This document is downloaded from DR-NTU (https://dr.ntu.edu.sg)
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Fairies, demons and reckless women : reading supernatural encounters in Middle English Breton Lays in didactic terms

Thaheera Salam Mohamed Althaf

2021

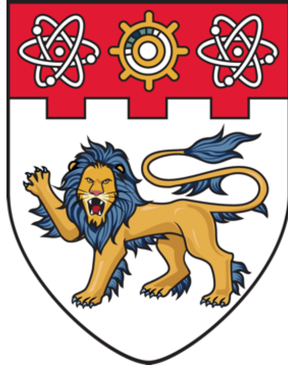
Thaheera Salam Mohamed Althaf (2021). Fairies, demons and reckless women : reading supernatural encounters in Middle English Breton Lays in didactic terms. Master's thesis, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. https://hdl.handle.net/10356/151944

https://hdl.handle.net/10356/151944

https://doi.org/10.32657/10356/151944

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Downloaded on 20 Apr 2025 04:50:24 SGT



NANYANG
TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY
SINGAPORE

FAIRIES, DEMONS AND RECKLESS WOMEN: READING SUPERNATURAL ENCOUNTERS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH BRETON LAYS IN DIDACTIC TERMS

THAHEERA D/O SALAM MOHAMED ALTHAF

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

2021

Fairies, Demons and Reckless Women: Reading Supernatural Encounters in Middle English Breton Lays in Didactic Terms

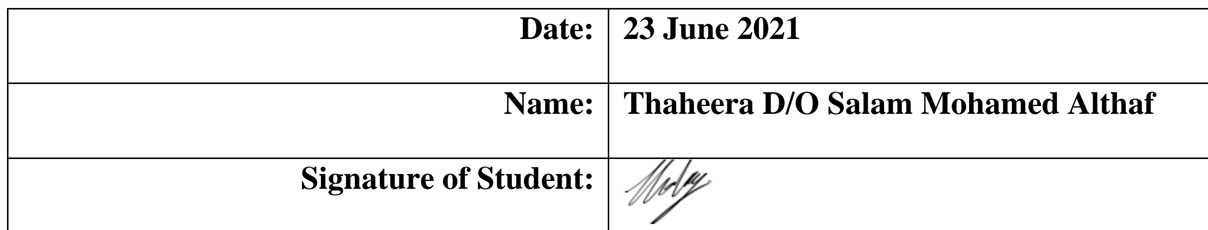
THAHEERA D/O SALAM MOHAMED ALTHAF

School of Humanities

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts 2021

Statement of Originality

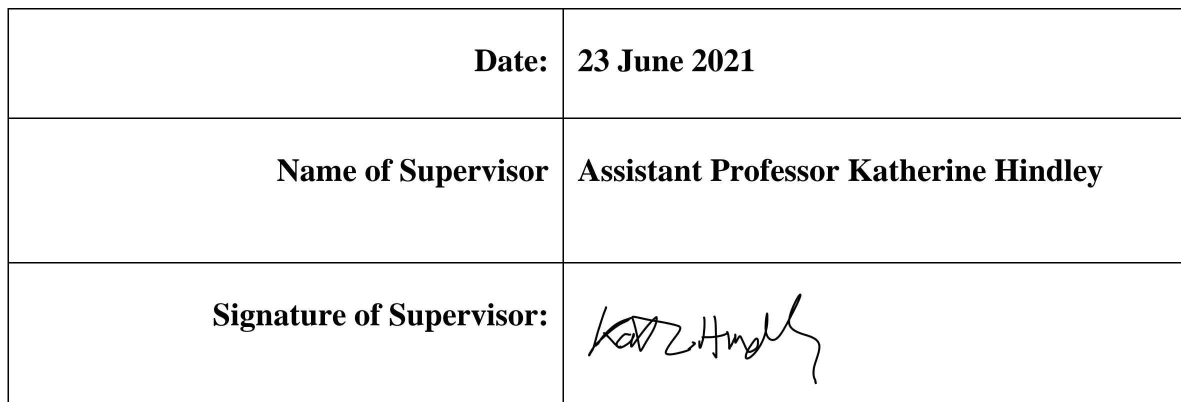
I certify that all work submitted for this thesis is my original work. I declare that no other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement. Except where it is clearly stated I have used some of this material elsewhere, this work has not been presented by me for assessment in any other institution or University. I certify that the data collected for this project are authentic and the investigations are conducted in accordance with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.



