. 129–130, 132–133, 184–186.

lover true/ With a pollaxe in her hande'.¹¹⁷ The queen proves an easy dupe, first believing and then convincing the king to believe the outlaws' lies, and remains passive except in her socially acceptable role as intercessor.¹¹⁸ As betrayer, the old wife is distinguishable by her more active role—disguising herself and participating in her own deceptions.

The old wife's character and her brief appearance within the ballad—(seemingly) disabled and deceitful, directing her ill deeds against a kindly and loving couple—is a twisted version of the wily old woman stock figure represented in several Western European medieval narratives.¹¹⁹ John Fleming traces the *vetula* (or *vielle*) stock figure from Dipsas to the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, and it is easy to see versions of her character as La Vieille of the *Roman de la Rose* and Chaucer's Wife of Bath. This *vetula* figure is a woman who is old, often poor, sometimes disabled, and filled with vice, who delights in tricking and goading young people, especially young women, into sexual promiscuity. One of the key features of the inclusion of a *vetula* character is the fear of abuse of charity; another, of filling maidens' heads with sexual knowledge they should not possess until after marriage.

The basis of the old woman's knowledge—and, thus, the source of anxiety for the text—differs in *Adam Bell* from more traditional continental *vetula* figures. In the Continental works examined by Fleming and Mieszkowski, the crafty old woman is presented as 'a formal authority and lecturer on love, the special tutor to youth in the old dance of cupidity'.¹²⁰ She can be 'a midwife of most dubious repute, privy to the vile secrets of abortion and contraceptive potions', or one who, 'insinuating herself among the poor people seeking alms, will come as a procuress for some monk or cleric'.¹²¹ In *Adam Bell*,

¹¹⁷ 'Adam Bell, Clim o' the Clough, and William Cloudesley', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, II, 97–8.

¹¹⁸ McCracken, pp. 6–9.

¹¹⁹ John V. Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 171–82, esp. 172.

¹²⁰ Fleming, pp. 172, 173.

¹²¹ Fleming, p. 173, 174; see also Ailred of Rievaulx, 'The "De Institutis Inclusarum" of Ailred of Rievaulx,' ed. C. H. Talbot, *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis*, 20 vols. (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1951), VII, p. 179: 'Nolo ut insidiatrix pudiciae vetula mixta pauperibus accedat propius, deferat ab aliquo monachorum vel

her knowledge is desexualised. The couple are already married; there are no sexual morals to corrupt.

The information she provides is of identification and of a legal nature, not of how to participate in and hide the evidence of pre- or extra-marital sex. The concern behind the old wife figure, consciously removed from her traditional sexual role, is instead turned to address hospitality anxieties, not sexual anxieties. Hospitality anxieties centre on the potential violation of the unspoken contract between guest and host. As a host, one is expected to provide shelter and food for one's guest and to protect them whilst they are under one's roof. As a guest, one is expected to respect the rules and privacy of one's host and to accept what is given with thanks. In inviting a person into one's household, one opens one's family to a host of potential violations: that the guest ask more than what the host is willing to provide; that the guest take—or steal—more than what is offered or what they need; that the guest overstay their welcome; that they, in being granted access to the family's private space, betray the family and expose them, either physically (aiding the intrusion of others) or verbally: telling others outside the household about private events or conversations they have witnessed—whether true or false. In first abusing Alice and William's generosity by taking their charity when she is physically capable of working and providing for herself, and then betraying William's presence to the sheriff and thereby inviting violence into Alice's home, the old woman violates multiple expectations in the guest-host relationship. She becomes the cuckoo in the nest.

The ballad is, amongst other things, an exploration of sympathy as relates to the violation of conflicting ethical codes of legality and hospitality. The old wife should be the

clericorum eulogia, non blanda verba in aure susernet, ne pro accepta elemosina osculans manum, venenum insibilet' ['I am unwilling that an old woman, one who lies in ambush of virtuousness, should come nearer having been mixed in with the poor, in order that she should take away a blessing from someone among the monks or clergy, [and] whisper in the ear unpleasant words, lest kissing the hand for the alms received she should hiss poison'].

most moral character in the ballad: she neither is nor aids an outlaw, and she reports the illegal presence of an outlaw in the town to the local authorities. However, her deceitful violations of hospitality ethics—methods, actions, and motive—compromise her status as upholder of the law and cost her all audience sympathy, situating her as the antagonist of the first fitt. As in the other English outlaw ballads like the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, hospitality ethics outweigh legalities.

The association with elderly, often disabled women and malicious wrongdoing was based as much in medical belief as it was in social biases of ageism, misogyny, and ableism,¹²² and old age and disability had long been associated with abuse of charity and of knowledge.¹²³ The *vielle* in *Pamphile et Galatée*, for instance, states, ‘Vielle sui, vieulz, et ma viellesche/ Atrait avarisse et peresche [...] Vieulz est qui vieuls est’ (‘I am old, base, and my old age attracts avarice and sloth [...] An old person is a vile person.’).¹²⁴ While the old woman’s age is not feigned, her inability to provide for herself is. Karen Pratt has argued that, while historically the ‘aged were often poor and in need of warmth and sustenance’, in many narrative texts ‘the eagerness with which the women extract rewards from all and sundry suggests that they are tainted by greed and gluttony, the food probably also having

¹²² Ableism here is defined as discrimination toward disabled people. In the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, it was believed that ‘since the toxins previously fluxed in dreaded menstrual fluid remained dammed up in their post-menopausal bodies, old women gave off vapors that could poison and that empowered their evil. According to preachers, old women were the devil’s mouth, and he used them to seduce men or kill sleeping babies by sucking their blood’, and Aquinas ‘believed the devil gave old women their dreaded evil eye as payment for pacts they made with him’. Gretchen Mieszkowski, ‘Old Age and Medieval Misogyny: The Old Woman’, *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: de Gruyter, 2007), 299–319, p. 316; Jole Agrimi and Chiara Cristiani, ‘Savoir médical et anthropologie religieuse: Les représentations et les fonctions de la vetula, XIII^e–XV^e siècle’, *Annales ESC*, 48 (1993), 1281–1308, pp. 1302–03.

¹²³ Cf. Karen Pratt, ‘De Vetula: the Figure of the Old Woman in Medieval French Literature’, *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: de Gruyter, 2007), 321–342, p. 330; Sarah Gordon, ‘Representations of Aging and Disability in Early Sixteenth-Century French Farce’, *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: de Gruyter, 2007), 421–436, p. 424.

¹²⁴ Jehan Bras-de-Fer, *Pamphile et Galatée*, ed. Joseph de Morawski (Paris: University of Paris, 1917), ll. 1918–1922. Translation borrowed from Mieszkowski, p. 316. Cf. the Reeve’s prologue in Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘The Reeve’s Prologue’, *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 77–78.

connotations of lechery'.¹²⁵ The feigned disability of the old wife in *Adam Bell* magnifies this presumed affinity with sloth and greed; she garners sympathetic charity when she is in fact physically able to earn a living herself. The ballad dates from 1505, but, like many of the outlaw (and other) ballads, it shows evidence of existing in earlier forms.¹²⁶ Though the Statute of Labourers was instituted in 1351, about 150 years before *Adam Bell* was written, it is possible to see some influence of English labour law in the old wife's sloth. The Statute of Labourers, though not well enforced, mandated that able-bodied persons work or face severe penalties.¹²⁷ The old woman is not simply being greedy, but through her disguise is depicted as outright fraudulent.

The old wife's disguise becomes emblematic of her corrupt motives and the poisonous nature of the use to which she puts her knowledge. While her 'disability' does place her in a position (Alice's household) to have inside knowledge that other townsfolk do not, viz. William's clandestine visit, her betrayal in exchange for a gown of scarlet is a malicious act of information-peddling. She does not fulfil the role of the wise old woman, but rather that of the cunning old woman who trades her information for personal gain. The information she provides does aid in legally correct action being taken. But the sharing of her knowledge and the consequences further erode the audience's sympathy, particularly

¹²⁵ Pratt, p. 330.

¹²⁶ The dating of *Adam Bell*, like many of the ballads, is difficult. Knight and Ohlgren note that 'the poem was entered in the Stationers' Register in 1557–58, indicating it was a mainstream text by then', but that '[a] 1432 Parliament Roll for Wiltshire adds to a list of local members, presumably in a spirit of satire, a sequence of outlaw names—Robin Hood, Little John, Much, Scathelock and Reynold are there, but, remarkably in so southern an area, the list is led by "Adam Belle, Clim O'Cluw, Willyam Cloudesle." Presumably the first named is also the Allan Bell mentioned as a fine archer in Dunbar's poem *Of Sir Thomas Norrey*, datable to the early sixteenth century at the latest.' Knight and Ohlgren state that '[t]he earliest full version of the ballad (C) is Copland's mid-sixteenth century text; however earlier fragments A (printed by John Byddel around 1536) and B (printed by Wynkyn de Worde c. 1505) show this ballad to be an originally medieval narrative [...] The overall tone is lucid, steady, metronomic narrative, most unlike the mildly mysterious stop-start movement of the popular and lyric ballad, and much more like the measured tread of the sixteenth-century historicist poems *Chevy Chase* or *The Battle of Otterburn*, and indeed not in this respect unlike the *Gest* itself, in this as in its compilation status a somewhat bookish text'. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, 'Adam Bell, Clim o' the Clough, and William Cloudesley: Introduction,' pp. 235–240.

¹²⁷ 'Statutes of the Realm, I 311–13: 25 Edward III, Stat. 2, cc. 1–7', trans. R. B. Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, ed. R. B. Dobson (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 63–68.

when one considers that her report directly harms not a single lone outlaw, but an entire family.¹²⁸ Her age and use of false appearances, and specifically her choice of feigning physical disability, work together to form an image of corruption that mirrors the town society itself—one that thinks nothing of harming families and children in its bloodthirst to punish those who step outside its rules.

Transformation and Substitution

In the previous chapter, a significant number of the disguises discussed were the product of transformations: Orfeo uses his transformed appearance to his advantage in his return to his kingdom; Uther agrees to Merlin's suggestion that he use magical transformation to gain access to Igraine's bedchamber; Nectanebus uses sorcery to appear before Olympias in the guise of a sheep god and a dragon, as discussed above. There are far more women in romance with supernatural powers or magical knowledge than there are men. And yet, their magic is not used to transform or disguise themselves; they do not change form of their own volition. Mélusine in the earlier French version of what would become the Middle English *Partonope of Blois* is the hybrid product of a human-beast union; her reptilian Saturday transformation neither is used as a disguise nor can it be removed. Nor does she attempt to disguise her body as human. Dame Ragnell's hag form in *The Marriage of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* and the Lady of Synadowne's appearance as a winged worm in *Libeaus Desconus* cannot be considered magical disguises.¹²⁹ To disguise oneself requires an act of volition and a desire to deceive. These women have been

¹²⁸ In fact, *Adam Bell* is the only surviving medieval English outlaw ballad to depict an outlaw with a family.

¹²⁹ *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 41–80, ll. 691–705; 'The Marriage of Sir Gawain', *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 359–372, ll. 175–182; *Lybeaus Desconus*, ed. M. Mills, EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), Lambeth MS, ll. 2085–2089; Cotton MS, ll. 2008–2012.

cursed and wish to be able to reveal their true forms: the precise opposite of disguise.¹³⁰ Given how much women were painted as deceitful, it would perhaps seem surprising that there are not more enchantresses attempting to disguise themselves to lure men, or women seeking the aid of those with magical knowledge to achieve the same.¹³¹ However, within English romance, female transformation is, by and large, something from which to be liberated, not something utilised for personal gain. The ideal medieval woman stands out amongst other female characters in the genre precisely because she is not deceitful. Having proven himself noble and worthy, the knight deserves a woman who poses no threat of deception toward him.

Between a Rock and a Wet Place

Though using their magic to transform themselves is uncommon (unlike Merlin or Nectanabus, who delight in transforming their own appearances), women in the English romances do, on occasion, use their magic to transform others' appearances—and usually with malicious intent, against the transformed person's will. In the following pages, I examine a narrative moment in which a woman deliberately uses magic to disguise herself: Morgan le Fay's singular transformation of herself in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, redacted from the *Suite du Merlin*.¹³²

An embodiment of dangerous female autonomy, Morgan le Fay presents a rare exception as a woman who uses transformation to disguise *herself*. Following the death of her lover Accolon in *Le Morte Darthur*, Morgan le Fay steals Excalibur's sheath. Realising that she cannot outrun Arthur, she throws the scabbard into a nearby lake. Then, we are told,

¹³⁰ At best Dame Ragnell's disguise (particularly in Chaucer's rendition, in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*) can be considered of ambiguous origin; her agency in the matter remains unclear.

¹³¹ Though in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Morgan uses elaborate headwear to distract from her ugliness; she does not, however, use magic to create an illusion of beauty.

¹³² Robert de Boron, *Merlin: roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich, 2 vols. (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1886), II, pp. 223–224.

‘she rode into a valey where many grete stonys were, ans whan she sawe she must be overtake, she shope hirself, horse and man, by enchauntemente unto grete marbyll stonys’.¹³³ Arthur, seeing the figure of his sister turned to stone like Lot’s wife to salt, believes the transformation to be both divinely executed and permanent: ‘here may ye se the vengeance of God! And now I am sory this mysaventure is befall’.¹³⁴ As soon as he and his men leave, Morgan promptly returns herself and the forty mounted men accompanying her to their original forms.¹³⁵ Morgan le Fay’s decision to not transform the countenances of her men and horses into those of other people—peasants, clerics, or some equally unoffending group of persons—is perhaps understandable given that Arthur’s men would be expecting a group of forty-one people to be nearby and such a large group of any persons would be suspect—though, as discussed in the previous chapter, Arthur is not notable for his perspicacity. However, the decision to transform into something inanimate, something *not alive* is unusual. She does not outrun them; she does not use her magic to transform Arthur; she does order her forty men to fight Arthur and Urience. In choosing to disguise herself, she does not opt for animals, in keeping with the forest location; she does not choose a fierce or terrifying creature—no dragons or shadow-cats; she does not choose simple invisibility. Instead, her transformation into ‘stonys’ links her to the quasi-supernatural Arthurian landscape.

Evident in the tradition as early as Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regnum Britanniae*, magic is always present in the Arthurian landscape. Merlin’s importation of the Stonehenge standing stones from Ireland and the dragons trapped beneath Vortigern’s tower; the Green Chapel; the spring where the mysterious ladies of the forest of Arroy meet Tor, Gawain, and Pellinor; swords planted in rocks and originating from lakes; Nimian’s

¹³³ Malory, p. 120.

¹³⁴ Malory, p. 120.

¹³⁵ Malory, pp. 119–120.

entrapment of Merlin in rock or tree; and Merlin's spirit speaking to Gawain through the unnaturally fog-permeated forest in the Vulgate Cycle: all create a sense that Arthur's lands, while not as otherworldly as Avalon, are, if not exactly *alive*, imbued with enchantments that interact with the humans inhabiting them.¹³⁶

Throughout *Le Morte Darthur*, the combined presence of rocks and water alert the reader—and sometimes the characters—to the presence of the supernatural, though whether the combination of rocks and water begets the supernatural or simply marks its presence is unclear. Arthur retrieves his first sword from a stone, and gains and returns his second to a lake. The three ladies of Arroy greet their knights at 'the hede' of 'a fayre streme of watir' in 'a depe valey full of stonys'.¹³⁷ Balyn's supernatural sword—later Galahad's—which gives the Dolorous Stroke and can only be taken up by the best knight of the world, is set by Merlin 'into a marbil stone stondynge upryght, as grete as a mylstone, and hoved allwayes above the watir, and dud many yeres'.¹³⁸ Malory is insistent upon this point, repeating in the last lines of the 'Tale of Balyn' that the sword was in a stone hovering above water, and again when Gawain, Percival, and Galahad try their hand at removing the sword.¹³⁹ The Lady of the Lake traps Merlin eternally under a rock.¹⁴⁰ Awakening from his journey on Morgan le Fay's enchanted ship, Accolon first lays eyes upon 'a depe welles [...] [a]nd there com out of that fountayne a pype of sylver, and out of that pype ran watir all on hyghe in a stone of marbil'.¹⁴¹ Seeing water meet stone, Accolon immediately knows that he is in the presence of magic:

¹³⁶ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, pp. 196–198; 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 207–300, ll. 1052–1078; Malory, pp. 8, 43, 74, 100, 127, 669, 671; *Prose Merlin*, pp. 693–694; cf. Mikayla Hunter, 'Evadeam, Gawain, Merlin: Penitential Transformation and Unseen Truth in the 'Dwarf Knight' Section of the Vulgate Cycle', *Arthuriana*, 29.4 (2019) [forthcoming].

¹³⁷ Malory, p. 127.

¹³⁸ Malory, p. 74.

¹³⁹ Malory, p. 74, 669, 671.

¹⁴⁰ Malory, p. 100.

¹⁴¹ Malory, p. 109.

Whan Sir Accolon sawe this he blyssed hym and syde, “Jesu save my lorde Kynge Arthure and Kynge Uryence, for thes damysels in this shippe hath betrayed us: they were fendis and no women. And if I may ascape this mysadventure I shall distroye them, all that I may fynde of thes false damysels that faryth thus with their inchauntementes”.¹⁴²

These are only a handful of the instances in *Le Morte Darthur* that combine the supernatural with images of rocks and water. The use of water in medieval romance has been the subject of some study, particularly as a boundary separating the ‘real world’ in the text and the Otherworld or dream world.¹⁴³ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen discusses Merlin’s petromancy across the Arthurian textual canon: identifying the cause of the structural instability of Vortigern’s tower, importing Stonehenge, and magically inscribing various stones and monuments.¹⁴⁴ But as yet I have not found any scholarship commenting on the combined presence of rocks and water in conjunction with supernatural occurrences. In John Darrah’s presentation of the evidence of pagan Celtic roots of Arthurian legend in its depictions of the relationship between the supernatural and water locations such as rivers, springs, and lakes, he briefly mentions the presence of rock:

She [Lunete] made it a condition that he [Branduz’s cousin] should set up the fountain in Broceliande, with a chapel above and a small perron and a basin, and made a spell so that if any knight errant cast water from the basin on the perron there would be thunder and lightning.¹⁴⁵

However, his analysis of the scene centres solely on the water and not the inclusion of the perron, yet the stone-and-water imagery has important biblical precedent as well. God’s instructions to Moses to take his rod and ‘smite the rock [in Horeb], and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink’ is referred to three times, in Exodus 17:6, Numbers 20:7-8, and, with a metaphorical glossing, in 1 Corinthians 10:4. In Genesis 35:13-15, Jacob sets up a pillar of stone and pours ‘a drink offering’ and oil thereon in order to speak with

¹⁴² Malory, p. 109.

¹⁴³ John Darrah, *Paganism in Arthurian Romance* (Rochester, NY: Boydell, 1994), pp. 83–91.

¹⁴⁴ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 174–176, 199.

¹⁴⁵ Darrah, pp. 94–95.

God. The episode in which Morgan le Fay enchants forty-one people and their horses into rocks is framed by stone-and-water imagery. First, she throws Excalibur's supernatural sheath into a lake, and it sinks quickly because it is 'hevy of golde and *precious stonys*'; she transforms living beings into marble stones and returns them to their natural forms; and immediately following, Morgan orders a knight to be drowned.¹⁴⁶ Her transformation strengthens her image as a powerful enchantress and ties her—like the Ladies of the Lake, those other powerful autonomous women—to the Arthurian landscape, perhaps reflecting an anxiety about the dangers lurking in untamed natural spaces.

'Naked as a Nedyll'¹⁴⁷

Disguise, as an assumption of an identity different from one's own, is a very personal type of deception: the aspects one changes or hides are those that most define and distinguish an individual. In that respect, perhaps the most interesting disguises are those in which the woman impersonates another woman by undressing. Her disguise is to strip herself of all distinguishing marks of rank, while at the same time exposing her breasts and genitalia, highlighting her femininity. This type of 'disguise' (or lack thereof) points to a certain degree of interchangeability between women within romance, and to a notion of womanhood as its own social rank—one that in many senses supersedes economic status.

Reduplication and interchangeability are qualities common to Arthurian women in particular. They often share the same names (two Isoldes, two Elaines, two Gonnors) and sometimes the same appearance (e.g. Queen Gonnore and Gonnore the steward's daughter are only distinguishable by a small birthmark).¹⁴⁸ Tristan temporarily forgets Queen Isolde and marries Isolde Blanche-Mains; both Elaine of Corbenic and Elaine of Astolat hold

¹⁴⁶ Malory, p. 120, emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁷ Malory, referring to Elaine of Corbenic, p. 621.

¹⁴⁸ *Prose Merlin*, pp. 213–214, 322.

narrative prominence due to their love of Lancelot; Gonnore, the daughter of King Leodegan and his wife, and her half-sister Gonnore, daughter of King Leodegan and Cleodalis's wife, both live for a time as Arthur's queen.¹⁴⁹

Brengwain, and the false Gonnore both successfully conceal their identity by undressing (or despite undressing).¹⁵⁰ In *Sir Tristrem*, a late thirteenth-century romance, Brengwain replaces Ysonde in Mark's wedding bed to hide the fact that Ysonde lost her virginity to Tristrem.¹⁵¹ Her replacement of Ysonde in the bridal chamber is, in a sense, admirable: a lady's maid sacrificing her most valuable social/marital commodity (her virginity) to protect her mistress. Her disguise does not protect Ysonde's virtue (she has already slept with Tristrem), but rather her reputation. Brengwain's physical masquerade conceals Ysonde's true sexual-social identity as a woman who has had sex outside of wedlock. Brengwain's deception poses an ethical dilemma for the audience: does the noble motive (to protect her mistress's reputation) outweigh the deceptive means? In this act, Brengwain encapsulates actual and counterfeit morality. That is, in romance, a sympathetic lady's maid is treated as exemplary when she places her mistress's needs above her own, even when she uses magical or deceptive means to accomplish those needs.¹⁵² At the same time, Brengwain aides Ysonde by preventing Mark from discovering his wife's lack of virginity. Ysonde praises Brengwain for being a 'trewe may [maid]' and 'loved hir wele ay'

¹⁴⁹ Malory, *Tristan and the two Isoldes*, pp. 348; Elaine of Corbenic, pp. 622–626, 630–635, 648–657; Elaine of Astolat, pp. 806–807, 815–822, 825–829; *Prose Merlin*, pp. 464–468.

¹⁵⁰ In Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Elaine of Corbenic also uses nudity as a successful disguise. She tricks Lancelot into believing she is Guinevere. Lancelot, however, may be excused for falling for the deception, as Elaine ensures that 'all the wyndowys and holys of that chambir were stopped that no maner of day myght be seyne', and employs the aid of the enchantress Dame Brusen to give Lancelot an enchanted wine that renders him 'so asoted and madde that he myght make no delay but wythoute ony let he wente to bedde. And so he wente that mayden Elayne had bene Quene Gwenyvere'. Malory, pp. 623–624.

¹⁵¹ Wendy Doniger refers to this plot device as 'the bedtrick'. Wendy Doniger, *The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 5–6, 8. Doniger argues that in Gottfried von Strassburg's version of Brengwain and Isolde's bedtrick, 'the servant Brangane substitutes (unofficially) for Isolde to atone for her sin in serving the love potion that made the servant Tristan substitute (unofficially) for the king', in Doniger, *The Bedtrick*, p. 277.

¹⁵² See the discussion on *William of Palerne's* Alexandrine in chapter one, above.

for her loyalty to Ysonde. Brengwain exemplifies best ethical practice for a lady's maid: loyalty to her mistress above all else, including herself and her king.

In *Sir Tristrem*, Brengwain uses 'smock' as a euphemism for maidenhood, saying of Ysonde:

Smockes hadde sche and Y
And hir was solwy [soiled] to sen,
Bi Mark tho hye schuld ly.
Y lent hir min al clen,
As thare.¹⁵³

While Brengwain may have been wearing a chemise while impersonating Ysonde, her disguise still consists of a stripping-down to a plain undergarment common to all women. The most distinguishing feature between Brengwain's and Ysonde's bodies—and perhaps only distinguishing feature, at least to Mark (depending on how well his chamber was lit)—is not their faces, but the state of their hymens.

Arthur, as well, fails to notice that his queen has been substituted for another woman. The *Prose Merlin* includes the episode of the 'false Gonnore', who attempts to replace the true Gonnore on her wedding night. While this scheme is foiled, the translator does include the original text's reference to a later episode in the *Lancelot-Grail*, not included in the *Estoire de Merlin*, in which the false Gonnore successfully masquerades as Arthur's queen for a time.¹⁵⁴ Arthur's lack of perceptive abilities has already been remarked upon in this thesis. While it is more likely that the two Gonnorees look alike, given that they are half-sisters, the true Gonnore has a birthmark, the absence of which ought to have been noticed when Arthur and the false Gonnore slept together. That the false Gonnore manages to maintain her charade for three years can be read as an implication that Arthur is not as attentive to his queen in the bedroom as a king with no heir should be. The translator seems

¹⁵³ 'Sir Tristrem', *Lancelot du Laik and Sir Tristrem*, ll. 1776–1780.

¹⁵⁴ *Estoire de Merlin*, in *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer, 7 vols. (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1908–1916), II, pp. 95–174.

to have less sympathy for Queen Gonnore than his source material provides: while the *Estoire* speaks of Gonnore's sorrow at the deception the false Gonnore and her supporters pull on Arthur, the translator replaces this sentiment with 'grete annoye' and adds that 'she com never in his [Arthur's] companye but was with Galehaut, a riche prince in the reame of Sorloys, for the love of Launcelot', giving the audience the impression that Arthur is driven into the arms of the false Gonnore through the coolness of his wife.¹⁵⁵ In the dark all cats are grey; and when stripped down to their smocks and skin, a wife and a little-known lady are one and the same. It seems that in romance, if stripped of their social signifiers, i.e. their clothing and their maidenhoods, women are largely of a muchness, even to those men who should know them best.¹⁵⁶

A certain amount of interchangeability is necessary: for Ysonde to remain faithful to Tristrem, and to also not be found out for treason, a substitute is necessary. Lancelot must beget Galahad in a manner which allows his devotion to Guinevere to remain intact while allowing Galahad to be descended from both King Pelles (the Grail king) and the best earthly knight (Lancelot). However, the ethical implications of these body-double disguises are obscure at best, and what Arthur, Lancelot, Tristan, and Mark are ultimately provided with (though they do not know it), is a choice between two deceitful women. In each of these doppelgänger situations, both women are to some degree deceitful—as, according to medieval clerical misogynistic views, all post-lapsarian women, as descendents of Eve, must be. It is imperative that the men choose the lesser of the two deceivers, the lesser of two

¹⁵⁵ *Prose Merlin*, p. 466; *Estoire de Merlin*, in *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, II, p. 310.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Doniger, *The Bedtrick*, p. 190. Doniger considers female interchangeability in bedtrick narratives to be somewhat more nuanced:

The truism of the cats in the dark can be presented from either a nonsexist or a sexist point of view: (1) People may look different but in all other aspects they are alike; hence, when you can't see them, they become alike. (2) Women may look different but, unlike men, in all other aspects, particularly in their sexuality, they are alike; hence, when you can't see them, they become alike.

In this way, men's inability to perceive the difference between women could be as much a comment on male characters' imperception (as discussed in chapter two of this thesis) as it is on female characters' interchangeability.

evils. Whether that less deceitful form is embodied in Isolde or Brengwein, the true or false Gonnore, or Elaine of Carbonic or Guinevere, is a matter of debate.

As we have seen across this chapter, women in disguise narratives fit within a variety of social ranks. However, insofar as female characters are depicted disguising themselves and recognising others in disguise, it seems that considerations of gender trump those of social status. Disguises as body doubles, of women successfully substituting themselves for other women with very little help in the way of physical disguise, suggests a widespread view of women as fairly interchangeable, particularly as there are few male equivalents of body doubling.¹⁵⁷

Noticeable shifts in the thematics of women's disguise narratives from early romances to late medieval romances include a later focus on cross-dressing, concurrent with the change in men's fashion to high-cut tunics, and the introduction of a false beggar in the late medieval *Adam Bell* ballad, recalling the provisions of the Statute of Labourers, introduced as a means of suppressing wage levels and free movement following the labour shortage produced by the Black Death. However, the trope of women as memory-keepers, and of disguise recognition as a largely gendered ability, remains popular throughout the medieval period.

It is interesting that the strategy of magical transformation as disguise is largely forced on female characters; it is not undertaken voluntarily in the way that Uther's disguise to sneak into Tintagel or Nectanebus's disguise as Amon are—except the transformative disguise assumed by enchantress-antagonist Morgan le Fay. Voluntary disguise transformations perhaps placed too much power in the hands of women for medieval audiences to view those women as compelling and sympathetic heroines and love interests.

¹⁵⁷ *Eger and Grime* is the exception to this. *Eger and Grime: A Parallel-Text Edition of the Percy and the Huntingdon-Laing Versions of the Romance*, ed. J. R. Caldwell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933).

CHAPTER THREE

MALORY'S KNIGHTS

Two knights meet at a castle; at a tournament; in the forest. They are wearing armour: it covers their faces, their bodies, even their horses. They must rely on their shield devices to announce their identity, but the shield of the nearest knight broke in battle the previous day and he borrowed a new one from a hospitable vavasour; the knight standing on the far edge of the field bears a device our knight does not recognise. They come to blows. Their strength is matched. The first knight barely gains the upper hand. But just before the fatal stroke, the second cries out. It is a familiar voice. It is his brother; his friend; a fellow. The unknown enemy is revealed to be a known ally. Tragedy is narrowly missed, and the two part ways to find new adversaries. Misidentifications of this sort are common in chivalric romance. Yet, in Malory's text, two of these misidentifications and subsequent confrontations do end in tragedy: the fight between Arthur and his knight Accolon (discussed later in this chapter), and between brothers Balyn and Balan.

Misidentifications pepper *Le Morte Darthur*. Gawain nearly kills Gareth following the tournament on the Assumption of Our Lady at the end of 'The Tale of Gareth'; Lancelot and Tristan fight each other in 'the grettist bateyle betwyxte two knyghtes that ever was or ever shall be', as foretold by Merlin in 'The Tale of Balyn'; Bors lodges his truncheon in Lancelot's side when he appears at a tournament wearing Elaine's sleeve.¹ These fights arising from misidentification serve as plot devices to allow Malory to establish a ranking of prowess amongst knights who, due to obligations of fellowship, ought not to be fighting against one another. These clashes also illustrate the tension of the Round Table as a rivalrous fellowship, one in which the knights are often concerned more with increasing

¹ Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. P. J. C. Field, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), I, pp. 282, 57, 809–810.

their individual reputations and worship than building up the Round Table as a whole against outside forces. In the early part of Arthur's reign, up to the quest of the Holy Grail, these misidentification encounters are often brought about through Arthur's struggle to establish a central ideology of chivalry as defined by the so-called 'Pentecostal oath' and the regularisation of custom.² Knights fight for the right to maintain individual customs of their castles and lands—or press-gang proxies to fight for them. In the latter part of Arthur's reign, post-Grail, the hierarchy of Round Table knights continues to be tested and re-established through the knights' prioritisation of kin-ties and devotion to individuals and groups outside of the Round Table fellowship over the bonds of brotherhood.

Jill Mann and Fredric Jameson have outlined two concepts regarding knighthood which are essential to the understanding of the knightly disguises in Malory that are under consideration in this chapter. They are the importance of 'taking the adventure', and the 'positional concept of evil' between knights. I will discuss these concepts here, and then refer back to them throughout the chapter.

Jill Mann writes that taking the adventure—whatever adventure that may be—is

a dedicated submission to chance. The knight puts himself at the disposal of chance; he does not decide his exploits in advance, but rides out so as to expose himself to the claims that chance may lay on him in his travels—or, alternatively, he responds to chance intrusions into the sphere of the court. The adventure is beyond the knight's control; it is something that comes to him. The knights who are least successful in the Grail Quest are not those who fail in adventures, they are those who simply do not have any. Nor can the knight ensure his success by effort; it is determined by "aventure".³

² This dramatisation of the centralisation of royal power in romance has been discussed by Stephen Knight, who examines centralisation of power and regularisation of custom in Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier au Lion*. I outline Knight's argument more fully and discuss its application to Malory's text in the section on 'Arthur and Accolon', below. For a discussion on chivalry and the Pentecostal Oath in Malory's text, see Dorsey Armstrong, *Gender and Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte Darthur* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), pp. 1, 7, 10, 28–44, 70–71, 78–82, 185–186.

