

The Importance of Disguise in the Middle English
Romances

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the literary motif of disguise in the context of the Middle English romances. The thesis seeks to explore the various manifestations and functions of disguise, and how they relate to the familiar exile-and-return structure of the genre. Chapter I discusses the conversation of genre description of the Middle English romances, and presents the scholarship reviewed for this project along with relevant terms to the discussion at large. Chapter II explores disguise as it relates to a character's social mobility in *King Horn*, *Havelok the Dane*, and *The Tale of Gamelyn*. Chapter III looks at disguise when it is used to test a character's true self, specifically in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Sir Amadace*, and *Sir Orfeo*. Chapter IV investigates the disguises of women through the romance of *Emaré*. Finally, Chapter V offers suggestions for further exploration on the types and purposes of disguise.

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CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION TO THE GENRE OF THE MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCES AND THE MOTIF OF DISGUISE

The element of disguise is widely used in literature to assist characters in deception, physical liberation, empowerment, social mobility, and to provide entertainment for the reader. This familiar literary device, and its various manifestations, spans centuries, and is seen in works as early as Homer's *Odyssey*. Our knowledge of what disguise entails is strictly contextual as its presence, role, and function varies from work to work, and century to century. During the early modern era, the use of disguise became a topic of interest through its various representations such as in Shakespeare's *The Twelfth Night*, and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, sparking multiple conversations, particularly those concerning gender and disguise. Christina Wald, in her book *The Reformation of Romance: The Eucharist, Disguise, and Foreign Fashion in early Modern Prose Fiction*, writes:

[D]isguise in early modern prose fiction is a powerful plot element used to create narrative suspense and to entertain readers with dramatic irony or sudden turning points, but it is almost the most relevant typos to explore selfhood [...] disguise narratives question whether and how an identity core can be covered or faked, whether and how the 'real' substance beneath can be determined, and whether this substance can change under the disguise, or possibly also because of it (8).¹

¹ Wald, Christina. *The Reformation of Romance: The Eucharist, Disguise, and Foreign Fashion in Early Modern Prose Fiction*. Buchreihe der Anglia/ Anglia Book Series, De Gruyter Mouton, 2014. ProQuest ebrary.

Wald acknowledges familiar perceptions of the function of disguise in relation to narrative and audience. She also underlines the thematic questions that disguise often invokes. These questions are predominantly text-specific, though, as the need and function of disguise are purely circumstantial. Wald's analysis can certainly be applied to classical and medieval works, as the presence of disguise in the literatures often prompts similar feelings. In medieval literature, and more specifically, in the Middle English romances, disguise is often seen used as a means of escape, a way to gain knowledge, a method for testing loyalty, or to gain access to a specific space. Although disguise appears in varying capacities within the tales, each instance elicits particular questions about identity—many of which will be explored in this thesis. Despite its overwhelming presence in the Middle English romances, there is not an abundance of scholarship on disguise; however, it is an area in which much scholarship could certainly be produced.

This project seeks to explore the vast presence, various manifestations, typical functions of disguise, and how disguise relates to identity within the Middle English romances. Through a thorough examination of several tales, I also hope to engage in the ongoing conversation surrounding the genre of the romances in relation to the thematic element of disguise. While no finite definition of the genre may be possible, or even necessary, accounting for genre conventions is important when discussing the tales as a cohesive category of works. Disguise appears in various capacities within the romances, and yet, seems to primarily occur when a character's identity is tested, threatened, or even stripped. These instances, I believe, correspond directly to the exile-and-return

structure that pervades the genre as it serves as a framework for a majority of the tales. I argue that a character's identity is tied to this structure, and in order to successfully return, a character must often adopt, or encounter a disguise. Their return is not merely physical, but also metaphorical, as they are able to reclaim or restore their original identity. I seek to argue that disguise is a crucial element in the Middle English romances; it not only serves a variety of functions within individual story lines, but it also illustrates the contemporary sociocultural perceptions of identity. By looking at the multiple instances of disguise, we can illuminate the various patterns that arise within the tales.

A Review of Scholarship

As aforementioned, there is not an abundance of scholarship on disguise in the Middle English romances. Conversely, there are numerous discussions concerning, or including, the fascination of identity in the romances, along with the exile-and-return structure. Over the past century, there have been numerous conversations discussing the description of the genre of the Middle English romances, making it one of the most talked about topics in Middle English literary studies. Many scholars have proposed definitions, offered classification methods/categories, and introduced various analyses of the tales in attempt to distinguish the genre as a whole. While many make compelling arguments, they admit that their contributions do not account for, or even fit with, every romance. Scholars often attach a disclaimer to their work, not as a renunciation of their claims, but as a justification for their specific focus and acknowledgement of the need for further work. This area of scholarship is vast and complex; Rosalind Field claims this immensity

results from the “[genre’s resistance] to definition.”² In her chapter “Popular Romance: The Material and the Problems,” Field discusses the search for a method of classification, or categorization, that accurately represents the genre of the Middle English romances.³ She insists the “initial problem [in defining the genre] has always been the unmanageable nature of the raw material and the sheer quantity of narratives of all shapes and none” (10). According to scholars and researchers who contributed to the website *Database of Middle English Romance* at The University of York, “there are more than eighty verse romances (metrical and alliterative), composed between c.1225 and c.1500.”⁴ The plots of these tales vary in form and subject matter from children growing up in exile, to princes becoming outlaws, and to tales with unicorns and other beasts. Field admits that the sheer volume of tales and their complexities create a “kaleidoscope effect” in which the “very size and categoric slipperiness of the corpus of [the romances] become part of its particular quality” (28).⁵ Many scholars echo Field’s sentiment in their disclaimers as they reveal the limited scope of their methods. Categorizing the tales by subject matter alone yields ample conversation; however, this is only one of many approaches to defining the genre’s conventions. Altogether, there are almost as many methods of

² Field, Rosalind. “Romance in England: 1066-1400.” *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, David Wallace, ed. Cambridge University Press, 2008, Cambridge. Pg. 152.

³ Field, Rosalind. “Popular Romance: The Material and the Problems.” *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, Edited by Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton. D.S. Brewer, 2009, Cambridge, pp. 9-30.

⁴ *Database of Middle English Romance*. The University of York, 2012, <http://www.middleenglishromance.org.uk>. Accessed 13 July 2016.

⁵ Field cites Nancy Mason Bradbury. *Writing Aloud*. University of Illinois Press, 1998, Urbana. pp. 9: “Each text is in a sense its own category; each new text makes the old definition obsolete.”

classification as there are tales, leaving those in the field with no concrete definition of the Middle English romance genre.

Because of this plethora of material to factor into categorization, many tales are often left out of suggested definitions of the genre. Field alludes to the number of scholars present in the discussion, specifically mentioning Hibbard Loomis and W.R.J. Barron, who have contributed to the search for an objective definition. She summarizes and claims a common method of categorization is by “subject matter [that] tends to adopt the Matters of Medieval Narrative: Rome, France, Britain, [and] sometimes extended to England” (10). Although popular, Field notes that this, like many other methods of classification, leaves many tales under the category of “Miscellaneous” (10). These tales that are left undefined, or unclassified, are too often neglected as they do not fit scholars’ working or proposed definitions of the genre. This exclusion is a recurring theme in the conversations, and often results in the disclaimer within scholars’ works. Field’s work provides a sufficient overview of the scholarship recounting the search for a genre definition, or description. Field stresses the need for a description that is inclusive, much like other scholars, such as Derek Pearsall, Raluca L. Radulescu, and Yin Liu who offer individual approaches to defining the genre in their writings.

In his chapter, “The Development of the English Romance,” Pearsall offers an approach to defining the genre that can be described as three-fold.⁶ His discussion is based on what he refers to as the “grammar of romance,” which involves the search for

⁶ Pearsall, Derek. “The Development of the English Romance.” *Studies in Medieval English Romances, Some New Approaches*, edited by Derek Brewer, D.S. Brewer, 1988, pp. 11-36.

specific patterns amongst the tales (11). This approach based on “grammar,” includes an analysis of speculated date of composition, verse form, and content. He begins with what he refers to as the “couplet romance[s],” composed around 1280, including “*Havelok [...]* *Guy of Warwick, Beves of Hamtoun, Kyng Alisaunder, Richard Couer de Lion, and Arthour and Merlin*” (17). These tales are usually adapted from French poems, and consist of “blunting the first keen edge of unsophisticated appetite with battles and heroic adventures strung in loosely climactic sequence over many thousands of lines” (17). The second category Pearsall presents is that of the “epic romance,” which includes “*Floris and Blancheflur, Ywain and Gawain, Sir Orfeo, the Lai le Freine, Sir Landeval, and Sir Degare*” (23). He claims that in addition to being composed around the same time, and sharing similar verse forms, they also connect in plot as they deal “less in battle, more in love and the supernatural, and the narratives are shaped to a purpose” (23). Following the “epic[s]” are the “lyric romance[s],” which include *King Horn, Sir Tristrem* (24). The final group, according to Pearsall’s timeline of tales supposedly composed between 1280-1380 (11), is classified as those who share extreme similarity in “plot material” (30). He references “*Octavian, Athelston, Sir Isumbras, Sir Eglamour, Torrent of Portyngale, and Sir Triamour*,” which are “all stories of rejection or exile, trial, constancy, and reward” (30). By combining patterns, Pearsall presents several methods of categorization that he believes are not only connected, but intimately dependent on one another, to create a unique way of defining the tales within the genre.

Pearsall’s work is extensive, and includes many of the more widely-recognized and frequently discussed tales. He argues against the previous categorizations based

primarily on date of composition, and proposes that the time in which the tale was written influenced the form and content. While this approach is unique, like Field, Pearsall acknowledges that with new research and findings, certain aspects of his theory may be altered. He claims, “there are many blurs [in his argument], and many assertions which lack of space alone has caused [him] to leave unqualified” (35). Despite these admitted oversights, his approach and research provide some “scaffolding” for this thesis. As I argue that disguise, in conjunction with exile-and-return and identity, is a common element amongst the romances that transcends both chronology and form, Pearsall’s search for patterns between romances is crucial. Although Pearsall looks for broader themes, such as “heroic adventures,” “love,” and “reward,” he reminds scholars that the content of the tales is pertinent in any discussion (17, 23, 30). Pearsall’s focus on the importance of subject matter in the conversation of genre runs in a similar vein to the work of Raluca L. Radulescu.

In her chapter entitled “Genre and Classification,” Raluca L. Radulescu proposes an alteration to a previously suggested definition of the genre.⁷ Radulescu discusses the complications that arise in defining the genre, including the great differences between the Anglo-Norman versions of the tales and their Middle English forms, and previously proposed definitions (34). She presents a specific definition of the genre set forth by Helaine Newstead and suggests that it is too narrow. Newstead proposes the following definition for the narrative of Middle English romances: “narrative[s] about knightly

⁷ Radulescu, Raluca L. “Genre and Classification.” *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, edited by Raluca L. Radulescu, Cory James Rushton, D.S. Brewer, 2009, pp. 31-48.

prowess and adventure, in verse or in prose, intended primarily for the entertainment of a listening audience.”⁸ While this definition certainly includes a number of tales, it excludes several more. Radulescu claims this approach “provides a functional understanding” of the genre, or rather, that it “acts as a starting point” for the discussion at large (39). She continues, and emphasizes that the majority of the tales include more than this definition alludes to. She explains that “adventure” should refer to “movement,” and “knighthood” to “social class.” By expanding this definition, and offering alternative interpretations of the key terms, Radulescu creates an approach that allows for more inclusivity when attempting to categorize the tales.⁹

Radulescu’s work is relevant to my research for several reasons. Firstly, although very similar to Pearsall, Radulescu, like Pearsall, aims to find broad “features,” as opposed to broader themes, to help describe the makeup of the genre. Disguise, I propose, is one of these features. It not only emerges frequently in the tales, but it also occurs in patterns. For example, disguise occurs when characters move across social classes, when characters are challenged by secondary characters, and for women specifically, during their exile. With a high frequency and significant purpose, disguise can be seen as part of the “backbone” of the genre. Also, Radulescu’s expansion of the terms “adventure” and “knighthood” are particularly important to the discussion of Chapter II, “Social Mobility by Way of Disguise.” By extending these terms, Radulescu highlights the fact that many

⁸Newstead, Helen. “Romances.” *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, Severs and Hartung, eds., Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967, p. 11.

⁹ Radulescu claims “a broadening of the definition of such texts is required in order to understand what features might constitute the backbone of popular romance” (42).

of the Middle English romances are not strictly adventures, and they do not solely concern the social class of knights. While many of the tales do operate within these parameters, many more do not. The terms “movement” and “social class” increase the number of tales that may be included in this description, and they also appear as relevant when considering the function of disguise. Ultimately, Radulescu’s content-based and inclusionary approach to describing the genre provides additional support for my thesis.

A third scholar’s work that is pertinent to this discussion is that of Yin Liu. In her article, “Middle English Romance as Prototype Genre,” Liu presents “the prototype theory of categorization in cognitive linguistics” as a new approach to describing the genre of the Middle English romances.¹⁰ Liu prefaces her argument by claiming that she desires to be more “descriptive” than “definitive” in her methodology (335). The prototype theory suggests “that a category is defined not by its boundary but by its best examples (it prototypes); that the attributes of the prototypes are not necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in the category but rather describe relationships between members” (337).¹¹ In other words, and in the context of the Middle English romances, Liu suggests scholars should be looking for themes that link the tales together. Instead of only looking at what scholars deem the “best examples,” or the more popular

¹⁰ Liu, Yin. “Middle English Romance as Prototype Genre.” *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2006, pp. 335-353. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25094331.

¹¹ Liu continues: “Usually, prototype theory is applied to ordinary-language categories, such as FURNITURE or BIRD, but there have been suggestions that it may also serve to map out more complex categories, such as that of literary genre” (337-338). She further explains that the prototypes, or “the best examples of a category,” can “share certain attributes; but not all examples will display every attribute, and not all to the same extent” (338).

examples, we should look at each tale and its content, and use the proposed themes to search for connections between tales, and ultimately to define the genre as a whole. Liu uses this theory to draw connections between tales that initially appear to have none. For example, she describes *Octavian* as a tale whose purpose is to “prove that nobility is innate” (345). Liu also acknowledges that there is another “narrative motif: [...] the sons are separated from Octavian because they are exiled with Octavian’s wife, who has been unjustly accused of wrongdoing.” (345) By focusing on the familial separation, Liu links *Octavian* to *Sir Isumbras*, a tale in which a man is also separated from his wife and children. She then shifts her focus to that of the “slander motif,” and also connects *Emaré* to *Octavian*. While *Emaré* differs greatly from *Octavian* in plot, the protagonists experience the effects of disparagement, thus creating a link between the two tales. By applying the prototype linguistic theory, Liu presents a compelling approach to describing the genre of the Middle English romances that, like Radulescu’s method, is more inclusive.

Liu’s work provides a linguistic approach to an argument proposed by Helen Cooper. In her book, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*, Cooper discusses the multitude of themes and motifs in the Middle English romances, as well as the variations, and complications to these themes.¹² Cooper supports her work by proposing a specific approach to the themes that exist with the romances. She first describes a “romance motif” (3). She describes a

¹² Cooper, Helen. *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*. Oxford, UP, 2004.