Date:	**23 June 2021**
Name:	**Thaheera D/O Salam Mohamed Althaf**
Signature of Student:	

Supervisor Declaration Statement

I have received the content of this thesis and to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain plagiarised materials. The presentation style is also consistent with what is expected of the degree awarded. To the best of my knowledge, the research and writing are those of the candidate except as acknowledged in the Author Attribution Statement. I confirm that the investigations are conducted in accordance with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.



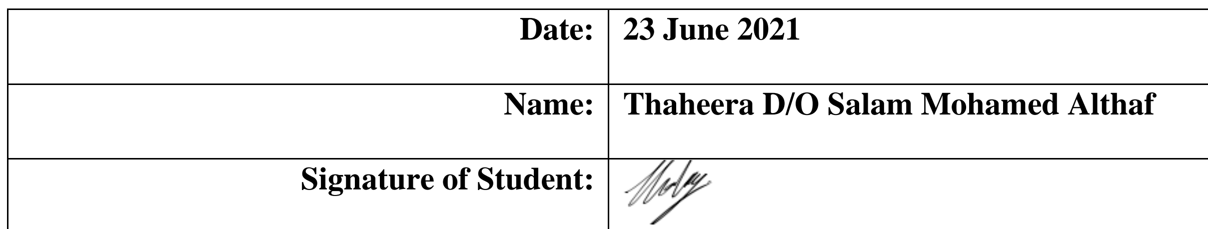
Date:	**23 June 2021**
Name of Supervisor	**Assistant Professor Katherine Hindley**
Signature of Supervisor:	

Authorship Attribution Statement

Please select of the following; *delete as appropriate.

***(A) This thesis does not contain any materials from papers published in peer-reviewed journals or papers accepted at conferences in which I am listed as an author.**

***~~(B) This thesis contains materials from [x number] paper(s) published in peer-reviewed journal(s) / from papers accepted at conferences in which I am listed as an author.~~**



Date:	**23 June 2021**
Name:	**Thaheera D/O Salam Mohamed Althaf**
Signature of Student:	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible if it were not for the endless support from my supervisor, Assistant Professor Katherine Hindley, and her patience and wisdom that saw me through the production of this work. Thank you very much for your encouragement and feedback, and I hope that I continue to improve further in the future.

Next, I would like to extend my thanks to my friends, both in person and those I know online, who have been with me through my near-daily updates about the status of this thesis, and for those who volunteered to read through and comment even though we are friends through leisurely interests, I thank you very, very much for your support and encouragement.

A special thank you to my online friends for offering to read through my thesis and for the useful comments I received.

And of course, I would like to thank my family for being there with me for the past two years, and staying with me through all the ups and downs of producing a thesis, and for tolerating me whenever the pressures of work showed on occasion.

Last but not least, a shout-out to all the artists, authors, directors, and actors whose hard work put into the works of art I have enjoyed during my time in the production of this thesis, without whom I would have been quite miserable.