³ Jill Mann, 'Malory: Knightly Combat in *Le Morte d'Arthur*', *Medieval Literature: Chaucer and the Alliterative Tradition*, ed. Boris Ford (London: Penguin, 1991) 331–339, p. 333.

She elaborates that ‘Malory’s conception of ‘taking the adventure’ [...] is not a matter of stoic suffering or iron resistance; it is an attempt to stretch the self to embrace the utmost reach of possible events’.⁴ This importantly includes embracing a certain degree of fatalism: a knight who takes an adventure properly ‘does not try to close the distance between himself and events by fitting them to himself, mastering them so that they become a mere expression of himself’; rather, he ‘achieves union with them by matching himself to them, by taking into himself, accepting without understanding, their mysterious inevitability and his enigmatic responsibility for them’.⁵ To be a good knight is also to be in a state of continual action, to jeopardise one’s body in pursuit of worship and worthy deeds and to accept what adventures fate bestows.⁶ Thus, in order to remain a knight in utmost good standing, a knight must accept any adventure which appears before him, within the bounds of the Pentecostal Oath and loyalty to his king.

In these adventures, knights are frequently pitted against other knights who appear at first to be foes, but are soon revealed to be allies, even kin. The unidentified knight as both threat and fellow, as Other and Same, the enemy revealed to be a friend, is a concept that has been explained persuasively by Fredric Jameson. It is a concept which he refers to as the ‘positional concept of evil’.⁷ That is, ‘the person standing opposite me [the protagonist] is marked as the villain, not by virtue of any particular characteristics of his own, but simply in function of his relationship to my own place’.⁸ The common model of knightly encounters within *Le Morte Darthur* is that the protagonist is the ‘known’ entity (and thus in the position of ‘good’), while the ‘bad’ is positioned as the unknown, that is,

⁴ Jill Mann, “‘Taking the Adventure’: Malory and the *Suite du Merlin*”, *Aspects of Malory*, ed. Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer (Cambridge: Brewer, 1981), 71–91, p. 90.

⁵ Jill Mann, “‘Taking the Adventure’: Malory and the *Suite du Merlin*”, p. 90.

⁶ Mann, ‘Malory: Knightly Combat in *Le Morte d’Arthur*’, pp. 335–336 and 338–339.

⁷ Fredric Jameson, ‘Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre’, *New Literary History*, 7.1 (1975), 135–163, p. 160.

⁸ Jameson, p. 160.

the knight whose affiliations and often even name remain obscured until he has been overcome. When he has been defeated, his identity is revealed and, in transitioning from a position of ‘unknown’ to ‘known’, the evil the knight represents becomes negated and he is soon aligned with the good. As Jameson puts it:

Romance may then be understood as [...] a symbolic answer to the question of how my enemy can be thought of as being evil, that is, as other than myself and marked by some absolute difference, when what is responsible for his being so characterized is simply the identity of his own conduct with mine, which—challenges, points of honor, tests of strength—he reflects as in a mirror image. In the romance, this conceptual dilemma is overcome by a dramatic passage from appearance to reality: the hostile knight, in armor, his identity unknown, exudes that insolence which marks a fundamental refusal of recognition and stamps him as the bearer of the category of evil, up to the moment in which, defeated and unmasked, he asks for mercy and tells his name [...], at which point he becomes simply one knight among others and loses all his sinister un-familiarity.⁹

When a friend can appear to be a foe, and a foe can be revealed as a friend, public recognition of identity becomes an issue of paramount importance in knightly culture. If everyone appears to be chivalric, with shields, swords, horses, and other such knightly accoutrements, then what defines friend from foe? What separates the appearance of chivalry from proven chivalric identity, of false or empty reputation from well-earned public recognition? As Jill Mann explains, knights’ “worship” becomes identified with their essence—with the continuity and integrity of their being, and with the continuity between their essential being and the exterior world.¹⁰ As this chapter shall show, Malory’s knights (and King Arthur as well) are greatly concerned with saving face—that is, in continually performing chivalric identity and with building and maintaining a good reputation. In Lancelot’s character arc in particular one sees Malory’s growing interest in what lies behind the performed (and performative) public personas. Throughout *Le Morte Darthur* disguise for knights is more than simply instrumental, a plot device for allowing Malory to establish a hierarchy of

⁹ Jameson, p. 161.

¹⁰ Mann, “Taking the Adventure”: Malory and the *Suite du Merlin*, p. 75.

proress within a supposedly egalitarian Round Table fellowship. Disguise becomes tied up with the performance of identity and the production of chivalric identity in a hierarchical model and performance of that identity.

Brothers in Arms: Balyn and Accolon

Balyn

*But ones y dud an hastenesse:
Therefore y loste bope more and lesse.*¹¹

If enemy knights unmasked are revealed to be in truth ‘the same’, as Jameson suggests, then what could be more ‘same’ than brothers? At the end of ‘The Tale of Balyn or the Knight with the Two Swords’, brothers Balyn and Balan kill each other in battle, each unaware that he is fighting his brother in disguise. This tragic misidentification is not the only disguise-encounter in the tale. Merlin briefly appears in disguise along the roadside, as he is wont to do throughout the intertextual Arthurian canon.¹² And as part of an earlier adventure leading to the castle of the Fisher King (in which Balyn delivers the Dolorous Stroke), Balyn repeatedly encounters Sir Garlon, a knight who ‘rydeth invisible’.¹³ Merlin’s moment aside, these other disguise-encounters help illuminate the general themes in this tale of what constitutes the good chivalric practice necessary to successful adventuring: humility and choosing a course of action which gives consideration to surrounding circumstances. Balyn sacrifices perception for haste. It is Balyn’s self-centred approach to adventure—his hubris and lack of circumspection—which contribute to the numerous deaths and tragedies in his ‘Tale’.

As these disguise-encounters function to support the tale’s overarching themes of hubris and lack of circumspection, it is therefore imperative to place the disguises in the

¹¹ *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, ed. Julius Zupitza, EETS (London: Trübner, 1875), ll. 7835–6.

¹² Malory, p. 57–58.

¹³ Malory, p. 64.

context of other events in the tale which contribute to this interpretation. To better illustrate how these disguises function as thematic elements, I will begin with a brief consideration of these themes in earlier parts of the tale, before Merlin's and Garlon's disguised appearances: namely, when Balyn acquires his second, magical sword, and when he beheads Lady Lyle—the two key scenes which set Balyn on his path leading to the misadventures with Garlon and Balan. Then I will move on to an analysis of Garlon's invisibility, Merlin's disguised interaction with Balyn and Balan, and finally an examination of Balyn and Balyn's final, fatal disguised encounter, considered alongside that of Arthur and Accolon.

Balyn's tale begins when a damsel enters Arthur's hall bearing a sword which has been magically affixed within its sheath and is belted (again, magically) to her waist, such that only a knight who is 'a passynge good man of hys hondys and of hys dedis, and withoute velony other trechory and withoute treson' can free the sword from the sheath and, by extension, from the damsel.¹⁴ Everyone at court is surprised when Balyn, newly released from prison on suspicion of killing Arthur's cousin (or kinsman), proves the only man able to achieve the sword. When the damsel requests that he return the sword to her, she reveals that the sword is cursed; if Balyn takes it, she warns: 'ye shall sle with that swerde the beste frende that ye have and the man that ye moste love in the worlde, and that swerde shall be youre destruccion'.¹⁵ Yet Balyn refuses and announces that he 'shall take the adventure'.¹⁶

To 'take the adventure' is knightly, and is an attitude of bravery and come-what-may that good knights embrace. See, for instance, Lancelot's appropriation of Kay's armour, discussed later in this chapter. However, in this particular moment, Balyn's decision to 'take the adventure' is a poor one for two reasons: first, while Lancelot always manages to make his word cousin to his deed, or succeed when he accepts odds against his favour, when it

¹⁴ Malory, p. 48.

¹⁵ Malory, p. 50.

¹⁶ Malory, p. 50.

comes to his ability to protect himself and those around him, Balyn consistently promises more than he can deliver. Robert Kelly mentions Balyn's tendency towards hubris:

Balin's error in Malory is not avarice or discourtesy, but the more serious flaw of *hubris*. The revelation that the sword is cursed only dares Balin to retort, 'I shall take the aventure that God woll ordayne for me,' implying that he is too self-confident to believe anything so terrible as the destiny revealed by the damsel could befall him. There is no statement in the *Suite* that corresponds to this Oedipus-like challenge to providence, which highlights Malory's emphasis, not on the ethics of knighthood, but on the more philosophical problem of destiny, in particular on the role that choice plays in shaping one's destiny.¹⁷

Secondly, in refusing to return the sword, he must either believe that he can circumvent the sword's curse, or he must think more of the honour he will acquire by taking the adventure than of the fatal consequence to the man he 'moste love[s]'.¹⁸ Recently released from Arthur's prison for killing Arthur's kinsman, Balyn has been proven honourable through his achievement of the damsel's sword and is threatened with the loss of honour if he returns the sword. To refuse the adventure would be to lose face before the court and before the damsel. His obstinacy in refusing to return the sword to the damsel, despite her warning demonstrates Balyn's prioritisation of honour over both circumspection and the life of another ('the man he most loves'). Moreover, the damsel tells the court when she first arrives that she comes directly from the court of Royns, Arthur's enemy. Yet Balyn (and everyone else in Arthur's court, it must be acknowledged) does not pause to question the damsel's

¹⁷ Robert L. Kelly, 'Malory's "Tale of Balin" Reconsidered', *Speculum*, 54.1 (1979), 85–99, p. 90. Kelly notes that Carolyn Martin Craft 'observes that Balin's defiance of fate is a moral failure which contributes to his destruction; following Reiss (Sir Thomas Malory, p. 49), however, she perceives it as a failure to assume responsibility for one's actions, not as a manifestation of hubris'. Carolyn Martin Craft, *Free Will in Malory's Le Morte Darthur and in Some Earlier Arthurian Writings* (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1973), p. 262. Andrew Lynch further argues that 'Malory and his characters like, if possible, to draw connections between people's actions and the fates they have or should have'. Andrew Lynch, *Malory's Book of Arms: The Narrative of Combat in Le Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 15–27, esp. p. 17.

¹⁸ Malory, p. 50. 'The advantage of a narrative whose incidents are not internally consistent is that it persuades us more powerfully of the influence of external forces of causation (destiny, fate, grace). Malory repeatedly alludes to these forces, and thinks of *aventure* as the means by which the knight can discover the relationship between these external forces of causation and the forces that lie under his own control', Ad Putter, 'Late Romance: Malory and the *Tale of Balin*', *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. David Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 337–353, p. 344.

integrity or her dubious origins and take them into account when forming his decisions to first attempt to remove the sword from its sheath and then to keep hold of it. That the damsel may not have good intentions for the man who achieves the sword (indeed, Merlin later reveals that she is ‘the falsist damesell that lyveth’), does not seem to enter Balyn’s mind; or if it does, he seems to believe he can outmanoeuvre her—or, as Kelly suggests, that he can outwit fate.¹⁹ The prospect of the honour attached to the achievement of the sword outweighs the risk of treachery posed by the damsel’s allegiances.

The beheading of Lady Lyle of Avilion, the next of Balyn’s misadventures, foreshadows Balyn’s second, more grievous breach of hospitality etiquette in the hall of the Fisher King—himself brother to the invisible Sir Garlon. As with many of his actions, Balyn acts in haste and self-interest, beheading Lady Lyle the moment he sees her to satisfy his personal need to avenge the wrongful death of his mother. He gives no thought to the inappropriateness of the setting (Arthur’s hall) nor how his action will impact those around him—specifically, how it violates the formal protection Arthur has extended to Lady Lyle as a guest in his hall and tarnishes the hospitality and reputation of Arthur and his court. Balyn’s lack of consideration for any consequences beyond the improvement of his own honour and standing in Arthur’s court, in the instance of the sword, and satisfying his own need for revenge, in the beheading of Lady Lyle, leads to his expulsion from court and to the death of his brother and himself at the end of the tale. While Balyn and Balan briefly return to Arthur’s favour following their successes in the battle against Royns, as Merlin knows, there is no circumventing fate.²⁰ Moreover, this introduction to Balyn’s character as

¹⁹ Malory, p. 53; on the damsel’s extraordinary falsity, see Carolyne Larrington, ‘Sibling Relations in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*’, *Arthurian Literature*, 28, ed. David Clark and Kate McClune (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2011), 57–74, p. 60.

²⁰ Malory, pp. 60–62.

‘a passynge good man withoute trechery or vylany’ but nevertheless a myopic knight sets the stage for his tragic subsequent episodes of disguise-blindness.²¹

On his adventures, Balyn thrice encounters Sir Garlon, the murderous knight who ‘rydith invisible’. Garlon’s invisibility is unique to Malory: in his probable source material, the *Suite du Merlin*, Garlon is able to ride *unseen*, but is not, in fact, able to render himself supernaturally invisible.²² Paul Rovang discusses Malory’s editorial changes regarding supernatural elements throughout *Le Morte Darthur*. In many instances Malory reduces the marvellous found in his source material; here in ‘The Tale of Balyn’, he intensifies it, partly as a straightforward change in terminology, and in part as a means of ‘condensing and simplifying’ the *Suite*’s somewhat confusing account of how Garlon rides unseen.²³ Malory consistently substitutes ‘invisible’ for ‘ne...veir’, literally ‘not to see’ and ‘celer’, ‘to hide’.²⁴ Regardless of whether or not Malory’s editorial shift toward the marvellous is intentional, Garlon’s full invisibility seems representative of Balyn’s deadly imperceptiveness. Balyn’s inability—or refusal—to take into account his surroundings and the subject positions of those around him repeatedly results in fatalities. He is directly responsible for the beheading of Lady Lyle and his own brother’s death, of course, as mentioned above, but also has a hand in the deaths of two knights; Sir Lanceor and his lover Colombé; the damsel under Balyn’s care at the Fisher King’s castle (paramour to Sir Harleus); and the lives of ‘the moste party of that castell’.²⁵ Garlon’s attributes also hint at a disturbing diabolical presence within the sacred space of the Fisher King’s castle. His ability to ‘rydeth invisible’ calls to mind Titivillus in *Mankind*, a devil ‘that goth invisibele’ (indeed, though ‘rydeth’ or ‘com’ are the verbs most commonly attached to Garlon’s

²¹ Malory, p. 48.

²² Paul Rovang, ‘Malory’s Treatment of the Marvelous: A Comparison with His Sources’, *Fifteenth Century Studies*, 21 (1994), 279–302, pp. 285–286.

²³ Rovang, p. 285.

²⁴ Rovang, p. 285–286.

²⁵ Malory, p. 68.

invisibility, at least on one occasion he ‘goth invisible’).²⁶ Additionally, one knight describes Garlon as ‘he with the blacke face, he ys the mervaylyste knyght that ys now lyvyng’.²⁷ In *Arthur and Merlin* (though not recognised as one of Malory’s sources), Merlin, as well, is described as having a ‘black face’, which is attributed to his diabolical parentage.²⁸ Garlon’s presence within the Fisher King’s castle, that is, the diabolical hiding amidst the divine, feeds into the sense of fatalism and higher forces at work shaping Balyn’s doomed adventure.

Balyn can perhaps be exonerated of contributing to the death of Sir Harleus le Berbeus, the first knight smitten down by Sir Garlon. On Arthur’s request, he retains Sir Harleus, demanding to know the cause of his panicked flight and equally demanding that Harleus accompany him to meet Arthur. Harleus tells him he is being pursued by a murderous knight, yet Balyn insists: ‘And as they were evyn before Arthurs pavilion, there com one invisible and smote the knyght that wente with Balyn thorowoute the body with a spere’.²⁹ Balyn’s refusal to heed Sir Harleus le Berbeus’s warning and to adhere to his mission regardless of circumstances could be forgiven insofar as he is heeding the command of his king, but as with his initial imprisonment and then immediate second fall from Arthur’s favour after slaying the Lady of the Lake, Balyn does not ever seem to learn from his mishaps.³⁰ Though his agreement to take over Sir Harleus’s quest after Harleus’s death is in keeping with good chivalric practice, Balyn’s lack of concern for Harleus’s fear and his slow, half-hearted, and unsuccessful attempt at preventing the suicide of Lancelot’s

²⁶ Malory, p. 66; *Mankind*, ed. Kathleen M. Ashley and Gerard NeCastro, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010), l. 876. *Mankind* was likely written between 1465–1470, and *Le Morte Darthur* was completed c. 1469–1470. Kathleen M. Ashley, ‘Introduction’, *Mankind*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010), 1–12, p. 11 and Donald C. Baker, ‘The Date of *Mankind*’, *Philological Quarterly*, 42 (1963), 90–91.

²⁷ Malory, p. 66.

²⁸ *Of Arthur and of Merlin*, ed. O. D. Macrae-Gibson, EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), ll. 980–982.

²⁹ Malory, p. 64.

³⁰ Malory, pp. 48–49, 51.

unnamed paramour denote continued self-involvement which hampers his chivalric inclinations.³¹ Balyn may be without villainy or treachery, but he is also without empathy for others' situations: lack of villainy does not equate to active goodness.

Balyn's response to the second knight's death at the hands of Sir Garlon is more revealing of his indifference to the needs and struggles of those around him. This knight, unnamed, has offered to protect Balyn from Garlon, swearing 'by the feyth of my body never to departe frome you whyle my lyff lastith'.³² To accept the protection of another knight, while perhaps sensible, detracts from Balyn's image as a brave knight of Arthur's following. And while this promise of protection may seem as presumptuous as Balyn's earlier promise to protect Harleus 'othir ellis, by the fayth of my body, I will dye therefore' unlike Balyn, this knight makes good on his assurance (up to a point).³³ Note Balyn's reaction to his protector's death:

'Alas,' seyde the knyght, 'I am slayne by thys traytoure knyght that rydith invisible.'

'Alas,' seyde Balyne, 'thys ys nat the first despite that he hath done me.'³⁴

Balyn's primary concern appears to be not the death of a good knight, nor that the knight's death came by his agreement to aid and protect Balyn, but the 'despite' that Garlon's murder has done *to Balyn*. It is the acme of self-absorption and prioritising his own honour or reputation above the wellbeing of others. The 'Tale of Balyn' takes place in the early, experimental stage in the development of Arthur's values of chivalry.

Rovang also notes that Garlon only appears invisible when he is mounted.³⁵ His disguise appears an extreme (supernatural) form of guerrilla warfare, attached to both his physical prowess and his horse: in essence, his knightliness. Attacking an opponent unseen

³¹ Malory, p. 64.

³² Malory, p. 64.

³³ Malory, pp. 64.

³⁴ Malory, pp. 64–65.

³⁵ Rovang, p. 286.

is distinctly unchivalrous. Obviously Garlon is not concerned with establishing and maintaining a positive reputation as a knight. However, his invisibility does address the linked concepts of performativity and visibility as central aspects of knighthood. Visibility, even theatricality, functions to enable performativity: even temporary assumed anonymity should ideally serve as a means of building reputation so that when a knight does finally reveal his identity, his visibility (or reputation) is amplified. Garlon functions as an object lesson in the wrong kind of chivalry, or un-chivalry: knightliness that is diabolically inspired.

This interest in a knight's visibility chimes with an earlier moment in 'The Tale of Balyn' in which King Mark encounters Balyn and his brother. When Mark asks Balyn's and Balan's names, Balan rather haughtily replies: 'Sir [...] ye may se he beryth two swerdis, and thereby ye may calle hym the Knyght with the Two Swords'.³⁶ Only a few lines later, the brothers encounter Merlin disguised on the road. After rudely refusing to tell him to where they are riding, they ask Merlin's name. Merlin replies: 'At thys tyme [...] I woll nat telle', to which Balyn and Balan, completely unaware of the irony of their response, say: 'Hit ys an evyll sygne [...] that thou arte a trew man, that thou wolt nat telle thy name'.³⁷ Dressed as he is in the guise of a churl, Merlin's refusal to divulge his name to a knight is rude, but Balyn takes this a step further, deeming Merlin's reticence to identify himself as an issue not merely of manners, but of personal integrity. Merlin, of course, already knows to whom he is speaking, and when he addresses Balyn by name, Balyn immediately realises Merlin's identity. Balyn's fairly quick realisation (unlike, for example, Arthur's or Lancelot's delayed transformation-recognition scenes in other areas of *Le Morte Darthur*) demonstrates that Balyn has the capacity to perceive revealing details of the people and

³⁶ Malory, p. 57.

³⁷ Malory, p. 58.

situations he encounters. However, his ego and his hastiness often obscure or override his innate perceptiveness. Take, for instance, Balyn's responses to the prophecy and warning Merlin gives him in this episode. When Merlin foretells Balyn's Dolorous Stroke, Balyn dismisses it as a matter that is within his control: 'Nay,' seyde Balyn, 'nat so for and I wyste thou seyde soth, I wolde do so perleous a dede that I wolde sle myself to make the a lyer'.³⁸ This is a complex utterance, speaking to intentionality and agency: Balyn does not believe in prophecy or fate (shedding light on his treatment of the damsel's warning regarding the sword), but claims that even if he did believe in it, then he would kill himself to circumvent it.³⁹ There are two disconnects of vital importance: first, between what Balyn believes (that the prophecy will not come true) and what he says he would do *if* he believed in it (frustrate the prophecy through suicide), and secondly, between what Balyn claims he would do and what he ends up doing. Later, when Merlin warns him to 'loke that ye do knyghtly, for ye shall have nede', Balyn again brushes off his advice: 'As for that,' seyde Balyne, 'dred you nat, for we woll do what we may'.⁴⁰ Balyn can be perceptive when he wants to be, but here in these examples, his hubris again clouds his judgement—and leads him to make promises of action which he cannot fulfil.⁴¹

This earlier illustration of Balyn's capacity for perception and intuitive conclusions alongside his unwillingness either to heed the advice of others or to devote the time and effort to properly pay attention to his surroundings (rather than simply the task immediately in front of him) puts greater onus on Balyn for the deaths and destruction attendant on the

³⁸ Malory, p. 57.

³⁹ Elizabeth Edwards reads this somewhat differently: 'he would kill himself if he thought it would be as Merlin said; but he will not need to kill himself, for the sword is already a death sentence'. Elizabeth Edwards, *The Genesis of Narrative in Malory's Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), p. 44.

⁴⁰ Malory, p. 58.

⁴¹ The Dolorous Stroke is itself a result of Balyn's self-centredness and astonishing lack of perception. In rushing to attack Garlon in his brother Pellam's castle, Balyn disregards both hospitality laws and the familial connections of his host. Moreover, he pays little to no attention to the signs of sanctity surrounding the spear of Longinus: the chamber in which it is held is 'mervaylously dyght and ryche', and the spear itself is 'strangely wrought' and rests upon 'a table of clene golde with foure pyloures of sylver that bare up the table', and yet he picks the spear up without hesitation (Malory, pp. 67–68).

Dolorous Stroke. By including this disguise-encounter with Merlin earlier in the tale, Malory makes clear that Balyn's penchant for ill luck ('misadventure') only contributes in part to his death and the tragedies he leaves in his wake. The other contributing factors—his hubris and lack of circumspection (particularly the latter)—are not fatal flaws, but character traits which he has the capacity to (and does, on occasion) rise above and yet chooses to not strive to do so.⁴²

The final fatal disguise-encounter in 'The Tale of Balyn', which ends in Balyn's and Balan's deaths at each other's hands, surprisingly shifts the greater responsibility for recognition away from Balyn, where it has rested for the most of the tale, and onto Balan's shoulders. While Balan's appearance is described in simple and fairly unremarkable terms, seemingly from a distance (a knight and horse 'trapped all in reed', like one of the many crayon-box knights in 'The Tale of Gareth'), Malory lingers on Balan's view of Balyn: 'Whan this knyghte in the reed beheld Balyn hym thought it shold be his broder Balen by cause of his two swerdys, but by cause he knewe not his sheld he demed it was not he'.⁴³ Balyn's description is both more specific (the swords; the shield) and holds greater potential for (mis)recognition: correct identification or a true error in judgement. From his obscure beginning as an overlooked, poor knight recently released from prison and hiding in the back of the hall, Balyn has, through his moments of self-wrought blindness and encounters with a knight who was literally invisible, developed into an unusually visible knight: first when he acquires a unique second sword; then when, in his exchange with Merlin, he adopts a physically descriptive moniker in place of his name; and finally, when he exchanges his battered shield for a 'bygggar' one.⁴⁴

⁴² Certainly not all of the deaths in 'The Tale of Balyn' can be at least partially attributed to his character; the double homicide-cum-suicide committed by Sir Garnysh of the Mount, for instance, is yet another instance of Balyn's ill luck but does not reflect poorly on Balyn—he acts appropriately throughout the Garnysh episode, to no avail. Malory, pp. 69–70.

⁴³ Malory, p. 71.

⁴⁴ Malory, p. 71.

This fateful shield which ultimately frustrates Balan's ability to recognise his own brother carries with it those combined causal elements of 'misadventure' and human fallibility which contribute to much of *Le Morte Darthur's* style of tragedy. The knight who offers Balyn the shield remains both anonymous and a neutral figure, apparently unaligned with any malicious figure or motive. The timing is woefully unfortunate, and though the damsel who accompanies Balyn prophesies that the change in shield will spell Balyn's death, Balyn—as with the sword—refuses to return the shield. Though his refusal to return the sword came from a professed disbelief in fate, just before Balyn accepts the shield one can see a sort of fatalism come upon him, an acceptance at last that fate cannot be avoided: 'And soo he herd an horne blowe as it had ben the dethe of a best. "That blast." said Balyn, "is blowen for me, for I am the pryse, and yet am I not dede"'.⁴⁵

This combination of accident (a poorly-timed but pragmatic trade for a better shield) and fatedness (the sword's curse and the damsel's prophecy) are what give the final episode of 'The Tale of Balyn' a more tragic weight than the similar tale of 'Arthur and Accolon'. While Arthur and Accolon's fight, which results in Accolon's death, occurs under similar circumstances (i.e. neither is aware of the other's identity, having been provided with arms and devices that are not their own), it lacks the emotional force of Balyn's and Balan's fight, revelations of identity, and subsequent deaths. This could be attributed to the nature of their meeting and the participants' identities. While Balyn's and Balan's meeting is, as stated above, a combination of fatedness and accident, and of the pragmatics of knighthood versus foolish cleaving to 'face' ("Me repenteth." said Balyn. "that ever I cam within this countrey; but I maye not torne now ageyne for shame, and what aventure shalle falle to me, be it lyf or dethe, I wille take the adventure that shalle come to me"), Arthur's and

⁴⁵ Malory, p. 70; cf. Edwards, p. 30, and Putter, p. 348.

Accolon's fight is carefully orchestrated by Morgan le Fay.⁴⁶ As such, and due to its position early in the text, the audience can easily anticipate Arthur's survival and Morgan's failure. Moreover, while the audience in 'The Tale of Balyn' has seen the titular hero fight repeated failing battles against the deadly cocktail of misadventure and hubris, Malory's emotional investment in 'Arthur and Accolon' is largely with Arthur, who fights to free his imprisoned knights when Accolon fights for a lady's love: an admirable but certainly less impactful motivation.

The 'Tale of Balyn' is situated in the early days of Arthur's reign and near the beginning of *Le Morte Darthur*, during the experimental stage of Arthur's chivalry. Arthur's court at this stage in the text is engaged in working out how to *do* chivalry with regard to the treatment of women, courtesy, prioritisation of values, and, here in the 'Tale of Balyn', empathy and flexibility in response to circumstances. Balyn's fixation on revenge and honour and his disbelief in prophecy blind Balyn to clues that, if given proper attention, could have saved numerous lives. Balyn, as a man who consistently represents rather a lack of villainy than a presence of integrity, has no place in the Round Table fellowship which Arthur is building. He is a transitional knight, with less 'velony other trechory' (that is, better chivalry) than the knights who came before him (and whom Arthur largely inherited), and yet who falls short of the mark later set by knights representative of the more mature Arthur's brand of chivalry: Lancelot, Gawain, Gareth, Lamerok, and others. The tale illustrates ways in which disguise perception does not necessarily help Balyn (or any knight) if he is blind to his own shortcomings, to the needs of others, and to the workings of fate.

⁴⁶ Malory, p. 71.

Arthur and Accolon

In appearance, the battle between Arthur and Accolon closely resembles that of Balyn and Balan's fatal fight. It begins with a similar premise: due to unethical circumstances (in the 'Tale of Balyn', a castle's evil custom; in 'Arthur and Accolon', as unwilling proxies for a dispute between brothers) two reluctant men are forced to fight each other. For Arthur, to refuse to fight would be to relinquish his goal of establishing a central ideology across his kingdom; for Accolon, Balyn, and Balan, to refuse to fight would be to refuse the adventure, and thereby lose face and social standing. All four men are outfitted in a manner atypical to each that obscures their identities. And it is only after a fatal blow has been dealt that they recognise an ally in their adversary: as Jameson writes, what was 'other' is revealed to be the 'same'. However, the main issues at stake in the fight between Arthur and Accolon are not the haste, hubris, and inability to empathise which characterise Balyn's actions and downfall—though the tale is similarly keenly interested in the concept of preserving one's honour and dignity. Rather, the disguised fight between Arthur and Accolon centres around two primary concerns: the duties and limitations of kingship versus knighthood, and the maintenance of the homosocial bonds of masculine fellowship. There is an anxiety that women may disrupt the Round Table's homosocial bonds; consequently women are scapegoated in order to maintain masculine solidarity, although men are also culpable in straining or breaking those homosocial bonds.

While hunting a 'grete harte', Arthur, Uriens, and Accolon are separated from their hunting retinue.⁴⁷ They come across 'a lytyll shippe all apparayled with sylke downe to the watir' which holds 'none erthely creature therein' and appears to sail itself.⁴⁸ They board the ship and find 'twelve fayre damesels' within, and soon after a supper the three men fall

⁴⁷ Malory, p. 106.

⁴⁸ Malory, pp. 106–107.

asleep.⁴⁹ However, the marvellous ship turns out to not be a ship of faith (as in the Grail Quest) but one of enchantment. Unbeknownst to the three men, Morgan le Fay has orchestrated their capture in order to put into operation her plan to seize the throne. Uriens awakens ‘in Camelot abedde in his wyves armys’ (providing an alibi for her, but also essential to her plot); Arthur finds himself ‘in a durke preson’; and Accolon, Morgan’s lover, finds himself ‘by a depe welles syde’.⁵⁰ A dwarf soon arrives with instructions from Morgan le Fay: Accolon ‘shall fyght to-morne with a knyght at the houre of pryme’, and he is to ‘do that batyale to the uttirmoste withoute ony mercy’.⁵¹ The dwarf presents Accolon with Excalibur and its scabbard (which Arthur had previously entrusted to Morgan for safekeeping) with instructions to use them in the battle.⁵² Meanwhile, Arthur discovers that he has been taken captive by Sir Damas, a man who has been wrongfully keeping lands from his brother, Sir Outlake. The two brothers have agreed to determine ownership of the lands via trial by combat. To gain his freedom, Arthur must fight for Damas, but on the field he finds himself facing an opponent who is wielding Excalibur against him. Just as Arthur is about to slay his opponent, he discovers that his opponent is, in fact, his own knight Accolon, who has been fighting as proxy for Outlake. The dying Accolon pleads ignorance about Arthur’s identity and asks for forgiveness for his complicity in Morgan’s plan to usurp Arthur, which Arthur grants.⁵³

The existence and functionality of the Round Table fellowship depends upon the solidity of the homosocial bonds between its members. This includes Arthur, who is recognised as *primus inter pares* within the Round Table though he is the king. In the earlier

⁴⁹ Malory, p. 107.

⁵⁰ Malory, pp. 107, 109.

⁵¹ Malory, pp. 109–110.

⁵² Malory, p. 110. Caxton adds that Morgan le Fay has made duplicates of Excalibur and its sheath and given Arthur the false sword and sheath (Malory, p. 62).

⁵³ The subsequent disguise-transformations of Morgan le Fay in ‘Arthur and Accolon’ are discussed in chapter two.

part of *Le Morte Darthur* (and, thus, Arthur's reign), from 'The Tale of Balyn' through 'The Tale of Gareth', an essential aspect of knight errantry is to promote a more standardised, centralised rule for Arthur by eliminating 'evil' local customs and bringing recalcitrant knights into the Round Table's fold. By finding and defeating knights or castles which have 'evil customs', Arthur and his knights are able to abolish those unique and problematic customs in favour of a universal (that is, Logres-wide) set of customs and laws. For example, before joining Arthur's fellowship, Pellinor demands that all knights passing by his pavilion must fight with him.⁵⁴ As he lays dying, Balyn prays: 'yf I myght lyve I wold destroye that castel for ylle customes'.⁵⁵ When Gareth defeats the Red Knight of the Red Lands, Gareth requires that the knight make 'amendys of all the trespasse that he hath done ayentst' Lyonesse and her lands.⁵⁶ Here in 'Arthur and Accolon' it is Damas's custom of capturing and forcing knights to fight for an unjust cause that must be abolished.