“romance motif” as “a unit within literature that proves so useful, so infectious, that it begins to take on a life of its own [...] an idea that behaves like a gene in its ability to replicate faithfully and abundantly, but also on occasion to adapt, mutate, and therefore survive in different forms and cultures” (3). This observation applies directly to the discussion of this thesis. The theme of disguise is most certainly a motif that has been replicated and altered within the genre. While there are many different appearances and functions of disguise, the understanding of the underlying theme remains stable.¹³ Cooper continues, and notes that these alterations are also an integral part of the romance genre. She states:

The ability to vary the pattern, to make a conventional, shared motif new and surprising, pervades early romance. The very familiarity of the pattern of the motif, the meme, alerts the reader to certain kinds of shaping and significance, and sets up expectations that the author can fulfil or frustrate. The same motif will not always mean the same thing, or in the same ways: on the contrary, what matters most is the variations on the ways it is used. Familiarity with the model is used precisely to highlight difference. The infinite adaptation of narrative material becomes a kind of shorthand for

¹³ Cooper argues that “whilst romance motifs remain superficially the same, sometimes even down to the verbal detail, the usage and understanding of them changes over time, rather in the way that a word may change meaning” (4).

meaning, since it draws on what an audience already knows but reconfigures it in different ways (15).¹⁴

This selection emphasizes, that, despite varying presentations of a given theme, the recognition of the theme is key to understanding the variances. By having a familiarity with a motif, a reader can start to analyze and account for the deviations, and adapt their base understanding of the theme.

Relevant Terms and Definitions

As Radulescu emphasizes, it is important to clarify definitions of key terms. The most important term in this discussion is “disguise.” As previously discussed, disguise is seen throughout literature in many forms and is easily recognized by audiences; however, there are specific parameters for the term within this discussion. Most commonly, disguise is understood as a physical alteration to one’s appearance. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term: “Altered fashion of dress and personal appearance intended to conceal the wearer's identity; the state of being thus transformed in appearance for concealment's sake.”¹⁵ This manifestation of the term is easily visible in the romances on many occasions. For example, as Horn enters the court of Rymenhild, he disguises himself as a harpist so as to not be recognized. The masking of one’s identity is also seen in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but not by the protagonist. Instead, Bertilak, tests

¹⁴ Cooper elaborates on this idea by discussing the various representations, and the different presentations, of the convention of beauty in the romances. She recounts the different uses, functions, and interactions that beauty illustrates (15).

¹⁵ "Disguise, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/54410?rskey=aLkeos&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>. Accessed on 24 February 2017.

Gawain's honor and chivalric identity while in disguise as the Green Knight. Though these are only two instances of disguise, they serve as two examples of the various manifestations of disguise that will be discussed in this thesis.¹⁶ It is important to note that the types of disguise directly correlate to a function of identity restoration or maintenance—a concept and connection that will be discussed at length in the following chapters.

An additional key term/concept is “exile-and-return” structure.¹⁷ This structure is mentioned by multiple scholars, and is one of the most widely agreed upon conventions of the genre. For this argument, the term “exile” refers to any removal, voluntary or involuntary, from a “high,” or original, space. This space, whether it be the court, the home, or an occupation, represents a starting point for the protagonist, and often holds great significance to the character, and more importantly, their identity. We are often introduced to a character in their high space at the beginning of a tale, and there is (usually) a noticeable association between the presented identity and space. For example, in *Emaré*, we are introduced to the princess in her home court. She lives a lavish life with her father, and her role as a royal is part of her identity. In the tale, a character's exile usually occurs towards the beginning of the protagonist's exile-and-return journey, and while not always the case, there is sometimes a secondary departure in which the

¹⁶ *King Horn* presents a protagonist in disguise as a lower-class member and *Sir Gawain* presents a secondary character in disguise.

¹⁷ Frye, Northrop. *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*. Harvard UP, 1976.

protagonist experiences a second hardship and, subsequently, a second exile.¹⁸ When considering identity, a character's exile is crucial to note as their exile is often accompanied by a departure from their identity. As a character is forcibly sent out from their high space, they no longer have access to the physical privileges or metaphorical associations of their initial identity. As mentioned, these physical departures can be seen as either voluntary or involuntary. A primary example of a voluntary departure is that of Sir Orfeo, who leaves his throne to retrieve his wife, Heurodis, from the Fairy King. An additional example is the tale *Ipomadon* as the knight leaves his home, of his own volition, to search for Le Fere. Another example of voluntary exile is seen in *Floris and Blancheflour* as Floris leaves his space to rescue Blancheflour who has been sold into servitude. While these men leave for the sake of love, this voluntary exile is still a departure. This type of exile is also seen in tales whose focus is that of war and succession. In *Guy of Warwick*, Guy sends himself to the hermitage after defeating the Giant Colbrand instead of accepting reward and honor. In *Ywain and Gawain*, Ywain leaves the court to seek honor, and to seek revenge on a fellow knight.

While there are numerous instances of self-exile, involuntary exile is seen more often, and is perhaps its most acknowledged form. There are numerous tales in which protagonists are forcibly removed from their high space, and many of them are the more widely discussed romances. In *Havelok the Dane*, Havelok is taken from the court by Grim to save his life—a similar scenario to that of Bevis, the young prince, in *Bevis of*

¹⁸ Double exile is not present in all tales, but it is seen in a select few, such as *King Horn* (as he is exiled a second time to Ireland), and *Emaré* (as she is first sent adrift, lands in Galys, and is then exiled to Rome).

Hampton. King Horn also illustrates a forced removal as Horn is both exiled as a child, and an adolescent. We also see an involuntary exile in *Emaré* as her father sends her out on a boat after she rejects his love, and also in *Erle of Tolous* as the Erle is forced out of his lands by way of invasions and war. These tales illustrate the same departure from one's identity, as characters are forced to leave behind their former selves to avoid persecution and death.

The "return" portion of this structure can be defined as when a character returns to both their original high space (such as the court), or their home and their initial identity—as the two notions are dependent on one another. For example, when Havelok returns to Denmark, he is able to reclaim his rightful place on the throne, and thus, his royal identity. When Gamelyn returns to his restored lands, he is once again recognized as a steward. A final example can be seen in *Emaré*. Only when she reveals her true identity to her husband and father is she then perceived as the princess again. This positive correlation between return and identity reinforces the romance's attention to the restoration and maintenance of identity, but it also reveals the importance of disguise in the plot. Characters often undergo various identity shifts throughout the exile portion of their journey, but disguise is not usually implemented until the character is attempting to return to their original space and identity, or to protect themselves along the way.

The following chapters analyze individual tales in order to illuminate the patterns, and also, the discrepancies and variations to the same patterns, of disguise and the exile-and-return structure. Chapter II discusses social class mobility, and how disguise facilitates this mobility as a character moves along their exile-and-return journey. Chapter

III investigates the use of disguise by secondary characters, and also, how disguise is used to test the loyalty of a character. Chapter IV participates in the ongoing conversation about the differences in the treatment of male and female characters—specifically, the differences and similarities of the use and function of disguise. The tales discussed in each chapter were chosen based upon the variances to the functions and manifestations of disguise that they present. Chapters II and III discuss three tales each. The first of the three is meant to serve as a primary illustration of the function/manifestation of disguise. The second and third tales present deviations from the first, and their discussions serve to illustrate how despite these divergences (in the presentation and use of disguise), there are identifiable links between the tales.

CHAPTER TWO : MOVING THROUGH SOCIAL CLASSES UNDETECTED

Many of the Middle English romances depict characters moving through a variety of spaces as they progress through the exile-and-return structure of the narrative. There are numerous instances of physical movement as characters sometimes move from country to country, or the court to the forest; however, there are also movements within socially constructed hierarchies. In several of the romances, the heroes or heroines move through various social classes along their exile-and-return journey. This movement can be referred to as a form of individual social mobility, as it is often one character regressing and progressing within the social class structure as opposed to an entire family. The decline in a character's social status often parallels, or coincides with, their initial exile in the tale. This decline is also, typically, accompanied by a shift in the protagonist's identity, and often times, the protagonist physically adopts a disguise of a lower-class member. Within the romances, there are slight variations to these concepts. For instance, the tale *King Horn* portrays a double exile. Horn is first exiled to Westernesse, and then to Ireland—each time he moves further away from his Suddene nobility. *Horn* also illustrates a protagonist physically adopting the disguise of a lower-class member in order to gain access to the upper-class spaces. A similar shift is seen in *Havelok the Dane*. Havelok moves from an upper-class position to that of a lower class as he is removed from his role as a prince and becomes a fisherman, and then a cook's aide. This dramatic downward movement is also seen in *Gamelyn* as the young steward becomes a criminal and is later forced to become an outlaw. In these three tales, the protagonist travels the full spectrum, from upper class, to lower class, to upper class as

they seek to successfully restore their original identities. As they return to their original spaces, rather, as they complete the return part of their journey, they reclaim their noble identities, the associated privileges, and often, additional gains, such as a noble marriage, children, and/or domain over more land. Although these gains differ from tale to tale, they signal to the reader that the protagonist's journey is complete.

Regardless of its magnitude, the movement between social classes within these tales is accompanied and facilitated by various shifts in the character's identity. This shift allows security and anonymity for the characters as they progress through a series of trials before they are reinstated to their original high position. While the characters are not always aware of these shifts, such as Havelok, the reader can trace the various roles that the protagonists occupy as they move through the tale. These new identities allow the characters to undertake the return part of their journey in which they regain access to their high physical space, and subsequently, their original identity. However, this reinstatement is only possible through the adoption of a disguise, or a shift in identity. This conscious choice that many characters make permits physical access to their previously occupied space. The awareness of adopting a different identity, when juxtaposed with the return segment of the character's journey, implies a direct relation between the two. This relationship is also seen when a character is unknowingly in disguise (*Havelok*), and also when a character willingly changes their social status/identity (*Gamelyn*). Through a close examination of *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane*, and also *The Tale of Gamelyn*, we can see this positive correlation between the protagonist's shifts in identity and their movements within the exile-and-return structure

as they move through various social classes. I have chosen these three romances as they not only act as exemplars for these concepts, but they also illustrate variations to these concepts as well. For example, while the journey and various identity shifts in *Havelok* are obvious to the reader, they are unknown to the character, yet, they allow him to move through his exile and arrive at the return. It is not until he is fully aware of his noble status, and fully prepared to return to Denmark that Havelok adopts a disguise and is able to reclaim his original identity. *King Horn* operates within similar parameters, but slightly differs due to the fact that Horn is completely aware of his noble identity throughout his journey. Horn knowingly adopts two disguises (a beggar and a harpist) in order to gain access to Rymenhild's court, and subsequently, his original status as king. *The Tale of Gamelyn* presents unique complications and appears to differ greatly from *Havelok* and *Horn*. Throughout the tale, Gamelyn is fully aware of his original status, yet, this awareness does not affect his movements. He moves downward on the social class scale from steward, to criminal, to outlaw, and is not able to return to his lands until he adopts a new identity, as king of the outlaws. The complication in this theory occurs in that Gamelyn does not adopt a disguise. Instead, Gamelyn adopts several new identities, in which his true self is not concealed, but altered.

I begin by discussing *King Horn*, as I believe it best sets forth the overarching themes and patterns of this chapter—social class mobility and characters of nobility in disguise as lower class members. While *Havelok* and *Gamelyn* also illustrate these themes, they do so in different ways that will be elucidated throughout this chapter. The

differences between these tales are just as important as the similarities, as they illustrate how specific themes and patterns vary within the romances.

King Horn

The tale of *King Horn* is perhaps the most exemplary illustration of a character knowingly moving through various social stratum, and also, adopting a lower-class disguise to gain access to an upper-class space. By following Horn's journey, it is easy to identify the various identity shifts, and/or physical disguises that occur, and how they correspond to the structure of the tale. It is important to note that *Horn* presents a double exile structure, or rather, the protagonist is exiled twice. Initially, he is exiled to Westernesse with his companions, and after he is framed for treason, he is exiled again, but this time to Ireland. This double exile will be elaborated on in this chapter, but it is pertinent to acknowledge that Horn's identity is associated with his noble status in Suddene, his home. While his relationship with Rymenhild appears to take precedence at times in the tale, his identity is deeply rooted in his initial noble status—not his nobility by association with Rymenhild, nor his relationship with her. By following the path of the protagonist's journey, the importance of this identity to Horn becomes more evident.

Horn's first exile occurs when the Saracens invade his home, Suddene. After killing his father, the invaders decide that Horn poses too much of a threat to them, and they send him and his friends adrift in a boat (ln 100-110).¹⁹ This removal represents

¹⁹ All line references and quotations are from: Herzman, Ronald B., Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, editors. "*King Horn*." *TEAMS Middle English Text Series*, University of Rochester, 1999.

Horn's first instance of exile. While he still has a right to the throne of Suddene, he is physically removed from his noble space, and also, his noble identity. Horn and his companions arrive in Westernesse, where they are welcomed by King Almair and his clan. As Horn is welcomed by Almair, and becomes a member of the community, he undergoes his first identity shift—he becomes a citizen of Almair's lands. While Horn is aware that he is of noble descent, he does not act, or demand to be treated as such. Instead, he learns various trades by the teachings of Athlebrus (ln 232-246). Horn states that he wants to “earn his keep,” and thus assimilates into a lower class (than that of his noble birth). While this is not a disguise, Horn adopts an identity different than his own, and in doing so, he creates a new set of circumstances for himself within Westernesse. This change brings new opportunities to Horn almost immediately, especially as he meets the King's daughter, Rymenhild.

Eventually, Horn and Rymenhild fall in love, but Horn claims that they cannot marry because he is not of equal social status, nor has he proven his worth in Westernesse. He claims:

Ich am ibore to lowe
Such wimman to knowe.
Ich am icome of thralle
And fundling bifalle [...]. (ln 421-424)

Although Horn knows he is of noble birth, he does not claim a noble identity, or the associated privileges. Instead, he continues to operate within the parameters of the working class, and what is allotted to them. It is not until later that Horn asks Rymenhild

to have her father make him and his companions knights so that he could engage in activities that would allow him to prove his worth. After they are knighted, Rymenhild gives Horn a ring as a reminder, or sign, of their love.²⁰ Horn still resists their betrothal, though, and declares that he must prove his worthiness as a knight before they can marry. Not long after their exchange, Fikenhild, one of Horn's companions from Suddene, grows jealous of Horn's love and success, and tells King Almair that Horn plans to kill him. Upon hearing this news, Almair exiles Horn on pain of death, and sends him adrift at sea.

Now Horn is further away from his Suddene identity, but he has also been removed from a meaningful identity in Westernesse. While Horn's current space in the court of Almair is not as noble as in Suddene, this exile sets him apart from his newly formed identity as a knight and Rymenhild's love. This second exile not only places Horn further away from his noble, Suddene identity, but it also places him away from the identity that he has forged with Rymenhild. This is important to note as it is another identity that Horn strives to return to later in the tale. Both spaces are now significant to the character as are the corresponding identities. As Horn attempts to return and reclaim these roles, he undergoes several more noticeable identity shifts, and also, physical disguises.