Thank you all, very, very much.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
... i

TABLE OF CONTENTS
... ii

SUMMARY
... iii

INTRODUCTION
... 1

CHAPTER ONE: Adapting the Supernatural: Fairy Abduction and Gender Relations in *Sir Orfeo*
... 15

CHAPTER TWO: Responsible Female Agency and Dynastic Heredity in *Sir Degare*
... 36

CHAPTER THREE: Being Evil Has A Price: Demonic Paternity and Female Speech in *Sir Gowther*
... 56

CHAPTER FOUR Fairy in Shining Armour: Identity and Courtship in *Sir Launfal*
... 80

CONCLUSION
... 103

CITATIONS
... 112

Summary

In medieval romances, and particularly, Breton lays, supernatural creatures such as fairies, and the occasional demon featured often. This thesis seeks to study the interactions these creatures had with men and women within these stories, aiming to examine how these moments may have illuminated the way medieval audiences would have read them alongside medieval conduct literature, in similarly didactic terms.

Introduction

Fairies, Demons, and Reckless Women: Reading Supernatural Encounters in Middle English Breton Lays in Didactic Terms

When reading a medieval romance, it is not uncommon to encounter supernatural creatures such as fairies, and the occasional demon, interacting with human characters in these stories. Supernatural creatures appearing in various types of medieval literature merit discussion on their own, given that they occupied the medieval imagination in ways that were not entirely different from that of modern-day readers. However, given that medieval England – the focus of my thesis – during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries was fully Christian, and religious belief and doctrine informing their daily lives more significantly, the presence of such supernatural creatures in secular literature such as romances would have been understood by medieval readers to be ascribed with certain meanings. At times, these creatures were representations of a pre-Christian past, both marvellous and frightening, powerful and dangerous. These creatures also existed outside the human realm, which meant that they did not subscribe to the moral expectations of humans. Therefore, any moment of interaction with humans in the stories they appear in would have been poignant, both to the plot of the stories they were in, and to the medieval audience engaging with these stories.

These types of interactions, which I term as 'supernatural encounters', though sometimes only brief, are often the key event around which the plot hinges. Each of these supernatural encounters in the romances I am studying, occur in a similar fashion; a human character meets the creature by chance when they are out in bodies of nature, be it a forest or an orchard. These human characters are often alone when they encounter the creature and the duration of the encounter itself is usually short. The four romances I will be studying are all

Breton lays, namely *Sir Orfeo, Sir Degare, Sir Gowther* and *Sir Launfal,* which fall within a sub-genre of medieval romance, that often features supernatural creatures appearing as characters within the stories. In fact, G.V. Smithers has cited an "amorous liaison with a fairy" (62), speaking of consensual fairy lovers, as one of the commonly occurring story elements in Breton lays. This, which I shall term as the 'fairy-lover' trope, has been the subject of study of several scholars working with medieval romances and the convention of Breton lays, and will be a key concern of this thesis.

Previous scholars, such as Aisling Byrne and James Wade, have argued that fairy mistresses benefit and nurture their human lovers. Wade shows that "the favors of [the fairy mistress'] love are often accompanied by supernatural gifts that aid their chosen knights in social, economic and political terms" (109-10). However, he argues that fairy mistresses were not just "simple vehicles of wish-fulfillment" (145), asserting that by having "fairy taboos [as] conditions of supernatural favours" (145), these same fairy mistresses "function as complex narrative devices […] who can provide for that which will lead to a happy ending, but who can also challenge and disrupt along the way" (145). By "fairy taboos", Wade here is referring to the conditions imposed by fairy characters when they grant seemingly beneficial gifts to humans. These gifts are magical in some way, but also come with a condition. In the case of *Sir Launfal*, for example, Launfal receives a pouch that refills with gold after every use, but he should not reveal his relationship with the fairy to anyone - otherwise, all that she has given him will disappear. As long as he fulfils this condition, Launfal gets to enjoy a beneficial romantic relationship with his fairy mistress.