In his chapter on *Le Chevalier au Lion*, Stephen Knight, building on the work of C. Köhler, discusses the socio-historical tension between baronial and royal interests in centralised power and local custom:

Property-linked customs do operate but only outside Arthur's court. Many of them are evil [...]. These bad customs the hero will defeat and abolish. But his own profitable customs, like Yvain's right to fight the disturber of the spring, remain unchallenged, as does [...] the potentially rewarding custom that he who defeats the evil custom will marry the daughter and the land. [...] There exists a basic baronial assumption that customary rights have force, provided they are controlled from the viewpoint of the individual lord or baron. So customs that prove hostile (that is, inconvenient or contrary to the hero's interests) are cancelled; those favourable to him or exploitable by him are validated; and the king, that annoying but ineradicable and even partly admirable presence, is given customs which have no socio-economic force and which in fact tend to privilege the baronial and knightly figures of the Round Table.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Malory, pp. 40–41.

⁵⁵ Malory, p. 73.

⁵⁶ Malory, pp. 253–254.

⁵⁷ Stephen Knight, *Arthurian Literature and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 80.

Enforcing the abolition of ‘evil customs’ as cover for the centralisation of power ‘so that the interests of barons and knights are convergent’ is a strategy clearly at work in *Le Morte Darthur*. When Arthur falls prey to Damas’s custom of capturing knights to demand that they fight on the unjust side in a land dispute (and thus lose worship), and then imprisoning those knights who refuse to trade their honour for their freedom, it is a situation which achieves just that balance of playing to sympathies of both baronial independence and kingly power.

As the elder brother in what appears to be a male primogeniture system of inheritance (though Arthur’s laws on the matter are never quite made clear), Sir Damas is legally within his rights to withhold lands from Sir Outlake. Failing to make due provision for a younger sibling is, however, morally reprehensible, as evinced not only in this narrative but in other romances such as *Gamelyn*, a mid-fourteenth-century text whose plot is driven by a similar situation.⁵⁸ When his father dies, Gamelyn’s eldest brother, Johan, refuses to apportion part of his inheritance to Gamelyn despite his father’s dying wish that Johan divide the inheritance amongst himself and his brothers. Gamelyn endures abuse at Johan’s hands and struggles to acquire a just inheritance for himself and his middle brother, Ote. This outlaw tale survives in twenty-seven copies, making it one of the better-preserved romances. It, like the situation between Damas and Outlake, plays on anxieties surrounding the abolition of partible inheritance and younger siblings’ reliance on older siblings’ generosity in order to maintain livelihoods suitable to their social rank. This sequestration of the family lands is an issue of popular sentiment, as is the other primary charge levelled against Damas: that he is ‘a very cowarde as ony lyvyth’ for refusing to fight Outlake in person for the lands, instead sending proxies.⁵⁹ Outlake, by contrast, only uses a proxy when

⁵⁸ *The Tale of Gamelyn*, in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 194–219.

⁵⁹ Malory, p. 108. This cloud of cowardice also hangs over Lynnet and Lyonesse’s brother in ‘The Tale of Gareth’, though Malory glosses over Gryngamor’s inaction: why is Lynnet forced to seek a champion at

he is too injured to fight: '[b]ut as he was wounded he wolde a takyn the batayle an honde'.⁶⁰

A knight whom Arthur meets in Damas's prison apprises the king of the situation and of the popular sentiment regarding the matter:

[Damas] hath a yonger brothir, a good knyghte of prouesse, and his name is Sir Oughtlake, And this traytoure Damas, the elder brothir, woll geff hym no parte of his londis but as Sir Outlake kepyth hit thorow prouesse of his hondis. And so he kepith frome hym a full fayre maner and a rych, and therein Sir Outlake dwellyth worshypfully and is well beloved with all peple. And this Sir Damas oure mayster is as evyll beloved, for he is withoute mercy, and he is a cowarde, and grete warre hath bene betwyxte them bothe. But Outlake hath ever the bettir, and ever he proferyth Sir Damas to fyght for the lyvelode, body for body, but he woll nat of hit, other ellys to fynde a knyght to fyght for hym'.⁶¹

Damas's actions challenge the conditions of Arthur's Pentecostal oath: that a knight should never do battle for a wrongful cause. There is perhaps some excuse for Damas: he himself does not participate in the wrongful battle, but instead tries to constrain others into undertaking it.

Arthur's decision to enter this 'trial by combat', even though he would be representing the less worthy knight, is a pragmatic one. As king, he cannot afford a lengthy stay in prison in the way the other knights can; to be absent for any great length of time would be a threat to the kingdom's stability. Moreover, as king it falls to Arthur to establish and uphold the law: that is, he more than any of his knights must not allow Damas's injustice to continue. Furthermore, if Arthur were to win the trial by combat (as he does), as a now-free king he would not need to honour the verdict of the trial by combat but would in fact be able to right Damas's wrongs (as he does). Jacqueline Stuhmiller notes Arthur's 'realist' approach to trial by combat, rather than a fatalistic or theological outlook:

Although Arthur is pained at the thought of fighting for the wrong side, he nevertheless does not seem to fear that God may punish him for doing so. Morgan, the engineer of this bogus contest, has no illusions that God will

Arthur's court when her able-bodied brother supports Lyonesse's side in the conflict with the Red Knight of the Red Lands?

⁶⁰ Malory, p. 110.

⁶¹ Malory, p. 108.

punish Arthur for fighting on the wrong side, so she leaves nothing to chance. [...] Arthur is never condemned for defying God's will both during and after the battle, nor does anyone seem to notice that God was wrong.⁶²

This could be because, as king, Arthur is divinely appointed to be God's mouthpiece and ensure justice is meted out across his kingdom. His actions following his battle with Accolon demonstrate that he has the authority to overturn the outcome of a trial by combat. The supernatural circumstances of the battle also undermine the possibility of divine will made manifest through the trial's outcome: as Stuhmiller writes, 'we know that the *duellum* has not been a *iudicium Dei* but a *iudicium magi*'.⁶³

Arthur cuts the Gordian knot when he punishes Damas: he provides for Outlake but does not upset the primogeniture system.⁶⁴ Rather, Arthur decrees that Outlake will 'hold the manoir of yow [Damas]/ and yerely to gyue yow a palfrey to ryde vpon', and that Outlake will come to court as one of Arthur's knights. The provision of a palfrey in place of a courser does, however, downgrade Damas. Such a mount precludes Damas from participating in jousts or battles, and as a type of horse largely associated with ladies, also emasculates him. Outlake is recognised as the true knight (and thus given opportunities for further adventure and winning of worship), while Damas is symbolically recognised as the false knight (who can no longer ride a knight's horse nor, as a consequence, participate in knightly activities).

The difficulty Arthur faces when he fights the disguised Accolon, however (instead of Outlake in person) is that the combat becomes much more serious and personal than the combat of two non-Round Table knights embroiled in a civil suit over inheritance rights. When Accolon and Arthur, specifically, become Outlake's and Damas's proxies, the battle

⁶² Jacqueline Stuhmiller, "Iudicium Dei, Iudicium Fortuna": Trial by Combat in Malory's "Le Morte Darthur", *Speculum*, 81.2 (2006), 427–462, pp. 448–449.

⁶³ Stuhmiller, p. 449.

⁶⁴ Arthur provides a similar solution in *Ywain and Gawain*. See Carolyne Larrington, *Brothers and Sisters in Medieval Medieval European Literature* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2015), pp. 133–135.

shifts from a civil suit to a matter of treason. Thus when Arthur discovers Accolon's identity, his actions shift from those of a king concerned with laying down law and determining justice, as reflected in his actions which deal directly with Damas, to those of one concerned with preserving as much of the honour of his court as possible in the face of treason and betrayal, and his own honour.

When Arthur's knights defeat opponents who have been acting unchivalrously and subsequently send the defeated knights to Arthur to join his Round Table, as discussed above, they seek a reason (or an excuse) to grant mercy on those false knights who uphold evil customs and partook in wrongdoings, in order to bring them into Arthur's fold. Generally, repentance for one's past deeds is not enough to wipe the slate clean; the deeds themselves must be excused. This frequently results in the scapegoating of women, usually a woman whom the trespassing knight claims to love. 'The Tale of Gareth' exemplifies this strategy when the freshly defeated Red Knight of the Red Lands, Sir Ironside, pleads mercy from Gareth. Gareth replies: 'I may nat with my worship to save thy lyff for the shamefull dethys that thou haste caused many full good knyghtes to dye'.⁶⁵ Sir Ironside lays the cause of his shameful behaviour at the feet of a lady:

I loved onys a lady fayre, and she had hir bretherne slayne, and she tolde me hit was sir Launcelot du Lake othir ellys sir Gawayne. And she prayed me as I loved hir hertely that I wolde make hir a promyse by the faythe of my knyghthode [...] to do all the vylany unto Arthurs knyghtes, and [...] take vengeance upon all these knyghtes.⁶⁶

By attributing Ironside's actions to an oath he made to a lover (considered to be a pardonable motive), Ironside is able to preserve his own honour, uphold Gareth's worship (that is, the worship of the man granting mercy to a man of ill deeds), and maintain the good

⁶⁵ Malory, 253.

⁶⁶ Malory, p. 253.

fellowship—both in the sense of the collective reputation and of the homosocial bonds—of the Round Table when he joins it.

Accolon pleads a similar case to Arthur, using a similar scapegoating: he tells Arthur that (a) Morgan le Fay ‘lovyth me oute of mesure as a paramour, and I hir agayne’, (b) ‘she devysed to have me kynge in this londe’ and equally devised for him to fight with Excalibur while representing Outlake, and (c) that he was unaware of Arthur’s identity when they were fighting.⁶⁷ The problem with this series of revelatory and dubiously logical statements is that while one knight might forgive and grant mercy to another after this formula has been followed, as king, Arthur cannot. For such a revelatory and conciliatory scene to work, it must have the foundation of social similarity outlined by Jameson. That is, the winning knight must recognise aspects of himself in his defeated opponent. The former’s worship can be maintained and the latter’s honour returned through the hero’s acknowledgement that in a comparable situation of love and promises and misrecognition, he might have acted similarly. For Balyn and Balan, this acknowledgement moves beyond recognition of similarity and into sameness: as twins, they are as much one person as two individuals can be, and in their final battle they act in mirror fashion, exactly parallel. But king and knight are too far apart for this pattern of disguise-(self)recognition-reconciliation to work. Any attack on Arthur by one of his own knights is treason, as is Accolon’s admission to what can at best be viewed as accessory to attempted regicide. Additionally, the argument that disguise might excuse his behaviour is complicated by Accolon’s assent to Morgan’s plan in principle, even though he seems astonished to find that it has been put into practice.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Malory, pp. 114–115.

⁶⁸ Larrington notes that ‘Malory’s Accolon makes fewer excuses for himself’ than Accolon in the *Suite*. In Malory’s version, Accolon blames misrecognition of Arthur for his treasonous attack more than his love of Morgan, though both are at play. Carolyn Larrington, *King Arthur’s Enchantresses: Morgan and Her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 35.

Arthur's responses to Accolon's revelations therefore become a carefully-worded performance in political shrewdness. He first addresses Accolon's claims in terms of inference: '*I fele by thy wordis that this tyme thou knewest me nat. But I fele by thy wordis that thou haste agreed to the deth of my persone, and therefore thou art a traytoure*'.⁶⁹ His phrasing places emphasis on personal sentiment over royal duty and skirts official recognition of Accolon's claims to misrecognition and premeditated agreement to regicide. This allows Accolon to retain his dignity without requiring that Arthur accept his position. His next words largely (though not entirely) exonerate Accolon's treason by laying the blame at Morgan's feet: '*I wyte the the less for my sistir Morgan le Fay by hir false crauftis made the to agré to hir fals lustes*'.⁷⁰ His repetition of 'false' takes the scapegoating past what, for example, Sir Ironside is willing to own up to: not even Accolon's love for Morgan is Accolon's fault. Arthur's willingness to give Accolon the benefit of doubt regarding his degree of complicity in their disguised battle is both pragmatic and shrewd. Accolon is dying, and so Arthur can therefore afford to show mercy towards Accolon, as he does not need to worry about Accolon's loyalty henceforth, as it will have no future repercussions.

Arthur calls to the 'kepers of the felde' and tells them that '*had ony of us knowyn othir, here had bene no batayle nothir no stroke stryken*'.⁷¹ By publicly supporting Accolon's claim to ignorance (and, by extension, innocence), Arthur is able to save face himself. In agreeing with Accolon to scapegoat Morgan, a woman and an enchantress, Arthur signals that the fissures which led to this treasonous near-coup are not produced within the Round Table fellowship, but rather are generated by outside, female forces. He is thus able to transform their disguised battle into a unifying event for the Round Table. The 'Other' ends up as Damas, not Accolon, and Damas is punished both with loss of lands and by being

⁶⁹ Malory, p. 65, emphasis mine.

⁷⁰ Malory, p. 65.

⁷¹ Malory, p. 115.

forbidden to ride any horse but a palfrey.⁷² Arthur's public call to the keepers of the field, referring to himself and Accolon both as merely knights ('Sirres, commyth hyder, for here ar we too knyghtes that have foughtyn unto grete damage unto us bothe') and claiming that neither he nor Accolon recognised each other, draws attention away from the potentially embarrassing acknowledgement of a king surrounded by treasonous knights, rather emphasising the strength of the Round Table's homosocial bonds.⁷³ Arthur recasts Accolon's death. It is no longer a potential scandal of treason but rather, his tragedy is simply a common adverse result of the chivalric custom of withholding identity on the field.

In conclusion, then, Balyn's and Accolon's final, fatal fights echo the knightly battle pattern laid out by Jameson which begins with non-recognition, then recognising one's opponent as one's ally, and ultimately recognition of oneself, or one's potential self, in another. However, unlike the happy ending of Gareth's and Ironside's or Arthur's and Pellinor's battles, in which like encounters like and the wayward is brought into the fold, Balyn's and Accolon's battles explore the tragedy that awaits at the edges of the spectrum, when same encounters same, or too-disparate figures encounter each other (e.g. knight and king). Plot logic requires disguise if these borderline and unnatural encounters are to occur: otherwise a brother would too quickly recognise his twin across the field, or a knight would either yield to his king or face charges of treason. Moreover, as king (a king who must pronounce law, not the sort of adventuring king largely free from responsibilities that, say, Pellinor represents), Arthur does not often get to fight. This disguise episode enhances King Arthur's reputation and the stability of his realm: he metes out justice (thereby strengthening his position as king) while also enhancing his reputation for knightly prowess (thereby increasing his standing in the eyes of his people, particularly as he fights well even when

⁷² Carol Kaske, 'Chivalric Idealism versus Pragmatism in Spenser and Malory: Taking Up Arms in a Wrongful Quarrel', *Spenser Studies*, 27 (2012), 1–22, p. 5.

⁷³ Malory, p. 115.

deprived of and indeed *against* Excalibur). Equally, the disguises in both tales point to a keen interest—for Balyn an anxiety, for Arthur a political necessity—in keeping up honourable appearances and gaining and maintaining face in front of one's peers and in front of the court, thus strengthening the homosocial bonds between knights required for a strong and functioning Round Table.

Lancelot

Taking the Adventure: Lancelot in Kay's Armour

Lancelot first disguises himself midway through the 'Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lac', when he dresses himself in Kay's armour and defeats numerous knights, both members and non-members of Arthur's court, who engage him on the presumption that he is, in fact, Kay. Situated well before the quest of the Holy Grail, and directly preceding the 'Tale of Sir Gareth', Lancelot at this point in the text is in his prime as the 'best knight of the world', without the 'earthly' qualifier that Galahad's arrival affixes to that laurel. His relationship with Guinevere (still putative in Malory) has yet to drive a wedge between himself and other members of Arthur's court; he is still viewed positively by all parties.

In this tale, Lancelot, enjoying a period of peacetime following the battle against Emperor Lucius, swiftly proves himself to be the best knight of the Round Table 'in all turnementes, justys, and dedys of armys', which wins him the admiration of his fellow knights and of the queen.⁷⁴ But, tiring of 'play and game', he 'thought hymself to preve in straunge adventures'.⁷⁵ It is thus that, after some adventures involving damsels and unchivalrous knights, he encounters Kay, exhausted and pursued by four knights. With 'seven strokys' Lancelot 'had strykyn hem to the erthe', and demands that they yield not to

⁷⁴ Malory, p. 190.

⁷⁵ Malory, p. 190.

him but to Kay, on pain of death. Kay and Lancelot spend the night in the nearby castle and in the morning, Lancelot dresses himself in Kay's armour and rides out, defeating anyone who challenges him with the demand that they submit themselves to Guinevere on Whitsunday. When Whitsunday arrives, the court marvels to find that Kay, not known for his prowess, has managed to defeat so many knights. When it is discovered that it was Lancelot, and not Kay, who defeated the knights, 'there was lawghyng and smylyng amonge them' at Lancelot's performance, indicating that the disguised affair is viewed positively (and humorously) by the court. It builds prestige for Lancelot in a way that also, considering its warm reception, benefits the court as a whole.⁷⁶

Malory adapts this tale from the Vulgate. In the French version of the tale, the text is at pains to clarify that Lancelot's appropriation of Kay's armour is accidental.⁷⁷ In Malory's version, however, Lancelot's actions are presented as straightforward and deliberate:

So on the morne Sir Launcelot arose erly and leffte Sir Kay slepyng. And Sir Launcelot toke Sir Kayes armoure and his shyld and armed hym; and so he wente to the stable and sadyld his horse, and toke his leve of his oste and departed.⁷⁸

Moreover, as knights take him for Kay and proceed to address him as such, Lancelot does not correct them. Instead, in a manner reminiscent of disguised kings in other romances (Orfeo in *Sir Orfeo*, Horn in *King Horn* and *Horn Childe*, Edward in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*), Lancelot uses equivocation to maintain his disguise as Sir Kay even when the other knights suspect that Lancelot is not who he appears to be:

'welle we know ye ar not Sir Kay.'

⁷⁶ Malory, p. 221. Andrew Lynch writes that, prior to the Grail Quest, 'Lancelot's identity is very much a public and externally negotiated matter, and especially a product of his military prowess', and that '[i]dentity is the amount of worship that qualified judges attach to a name on the basis of the "proof" supplied by behaviour'. Lynch, *Malory's Book of Arms*, pp. 6, 10.

⁷⁷ *Lancelot: roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Alexandre Micha, 9 vols. (Genève: Droz, 1978–1983), V, pp. 285–286.

⁷⁸ Malory, p. 210.

‘As for that, be as be may. For ye shall yelde you unto Dame Gwenyvere, [...] and sey that Sir Kay sente you unto hir.’⁷⁹

Given association I have established between equivocation and kingliness, and the praise and miracle-working that Lancelot achieves later in the tale, it is evident that Lancelot’s ambiguous phrasing is a noble form of deception, insofar as he does not candidly lie about his identity but allows the burden of the misidentification to fall on those whom he encounters. Thus his reputation as a ‘noble’ knight remains intact despite his use of deceptive means to furnish himself with adventure. In Malory’s text as in the other aforementioned romances, it seems that withholding identity and misleading others about one’s identity do not cross a moral line wherein the means do not justify the end, where actively announcing himself to be Kay would cross that line into mendacity. Rather, as it stands in the text, Lancelot’s ends (discussed below) justify his deceptive means.

This moment equally provides an example of the performativity of knighthood as relative to identity. To announce himself as Kay (that is, to fully take on a false persona) would not further his reputation, as any feats he accomplishes under Kay’s name would then quite possibly never be attributed to Lancelot; by wearing Kay’s armour but not naming himself as such, he invites combative engagements while retaining the possibility of later claiming those feats for himself, and thus increasing his public worship as Arthur’s best living knight.

Unlike Arthur, who must wait for marvels to come to him at major feasts, Lancelot can and does actively seek adventure, leaving the court space at the opening of the tale to become a knight errant. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Jill Mann has established the necessity of always ‘taking the adventure’ in order to remain a knight in utmost good standing, but if there is no adventure to be had, a knight must create it. Thus,

⁷⁹ Malory, p. 212.

in disguising himself, Lancelot creates more opportunities to best opponents by drawing them into conflict with someone whom they suppose to be 'Kay'.

The four knights from whom Lancelot first delivers Kay are never named. The next group of knights Lancelot defeats, this time while disguised as Kay, are identified but are not members of the Round Table: Gawtere, Gylmere, and Raynolde.⁸⁰ Finally, Lancelot is challenged by fellow members of the Round Table: Gawain, Uwain, Sagremour, and Ector de Maris. In this series of increasingly familiar opponents who escalate in skill, the 'positional concept of evil' in romance which Jameson has outlined is evident: those who appear to be foes are soon unmasked as brothers of the Round Table fellowship (and, in the case of Ector de Maris, kin).⁸¹ In this episode, it is the disguised Lancelot who positions himself as the consistent 'un-sinisterly familiar' (in Jameson's terms, that is, as the unthreatening Kay). Yet really as Lancelot he is the 'sinister unfamiliar'. The other knights in each subsequent encounter become increasingly familiar both to him and the audience. Although first they are unnamed and unknown, thereafter they are named and already known to Lancelot but not members of Arthur's court, and finally they are well-known fellow members of the Round Table. Though the knights each initially believe him to be Kay, they swiftly realise that it must be another knight in Kay's armour (due to his larger size, his strength, his skill, and his style of riding).⁸²

It is important that Lancelot himself consistently positions himself within the fellowship of the Round Table throughout the narrative. It is this positioning that marks the difference between this disguise episode, which is presented positively and ends happily, and the disguise narratives in the 'Tale of Lancelot and Guinevere', in which Lancelot increasingly positions himself apart from Arthur's court (see following section). When

⁸⁰ Malory, p. 211.

⁸¹ Jameson, p. 160.

⁸² Uwain, for instance, supposes that 'he hath slayne Kay' and taken his horse and armour; Gawain alone realises it must be Lancelot 'by his rydyng'. Malory, pp. 212, 213.

Lancelot takes Kay's armour, he simultaneously achieves three things: increasing his own worship, aiding a fellow Round Table knight, and tightening the fraternal bonds within Arthur's court.⁸³ First, in insisting that the defeated knights submit in Kay's name rather than his own, it signals that Lancelot is undertaking this deception for the adventure and not his reputation at court. It separates worship from adulation.⁸⁴ Secondly, in disguising himself he comes to Kay's aid, as Kay would have been defeated by the same knights; nor does Kay relish the thought of adventure for adventure's sake. Thirdly, his disguise helps unify the Round Table. His defeat of Gawain, Uwain, Sagremour, and Ector de Maris chastises them for their decision to engage with 'Kay' on the unchivalrous grounds that he will be easily bested (which does not increase their worship, as it is mere empty point-scoring and furthermore involves turning against another member of the fellowship instead of seeking engagement with knights who have not sworn fealty to Arthur). By being able to fight with more knights while disguised as Kay than he would if appearing as himself, Lancelot is able to send more knights to Guinevere and thus increase the worship of Arthur's court as a whole on a high feast-day (the timing of which in itself amplifies the theatricality of Lancelot's actions). The Round Table knights are able all to share laughter at the same joke when the truth is revealed. What begins as fragmented groups of knights fuelled by in-fighting and contempt for a fellow ends as a joyful and unified knightly social rank under Arthur's jurisdiction.

Lancelot's disguise also restores social order within Arthur's court insofar as it places Kay, who holds a marginally chivalric position as Arthur's seneschal, back in his proper, largely administrative, role—a narrative theme which later plays out across the

⁸³ Though, it should be noted that Malory does not use the term 'fraternal' to describe the homosocial bonds within the Round Table fellowship: see Elizabeth Archibald, 'Malory's Ideal of Fellowship', *Review of English Studies* 43 (1992), 311–328, p. 315, n. 15.

⁸⁴ Cf. Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 233–237. Cf. J. A. Burrow, 'The Uses of Incognito: *Ipomadon A*', *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994) 25–34, pp. 28–30.

Gareth narrative. To illustrate how this works, it is first necessary to discuss Kay's reactions to Lancelot's disguise and the tensions attendant to Kay's role as seneschal in a society in which masculinity is proved through chivalric performance.

Kay's own reactions to Lancelot's disguised adventures in Malory's version of the tale set him up as a foil to Lancelot, and mark Lancelot's decision to ride out in disguise as an act of deception that increases rather than decreases his worship.

Than sone aftir arose Sir Kay and myssid Sir Launcelot, and than he aspyed that he [Lancelot] had his armoure and his horse.

“Now, be my fayth, I know welle that he [Lancelot] woll greve som of the courte of Kyng Arthure, for on hym knyghtes woll be bolde and deme that hit is I, and that woll begyle them. And bycause of his armoure and shyld I am sure I shall ryde in pease”.⁸⁵

In a rare moment of interiority, Malory gives his audience Kay's thoughts upon discovering Lancelot has taken his armour. Unlike much of his behaviour throughout *Le Morte Darthur*, where Kay frequently reacts to his fellow knights in an abrasive manner with a bully's sense of humour and effrontery, his reaction here is surprisingly acquiescent. Rather than being angered by Lancelot's appropriation of his identity and the subsequently stolen chances at winning worship through combat, Kay seems relieved that he 'shall ryde in pease'—that is, he will not be beset upon by other knights and need to defend himself against them. That is to say, Kay sees a lack of military engagement with other knights as a desirable state, whereas Lancelot, whom few knights will challenge due to his reputation as undefeatable, actively seeks such encounters.⁸⁶ Thus, while Lancelot gains worship by actively seeking physical engagements, Kay loses worship—at least in the audience's eye, as we are privy to his thoughts—by showing no disappointment in the prospect of a ride back to Arthur's court

⁸⁵ Malory, p. 210.

⁸⁶ 'hit was prevyd on Sir Launcelot de Lake, for in all turnementes, justys, and dedys of armys, both for lyff and deth, he passed all other knyghtes, and at no tyme was he ovrcom but yf hit were by treson other inchaument.' Malory, p. 190.

devoid of combat and adventurous encounters, left alone by men who know it would not be advantageous to challenge and lose to whom they suppose is the undefeated ‘Lancelot’.

As seneschal, Kay is in charge of the day-to-day administrative activities attendant to the running of Arthur’s court. He would not be expected to, nor have much opportunity to, participate in the one-on-one battles and adventure-seeking that defines the lives, and social hierarchy, of most of the Round Table knights. This administrative role does not allow Kay much chance to prove or even improve upon his chivalric prowess, and contributes to his disparagement in Malory’s source material (and, by extension, this portion of *Le Morte Darthur*, which is derived from earlier French tradition). As Linda Gowans explains,

Two factors in particular did not militate in his favour. First, in the world of Chrétien and his contemporaries, the seneschal could be a very influential person, closely involved with the administration of justice, and at times exercising the full responsibilities of government in the absence of an overlord. So favoured a position was not guaranteed to ensure personal popularity [...] Second, at the other end of the scale, there is the age-old situation that those whose sphere of responsibility includes the kitchen are not best placed for an heroic—or even commendable—literary career.⁸⁷

Kay’s characterisation is transformed from that in the Vulgate into Malory’s own version. Gowan touches on this, noting that ‘[w]hen Lancelot enters the story, so does Kay’s Continental reputation for continual defeat, but Malory uses this in a kindly way, to provide light-hearted humour and portray Kay and Lancelot as old and good friends’.⁸⁸ Malory achieves this transformation of character through two approaches: the opinions of Kay which the other knights in the tale hold, and Kay’s own reactions to Lancelot’s actions. In his Vulgate source material, the knights Lancelot encounters refer to Kay disparagingly as ‘cowardly’ (‘li plus coars cheualiers qui soit el monde’).⁸⁹ However, Malory reduces the

⁸⁷ Linda Gowans, *Cei and the Arthurian Legend* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1988), pp. 46–47. The narrative episode in which Lancelot impersonates Kay comes from the early thirteenth-century *Lancelot-Grail*, while Chrétien de Troyes was writing in the late twelfth century, but the view of seneschal figures (and thus Kay) is much the same in both periods.

⁸⁸ Gowans, p. 142.

⁸⁹ *Lancelot*, ed. Alexandre Micha, V, p. 287; English translation from *Lancelot*, in *Lancelot-Grail*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. Carleton W. Carroll, 5 vol. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), III, p. 275.

knights' ill opinions of Kay. He is accused of being 'proude' and to have an inflated opinion of himself ('He wenyth no knyght so good as he, and the contrary is oftyen proved'.⁹⁰ And yet, at the end of the tale, Kay is quick to tell the king 'how Sir Launcelot rescowed hym whan he sholde have bene slayne', and to take no credit for the knights who submit to Guinevere under Kay's name.⁹¹ Though accused of pride, his actions reveal himself to be honest and humble, and thus even the weakest knight in Arthur's court (who, in the source material, serves only as the butt of the tale's joke) gains worship through Lancelot's disguised adventure. In his ready admission that he did not himself overcome all of these knights, Kay earns real worship (for his humility) and proves himself of good character, and not a man concerned with ill-earned reputations and empty adulations. However, Kay must learn to limit his chivalric ambitions to contribute to the stability of the court; he later proves a good opponent for untried knights on which to cut their eye teeth (i.e. Gareth and Le Cote Mal Tayle), but he is most helpful and effective to bolstering Arthur's court when he confines himself to his largely administrative role. Due to his position at court, Kay remains marginal to the practice of proper chivalry. His insistence on participating in knight-errantry stirs up personal trouble for him, but he is not the butt of the joke in Malory's rendition of the tale—rather, the defeated knights are. Kay's true humility (an important quality in knighthood, as we will see in the discussion on 'The Tale of Gareth', below) points to the defeated knights' deficiencies in chivalry for choosing a soft target. Reputation is essential to knighthood, but empty reputation—that is, empty point-scoring on easy targets—is worth less than attempting a fight and admitting defeat.

⁹⁰ Malory, p. 210.

⁹¹ Malory, p. 221.

The Poisoned Apple: A Prelude to Lancelot's Exodus

The 'Book of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere' (to borrow Vinaver's title, as Malory does not supply one) immediately follows the Grail quest, and over a series of events shows Lancelot increasingly positioning himself apart from Arthur and the Round Table as he begins 'to resorte unto Quene Gwenivere agayne' and forget 'the promyse and the perfeccion that he made in the queste'.⁹² The knights begin to split into the opposing factions featured in the battles of the final book.

Vinaver's edition breaks this penultimate book into five chapters, and perhaps due to this division there has been a tendency within Malorian scholarship to examine these chapters individually without considering how they work as a whole.⁹³ In the Winchester manuscript (but not in Vinaver's edition), the Fair Maid of Astolat episode is narrated as following seamlessly from the burial of Sir Patryse, whose poisoning instigated Lancelot's first disguise within the book, indicating an intentional linking of the two tales. In the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* and Vinaver's edition, the tale of the Fair Maid of Astolat begins with Arthur calling the tournament at Winchester. The disguises Lancelot uses in the 'Poisoned Apple' and 'Fair Maid of Astolat' chapters of this book encourage the consideration of the two tales as linked, if not as an exactly continuous narrative, and demonstrate Lancelot's increasing distance from Arthur.

When Lancelot dramatically arrives at the eleventh hour to defend Guinevere in trial by combat against accusations of the murder of Sir Patryse, he rides onto the field incognito, 'a knyght all armed uppon a whyght horse with a straunge shyld of straunge armys'.⁹⁴ He has previously been banished from court by the queen, and his mysterious appearance certainly increases the theatricality of the moment. However, it is also the first time Lancelot

⁹² Malory, p. 790.

⁹³ Sir Thomas Malory, 'The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere', *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 609–669.

⁹⁴ Malory, p. 800.

has intentionally used a disguise to separate himself from, and thus align him against, his fellow knights; when he borrows Kay's armour he nevertheless remains an integrated member of the Round Table. This disguise provides the first real visual image of Lancelot as outside the Round Table fellowship, as a fellow now made stranger because of his devotion to the queen.