Upon landing on the shores of Ireland, Horn adopts his first official disguise—a man named Cutberd. While this disguise is not as elaborate as the disguises that he will later adopt, Horn conceals both of his former identities—the prince of Suddene, and a

²⁰ The ring is inscribed with the following text: "Rymenhild the yonge" (ln 567).

lover of the princess of Westernesse. On the beach, Horn encounters two princes, Harlid and Berlid, who both inquire about his identity. Horn responds:

“Cutberd," he sede, "ich hote,
Icomen ut of the bote,
Wel feor fram biweste
To seche mine beste" [...]. (ln 773-776)

Horn presents this false front as to not draw attention to his true self. It is important to note though, that while Horn changes his name, he does not abandon his identity as a knight (that he gained in Westernesse). Instead, he uses the status of the knight, along with a false name, to gain a stronger foothold than that of a lower-class member. The poet highlights that this disguise is not physical, but rather it is a mere concealment of his noble title(s). He mentions no other change to Horn aside from his name. This description differs greatly from those we see later in the tale, and the poet uses these descriptions to emphasize the difference between the depths of each disguise. By maintaining his knightly status, he is quickly accepted by King Thurston as a “son,” and is enlisted as a noble fighter in his court. While Horn’s previous identity shift was distinctly from an upper class to a lower class, the shift that occurs in Ireland is rooted in his desire for anonymity; therefore, in concealing his identity, Cutberd becomes Horn’s first official disguise.

While in Ireland, Horn makes a great impression upon King Thurston. When the land is attacked by invaders, Horn leads his two adopted brothers to battle. It is not long after they arrive on the beaches that Horn realizes the invading men are the Saracens—

the men who killed his father and sent him into his initial exile. Horn is immediately reminded of his original identity as a noble of Suddene, and instead of fighting in the name of Thurston, Horn seeks revenge for his father. The poet also reminds the audience that Horn's initial identity lies in his role in Suddene; he says: "His fader deth wel dere hi boghte" (ln 892). By specifically mentioning Horn's father, the poet emphasizes that Horn has more at stake than the battle for Thurston, or his love of Rymenhild—he has his Suddene nobility to fight for. Despite the appearance of the love story of Horn and Rymenhild being at the forefront of the tale, this specific memory reminds the reader that Horn's journey will not end until he reclaims Suddene and restores his noble identity.

Horn and his brothers defeat the Saracens, but, unfortunately, Harlid and Berlid die in the process. Upon returning to the court, Thurston expresses his fear of not having an heir, and he offers his daughter to Horn in marriage. Horn declines, revealing that he is promised to another, and also, that he is the heir to Suddene (ln 991-1000). This unveiling of his disguise, and his personal journey, resonates with Thurston who assists Horn in his return to Rymenhild. Horn's decision to return to Westernesse serves as a signifier of the beginning of his journey back to restore his original identity. While Westernesse is not his final destination, his identity as Rymenhild's future husband requires attention as Rymenhild is forced to marry another man. Due to his criminal reputation, Horn knows that he cannot return as himself. Instead, he once again adopts a disguise as a member of the lower-class—that of a servant.

Upon arriving at Rymenhild's wedding ceremony, Horn convinces a servant to trade clothing with him for him to gain entry into the court:

Quath Horn, "So Crist me rede,
We schulle chaungi wede.
Have her clothes myne
And tak me thi sclavyne,
Today I schal ther drinke
That some hit schulle ofthinke."
His sclavyn he dude dun legge,
And tok hit on his rigge,
He tok Horn his clothes:
That nere him noght lothe.
Horn tok burdon and scrippe
And wrong his lippe.
He made him a ful chere,
And al bicolmede his swere.
He made him unbicomelich
Hes he nas nevremore ilich [...]. (ln 1061-1076)

I quote this passage at length to highlight the elaborateness of Horn's second disguise. The poet takes time to recount each physical change. In comparison to Horn's disguise as Cutberd, this disguise is all encompassing, as he physically presents himself as a member of the lower class. The poet describes his sartorial changes at length, emphasizing the depth to which he is disguised. The poet also describes the physical changes that Horn inflicts upon himself (such as scraping his lip, and covering himself in dirt). As the next

several passages describe the extravagance of Rymenhild's wedding ceremony and guests, Horn's disguise clearly marks him as a member of a lower class. This disguise also creates a physical juxtaposition between the two classes, and as Horn gains entry into the space of the upper class, the audience recognizes the importance of outward identity.

Without this disguise, Horn would not have been able to gain access to the court, and more specifically, to Rymenhild. Being disguised as a lower-class member poses no threat to the upper class, as they are inferior in almost every way. This is not only emphasized in the description of Horn as a servant, but also in his physical stature when talking with Rymenhild. When he interacts with Rymenhild, the text notes that he is sitting on the ground, positioning him physically below her, and in essence, the entire upper class. The text says:

He sette him wel loghe

In beggeres rowe;

He lokede him abute

With his colmie snute [...]. (ln 1089-1092)

This physical distance that he creates between himself and the upper-class, through his disguise, ultimately is what allows him access to both his original space in Westernesse, and also with Rymenhild. Despite being in Rymenhild's presence, Horn retains this disguise for a while to see if her love for him remained, and eventually, Horn reveals himself to her through the presentation of the ring. In this moment, he physically strips

his disguise by wiping the dirt from his neck, revealing his identity as both knight of Westernesse and Rymenhild's love (ln 1215, 1219).²¹

This restoration is a key moment of transition in the tale's exile and return structure, and also in Horn's journey towards identity restoration. Horn experiences two instances of exile correlating to two separations from two identities: first from Suddene and his noble identity, and second from Westernesse and his identity with Rymenhild. Upon revealing himself to Rymenhild and reclaiming his position in Westernesse, Horn reveals that even though he has returned to her, his journey is not over and he must return to Suddene. He claims that he cannot marry her until he has reclaimed the lands of his father:

Ne schal ich hit biginne,
Til I Suddene winne.
Thu kep hure a stunde,
The while that I funde
In to min heritage,
And to mi baronage.
That lond I schal offreche
And do mi fader wreche (ln 1289-1296).

Horn claims his identity as prince of Suddene lies in his lineage and relationship to his immediate family, implying a great importance to the identity. The poet uses this time to once again remind the audience of Horn's Suddene nobility, just as when he was on the

²¹ Line 1215: "He wiped that blake of his swere."

shores of Ireland. Because of his loyalty to his father and his lineage, Horn and Rymenhild remain unmarried, and Horn returns to Suddene to reclaim his original identity. He employs many men who have suffered under Saracen rule to aide him in this battle. Shortly after his return, Horn defeats the Saracens and he becomes King of Suddene—restoring his original identity.

It is worth noting that Horn did not need to adopt a disguise to re-enter Suddene as he did in Westernesse. Following the plot's double exile and return structure, Horn reclaims his identity in Westernesse before returning to Suddene, yet, he left Westernesse as an unmarried man. Upon rescuing Rymenhild, Horn does not fulfill his true identity as her betrothed, thus leaving "unfinished business" in that particular level of exile. After he defeats the Saracens, Horn learns that he once again must rescue Rymenhild from a forced marriage, thus inciting his return to Westernesse. In order to get back into the court, though, he has to adopt a disguise of a lower-class member, again. This disguise is not as drastic as the first as he and his men disguise themselves as "harpurs" and "gigours" (ln 1485-1486).²² After he gains access to the hall, he quickly kills Fikenhild, and, again, reunites with Rymenhild.

The tale concludes promptly after this scene. Horn has finally reclaimed the identity of Horn of Westernesse and the fiancé of Rymenhild, and can finally return to Suddene. While he still does not enter Suddene in disguise, he is able to restore his original identity.

²² Rather, the poet does not spend as much time describing their physical disguises as before (when Horn disguised himself as a beggar).

Havelok the Dane

The idea of characters moving between social classes is not unique to *King Horn*. It is a common theme amongst the Middle English romances, and in scholarly discussions the motif of social mobility tends to appear in discussions of subject matter and intended audience. Northrip Frye, in *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, suggests that the romances were a space to discuss “anxieties” or concerns of the author’s intended audience (25).²³ While a tales’ primary focus tends to be an individual’s journey, there are many sub-plots within the story that one can also focus on. In *Havelok*, our underlying focus is the young prince who is removed from his home, placed in the lower class, marries a princess, and eventually, takes back his noble status and lands. However, Havelok’s removal is prompted by Godard’s desire of his inheritance and land. Radulescu highlights that Godard’s actions may emphasize the tale’s contemporary audience as one of “[political] concerns with inheritance and succession” (41).²⁴ Another sub-plot is the change in Havelok’s social status. He not only moves from prince to fisherman’s son, but he also progresses in an upward motion as he becomes a cook’s aide, and later a husband to Goldeboru. The protagonists often spend a decent amount of time in these lower-class positions/roles, which Harriet. E. Hudson suggests indicates a specific audience. Hudson, in “Construction of Class, Family, and Gender in Some Middle English Popular Romances,” discusses social mobility briefly. Hudson notes the

²³ Frye, Northrop. *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*. Harvard UP, 1976.

²⁴ Radulescu, Raluca L. “Genre and Classification.” *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, edited by Raluca L. Radulescu, Cory James Rushton, D.S. Brewer, 2009, pp. 31-48.

relevant work of Crane who writes: “the conventional discourse of the English poems eschews exclusivity, touting instead the accessibility and imitability of chivalry and courtly love” (80). While Crane speaks in the context of specific tales, she accentuates the presence of social class movement in the Middle English romances. Presenting the idea of “imitability” in social status, she suggests, speaks to a particular audience’s interest. Rosalind Field makes a similar observation when discussing *Havelok the Dane* in “Popular Romance: The Material and the Problems.” She says, Havelok is “a narrative that engages with the realities of peasant and urban life” (25). As Havelok spends a majority of his journey in “peasant and urban life,” Field suggests it could be an indicator of the popular audience. While this may indeed be the case, the presence of social mobility is certainly a predominant element in the romances. The focus of this particular discussion is not to draw conclusions about the audience, though, but to highlight the function of disguise within the theme of social mobility. As characters transcend social boundaries, both in their descent from (exile), and their ascent to (return), their high space, the use of disguise is proven necessary for their journey.

The movement between social classes is particularly evident in *Havelok* as both the hero and heroine are forcibly removed from their respective noble status and space. The tale opens by describing the rule of King Athelwood. The text describes him as a great king: “Of word, of wepne, he was bold./ In Engeland was hevre knicth/ That betere held the lond to ricth” (ln 107-109).²⁵ On his deathbed, he instructs a renowned earl,

²⁵ All line references and quotations are from: Herzman, Ronald B., Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, editors. “Havelok the Dane.” *TEAMS Middle English Text Series*, University of Rochester, 1999.

Godrich, to ensure his daughter's safety until she becomes queen. Following the death of her father, though, Godrich removes Goldeboru from the court and imprisons her in Dover in an attempt to usurp the throne. He also strips her of her physical status in the court. While her identity as the future queen is still intact, her departure represents the beginning of her exile. The tale then leaves her lying in a prison, and the poet begins to introduce Havelok's story (ln 330). After the death of his father, Birkabeyn, who is also described in a positive manner, Havelok and his sisters are imprisoned by Godard. Despite his allegiance to the king, Godard sentences the children to death, killing Havelok's sisters himself (ln 419). Havelok, who is a young child at the time, begs for his life. Godard instructs Grim, his servant, to drown the young prince.

Havelok's removal from the court is meant to be the end of his character. Upon his arrival at Grim's cottage, though, Grim's wife witnesses the light shining from Havelok's mouth and insists that his life be spared. Grim has a change of heart and agrees, and decides to move his family, with Havelok, to someplace out of Godard's eye and reach. Havelok's physical separation from the court now represents the beginning of his exile (as opposed to the end of his life). As he leaves with Grim's family, Havelok no longer has access to the noble space and all the privileges associated with it. It is important to note that Havelok's exile is accompanied by the new identity that he is given, which inhibits an awareness of his original status. For the majority of the tale, Havelok identifies as a member of the lower class. Havelok is unaware of his true

identity, which only further emphasizes his distance from his noble status. This ignorance is important to keep in mind as Havelok moves through his journey as it highlights the critical function of disguise as a character moves through the exile-and-return structure; however, it also allows for a complete acceptance of a new identity (as a fisherman). Havelok remains with Grim's family for more than 12 years, and he eventually learns the trade of fishing. He is more than willing to embrace this identity and trade, along with the work it entails. He says:

It ne may nouth ben thus longe.

Goddot! I wile with hem gange

For to leren sum god to gete.

Swinken ich wolde for my mete -

It is no shame for to swinken!

The man that may wel eten and drinken

Thar nouth ne have but on swink long [...]. (796-802)

This prolonged separation from his noble space combined with the new role allows Havelok to maintain an identity in which he has both security and anonymity. The audience sees Havelok as a noble in disguise; they also realize that this disguise allows him to work and exist in public without being recognized. Although Havelok is unaware that he is in disguise, this anonymity is vital to him as he moves to different physical spaces and adopts different identities throughout the remainder of the tale. After leaving Grimsby, Havelok travels to Lincolnshire. He arrives in the clothing of a fisherman, and

begins to look for work. Eventually, a cook offers him a job, and he undergoes his second identity shift—from a fisherman to a cook's boy.

The position Havelok receives from the cook transforms him physically and figuratively. First, the cook gifts him new clothes that include shoes and socks—a noticeable difference from his fisherman's attire.²⁶ Havelok fully embraces his new role, and as he excels at his work, people quickly take notice of him (ln 946-961). During his time in his new identity, though, he is also noticed for his physical size and strength. There are multiple mentions of his stature, and these sections of text serve to distinguish him from those around him:

Than was Havelok bi the shuldren more
Than the meste that ther kam:
In armes him noman nam
That he doune sone ne caste (ln 983-986). [...]
And kipte up that hevi ston
That he sholde putten withe;
He putte at the firste sithe,
Over alle that ther wore
Twelve fote and sumdel more (ln 1051-1055). [...]
The speken of Havelok, everi del -

²⁶ The text notes that Havelok arrives in Lincolnshire nearly naked with no shoes, enforcing his level of poverty: "But on that he was almost naked:/ For he ne havede nouth to shride/ But a kovel ful unride,/ That was ful and swithe wicke;/ Was it nouth worth a fir-sticke" (ln 963-967).

Hw he was strong man and hey,

Hw he was strong, and ek fri [...]. (1071-1073)

I highlight these specific areas of text as they serve as a reminder to the audience of Havelok's noble and distinct identity despite his current social status. Although he is completely unaware that he is of noble descent, his physical strength can be seen as an indicator that he does not truly belong in his current space. This is not the first distinguishing trait we have seen in the text. Previously, the light that shone from his mouth (the light seen by Grim's wife), indicated that he was of elite status. These traits, as they show through his current identity, help him move from space to space. Now, it is Havelok's physical strength that distinguishes him. These traits, as they show through his adopted identities, help him move from space to space. As the light prompted his life to be spared, his size now causes another advancement in his story. His reputation and physical strength are recognized by Godrich, who offers him his next identity, and also, his next movement in the social stratum.