Aisling Byrne furthers Wade's argument by postulating that "the use of the [fairy mistress] trope in some of these texts has a pronounced ethical dimension" (100). She suggests that "what some authors are most interested in when they use the fairy lover motif is

not sex or sexuality, but the humanizing effects of an ordered approach to both gratification and restraint" (100) and that "romance writing provided a particularly compelling backdrop to these considerations" (100). As such, Byrne sees the fairy-lover trope as a feature of romances serving an ideological function beyond just being a plot element. The female fairy lovers are not only in the stories to form sexual and romantic relationships with the men, but also serves a means through which aspects of social order and norms can be studied as well. In short, while Wade studies the fairy-lover trope through the figure of the fairy mistress herself, Byrne's study focuses on the impact these fairy lovers would have had on the men in these stories, and hints at how an outside reader may have perceived such instances. She draws connections between the fictional stories of these fairy lovers and enraptured men and the way this trope may have been interpreted by the readers of the romances. However, in either study, the human character examined in these instances is male and the fairy, the beneficial lover, is female. Neither scholar has studied male fairies extensively, nor have they examined similar encounters where the human character was female instead.

Unlike Wade and Byrne, I view male fairies as central to understanding the use writers made of supernatural creatures in these types of stories. Examining the roles of male fairies and the way they interact with women within the romances reveal patterns that convey gendered social values to readers. Male fairies, as opposed to female fairies, are generally violent and non-nurturing, especially when they are encountering a woman. In three out of the four lays studied in this thesis, the supernatural encounter features a male creature and a woman. None of these encounters ends favourably for the woman, though the extent of the negative outcome is in tandem with the extent of transgression shown by the woman in the story. I choose to focus on male fairies particularly because of the sexual nature of the threat that they pose to the women they interact with, which can be seen in opposition to the sexually fulfilling relationship that the fairy mistresses as studied by Byrne and Wade offer to

their human male lovers. Building on Byrne's suggestion that the fairy-lover trope in romances could have been used to examine larger, societal concerns, I propose a didactic reading of these supernatural encounters as presented in the four Breton lays studied in this thesis and how they may have been understood by their female readers.

In order to gesticulate at this didactic reading of the supernatural encounters in the Breton lays discussed in this thesis, I would like to explore how writing was perceived during the period in general. All four lays discussed in this thesis were composed between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. These stories were being circulated in a period where Elizabeth Allen observes that there was a "concern with the moral benefit of literature" (2). Literature was hence not only supposed to entertain, but also inform and instruct as well. Drawing a parallel with explicitly didactic medieval exempla, Allen argues that exemplarity should be understood "not as a form or genre but as a mode" (3). Morality was represented across a variety of literary works. The didactic value of religious exempla - their capacity to teach through inviting the audience to "examine principles rather than reenact given norms" (7-8) - can be found in secular texts as well. Allen's analysis suggests, therefore, that medieval readers would have focused on the lessons taught by all kinds of narratives as they would have with exemplary texts.

With this attention paid to the effect written texts were having on people, came a rising anxiety over the impact of fictional narratives such as romances. The inclusion of fictional narratives, or as Allen terms it, *fabula*, within sermons and other forms of religious literature, raised concerns in the thirteenth century over the "dangers of promulgating *fabula* among a potentially various and unpredictable lay audience" (12). The concern here lies with the fictionality of narratives and stories such as romances, as opposed to the perceived truthfulness of exempla and other religious literature. Fictional narratives that sprang from

the imagination were criticised for being dangerous as opposed to exempla, and related texts. Among the detractors of romance, one even went as far as to boast that "not one word in the body of his book that is not drawn from Holy Writ or from the writings of holy men" (Furrow, 30), demonstrating that the adherence to a religious truth was a marker of meaningful works that was of most value to readers, as opposed to the untruths seen in fictional narratives such as romances. As Susan Crane concludes in her study, the religious opposition to romance literature "openly recognises that romances and religious literature are animated by different values and ultimately endorse separate truths" (96). Hence, the two types of literature cannot be consumed by the same audiences since it would be hard to discern one type of values from the other. However, the very fact that these ecclesiastical figures were opposing romances shows that they are still acknowledging that these stories were being read by the readers for certain truths that may not necessarily be fully aligned with the mode of transmission as seen in exemplary texts but were nevertheless, performing a similar function. Both scholars have thus performed a comparative study of romance literature and exemplary literature, looking at where the tension arises between the two and why this was the case, arriving at the conclusion that the two were being read in a similar way by the audience – to look for values and truths within the texts themselves.