Malory's deliberately vague description of Lancelot's disguise—'a straunge shyld of straunge armys'—lends a sense of blankness to Lancelot's assumed identity. Just as the knight who cuts off the adder's head and catalyses the final battle remains a nameless everyman, the description of Lancelot's shield, devoid of any associations with any other characters, affords an absence of identification either within or as a member of the Round Table rather than an indicating actively external presence. It shifts his placement relative to the Round Table fellowship as a man who is no longer recognisably within Arthur's circle, but has not yet defined himself as completely disassociated from it. His disguise is closer to an absence of truth than an active false identity, just as his relationship with Guinevere in Malory's version has apparently not yet become adultery but hovers in the morally grey realm of emotional infidelity. Paired with Lancelot's subsequent disguise, in the 'Fair Maid of Astolat' episode immediately following, his self-presentation in each chapter becomes a series of steps further away from the fellowship towards an identity that is more clearly individual and distinct from the knights of the Round Table.

So Much Depends upon a Red Sleeve

Critical analysis of the 'Tournament at Winchester', or the 'Fair Maid of Astolat', section largely has focussed on Elaine of Astolat. Within the 'Tournament at Winchester' portion of this book, Vinaver's edits set the beginning of the narrative at Arthur's announcement of a tournament, in parallel with the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* (one of Malory's

sources for the tale). At the end of the narrative Lavayne exonerates Lancelot from any role in his sister Elaine's death and he joins the Round Table. But as mentioned above, in the Winchester manuscript, 'the story is integrated within a sub-section of text which extends from fols 414^v–431^v, beginning with Lancelot's arrival in disguise to defend Guinevere against the charge of treason made against her in the killing of Sir Patryse [...] and concluding after the account of Lancelot's wounding prior to the Candlemass joust'.⁹⁵ Carol Meale notes that 'the framing of the story of Elaine of Astolat in this [the Winchester manuscript's] way shifts the narrative emphasis onto Lancelot's role as a knight, rather than as a lover'.⁹⁶ Lancelot's role as a knight, particularly as a knight within the Round Table, and his increasingly strained relationship with Guinevere, are, of course, inseparably entwined, and should be analysed with consideration to each other. Here I will first discuss the circumstances of Lancelot's disguise at the Tournament of Winchester in Malory's two source materials, the *Lancelot-Grail* and the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, and then examine how Malory's adaptations of these texts portray Lancelot as becoming increasingly duplicitous toward Arthur and his knights as the tension of maintaining an appearance of distance between himself and Guinevere grows. The falseness of the disguise marks a growing moral falsity in the best of knights.

In the *Lancelot-Grail*, the woman whose sleeve Lancelot wears at the tournament is not given a name, nor is she particularly characterised—at least not as fully as she is in the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* and Malory's *Morte Darthur*. In the *Lancelot-Grail*, the woman takes on the role of the conventional, slightly predatory damsel whose presence is largely there to, like the damsels in the works of Chrétien de Troyes, put the knight between a rock and a hard place. The text characterises her not as the young, lovelorn girl who sets her sights too

⁹⁵ Carol Meale, "'The Hoole Book": Editing and the Creation of Meaning in Malory's Text', *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards (Rochester, NY: Brewer, 2000), 3–17, p. 15.

⁹⁶ Meale, p. 15.

high as in *Le Morte Darthur*, but as a trap or an obstacle for Lancelot to overcome. She is love-struck but she is also cunning, and through a rash boon traps Lancelot into wearing her sleeve at the tournament and puts him in a chivalric dilemma. Lancelot has already, earlier in the narrative, been characterised as foolish and indiscreet in his displays of affection toward Guinevere subsequent to his return from the Grail quest, and being caught out through a rash boon cements that foolishness.⁹⁷ He is ‘distressed’ by the request, but complies out of honour.⁹⁸ In addition, equal attention is paid to the red shield Lancelot borrows as to the red sleeve; the red shield is the mark of a young man in his first year of knighthood. Moreover, Lancelot had already planned on attending the tournament in disguise against the other members of the Round Table; thus this decision is not prompted by a need to direct attention away from his relationship with Guinevere. Rather, it stems from Lancelot’s wish to win honour by maximising his chances of meeting high-quality opponents in the tournament. As such, the treatment of Lancelot’s disguise in this episode of the *Lancelot-Grail* more closely parallels Lancelot’s acceptable disguise in the ‘Kay’s

⁹⁷ On Lancelot’s foolishness and indiscretion:

Mes comment que Lancelos se fust tenuz chastement par le conseil del preudome a qui il se fist confés quant il fu en la queste del Seint Graal et eüst del tout renoiee la reïne Guenievre, si comme li contes l’a devisé ça arrieres, si tost comme il fu venuz a cort, il ne demora pas un mois après que il fu autresi espris et alumez come il avoit onques esté plus nul jor, si qu’il rencheï el pechié de la reïne autresi comme il avoit fet autrefois. Et se il avoit devant meintenu celui pechié si sagement et si couvertement que nus ne s’en estoit aperceüz, si le meintint après si folement que Agravains, li freres monseigneur Gauvain, qui onques ne l’avoit amé clerement et plus se prenoit garde de ses erremens que nus des autres, s’en aperçut.

Until now, Lancelot had remained chaste, following the counsel of the holy man to whom he had confessed during the Quest for the Holy Grail, and had renounced Queen Guenevere, as the story has told earlier. Yet when he returned to court, not a month passed before he was as enamored and inflamed as he had ever been before, so that he again lapsed into sin with the queen just as he had done formerly. But whereas he had previously indulged his sinful passion so prudently and so discreetly that no one knew of it, now he behaved so foolishly that it became apparent to Sir Gawain’s brother Agravain, who had never liked him and who watched his comings and goings more attentively than any of the others.

La Mort le Roi Artus, ed. Jean Frappier (Genève: Droz, 1964), p. 3. English translation from *The Death of Arthur*, in *Lancelot-Grail*, ed. and trans. Norris J. Lacy, 5 vols. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), IV, 91–160, p. 91.

⁹⁸ Lancelot’s rash boon and his distress at the damsel’s request: ‘Quant Lancelot oi ce si en fu moult esmaies. Car il savoit que se la reïne le savoit quele l’en savroit trop mal gre si ne troveroit jamais pais envers li’ in *La Mort le Roi Artus*, p. 10; English translation from *The Death of Arthur*, in *Lancelot-Grail*, ed. and trans. Norris J. Lacy, 5 vols. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), IV, 91–156, p. 93.

armour' episode of *Le Morte Darthur* than Malory's rendition of the red sleeve disguise, as Lancelot in this moment in the *Lancelot-Grail* is more interested continuing to accrue honour and status within the Round Table than he is (as in Malory's version of the Tournament at Winchester) in hiding his treasonous relationship from his king and fellow knights.

In the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, Arthur's court is already noticeably failing, and Gaynor suggests the tournament, as in the *Lancelot-Grail*, as a way to regain some of its earlier glory. Lancelot deliberately chooses to stay behind in order to be with Gaynor, falsely citing poor health:

Launcelot left with the queen,
And seke he lay that ilke tide;
For love that was them between,
He made enchesoun for to abide.⁹⁹

His intent to deceive his king and his fellow knights has already begun. The daughter of the Lord of Ascolot begs him to wear her sleeve out of her love for him (without the trickery used in the *Lancelot-Grail*) and Lancelot makes it explicit that he does not reciprocate her love. However, the sleeve alone is the focus of his identification and, as in Malory's version, it is largely the sleeve that effects the disguise. This emphasis on the sleeve, as a lady's favour, draws the audience's attention to Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere and the accompanying tensions which arise from the need to disguise the nature of their relationship from the rest of the court. Lancelot is blameless in the daughter of the Lord of Ascolot's death (as he made his lack of erotic interest in her very clear) but this disguise with its focus on the sleeve still carries with it elements of shame and taboo, as it illustrates the shift in Lancelot's loyalties away from Arthur and the Round Table apparently in favour of a woman's love.

⁹⁹ *The Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, in *King Arthur's Death*, ed. Larry D. Benson and Edward E. Foster, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), 9–128, ll. 53–56.

Where the Stanzaic *Morte* is direct, Malory plays coy regarding Guinevere and Lancelot's motives for staying behind. The audience is told what they *say* to the court and what the court says about them, but Malory is careful to word it as that which is being voiced and rumoured, and he offers no hint at Guinevere and Lancelot's underlying motives. ('many demed the Quene wolde nat be there because of Sir Launcelot, for he wolde nat ryde with the Kynge, for he seyde he was nat hole of the play of Sir Madore—wherefore the Kynge was hevy and passynge wroth; and so he departed towarde Wynchestir with hys felyship').¹⁰⁰ Even his initial decision to ride against the Round Table in the tournament, prior to encountering Elaine of Astolat and her family, is framed as passive, reactive, and peevish, dismissing Guinevere's counsel in favour of chance. Like Balyn, he will take the adventure:

'I alow youre witte. Hit ys of late com syn ye were woxen so wyse! [...] But wytte you well,' seyde Sir Launcelot unto the quene, 'at that justys I woll be ayenste the kynge and ayenst all hys felyship.'

'Sir, ye may there do as ye lyst,' seyde the quene, 'but be my counceyle ye shall nat be ayenst youre kynge and your felyshyp, for there bene full many hardé knyghtes of youre blood.'

'Madame,' seyde Sir Launcelot, 'I shall take the adventure that God woll gyff me'.¹⁰¹

Lancelot's positioning of himself against his fellows progresses through three stages: absence from the tournament; the decision to attend in disguise (in the form of suppressing identification); and finally to improve his disguise with a false identifier: Elaine's sleeve. Moreover, his decision to disguise himself using Elaine's sleeve is a reaction to events and rumours rather than the active adventure-seeking he displays in the Book of Sir Lancelot. In fact, in much of the book Lancelot is shown as reacting to events rather than acting or actively seeking action (e.g. his exile from court and appearance at Guinevere's trial; and his rescue of Guinevere in the Knight of the Cart section)—in direct contrast with his

¹⁰⁰ Malory, p. 804.

¹⁰¹ Malory, p. 805.

behaviour in earlier parts of the text, as with his appropriation of Kay's armour, discussed above.

Compared with both source texts, Lancelot's behaviour when Elaine requests him to wear the sleeve is more duplicitous in Malory's version. As Helen Cooper discusses, Malory is notably circumspect when it comes to giving his characters' inner dialogue, and mostly reserves it for Dinadan.¹⁰² But here, when Elaine asks Lancelot to wear her sleeve, the audience is given a rare glimpse into Lancelot's thoughts. He 'bethought him of his need to appear in the tournament disguised'—that is, he agrees to wear it not chiefly out of courtesy to his host's daughter as in the Stanzaic *Morte*, nor out of an obligation elicited by wiles, as in the *Lancelot-Grail*, but primarily in order to fulfil his own deliberate and already formed intention to deceive his fellow knights. Thus Lancelot seems to cross an ethical line with regard to the degree of incognito that is morally permissible. First, he is not simply withholding a name or obscuring a device, which is a withdrawal of information; rather, he chooses a disguise that instigates a new identity: as a knight with relationships and affiliations beyond the Round Table fellowship, namely, and tragically, to Elaine. Second, his deployment of that disguise against his fellows and his king is a combination of accident and design, as with many key moments of danger and often tragedy in *Le Morte Darthur*: though he does not seek Elaine's sleeve, he readily accepts her offer of it with the purpose of enhancing his disguise.¹⁰³ And finally, he does not make clear enough to Elaine that he has no feelings for her, but rather uses her sleeve instrumentally—and then it vanishes from the story, just as he makes instrumental use of her feelings for him, evidenced by her offering the sleeve. However, Elaine does not then vanish from the narrative as the sleeve does. The

¹⁰² Helen Cooper, 'The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones', *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 183–202, p. 194.

¹⁰³ See, for instance, the events leading to the tragedy of Balyn and Balan, discussed in the previous section, or the events preceding the final battle at Camlann: the drawing together of opposing forces coupled with the presence of the adder. Malory, p. 922.

audience knows that his feelings for Guinevere remain steadfast, but the phrasing of his reply to Elaine is thoughtlessly ambiguous: he is doing ‘more for your love than ever y ded for lady or jantillwoman’.¹⁰⁴ In his eagerness to convincingly deceive Arthur and his knights, Lancelot unwittingly deceives an innocent girl. In this, Lancelot’s deceptions, with regard to the adultery with Guinevere and in his red-sleeve disguise, carry tragic repercussions that extend beyond the court, foreshadowing the collateral damage caused by the actions and intrigues of Arthur’s court and the fall of the Round Table to the rest of the kingdom.

As in the *Lancelot-Grail*, Arthur recognises Lancelot in his disguise. As established in chapter one, recognition is a weak point for Arthur and it is unusual that he should be the first to determine Lancelot’s true identity.¹⁰⁵ It is a grand irony that at a moment when Arthur is perhaps most blind to the deception before him (that is, Guinevere and Lancelot’s relationship), he has his greatest moment of disguise-perception. Elaine’s red sleeve becomes a red herring. In congratulating himself on uncovering the truth of Lancelot’s identity, Arthur nevertheless demonstrates obliviousness to the larger import of Lancelot’s actions. Reality and appearance are inverted: Lancelot’s identity as one apart from the Round Table, flagrantly displayed on the field, is uncovered to reveal his mask: that of a loyal man positioned alongside Arthur and his knights.

Lancelot’s earlier disguise through the appropriation of Kay’s armour asserts a communal identity. It exhibits Lancelot’s interest in belonging to and strengthening the homosocial bonds of the Round Table fellowship. Here at the Tournament at Winchester, Lancelot’s disguise is no longer aligned with honourable chivalric identity as a fellow, a team member, but rather enacts Lancelot’s moves towards individualism in pursuit of his

¹⁰⁴ Malory, p. 806.

¹⁰⁵ In the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, no one recognises Lancelot in his disguise. It is only after he has been wounded and left the tournament that his fellow knights realise his identity.

own erotic satisfaction. The disguise performs the act of separation which will be the nucleus around which the final fragmentation of the Round Table into factions will cohere.

Gareth

From the moment Gareth steps in to Arthur's hall at the opening of his tale, he brings with him an air of theatricality. As Arthur awaits a marvel before commencing the Pentecostal feast, a young man enters, unknown to the court.¹⁰⁶ He is 'large and longe and brode in the shuldrys, well-vysaged, and the largyste and the fayreste handis that ever man sye', but he is supported by two other men as if he cannot walk unassisted.¹⁰⁷ Then, approaching the king, the young man suddenly straightens up, and reveals himself to be physically 'one of the goodlyest yonge men' that Arthur has ever seen. This unusual beginning to one of Malory's books introduces some of the book's distinctive characteristics: the theatrical quality of the narrative, and its themes of false appearances and hidden true worth.

Felicity Riddy sees a symbolic childishness in Gareth's physically supported entrance to court:

this version of the Fair Unknown story [...] is about growing up, but into an adulthood which is also a principedom. The difference between the ways in which Gareth and Lyonett are received at Arthur's court emphasizes Gareth's youth, which has already been suggested symbolically by his mode of entry. He comes into the hall leaning on the shoulders of two older men and asks for food and drink for a year: he cannot support himself and requires sustenance as children do.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Awaiting a marvel before commencing the Pentecostal feast is a motif found throughout the intertextual Arthurian canon which uses the feasting context to showcase 'the interdependence of knightly prowess and courtly display'. Aisling Byrne, 'Arthur's Refusal to Eat: Ritual and Control in the Romance Feast', *Journal of Medieval History*, 37 (2011), 62–74, p. 68. Displays of prowess and courtliness both feature heavily in 'The Tale of Gareth', and are instrumental in signaling Gareth's nobility and his maturation, as discussed in this section.

¹⁰⁷ Malory, p. 223.

¹⁰⁸ Felicity Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1987), pp. 67–68.

Derek Brewer views this childish entrance as representative of Gareth's view of how others perceive him:

His simulated weakness is [...] a view of his own childishness, which is emphasised by the request for food and drink; all of it a sort of 'wilful' expression of childishness—if *that's* what you think of me, that's how I'll behave!—which easily co-exists with the protagonist's even stronger sense of his own beauty, wealth and great potential. It is an excellently complex image in human terms of, so to speak, the chicken just as he is breaking the shell, as ancient as the presentation of David'.¹⁰⁹

Riddy's and Brewer's arguments are compelling, and the importance of shedding childishness is central to the tale, as discussed below. But there is also more to Gareth's theatrical entrance and refusal to identify himself than simply a symbolic need to put away childish things.

Like many of the wonders in his tale, Gareth's entrance is a manufactured marvel: there is no cursed sword, Siege Perilous, or Grail sighting; nor is his entrance, like the adventure of the lady and the brachet that commences the early adventure undertaken by Gawain, Tor, and Pellinor, the product of happenstance and (possibly) magic. Arthur awaits a marvel and Gareth purposely provides one for him. Gareth is evidently aware of Arthur's custom to await a marvel before dining on Pentecost and to grant boons on that day. Thus, he knows that he can manipulate the conventions of the court to get the two things he wants: the boon he requests, but also a chance to test the temper of the court, specifically regarding the extent of its generosity. As Larrington explains, the "invitation to adventure" identified by Aisling Byrne challenges the court to open itself to an outsider and allow its claims to pre-eminence to be probed'.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the

welcome encounter is a fraught one. Who is the newcomer? What does he want? Does his arrival enhance or threaten the honour of the court? And for the guest himself: Will I be welcomed and gain the boon that I ask? Will I be

¹⁰⁹ D. S. Brewer, *Symbolic Stories* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1980), p. 101.

¹¹⁰ Carolyn Larrington, "Wyze, Welcum Iwys to Dis Place!": Emotions in the Schemas for Arrival, Return and Welcome at the Arthurian Court', *Journal of the International Arthurian Society*, 4.1 (2016), 92–103, pp. 94–95; quoting Aisling Byrne, 'The Intruder at the Feast: Negotiating Boundaries in Medieval Insular Romance', *Arthurian Literature*, 27 (2010), 33–57, p. 34.

accepted into the court and allowed to join the knightly community? What kinds of values and customs prevail in this hall?¹¹¹

In staging this theatrical entrance and withholding his name and lineage, Gareth creates an opportunity to evaluate the generosity of Arthur's court and the chivalry and *gentillesse* of his Round Table fellowship before making the commitment to join it.

Following his theatrical and enigmatic entrance, Gareth does not disguise himself when he introduces himself to the court; he stands up straight, signalling his actual physical stature and build, and withholds his name—a choice not uncommon among knights. However, while a knight may withhold his name, his status as a knight speaks for his noble lineage. Gareth is not yet a knight and so his decision to withhold his lineage results in inappropriate assumptions about his social status, and ultimately a disguise is put upon him: Kay, believing him to be a young man of ignoble status, assigns him to the kitchens.¹¹²

The Malorian Fair Unknown

Gareth's decision to withhold both name and family from the court situates him amongst the literary fellowship of *bel inconnu* knights. The best-known *bels inconnus* in the inter-textual Arthurian canon are Percival and Gingalain, called Libeaus Desconus in the Middle English version possibly by Thomas Chestre—though Malory includes neither's *bel inconnu* tales in his work.¹¹³ They follow the more traditional *bel inconnu* narrative in which a hero unaware of his parentage seeks knowledge of his lineage and, over the course of his adventure, proves himself a worthy knight.

¹¹¹ Larrington, 'Wyȝe, Welcum Iwys to Þis Place!', pp. 94–95.

¹¹² Larrington writes that Kay's 'hostile snap judgements are an important element of the welcome schema' in Arthur's court, insofar as 'his response is consistently to be understood by the audience as situationally inappropriate'. Larrington, 'Wyȝe, Welcum Iwys to Þis Place!', p. 94 and n. 8.

¹¹³ *Lybeaus Desconus*, ed. M. Mills, EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 9–18.

Barbara Nolan identifies two types of *bel inconnu* narratives.¹¹⁴ The first type of *bel inconnu* is best typified by the Percival Cycle: a young man who does not know who he is arrives at court wishing to be knighted but is laughed at for his rustic and naïve ways. Over the course of the tale, he proves himself a worthy knight, learns his true name, and discovers that his father was a knight. In the second type of *bel inconnu* romance, the young man in question knows who he is, but initially refuses to reveal his name and/or lineage to the court. He receives a shameful nickname and is taunted for his assumed low birth. His name and noble lineage is usually revealed at the end of the narrative, after he has successfully completed a series of adventures which highlight his bravery, chivalry, and prowess. Often, the young hero will be related to Gawain.¹¹⁵

Malory nevertheless is interested in exploring the narrative possibilities the figure of the *bel inconnu*. The concept of the Fair Unknown is central to the Arthurian world, perhaps because Arthur's ascent to the throne and early kingship itself evokes the *bel inconnu* motif: he is a *roi inconnu* initially unaware of his noble parentage. He proves himself worthy of his lineage through a marvel (i.e. the pulling of the sword from the stone) and feats of arms (e.g. the battles of the five and eleven kings) before Merlin reveals his royal parentage to both Arthur and the court. Breunor le Noir (La Cote Mal Tayle), Tor, and Gareth all display recognisable elements of the *bel inconnu* narrative, and Malory situates his Fair Unknown tales at key points in Arthur's reign. Tor is the first man Arthur knights at his wedding; Gareth's tale comes at the pinnacle of the Round Table's achievement and community spirit before the dark mirror-world book of Tristan and the shattering of the Round Table fellowship which the Grail quest heralds. La Cote Mal Tayle's tale functions as a pivotal

¹¹⁴ Barbara Nolan, 'The Tale of Sir Gareth and the Tale of Sir Lancelot', *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A. S. G. Edwards (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996) 153–181, p. 157–158 and n. 4.

¹¹⁵ For a close comparison of the narrative elements of *bel inconnu* tales ('The Tale of Gareth', 'La Cote Mal Tale', *Libeaus Desconus*, *Wigalois*, Renant de Beaujeu's *Bel Inconnu*, and the *Carduino*), see Robert Wilson, 'The "Fair Unknown" in Malory', *PMLA*, 58.1 (1943), 1–21, pp. 6–10.

break between Tristan's marriage and his madness. 'La Cote Mal Tayle' brings Lancelot more fully into the *Book of Sir Tristan* (as Breunor's mentor) and Malory uses the narrative to more closely intertwine Tristan's and Lancelot's histories: Lancelot spends much of the tale writing letters sympathising with Tristan over their similar love lives as he rides alongside Breunor and mentors him from a small distance.

On the other hand, Malory often suppresses the search for and reconnection with family, a traditional aspect of the Fair Unknown narrative—a remarkable choice given how central establishing and honouring one's lineage is to the *bel inconnu* narrative arc. His version of Percival knows his family and has an already well-established, close relationship with his sister. Tor is unaware of his true parentage, but rather than seeking that knowledge through a quest, Merlin enlightens him and the court upon Tor's arrival. Tor's mysterious origins chime at this point with Arthur's own; Merlin's revelation of Tor's parentage occurs very close to the revelation about Arthur's parentage when Igraine arrives at court following the battle of the eleven kings. Tor's story is thus transformed into one that is more concerned with his desire to become a knight, regardless of his social origins, and proving his chivalry and prowess alongside, or in comparison with, established noble knights Pellinor and Gawain, than to reconnect with his absent father. The theme of broken or strained father-son bonds begins with Arthur and Uther. The knighting of Tor and the arrival of La Cote Mal Tayle revisit this theme, and Arthur's death is brought about through, amongst other things, his own paternal failings: Mordred's incestuous conception, his childhood abandonment, and his disagreement with his father's view of what constitutes correct justice and mercy toward Guinevere.¹¹⁶ Gareth's tale provides a variation in the form of a strained sibling bond between Gareth and his eldest brother, Gawain.

¹¹⁶ Interestingly, the narrative of Mordred's birth and early childhood follows much more closely the plot points of the traditional hero's conception, birth, and infancy (as outlined by Otto Rank) than Arthur's early childhood does. Though both are conceived by royalty and their conception is 'preceded by difficulties ... prohibition or obstacles', it is Mordred and not Arthur who is then 'surrendered to the water' at 'the instigation

Breunor le Noir—La Cote Mal Tayle—knows precisely who he is and who his father was when he walks in to Arthur’s court, wearing a coat which ‘sate overthwartely’ due to the unended sword-cuts from the murder of his father. He gives his name, but only makes oblique reference to his lineage (‘my name is Br[e]wnor le Noyre, and [...] I am comyn of goode kynne’; ‘I had a fadir, a noble knyght’).¹¹⁷ Malory signals to his audience that Breunor’s tale is to be a vengeance narrative, avenging the murder of his father, and yet that same avenging takes place off-stage. Breunor announces his intention to avenge his father’s death when he first introduces himself to court: ‘Thus, to have my fadyrs deth in remembraunce, I were this coote tyll I be revenged’.¹¹⁸ Kay’s nickname for Breunor again highlights Breunor’s mission, drawing attention to his father’s hacked and blood-stained coat; and Breunor announces to the court that he wishes to keep the nickname even when he has been accepted into the fellowship. However, none of the fights, encounters, or adventures La Cote Mal Tayle undertakes in the tale are related to his quest for revenge. As an afterthought following the adventure in which La Cote Mal Tayle brings Sir Plenoryus into the court of King Arthur, Malory tacks on to the last sentence of the tale: ‘and also, as the Freynshe book makith mencion, Sir La Cote Male Tayle revenged the deth of hys fadir’.¹¹⁹

Though Malory does suppress the role of family and the importance of lineage in the histories of some of his *bel inconnu* characters, both Tor and La Cote Mal Tayle suffer from the family trauma in their histories. Tor behaves in a way such that his ostensible rank does not match his instinctive desires; he is an outsider in his family, sharing little in common with his brothers. La Cote Mal Tayle is made fatherless through murder. Gareth is alone in

of the father ... doomed to be killed or exposed’ and who is then saved by a herder. Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Exploration of Myth*, trans. Gregory C. Richter and E. James Lieberman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 47.

¹¹⁷ Malory, p. 360.

¹¹⁸ Malory, p. 360.

¹¹⁹ Malory, p. 375.

instigating a separation from family, choosing to hide his identity from them: he knows who he is and yet conceals it from his family—including his uncle, Arthur—already at court.¹²⁰

Inheritance Anxieties and Kitchen Boys

A younger brother or a nephew dressed well below his station and hiding in obscurity in the kitchens is not unique to Malory or indeed to chivalric romance. The usurped rightful heir hiding for his own safety until he comes of age to reclaim his throne is a figure popular in early English romances such as *Havelok*, *King Horn*, and *Horn Childe*, as discussed in chapter one; so, too, through Merlin's efforts and Arthur's ignorance, the situation is also reminiscent of Arthur in his youth. Tied more thematically closely to Gareth's incognito kitchen adventure is the outlaw romance-ballad *The Tale of Gamelyn*.¹²¹ *The Tale of Gamelyn* was included amongst Chaucer's papers and was incorporated into the *cd* group of *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts, though 'no sign that Chaucer's own hand was involved in the transmission of the text'.¹²² It predates *Le Morte Darthur* by perhaps a hundred to 120 years.¹²³ Gamelyn, like Gareth, is ostensibly a youngest son, and thus in a precarious position concerning inheritance.¹²⁴ Like Gareth, his tale takes the shape of a male Cinderella

¹²⁰ Gareth's purposeful withholding of his family connections is perhaps closest to La Cote Mal Tayle, and both narratives share many similar points. However, as with many of the tales within 'The Book of Sir Tristan', La Cote Mal Tayle's Fair Unknown origin and adventures are darker and less successful than those of his Round Table counterpart.

¹²¹ The genre of *The Tale of Gamelyn* has been a subject of ongoing debate. Walter Skeat consider it an 'older and longer kind of ballad'; Lee Ramsey and Richard Kaeuper think of it as a romance; and Derek Pearsall argues for a category of 'epic romance' under which *Gamelyn* would fall. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren prefer to classify it alongside 'the *Gest*, *Adam Bell*, and long battle ballads of the sixteenth century such as *Chevy Chase* or *The Battle of Otterburn*' as a 'popular epic'. I find it to blend aspects of romance and ballad, sharing elements with the *Gest* as well as *Havelock* and the Anglo-Norman outlaw tale *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*. Richard Kaeuper, 'An Historian's Reading of *The Tale of Gamelyn*', *Medium Ævum*, 52 (1983), 51–62; Derek Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', *Medieval Studies*, 27 (1965), 91–116; Lee Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), pp. 90, 93–95; Walter W. Skeat, *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1894), p. vii; Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, 'The Tale of Gamelyn: Introduction', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000) 184–193, p. 185.

¹²² Laura Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 156.

¹²³ Knight and Ohlgren, 'The Tale of Gamelyn: Introduction', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, p. 185.

¹²⁴ Mordred is Morgause's youngest son. However, at this point in the narrative his parents believe him to be dead; he is in fact being raised by a foster father who found him after the wreck of the May Ship: 'And so by fortune the shyppe drove unto a castell, and was all to-ryven and destroyed the moste party, save that Mordred

story, one Hyonjin Kim calls a ‘riches to rags to riches’—Gamelyn and Gareth are, after all, sons of a land-owning knight and a king respectively.¹²⁵ Gamelyn is forced into his kitchen-boy obscurity and, later, his outlawry, by a grasping older brother determined to steal Gamelyn’s inheritance. Gamelyn, Havelok, Libeaus Desconus: these characters have obscurity and concealment thrust upon them for strategic reasons.¹²⁶ Gareth is sent to the kitchens but, unlike these literary predecessors, remains in obscurity by choice, with every opportunity to reveal himself to and be welcomed by those in the hall. With Gareth, one gets the sense that he is, like Balyn and Lancelot and other leading Round Table knights before him, biding his time before electing to ‘take the adventure’ Kay (unwittingly) puts before him. By not announcing himself but rather eschewing family connections and waiting for Arthur and Kay to assign him what bed and board they will, Gareth opens himself to the opportunity of one year of seeing whatever adventure may come, even if such adventure is in the kitchens and not the chivalric spaces of court and forest.¹²⁷ In addition, Kay’s welcome highlights the importance humility will have in Gareth’s adventure: is Gareth humble enough to take the kitchen adventure? Is he *really* ready to accept the indignities and trials of knighthood and taking the adventure?

Gareth deliberately hides his identity and capacity for greatness precisely in order to effect a dramatic contrast between his disguised self and the well-equipped young man he becomes once assigned the adventure. His voluntary year in the kitchen sets the stage for

was cast up, and a good man founde hym, and fostird hym tulle he was fourtene yere of age, and than brought hym to the courte’, Malory, p. 46. Elizabeth Archibald, questioning why Mordred is never granted a Fair Unknown arrival-at-court scene in medieval romance as Gareth is, proposes that given that such a recognition scene must include a public announcement of Mordred’s incestuous conception and Arthur’s infanticide, ‘Mordred’s recognition scene was just too problematic for medieval authors’. Elizabeth Archibald, ‘Comedy and Tragedy in Some Arthurian Recognition Scenes’, *Arthurian Literature XIX: Comedy in Arthurian Literature*, ed. Keith Busby and Roger Dalrymple (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), 1–16, p. 16.

¹²⁵ Hyonjin Kim, *The Knight without the Sword: A Social Landscape of Malorian Chivalry* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), pp. 20–21.

¹²⁶ It is important to note that in *Havelok*, Havelok has no choice, and humbly offers himself to work in the kitchen; Gareth, by contrast, is play-acting.

¹²⁷ Malory, pp. 224–225.

his second, grand theatrical entrance into knighthood, and ultimately into Arthur's Round Table. As with other *bels inconnus*, without a humble, childish beginning (even a manufactured one as a kitchen boy), Gareth's later, mature demonstrations of extraordinary courage, patience, and chivalry would not shine as brightly.

Comparing the similarities in plot and setting between the first section of 'The Tale of Gareth' and *The Tale of Gamelyn* invites further comparison of their themes of inheritance anxieties: a parallelism which supports Kim's reading of 'The Tale of Gareth' as a youngest son's quest for landed property.¹²⁸ While inheritance is not mentioned explicitly in 'The Tale of Gareth', he is, as a youngest son, not expected to inherit lands from his father, and, in marrying Lyonesse, a chatelaine, acquires her castle and accompanying lands.¹²⁹

Little Brother

If the pressure on Gareth is to acquire property, why, then, maintain his disguise as a lowly kitchen boy in front of both Lyonesse and her sister Lynnet? And if acquiring land through marriage is one of his goals, then why keep his identity from his brothers, who would surely understand such an objective from their youngest full sibling? This is particularly applicable to Gareth's decision to place himself under the mentorship of Lancelot rather than Gawain. The answers to these questions perhaps lie again in Gareth's position as the youngest child. The concept of birth order influencing the development of a person's personality appears to have been in the popular consciousness long before Alfred

¹²⁸ Kim, pp. 40–43.