After his second identity shift to that of a cook's aide, Havelok's and Goldeboru's stories begin to merge. Havelok enters into a contest and is noticed by Godrich, who truly believes that Havelok is of a lower social class. Godrich is unaware of Havelok's noble lineage, and presents him as the perfect man for Goldeboru to marry, all the while knowing that she would lose her royal inheritance for marrying a man of lower status. Goldeboru is also misled by Havelok's current identity and is distraught by the idea of marrying beneath her. Both Godrich's and Goldeboru's initial assumptions about Havelok emphasize the importance, or rather the weight, of outward identity. As

previously seen in *King Horn*, appearances are taken at “face value” in the romances.

Havelok is seen as a cook’s aid, and this identity is not questioned—in fact, it is blatantly accepted. This acceptance implies a trust and belief in outward appearances. For Havelok, this trust is key in his success.

On their wedding night, though, this outward appearance is shattered as Goldeboru has a similar experience to that of Grim’s wife—she sees a light shining from Havelok. The poet writes:

On the nith als Goldebory lay,
Sory and sorowful was she ay,
For she wende she were bisweke,
That she were yeven unkyndelike.
O nith saw she therinne a lith,
A swithe fayr, a swithe bryth -
Al so brith, all so shir
So it were a blase of fir.
She lokede noth and ek south,
And saw it comen ut of his mouth
That lay bi hire in the bed. (1249-1258)

Upon seeing the light, Goldeboru’s concern for her husband’s social status immediately disappears. An angel accompanies the light and tells her the following:

"Goldeboru, lat thi sorwe be!
For Havelok, that haveth spuset thee,

He, kinges sone and kinges eyr,
That bikenneth that croiz so fayr
It bikenneth more - that he shal
Denemark haven and Englonde al.
He shal ben king strong and stark,
Of Englonde and Denemark -
That shal thu wit thin eyne seen,
And tho shalt quen and levedi ben!" (1266-1275)

The angel informs Goldeboru of Havelok's noble birth, and also, of their future as restored rulers. Goldeboru wakes Havelok, who has been dreaming of Denmark, and informs him of the message revealing and affirming his true identity. While this is clearly a moment of transition in the text as both characters acknowledge their desire, and need to return to their "high" spaces, their statuses have not changed—i.e. their characters' initial and noble identities are revealed, yet not restored. Physically, they are still distant from court life as they reside at Grimsby, and although they know their royal rights, they do not have access to them. This realization though (of Havelok's noble birth) also emphasizes the function of disguise throughout the first half of the tale. While Havelok was unaware of his true identity, as a lower classman, Havelok posed no threat, especially to Godrich's plan. If Havelok's noble status had been revealed prior to the marriage, it would not have happened. This concept illustrates how disguise assists and functions for characters in their ascent to their high space, or rather, in their return. Havelok's disguise as a member of lower birth allowed him entry to a higher position—

the marriage to Goldeboru. Only after he had secured his position in this new status could his true identity be revealed. This function is more evident as Goldeboru and Havelok attempt to return to their noble spaces.

Both Goldeboru and Havelok desire to take back their fathers' lands. First, they return to Havelok's home, Denmark. Unfortunately, their arrival in Denmark is missing from the manuscript MS Laud Misc. 108. Herzman and others cite Donald B. Sands and Sir Frederic Madden to account for the missing leaf. Sands says the following in regards to the section missing: "[...] the three sons agree to follow Havelok; and all the men, together with Goldeboru, sail for Denmark. Ashore, Havelok, William, and Roberd, disguised as peddlers, meet the Danish earl Ubbe and ask permission to sell their wares. Line 1625 opens in the middle of Havelok's plea" (95).²⁷ While there are varying opinions about the missing text, the character's actions following their arrival in Denmark indicate that they did not reveal their noble identities. Operating under Sands' assumptions, the disguise of a peddler allows Havelok and his adopted brothers access to the streets of Denmark, and also to a valuable confidant—a man named Ubbe. Through a series of events, Havelok is injured. While in recovery, Ubbe sees the same light from Havelok that Goldeboru and Grim's wife had seen before, and recognizes his nobility. Similar to before, Havelok's true identity is not revealed until after he has secured a favorable position with Ubbe, although this time, Havelok is aware of his concealed

²⁷ Herzman et al. reference the works in this note: Sands, Donald B., ed. *Middle English Verse Romances*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966; Madden, Sir Frederic, ed. *Havelok the Dane*. Roxburghe Club. W. Nicol, Shakespeare Press, 1828.

identity. Entering Denmark as a peddler allows him anonymity, and the anonymity permits him to make his way to the numerous resources that Ubbe provides. After Ubbe welcomes Havelok, the earl gives him a warm reception, recounts Birkabeyn's legacy, and promises to help reinstate Havelok as king with the help of many:

Thou shalt be King of al Denemark -
Was ther inne never non so stark.
Tomorwen shaltu manrede take
Of the brune and of the blake,
Of alle that aren in this tun,
Bothe of erl and of barun,
And of dreng and of thayn
And of knith and of sweyn.
And so shaltu ben mad knith
Wit blisse, for thou art so with. (2178-2187)

This allegiance and support of Ubbe, and his men, help Havelok gain access to Denmark and his noble identity. He confronts and kills Godard, which physically places him back in the court, and allows him to finally re-embrace his royal status. As aforementioned, the hero in the romances often receives additional gains in their return. Havelok's marriage to Goldeboru gives him access to the throne of England as well. After some resistance from Godrich, Havelok gives Goldeboru access to her noble status and space. As both nobles regain their identities and return to their original space, the exile and return structure is complete, along with their need for disguise.

While *Havelok* follows a familiar story line, it also presents several aspects that complicate the discussion of disguise and social mobility. As mentioned, Havelok is unaware of his nobility throughout a majority of the tale, although this naivety does not prevent him from travelling through the exile-and-return structure or adopting various disguises. His journey starts early on in his life as he offers up his rights to the kingdom as a small child. He is physically removed from the court as a child and does not return until he is an adult. His initial removal and disguise are the actions of another—Grim—and while Havelok has no choice in the matter, the decisions play crucial roles in his story. Havelok does not adopt a disguise of his own volition until he and Goldeboru return to Denmark, and he does so in an attempt to remain anonymous and secure entry to the country. Another unique aspect of his story is that it parallels that of another character—Goldeboru. While her movement and disguise varies from that of Havelok, her story plays an integral part in Havelok’s journey and vice versa. Havelok’s movement is more drastic than that of Goldeboru as he moves through the full spectrum of the social class structure—from upper class, to lower class, and back to upper class. This parallel, along with other variations, differ greatly from Horn; however, these differences highlight other emerging themes within the discussion of social mobility and disguise. One in particular offers a starting point for the discussion of *The Tale of Gamelyn*—a noble assimilating into a lower class while in exile.

The Tale of Gamelyn

There are a few connections that we can discern between *Havelock* and *The Tale of Gamelyn*. Rosalind Field writes of one when she observes that “[b]oth heroes are

displaced from the world of established power by corrupt usurpers [...]” (26-27).²⁸

Godrich and Johan defy their orders and force Havelok and Gamelyn out of their high spaces and into their first disguise as someone of a lower class. While the heroes’ foci differ as they move through their exile-and-return journey, they both move through lower social classes before they are able to return to their original noble identity and class.

There are several differences between the two though, which will be discussed through a close reading of *The Tale of Gamelyn*. One of the first differences is that Gamelyn is aware of his original title throughout his journey while Havelok remains unaware of his own. This difference shapes the way in which Gamelyn moves through the social classes, and also, the way in which his identity shifts. Unlike Horn and Havelok, Gamelyn does not conceal his identity as he moves through his journey, or, rather, he does not physically adopt disguises of lower classmen. Despite these differences, *Gamelyn* is still noteworthy in this discussion as it presents a unique variation to the overarching patterns discussed in this chapter. The focus of the tale, while similar to others, provides a conflict in which Gamelyn is more interested in regaining his land, than his title as a steward (i.e. he cares for the possessions and associations of his identity).

Like *Havelok*, *The Tale of Gamelyn* is concerned with the rightful inheritance of land. Joanna Luwikoska, in her article “(Breaking) the Law: Social Control, Self-Help and Violence in *The Tale of Gamelyn*,” writes that “[*Gamelyn*] represents important

²⁸ Field, Rosalind. “Popular Romance: The Material and the Problems.” *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, edited by Raluca L. Radulescu, Cory James Rushton, D.S. Brewer, 2009, pp. 9-30.

aspects of material and legal dealings of medieval English minor gentry” (64).²⁹ She continues, and says, “the text focuses on social attitudes to law, justice, and violence represented by both the gentry, and members of other classes, such as servants, craftsmen, fighters, and church and law officials” (64). This is noteworthy for two reasons. First, Luwikoska highlights the fact that *Gamelyn* is not focused on the concerns and values of one social class, but of several. As Gamelyn moves through various social classes, like Havelok, he encounters people from various classes and experiences their various social climates. Gamelyn is not merely immersed in these classes, but he learns what it is like to exist in the class of a servant and an outlaw. Secondly, Luwikoska makes an observation that creates a distinction between the “starting points” and subsequent movements of Gamelyn and that of Havelok. While both members of the upper class, Gamelyn does not descend from royalty; instead, he is a member of the “minor gentry.” The gentry, while still considered part of the upper class, is not part of the aristocracy. This discrepancy illustrates that social mobility in conjunction with disguise was not limited to tales with protagonists of the upper class.

The conflict in *the Tale of Gamelyn* exists between two brothers. After the death of their father, the eldest brother, Johan, attempts to usurp the land that is left to the

²⁹ From: Luwikoska, Joanna. “(Breaking) the Law: Social Control, Self-Help and Violence in *The Tale of Gamelyn*.” *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2013, pp. 63-77. *ProQuest Literature Online*.

She further specifies that the “minor gentry” refer to “provincial landlords with predominantly local interests” (64). Luwikoska cites this from Kaeuper, Richard W. “An Historian's Reading of *The Tale of Gamelyn*.” *Medium Ævum*, vol. 52, no. 1, 1983, pp. 51-62. *JSTOR*, doi: 10.2307/43628682.

youngest brother, Gamelyn.³⁰ He offers to care for Gamelyn, with food and clothes, and to care for his inheritance until he is of legal age (ln 71-72).³¹ Johan believes that he is entitled to these lands, and to express his outrage, he abuses and destroys them. As Johan confiscates Gamelyn's lands, he strips Gamelyn of a privilege associated with his title. I suggest this marks the beginning of Gamelyn's journey as it is his primary focus throughout the tale. When Gamelyn objects to this usurpation, Johan attempts to physically force Gamelyn into compliance. Johan instructs his men: "Goth and beteth this boye and reveth hym his witte,/ And lat him lerne another tyme to answeere me bette" (ln 11-112). Gamelyn overcomes Johan's men, and realizes his strengths and skills. He takes these skills to a local wrestling match, and upon his victory, he returns and confronts Johan a second time. His brother, who is afraid of his strength, attempts to keep Gamelyn locked out of the castle. Gamelyn proceeds to break down the door and violently kill a porter:

Gamelyn overtoke the porter and his tene wrake,
And girt him in the nek that the boon to-brake,
And toke hym by that oon arme and threwe hym in a welle,
Seven fadme it was depe as I have herde telle (ln 301-304).

³⁰ Luwikoska notes that this would not have been unreasonable by the "law of primogeniture" (65). Gamelyn, as he was the youngest son, would not legally have any rights to the lands of his father. She cites lines 44-48 of the text to emphasize this.

³¹ All line references and quotations are from: Knight, Stephen, and Thomas H. Ohlgren, editors. "The Tale of Gamelyn." *The Middle English Text Series*, University of Rochester, 2017, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/tale-of-gamelyn>. Accessed 27 October 2017.

I quote this passage to emphasize the brutality of Gamelyn's response, which Luwikoska notes, is punishable by both "common and canon law" (70). Gamelyn is presented as both a physically violent and powerful character, and this is something that remains with him throughout the remainder of the tale. This particular instance of violence though, leads to punishment and another removal from his "high" space. After Johan takes back control of the castle, Gamelyn is forced to face the consequences of his actions by way of trial. It is in this moment that we see Gamelyn's first identity shift—from a steward to a lawbreaker. Even though Gamelyn's actions are inspired by not only his desire to take back his inheritance, but also to take revenge on his brother, Gamelyn is now a murderer in the eye of the public. The combination of his actions and the community's response to his violence permit Gamelyn to fully embrace the identity of a criminal, and also, enable him to continue downward in the exile-and-return structure.

Johan sentences Gamelyn to stand tied to a post without food and water (ln 383-386). One night, Gamelyn begs Adam, a servant instructed to guard him, to release him in exchange for land. Adam agrees, and upon his release, Gamelyn undergoes another, although subtle, identity shift. As he tries to plan his escape Gamelyn turns to Adam for advice: "'Adam,' seide Gamelyn, 'what is nowe thi rede? Or I go to my brother and gerd of his heed?'" (ln 425-426). In this moment, Gamelyn aligns himself with Adam in multiple facets. First he realizes that he must change his approach to revenge; he is now a criminal, and a fugitive (upon escaping), and cannot attack Johan in the open without further retribution. He then turns to Adam for advice, or rather, he uses information that Adam has gained from his social position in order to strategically alter his plan for

revenge. Gamelyn has no knowledge of how things work in his new status, so reliance and acknowledgement of his new position are key to his survival. Like other protagonists, Gamelyn is distant from his original space and the privileges associated with it. This exchange between Adam and Gamelyn emphasizes this distance as he is reliant on a member of a lower class. This alignment with Adam signals a shift in Gamelyn as he accepts his new role as an outsider. As Gamelyn engages with this new social position by planning revenge, though, he opens the path for more downward movement. After their plan fails to surprise Johan, Adam suggests that they flee:

"My rede is now this,
Abide we no lenger lest we fare amys:
I rede we to wode gon er we be founde,
Better is ther louse than in the toune bounde." (599-602)

By suggesting that they leave their space, and retreat to the woods (a space and social standing that is even further removed from the castle), Adam implies that Gamelyn's ascent towards his original identity is not yet possible; rather, he is still removed from his original space. Gamelyn then moves to his next space, and subsequently, next identity in the forest.

Upon their arrival in the forest, Gamelyn reaches the bottom of the social strata. Luwikoska suggests that in this moment, Johan acts as a placeholder for the upper class from which now Gamelyn is both physically and mentally removed (67). He has no access to his home, nor to his rights as a steward. Gamelyn openly acknowledges this separation when he meets the king of the outlaws (a group of men that resides in the

forest). He says, “He most nedes walk in feeld that may not in toune” (ln 667). After a short period of time with the outlaws, Gamelyn is named their master, or king, and shortly after, he learns that Johan has taken his men and has abused them as well. These men retreat and seek out Gamelyn to beg for help. Upon hearing this news, Gamelyn attempts to confront John, but fails and is once again thrown in prison. Now imprisoned as a king of the outlaws, Gamelyn is caught between two identities. He has embraced the identity of an outlaw, yet he is still held responsible for the crimes he previously committed. After his brother, Sir Ote, bails him out, he returns to the woods to be with the outlaws pending judgment. The text says:

His men tolde him of adventures that they had founde,

And Gamelyn tolde hem agein howe he was fast bounde.