In addition to the reasons given by the detractors of romance, much of the criticisms directed at medieval romance could also be attributed to their status as popular literature. Medieval romances were popular secular works, with more than a hundred romances surviving from England alone. Nicola McDonald states that they form "the most audacious and compendious testimony to the imaginary world of the Middle Ages" (1). Both the genre as a whole and the individual works within it remained popular for several centuries. Megan G. Leitch notes that "romance was a dominant genre in Western Europe from the twelfth century to the early sixteenth" (1), while McDonald observes that "romances written in the

thirteenth century continue to be copied into the fifteenth century" (1). Others like Robert B. Burlin have noted that romances, both the earlier French ones and the later English ones, "were carefully nurtured within [the existing] aristocratic social and political milieu and its attendant ideologies" (3). Given the popularity of medieval romance, it seems plausible that some of the criticism directed towards it stemmed from a perception that romance drew people's attention away from explicitly religious texts. The criticisms might then be seen as evidence that the authors of religious texts viewed romance not as a corrupting influence, but as competition. In order to understand the kinds of didactic messages we might expect to see in romance literature, we can turn to explicitly didactic, but not religious, texts. Didactic literature, also known as conduct literature, contained advice and instruction for Christian audiences and was often aimed at specific social subgroups.

Didactic literature falls into the category between religious and secular literature, making it a ripe ground for understanding how religious ideas may have been circulated among medieval societies outside of religious spaces such as churches. Sometimes, these texts used a framing device that often involved "a wise parent or elder instructing a […] young person in the ways of the world" (Roberta L. Krueger, Kathleen M. Ashley, xvi). They were sometimes presented in the form of prose, and other times as poems, but they did not possess the fictionality associated with romances and other related texts. Since they were texts targeted individually at men and women, they also contained lessons derived from Christian teachings regarding the regulation of social behaviour according to gender. One such example would be, *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter,* a conduct poem written in the mid to late fourteenth century aimed at women and providing gender-related advice, "mixing proverbial advice, moral guidance, and lessons in courteous behaviour", which will the conduct poem I will be referring to across the chapters in this thesis. A separate poem targeted at young men, *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* also exists in the same

manuscript, but falls outside of the scope of this thesis. In the introduction to the TEAMS Middle English Texts edition, George Shuffleton writes that the main advice in the poem "largely revolves around the two ideals of thrift and honor [… the latter of which] imagined women's honour primarily in sexual terms". Women were instructed to protect their chastity and virginity before they were married and once they were married, they were to continue to keep themselves protected from men who were not their lawfully wedded husbands.

Framed as long piece of advice given by a mother to her daughter, *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter* lists out the important things that a young girl needs to be aware of as she proceeds towards womanhood. It is of note that this poem is found in Bodleian Library Ashmole 61, along with several medieval romances such as *Sir Isumbras* and *The Erle of Tolous,* alongside other didactic texts like *How the Wise Man Taught his Son,* all attributed to a single scribe who signed his initial as Rate. Though I am not covering the mentioned romances in this thesis, this is evidence that didactic literature and medieval romances were not seen as separate by medieval readers, and it is highly probable that they may have been reading them for sometimes similar reasons. The first words that the narrator, the mother says, are "[d]aughter, and thou wylle be a wife" (6-7), which already posits that the daughter here is seen in terms of the potential she has to be a future wife. This then lends the tone to the type of advice meted out throughout the poem; all of it will concern aspects of the girl's current life, but more importantly directed towards the most ideal fulfilment of her future role as a wife. She is advised to always remain cautious and wary of herself and her surroundings, and refrain from placing herself in risky situations. For instance, she is advised to head straight to her destination when she is outside and not wander around "hyderward [and] thederward" (58). She is asked to stay away from the houses of other men so that she does not fall victim to "vylony" (103) and ends with the note that if she has "a doughter of age [… to] pute her sone to maryage" (181-2). The poem therefore begins with addressing the young