¹²⁹ Kim, pp. 41–42. Compare with the system of partible inheritance between sisters in *Yvain*, discussed in Larrington, *Brothers and Sisters in Medieval European Literature*, pp. 133–135. A similar narrative of a knight acquiring wealth and lands through amorous union (in this narrative, with a fairy mistress) can be found in 'Sir Tryamour', *Four Middle English Romances*, ed Harriet Hudson, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006), 149–193.

Adler's work.¹³⁰ While the actual, measurable effects of ordinal position within the family on personality are questionable, the idea that birth order does influence personality has persisted in the public conscious as a 'zombie theory' for generations—that is, a perception without sufficient or conclusive evidence to support it.¹³¹ Michael Jackson notes that, across several cultures' folklore, globally, many

associate, in their collective fictions, cleverness with the younger son, inferior ability with the eldest. In the fictional paradigm the younger outwits, displaces, and becomes the older; discrepancy between dogma and fiction (status and disposition) is corrected by certain ideational sifts and this play upon forms enables the illusion to be maintained that culture can always shape and transcend nature.¹³²

In keeping with this view, Gareth does outshine his eldest brother: though their final battle in 'The Tale of Gareth' proves them to be physically matched, Gareth's patience and humility which he displays first by accepting a year in the kitchens and then by bearing the tongue-lashings and scorns of Lynnet, reveal a greater chivalric potential than displayed by perennially hot-headed, 'vengeable' Gawain.¹³³ Moreover, if Gareth were to take his eldest brother Gawain into confidence as his mentor, he would forever be trapped in a mentor-mentee relationship with Gawain. The power dynamic would permanently be out of his favour. By seeking out Lancelot as his mentor and withholding his identity from his brothers until he has proven himself a man of exceptional chivalry and prowess, Gareth is able to establish himself socially and physically as his older brothers' peer, instead of being

¹³⁰ Alfred Adler, 'Characteristics of the First, Second, and Third Child', *Children*, 3.5 (1928), 14–52. For an overview of developmental psychology relating to sibling relationships and birth order, see Carolyne Larrington, *Brothers and Sisters in Medieval European Literature*, pp. 3–10, esp. p. 10.

¹³¹ Rodica Ioana Damian and Brent W. Roberts, 'Settling the Debate on Birth Order and Personality', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112.46 (2015), 14119–14120, p. 14120. See also Julia M. Rohrer, Boris Egloff, and Stefan C. Schmukle, 'Examining the Effects of Birth Order on Personality', *PNAS*, 112.46 (2015), 14224–14229, p. 14224; Catherine Salmon, Alyssa Marie Cuthbertson, Aurelio José Figueredo, 'The Relationship between Birth Order and Prosociality: An Evolutionary Perspective', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 96 (2016), 18–22, p. 20; Marco Bertoni and Giorgio Brunello, 'Later-Borns Don't Give Up: The Temporary Effects of Birth Order on European Earnings', *Demography* 53.2 (2016), 449–470, pp. 449, 465, 467; and Michael Jackson, 'Ambivalence and the Last-Born: Birth Order Position in Convention and Myth', *Man* 13.3 (1978), 341–361, pp. 342, 350, 354, 358.

¹³² Jackson, p. 354.

¹³³ Malory, p. 285.

automatically relegated to a lower social standing due to his position within the family before being allowed a chance to prove his exceptional embodiment of the chivalric ideal.¹³⁴

The affectionate blindness of Gareth's family to his maturation persists throughout the tale. When he arrives at court, his own brothers and uncle fail to recognise him. This in part is excused by Gareth's long absence from court since his half-brother Mordred's conception and his older brothers' (presumable) absence from their family home since their respective knightings. However, either Gareth bears little familial resemblance to the other members of his family, or there is a certain degree of blindness in each of them to his transformation into an adult. This failure to recognise the adult their brother has become is emphasised by Morgause's arrival at court. While her arrival on scene is justified—she sent him well-provisioned and yet has heard no word of his arrival, and his brothers and uncle believe he never arrived—it is still the only point in *Le Morte Darthur* in which a mother travels to court to check up on her (adult) child. Other mothers, for example Tor's mother or Igraine, are mentioned within Arthur's court to account for their sons' parentage, not to check in on their safety. His brothers' failure to recognise him and his mother's visit to court illustrate for the audience why Gareth felt the need to manufacture a *bel inconnu* persona in the first place: to create a space for himself to fill out into adulthood away from the preconceived notions of his family. When he reveals his identity at the final tournament, their eyes are opened at last to his transformation into a capable, self-reliant adult.

True Colours

More than the other tales that comprise *Le Morte Darthur*, Gareth's tale is one of playfulness. As discussed above, Gareth's entrance to court is a manufactured marvel,

¹³⁴ See Larrington, 'Sibling Relations in Malory's *Morte Darthur*', pp. 63–68 for further discussion of Gareth's 'project of differentiation' from his siblings.

lighthearted play-acting, particularly when compared with the serious marvels which can precipitate adventures, such as the kidnapping of the Damosel of the Lake at the opening of the adventure of Tor, Gawain, and Pellinor at Arthur's and Guinevere's wedding. Similarly, Lynnet's magical knight who wounds Gareth in Lyonesse's chamber is there in part for comedic effect: a far cry from the dangerous traps that other enchantresses set for knights. Think, for instance, of the curse attached to Balyn's sword (discussed earlier in this chapter), Morgan's and her fellow queens' enchanted sleep and kidnapping of Lancelot, or Hallewes, who tries to seduce Lancelot in order to 'have thy [Lancelot's] body dede', embalm it, and then 'clypped' and 'kyssed' the corpse 'dispyte of quene Gwentyvere'.¹³⁵

Equally, the bright paint-box colours of knights Gareth encounters, and his magical rainbow disguise at the final tournament, emphasise the fairy-tale, playground (or, more precisely, practice ground) feeling that suffuses the narrative. Max Lüthi remarks upon the folktale genre's penchant for bright, abstract colour schemes. He writes that the 'real world shows us a richness of different hues and shadings. Blended colors are far more frequent than pure tones. By contrast, the folktale prefers clear, ultrapure colors: gold, silver, red, white, black, and sometimes blue as well'.¹³⁶ However, this playfulness becomes increasingly problematic as Gareth excessively delays his assumption of adult identity. His disguises make visible his playfulness and his insecurity about his chivalric identity. Gareth is too comfortable, too safe in his anonymity. His anonymity is useful up to a point: it allows him to establish a reputation relatively risk-free, socially speaking (though not, of course, physically speaking). But his assumption of adult identity is excessively delayed. Gareth clings to the childish safety of his disguises overlong. In remaining in disguise out of

¹³⁵ Malory, pp. 193, 215–216.

¹³⁶ Max Lüthi, 'Abstract Style', *The Classic Fairy Tales*, ed. Maria Tatar, trans. John D. Niles (London: Norton, 2017) 375–387, p. 378. Originally printed in *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, trans. John D. Niles (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982), 24–36 and 140–142.

measure, Gareth runs the risk of losing out on a wife and her lands, and of killing his own brother.

The first indication Malory gives that Gareth's anonymity has begun to work against him is when Lyonesse confides in her brother that 'tyll I know what is his [Gareth's] ryght name and of what kynrede he is commyn shall I never by myrry at my herte'.¹³⁷ His determination to mask his lineage nearly costs Gareth Lyonesse's affections. It is Gareth's dwarf who ensures their courtship continues by revealing Gareth's name to her. The dwarf in this tale is exceptionally active: he reveals Gareth's lineage and identity to Lyonesse and her siblings, and then later reveals Gareth's identity to the court. That is, he steals the magical ring Lyonesse has given Gareth that disguises Gareth's identity so that Gareth must at last appear as himself—including words 'wryten about his helme in golde, seyynge: "This helme is Sir Garethis of Orkenye"'.¹³⁸ Gareth's dwarf forms a counterpoint to the rude dwarves commonly seen in romance literature.¹³⁹ These dwarves often regulate a hero's access to spaces as porters and dispense information and ethical advice to the hero. Gareth's dwarf, on the other hand, regulates other characters' access to Gareth, and dispenses information *about* the hero rather than *to* him. He 'wyste well' when Gareth 'sholde be knowyn', and enables first a happy resolution to Gareth and Lyonesse's love, and then enables happy ending to the tournament by effecting Gareth's integration as himself into society.¹⁴⁰ A dwarf is an odd choice of squire and companion, though, and perhaps there is something in his short stature that speaks to Gareth's childishness.

¹³⁷ Malory, p. 256.

¹³⁸ Malory, p. 277.

¹³⁹ Megan Leitch, 'The Servants of Chivalry?: Dwarves and Porters in Malory and the Middle English Gawain Romances,' *Arthuriana*, 27.1 (2017), 3–27, p. 4; Claude Lecouteux, *Les nains et les elfes au Moyen Age* (Paris: Editions Imago, 1988), pp. 30–31; Mikayla Hunter, 'Evadeam, Gawain, Merlin: Penitential Transformation and Unseen Truth in the 'Dwarf Knight' Section of the Vulgate Cycle', *Arthuriana*, 29.4 (2019) [forthcoming].

¹⁴⁰ Malory, p. 276.

When Gareth makes his grand appearance at the tournament, he is disguised with the aid of Lyonesse's ring such that all he is wearing is inverted: the ring works such that

grene woll turne to rede, and that that is rede woll turne in lykenesse to grene, and that that is blewe woll turne to whyghte, and that that is whyght woll [turne] in lyknesse to blew; and so hit woll do of all maner of coloures.¹⁴¹

Like a glass prism, this multicoloured disguise refracts all of the heraldic identities of those Gareth has conquered: Gareth has, in a sense, absorbed them, and each defeated knight has come to form a part of Gareth's growing identity. His disguise visually displays what has in truth happened: these knights have become part of Gareth's holdings, each promising fealty to Gareth, both of themselves and of the scores, even hundreds, of knights under their control. These knights' theatrical roles as Gareth's cupbearer, butler, and other servers at his wedding also reflects this subsumption. The excessive withholding of Gareth's identity and fame is finally let loose, in the particoloured disguise and at the wedding, as (once again) excessive theatricality.

His disguise at the tournament is not treated entirely negatively. Rather, this disguise episode is one of the few times Malory portrays marriage positively, with the wife enabling her husband rather than trying to limit his appearance at knightly events. Even one of the additional magical powers of Lyonesse's ring, that it 'encresyth my [Lyonesse's] beawté muche more than hit is of hymselff', is not considered problematic in the way that other enchantresses' or betrotheds' false beauty is often treated in Arthurian literature.¹⁴² Think, for example, of Morgan's magically ruined and then magically manufactured beauty in the *Suite du Merlin*:

Et sans faille elle fu bele damoiselle jusques a celui terme que elle commencha aprendre des enchantemens et des charroies; mais puis que li anemis fu dedens li mis, et elle fu aspiree et de luxure et de dyable, elle pierdi si otreement sa biauté que trop devint laide, ne puis ne fu nus qui a bele le tenist, s'il ne fu enchantés.

¹⁴¹ Malory, pp. 271–272.

¹⁴² Malory, p. 271. The Winchester version reads 'myselff'; see Field's note to 271.34 in the 'Apparatus and Commentary' section (vol. II, p. 230).

Unquestionably she was a beautiful girl up to the time she began to learn enchantments and magic charms; but once the enemy entered her and she was inspired with sensuality and the devil, she lost her beauty so completely that she became very ugly, nor did anyone think her beautiful after that, unless he was under a spell.¹⁴³

Gareth readily agrees to return Lyonesse's ring; he does not seem to mind whether his lady's beauty is real or a false appearance.

What is treated negatively, however, is Gareth's determination to 'nat be knowyn [...] nothir at the begynnyng nother at the endyng' of the tournament.¹⁴⁴ Before the dwarf steals Lyonesse's ring from Gareth, word already begins to circulate of Gareth's identity. Ironside (formerly the Red Knight of the Red Lands), observing Tristan marvelling at Gareth's fortitude on the field, pushes Tristan into asking about Gareth's identity, which Ironside readily gives. Tristan is duly impressed by Gareth's lineage, and comments that 'he is a good knyght and a bygge man of armys: and yf he be yonge, he shall preve a full noble knyght', but Ironside (accompanied by Sir Persaunte and his brethren) immediately corrects Tristan: 'Sir, he is but a chylde'.¹⁴⁵ While Tristan chooses to take Ironside's comment positively, a remark on Gareth's precociousness (at least when it comes to physical prowess), Gareth's emotional maturity is proven indeed childish by his determination to remain incognito. While the dwarf forces Gareth to reveal himself at the tournament (the timing of which has the most dramatic theatrical impact), Gareth's responses are not that of

¹⁴³ Robert de Boron, *Merlin: roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich, 2 vols. (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1886), I, p. 166; English translation from *The Post-Vulgate, Part I: The Merlin Continuation*, in *Lancelot-Grail*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, trans. Martha Asher, 5 vols. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), IV, 163–277, p. 172.

¹⁴⁴ Malory, p. 271. J. A. Burrows argues that, in *Ipomadon A*, Ipomadon's decision to enter each day of a three-day tournament in a different disguise increases Ipomadon's ultimate worship because he must, with each new day, effectively begin building his tournament reputation again from nothing. Burrows, 'The Uses of Incognito: *Ipomadon A*', p. 30–31. The extensive use of incognito in *Ipomadon* (and the French version of the romance) has led some scholars to classify the narrative as parody or burlesque. Burrows, 'The Uses of Incognito: *Ipomadon A*', p. 27.

¹⁴⁵ Malory, p. 276. See Field's note to 276.20 in the 'Apparatus and Commentary' section (vol. II, p. 234) regarding Caxton's 'they all seyde' versus the Winchester's indication that Ironside is speaking while Persaunte and Tristan listen to his words.

a champion, but that of a child: he lashes out at his kinsmen in anger at his discovery and then runs into the woods to hide.

Malory's continuation of Gareth's adventures after his victory at the tournament draws the audience's attention to the comfortable space Gareth has created for himself in his disguise as Beaumains. While his Beaumains persona initially provided challenging adventures which built up Gareth's reputation both for prowess and humility, now, after his sparkling success on the field, the defeat of the Brown Knight is underwhelming. The audience can expect Gareth to defeat him as Gareth has already defeated a host of knights with more fearsome reputations than the Duke de la Rouse (the true name of the Brown Knight). The fight against the Brown Knight takes place far from court, with none to witness the confrontation: as soon as de la Rouse departs, Gareth is left standing in the silence, 'alone'.¹⁴⁶ The lull in the action suggests that, should Gareth continue to cling to anonymity, to disguise himself out of measure, he runs a risk of social isolation, of no opportunity to join a knightly fellowship at all. Malory takes this a step further, as Gawain crashes into Gareth's solitude, set to destroy him. Gawain comes close to seriously wounding Gareth because he is unaware of his brother's identity, and Gareth nearly commits fratricide. Were it not for Lynnet's timely intervention and revelation of the brothers' identities, the fates of Balyn, Balan, and Accolon would have played out again, this time with Arthur's nephews. When Gareth's identity is first revealed to Gawain when he is fighting Gawain and Sagremour on the tournament field during the *mêlée*, Gawain immediately pulls back from the fight with the utterance 'A, brother [...] I wente ye wolde have smyttyn me', yet Gareth's reaction upon being discovered is to double his strokes and efforts to smite down Gawain and Sagremour. Gawain reacts with maturity and caution, Gareth with self-centred anger. At their final fight, once Gareth understands that his opponent is Gawain, he reacts by

¹⁴⁶ Malory, p. 282.

unlacing his helm, demonstrating his newfound emotional maturity by completely casting off all visual obfuscation.

When Gareth's dwarf companion reveals Gareth's true identity to the court at the final tournament, the colour of Gareth's clothing is transformed: 'byfore he was in so many coloures, and now he is but in one coloure, and that is yolowe', Arthur remarks.¹⁴⁷ This yellow reflects Gareth's complicated nature, one that is both ready to exploit the advantages conferred by false appearances and, yet at the same time is more pure of heart and of greater prowess than his brothers and indeed most of the Round Table knights. As C. M. Woolgar explains, in medieval colour symbolism, 'yellow might denote the false, from the thirteenth century; but gold, at the same time, was a "good yellow", a colour denoting high worth.¹⁴⁸ Malory's Gareth more than any of the Round Table knights excepting perhaps his mentor, Lancelot, demonstrates an understanding that performance and person are separate but can work symbiotically; artifice does not detract from underlying value. It is perhaps this shared understanding that makes Gareth's death all the more poignant; Gareth is completely exposed, and Lancelot distanced so far from his fellows that he cannot recognise them even when appearance and reality are entirely in alignment.

Larrington, in discussing Gareth's disguises and theatrical unveiling at the start of the tale, in Arthur's hall, writes that 'Gareth's Otherness represents only an enhanced version of Sameness, one eager to define itself as emphatically not the same as his brothers already at court, but which nevertheless confirms his worthiness to join the Round Table'.¹⁴⁹ This is undoubtedly true. Throughout 'The Tale of Gareth', Malory shows the usefulness of knightly disguise and at the same time, the dangers of disguising oneself out of measure or

¹⁴⁷ Malory, p. 277.

¹⁴⁸ C. M. Woolgar, 'Medieval Food and Colour', *Journal of Medieval History*, 44 (2018) 1–20, p. 3. Cf. Michel Pastoureau, 'Les couleurs médiévales: systèmes de valeurs et modes de sensibilité', *Figures et couleurs: études sur la symbolique et la sensibilité médiévales*, ed. Michel Pastoureau (Paris: Léopard d'Or, 1986), pp. 39–53, esp. pp. 49–51.

¹⁴⁹ Larrington, 'Sibling Relations in Malory's *Morte Darthur*', p. 97.

in the wrong setting. Through his disguises, Gareth is able to establish himself as more than just the 'little brother' of Orkney. He builds an adult identity by achieving a wife, lands, and men at his disposal; and establishes a foundation for a good social reputation. On the other hand, his reluctance to reveal himself runs the danger of losing out on the very goals Gareth originally hoped to achieve with his disguises, and later, when Gawain does not know he is fighting against Gareth, that risk escalates to the point at which the two brothers nearly commit fratricide.

Through the disguises knights take on in *Le Morte Darthur*, Malory reveals a growing interest in what lies behind public personas. Is a knight simply who he appears to be, or is there an essence behind the shields, the sleeves, the chivalric accoutrements of knighthood? When all in armour look much the same, how can a person detect friend from foe, brother from backstabber? Performativity maintains a knight's identity, for inactivity causes not just stasis but diminution. For early, pre-Grail Quest characters like Balyn and Gareth, reputation, performativity, and identity are nearly inseparable. But through Lancelot's character arc, disguise becomes more than instrumental. Through it, the audience can see a growing disconnect between reputation and identity; performativity becomes acting and theatricality turns to theatre, a show of smoke and mirrors.

CHAPTER FOUR

YEOMEN OUTLAWS

The Many Faces of the Yeomen Outlaws

From Sloth's admission in *Piers Plowman* that he knows 'rymes of Robyn Hood' but 'kan noȝt parfitly my Paternoster', it is evident that ballads of yeoman outlaws have been in circulation since at least the 1370s.¹ J. R. Maddicott suggests that these rhymes emerged only a few decades before Langland's 1377 *Piers Plowman* text, though outlaw motifs present in the extant Robin Hood ballads clearly either derive from, or at least are shared with, the thirteenth-century French and Anglo-Norman outlaw romances of *Eustache li Moine* and *Fouke FitzWaryn*.² The majority of Robin Hood ballads are of Early Modern or later composition, but there are some extant Middle English outlaw ballads which date from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These are preserved alongside the emergence of a yeoman class. Prior to this, yeomanry was a household rank.

Much of Robin Hood scholarship has centred on the struggle to define the social position of yeomen in the late Middle Ages and to identify the medieval audience of the ballads.³ This has been explored on linguistic, legal, and historical grounds (discussed

¹ Langland, William, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman, together with Vita de Dowel, Dobet, et Dobest, Secundum Wit et Resoun*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, EETS (London: Trübner, 1886), Passus V, ll. 401–402.

² J. R. Maddicott, 'The Birth and Setting of the Ballads of Robin Hood', *English Historical Review*, 93 (1978), 276–299, p. 278. For *Eustache li Moine* and *Fouke FitzWaryn*, see below.

³ The third primary concern in the field of Robin Hood studies is to attempt to pinpoint an historical Robin. Who the 'real' Robin Hood was, if he ever were real at all, is a question that cannot be satisfactorily answered with the evidence currently available to scholars. We are awash with potential historical Robins, none of whom stand out as particularly compelling options (see Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 22–26 and R. B. Dobson and James Taylor, 'Foreword', *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, ed. R. B. Dobson and James Taylor (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), xiv–xxxvi, pp. xvii–xxii, xxx–xxxvi).³ Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren have argued against any 'original' Robin Hood, instead positing that 'the name refers generally to someone who was in some way outside or against the law as it was being imposed', and barring a discovery of hitherto unknown material, I agree. Thus a search for an historical figure who might have provided an heroic basis for the ballads has not, indeed does not, profit the academic community in attempting to identify the possible audience of the medieval ballads. If Robin is taken to be a sort of 'everyman' outlaw, it then follows that to better understand the composition of the ballads' audiences would be to investigate the texts' attitudes toward yeomen. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, 'General Introduction', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications), 1–17, p. 5.

below). The first part of this chapter attempts to further elucidate the yeomen's social position and the audience of the ballads by looking at the disguises that the yeoman outlaws adopt and their behaviour whilst attempting to feign a rank other than their own. With few exceptions, the outlaws are the perpetrators and not the victims of disguise encounters.⁴ They pretend to be figures of varying social positions to further their own plans: potter, king's messenger, member of court, or kitchen knave, either through disguises or through the behaviour they affect. This play-acting is by and large characterised by the repeated failure of the yeoman outlaw to behave in a manner appropriate to the role he is arrogating. The employment of disguise in these medieval ballads shows the yeomen to be members of neither the gentry class, the court, nor the merchant-artisan class, but rather as failing to fit comfortably and successfully in those social positions when they disguise themselves as members of those ranks. The yeomen outlaws are characterised as clever in their tricks but foolish in their social pretensions as they struggle and fail to find an appropriate space within court and town societies. These factors further strengthen Richard Almond and A. J. Pollard's arguments that the early ballads do not merely reflect but in fact respond to an era of social mobility. They reveal anxieties produced by the emergence of the new yeoman social category and uncertainty about the yeomanry's status within society, and often use humour to display disdain for yeomen's social aspirations. This suggests a wide audience that may well have included yeomen but was by no means confined to the lower gentry to which the protagonists belong.

I will first discuss Robin Hood and his merry men as representative of yeomen (and not just outlaws) and the current scholarship around outlaw ballads and the social position of yeomen. Then I will examine the role of disguise across three Robin Hood ballads: *Robin*

⁴ Disguise here is defined as pretending to be a person/role other than an outlaw yeoman in order to fool another person, including instances in which the physical clothing the outlaws are wearing is not necessarily defined.

Hood and the Potter, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, and *A Gest of Robyn Hood*. I will compare the distinctly fifteenth-century views within these texts regarding social mobility to the earlier outlaw romance-ballad *Gamelyn*, and then discuss how Robin's role as a trickster figure relates to the ballads' portrayal of yeomen as both social upstarts and existing as a class apart from knightly-gentry and tradesmen-artisan social groups.

Yeomen Outlaws

Historically, and in contrast to the merry men, historical medieval outlaws hailed from a variety of social backgrounds. Fouke FitzWaryn (1160–1258) was a marcher lord. James Coterel (active c. 1328–1351) was the younger son of a landowner.⁵ Richard de Folville (d. 1340 or 1341) was a priest and William Chetulton a knight.⁶ English court documents contain the names of people from all ranks sentenced to outlawry.⁷ And yet all of the outlaws in the extant medieval ballads are definitively and uniformly depicted as yeomen. They are referred to throughout the ballads as yeomen and wear the dark green clothing associated with yeomen foresters. More than this, there are no yeomen characters inhabiting the town or court spaces within the ballads. Even Guy of Gisborne, a yeoman turned bounty hunter and not an outlaw, is only seen in the context of the forest.⁸ In the ballads, yeomen and outlaws are conflated, living outside society in liminal spaces and inserting themselves into pre-existing socially defined spaces (town and court), with, as we shall see, limited success.

⁵ J. Bellamy, 'The Coterel Gang: An Anatomy of a Band of Fourteenth-Century Criminals', *English Historical Review*, 79.313 (1964), 698–717, pp. 698–699.

⁶ E. L. G. Stones, 'The Folvilles of Ashby-Folville, Leicestershire, and Their Associates in Crime, 1326–1347', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 7 (1957), 117–136, p. 117.

⁷ Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Fur-Collar Crime: The Pattern of Crime among the Fourteenth-Century English Nobility', *Journal of Social History*, 8.4 (1975), 1–17, esp. pp. 2–3; Henry Summerson, 'The Criminal Underworld of Medieval England', *The Journal of Legal History*, 17.3 (1996), 197–224, pp. 198, 201, 206–209.

⁸ 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne' is discussed below.

The social position of the yeoman class in the English social hierarchy in the fifteenth century (when the majority of these outlaw ballads are believed to have been composed), ‘remains problematic’; the precise connotations of yeoman status at different times and in different contexts have proven ‘difficult to pin down’.⁹ The *Middle English Dictionary* gives several possibilities for the definition of a ‘yēman’. It could mean anything from a ‘free-born male attendant in a royal or noble household holding a rank above that of groom and page but below that of squire, a household official; an attendant or assistant to someone of higher rank, a retainer’, ‘a subordinate officer in a specific department of a royal or noble household, ranking below a sergeant and above a groom; also, as a prefix to the titles of various officers of the household’, ‘a subordinate military officer; an assistant to a master gunner; an officer in charge of cannon for a town’, ‘a hired laborer; also, a member of a ship’s crew, seaman’, ‘a term of disparagement: an underling, inferior; in direct address: fellow’, or a ‘member of the landholding class below the rank of squire; a man holding a small landed estate’.¹⁰

Almond and Pollard suggest that yeomanry could have had ‘a status akin to that enjoyed by artisans and tradesmen’, but the term equally ‘extended to an intermediary social category between husbandman and gentleman’ in the later Middle Ages.¹¹ A late fifteenth-century list that defines which birds of prey are appropriate to each rank lists yeomen as a rank below youngmen and squires.¹² Almond questions the realism of the list, and suggests

⁹ Richard Almond and A. J. Pollard, ‘The Yeomanry of Robin Hood and Social Terminology in Fifteenth-Century England’, *Past & Present*, 170 (2001), 52–77, p. 52; R. H. Hilton, ‘The Origins of Robin Hood’, *Past & Present*, 14 (1958), 30–44, p. 36; Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. xvii.

¹⁰ ‘yēman’, *Middle English Dictionary* (University of Michigan Press, July 2019) <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary>>.

¹¹ Almond and Pollard, ‘The Yeomanry of Robin Hood’, pp. 52–53; cf. Richard Tardif, ‘The “Mystery” of Robin Hood: A New Social Context for the Texts’, *Words and Worlds: Studies in the Social Role of Verbal Culture*, ed. Stephen Knight and S. N. Mukherjee (Sydney: Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture, 1983), 130–145, esp. p. 133, who locates yeomen amongst an urban lower class, analogous with journeyment and tradesmen.

¹² Dame Juliana Berners, ‘The Boke of Hawking’, *The Boke of St Albans*, 1486, facsimile edn. (London, 1899), two unnumbered folios at the end of ‘The Boke of Hawking’.

that the birds paired with each rank could be intended as jokes as ‘priests were supposedly forbidden to indulge in hunting and hawking’; however the persons themselves are ranked in correct order: emperor, king, prince, duke, earl, baron, knight, squire, lady, youngman, yeoman, poor man, priest, and holiwater clerk.¹³ Ranulph Higden, in his 1387 *Polychronicon*, laments the social pretensions of all Englishmen, writing that ‘a zeman arraieþ hym as a squyer, a squyer as a knyzt, a knizt as a duke, a duke as a kyng’—confirming that at the end of the fourteenth century, a yeoman was ranked below a squire.¹⁴

Historians have fiercely debated the existence of the yeoman class as a distinct social rank, on the one hand, and on the other, a diffuse social identity.¹⁵ J. C. Holt argues for yeomanry’s nonexistence as a distinct social class, and against the ballads’ focus on yeoman protagonists as representing ‘exclusive class interests’.¹⁶ He views yeomanry rather as a household office of ‘a middling sort’, and that those who held the office were members of several classes, and did not have an exclusive status unto themselves. While this was true in earlier centuries, it was not the case at the time that the extant ballads were composed. Most scholarship produced in the 1990s and 2000s, while agreeing with Holt that Robin Hood was not a ‘by-product of the agrarian social struggle’ of the late fourteenth century—a peasant hero for a peasant class—argues that Holt’s view of fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century yeomen as members of diverse social groups is out-dated and that the later Middle

¹³ H. W. Carless Davis, *Medieval England* (London: Bracken, 1995), p. 388; Dame Juliana Berners, *Hunting, Hawking, and Fishing, with the True Measures of Blowing* (London: Edward Allde, 1586), pp. 188–189; Richard Almond, *Medieval Hunting* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), pp. 43–46. See also John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. Joseph B. Pike (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 25.

¹⁴ Ranulph Higden, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis: Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, trans. into Middle English by Trevisa, ed. William Caxton, John Malverne, C. Babington, and J. R. Lumby, 9 vols., *Rolls Series* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865–1886), II, p. 171.

¹⁵ J. C. Holt, ‘The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood’, *Past and Present*, 18.1 (1960), 89–110, pp. 89–99; Hilton, p. 41; cf. Maurice Keen, ‘Robin Hood: A Peasant Hero’, *History Today* (1958), 20–25.

¹⁶ Holt, ‘The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood’, pp. 99–101.

Ages did indeed witness the emergence of a distinct yeoman class.¹⁷ Colin Richmond looks at Robin Hood as representing yeomen in an intermediary and transitional status between rank and class, citing late fourteenth-century accounts to point to a period of social reformation.¹⁸ As I shall show in the following sections, often the ballad authors' use of disguise in the ballads will uphold arguments for a fifteenth-century emergence of a distinct yeoman class, in contrast to an earlier diffusion of yeomen amongst 'diverse social groups', suggesting that the changing position of the yeoman following the social fluctuations subsequent to the Black Death was a topic of debate for contemporary medieval authors as well as modern scholars.¹⁹

Robin Hood and the Potter

Robin Hood and the Potter survives in a collection of poems from c. 1500. It is complete but appears to have one or two lines missing through scribal error.²⁰ In the ballad, Robin stops a traveling potter, demanding that he pay a penny 'toll' to Robin and his men in order to safely continue on his way. The potter refuses and defeats Robin in a fight with swords and bucklers. Robin then suggests that he and the potter trade roles for a day, the potter staying in the forest as a yeoman and Robin playing the potter selling his wares in town. While the potter does well in his assumed role, Robin plays the fool, selling the pots

¹⁷ Richard Almond and A. J. Pollard argue this on linguistic grounds, supporting Dobson and Taylor's arguments. Almond and Pollard, pp. 52–63; R. B. Dobson and James Taylor, 'Introduction', *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, ed. R. B. Dobson and James Taylor (London: Sutton Publishing, 1989), 1–67, pp. 8–9. Peter Coss draws attention to the 1413 Statute of Additions, which treats yeomen as a distinct class. Peter Coss, 'Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England: The Early Romances, Local Society, and Robin Hood', *Past and Present*, 108.1 (1985), 35–79, pp. 47–48.

¹⁸ Colin Richmond, 'An Outlaw and Some Peasants: The Possible Significance of Robin Hood', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 37 (1993), 90–101, pp. 99–101.

¹⁹ Almond and Pollard, p. 52–53.