While Gamelyn was outlawe had he no cors;

There was no man that for him ferde the wors [...]. (ln 773-776)

The poet discusses the events of Gamelyn’s life prior to the woods as “adventures.”

However, he also says that when he “was outlawe had he no cors.” This juxtaposition of Gamelyn’s past and present indicates a distance from his former self. As he embraces his identity as an outlaw, he acknowledges the freedom associated with it.³² This acceptance ultimately provides an avenue for Gamelyn to re-enter the original space from which Johan removed him earlier on in the tale.

³² Just as Gamelyn embraced the specific knowledge associated with the servant, Adam.

Gamelyn returns to face his bail, but he does not go alone. Acting as the king of the outlaws, Gamelyn “brought with hym yonge men of pris” (ln 800). The outlaws have embraced Gamelyn as their king, and committed themselves to him, unfalteringly:

"And if thou to us have nede thou shalt finde us prest;

We wil stonde with the while that we may dure;

And but we worchen manly pay us none hure."

"Yonge men," seid Gamelyn, "so mot I wel the!

A trusty maister ye shal fynde me" (ln 826-830).

As the men illustrate their commitment to Gamelyn as their king, his new identity is further reinforced. This allegiance would be expected in this type of relationship, and it is through this relationship that Gamelyn acquires the necessary means to take back his lands—a loyal army.

Gamelyn takes back his lands from Johan, and like the poets of *Horn* and *Havelok*, the poet summarizes Gamelyn’s victory quickly in the text (ln 873-882). Once again, we see a great focus on the protagonist’s decline and rise, or rather, their personal journey. Along this journey, we do see shifts in Gamelyn’s identity, although they differ greatly from those of *Horn* and *Havelok*. At no point in the tale does Gamelyn conceal his identity, or alter his physical appearance. Instead, he appears to alter his mindset and his approach to handling adverse situations. In “The Tale of Gamelyn: Introduction,” Stephen Knight and Thomas H. Ohlgren emphasize that Gamelyn’s journey was to retrieve more than land, but also that of family and law.³³ These unique aspects present

³³ Knight, Stephen, and Thomas H. Ohlgren, editors. “The Tale of Gamelyn.” *The Middle*

great variation to the schema set forth by tales such as *Horn* and *Havelok*. These differences serve to provide a framework of thinking when it comes to analyzing other tales that do not seem to match perfectly. By highlighting these divergences, we can see the alterations to the disguise motif within the genre of the romances, and we can also identify the numerous occurrences of the motif.

English Text Series, University of Rochester, 2017,
<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/tale-of-gamelyn-introduction>. Accessed 27 October 2017.

CHAPTER THREE : A TEST OF LOYALTY

This chapter illustrates a different connection between a protagonist's return, identity, and disguise. There are several tales in which disguise is present, but is not used by the protagonist; instead, a secondary character adopts a disguise for a specific function. These characters, while not the focus of the tale, play an integral role in the protagonist's journey. In tales where this is the case, the protagonist's journey differs significantly from other tales, including those of Havelok, Horn and Gamelyn. These tales include characters attempting to restore their identities, but also, characters attempting to maintain a certain identity. Instead of attempting to restore their stripped identity, the characters strive to maintain their true self. Often in these tales, the character that dons the disguise uses it to test the protagonist. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Lord Bertilak disguises himself as the Green Knight to test Gawain's chivalric ideals. In *Sir Amadace*, the (presumed dead) beggar is disguised as the White Knight to test Amadace's ability to keep his word. A similar situation also exists in *Sir Orfeo*. To discuss the differences regarding identity and disguise, I will focus on these three tales: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Sir Amadace*, and *Sir Orfeo*. In these tales, it is also pertinent to acknowledge that the exile and return structure varies from that discussed in the previous chapter. While Gawain and Amadace still experience exile, it is less violent and tumultuous than those of Havelok, Horn and Gamelyn. In this chapter, the exile of a given protagonist corresponds to when their identity is put to the test, or more specifically, when they venture out to maintain or restore it. This is a subtle shift from the familiar structure, but important to acknowledge as the shift appears to occur in specific

plots or circumstances. The return aspect of the journey, therefore, also differs. Along with physically returning to a specific space, the protagonist encounters their original identity with some caveats—which will be expanded on in this chapter.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is centered upon a character's quest to maintain his identity. Unlike *Havelok* and *Horn*, *Sir Gawain* presents an established knight with an outstanding reputation at the outset of the poem, but this reputation is quickly called into question. While Havelok and Horn are both metaphorically and physically separated from their identities (as nobles), Gawain's identity is challenged, but remains essentially intact throughout his journey. Gawain's quest is not to reclaim his chivalric identity, but rather, it is to maintain it.

Jesse Weston, in his introduction to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, describes Gawain as a knight that is "loyally faithful to his word."³⁴ Weston's observation of Gawain's nature is particularly important, as it is this nature, and subsequently, Gawain's knightly identity, that is called into question in the poem. Alan Markman, in his essay "The Meaning of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," suggests that "the primary purpose of the poem is to show what a splendid man Gawain is" (161).³⁵ While it is difficult to claim that *Sir Gawain* has one purpose, Markman highlights the poem's focus on the character of Gawain. Markman continues, and says that the poet sets to fulfill its purpose

³⁴ Weston, Jesse, translator. "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." *The Camelot Project*, University of Rochester, 2017, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/weston-sir-gawain-and-the-green-knight>. Accessed 19 January 2017.

³⁵ Markman, Alan M. "The Meaning of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*." *Sir Gawain and Pearl*, edited by Robert J. Blanch, Indiana UP, 1996, pp. 37-59.

through a “controlled test” (161). The poet does not introduce a test of physical strength though; instead, the test is of the “non-physical qualities of the ideal knight,” which Gawain is believed to be (Markman 163). Markman claims these qualities are “humility, courtesy, and loyalty” (163). These traditionally chivalric qualities are tested not once, but twice in the poem: first, by the Green Knight, and second by Lord and Lady Bertilak. The first challenge to his identity tests if Gawain is truly “loyally faithful to his word,” as he must fulfill his agreement to the Green Knight’s game (Weston).

The poem opens detailing a great New Year's feast in Arthur’s court. The first knight that is identified to the audience is Gawain, who is seated next to Guinevere. The lavish feast is soon interrupted by the entrance of the Green Knight. The narrator spends an extensive amount of time detailing the knight’s appearance describing his stature, as well as his dress and armor (ln 136-220).³⁶ The Green Knight first demands to see the “þe gouernour of þis gyng,” and he claims that he means no harm (ln 225). The Knight then reveals his true mission: to play a game (ln 273). The Knight describes the game as follows:

If any so hardy in þis hous holdez hymself
Be so bolde in his blod, brayn in hys hede
Þat dar stifly strike a strok for an oþer
I schal gif hym of my gyft þys giserne ryche,

³⁶ All line references and quotations are from: Benson, Larry D., translator. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Close Verse Translation*. Edited and with a foreword by Daniel Donoghue, West Virginia UP, 2012. *ProQuest ebrary*.

Þis ax, þat is heué innogh, to hondele as hym lykes,

And I schal bide þe fyrst bur as bare as I sitte. (ln 285-290)

There are many things to note about the knight's description of the game. The Green Knight says it requires a participant who is "bolde in his blod, brayn in hys hede" (ln 286). This gesture makes a statement about the volunteer's personal character, as he does not ask for a brave, or noble knight, but a "bolde" one. Another aspect to the proposal is that the game appears to be easy to win as the participant is permitted the first blow. Despite this set-up, no one immediately volunteers, and the Green Knight proceeds to taunt the men of Arthur's court, questioning their great reputation (ln 309-327). At first, Arthur steps forward, but Gawain quickly volunteers in his place (ln 341-342).³⁷ Gawain's volunteering appears to be humble as he states: "I am þe wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,/ And lest lur of my lyf, quo laytes þe soþe" (ln 354-355). This justification presents him as selfless and modest. Arthur then accepts Gawain's pledge, and the game begins.

To ensure that Gawain is aware of the rules, the Green Knight asks Gawain to fully consider the parameters of the game. Gawain repeats the stipulations set forth: "And at þis tyme twelmonyth take at þe an oper/ Wyth what weppen so þou wylt, and wyth no wyȝ elleȝ/ on lyue." (ln 383-385). The Knight extends the rules, claiming that Gawain must seek him out wherever he resides at the end of the year to complete the game. Gawain proceeds to take the first blow, and upon doing so, the Knight's "Þe fayre hede fro þe halce hit to þe erpe" (ln 427). It appears that the game is over, and that Gawain is

³⁷ Ln 341-342, Gawain says: "I beseche now with saȝeȝ sene/ Þis melly mot be myne."

safe from participating; however, to the court's astonishment, the body of the Green Knight stands, picks up his head, and prepares to leave the court.

This encounter with the Knight is the first challenge to Gawain's chivalric identity in the text. The choice that he is now faced with (to uphold the rules, or to shy away) poses a real risk to Gawain's reputation. Gawain realizes that he has been tricked and is now engaged in a potentially fatal situation. This engagement was not only witnessed by the Knight, but also by the court. As Markman notes, loyalty is one of the qualities of an "ideal knight," and that "it is obvious that the feudal age admired these qualities" (163-164). Gawain gave his word that he would uphold his part of the game, and to break this word would be in stark contrast to this knightly quality. The Green Knight takes time to remind Gawain of his agreement, reinforcing Gawain's public involvement. He continues and claims that if Gawain fails to fulfill his promise, he will "be calde þe behoues" (In 456). The Green Knight plays on Gawain's pride, which Jan Solomon, in her chapter "The Lesson of Sir Gawain," notes is established at the outset of the poem (268).³⁸ Gawain is now under a very specific pressure: in order to maintain his knightly identity and ideals, he must finish a game that will result in his death. Although he unknowingly engaged in an agreement with a hidden disadvantage, he is still expected to uphold his part of the bargain.

At this point in the poem, Gawain and the audience of the poem are unaware that the Green Knight is a character in disguise; instead, he is viewed as the antagonist. The

³⁸ Solomon, Jan. "The Lesson of Sir Gawain." *Critical Studies of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, edited by Donald. R. Howard and Christian Zacher, University of Notre Dame Press, 1968.

Knight's challenge acts as a catalyst for Gawain's journey as it prompts Gawain's departure from Arthur's court. *Sir Gawain*, along with the other tales in this chapter, present a different type of journey (one for maintenance instead of restoration), and this alters the perception of the tale's exile and return structure. I suggest that Gawain's exile is represented by his questioned identity, or rather, it is the time in which his identity and fate are uncertain or questioned. Gawain and the other members of the court realize the futility of the situation. While his exile differs in severity from Horn, Havelok, and Gamelyn, Gawain is still engaged in a journey focused on maintaining his identity.

In *Sir Gawain*, the conversation surrounding identity is intimately related to that of chivalry, and more specifically, upholding promises. As stated, Gawain's identity is tested twice within the tale, and the second test appears to be by another secondary character. After nearly a year has passed, Gawain seeks out the Green Knight. Before his deadline arrives, he takes up residence with a lord and lady who live near the Knight's chapel. Lord and Lady Bertilak are generous and offer him their best. Lord Bertilak even invites Gawain to take part in his daily hunting, but Gawain declines. Bertilak accepts, and makes a seemingly unusual deal with him instead:

[...] "a forwarde we make:

Quat-so-euer I wynne in þe wod hit worþez to youreȝ;

And quat chek so ȝe acheue chaunge me þerforne.

Swete, swap we so, sware with trawþe,

Queþer, leude, so lympe, lere oþer better." (ln 1105-1109)

Lord Bertilak implements a deal of exchange, and he asks for Gawain to “sware with trawþe.” This deal is similar in nature to that of the Green Knight in that it calls on Gawain’s loyalty, but also his honesty to present his findings, “lere oþer better,” each day. This arrangement is the second test of Gawain’s character. Lady Bertilak complicates Gawain’s agreement to Lord Bertilak though when she offers herself to him.³⁹ Gawain refuses this offer, but accepts a kiss from her. When Lord Bertilak returns, he asks Gawain to uphold their deal. Gawain upholds his promise:

He hasppez his fayre hals his armez wythinne,
And kysses hym as comlyly as he couþe awyse:
“Tas yow þere my cheuicaunce, I cheued no more;
I wowche hit saf fynly, þa 3 feler hit were.” (ln 1388-1391)

Although he upholds their agreement, Gawain conceals the fact that the kiss came from Lady Bertilak. The same interaction occurs on the second day, except, with two kisses. On the third morning, the Lady offers something more to Gawain:

Ho razt hym a riche rynk of red golde werkez,
Wyth a starande ston stondande alofte
þat bere blusschande beme3 as þe bryzt sunne;
Wyt 3e wel, hit watz worth wele ful hoge. (ln 1817-1820)

³⁹ Ln 1237-1240 ““3e ar welcum to my cors,/ Yowre awen won to wale;/ Me behouez of fyne force/ Your seruaunt be, and schale.”

Gawain refuses her offer, knowing it would surely reveal their interactions to Lord Bertilak. She then offers him her girdle, but again, Gawain refuses. The lady then describes the girdle, which presents an opportunity that Gawain cannot refuse.

Lady Bertilak says:

“Now forsake ȝe þis silke,” sayde þe burde þenne,

“For hit is symple in hitself? And so hit wel semeȝ.

Lo! So hit is littel, and lasse hit is worþy;

Bot who-so knew þe costes þat knit ar þerinne,

He wolde hit prayse at more prys, paraenture:

For quat gome so is gorde with þis grene lace,

While he hit hade hemely halched aboute,

þer is no hæpel vnder heuen tohewe hym þat myȝt,

For he myȝt not be slayn for slyȝt vpon erþe.” (1847-1854)

The girdle appears to be an answer to Gawain’s underlying problem—his approaching encounter with the Green Knight’s axe. He realizes that the girdle could save him from death, and allow him to return to Arthur’s court (ln 1855-1858). Until now, Gawain has maintained his loyalty in his deal with Lord Bertilak, and also his moral code by not allowing the Lady into his bed (Markman 172). He is placed in a compromising position though, as the Lady bids him keep this specific exchange a secret. If he upholds the Lady’s request, he gets to keep the girdle, but he knows in doing so, he would compromise his character by being unfaithful to his deal with Lord Bertilak. On the other hand, if he gives the girdle to Lord Bertilak, thereby keeping his word, he may not

survive the later interaction with the Green Knight. Gawain decides to take the girdle, and hides it when the Lord asks for their daily exchange of winnings. Markman notes “his acceptance of the Lady’s lace, of course, is the most notable incident in the romance which illustrates his humanity” (165). This moment reminds the audience that although Gawain is a knight, he is still human and has a desire to live, as well as a desire to maintain his reputation. John Burrow, in his article “The Two Confession Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” observes: “It is [...] clear from what follows that his intention to conceal the girdle from the host is never in doubt—[Gawain] has no intention either of returning it to the lady or of giving it up, according to his promise, to the host” (126). When asked for his daily winnings, Gawain instead kisses Lord Bertilak thrice, and claims: “Ȝe, of þe chepe no charg,” quoth chefly þat oþer,/ As is pertly payed þe chepez þat I azte” (ln 1940-1941).