girl with her future as a wife in mind and ends with her vision as a mother with a daughter, to whom she is expected to pass on the same advice she has received from her own mother in her girlhood. This type of education is expected to be given to young girls to protect themselves and their chastity until they were married and continue to remain wary of men as "all the men be not trew" (89). The onus here falls upon the girl to protect herself from any danger and sin, and her mother who teaches her to do so.

Taking this poem into account, the kind of advice given to the girl seems to be targeted at protecting her sexual purity. She was the one expected to take responsibility for herself and if she is too young to understand how to do so, her mother is expected to teach her to do so. The ideals of sexual purity and marital obedience emphasised in the conduct poems were not just social expectations, but religious ones and featured heavily in poems such as *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter,* which were aimed at unmarried women. Such teachings were of course in line with that of "the Christian Church [which] promoted a gender system based in biblical texts and exegesis" (Schaus, 312). Of course, women were expected to be subservient to men, since Christian belief in the Middle Ages emphasised on "woman's secondary place in creation, and thus both her subordination and dependence" (Murray, 40). Women were thus vulnerable to threats around them, and were expected to guard themselves against them particularly when they were not around a male guardian. When considering conduct literature and the kind of lessons they conveyed to the audience, it is necessary to understand that social behaviour in the Middle Ages tended to align with teachings derived from Christian doctrine. Men and women were expected to behave in specific ways, and women especially were closely expected to adhere by strict standards pertaining to their chastity and behaviour. Sexual behaviour was only legitimate when carried out within marriage, and even so, there were rules about what was and was not acceptable. Although St Augustine, known as "the most influential writer on marriage among the Church

fathers" (McCarthy, 107) argued that the production of offspring was "one of the three goods of marriage" (108), some influential canonists such as Huguccio argued "that if [acts of intercourse] involved pleasure, they were sinful" (113).

Although both sexes might commit sexual sin, their sins were not viewed as equally serious. The act of adultery was a punishable sin for both genders in the Middle Ages, but for most people "female adultery was far more serious, because it threatened legitimate production of progeny and proper descent of property" (Dunn, 120). It was not particularly because women were seen as more sinful than men, but rather because women's infidelity might threaten the patrilineal inheritance tradition of the Middle Ages. This would have informed the reasoning behind the anxiety that attaches itself to the maintenance of a woman's sexual purity before and after marriage, as shown in *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter*, where the girl's future roles as a wife and a mother serve as the fundamental reason for her needing to abide by the advice she is receiving. Concern around the legitimacy of heirs, the anxieties surrounding the lack of an heir, and issues such as inheritance come into the discussion, as we shall see in these romances particularly because of the social status of the women in these texts.

Besides inheritance and sexual purity, the lays also raised the same concerns that conduct literature had about other aspects of women's lives such as their agency and speech. For example, Thomas Aquinas argues that it "is appropriate for [a woman], that she is silent, [which] proceeds from the modesty which is owed to women; but this does not relate to the ornament of a man, instead, it is fitting that he speaks" (51). Gratian, another prominent theologian, states in his *Decretum,* that "it is the order of nature among human beings that women obey men and sons obey their parents, because it is justice in these matters that the lesser obeys the greater" (84). If a woman behaves outside of these tightly set boundaries, then, as warned in *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter,* "[her] neyghbors wyll speke