²⁰ Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, 'Robin Hood and the Potter: Introduction', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 57–79, p. 57; R. B. Dobson and James Taylor, 'Robin Hood and the Potter (Child 121)', *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, ed. R. B. Dobson and James Taylor (London: Sutton Publishing, 1989), 123–125, p. 123.

at far below their retail value. The sheriff's wife invites the foolish 'potter' to dinner as a gesture of thanks for selling his pots at such a good price, and while dining the 'potter' tells the sheriff that he knows where to find Robin Hood. The next day, the sheriff accompanies the 'potter' into the wood to find Robin Hood, but instead is robbed by Robin and his men and sent home in disgrace on a palfrey—a gift for the sheriff's wife, Robin tells him; a gift which hints at a previous sexual encounter with her. Robin then gives the true potter ten pounds in recompense for what the potter says was, in truth, two nobles (that is, thirteen shillings and four pence) worth of pottery sold the previous day, and sends the potter on his way.²¹

It is possible to see the poem as a diptych comprised of two narrative arcs: 'Robin versus potter' and 'Robin versus sheriff'. Rather than this division, which might suggest a blending of two earlier ballads when the narrative is actually quite cohesive, I view the plot as 'Robin versus potter' followed by 'Robin *as* potter'. In this way, rather than a straightforward narrative of Robin meeting his match followed by Robin outfoxing the sheriff, Robin's disguise has a twofold purpose. First, the disguise enables Robin to outwit his nemesis, the sheriff, in an entertaining trickster tale; secondly, Robin's encounter and identity exchange with the potter sets the two figures in juxtaposition, patrolling the boundary between artisan and yeoman ranks and humorously deriding yeomen for entertaining higher social pretensions. Robin experiments with social positions other than his own (the artisan and the noble) with mixed results, while the potter, who knows and is comfortable in his station, prospers.

Robin, disguised as a potter, is not good at being an artisan: as a yeoman, he is a touch too far up the social scale to perform a potter's role effectively. He demonstrates a contempt for money unsuitable for members of the artisan class. By contrast, the potter is a

²¹ A pound is worth twenty shillings.

character content with his place in society. He knows his business well and his actions do not suggest that he harbours any dreams of social climbing. His (presumably) honest and (comparatively) modest assessment of the expected price of his pots (two nobles), shows a man who seeks to earn an amount appropriate to his social position through honest means. He attempts neither to lie to Robin about the amount he expected to make from their sale nor swindle the townsfolk. The potter does not act above his status, but neither does he consent to pay ‘pavage’ to those whom he views as his near-equals: Robin and his band of yeomen outlaws.²² Most importantly, by observing class boundaries and by refusing to be exploitative, by the end of the narrative the potter makes ten pounds profit and loses nothing.²³

Robin, on the other hand, constantly aspires to a nobler status—such as that of a squire or knight (as suggested by Higden in his *Polychronicon*, mentioned above), but these actions often cost him rather than allowing him to profit from them. For instance, when Robin and the potter come to blows, the potter fights with a staff, while Robin ‘howt with a swerd bent,/ A bokeler en hes honde’.²⁴ The sword and buckler are a knight’s weapons, employed by noble heroes of romance such as *Sir Beves of Hampton*; the staff is a weapon suitable to the potter’s station, as the bow is to the yeoman’s.²⁵ Robin is an exceptional Bowman, as his contest with the sheriff demonstrates, but he overreaches himself by

²² ‘Robin Hood and the Potter’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 57–79, ll. 41–52. Robin’s demand of a toll to pass through the forest places him in a fee-demanding position, comparable with a landowner.

²³ Knight and Ohlgren note that ten pounds would be approximately the equivalent of a year’s salary. ‘Robin Hood and the Potter’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, note to l. 312.

²⁴ ‘Robin Hood and the Potter’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 81–84.

²⁵ *The Romance of Sir Beves of Hamtoun*, ed. Eugen Kölbing and Carl Schmirgel, EETS (London: K. Paul Trench, Trübner, 1885, 1886, 1894), ll. 4339–4342:

Whan þe peple herde þat cri,
 Ðai gonne hem arme hastelie,
 & hii, þat hadde armur non,
 Ðai toke staues & gonne gon.

attempting to fight with the sword and buckler instead of the weapon of his profession or by matching the potter's staff, and thus he resoundingly loses to the potter.²⁶

When the potter agrees to switch roles with Robin, we are told that the potter performs well, stays within the forest, and profits from his day of play-acting as a yeoman with minimal risk to himself. Robin, however, refuses to stay within the conventions of his assumed role as artisan and instead continues to perform mock-chivalric gestures of over-generosity (selling the pots at a too-low price) and exchanging tokens with a lover.²⁷ It is as much to say that the yeoman class is not on a social level with the artisan class (represented by the potter), because when yeomen such as Robin try to pretend to be artisans, their higher status betrays them. However, that status is only slightly above the potter and not as high as a knight or squire: Robin and his men only act in a comic simulacrum of lordly behaviour. Though ultimately successful in his confidence game, he risks wealth, reputation, and his life by play-acting at other social ranks, and damages the wealth, reputation, and marriage of the sheriff, the representative of law and order. One is left with the sense that even if granted full pardon, Robin would not, indeed could not, fit within town society. The yeoman's desire to experiment with ranks other than his own threatens to disrupt society. Moreover, wealth in the *Potter* does not improve character: it cannot buy Robin high rank just as it cannot imbue the sheriff with common sense. For all his disguised antics and

²⁶ Robin Hood and the Potter', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, II. 193–214. May McKisack notes that: Under Edward I's Statute of Winchester (modified in points of detail by the Statutes of Northampton, 1328, and Westminster IV, 1331), laymen between the ages of fifteen and sixty were bound to possess arms, ranging from the helmet, hauberk, and sword of the knight down to the poor man's bow, arrows, and knife. The object of this legislation was, of course, the defence of the realm and the maintenance of the peace. [...] But to arm the population entailed arming its numerous criminals and accustoming ordinary citizens to the expert handling of weapons, a tendency further encouraged by Edward III's exhortations concerning the practice of archery.

May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century 1307–1399* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 203.

²⁷ Robin loses a sum worth more than an average knight's income, as he gives away ten pounds and a typical knight's income by the mid-fourteenth-century was approximately two shillings a day, or £36.5 per annum. McKisack, p. 238. Whilst dressed as the potter Robin still plays at mock-chivalry, first dining with the knighted sheriff, then slipping the sheriff's wife a gold ring (see the section on recognition tokens in the previous chapter on women), and gifting her a palfrey.

cleverness, Robin ultimately ends exactly where he began: he is still an outlaw, and still a yeoman. The boundaries between ranks have been maintained.

The ballad repeatedly stresses Robin's position as a yeoman rather than an outlaw, suggesting the focus of the ballad is on lateral or slight distinctions of rank between yeomen and those just above and just below them on the social scale.²⁸ What is more, from the opening stanza of the ballad to its closing lines, Robin is depicted not as an individual but as a representative of all yeomen. The ballad's opening call is to

Herkens, god yemen,
Comley, corteys, and god,
One of the best that yever bare bowe,
Hes name was Roben Hode

and it closes with an appeal to God to 'haffe mersey on Roben Hodys solle,/ And saffe all god yemanrey'.²⁹ By the end of the ballad, Robin has proved himself clever, resourceful, and bold. Thus it appears on one level that the ballad was intended for a primarily yeoman audience, which would by extension include those of near or similar rank, e.g. merchants, artisans, 'yongmen', and even younger sons of knights.³⁰ But these passages could just as easily be understood as tongue in cheek. Knight and Ohlgren have remarked on the description of Robin in lines nine and ten as a yeoman 'boyt corteys and fre' as pairing 'senses of lordly generosity and yeomanly independence'; 'comley, corteys, and god' may be excessive praise and could easily be read (or delivered) in a tone which would lightly mock yeomen for collectively thinking too highly of themselves. 'Comley' is an adjective

²⁸ Take, for instance, Robin's discussion with the potter on what constitutes 'god yemenry' (fellowship and not hindering good men on their journeys, ll. 85–92), and of the opening and closing lines of the ballad, discussed below. 'Robin Hood and the Potter', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 5–6, 85–96, 322–323.

²⁹ 'Robin Hood and the Potter', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 5–8, 85–92, 322–323.

³⁰ Almond and Pollard, pp. 52–56. 'Many speak of Robin Hood that never bent his bow' was a common proverb. See, for example, John Walsingham, *Friar Daw's Reply*, in *Six Ecclesiastical Satires*, ed. James Dean, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991), 150–200, ll. 232–33; George Ripley, 'The Compound of Alchymie' [1471], *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum, Containing Severall Poeticall Pieces of our Famous English Philosophers, who have written the Hermetique Mysteries in their owne Ancient Language*, ed. Elias Ashmole (London: J. Grismond, 1652), 107–193, p. 175. An early version with Love rather than Robin Hood can be found in Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Troilus and Criseyde', *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 473–585, Bk. II, ll. 855–61.

reserved elsewhere in the ballads for royalty; ‘corteys’ for knights, and Knight and Ohlgren argue that the ballad as a whole ‘show[s] more art than has sometimes been assumed’, not least for its ‘well-maintained level of irony’.³¹ The inclination to read the ballad’s call to a yeoman audience as ironic is compounded by the closing lines to have mercy on Robin’s soul and save all good yeomanry. Robin has, as outlined above, behaved spectacularly poorly: acting as bully, robber, deceiver, and possibly adulterer; a plea to save his and other yeomen’s souls may therefore come across playfully, as rather a satirical plea than a call for blessing. Mocking yeomen for their simulacrum of knightly behaviour and Robin’s social experimentation—a humour more aligned with mid- to upper-gentry sensibilities—while simultaneously providing in the potter a sympathetic character who represents artisans and local merchants (and, of course, Robin as the universally-loved trickster figure), the ballad could readily appeal to a very wide audience, supporting Peter Coss’s argument for ‘cultural diffusion’ of romances and ballads alike.³²

Outlaws, Yeomen, and Merry Men

Robin Hood and the Monk takes a less friendly view of the yeomen outlaws than *Robin Hood and the Potter*. Robin, Little John, Much, and Will Scathlok are characterised less by their cleverness and audacity than their hypocrisy and brutality. Robin claims piety and risks the danger of going to town in order to attend mass; meanwhile his ‘fellows’ impersonate in rapid succession the king’s yeomen foresters, a jailer, and messengers. They kill other men with ease, lie to the king, and display little remorse for breaking several of the commandments: they kill, covet goods and steal them, and bear false witness; that is, they lie. Unlike Robin-as-potter, Little John and Much’s impersonations are successful and

³¹ Knight and Ohlgren, ‘Robin Hood and the Potter: Introduction’, p. 59.

³² Coss, ‘Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England’, pp. 61–65, 72–75.

they blend in to their roles well; they also, importantly, choose roles that share a similar social rank with yeomen foresters.

The *Gest of Robyn Hode* is discussed more fully in section two below, but a few comments on rank, false identity, and social mobility should be made here. Like the potter successfully assimilating to yeoman company for a day, in *A Gest of Robyn Hode* the nobility, sure of their positions, can successfully play-act in other ranks, while Robin pretends to a higher rank and fails. The king can, with some measure of success, temper his actions to fit into the roles at which he plays, temporarily fooling the merry men in his monk's habit and nearly becoming a 'good fellow' himself.³³ Similarly, Sir Richard at the Lee proves able to both uphold the characteristics indicative of his knightly position and, for a time, integrate with the yeomen as a 'gode felawe'.³⁴ The ballad, in this respect, is fairly conservative: one can easily pretend to be a member of a lower class, but not a higher one; as with disguises in the romances, nobility remains an inherited trait that cannot be faked.

Though not in disguise in the *Gest*, Robin does try out different social personae for size with extremely limited success. Robin cannot fit into the social framework of town life, but neither does he feel at home in a higher, courtly social setting. There seems to be no appropriate role for him in civilised social spaces, nor is he willing or able to change his behaviour to conform to these spaces. At court, Robin's lack of economic means quickly renders him burdensome and ineffectual. But more than this, he simply does not feel at home, growing despondent and sighing that he 'longeth sore to Barnesdale'.³⁵ The tension in the plot is introduced and maintained when the outlawed yeomen are trying to mingle with members of other social groups, and resolved when they retreat to the woods,

³³ See chapter one on kings and section two of this chapter, below.

³⁴ 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 90–148, ll. 1465–1640; quote l. 56.

³⁵ 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1765.

physically removing themselves from the alternative social spaces of town, court, and estate. Like Floris dressing as a merchant to slip into enemy territory or Gareth playing the kitchen boy, King Edward and Sir Richard prove able to condescend, to play quite successfully membership of a lower rank for a time, but successful adoption of disguise in the ballads, as in the romances, seems to largely be a one-way street.³⁶ In the *Gest* as in the *Monk*, Robin and his men only successfully pull off disguises when they purport to be men who are, like yeoman, non-noble and at most lower gentry. That Robin and his men may much more easily pretend to belong further down the social ladder than up it in the *Gest*, even more so than in the other ballads, suggests a primary or intended audience somewhat higher than yeomen on the social scale, interested in narratives that secure their superiority while keeping those who threaten to intrude firmly in their place.

Many of the class-conscious hallmarks of these fifteenth-century yeomen outlaws are absent in *The Tale of Gamelyn*, a Middle English outlaw romance composed rather earlier, in the mid-fourteenth century, before the emergence of the rank of yeomanry and the impact of the large-scale social mobility following the Black Death. Gamelyn is the youngest son of a knight and thus socially on a level with, or near-level with, yeomen.³⁷ However, unlike the yeomen outlaws of the above texts, Gamelyn is not characterised by his guile and social pretensions or ambitions, but rather by his guilelessness and his legitimate claim to his father's land. In the late fifteenth-century texts, the yeomen outlaws have agency over their own adventures and choose the roles they pretend to be, unlike knights, who must 'take the adventure' God or fate provides.³⁸ Gamelyn, on the other hand,

³⁶ *Floris und Blancheflur*, ed. Emil Hausknecht (Berlin: Weidman, 1885), ll. 385–416, 563–564; Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. P. J. C. Field, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), I, pp. 224–225.

³⁷ Younger sons could consider themselves yeomen, but the Gamelyn manuscripts refer to him as a 'yonge childe', which Knight and Ohlgren gloss as 'squire'. *The Tale of Gamelyn*, in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 194–219, gloss to l. 190.

³⁸ See chapter three, above.

finds roles unsuited to his rank thrust upon him through a combination of others' deceitfulness, and happenstance. His wicked older brother disinherits him and places him in the kitchens; fleeing his brother's reach, he stumbles across a group of outlaws who, recognising his superiority to them, make him their king. All in all, Gamelyn's tale more strongly echoes the romance of Havelok the Dane than any surviving early poems about Robin Hood. Gamelyn must learn guile to survive and thrive amongst the landed gentry; innocence is saved for franklins, wrestlers, and kitchen boys. The text shares none of the anxieties about social mobility that are so prevalent in the post-Plague outlaw poems: noble rank is depicted as something that cannot be feigned or falsely claimed, and movement on the social ladder is minimal and largely one-way: down.

Trickster of All Ranks, not Hero of One

One of the methods for trying to identify the likely audience of the ballads has been to try to determine who may have considered Robin Hood a hero. The argument has been that if the values which Robin champions also represent those of a specific social class, e.g. yeomen, then the the audience of the ballads would be that group for whom Robin is a hero. Richmond, Almond, and Pollard, for instance, argue that Robin Hood ballads created 'a hero for a new large social group formed a century after the Black Death' (that is, the yeoman class), one who possessed an 'intermediary and transitional status' born of the fourteenth and fifteenth-century 'era of social flux', one of great economic upheaval and of social mobility on a scale unseen in the previous three centuries.³⁹

However, as I have demonstrated above, the ballads do not so much applaud Robin and other yeomen outlaws as they laugh at their inability to fit within preexisting social ranks. Holt argues that 'trickery by disguise and king incognito themes' and generic forest

³⁹ Richmond, pp. 99–101; Almond and Pollard, p. 53.

themes ‘formed a class-less common denominator’ for the ballads, suggesting a wide-ranging audience.⁴⁰ By understanding Robin strictly as a trickster and *not* as an heroic figure, one can see that the ballads are not so much a corpus of hero-tales about and for yeomen-ranked individuals, in the mould of early romances that appeal to a noble audience, but rather are responding to the emerging yeoman class by addressing concerns of all those affected by this new social disruption: the yeomen, certainly, but also those immediately above and below the yeomen in the social hierarchy.

‘Robin Hood,’ Colin Richmond explains, ‘does not seem to me to have been created as an anti-type; he is not deliberately depicted as a not-everything-a-gentleman-is. He is simply a not-gentleman type’.⁴¹ Richmond argues that as Robin ‘is without lineage the test of *his virtue* has to be (and is meant to be) his behaviour’ (emphasis mine). But what are we to make of Robin’s behaviour?⁴² Certainly his sense of rough, vigilante justice is satisfying to audiences who do not make or enforce the law, and especially to those who may have found themselves wronged through an insufficient or corrupt justice system. His prowess with a bow (and with women)⁴³ and his moments of cleverness seem to make him an ideal hero for the new yeoman class. But his cleverness is inconsistent, his skill outmatched as often as not, and he acts more often in his own interests than in others’. To call Robin a ‘hero’ for yeomen or the flexibly non-gentlemen types seems inappropriate, and yet it is a commonly used term.⁴⁴ Adhering to a ‘non-gentleman type’ does not make him a hero for that type, for that is not an ideal. The Robin of the medieval ballads, unlike the Robin of subsequent eras, is not, I argue, a hero, for yeomen or anyone else. This tendency either to

⁴⁰ Holt, ‘The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood’, p. 101.

⁴¹ Richmond, p. 93.

⁴² Richmond, p. 93.

⁴³ ‘For the loffe of owre ladey/ All wemen werschepyd he’, ‘Robin Hood and the Potter’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 11–12.

⁴⁴ Richmond, p. 99; Dobson and Taylor, ‘Introduction’, pp. 32–36; Knight and Ohlgren, ‘General Introduction’, p. 1.

conflate the early modern with the medieval Robin or, more likely, equating protagonism to heroism in the early ballads has done medieval Robin Hood scholarship a disservice, as it obfuscates how socially wide-ranging the audience of the ballads probably was. Robin Hood is a trickster figure, and the values and actions of his character are aligned with that.⁴⁵ His values and actions align with trickster figures in folklore and myth around the world. When understood as such, his actions become entertainment in a way that transcends rank, in contrast to a heroic figure who speaks more narrowly to an audience whose values are more closely align with him.

Robin Hood does not simply share several of the key elements that define a trickster as defined by Lewis Hyde; indeed, the plots of his poems are propelled by these very attributes: a lack of place, greed (which Hyde calls ‘appetite’), a lack of a ‘way’ (in Hyde’s terminology—that is, a set role in society and manner of behaviour considered appropriate to that role), shameless speech, and limited success.⁴⁶ Robin’s outlaw status strips him of a ‘place’, insofar as the wood is a liminal space that does not provide Robin with all that he should need (e.g. a church) and thus he is set ‘wandering’, intruding into society.⁴⁷ His appetite for wealth and status also drives him to act. This desire for wealth and status is not unique to Robin but is represented more intensely in this character than characters such as the sheriff. Robin’s hunger for higher social status and his capacity for deception is greater than other characters (like the sheriff, potter, and higher members of the clergy) who desire the same things but are less willing to push at the boundaries of their social status to acquire it. Robin’s shameless speech, and the shameless speech of his men, show that they are willing and ready to lie about their identities and their purposes without compunction—even

⁴⁵ Knight and Ohlgren discuss Robin as a trickster, though view his trickster qualities as an aspect of his character rather than defining his character.

⁴⁶ Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture* (London: Canongate, 2008), pp. 18, 39, 42–43, 96, 153, 159.

⁴⁷ Hyde, p. 96.

though they simultaneously demand honesty from others (see section two, below). But the most important of these traits (at least, for the purposes of this chapter) are Robin's lack of a 'way' and his limited success in appropriating or mimicking other's 'ways'. Hyde illustrates this 'lack of way' with a recounting of an Okanagan folktale in which Coyote is the trickster:

Kingfisher, Snipe, Polecat, Bear, Muskrat—each of these animals has a way of being in the world; each has his nature. Specifically, each of them has his own way of hunting and, in these stories at least, he is never hungry, because he has that way. Coyote, on the other hand, seems to have no way, no nature, no knowledge. He has the ability to copy the others, but no ability of his own.

This lack has several consequences. For one thing it means, as Carl Jung put it, that trickster is “stupider than the animals.” Animals at least have inborn knowledge, a way of being, and trickster doesn't. [...] Trickster knows none of this, and so ends up hungry [...] What conceivable advantage might lie in a way of being that has no way? A first answer might be that whoever has no way but is a successful imitator will have, in the end, a repertoire of ways. [...] Perhaps having no way also means that a creature can adapt itself to a changing world.⁴⁸

One can easily replace 'Coyote' with 'Robin Hood' and the animals with townsfolk and courtiers, each with his or her own way of making a living. Robin and his men as members of a new social group and thus having, it seems, no consistent or pre-established 'way' of their own, instead experimentally imitate others, accruing 'a repertoire of ways'—with varying degrees of success. Inconsistent success is the hallmark of the 'Robin meets his match' motif found in the *Potter* and the *Gest* and of trickster figures globally. They try out new tricks, imitations, or contests and succeed as often as not. What these early Robin Hood ballads are exploring is how to adapt to a rapidly changing world, and it is the yeoman, that opportunistic chameleon with one foot amongst the tradesmen and artisans and the other in the landed gentry, that stands the most to profit.

⁴⁸ Hyde, pp. 42–43.

Whose Disguise Is It, Anyway? Lying and Deception in *A Gest of Robyn Hode*

In the first chapter of this thesis, I mentioned the role of King Edward as king incognito in the *Gest of Robyn Hode*, a role which highlights the separation between the monarch's self and State persons, and the Bakhtinian sense of release his disguises afford him. In the section below, I will revisit the *Gest* and consider the role of Robin as both deceitful outlaw and, paradoxically, arbiter of honesty, his relationship with the disguised King Edward in fitts seven and eight, and how Robin's self-appointed role as moral judge signposts the structure of the *Gest*. This will raise questions of who really is in disguise, and, beyond the confines of the narrative, how successfully a medieval man can pretend to a higher social status than that of one's birth.

The *Gest* is a hybrid text that is neither quite romance nor quite ballad, but rather weaves together a number of originally distinct ballads together to form an extended narrative. Though Francis Child argues that two separate ballad cycles have been condensed into one narrative with a tripartite structure, Dobson and Taylor argue more persuasively for 'a weaving together of various tales', identifying particularly the tales of the miracle of the Virgin as found in *The Merchant's Surety* c. 1390 and c. 1450, the archery contest episode, and the king-and-subject narrative.⁴⁹ The artistic quality of the *Gest* has been a matter of debate for the past century. Holt claims the ballad with its disjointed fitts and incorporation of other ballad narratives is 'clumsy and artificial'.⁵⁰ However, the theme of hypocritical moral judgement, or moral judgement performed by a culpable individual, mostly provided through the inclusion of the 'test of truth' motif that runs throughout the entire *Gest*,

⁴⁹ Francis Child, '117: A Gest of Robyn Hode', *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. (New York: Dover, 1965), III, 254–256, p. 255; Dobson and Taylor, 'Introduction', p. 37; 'The Merchant's Surety', *Middle English Miracles of the Virgin*, ed. Beverly Boyd (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1964), 44–49.

⁵⁰ J. C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), p. 17. One of Knight and Ohlgren's arguments for an unsophisticated text is its lack of realism (Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, 'A Gest of Robyn Hode: Introduction', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 80–89, p. 81). Given the improbable and even impossible feats and settings in even the more sophisticated romance texts, I consider realism to be an unrealistic expectation.

provides the warp to the source ballads' weft. It flags the text's triune structure, thus supporting D. C. Fowler's argument for neat construction and William Clawson's claims for 'admirable artistic skill'.⁵¹ In the following section I argue that the author's (or authors') treatment of these tales throws a subversive light on the traditional motifs of the king-and-subject ballad (a narrative which hinges on the king-in-disguise motif) and the 'test of truth' motif. The *Gest* demonstrates a level of sophistication, nuance, and even-handedness in its social satire that is atypical of king-and-subject ballads.

The structure of the *Gest* is essentially tripartite, comprising fitts one and two ('Robin and the knight'), fitt five ('Robin and the abbot'), and fitts seven and eight ('Robin and the king'). Fitts four and six (in fitt four: Little John wins an archery contest, plunders a house, and tricks the sheriff; in fitt six: Robin wins an archery contest, escapes prison, and tricks the sheriff) are comedic interludes, and fitt nine, 'Robin's death', is the dénouement. Within fitts seven and eight, 'Robin and the king', another tripartite narrative unfolds: the king as deceitful intruder in Robin's realm; Robin and king as equals of questionable morals; and Robin as former outlaw in the king's realm.

The King-and-Subject Ballad

The taste for king-and-subject ballads flourished in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in England as well as other Western European countries like Scotland and France, adhering to a narrowly uniform set of motifs and characterisations. Five English-language king-and-subject ballads survive: 'Rauf Coilyear', 'King Edward and the Shepherd', 'The King and the Hermit', 'John the Reeve', and 'The King and the Miller', and with the exception of the tale of John the Reeve who possesses higher social status, each narrative

⁵¹ William H. Clawson, *The Gest of Robin Hood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Library, 1909), p. 128; D. C. Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1968), p. 72.

conforms to the following formula: the king is out hunting and becomes separated from his retinue. He spends the night with a subject who, despite his humble appearance, entertains his mysterious noble guest quite hospitably—but with the king’s own game. After-dinner entertainment follows, often in the form of a drinking game.⁵² At some point the host will give the king a courtesy lesson. In the case of Rauf Coilyear, for example, Rauf rebukes the king on two occasions for behaving as host rather than guest, usurping Rauf in his position as host.⁵³ When the king returns to his castle the following morning, the subject is either invited or summoned to appear at court, where he discovers that his guest was none other than the king himself. The subject fears the punishment he will receive for serving poached game but instead is rewarded for his good hospitality, usually with a rise in station. These narratives underscore the majesty and magnanimity of the king, provide humour through individualising his subjects, and suggest to their audiences that good things come to those who are hospitable.

Elizabeth Walsh notes that the primary difference between insular and continental king-and-subject ballads is the former’s emphasis on creating memorable individual characters and the latter’s reverence for the king’s majesty.⁵⁴ On a surface level, fitts seven and eight in the *Gest* follow many of the conventions of the king-and-subject narrative. However, the author(s) repeatedly, consistently twist and undercut these conventions, resulting in a text that, in a Chaucerian fashion, skewers all classes—king, yeoman outlaws, clergy, sheriff, cook, and butler—proving more irreverent than even the insular king-and-subject ballads. Arguably only the poor knight, who still remains a problematic figure, is spared. This near-universal irreverence supports arguments for the gentry as the intended

⁵² Elizabeth Walsh, *The Tale of Ralph the Collier* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 27. In these narratives, the king often fails at these competitions or tasks, thus proving his extraordinary majesty in his inability to perform the ordinary.

⁵³ Elizabeth Walsh, *The Tale of Ralph the Collier*, ll. 118–130, 144–180 in text; Walsh’s commentary p. 7.

⁵⁴ Walsh, *The Tale of Ralph the Collier*, pp. 9–10, 14, 19, 27–28.

primary audience of the *Gest*.⁵⁵ The ballad seems to argue that no one is as good—or bad—as the stereotypes about their social class would initially indicate.

These insular king-and-subject ballads (as, indeed, most continental king-and-subject ballads) begin with the king hunting in the woods and becoming unintentionally separated from his retinue. Like Orfeo in the romance of the same title, he does not deliberately disguise himself; rather, his subject fails to recognise him and the king takes the opportunity to assume a false identity.⁵⁶ This motif highlights the ignorance and humble origins of the subject, imparting to the audience a sense of rural innocence. It also serves to portray the king as a man who, in being willing to suspend—indeed, hide—his royal identity and not demand the deference due his personage for the night, is also gracious, modest, clever, and inquisitive, wishing to know what his subjects truly think of him.

The *Gest* deliberately departs from the traditional motif: Robin is both the hunted and the host, and the king deliberately disguises himself with the express purpose of deceiving Robin and his men. Much of the imagery in this fitt paradoxically figures Robin as the noble within the greenwood and King Edward as the deceitful intruder. As in the opening scenes of fitts one and four (the other ‘plies’ of the *Gest*’s ‘three-ply web’ structure), Robin, adopting an Arthurian custom, refuses to dine before he receives an unusual, unsought-for guest.⁵⁷ Though a yeoman, Robin is depicted in the primary fitts (one, two, five, seven, and eight) as a character with a lordly disposition and noble generosity—though these qualities are not always appreciated by his men (for instance, Little John refuses to carry Robin’s bow). This depiction of Robin is more in keeping with the earlier French

⁵⁵ Coss, ‘Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England’, pp. 76–79. However, as Coss acknowledges, though these ballads may have been written for or largely enjoyed by a gentry audience, any number of other members of a household could have been listening to them if they were read aloud. See also Peter Coss, *The Origins of the English Gentry* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2003), pp. 37, 103, 245.

⁵⁶ For Orfeo, see chapter one, above.

⁵⁷ Child, ‘117: A Gest of Robyn Hode’, III, 254–256, p. 255; Coss, ‘Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England’, p. 69; Aisling Byrne, ‘Arthur’s Refusal to Eat: Ritual and Control in the Romance Feast’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 37 (2011), 62–74, p. 68.

outlaw romances of *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* and *Wistasse li Moine*, or the Dutch *Karel ende Elegast*, which feature clever outlaws of noble rank, rather than the buffoonish colliers, shepherds, and reeves of the Middle English king-and-subject ballads.⁵⁸

The Test of Truth Motif

In the greenwood, Robin assumes lordly roles (feasting, sitting in judgement) that as a yeoman, he would not be in a position to fill if he were at court or in town. This includes placing himself in a quasi-judicial role, setting ethical tests (specifically, against mendacity and greed) for those who enter his greenwood realm and then pronouncing judgement upon them. Though Robin has no qualms about participating in a variety of deceptive and/or immoral behaviours, he demands that others should not lie. In the *Gest*, disguise is an acceptable form of deception that indicates cleverness and instigates comedy, but lying is an offence worthy of punishment. Such punishment is usually swift to follow upon the transgression and tends to be monetary in nature. Robin twice appoints himself as a judge of honest behaviour, forcing travellers to undergo a test of truth. This is not the same kind of truth-test as undergone by knights in the romances: in those, it is usually the knight's fidelity to his lover that is tested, as, for example, when the enchantress Hallewes tries to convince Lancelot to kiss her and compromise his devotion to Guinevere.⁵⁹ Here in the *Gest*, the test of truth takes this form: a person enters the greenwood and is stopped by Robin. Robin asks how much money the traveller has on his person. If the person lies, Robin keeps it all. If the person tells the truth, Robin only confiscates half the amount. In the *Gest*, Robin first employs the test of truth against a monk from St Mary's Abbey, who fails the test to

⁵⁸ *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, ed. E. J. Hathaway, et al. (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1976); *Li romans de Wistasse le Moine: roman du treizième siècle*, ed. D. J. Conlon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972); 'Karel ende Elegast', ed. Bart Besamusca and Hans van Dijk, trans. Thea Summerfield, in *Olifant*, 26.2 (2011), 51–166.

⁵⁹ Malory, pp. 215–216.

the tune of £800. Then, Robin puts the king (who is disguised as an abbot) to the same test. The king, of course, is honest, and loses only twenty pounds.⁶⁰

This motif can be traced back to the earlier French outlaw romance of *Witasse le Moine* (Eustace the Monk). Monk, member of the landowning gentry, outlaw, pirate, and twice-turncoat, Eustace Busket was born c. 1170 near Boulogne. The tales of Eustace the Monk were popular in England: '[a]mong other accounts, now lost, two fourteenth-century chroniclers, John of Canterbury and William of Guisborough, recounted his adventures'.⁶¹ It seems likely that tales of Eustace influenced the author of the *Gest*, though Robin displays a consistent code of conduct and a morally pragmatic nature, while Eustace seems demonically mercurial, stealing and murdering or (less often) showing mercy at whim. While Eustace puts the abbot of Jumièges through the same test of honesty that Robin does to the abbot of St Mary's, his sudden insistence on honesty and a moral code is an atypical episode in the *Witasse li Moine* romance.⁶² Whereas Eustace's actions seem arbitrarily merciful and cruel by turns, Robin is portrayed as correcting clerical avarice where the king's reach fails.

The Anglo-Norman *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, which contains a similar 'test of truth'/'outlaw as judge' episode, is also a source for the Robin Hood tradition. Like Eustace, Fouke Fitz Waryn III was an historical figure, outlawed by King John from c. 1200 to 15 November 1203. The romance survives in British Library, Royal 12.C.XII, 'a miscellany of works in Latin, French, and English, dating from c. 1325–40'.⁶³ In this 'test of truth'

⁶⁰ £800 is ridiculously exorbitant, but £40 is well under the amounts some outlaws were making from highway robberies at that time. For examples of amounts historical outlaws made from robberies and extortions, see Stones, pp. 122, 133; Bellamy, pp. 706–708; Summerson, p. 205.