Solomon discusses these pivotal moments at length, detailing the “conflicting demands” that Gawain encounters in the final exchange (270). She claims that these “conflicting demands on Gawain’s courtesy create a situation wherein it is impossible for [his] courtesy to be preserved on all counts” (270). Gawain’s situation is complex as his two identity tests have collided. He can either lie to Bertilak, conceal the girdle, and save his life, or, he can be honest and surely die in the Green Knight’s challenge. The latter would mean that he would never return to Arthur’s court as a knight. At the center of his conflict though, is the question of whether or not Gawain can uphold his chivalric identity and virtues (Solomon 271).

The new year finally arrives, and Gawain leaves the Lord's castle with the girdle in tow, and travels to the Green Chapel. He meets the Green Knight, and upon recounting their arrangement, he prepares to receive the Knight's blow.⁴⁰ The Knight swings his axe, and misses prompting Gawain to jump out of the way. The Knight immediately calls Gawain's character into question. He attacks Gawain's identity by claiming that he is not the same knight he met at Arthur's court. The Knight says, "'Pou art not Gawayn," quop þe gome, "þat is so goud halden,/ þat neuer arzed for no here by hylle ne be vale," (ln 2270-2271). He also reminds Gawain that he held perfectly still when Gawain delivered his blow.⁴¹ This critique of Gawain prompts him to offer the Green Knight additional swings. On the third swing, the Knight knicks Gawain, but nothing more. Gawain immediately claims their deal is fulfilled. The Green Knight agrees, but reveals an unsettling truth to Gawain: he is Lord Bertilak in disguise.

The Green Knight recounts Gawain's interactions with his wife, along with the secrets that he kept. He says:

"[...] I wrozt hit myseluen.

I sende hir to asay þe, and sothly me þynkkez

On þe fautlest freke þat euer on fote zede;

As perle bi þe quite pese is of prys more,

So is Gawayn, in god fayth, bi oþer gay knyztez.

⁴⁰ Ln 2255-2258: "He lened with þe nek, and lutte,/ And schewed þat schyre al bare,/ And lette as he nozt dutte;/ For drede he wolde not dare."

⁴¹ Ln 2272-2274: And now þou fles for ferde er þou fele harmez! Such cowardise of þat knyzt cowþe I neuer here./ Nawþer fyked I ne flaze, freke, quen þou myntest [...]."

Bot here yow lakked a lyttel, sir, and lewté yow wonted;

Bot þat wat3 for no wylde werke, ne wowyng nauþer,

Bot for 3e lufed your lyf; þe lasse I yow blame.” (2361-2368)

The Knight confesses to orchestrating both tests, and admires Gawain for resisting his wife, but admonishes him for keeping the girdle. While the Knight acknowledges that Gawain kept it for fear of his life, he cannot overlook his choice. Gawain does not take well to this realization, and says: “Corsed worth cowarddyse and couetyse boþe! In yow is vylany and vyse þat vertue disstryez” (2374-2375). He recognizes that while he completed his deal with the Green Knight, he had to compromise his chivalric ideals, specifically that of loyalty and honesty, to do so. In revealing his identity, Lord Bertilak also reveals that this plan was not of his own, but of “Morgne la Faye” (ln 2446).⁴² He refers to her as “þe goddess,” and claims she sent him in disguise to “assay þe surquidré, 3if hit soth were,/ Þat rennes of þe grete renoun of þe Rounde Table” (ln 2452, 2457-2458). Lord Bertilak continues to say that le Fay also wished to upset Guinevere with the sight of the Green Knight and his talking head (ln 2460-2462). While le Fay’s intentions were two-fold, the test upon Gawain’s character served to potentially damage the prestigious reputation of Arthur’s court. As Gawain completed his tests and maintained

⁴² In her article, “From The Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Fay in Medieval Romance,” Maureen Fries discusses the various appearances of Morgan le Fay, as well as her devolving image. Fries illustrates how le Fay moves from an “initial portrait [image as] positive” to one of “death with illicit sex and wrongful imprisonment” (2). The image we see in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is more closely related to her malicious self that is present in many Arthurian romances.

his chivalric identity, but only to an extent, Gawain must return to Arthur's court with his armor (ln 2429-2433).⁴³

Donning the girdle implies an acceptance of his shortcomings, and it also serves as a physical reminder of the experience as well. While the disguise of the Green Knight is deceptive, it serves a distinct purpose—to test Gawain's (and the court's) reputation. By donning the disguise, Bertilak creates a situation that tests Gawain's character on multiple levels, including loyalty, courtesy, and honesty. This disguise and its subsequent test allow for Gawain to show his true self to not only Arthur's court, but to himself as well. When he returns to the court, he is welcomed warmly (ln 2490-2495).⁴⁴ Gawain recounts his adventures, but is ashamed that he failed to be a true chivalric knight. Instead of punishing him, the court embraces his faults, and adopts the green girdle as part of their traditional wear (ln 2513-2518).⁴⁵ This gesture indicates that the court accepts Gawain, and his actions, and they honor his humility.

Sir Gawain illustrates a protagonist in search of maintaining his chivalric identity.

While the search to maintain an identity in the romances is common, it is important to

⁴³ Ln 2429-2433: "Bot your gordel," quoth Gawayn, "God yow forzelde! / þat wyl I welde wyth guod wylle, not for þe wynne golde, / Ne þe saynt, ne þe sylk, ne þe syde pendaundes, / For wele ne for worchyp, ne for þe wlonk werkkez, / Bot in syngne of my surfet I schal se hit ofte [...]."

⁴⁴ Ln 2490-2495: "þer wakned wele in þat wone when wyst þe grete / þat gode Gawayn wat 3 comen, gayn hit hym þoȝt. / þe kyng kyssez þe knyȝt, and þe whene alce, / And syþen mony syker knyȝt þat soȝt hym to haylce, / Of his fare þat hym frayned; and ferlyly he telles, / Biknowez alle þe costes of care þat he hade [...]."

⁴⁵ Ln 2513-2519: "þe kyng comferteȝ þe knyȝt, and alle þe court als / Lazen loude þerat, and luflyly acorden / þat lordes and ladis þat longed to þe Table, / Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue, / A bende abelef hym aboute of a bryȝt grene, / And þat, for sake of þat segge, in swete to were, / For þat watȝ acorded þe renoun of þe Rounde Table [...]."

note that not all identities are based in ideals and values. *Sir Amadace* presents a variation to this notion, as the protagonist's identity is attached to a physical possession—wealth. Amadace's journey focuses on first restoring his wealth, and then maintaining it when it is threatened by a secondary character in disguise—the White Knight.

Sir Amadace

The story of *Sir Amadace*, like *Sir Gawain*, involves a test of the protagonist's true character by a secondary character in disguise. While there are some similarities to Gawain, the tale offers its own variations to the overarching themes of disguise and tests of loyalty. Similar to Gawain, Amadace is a knight whose loyalty is tested, specifically, his ability to keep his word. However, Amadace is tested only once, and his test appears under much different circumstances than Sir Gawain. The opening of the tale describes the financial troubles of Sir Amadace and how he is currently in much debt. Edward Foster observes in his introduction to *Sir Amadace*, that “the narrator seems to imply that Amadace's predicament is the result of excessive, but basically admirable, liberality [...].”⁴⁶ This excessiveness puts him in a financial crunch, and he is forced to make a hard decision. Ad Putter notes in “Gifts and Commodities in Sir Amadace,” that in order to rectify his debt, “Amadace is advised by his steward to economize, but to make a final splash: he mortgages his lands to provide a banquet sundry, and then departs [...].” (372).⁴⁷ Amadace's fleeing signals the beginning of his journey, or his exile. Foster

⁴⁶ Foster, Edward. E., editor. “Sir Amadace: Introduction.” *TEAMS Middle English Texts Series*, University of Rochester, 2007, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/foster-sir-amadace-introduction>. Accessed 25 September 2016.

⁴⁷ Putter, Ad. “Gifts and Commodities in Sir Amadace.” *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 51, no. 203, 2000, pp. 371–394. *New Series*, www.jstor.org/stable/519298.

comments on Amadace's actions and claims that while "foolish," they are not "evil," and "therefore [he] deserves the restoration of [his] wealth." Putter's comment highlights that Amadace's journey does indeed focus on his return to wealth. I suggest that this is merely a part of the larger journey initiated by the White Knight. While he seeks to regain his wealth, Amadace's loyalty (to his word) is tested. In order to return to his wealth fully, he must prove that he is worthy of it. This test is administered by the White Knight as he tests Amadace's ability to keep his promise when doing so would mean giving up his wife and son.

Shortly after he leaves his lands, Amadace encounters a chapel in the woods. He and his companion see a light shining from the window and go to investigate. Sir Amadace finds a woman inside with her husband's corpse, and inquires as to why she has not buried his body. She tells Amadace of how her husband lived foolishly in life, especially in terms of his finances, and that when he died, she was left with his debt. She continues and explains that the merchant to which her husband was in debt will not allow her to bury the body until the debt is paid. Despite his current situation, Amadace volunteers to help her. He then seeks out the unforgiving merchant (to which she owes the money), in the hope that he can convince him to forgive the widow's debt. Unfortunately, the merchant is unwilling to do so, and Amadace decides to use his remaining pounds to pay the dead man's debt.

After Sir Amadace has dismissed his men, he wanders in the forest. Eventually he comes into contact with the White Knight. The text describes him: "Milke quyte was his

stede,/ And so was all his othir wede -/ Hade contiens of a knyghte” (ln 439-441).⁴⁸ The Knight asks Amadace why he is upset, and when Amadace resists answering, he responds:

For that quile have I bene here.
Thowe schild noghte mowrne no suche wise,
For God may bothe mon falle and rise,
For His helpe is evyrmore nere. (ln 450-454).

The Knight presents a plan for Amadace: he will dress Amadace, and send him to the nearby king to compete for the hand of the princess in a jousting tournament. The Knight’s help, though, does not come freely as he asks for half of Amadace’s winnings in exchange for his help. Amadace agrees, and claims “Als true as any mon may be” (ln 516).

This moment is significant for a number of reasons. Like Gawain, Amadace has engaged in a deal that he will be expected to pay in the future and this agreement will depend on Amadace’s loyalty to his word. While Amadace and the audience of the poem are unaware that the White Knight is a man in disguise, he seems less antagonistic than the Green Knight. The White Knight does not trick Amadace upon his engagement in the deal, nor does he present a threat to Amadace’s life. The Knight’s didactic role is hidden from Amadace and the audience at this point, as was the Green Knight’s early in

⁴⁸ All line references and quotations come from: Foster, Edward E., editor. “Sir Amadace.” Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace, *The Middle English Texts Project*, University of Rochester, 2007, http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/foster-sir-amadace_

Gawain's journey. While in *Sir Gawain*, the Green Knight prompts or causes Gawain's exile, the White Knight appears to aid Sir Amadace's journey by providing him with funds, clothing, and direction. Amadace's exile, or challenge to his identity, began when he left his debts behind, and seemed to get worse when he aided the widow. But now, with the help of the White Knight, he is able to move forward, or closer to his wealthy status.

Upon his arrival in the nearby town, Sir Amadace presents himself as a knight who has lost all his belongings:

"I wasse a prince of mekil pride,
And here I hade thoghte to ryde,
Forsothe atte this journay.
I was vetaylet with wyne and flowre,
Hors, stedus, and armoure,
Knyghtus of gode aray.
Stithe stormes me oredrofe,
Mi nobull schippe hit all torofe,
Tho sothe youreselvun may say.
To spend I have enughe plenté,
Butte all the men that come with me,
Forsothe thai bynne away" (ln 565-576).

I quote this passage at length to emphasize the parallels between his falsified story and his real life. The difference between his false persona and his true self though is that

Amadace is to blame for the loss of his belongings, not the sea. This simple alteration presents him as a victim as opposed to a lavish spender. This fabrication works in his favor as the king, who is under the impression that he is truly chivalric, invites him into the court. The king treats Amadace well while he is in his care. After Amadace wins the jousting tournament, the king offers him much reward:

Ther he wanne so mycull honoure,
Fild and frithe, towne and toure,
Castell and riche cité;
A hundrithe sedis he wan and moe [...] (ln 607-610).

As seen in this passage, the King offers Amadace honor and riches—both things that he has lost. In the midst of his fortune, the poet notes that Amadace keeps his word, and saves half of his winnings for the White Knight.⁴⁹ Amadace's fortune continues to grow, and shortly after the tournament, he marries the princess. The king tells Amadace that through their marriage he will inherit half of the kingdom (ln 634-636). While this victory restores his wealth, Amadace's journey is not finished—he still has to fulfill his agreement with the White Knight.

Three years later, the White Knight returns, and he demands his part of Amadace's fortune. In a moment of panic, Amadace resists fervently:

"For Goddus luffe, lette suche wurdus be!
Thay grevun my herte full sore.
For we myghte noghte this faurtenyghte

⁴⁹ Ln 649: "[...] Sir Amadace kevyrt of his wo."

Owre rich londus dele and dighte,

Thay liun so wide quare [...]" (ln 710-714).

The White Knight then reveals that he does not want any of Amadace's monetary riches or possessions. Instead, he wants half of his wife and son (ln 730-732). Again, Amadace resists and claims that he can do no such thing. His wife hears this exchange and steps forward. She tells Amadace that he is to honor his word, or rather promise, to the White Knight, and that she will offer up herself and her son (ln 758-768). Amadace feigns insanity as his wife positions herself to be divided, but when the White Knight hands him the sword, he steps up to the table and prepares to fulfill their agreement.

Before Amadace can swing his sword, though, the White Knight stops him. He says, "Sese! [...]/ Now is tyme of pees!" (ln 801-804), and removes the wife and child from the table.⁵⁰ The Knight turns to Amadace:

"I con notte wite the gif thu were woe,

Suche a ladi for to slo,

Thi wurschip thus wold save.

Yette I was largely as gladde,

Quen thu gafe all that evyr thu hade,

My bones for to grave.

⁵⁰ There is a notable parallel between the culminating events of this tale and that of Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22). In the Bible, Abraham's loyalty was tested by God when he was asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Before Abraham brought down his knife, an angel halted his hand, telling him his task was fulfilled. There are numerous references to God throughout *Sir Amadace*. When Amadace's wife volunteers herself for sacrifice, she claims that Amadace must keep his word like the Lord: "For His lufe that deet on tre,/ Loke yaure covandus holdun be,/ Yore forward was full fyne [...]" (ln 760-762).

In a chapell quere I lay to howundus mete,
Thu payut furst thritty powund by grete,
Sethun all that thu myghtus have [...]” (ln 805-813).

There are several things to note about this passage. The first is that like the Green Knight, the White Knight acknowledges that Amadace’s actions, or rather his reaction to the notion of splitting his wife and son in half, were based in his humanity. He says, “I con notte wite the gif thu were woe [...]” (ln 805) acknowledging that he does not hold this reaction against Amadace. The second half of this passage reveals the White Knight’s true identity—the spirit of the dead man from the chapel in the woods. Again, this confession is similar to that in *Sir Gawain* of the Green Knight.