[her] vylony" (106) 'vylony' here referring to shame. The daughter is repeatedly told to adhere strictly to the code of behaviour taught to her by her mother, who had "the same techynge of [her] modur" (199). As a woman, she has to be wary of her speech, instructed to "make no jangelyng" (22) and be of "gode beryng and of gode tonge" (24). She is further instructed to not change her "countenans with grete laughter" (46), and hence, ensure that she stays in control of her body and her words in order to stay true to her nature as a woman. As such it was not just a woman's biology that was regulated, but also other forms of behaviour such as the exercising of her free will, agency, and speech. Agency was not disallowed, but it was supposed to be exercised in a way that assured protection for the woman until she got married, and afterwards, from men who were not her lawfully wedded husband. Though these conduct poems were not explicitly Christian, they were still disseminating the same kind of lessons that would have been found in official religious texts. However, my interjection here is that medieval romances too, were concerned with and passing on similar lessons to their readers, albeit in different ways. The concerns of the lays map closely onto the concerns of conduct literature, as discussed above. Issues of female authority and speech are foregrounded and warned against through the occurrence of the supernatural encounters that end negatively for the women who engage in such indecorous behaviour.

Hence, bringing these two popular types of literature together, would allow an exploration into the ways through which such standards for women were not only depicted but also disseminated to specific readers. As women are often - although not always - the first characters to encounter supernatural beings in the Breton lays, my focus is on the texts' implied lessons about female behaviour. There is significant evidence that women read romance. Medieval romance also had an association with women, with Geoffrey Chaucer commenting in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* on how women held the book of Lancelot de Lake in "ful greet reverence" (3213), and Carol M. Meale pointing to a variety of evidence for female

ownership of medieval romance manuscripts "ranging from internal references in literary texts, including the romances themselves, to inscriptions made in surviving manuscripts and […] citations within probate records and inventories" (209). Amy Vines furthers this statement by arguing that beyond just evidence of ownership of manuscripts, "medieval romances are a central and under-explored site of evidence about representations of women's cultural and social authority" (2). As for the kind of readership that romances typically would have received, there is enough "internal evidence [that] implies that romances were read aloud in courtly circles and aristocratic households to mixed audiences, as well as by individual male and female readers" (McAvoy, Watt, 86). This suggests that the primary audience of romances were from the upper and aristocratic classes, which would mean that it is possible that they may have related to the concerns shared by the aristocratic characters appearing in these romances.

In this thesis, I suggest that female readers would have interpreted the supernatural encounters in the four Breton lays in a didactic manner as they would have with conduct literature. The lays chosen for this study each feature at least one encounter between a supernatural creature and a human character that the plot of the romance hinges on. In three out of the four lays, the human character at the central of this encounter is a woman, who is negatively affected by the encounter in one way or the other, the severity of the impact differing according to her level of transgression. Each of these women also act out of their expected behaviour as described by the conduct poem and social expectations explored above and faces the supernatural creature as a result of her action. None of these interactions are beneficial to the woman herself in any way. The final lay, *Sir Launfal* involves the fairy-lover trope as previously discussed by Aisling Byrne and James Wade, and in it, the male character enjoys a beneficial romantic relationship with a fairy mistress. The same romance, *Sir Launfal,* also features an interaction between a female fairy and a woman, and as with all the

previous cases with women, the encounter ends negatively for her. Hence, this demonstrates that the gender of the supernatural creature is not important when it comes to determining the outcome faced by a woman in such supernatural encounters. In *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Degare,* there are brief encounters between the male supernatural creatures and the titular male hero of the romance, and both encounters end favourably for the man. This therefore suggests that women interacting with supernatural creatures will likely face a negative consequence arising from it. This gendered difference in outcome is what drives the thrust of this thesis, which ultimately argues that these encounters are positioned so that the female characters are punished for their respective transgressions, while the males are either rewarded or achieve success in their quest narratives.