⁶¹ R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 117; Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, 'Robyn Hod and Shryff of Nottingham: Introduction', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 269–274, p. 272.

⁶² *Li romans de Witasse le Moine*, ll. 1742–77; for an English translation, see Glyn Burgess, *Two Medieval Outlaws* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 61, 71.

⁶³ Stephen Knight, 'Fouke le Fitz Waryn: Introduction', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 687–692, p. 687.

episode, some merchants are travelling through the woods with rich cloth to trade on behalf of King John:

[...] sire Fouke e sa compaignie, e assaylerent les marchantz, e yl se defendyrent mout vigerousement. Au dreyne se rendirent, quar force lur fist ce fere. Fouke les mena en la foreste, e yl ly conterent qe marchantz le roy erent, e quant Fouke ce enteny, mout fu lee, e lur dist: “Sire marchantz, si vous perdisiez cest avoyr, sur qy tornereit la pierre ? Dite moi le veyr.” “Sire,” font yl, “si nous le perdisoms par nostre coardise ou par nostre vaveise garde demeyne, la pierre tornereit sur nous, e, si en autre manere le perdisoms, en peril de mer ou par force de gentz, la pierre tornereit desuz le roy.” “Ditez vous le voyr ?” “Oyl, sire,” fount yl. Sire Fouke, quant enteny qe la pierre serreit al roy, donqe fist mesurer le riche drap e riche pelure par sa launce, e si vesti tous ceux qe ou ly furent, petit e grantz, de cel riche drap, e dona a chescun solum ce qu’il estoit ; mes mesure avoit chescun assez large. De l’autre aver prist chescun a volenté.

Quant il fust avespré, e les marchauntz aveynt bien mangé, si les comanda a Dieu, e pria qu’il saluasent le roy de par Fouke [le] fitz Waryn, qe ly mercia mout de ces bones roes. Fouke ne nul dé suens, de tot le tens qu’il fust exilee, unqe ne voleint damage fere a nully si noun al roy e a ces chevalers.

[...] Sir Fouke and his company came up and attacked the merchants, who defended themselves with great vigour. In the end they surrendered, for they were forced to do so. Fouke took them into the forest and they told him that they were the king’s merchants. [...] ‘Lord merchants, if you lost these goods, who would suffer the loss? Tell me the truth.’ ‘Lord,’ they said, ‘if we lost them through our cowardice or through want of proper care, we would suffer the loss, and if we lost them in any other way, though peril at sea or by force, the loss would be the king’s. ‘Are you telling the truth?’ ‘Yes, lord,’ they said. When Sir Fouke heard that the loss would be the king’s he used his lance to measure the rich cloth and the costly furs, and he clothed in this rich cloth all those who were with him, great or small, and gave to each according to his rank. But each man had a liberal allowance. Each one took what he wanted from the rest of the goods.

When evening came and the merchants had eaten well, he entrusted them to God and asked them to greet the king on behalf of Fouke Fitz Waryn, who thanked him warmly for his fine robes. During the whole period of his exile, neither Fouke nor any of his men ever attempted to harm anyone other than the king and his knights.⁶⁴

Here, Fouke is concerned not so much with judging the honesty of the merchants as with ensuring that only the king suffers from his theft of their goods. As King John has wrongfully

⁶⁴ *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, ed. E. J. Hathaway, et al. (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1976), p. 27; English translation from Glyn Burgess, ‘The Romance of Fouke Fitz Waryn’, *Two Medieval Outlaws: Eustace the Monk and Fouke Fitz Waryn* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), 134–192, p. 153.

and spitefully outlawed the marcher lord Fouke, this episode (amongst others) illustrates Fouke's nobility. Fouke maintains larger principles of justice by ensuring it is only the king who will suffer financial losses.

Robin's sense of ethics as depicted in his 'test of truth' episodes of the *Gest* is situated between Eustace's capriciousness and Fouke's uprightness: he is depicted neither as a villain nor wronged hero, but as a more protean figure. Like King Edward, he and Little John regard lies as significant ethical breaches while accepting, forgiving, and even participating in other forms of deception (particularly disguise). As a king, Edward especially is more apt to employ ambiguity about the truth than to tell an outright lie, even while trying to maintain his disguise.

Placing value on words is common in romances: upholding one's oath, fulfilling a rash boon, and misleading truths as a mark of cleverness. Clever wording and 'technical' honesty are associated with the sharp-wittedness of noble characters: for instance, Orfeo's self-identification as 'a harper of heathenness' and his equivocations discussed in chapter one. Robin demonstrates a similar skill in verbal trickery: he tricks the sheriff into entering the greenwood, coerces promises from him, and sneaks into town to participate in an archery challenge, yet he is gravely affronted when the abbot lies to his face and the sheriff breaks his word to him. Both the ballads and romances suggest that disguise, if one is famous or infamous enough to need to assume it, can be penetrated if another person is clever enough, but lies are more difficult to discern; telling a simple lie is easier to do than successfully carrying off a false identity. Lying is both common and uninteresting: anyone may tell a lie, but takes cleverness and ingenuity to pull off a disguise.

Robin may not be the thug that Eustace is, but his decision to take half of the 'honest monk's' (king's) money proves he is not truly noble as he pretends. He rights what he views to be wrongs according to a personal rather than legal sense of justice, and delights less in

cruelty (like Eustace) or conscientious outlawry (like Fouke) than in mischief (e.g. his capturing of the sheriff in fitt six or his carousing through the town with the king in fitt eight). Though he is not above murdering a foe—he shoots the sheriff and cuts off his head—he only does so when the sheriff breaks his earlier oath to Robin and tries to kill him.⁶⁵ Rather, Robin pretends to lordliness as much as Edward plays at being a monk, and, later, at outlawry. His grand gesture, his imitation of Arthur demanding an unusual guest before he dines is another example of his noble pretensions. The difference lies in the effectiveness of the deception: while Edward puts on a disguise and deceives those around him, all the while knowing who he really is, Robin plays at lordliness, deceiving no one but himself.

The King in Disguise and Robin Unmasked

When Robin puts the king (who is disguised as an abbot) to the same test of truth to which he has put the abbot of St Mary's Abbey, the king is placed in a subordinate position on two levels: Robin is not only his host but his judge. The king responds honestly that he carries 'but forty ponde' on his person, and his offer to share half with Robin is deemed acceptable by the outlaw and carried out immediately, with Robin patronizingly permitting the king to 'have this [twenty pounds] for your spendyng'.⁶⁶ Though the king has not lied about the amount of money he is carrying (which is more virtue than the abbot can claim), this honesty is immediately undercut by a reminder of the king's disguise. Edward tells Robin:

But well the greteth Edwarde, our kynge,
And sent to the his seale,
And byddeth the com to Notyngham,
Both to mete and mele.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1385–1392.

⁶⁶ 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, l. 1521; 1521–1532.

⁶⁷ 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1533–1536.

It is important to note here that Edward is not lying. He is, however, maintaining his disguise with clever sidestepping, equivocation, and verbal play, much as other kings in romances do to avoid detection in their disguises.⁶⁸ The king notably receives no courtesy lesson in fitt seven of the *Gest*, as is otherwise typical in king-and-subject ballads; he has behaved correctly throughout his forest sojourn. As an exemplary king, Edward never needed to learn a lesson in the first place. Moreover, Edward's honesty regarding the amount of money he is carrying on his person undercuts the deceitfulness of his disguise: the incorporation of the test of truth motif shows the king as an honest person, and his disguise does not undermine his moral superiority. The king's disguises are employed for investigative purposes and for Bahktinian carnivalesque release, both of which support his continued practice of good kingship. Edward's honest account of the amount of money on his person provides the conclusion to the recurrent 'test of truth' motif and theme of verbal and economic honesty that unites the three main narrative episodes of the *Gest*. His disguise does not carry the ill consequences that lying and avarice do. In matters of deception, disguise, it seems, is a gentleman's game; lying, in contrast, a common vice.

As Edward neither needs nor receives a courtesy lesson in the *Gest*, Robin's performance of lordship and judgement is comedically inappropriate and parodic. Justice is best meted out by the king. Robin's version of the administration of justice and the re-balancing of Church and secular power is at least safely contained within the greenwood space. What Edward *is* impressed by, however, is the loyalty Robin inspires amongst his men. The yeomen present to the king a different social model, one which upends the social hierarchies found in more urban contexts: a model of loyal comradeship amongst the yeomen, with Robin as *primus inter pares*.

⁶⁸ See chapter one.

When the king reveals himself, it is Robin who ought to receive a lesson in recognising nobility—both in the sense of disguise-recognition and in the sense of showing deference to the king. In the traditional king-and-subject ballad model, the king’s revelation of his identity signals a restoration of the social order, and the previously impudent subject reforms himself and consequently shows proper deference to his social betters. Robin, however, seems to learn little from his king-and-subject encounter: though rewarded for his hospitality with a purse and a position at court, he swiftly squanders the money and returns to his outlaw life. Even when offered a pardon and a courtly position, Robin is reluctant to accept it and, unlike his king-and-subject counterparts who rejoice in their good fortune, honestly but impudently tells King Edward:

I wyll come to your courte,
 Your servyse for to se,
 And brynge with me of my men
 Seven score and thre.
 But [Unless] me lyke well your servyse,
 I come agayne full soone,
 And shote at the donne dere,
 As I am wonte to done.⁶⁹

The text makes clear that both the yeoman social model and Robin’s noble aspirations are unsustainable in an urban setting: Robin is an outlaw yeoman through and through, and ultimately abandons his experimentation with courtly life to return to the Barnsdale woods. While Robin imitates the manners of such figures as Fouke and Elegast in *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* or *Karel ende Elegast*, who are wrongfully outlawed lords, the humour lies in that Robin is not wrongfully outlawed, but rather he very much enjoys his life in the greenwood, and when given a choice between honesty and outlawry, ultimately prefers the latter.

For Edward, outlawry is a disguise that he can shed after a night of revelry; for Robin, it is his entire social identity. Thus, while Edward *is* noble and can *play* the rioter,

⁶⁹ ‘A Gest of Robyn Hode’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1661–1669.

Robin can only pretend lordliness, in a social impersonation that cannot be sustained in the traditional social hierarchy that defines the town and court; it only works amongst other yeomen in the liminal space of the greenwood. Robin judges and punishes people for their dishonesty, and rewards those who, like Sir Richard at the Lee, act with chivalry and generosity, but—hypocritically—he does not hold himself to the same standards, just as the abbot of St Mary’s professes clerical ideals of charity and poverty but possesses great quantities of cash and acts avariciously. As a yeoman, occupying an ambiguous and rising social position, Robin may exhibit intermittent social pretensions to courtliness, but he cannot disguise his baser nature. His and his fellow yeomen’s alternative social model of behaviour, both pseudo-lordly and hypocritically deceitful, has no place in the ‘real’ world of town and court.

Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne

Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne has largely remained an enigma to scholars, who have frequently remarked on its unsettling exchange between Robin and Guy but have struggled to discern the scene’s significance. Most have acknowledged its ‘grim’ nature and ‘exceptionally violent tone’ but have otherwise skirted analysis of Robin’s brutality and Guy’s odd horse-hide clothing.⁷⁰ Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren remark that ‘both ritual and savagery seem to be invoked’, and Knight suggests that Robin’s actions ‘tap into some sort of ancient ferocity’, but they have not elucidated the text much further.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Holt, *Robin Hood*, pp. 35–36; R. B. Dobson and James Taylor, ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne (Child 118)’, *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, ed. R. B. Dobson and James Taylor (London: Heinemann, 1976), 140–145, p. 141; Stephen Knight, ‘Bold Robin Hood: The Structures of a Tradition’, *Southern Review*, 20 (1987), 153–167, p. 154.

⁷¹ Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne: Introduction’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 169–172, p. 170; Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, p. 57.

Wandering through the forest, Robin chances upon Guy, a bounty hunter dressed in a full ‘capull-hyde’ (horse hide) including ‘[t]op and tayle and mayne’.⁷² Guy, unaware of to whom he is speaking, informs Robin that he has been seeking the outlaw. Robin, as is his custom in other ballads, treats Guy courteously and offers to engage with him in an archery competition. But when Robin reveals his name, swords are drawn and Robin kills Guy.⁷³ Robin then proceeds to mount Guy’s head on his bow, deface the head with an ‘Irish kniffe’, and exchange clothes with the corpse.⁷⁴ Disguised as Guy, Robin enters Barnesdale and the text ends with Robin rescuing Little John from the clutches of the sheriff.

Knight and Ohlgren see in Robin’s violence and appropriation of Guy’s horse hide an ‘ancient’ and ‘mythic’ ritualism, and the clothing exchange as indicative of Robin’s ‘understanding’ and ‘appropriation’ of his enemies’ ‘own ritual costume’, but do not elaborate on what that understanding is, or in what ritual Guy is participating.⁷⁵ R. H. Hilton and Joanna Szwed-Śliwowska, in contrast, see nothing unusual in the atrocities Robin commits upon Guy’s corpse, describing the scene as typical medieval violence to which ‘the medieval audience was accustomed’, violence that perturbs only the squeamish modern reader.⁷⁶ Great acts of violence are certainly common in medieval romance and hagiography, but these acts are rarely committed upon the already dead. There is a barbarity in desecrating bodies that is not attained in decapitating or cleaving one’s living opponent from crown to saddle in the midst of battle. Hector may kill 31,000 Greek warriors, but it is

⁷² ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 169–183, l. 30.

⁷³ ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 139–162.

⁷⁴ ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 163–178, qt. l. 167.

⁷⁵ Knight and Ohlgren, ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne: Introduction’, pp. 169–170.

⁷⁶ Hilton, ‘The Origins of Robin Hood’, pp. 35–36; Joanna Szwed-Śliwowska, ‘The Dark Shade of Lincoln Green: Violence, Cruelty, and Anger in the Robin Hood Legend’, *Anglica*, 1 (2012), 117–132, pp. 119–121, qt. p. 121.

he who numbers amongst the Nine Worthies and Achilles who goes beyond the pale when he desecrates Hector's body, dragging it around the city walls.⁷⁷

Stuart Kane and Renée Ward have both approached the ballad with the assumption that the horse-hide clothing/disguise and the violence enacted upon Guy's body must be directly linked.⁷⁸ Their resulting readings are both problematic as in each the significance of the horse hide and the intention behind Robin's and Guy's actions are required to shift several times throughout the scene in order to accommodate these interpretations (discussed below). The presence of the unusual horse hide clothing has misdirected modern readers, obscuring the purpose of Robin's decapitation and defacing of Guy. If the horse hide and the violence are treated as fundamentally separate matters that are only loosely entwined, two straightforward explanations for the unusual clothing and the 'ritualistic' violence reveal themselves, with no discernable linkage. Incorporating the findings of a 2017 archaeological discovery, I shall present a comprehensive explanation for the hitherto enigmatic ballad, as the mutilation of the corpse aligns with contemporary practices for laying to rest the revenant dead. This inclusion of fears of the revenant dead fits with the ballad's Yorkshire setting and its possible origin dates. In addition, the horse-hide disguise chimes with other medieval and early modern tales of wrapping shrewish women in horse-hides to effect submission to their husbands, and thus, I suggest, signals to the reader Guy's weak, effeminate even, subservience to his master, the sheriff.

⁷⁷ Gaius Julius Hyginus, *Fabulae*, ed. Peter K. Marshall (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2002), CXV.1. In the *Laud Troy Book*, it is Troilus's body and not Hector's that Achilles desecrates; this act is still considered a 'dede foule a-gramed' of 'schame & vylony'. *The Laud Troy Book*, ed. J. Ernst Wülfing, EETS (London: Trübner, 1902), ll. 14885–14950, qt. ll. 14962, 14897.

⁷⁸ Renée Ward, "'Thou Shalt Have the Better Cloathe": Reading Second Skins in *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*', *Flying in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Cambridge: Brewer, 2017), 349–365, p. 350; Stuart Kane, 'Horseplay: Robin Hood, Guy of Gisborne, and the Neg(oti)ation of the Bestial', *Robin Hood in Popular Culture*, ed. Thomas Hahn (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 101–110, pp. 106–110.

The Revenant Dead

Tales of the revenant dead, ‘historical’ and literary, are in widespread evidence throughout medieval Europe.⁷⁹ In England, explanations of how a revenant is created and solutions to prevent, incapacitate, or lay the individuals to rest, and archaeological evidence for attempting such, are in evidence from the early medieval period up to at least the fifteenth century, including around Yorkshire—not far from the proposed date of origin of *Guy of Gisborne*, and where the ballad is set.⁸⁰ In addition to evidence of actual belief in revenants, tales of ghosts and the reanimated dead were also told for entertainment. The Byland Abbey Tales collected from locals by a Cistercian monk c. 1400 reflect a widespread interest in and tradition of tales of ghosts and revenants in Northern Yorkshire.⁸¹ Andrew Joynes notes that

the monk of Byland seems to have been more concerned to record the eerie, grotesque, and fantastic details of ghostly occurrences than to draw moral

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Hrappr in *Laxdæla saga*: ‘The Saga of the People of Laxardal’, trans. Keneva Kunz, *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders including 49 Tales*, ed. Viðar Hreinsson, 5 vols. (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), V, 1–120, p. 19, (c. 1230–1260); Glámr and Kárr in *Grettis saga*: ‘The Saga of Grettir the Strong’, trans. Bernard Scudder, *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders including 49 Tales*, ed. Viðar Hreinsson, 5 vols. (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), II, 49–191, pp. 74–75, 100–107, (c. 1320); the Byland Abbey tales (c. 1400, Yorkshire) in M. R. James, ‘Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories’, *English Historical Review*, 37 (1922), 413–422; English translation in Andrew Joynes, *Medieval Ghost Stories: An Anthology of Miracles, Marvels and Prodigies* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), pp. 166–174; William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, ed. Richard Howlett, Rolls Series 82, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1884–5), 1: 1–408; 2: 409–500; for an English translation, see Joseph Stevenson, *The Church Historians of England*, 5 vols. (London: Seeley, 1861), IV, part ii, (c. 1198, Yorkshire); Cf. Stephen Gordon, ‘Social Monsters and the Walking Dead in William of Newburgh’s *Historia rerum Anglicarum*’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 41.4 (2015), 446–465; and Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, revised by C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), II.27, pp. 202–205 (c. 1182); cf. Stephen Gordon, ‘Monstrous Words, Monstrous Bodies: Irony and the Walking Dead in Walter Map’s *De Nugis Curialium*’, *English Studies*, 96.4 (2015), 379–402; Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, in *Ottoman Germany: The Chronicon of Theitmar of Merseburg*, trans. David A. Warner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), I.11–14 and VII.32–33, pp. 75–78 and 329–330, (c. 1009–1018); Jean de Mailly, *Abrégé des gestes et miracles des saints*, ed. Antoine Dondaine (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1947), cxix.16, (c. 1250); and Thomas de Cantimpré, ‘Bonum universale de apibus’, *Thomæ Cantimpratani, S. Th. Doctoris, Ordinis S. Dominici, et Episcopi Suffraganei Cameracensis, Miraculorum, et exemplorum memorabilium sui temporis, libri duo [...]* (Duaci: Baltazar Bellerus, 1597), ii.57.8, p. 452, (c. 1257–1263). These texts’ tales of the revenant are disseminated further in Nancy Caciola, ‘Revenants, Resurrection, and Burnt Sacrifice’, *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, 3.2 (2014), 311–338; Nancy Caciola, ‘Wraiths, Revenants, and Ritual in Medieval Culture’, *Past and Present*, 152 (1996), 3–45; and Jacqueline Simpson, ‘Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England’, *Folklore*, 114.3 (2003), 389–402.

⁸⁰ Caciola, ‘Wraiths, Revenants, and Ritual in Medieval Culture’, pp. 3–45; S. Mays, R. Fryer, A. W. G. Pike, M. J. Cooper, and P. Marshall, ‘A Multidisciplinary Study of a Burnt and Mutilated Assemblage of Human Remains from a Deserted Mediaeval Village in England’ *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*, 16 (2017), 441–455, pp. 452–453; James, pp. 413–422; Joynes, pp. 166–174; Simpson, ‘Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England’, pp. 394–397.

⁸¹ Joynes, pp. 166–174; James, pp. 413–422.

conclusions from his stories. In that sense, these fragments of popular legend, written down by the person to whom they were recounted in the neighbourhood where the various spirits supposedly appeared, bear a basic resemblance to the modern notion of a ghost story as an entertaining narrative which can be both frightening and enjoyable.⁸²

According to several medieval accounts across Yorkshire, England, and indeed western Europe, a revenant can be created when a person of bad character suffers a sudden and/or violent death without opportunity for absolution.⁸³ The body is then either inhabited by a demon or the person's own spirit returns to the corpse, the latter more often than the former.⁸⁴ Usually the revenant then wreaks havoc on locals or those whom the individual believes to have done them wrong whilst they were living.⁸⁵ Guy fulfils the requirements of both malevolent character and violent death. Robin denounces Guy for having 'beene a traytor all thy liffe', and Guy equally brags of having 'done many a curst turne'.⁸⁶ He violates hospitality laws and other somewhat-chivalric values held in high regard across the outlaw ballads: for example, when Guy attacks Robin, his host. When Robin stumbles on a root, Guy discourteously takes the opportunity to strike his opponent whilst he is down.⁸⁷ Knight and Ohlgren see in Guy 'some resonances of the devil in Chaucer's *Friar's Tale*'; a

⁸² Joynes, pp. 166–167.

⁸³ Caciola, 'Revenants, Resurrection, and Burnt Sacrifice', p. 319; Caciola, 'Wraiths, Revenants, and Ritual in Medieval Culture', pp. 18–20, 23; Simpson, 'Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England', pp. 393, 395.

⁸⁴ 'The demonic-possession school of thought about revenants [...] was distinctly a minority viewpoint', Caciola, 'Wraiths, Revenants, and Ritual in Medieval Culture', p. 19.

⁸⁵ Caciola, 'Wraiths, Revenants, and Ritual in Medieval Culture', pp. 16, 17, 19; Gordon, 'Monstrous Words, Monstrous Bodies', pp. 389–390. Gordon cites examples from Herman of Bury's *Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey*, the *Vita et Miracula S. Kenelmi*, and William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regnum Anglorum* and *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*.

⁸⁶ 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 165, 136. When they come to blows, Ward suggests it is Guy's blade which is 'browne' with old bloodstains whilst Robin's, by contrast, is 'bright', underlining the moral discrepancies between Guy's and Robin's characters. While this reading does support the author's portrayal of Guy as a sinister character, I am not convinced this is actually what is meant by 'blades both browne and bright'. Knight and Ohlgren gloss 'browne' as 'bloodstained', and it is on their glossing that Ward relies. However, Dobson and Taylor gloss 'browne' as 'gleaming', which is in keeping with both the *Middle English Dictionary*'s definition of 'browne' as an adjective when describing swords and corresponds with the use of 'browne/broune' when describing swords in Middle English romances. 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, p. 177, l. 146, gloss in margin; Ward, p. 359; Dobson and Taylor, 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne (Child 118)', p. 144, n. 1; 'broun, n. 5', *Middle English Dictionary* (University of Michigan Press, July 2019) <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary>>.

⁸⁷ 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 151–154.

‘personal enemy’ of Robin’s, ‘with a vengeful, almost diabolic character, and his humiliation and destruction are an essential part of the story’.⁸⁸ Knight writes:

In his horse-hide and with his skills, Guy seems to represent a false forester, one who acts on his own, seeks money and, through his costume appears to use deception in someway [sic]. He is implicitly a false comrade as they walk, shooting, and through the woods, a familiar mode of friendly activity in the ballads. Robin, though, represents a world of true value, in green, despising money, rescuing his comrade, praying to our lady, and so personifying a fully natural version of the free hero as he is conceived in these ballads.⁸⁹

Thus when Robin unintentionally kills Guy with ‘an awkward stroke’ of his sword, Robin is right to worry that Guy may rise again.⁹⁰ That Guy, as a fellow yeoman who has aligned himself with the sheriff, is a personal enemy of Robin’s, is certain, though for the revenant-ritual reasons stated above I disagree with Knight and Ohlgren that the humiliation of Guy via destruction of his corpse is part of Robin’s agenda.

Throughout England and other parts of Europe, ‘[m]ethods of dealing with the undead involved physical and/or spiritual means, with an emphasis on the former’.⁹¹ Decapitation was the most common method.⁹² Additional mutilation of the corpse was also often deemed essential, as ‘it is only in the liminal period between death and the decay of the flesh that the body poses a threat’.⁹³ In *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, Robin fulfils these requirements for ‘rendering unrecognisable’ Guy’s body: after decapitating Guy’s corpse,

Robin pulled forth an Irish kniffe,
And nicked Sir Guy in the face,
That hee was never on a woman borne

⁸⁸ Knight and Ohlgren, ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne: Introduction’, pp. 170, 171.

⁸⁹ Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 58.

⁹⁰ ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, l. 161–162.

⁹¹ Mays et al., p. 452.

⁹² Simpson, ‘Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England’, p. 393. Cf. Darren Oldridge, *Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and Other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 67; and Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 25.

⁹³ Mays et al., p. 452; Simpson, ‘Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England’, p. 393.

Cold tell who Sir Guye was.⁹⁴

Bones from a recent archaeological dig in Wharram Percy, a village in northern Yorkshire show evidence of similar attempts to lay to rest the revenant dead.⁹⁵ Attempts were made through burning and knife-work to ‘render unrecognisable the fleshy parts’ of the corpses, particularly around their faces and heads, while the lack of knife marks around the meatier areas of the body (e.g. the torso and limbs) rule out any possibility of cannibalism.⁹⁶ The bodies range in date from the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, suggesting that the Wharram Percy community’s belief in the revenant dead and in the efficacy of decapitation and defacement in negating the ability of a corpse to rise again was sustained by the community over several centuries.⁹⁷ *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* was composed in and is set in Yorkshire, and the poem dates from 1475 at the very latest, though several scholars have suggested an earlier date.⁹⁸ The Byland Abbey tales, written around 1400, were composed and set in an area in Yorkshire about twenty-six miles from Wharram Percy.⁹⁹

In the ballad, Robin reinforces his ritualistic mutilation with a speech act, a command-cum-wish formula in which he bids the corpse to ‘lye there, lye there, good Sir

⁹⁴ ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 167–170.

⁹⁵ Mays, et al, p. 452.

⁹⁶ Mays et al., p. 452.

⁹⁷ Mays, et al., pp. 450, 452.

⁹⁸ As noted in the introduction of this thesis, while the copy of this poem dates from the mid-seventeenth century, it shares the plot and similar phrasing to the play ‘Robyn Hod and the Shryff off Notyngnam’, which was produced by the Paston family in 1475. Helen Phillips notes that the text is ‘linguistically indicative of medieval origin’, and has argued persuasively for its inclusion in the medieval corpus of Robin Hood poems. Knight and Ohlgren agree that it ‘may well date from the fifteenth century’ with little change to its present form, and Child and Fowler consider it to be ‘one of the earliest Robin Hood ballads’. Helen Phillips, ‘Review of *Early Rymes of Robin Hood: An Edition of the Texts, ca. 1425–1600*, ed. by Thomas H. Ohlgren and Lister M. Matheson’, *Speculum*, 92.3 (2017), 871–873, p. 873; Knight and Ohlgren, ‘Robyn Hod and the Shryff off Notyngnam: Introduction’, pp. 269–270; Knight and Ohlgren, ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne: Introduction’, p. 169; Francis Child, ‘118: Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne’, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. (New York: Dover, 1965), III, pp. 89–91, p. 278; D. C. Fowler, ‘Ballads’, *The Manual of Writings in Middle English 1050–1550*, ed. A. D. Hartung, et al., 11 vols. (New Haven, Connecticut: Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1980), VI, 1753–1808, p. 1782.

⁹⁹ James, p. 414; Simpson, ‘Repentant Soul or Walking Corpse? Debatable Apparitions in Medieval England’, pp. 394–397; an English translation can be found in Joynes, pp. 166–174.

Guye,/ And with me be not wrothe'.¹⁰⁰ Robin fears that Guy's spirit has sufficient cause to return, and thus has performed all acts available to him as a non-cleric (i.e. he cannot give absolution) to prevent Guy from becoming one of the revenant dead: 'efforts to destroy the integrity of the corpse', speech acts to solidify that action, and, in gifting Guy 'the better cloathe' (that is, Robin's own clothes) as a covering for his corpse in exchange for the horse hide, an attempted appeasement of the deceased.¹⁰¹ Of course, true to Robin's enterprising character, the exchange of green forester's clothing for Guy's horse hide also benefits himself, providing a disguise with which he can deceive the sheriff and rescue Little John.

The Capull-Hyde

Interpretations of the 'capull-hyde' (horse hide) that Robin takes off Guy have posited a parallel between Guy and Robin and the hunter-hunted relationship; homoeroticism; and knightly social aspirations. To uphold these interpretations requires the reader to make unwarranted assumptions or logical leaps for which there is insufficient evidence in the text, or for the horse hide to take on multiple, shifting significances within the space of a few lines. As there are limited but very various set of critical responses to this enigmatic episode, below I summarise and critique some of the prevailing explanations offered for this motif.

Hunting Rituals

Stuart Kane sees in the death and dismemberment of Guy a perversion of the medieval hunt: Guy becomes 'the hunted body', and his dismemberment 'can be read as a

¹⁰⁰ 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 171-172. Not recognising Robin's actions as anti-revenant precautions, Dana Symons has (mis)interpreted this line as Robin 'taunting' Guy's body. Dana Symons, 'Relishing the Kill', *Robin Hood in Outlaw/ed Spaces: Media, Performance, and Other New Directions*, ed. Lesley Coote and Valerie Johnson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), Ch. 9, para. 7-8 [Legal Deposit].

¹⁰¹ Mays et al., p. 452; 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, l. 174.

perverse representation of “breaking” and cleaning one’s prey’.¹⁰² Kane cites Robin’s mutilation of Guy’s body combined with Guy’s animal clothing as the foundation for his argument. The ballad does incorporate elements of the hunt (e.g. the horn blast Robin gives whilst disguised as Guy to alert the sheriff to ‘Robin’s’ death) but the problems with reading this encounter as a hunter-prey narrative, even a hunter-turned-prey narrative, are manifold.

Who is the hunter? Guy, who seeks to bring Robin to the sheriff, or Robin, who ultimately kills Guy and mounts his head? Who is the (supposed) prey? Guy cloaked in his animal skin or Robin the wolf’s-head? It is difficult to discern as there is no chase. Robin comes across Guy it seems almost by happenstance and they engage in a friendly shooting game alongside each other. They come to blows in almost knightly fashion, only when Robin has revealed his name. To cast this as a hunter-prey narrative would be to equally cast King Edward and Robin’s encounter in the *Gest* as such, as it follows a strikingly similar narrative pattern. Moreover, the horse is a domestic beast of toil, not a wild animal associated with the hunt. A hart, boar, or bear hide would support a hunter-prey parallel; the horse hide does not permit the sort of theriomagical/therianthropic slippage of wild or noble attributes that would support a hunter-prey reading of Guy’s clothing and Robin’s savagery.

The grounds for this kind of reading must then rest upon Robin’s desecration of Guy’s body, a desecration which does not ‘reflect directly the procedures of’ ‘a precise and nearly ritual process detailed in the Middle English hunting manuals as well as in literary forms’, as Kane argues.¹⁰³ In fact, it hardly reflects those procedures at all. When a hunter (or, on a noble hunt, a yeoman forester) breaks a prize, the areas of most value for meat are the torso and limbs.¹⁰⁴ Robin restricts his attentions to Guy’s head and face—an area more

¹⁰² Kane, ‘Horseplay’, p. 109.

¹⁰³ Kane, ‘Horseplay’, p. 109; Kane cites *Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* as examples of these ‘literary forms’.