As the White Knight reveals his identity, the role of disguise in Amadace’s return, or maintenance of his identity, becomes more evident. The Knight serves a specific purpose—to help Amadace prove his true self. Michael Johnston, in his article “Knights and Merchants Unite: *Sir Amadace*, the Grateful Dead, and the Moral Exemplum Tradition,” observes that the “erstwhile merchant—in his appearance as the White Knight—is the bearer of the tale’s moral and economic message” (736).⁵¹ Johnston highlights the didactic nature of the dead man’s disguise, and how it aids in Amadace’s attempt to uphold his word. After the test is complete, Amadace’s tale ends quickly. The poet says he was able to return to his lands, and live happily with his wife and son (ln 841-864). While Amadace restored his financial status long before the White Knight

⁵¹ Johnston, Michael. “Knights and Merchants Unite: *Sir Amadace*, the Grateful Dead, and the Moral Exemplum Tradition.” *Neophilologus*, vol. 92, no.4, pp. 735-744, 2008. *ProQuest Literature Online*, doi: 10.1007/s11061-008-9107-y.

appeared to collect his share, Amadace was not able to return home until he proved he could uphold his word. *Sir Amadace* and *Sir Gawain* both present unique, yet similar, situations regarding secondary characters in disguise; however, there are variations to the schema set forward. In several romances, the protagonist adopts a disguise to gain information about a character's loyalty. These tales present, essentially, the opposite of *Sir Amadace* and *Sir Gawain*—a protagonist testing a secondary character while in disguise.

Sir Orfeo

The tale of *Sir Orfeo* complicates the theme of secondary characters in disguise, along with the type of exile-and-return structure associated with these tales. There are two uses of disguise in this tale. The first illustrates the focus of the previous chapter: a protagonist using the disguise of a lower-class member to gain access to a high space. The second involves the protagonist using a disguise to test a secondary character—the opposite of what we see in *Sir Gawain* and *Sir Amadace*. Another noticeable difference in the tale is the exile and return structure. In her article, “Sir Orfeo and English Identity,” Dominique Battles writes that “Orfeo’s self-imposed exile in the forest after the loss of Heurodis is one of the most compelling and perplexing plot features [...]” (196).⁵² Battles continues this thought and notes that Orfeo’s exile is not like others; instead of actively pursuing the cause of his exile, or trying to rectify it, he is stagnant (196). His journey does not gain momentum until 10 years later—an unusually long period of time for the

⁵² Battles, Dominique. “Sir Orfeo and English Identity.” *Studies in Philology*, vol. 107, no. 2, 2010, pp. 179-211. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25681415.

romances (Battles 202). These apparent divergences from the overarching patterns set forth in this chapter represent several of the complexities that arise when analyzing disguise and its function.

The poet begins by describing Orfeo as an honorable and just king (ln 25-40).⁵³ Not long after his introduction in the tale, Orfeo's wife is taken captive by the Fairy King (ln 190). Orfeo is devastated by this and, dramatically, decides to leave the court and all of his possessions behind.⁵⁴ The poet notes that he left resembling a beggar and carrying a harp: "[Orfaeo] went so poverlich out of toun!" (ln 236). Interestingly, he does not seek out his wife or her captor; instead, he simply resides in the woods for ten years. In comparison to Gawain and Amadace, Orfeo is in extreme mourning, and therefore has no motivation to improve his circumstances, nor does he attempt to cultivate his noble identity. Instead, he wanders and wallows. Battles notes that this is in great opposition to traditional romance, where "the hero's quest, which invariably separates him from the court, is future oriented as he works towards the goal of proving himself worthy for membership in the court, to which he has every expectation of returning" (198).⁵⁵ His dormant state does not change until he sees his wife in the woods, which Battle suggests, implies his exile "does not correlate with character development" (199). This is

⁵³ All line references and quotations are from: Laskaya, Anne and Eve Salisbury, eds. "Sir Orfeo." *The Middle English Breton Lays, The Middle English Text Series*, University of Rochester, 1995, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/laskaya-and-salisbury-middle-english-breton-lays-sir-orfeo>.

⁵⁴ He gives all his lands to his "heighe steward" (ln 205).

⁵⁵ Battles continues, and compares Orfeo's exile to that of the Old English elegies including "*The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and the Last Survivor episode in *Beowulf*" (197).

significantly different from *Sir Gawain* and *Sir Amadace* as their exile periods directly correlate to their maintenance of character, and also from *Havelok*, *Horn*, and *Gamelyn* as the exile periods present noticeable instances of character development as they work to restore their noble identities.

Upon seeing “sexti levedis” (ln 304) and “his owen quen, Dam Heurodis” (ln 322) passing through the woods, Orfeo finds his motivation. Orfeo decides to follow the fairy clan back to their castle (ln 341-374). When he arrives at the castle, Orfeo adopts his first disguise—he presents himself as a humble harpist and does not reveal his identity, or his intentions. This use of disguise, specifically the use of disguise as a member of a lower class, is very similar to that of Horn and Havelok. Like these other protagonists, Orfeo hides his identity under a physical facade that presents no threat to the Fairy King, or the court. After he gains access to the court, he mesmerizes the King with his music. The King responds positively:

"Menstrel, me liketh wel thi gle.

Now aske of me what it be,

Largelich ichil the pay;

Now speke, and tow might asay" (ln 449-452).

Orfeo says that he wants the queen to be his reward, but the Fairy King refuses. He claims, “For thou art lene, rowe and blac,/ And sche is lovesum, withouten lac [...]” (ln 459-460) implying that a beggar could not be fit for a queen. One can argue that, in this interaction, Sir Orfeo is testing the king’s ability to uphold his word (ln 466-468). This is plausible because after Orfeo states that the king made a promise, the king changes his

attitude, instantaneously, and releases the queen. After he claims his wife, though, Orfeo does not reveal his true identity to the king—a pattern we have seen in *Sir Gawain* and *Sir Amadace*. Although he administers this test, he does not announce his noble status to the court—he just leaves. This suggests that reclaiming his wife, or the identity he finds with her, is not the final challenge he will face. Reuniting with his wife gives him back part of his original identity, and also propels him back towards his court—his final destination. His following actions enforce this notion, as he decides to return to his home and take back his original title, or position, and lands.

As Orfeo returns to his lands, he again, employs the disguise of a beggar.⁵⁶ Although there is no threat to him entering the space as himself, Orfeo uses this disguise to test the loyalty of the steward that he left in charge. As he enters the city, he asks the steward for help. The steward replies: ““Of that ichave, thou schalt have some./ Everich gode harpoure is welcom me to/ For mi lordes love [...]”” (ln 516-518). Sir Orfeo proceeds to play his harp for the steward, and when the steward recognizes the harp, he asks Orfeo where he found it. Instead of revealing his identity, Orfeo fabricates a story claiming that the steward’s lord is dead, invoking a woeful response from him (ln 542-548). Upon seeing the steward’s reaction, Orfeo decides to reveal his true identity:

King Orfeo knewe wele bi than
His steward was a trewe man
And loved him as he aught to do,

⁵⁶ Ln 499-500: “The beggers clothes he borwed anon, And heng his harp his rigge opon [...]”

And stont up, and seyt thus, "Lo,

Steward, herkne now this thing:

Yif ich were Orfeo the king [...] (ln 553-558).

The poet notes that Orfeo specifically waited to see that the “steward was a trewe man,” implying a test of loyalty. This test differs from the previously discussed examples as the secondary character, the steward, is not administering the test. Rather, the protagonist, Orfeo, conducts the test of loyalty. While the test still relates to a specific person’s true nature, it is not a character that the audience has been focused on throughout the tale. This is significant because it illustrates a deviation from a popular and familiar structure, as seen in *Sir Gawain* and *Sir Amadace*. This deviation though, is still related to Orfeo’s return. He is able to return to his status as both a noble, and as a husband, with the knowledge that he is revered by those around him.

Sir Orfeo presents scenarios of both identity maintenance and restoration. If we look at the portion of the tale that relates to finding and rescuing of his wife, one could argue that Orfeo’s quest was for identity restoration, as he wished to reclaim the role of husband to his wife. If we look at the portion of the tale that relates to his return to his original position, it can be argued that his quest was for identity maintenance. Upon returning to his lands, he goes to the steward alone, leaving his wife outside of the space. He uses the disguise to test the steward’s loyalty to him to ensure that his men were “trewe.” By performing this test, Orfeo, like the Green Knight and the White Knight, looks to ensure that his previously role can be filled again. Had the steward failed Orfeo’s challenge, the return of the protagonists may not have been possible. When the steward

passes his challenge, Orfeo is able to reveal his identity with the certainty that his return is possible, and that he could live and rule happily once again. This is just one of several variations to the overarching themes that *Sir Orfeo* presents, but like *The Tale of Gamelyn*, these divergences are important to account for as they may help draw connections between these tales and others that present similar circumstances.

CHAPTER FOUR : WOMEN IN DISGUISE

The previous chapters of this thesis focus primarily on the journeys of men, or male characters, in the Middle English romances. While women have a great presence in the romances in varying capacities, there are few tales in which the focus is purely on a female character. Despite this, there are several women who undergo similar trials to those of their male counterparts. In *Havelok the Dane*, Goldeboru experiences an exile of her own as she is removed from her father's court, and imprisoned for an extended period of time. In *King Horn*, Rymenhild is forced to (nearly) marry two men despite being engaged to Horn. Similar to Rymenhild, Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo*, is forced to live with the Fairy King after being kidnapped from her true husband. While these women appear to be victims to the actions of men, and rather helpless, not every woman in the romances follows this pattern. There are many women who can be described as antagonistic, or malicious, as they often play a role in removing, or displacing, other women, such as in *Octavian*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Cheuelere Assigne*.⁵⁷ Despite the various roles women can play in the romances, more often women tend to play a supporting role as opposed to a leading one. In his article, "'Born to thralldom and penance': Wives and Mothers in Middle English Romance," David Salter observes that there are "virtually no female heroines [in the romances]" (42). He continues, and claims that "women [play a role] in moulding, and developing the identity of male" (43). This

⁵⁷ Octavian's mother fabricates a story of his wife's infidelity and convinces him to exile her. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Morgan le Fay orchestrates Gawain's tests to derail the reputation of Arthur's court, while also undermining Guinevere. In *Cheuelere Assigne*, Orien's mother also tricks him into believing that his wife, Beatrice, is unfaithful, and also orders their children to be put to death.

can be seen in tales such as *King Horn*, where rescuing a woman serves to further glorify the male hero. Salter's observation is valid, although, there are some romances in which this is not the case.

There are few romances where women play a more central role. While these women do not experience as much "reward" post-journey as central men, they do receive an individual story line that focuses on their personal trials.⁵⁸ In these tales, the female protagonist also experiences a blow to her identity and is forcibly removed from a particular space. While the trials and removals that the women experience mirror those of the men, to an extent, there are severable noticeable differences. Some of these differences fall in line with the discussions of previous chapters, including the way in which women utilize disguise, their exiles and returns, and the attention the tales give to identity. As Helen Cooper notes, "the same motif will not always mean the same thing, or in the same ways: on the contrary, what matters most is the variations on the ways it is used" (15).⁵⁹ This chapter seeks to illuminate several of the variations to the disguise, exile and return, and identity motifs (discussed in previous chapters) that are particularly present in tales with a leading female. I will use the tale of *Emaré* as example for this subject, as the tale presents a central female figure who is exiled, adopts a disguise, and eventually reclaims her initial identity. While not all tales with a female protagonist

⁵⁸ As stated in Chapter 2, as male protagonists return to their original spaces, they reclaim not only their noble identities and the associated privileges, but also, additional gains, such as a noble marriage, children, and/or domain over more land. This is not the case for female protagonists.

⁵⁹ Cooper, Helen. *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*. Oxford, UP, 2004.

exhibit these motifs as clearly as *Emaré*, the tale, I believe, serves as a guiding framework.

Emaré, the daughter of Sir Artyus, loses her mother as a young girl. When she grows up, her father notices her beauty, and falls in love with her. The poet says, “Byfore her owene fadur sete,/ The fayrest wommon on lyfe” (ln 221-22).⁶⁰ Upon recognizing her beauty, Emaré’s father proclaims his love for her, and decides to make her his wife.⁶¹ Upset by the proposition, Emaré refuses:

Nay syr, God of heven hyt forbede,
That ever do so we shulde!
Yyf hyt so betydde that ye me wedde
And we shulde play togedur in bedde,
Bothe we were forlorne! (ln 251-255)

Emaré claims that such a union between her and her father would be sinful before God. Her response, while stating her opposition, also leads her father to exile her from his kingdom. His response illustrates a unique aspect seen in tales concerning women (in the romances), which Marijane Osborn discusses thoroughly. In her book, “Romancing the Goddess,” Osborn discusses the framework surrounding women-focused tales in the Middle English romances. She explains that *Emaré*, along with *Le Bone Florence of*

⁶⁰ All line references and quotations are from Laskaya, Anne and Eve Salisbury, eds. “Emaré.” *The Middle English Text Series*, University of Rochester, 2017, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/laskaya-and-salisbury-middle-english-breton-lays-emare>.

⁶¹ Ln 223-228: That all hys hert and all hys thowghth/ Her to love was yn browght:/ He byhelde her ofte sythe./ So/ he was anamored hys thowghtur tyll,/ Wyth her he thowghth to worche hys wyll,/ And wedde her to hys wyfe.”

Rome and Custance, “offer[s] variations upon the basic medieval plot that begins with a good woman of high birth being cast adrift or sent overseas by or because of a close relative, usually her father” (6). Osborn claims Sir Artyus’s actions are expected given the tradition of father figures in female-centered romances. This observation also highlights a pattern of men having power over women’s movements and freedoms in the romances.

Emaré’s removal also illustrates how easily women are moved, or displaced, as if they were objects as opposed to people. In her book, *Space, Gender, and Memory in Middle English Romance: Architectures of Wonder in Melusine*, Jan Shaw discusses this pattern in the context of *Sir Orfeo*—specifically the removal of Heurodis from Orfeo’s court.⁶² Shaw recounts how despite the presence of military in the woods with her, Heurodis was still captured by the Fairy King. There is no conflict in the woods, she is simply gone. The poet says:

Er the quen schuld fram hem gon.
Ac yete amiddes hem ful right
The quen was oway y-twight,
With fairi forth y-nome (190-193).⁶³

⁶² Shaw, Jan. *Space, Gender, and Memory in Middle English Romance: Architectures of Wonder in Melusine*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2016. *ProQuest ebrary*.

⁶³ Laskaya, Anne and Eve Salisbury, eds. “Sir Orfeo.” *The Middle English Breton Lays, The Middle English Text Series*, University of Rochester, 1995, <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/laskaya-and-salisbury-middle-english-breton-lays-sir-orfeo>.

Despite the fact that Heurodis was surrounded by Orfeo and his men, she is removed from the woods by the King without any physical force, and later, she is also released without any violence. When Orfeo requests Heurodis as his prize, the King initially resists, but gives in easily after Orfeo reminds him of his promise (Shaw 104).⁶⁴ Shaw's observations, while discussing a male-focused romance, are still applicable to *Emaré*. In this tale, the female protagonist has no control over her removal, nor is it a violent removal—something that is characteristic of the male-centered romances.⁶⁵ Emaré can not overpower her father, nor is she able to physically retaliate when forced into the boat.⁶⁶ This lack of control in regards to her exile is further emphasized by the manner in which she is sent away.

Emaré is sent on a boat with no money and no food (ln 268-273). The text says she was to “have wyth her no spendyng,/ Northur mete ne drynke,/ But shate her ynto the se” (ln 271-273). She is sent into the sea with no possessions, and also “wythowte anker or ore,” highlighting her physical lack of control in terms of the direction of her journey (ln 275).⁶⁷ She eventually lands in Galys, where she lands on a beach and is found by the king's steward, “Syr Kadore” (ln 340, 342). On the beach, though, she presents herself as

⁶⁴Shaw also mentions the *Erle of Tolous* in a similar vein, as the erle's wife is forced to marry someone else (105).

⁶⁵ Havelok (*Havelok the Dane*) is removed after the slaughter of his two sisters; Horn (*King Horn*) is exiled after his family is massacred; the Erle of Tolous (*Erle of Tolous*) is forcibly removed from his lands; Bevis (*Bevis of Hampton*) is sold to merchants after a public onslaught of his family.

⁶⁶ Osborn comments on this phenomenon, and how it is unique to the tales of women: “In the male romance the man goes out voluntarily to encounter his fate, venturing forth, confident and in control of his adventure, or so it seems to him” (21).

⁶⁷ The text notes that her father feels immediate remorse (ln 295-300). This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Egaré as opposed to Emaré.⁶⁸ While the poet does not expound upon why, or give any indication as to why she would change her name, it suggests that she is separating herself from her former life as Emaré. She is physically malnourished, and sea-worn, and she also refrains from mentioning her nobility, yet, Sir Kadore still welcomes her into the court. This disguise, while not as elaborate as some of those previously discussed, appears to have a simple purpose—to conceal her identity. It is also important to note that being in a new place, out from under her father's rule, gives her freedom over her identity. She creates the disguise of Egaré, and in doing so, she asserts authority over herself. This suggests that her ability to utilize a disguise is based in a change of space. In Galys, she is unknown, and she uses this anonymousness to create a new identity, and exist in her new space.

Emaré immediately makes a great impression on the court, and after she is nursed back to full health, she makes an impression on the king too. Upon seeing her, the king gathers his men, including Sir Kadore, and declares: “I wyll have that fayr may/ and wedde her to my quene” (ln 431-432). The king then relays his plan to his mother, but she is not as accepting as his men. She says:

[...] “Sone, thys ys a fende,
In thys wordy wede!
As thou lovest my blessynge,
Make thou nevur thys weddynge,

⁶⁸ Ln 358-360: “They askede her what was her name:/ She chaunged hyt ther anone,/ And sayde she hette Egaré.”

Cryst hyt the forbede!" (ln 446-450)

In this instance, the mother illustrates one of the many roles that women play in the romances—an antagonist towards the female “heroine.” This role is common in the romances, and could be discussed as a theme of its own. These mothers, or sometimes grandmothers, are often responsible for exiling other females, but they do so indirectly—by using the men that they have significant influence. In *Emaré*, the mother manipulates the men who report to her son (the king), and fabricates a story about the king’s new bride. The king ignores his mother’s request, and proceeds to marry Emaré.

It seems that Emaré is once again in a stable position; she is married to a king (a member of the upper-class), and they have a happy marriage.⁶⁹ When the king is called away to assist the king of France, he leaves Emaré and their child, Segramour, in the care of Sir Kadore (ln 496-497). The king’s mother, though, who is unhappy with the marriage, takes advantage of his absence, and plots to destroy Emaré—further emphasizing her malicious nature. The mother interferes with a series of exchanges between the king and his men (at home), and fabricates an order from the king to send Emaré adrift once again.⁷⁰ This is her second exile, but it varies from those we previously seen, and one of the biggest differences is the response to Emaré’s departure:

When she wente ynto the see

⁶⁹ Ln 472-480: “The kynge belafte wyth the qwene;/ Moch love was hem betwene,/ And also game and gle./ She was curteys and swete,/ Such a lady herde y nevir of yete;/ They loved both wyth herte fre./ The lady that was both meke and mylde/ Conceyved and wente wyth chylde,/ As God wolde hyt sholde be.”

⁷⁰Ln 584-588: “The false qwene hys lettur sowghte./ Into the fyre she kaste hyt downe:/ Another lettur she lette make,/ That men sholde the lady take,/ And lede her owt of towne [...].”

In that robe of ryche ble,
Men sowened on the sonde.
Sore they wepte and sayde, "Alas,
Certys thys ys a wykked kase!
Wo worth dedes wronge!" (ln 643-648)

The poet takes time to note the response of those around Emaré, and in doing so, the poet highlights both the upset of her departure, but also the impact that she had on those around her. As the people around her mourn her departure, the poet dramatizes her exile even more. This public response of despair, paints Emaré in a good light (so to speak), thus further emphasizing the unfortunateness of her situation.

The presence of a second exile is not foreign to readers of the Middle English romances. As discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis, there are several occurrences in which the protagonist is exiled twice, setting them further away from their original space. Osborn highlights how Emaré's double exile is "traditional" when grouped with other tales with leading female characters. She writes: "First comes an outward journey impelled by family violence, with discovery of a shelter that proves only temporary, then a second outward journey impelled by calumny and concluded by the protagonist finding sanctuary in Rome or its usually religious equivalent, where she manages reunion and forgiveness" (28-29). Osborn highlights the specificity and typicality of female journey in the romances. She also establishes a clear distinction between the journey, as well as types of exile that are typically seen in male-focused romances, such as *King Horn*. While Horn also experiences a double exile, he does not

follow the latter half of Osborn's claim. Instead, Horn's return involves physical violence, and no forgiveness to the initial offenders. Emaré's tale concludes much differently than that of Horn, and most male-centered romances, in comparison.

Emaré's second voyage takes her to Rome (ln 679). Her arrival and discovery is similar to that of when she landed in Galys. Once again, she is found by a member of the upper-class--a wealthy merchant (ln 685-686). The merchant happens to be walking along the sea, and suddenly, he comes across the "fayr lady" (ln 695). Again, she changes her name. She presents herself as Egarye and conceals her former identities and backgrounds (that of her initial status, and her status in Galys) (ln 704). Once again, Emaré uses her new space (of Rome), and her anonymity, to create a new disguise. Emaré appears to start again for the second time, as she arrives on the beach, and once again has to assimilate into a new place. Like the king of Galys, the merchant of Rome treats her well, and provides her with whatever she needs (ln 715-720). Emaré has, again, found a space in which she can exist, but her story now appears to stand still. The poet then shifts dramatically from Emaré's life in Rome to the two men who were involved in her previous exiles—her father and the King of Galys.

Again, Emaré's father feels immediate remorse after sending her adrift (ln 295-300). Later in the poem, the poet notes that he decides to visit Rome to repent for the acts committed upon his daughter (ln 997). The poet also focuses on the response of Sir Galys. After he returns from war, he quickly learns of what his mother has done. (ln 769-780). Under the impression that his wife is dead, the king also makes preparations to go to Rome and pay penance:

Tyll a thougth yn hys herte come,
How hys lady whyte as fome,
Was drowned for hys sake.
"Thorow the grace of God yn trone,
I woll to the Pope of Rome,
My penans for to take!" (ln 817-822).

While he is not directly responsible for her death, the king still holds himself accountable for what happened to her. Both her father and the king's realizations put Emaré's restoration, and her story, (back) into motion. As Osborn mentions, these tales typically end with "reunion and forgiveness," and this is explicitly speaking to male involvement in the female's journey home (29). Although it was the king's mother who caused Emaré to be sent adrift, it is the king that goes to Rome, not her. Both men are in a stage of repentance, and their movement towards Rome, and ultimately Emaré, allows for the tale to continue towards resolution. Although the men do hold a certain power in relation to the plot of the tale, Emaré still holds a significant amount of agency as she has kept her true identity, and her past(s) a secret. The audience is reminded, again, that she changed her name again upon entrance to Rome (ln 907-908), and this is not mentioned once, but twice: "Ye shull come speke wyth Emaré/ That changed her now to Egaré" (ln 922-923). The poet states that this was a conscious choice, and one that she made in response to both of her exiles. Emaré arguably derives her agency from her decision to adopt disguises and concealing her identity, along with the actual adoption of a new identity.

Both the king of Galys and her father arrive in Rome. Emaré learns of their arrivals, and sends her son Segramor to the two men. Segramor reveals her true identity to both the king, and her father:

[to the king of Galys] "Syr, yf your wyll be,

Take me your honde and go wyth me,

For y am of yowr kynne!

Ye shull come speke wyth Emaré

That chaunged her nome to Egaré,

That berys the whyte chynne" (919-924).

[to Emaré's father] Lord, for thyn honour,

My worde that thou wyll here:

Ye shull come speke wyth Emaré

That changede her name to Egaré,

That was thy thowghthur dere" (1004-1008).

While Emaré is overjoyed for both reunions, it is interesting that she is not the one to reveal her true self, rather her son does.⁷¹ Thinking in the mindset of the exile and return journey, and also comparing Emaré's conclusion to those discussed previously, her ending is quite different. It appears that Emaré has reached a resolution to her exiles, as

⁷¹ Ln 931-936 Reuniting with the king of Galys: "Nevurtheles wyth hym he wente;/ Ayeyn hem come the lady gent,/ In the robe bryght and shene./ He toke her yn hys armes two,/ For joye they sowened, both to,/ Such love was hem bytwene."

Ln 1016-1020 Reuniting with her father: "Ayeyn hym come that lady gent,/ Walkynge on her fote./ And the Emperour alyghte tho,/ And toke her yn hys armes two,/ And clypte and kyssed her sote."

she is reunited with both her father and husband, but she is not the one who reveals her true self. Osborn comments on this, to an extent, when she says, “[a woman’s] spirit and dignity never falter and she regains control at the end [of the romance]” (6). Emaré permits her son to reach out to both her father and husband, and allows him to reveal her identity to both of them. She also reveals that she was the one who changed her identity, which attributes to her maintenance of some authority over herself throughout her journey.

The tale of *Emaré* provides a primary example for looking at Middle English romances with female protagonists. While the exile-and-return plot of *Emaré* is familiar, the subtle variations to the function of disguise, or rather, how disguise functions, speaks volumes to the treatment of women in the Middle English romances. As mentioned, women are rarely the focus of a tale; however, when they are, there are discernible patterns amongst their journeys. There is much to be investigated in the romances where women are not at the forefront, and several of these tales are mentioned in this thesis. In *Havelok the Dane*, Goldeboru experiences a parallel exile to Havelok; she goes through her own trials which include being stripped of her noble identity and being removed from her noble space. In *Sir Orfeo*, Heurodis is removed from her home and forced to exist in a new space with a new identity. While both of these women’s fates and movements are determined by the actions of men, there is still much to be said about their journeys. Similar to the previous chapters of this thesis, examining an individual tale illuminates familiar themes, it also has the potential to highlight other patterns. *Emaré* presents the power gained from moving to a new space, and while this is not unfamiliar (as we also

see it in *King Horn*), it is a variation to the pattern as it is a woman utilizing this power when it appears that she has none.

CHAPTER FIVE : CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

These chapters focus on several variations of disguise, the concept of identity, and the exile and return structure. Initially, this project set to cover the many functions of disguise within the Middle English romances, but each tale requires its own investigation as each tale presents a unique plot. This thesis seeks to show that despite the wide variety of stories, characters, structures, and themes, disguise is intimately connected to the romance genre. There are as many functions and instances of disguise as there are tales, and these variations provide ample material for future investigation. Additionally, there are many possible interpretations of the exile-and-return structure seen within the genre. Like the element of disguise, how one approaches analyzing the structure is based in each individual tale.

While I suggest that each tale be analyzed on an individual basis, there are many connections that can be seen between them. As seen in this thesis, by focusing on the element of disguise in the romances, we can identify patterns of function and use to assist in drawing out themes and patterns to illuminate these connections. There will be variations to each recognized schema, but with careful investigation, and by acknowledging the divergences not as exclusionary principles, but rather as points of inclusion, we can create a description of the genre that accounts for a significant number of tales.

While this project discusses several themes and subject matters, there are many more that could be explored in future work. Chapter 4 lightly touches on the differences in the treatment of protagonists of opposite genders. As stated, there are few tales where

women are the focus, but there are numerous tales in which women are subjected to similar exiles and identity shifts even when they are out of the audience's direct focus. Investigating the presence of women in the romances could yield more patterns or themes. There are also several romances that have an overt religious tone, or even subject matter. The scenarios of these tales sometimes focus on an individual's walk with God, or their relationship with their faith. While the journeys of the protagonists in these tales differ in motive than those with a focus of war, or inheritance, the exile-and-return structure may remain intact. When set in the context of a man's relationship to God, does exile occur when one falls out of God's favor? This shift in how we interpret the exile-and-return structure would also require a new approach to the concept of identity—is identity based in the status of one's relationship to God? One tale in particular that could be used in this discussion would be *Sir Isumbras*. As the knight falls out of favor with God, does his identity change? Sir Isumbras spends the majority of the tale trying to make his way back to his righteous self—does this qualify as a journey of identity restoration? By analyzing *Sir Isumbras*, along with other tales of religious nature, we could possibly identify another connection between identity and the exile-and-return structure of the genre.

As mentioned, there are close to eighty surviving Middle English romances.⁷² While this thesis only discusses seven of these tales, as they each include a type of disguise or identity shift, more than half of the romances qualify for this discussion based

⁷² *Database of Middle English Romance*. The University of York, 2012, <http://www.middleenglishromance.org.uk>. Accessed 13 July 2016.

on content alone. There are multiple forms of disguise, and correspondingly, there are numerous functions for the disguises. There are many tales in which characters are magically transformed into animals. While a majority of the time, the reason behind the transformation is to protect the identity of the disguised, there are some instances in which it is used as punishment for a character, and they must overcome a challenge before returning to their original state. Example tales of these circumstances are *Cheuelere Assigne*, *William of Palerne*, and *Carle of Carlisle*. In *Cheuelere Assigne*, the children of the king are transformed into swans and sent into the forest to protect them from the evil grandmother. In *William of Palerne*, the prince of Spain is transformed into a werewolf. Carle in *Carle of Carlisle* is disguised as a beast for a good portion of the tale. Even as we identify the theme of magical transformations, we already see two distinct purposes. With further investigation, one would also see that *Cheuelere Assigne* highlights another prominent theme in the Middle English romances—children being disguised as, and or carried away by, animals. Additionally, one could investigate tales in which friends disguise themselves as other friends, such as in *Amis and Amiloun* and *Eger and Grime*. These specific tales vary in plot and construction, but their disguises seem to serve a similar purpose—to aid a friend in regaining something lost.

The element of disguise facilitates much discussion in the genre of the Middle English romances. Accounting the various instances and their respective functions is an elaborate conversation on its own, but in the context of the discourse surrounding the description of the genre of the romances, it opens a new avenue of research. This

approach, when trying to find links between seemingly unrelated tales, illustrates the importance of disguise to the Middle English romances.

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