¹⁰⁴ While breaking and cleaning was done by noblemen on the continent, English practice left the task to yeomen foresters. Almond, p. 80. See also Edward of Norwich, *The Master of Game*, ed. W.A. and F. Baillie-Grohman (Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press, 2005), pp. 176–177.

associated with identity than corporality.¹⁰⁵ In other literary inclusions of a hunting scene, the hunting procedures outlined in the manuals are either closely adhered to or broken with deliberate authorial intent to humorously denote a lack of education or nobility, such as found in the quartering scene in *Tristan*.¹⁰⁶ Even if the author was uninitiated in the correct procedures, '[t]he procedural way of breaking a carcass is simply the best way of tackling a not too difficult problem, the requirements being a good sharp, strong knife, patience and a minimum of training. In fact, confronted with such a task, by the nature of the anatomy of the animal, an intelligent person would almost inevitably follow the main logical steps as detailed in the hunting manuals'.¹⁰⁷ In *Guy of Gisborne*, Robin is characterised by his capability and quick thinking. The audience is never invited to laugh at Robin's savagery of Guy's corpse, suggesting that a 'perverse representation of "breaking" and cleaning' prey is not what the author had in mind when composing the scene.¹⁰⁸

Kane sees in the decapitation and flaying not humour, but humiliation. Unlike in the medieval hunt where the stag or boar is treated as a noble creature worthy of pursuit, Kane writes that 'Robin-as-hunter humiliates and defiles his prey; upon Guy's death, Robin violently destroys rather than carefully preserves the body'.¹⁰⁹ Hunted animals, particularly large ones like the boar or the hart, were treated with great respect.¹¹⁰ Robin humiliating his prey would be out of keeping with medieval literary tradition and with Robin's canonical character. Robin, for his many faults, is not portrayed in the tradition as a villain, but rather he is often depicted mirroring chivalric or courtly behaviour, to either noble or ironic comedic effect. In the *Gest*, Robin feasts, grants livery, maintains the loyalty of followers,

¹⁰⁵ N.B. The violence inflicted on the Wharram Percy individuals was similarly focussed on the upper body areas. Mays et al., pp. 444–451.

¹⁰⁶ Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, trans. and ed. A. T. Hatto (London: Penguin, 1960), pp. 78–80.

¹⁰⁷ Almond, p. 81.

¹⁰⁸ Kane, 'Horseplay', p. 109.

¹⁰⁹ Kane, 'Horseplay', p. 109; Almond, pp. 64–66.

¹¹⁰ Almond, pp. 64–66.

and displays noble generosity to a knight. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, he again demonstrates generosity as well as adherence to verbal contracts, and has his own parodic courtly love scene involving the exchange of a love token, discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.

Kane tries to reconcile the discrepancies between medieval depictions of the hunt and Robin's treatment of Guy by combining his argument with two others: first, that the horse-hide clothing and the violence enacted between Robin and Guy masks a 'transgressive homoerotic[ism]', arguing that Guy's bestial clothing is a sort of 'monstrous transvestism' and that the hunter-prey relationship they share, coupled with Robin's exchange of clothes, points to a form of bestial desire and thus a 'conceptual equivalent of homosexuality'. Second, Kane claims that the ballad also is exploring issues of 'de-personalisation', whereby 'Guy is, for Robin, a pretext for severing himself from his own desiring identity'.¹¹¹

I do not see sufficient evidence outside of the yeomen's archery competition, where they shoot at 'pricks', to suggest homoeroticism: there is no further wordplay, no non-violent physicality, exchange of words or tokens, or other behaviour normally used in medieval literature to allude to erotic desire.¹¹² Indeed, a 'prick' was the official terminology for the wand that held an archery garland and marked the centre of the target, and a shooting competition at pricks and garlands between Robin and another individual (King Edward in the *Gest*, for instance) is a standard outlaw ballad trope that is not treated as if it had sexual implications. That the ballad intentionally blurs the lines between animal and man and links Guy's and Robin's yeoman forester identities is irrefutable. But the violence inflicted upon Guy's corpse and the significance of the horse hide are incompletely understood within a hunting context.

¹¹¹ Kane, 'Horseplay', p. 109, 107.

¹¹² 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 114, 120, 125.

Renée Ward has equally been led astray by Guy's clothing, claiming that '[t]he cultural meaning of Robin's violence and his treatment of Guy's body resides in the animal skin (a horse hide) the bounty hunter wears'.¹¹³ Ward sees in the wearing of the hide a transgression of species boundaries that reflect Guy's desire to transgress social boundaries, arguing that in dressing as a horse Guy reveals his aspirations to knightly social status. This argument rests on two assumptions: first, that the horse hide is that of a destrier, and secondly, that Guy has been promised the equivalent of a knight's fee in exchange for bringing Robin Hood to justice.

Ward acknowledges that the term 'capull' refers to a generic horse of no specific type or purpose, but argues that a destrier is the only logical type of horse hide for Guy to be wearing as it would then denote Guy's knightly social aspirations—a somewhat circular argument.¹¹⁴ But as much as Gawain may respect Gringolet or Beves respect Arundel, a horse is still beneath a knight—figuratively and literally.¹¹⁵ Ward draws on much of the same evidence as I have cited, yet concludes from this that dressing as a knight's horse is thus somehow equivalent to affecting knighthood, or at least displaying knightly aspirations. For the author to equate dressing like a knight's horse to dressing like a knight seems odd logic, particularly when no other sources I have found treat dressing like an animal, or in full animal skins (i.e. not furs), as a social improvement, nor in which dressing like an animal is socially equal to that of dressing as a person. Indeed quite the opposite may be true: Frederika Bain suggests to be dressed like an animal could be used as a form of humiliation and punishment, even if one dressed as a noble hart.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ward, p. 350.

¹¹⁴ Ward, p. 356. Cf. Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Reeve's Tale', *The Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 78–86, ll. 4088, 4105.

¹¹⁵ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Genesis 1:28; Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 79–82.

¹¹⁶ Frederika Bain, 'Skin on Skin: Wearing Flayed Remains', *Flaying in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2017), 116–137, pp. 120–123.

Receiving a knight's fee for bringing in the notorious Robin Hood would indeed provide strong incentive for a bounty hunter, yet attaining the rank of knighthood would be quite a leap from Guy's yeoman status.¹¹⁷ The ballad's occasional use of 'Sir' when referring to Guy is an honorific:

This honorific is used frequently in the text, but [...] the text states that he and Robin are both yeoman (line 87), and so the knightly title seems anomalous, though Percy did add a note that "Sir" was used outside the knightly class.¹¹⁸

As established earlier in this chapter, the rank of yeoman was 'a broad social rank below knights and squires, ranging from a small landowning farmer to an attendant, servant, or lesser official in a royal or noble household'.¹¹⁹ As J. C. Holt notes, '[t]he succession of yeoman, squire, knight, seems to have been commonly accepted at this time, and is indeed implied by Chaucer's Prologue. But Chaucer's yeoman was a special kind of household officer'.¹²⁰ This established hierarchy of knight-squire-yeoman is reflected in Higden's lament in his *Polychronicon*:

Þese men despiseþ hir owne and preiseþ other menis, and vnneþe beeþ apaide [content] with hir owne etate; what byfalleþ and semeþ other men, they wolleþ gladlyche take to hem self. Þerfor hit is þat a zeman arraieþ hym as a squyer, a squyer as a kniȝt, a kniȝt as a duke, and a duke as a king.¹²¹

The sheriff offers Robin, disguised as Guy, a knight's fee as reward for killing 'Robin', and Guy 'might have expected a knight's fee as his reward for slaying Robin' (though this is speculative), but in fact Guy does not admit to receiving any such offer.¹²² In fact, the sheriff first asks 'Guy' (Robin) what reward he would like: 'Come hither, thou good Sir Guy,/ Aske

¹¹⁷ 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 87, 25, 33, 145, 147.

¹¹⁸ Knight and Ohlgren, 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne: Introduction', p. 169; London, British Library, MS Additional 27879 (Percy Folio), fol. 86.

¹¹⁹ 'A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, p. 149, note to l. 3.

¹²⁰ Holt, 'The Origins and Audience of the Ballads of Robin Hood', pp. 224–225. See also Hilton, pp. 36–37.

¹²¹ Higden, II.167–71.

¹²² Holt, *Robin Hood*, p. 225. Cf. Ward, p. 357.

of mee what thou wilt have’, and only when Robin has asked for a reward that the sheriff deems too low in value for the service rendered does the sheriff exclaim:

Thou art a madman [...]
Thou sholdest have had a knights fee;
Seeing thy asking bee soe badd,
Well granted it shall be’.¹²³

There is a distinct difference between expecting a knight’s fee and being told one deserves it. Guy himself claims he would ‘rather meet with him [Robin Hood] upon a day,/ Then forty pound of golde’, the same large quantity King Edward carries with him when seeking Robin in the *Gest*—forty being a number biblically associated with exile and trial.¹²⁴ Guy appears more interested in matching himself against the famed outlaw than collecting a bounty on his head.

Though the wildly divergent critical readings I have discussed above draw on interesting ways aspects of social history, their very variousness demonstrates the difficulty in explaining this mysterious motif. Below I shall argue, however, for an implication which looks forward to early modern custom, as questioning Guy’s gender performace as well as his social aspirations.

Submission and Freedom

The horse-hide clothing is not directly bound to Robin’s desecration of Guy’s body, but rather signals Guy’s subservience to the sheriff.¹²⁵ A number of medieval and early

¹²³ ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 195–196, 203–206.

¹²⁴ ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 101–102; ‘A Gest of Robyn Hode’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, l. 1521; Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1969), pp. 15, 25–26.

¹²⁵ The horse hide is notably absent in the theatrical version of this poem, ‘Robyn Hod and the Shryff off Notyngham’. The play is fragmentary, but the disguise element involves Robin Hood disguising himself in knightly clothes. ‘Robyn Hod and the Shryff off Notyngham’, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 275–280; W. E. Simeone, ‘Still More about Robin Hood’, *Journal of American Folklore*, 65.255 (1952), 418–420, p. 420; Jay Williams, ‘More about Robin Hood’, *Journal of American Folklore*, 65.257 (1952), 304–305.

modern tales suggest wrapping a shrewish or obstinate wife in a horse's hide would make her submissive to her husband.¹²⁶ As Ward argues in terms of social rank, the key thing here is hierarchy of genders: the hide-wrapping reinforces the woman's social position vis-à-vis her husband. Valerie Wayne traces the motif of taming a wife by wrapping her in a horse's skin to the early fifteenth century, and finds four examples in sixteenth-century plays. Frederika Bain and Linda Woodbridge discuss some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century examples of the same motif. *Guy of Gisborne*, written no later than 1475 and surviving in the eighteenth-century Percy Folio, falls well within the time frame of this motif. Therianthropy is a not uncommon motif in medieval and early modern literature.¹²⁷ For example, in *Völsunga saga*, Sigmundr and Sinfjötli acquire the ability to hunt as wolves when they dress in magical wolf skins.¹²⁸ In cloaking himself in the horse hide, Guy shows himself to be an instrument of the sheriff's will. As the examples discussed by Bain, Woodbridge, and Wayne all involve women being wrapped in horse hides, it is possible that wearing the horse hide is a subtle insult, suggesting that Guy is weak and effeminate.

In taking Guy's horse hide, Robin disguises himself as Guy, thus as in the service of the sheriff, so that he may sneak into town and rescue Little John. The horse hide and the ritual of laying the revenant dead intertwine briefly when Robin gives Guy's corpse his own green forester's clothes in exchange for the horse hide. Robin's exchange can be seen as a further attempt to appease Guy's spirit by gifting his corpse 'a better cloathe' than the one in which he was killed. In removing the symbol of Guy's subservience to the sheriff and covering his body with the clothing of the greenwood, Robin symbolically frees him from

¹²⁶ Bain, pp. 123–126. Linda Woodbridge, 'New Light on "The Wife Lapped in Morel's Skin" and "The Proud Wife's Paternoster"', *English Literary Renaissance*, 13.1 (1983), 3–35, pp. 9–11; Valerie Wayne, *The Compliant Shrew in Shakespearean Comedy and Romance*, PhD dissertation (University of Chicago, 1978), pp. 117–8. Stith Thompson's motif-index points to an Estonian tale in which the devil disguises himself in a stable by wrapping himself in a horse-hide, but any significant link between this tale and *Guy of Gisborne* seems unlikely. Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1955–1958), G303.8.12.

¹²⁷ See Bain, pp. 116–137 for several accounts of therianthropy across pre-modern Europe.

¹²⁸ *Völsunga Saga*, ed. and trans. R. G. Finch (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965), pp. 11–12.

his former position under the sheriff's yoke.¹²⁹ As he dresses Guy's body in the green cloth of the merry men (and at the same time performing the physical and speech acts mentioned above), Robin gives Guy a sort of outlaw freedom, a freedom outside of social structures, while simultaneously performing the ritualistic acts necessary to limit the amount of damage Guy's spirit and corpse could do postmortem.

Who can impress the forest?¹³⁰

In the *Gest*, the *Potter*, and the *Monk*, the greenwood is imagined as a safe space, an idyllic world to which Robin retreats after his adventures in town and court, and into which venturesome townsfolk and kings may expect to encounter a carnivalesque upending of civil or courtly order.¹³¹ But in *Guy of Gisborne*, the greenwood is reimagined as a dangerous space, certainly for the sheriff's men but also as a space that seems to be turning hostile towards Robin and his companions. Guy's position first as a yeoman and then as a dead man, both seemingly safe roles (fellow yeoman; dead body) that hide a sinister potential for Robin (bounty hunter for the sheriff; possible revenant), fit within an overarching theme of hidden danger and betrayal that runs throughout the ballad.

The ballad's opening stanza closely patterns itself after other Robin Hood ballads, establishing an idyllic summer day in the woods, using much the same phrasing as the opening stanzas of the *Monk* and the *Potter*.¹³² But this pleasantly familiar opening stanza

¹²⁹ 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 171–178.

¹³⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. S. Greenblatt, et al. (London: Norton, 1997), 2564–2617, IV.i.99.

¹³¹ For more on carnivalesque release in Robin Hood ballads, see Peter Stallybrass, "'Drunk with the Cup of Liberty': Robin Hood, the Carnavalesque, and the Rhetoric of Violence in Early Modern England", *Robin Hood: Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Stephen Knight (Cambridge: Brewer 1999), 297–327 and Richard Firth Green, 'Violence in the Early Robin Hood Poems', *'A Great Effusion of Blood': Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. Mark Meyerson, Daniel Thiery, and Oren Falk (London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 268–286, pp. 278–281.

¹³² 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1–4; 'Robin Hood and the Monk', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 37–56, ll. 1–4; 'Robin Hood and the Potter', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 1–4.

gives only a false sense of security. Unlike the openings of *Robin Hood and the Monk* or *Robin Hood and the Potter* which then leap to Robin's desire for an adventure—a stealthy trip to Nottingham to hear mass, a plan to rob an unsuspecting potter—this Arcadian scene is immediately undercut by ill portents: the 'woodweele' will not cease his song and Robin recounts an ominous dream to Little John in which 'two wight yeoman'—men sharing the same social status as Robin, with whom Robin might expect the most sympathy or camaraderie—'beate and binde' Robin and take his bow, foreshadowing Guy's own betrayal of a fellow yeoman for personal profit.¹³³ Shortly after, Guy is found in his capull-hyde leaning against a trysting tree, confident in his intrusion into the heart of the outlaws' forest space, as Will Scarlet flees the woods with the sheriff's men in close pursuit.¹³⁴ Some few stanzas later, Little John's bow betrays him, the 'good yeiwe' 'made of a tender boughe' suddenly turning to 'wicked wood' as it looses an inaccurate shot that kills William of Trent and results in Little John's capture.¹³⁵ The audience is told ominously that

It had beene better for William a Trent
To hange upon a gallowe
Then for to lye in the greenwoode,
There slaine with an arrowe.¹³⁶

¹³³ Birdsong is common to many ballads' opening stanzas, setting an idyllic spring-summer scene; however, this bird and its ceaseless noise seems portentous. The woodweele, woodweete, or woodwall is likely either the golden oriole or the green woodpecker. The golden oriole was noted for its sweet song; the woodpecker, however, was used in auguries and was believed to have some preternatural abilities. Isidore of Seville and Pliny the Elder write that 'nails or anything else attached to a tree where a woodpecker nests will immediately fall out'. John Aubrey in the sixteenth century believed that woodpeckers were used by druids for divination, noting that 'to this day the country people do divine of raine by their cry'. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, ed. and trans. Harris Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, 9 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), III, X.20, pp. 316–319; Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* [electronic resource], ed. and trans. S. Barney, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), XII.vii.47; John Aubrey, *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme*, ed. James Britten (London: Satchell, Peyton, and Co., 1881), p. 258; 'wōde-wāle', *Middle English Dictionary* (University of Michigan Press, July 2019) <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary>>. Dobson, Taylor, Knight, and Ohlgren have assumed the woodweele must refer to the golden oriole in their glosses to their editions of the ballads, but the woodpecker is the far more common bird found in England. Dobson and Taylor, 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne (Child 118)', pp. 140–145, n. 3; 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, note to l. 5; Paul Mason and Jake Allsop, *Golden Oriole* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), pp. 35f–35i.

¹³⁴ 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 25–34; 51–54.

¹³⁵ 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 59–70.

¹³⁶ 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 71–74.

The forest does not let the dead rest easily; better, it seems, to die an ignominious but socially regulated death in town than an accidental one in the woods, without being given last rites or a proper burial. Perhaps William, too, as one of the sheriff's men (and therefore of questionable character) killed and left lying in unconsecrated ground, also runs the risk of rising again, much like Guy before Robin performed his precautionary rituals.

The greenwood then turns from 'dwelling' to jail for Little John, who is 'bound fast to a tree' by the sheriff's men and threatened with drawing and hanging.¹³⁷ At the climax of the ballad, Robin's fight with Guy, the forest again betrays Robin, nearly to his death:

Robin was reachles on a roote,
and stumbled at that tyde,
And guy was quicke and nimble with-all,
And hitt him ore the left side.¹³⁸

By its final line, the ballad shows the outlaws defeating a three-fold threat: man versus man, man versus nature, and man versus the unnatural. At the ballad's conclusion, Robin and Little John have successfully killed the men threatening their lives, overcome the threats presented by the forest, and negated the unnatural threat of the revenant dead—surviving yet another day as outlaws.

As established above and in the introduction to this thesis, the date of composition of this ballad is unclear, and the other literary and archaeological evidence in Yorkshire for belief in the revenant dead spans several centuries. In light of this, it is difficult to point to any specific reason why the author might have been particularly interested in incorporating the capull-hyde or rituals surrounding fears of the revenant dead into the ballad, or to what social or historical stimuli the author may have been responding. Scholars have suggested that spikes in the popularity of tales of the revenant dead, globally, can be tied to disease outbreaks such as plague, to social unrest and upheavals of previously stable social

¹³⁷ 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 77–84, quote 84; 139.

¹³⁸ 'Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne', *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ll. 151–154.

hierarchies, and to anxieties surrounding mass immigration movements.¹³⁹ Given the ballad's approximately fifteenth-century date and its Yorkshire setting and composition, Robin's ritual desecration and clothing exchange as reflective of revenant protection measures could be a response to plague or other epidemic, to the social upheavals following the population decimation caused by the Black Death and Hundred Years War, or to a several-centuries-long local history of foreign invasion and settlement. The ballad could be responding to any number of these social factors. Additionally, unlike the other Robin Hood tales discussed in this chapter where social order is restored, this one ends with the death of the sheriff, suggesting that the outlaw identity harbours socially disturbing possibilities. The depiction of outlawry that this ballad offers, and the depiction of horror, suggests concerns about the disruption of the social fabric of Yorkshire and anxieties about the possibility of containment: containment of the metaphysical as well as containment of social intruders and those looking to upset the social order.

Disguise works differently in Robin Hood tales from how it does in romance. Disguise in romance confirms rank ideology about rulership and chivalry, and shines some light on gender norms. Here, in the ballads, disguise is often motivated by experimentation with discrete social roles requiring some recalibration, given the emerging social identity of yeomanry. Disguises work to define what the yeoman identity is within this outlaw context, in distinction from other social groupings (e.g. potter, knight, king). Yet also, interestingly,

¹³⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Grey', *Zombie Theory*, ed. Sara Juliet Lauro (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 380–394, pp. 385–392; Ola Sigurdson, 'Slavoj Žižek, the Death Drive, and Zombies: A Theological Account', *Modern Theology*, 29.3 (2013), 361–381, pp. 370–372, 374–380; Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. 86, 94, 97–103; Jen Webb and Samuel Byrmand, 'Some Kind of Virus: The Zombie as Body and as Trope', *Zombie Theory*, ed. Sara Juliet Lauro (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 111–123, pp. 111, 113–115, 120–121; Penny Crofts and Anthea Vogl, 'Dehumanized and Demonized Refugees, Zombies, and *World War Z*', *Law and Humanities*, 13.1 (2019), 1–23, pp. 32, 39–42, 50; Steven Pokornowski, 'Vulnerable Life: Zombies, Global Biopolitics, and the Reproduction of Structural Violence' *Humanities*, 5.3 (2016), 71–93, pp. 76–77, 80–81; Jon Stratton, 'Zombie Trouble: Zombie Texts, Bare Life and Displaced People', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14.3 (2011) 265–281, pp. 265–266, 269; Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, 'Alien Nations: Zombies, Immigrants and Millennial Capitalism', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101.4 (2002), 779–805, pp. 783, 795–796.

disguise seems to intersect in *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* with truly unsettling material. It situates yeomanry as pitched against not only other social strata, but also the forces of the natural and the supernatural. Disguise in its various forms in the ballads, then, is concerned with the negotiation of new boundaries, and of the new social grouping's need to find ways of living and adapting in the environment, whether that environment is urban, courtly, or a supernaturally sinister wilderness.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined various forms of disguise, transformation, and revelation in medieval English romances and outlaw ballads. In these texts it is the character's social role that is the principal determinant in both the motivations and the consequences of adopting a disguise or transformation. Disguise enables a particular kind of exploration of gender and social rank with regard to the abilities and duties associated with those positions. The social and political anxieties of the period, in addition to the normative views of rank and gender held by different romance and ballad audiences, are addressed through the motifs of transformation, disguise and revelation.

Chapter one examined kings in disguise and kings encountering disguised individuals. Two of the primary motives for kingly disguise are disguise for investigative purposes and as a form of carnivalesque release. Though disguise is, of course, a form of deceitful behaviour, a 'good' or sympathetic king can disguise himself without losing honour when he does so to keep an eye on his household (that is, seek out possible traitors) or to protect the safety of his person. A king incognito who reveals himself after walking amongst commoners can also contribute to the maintenance of his own charisma, important for sustaining power and authority. However, problems arise when a king's motives for disguise prove to be more self-serving, and an excuse for abandoning political responsibilities. This narrative seems to be more popular in English texts than those disguise narratives which highlight the king's omnipotence.

These questions are answered in medieval secular literature in part through disguise narratives wherein the king temporarily abandons his official role. Making use of the political theory of the king's two bodies outlined by Ernst Kantorowicz, and Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy regarding the social safety-valve function of carnivalesque release, this chapter looked at the royalist conservatism and socially stabilising ends for which

narratives about royal disguised escapades propagandise. Such narratives provide comedic release for the audience in such a way that the monarch's humanity, his desire to temporarily walk undetected amongst his people, can in fact underscore his moral and social superiority. When a kingly figure executes a disguised adventure well, the episode can be used to demonstrate how his kingly attributes are a matter of ingrained character rather than costly trappings and courtly setting. Even when the king appears to work at cross-purposes to his people's interests, he actually is acting in a manner which is intended ultimately to benefit his people. This model is disrupted when a 'bad' king (e.g. Mark in the Arthurian legends anywhere other than Malory) disguises himself for selfish or antisocial purposes or does not envisage the adoption of disguise as a temporary release, but rather attempts to sustain his deception for too long.

The second section of the chapter considered transformations as disguise. I looked at the ethics of physical deception (disguise) compared with verbal deception (lying, equivocation) and incidental transformations as disguise. I then investigated the popular motif of kings as characters who are significantly less able than other characters to detect disguise. This royal imperceptiveness plays off audience anxieties surrounding the king's ability to detect traitors and the deceitful machinations of self-interested advisors. Attention has also been paid to the mechanics of detecting magically-wrought disguise: in the English *Prose Merlin*, Merlin's magic is always able to successfully change a person's appearance; however, his magical transformations are often penetrated by paying attention to auditory details. In both romances and ballads, kings usually don disguises either for investigative purposes or for temporary Bakhtinian release from what Kantorowicz calls their second, political body: their official role as king. These disguised forays are acceptable and unproblematic because they are temporary. However, disguise that becomes permanent

transformation, or which is employed for morally wrong purposes, is unkingly and raises serious ethical questions.

Kings make strategic use of disguise, often detecting treason or threats to the stability of the realm; thus the deceptiveness (and therefore potential ethical violation) inherent in assuming a disguise is subordinated to the king's political role. It is the king's personal body that is playfully experimenting in these narratives. Disguise visually separates out the king's personal behaviour from his kingship. He has not demeaned the office of king when he is being false for his own purposes. Lying, though, is a different matter. The king must not lie whilst he is in the person of the king (that is, his political body), though he may need to be diplomatic on occasion. But he ought not to lie in his private person either. Lying, unlike disguise, seems to cross a moral line even when it is done for personal reasons. Equivocation and ambiguity, however, are consistently treated as acceptable across the romances and ballads. They are regarded as marks of kings' honesty and cleverness. The idealisation of kingship would be troubled by the suggestion that good kings can lie. Disguise and equivocation play off the gullibility and imperceptiveness of the deceived person, while an outright lie would raise questions regarding the king's legitimacy: as a consecrated king holds his office from God, ergo he is, idealistically, the arbiter of truth.

Chapter two considered women's relationships to disguise. Across the romance genre, gender is more important than social status, whether a woman is assuming a disguise or piercing the veil of disguise in others. This was seen to be true regardless of social rank. Using memory triggers such as rings or textiles to recognise a person in disguise is a predominantly female-gendered ability. Cultural memory studies, drawing on the work of Mary Carruthers on medieval mnemonic techniques, provided a methodology that illuminated women's historical role in commemorating individuals lost to the community. Mnemonic objects are key to romance recognition scenes; through them women are

characterised as possessing a significantly higher ability to recognise disguised individuals than men. Disguise-recognition scenes in romances thus reflect the unique historical role that women had as memory keepers, recognised by historians but not foregrounded in literary studies.

Section two looked at women who disguise themselves. It first examined the sexual implications of Josian's feigned leprosy disguise in *Beves of Hampton*, keeping in view that the medieval medical belief that leprosy was a sexually transmitted disease. Women disguise themselves in the romances for mobility and safety, but in addition to this, their disguises raise a possibility of erotic frisson. Cross-dressing women were considered: the rapid changes in men's fashion contemporary with some of these romances may imply an erotic aspect to these women's disguises. Here the argument incorporated Bennett and McSheffrey's work on cross-dressing in the medieval London sex trade. This argues, of course, for an essentialist view of the women in these narratives: their textual function is, ultimately, to be marriageable. The case of an elderly woman who pretends to have an infirmity in order to spy on her neighbours while abusing their charity taps into ageist and ableist concerns about post-menopausal women's social roles in society, intersecting with longstanding concerns about false beggars that followed the introduction of the 1351 Statute of Labourers.

Arthurian romance does something different with woman in disguise topos from other romances. Disguise is no longer about exploring immediate social questions, but rather, it raises fundamental questions about women within a chivalric context. The Arthurian motif of women body-doubling for each other—the two Guineveres, Brengwain taking Ysonde's place in the marriage bed, and Elaine of Carbonec's impersonation of Guinevere—points to a certain interchangeability of women which is perhaps necessary to the plot (for instance, the begetting of Galahad), but for which the ethical implications for

the involved parties are cloudy. Narratives involving disguise doubles present a choice of two evils: two deceitful descendents of Eve, of which a knight or king much choose the lesser. This post-lapsarian inclination toward deception, for enchantresses like Morgan, can go to changing form so radically that they become indistinguishable from the landscape. These views of women are part of the medieval clerical misogyny that underpins the Arthurian context for women in disguise.

Knights disguising themselves is a common trope in Middle English romance. Chapter four provided a single-text case study of disguised knights: Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. This chapter investigates the concepts of 'taking the adventure' and the Other as revealed ally in unknown knight narratives. It illustrates the knights'—and Arthur's—preoccupation with theatricality and attention to face (honour, reputation). Accolon's and Arthur's fight in disguise explores differences between kingship and knighthood, and is greatly concerned with a number of aspects of the relationship between the king and his knights: saving face, justice, treachery, and the scapegoating of women. Balyn's tale warns of the dangers of overconfidence, self-centredness, and haste. The succession of disguises assumed by Lancelot were shown to parallel his increased alienation from the Round Table. In the 'Book of Sir Lancelot du Lac', Malory changes his source material to show Lancelot deliberately disguising himself as Kay. This disguise adventure is treated in a positive light as it seeks to solidify the bonds within the Round Table and to improve the 'worship' of Lancelot while carefully allowing those he encounters to save face. However, in the post-Grail quest 'Book of Lancelot and Guinevere', Lancelot takes on disguises which perceptibly position him successively further outside Arthur's court, and result in increasingly tragic consequences. I concluded with 'The Tale of Gareth' as a coming-of-age story in which Gareth's excesses in theatricality and disguise expose a persistent immaturity. Disguise dramatises the relationship between knightly performativity

and knightly identity, because knightly identity is central to the accrual of ‘worship’—which is the knights’ primary goal. In the early part of Malory’s text, disguise is employed largely to establish the parameters of chivalric behaviour and a relative ranking within the Round Table. Disguise in first half of the text plays with themes of maturation, of the institution and of individual knights. In the second half of the text, disguise becomes significantly more sinister and dangerous. By the end of the book, as evident through his disguises as well as his actions, Lancelot has distanced himself so much from Arthur and his fellow Round Table knights that he cannot recognise friend from foe, even those lacking any kind of chivalric identifier or even armour—as when he unknowingly kills Gareth and Gaheris (‘none harneyse of warre uppon us’).¹ Ironically, in their final moments it is Gareth’s and Gaheris’s lack of disguise that disguises them from Lancelot.

The final chapter looked at yeomen outlaws in disguise. Part one participated in a continuing dialogue within the field of Robin Hood studies regarding the social position of yeomen, examining the evolution of yeomanry from a broader literary viewpoint. By the fifteenth century, yeomen had become a distinct social rank. The three medieval outlaw ballads discussed in this chapter reflect anxieties about social interlopers and patrol boundaries between yeomen and nearly similar ranks in a way that the earlier *Gamelyn* does not. They portray Robin and Little John in a sequence of disguises which principally illustrate how yeomen are distinguished from other social groups: merchants, artisans, and courtiers. *A Gest of Robyn Hode* shows Robin as both deceitful outlaw and, paradoxically, arbiter of honesty. Robin’s moral stances within the text raise questions of who really is in disguise, and, beyond the confines of the narrative, how successfully one can pretend to a different social status than that of one’s birth. *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* is one of

¹ Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. P. J. C. Field, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), I, p. 884.

the most puzzling disguise narratives in both medieval English ballads and romance. Drawing on a recent archaeological discovery in Yorkshire—where the ballad was both composed and set—and studying medieval folktales popular in the Yorkshire region, I argued that Robin's ritualistic actions align with contemporary regional fears of and preventative practices against the revenant dead. Both Robin's yeoman and his outlaw identities harbour socially disturbing possibilities. Disguise in its various forms in the ballads is concerned with the negotiation of new boundaries, the disruption of the social fabric which the emergence of a new class necessarily makes, and of the yeomen outlaws' need to find ways of living and adapting in the environment—whether that environment is urban, as in *Robin Hood and the Potter* and *A Gest of Robin Hood*, or sylvan, as in *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*.

This thesis has shown how disguise, transformation, and revelation motifs in romance—the most popular secular literary genre of the time—engaged with contemporary concepts of social roles and the ethical norms appropriate to different social groups. I have shown how romance and ballad complicate our understanding of secular medieval English morality through means- and ends-justified actions: the paradox of truths revealed through deceitful acts. Disguise itself, then, is neither ethical nor unethical; it is a tool for uncovering and illuminating medieval social norms and practices. In particular it enables the testing and patrolling of boundaries between social ranks—especially king and subject—and between genders. It also reveals markedly gendered implications of disguise for women: the important social function of memory keeping and the erotic implications of cross-dressing. The switch to a different genre and an historically later context than many of the romances shows how the motif of disguise is adapted in response to the formation of new social groupings in hybridising genre models going forward into the Early Modern period.

The disguise trope has enabled investigation of fundamental questions about performance and identity, and the individual and the social group. I have uncovered the particular, often socially contingent, anxieties invoked by disguise, transformation, and revelation, and the specific social beliefs and identities challenged or upheld by such behaviour. As a form of deception, disguise is a morally serious undertaking, but equally, its inherent playfulness enables crucial experimentation in ways of medieval being.

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