Each chapter in this thesis discusses one lay, and in which the woman exhibits increasingly serious disregard for the kind of social rules she is expected to follow. Chapter One studies *Sir Orfeo.* In this lay, the queen, Heurodis, is abducted from her own orchard by a fairy king, who had previously pre-empted this abduction in a dream to her. Though at no full fault of her own, Heurodis' abduction seems to be blamed on her lack of cautiousness, given that the abduction occurred under circumstances that medieval readers would have associated with fairy abductions. At the end of the story, Heurodis is returned to her husband and all is seemingly well. Chapter Two explores *Sir Degaré,* where the only daughter and heir to a kingdom wanders out into the forest after being lost, a harmless intention but nevertheless punished because she was acting without concern for her own safety. She encounters a fairy knight who declares his love for her before violently raping her, resulting in a child who becomes the heir to the kingdom. *Sir Gowther,* examined in Chapter Three, features a Duchess who makes a careless plea to God for a child through any means, driven by desperation after being childless for many years. She later encounters a demon in her orchard, who has intercourse with her disguised as her husband. Once more, the concern of a

lack of a legitimate heir is brought up, and, like in *Sir Degaré,* the heir in question is the result of the sexual encounter between the woman and the supernatural creature. In *Sir Launfal,* addressed in Chapter Four, the fairy princess Dame Tryamour interacts with both Sir Launfal and Queen Guinevere. The nature of her interactions with Launfal and Guinevere are drastically different. To Launfal, she is a nurturing and caring lover, and she is not harsh with her expectations of him. To Guinevere, she is the bearer of punishment for the queen's adulterous transgressions. Guinevere, of all the women across the romances, seems to be the most transgressive one, since she attempts to seduce Launfal while she is already married to King Arthur and is hence, blatantly punished.

The romances therefore seem to criticise misused female agency. According to the romances, as in the conduct literature, women should use their agency to protect themselves and their bodies in order to ensure that their purpose, to produce a legitimate heir for their respective husbands, is met. In *Sir Orfeo,* Queen Heurodis enjoys a restorative ending because of the appropriate actions she takes in order to mitigate the situation after her encounter with the fairy king. However, the other women in the other romances experienced different outcomes based on the level of their supposed transgression. The extent of the risk posed by the supernatural creatures appear to reflect an increasing level of punishment for the women as their transgressions diverge more and more from their expected behaviour.

In the chapters that follow, I argue that romance authors used the supernatural to warn medieval women about the dangers of female agency. By featuring such behaviours, the romances would have served as reminders for the medieval audience of the probable dangers of such transgressions, especially for women, both in the stories and among the audience. The negative outcomes faced by female characters reinforce the idea of danger brought about by these transgressions. The supernatural creatures function as the manifestation of punishment that cannot be avoided by these transgressing women. Through these supernatural encounters,

the romances hence present the fates of these transgressing women, reinforced through the dangers manifested through the supernatural creatures that they encounter, hence serving their didactic function as literary texts.

Chapter One

Adapting the Supernatural: Fairy Abduction, Gender, and the Restorative Ending in *Sir Orfeo*

Middle English Breton lays such as *Sir Orfeo,* which was composed in the late thirteenth century, are regarded as a subgenre of medieval romance, often featuring supernatural elements. Like any literary product, these lays are influenced by their context, in this case the socio-political norms and ideals of medieval England. *Sir Orfeo*, the subject of this chapter, is not only a Breton lay but also a Middle English adaptation of the well-known Greco-Roman myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. In retelling the myth*,* the *Orfeo*-poet has made certain changes to the story and the way the characters are reimagined, all of which are in line with the expectations of medieval English society. For example, the role played in the original myth by Hades, the pagan god of the Underworld, is given in *Sir Orfeo* to the fairy king of a fairy kingdom - a creature that could fit more comfortably with medieval Christian beliefs. Similarly, Orfeo rescues Heurodis from abduction instead of from death, meaning that he is not attempting to perform a miracle of resurrection. Other changes have also been deliberately made with consideration paid to the socio-political climate of medieval England. By presenting a story adapted to fit the context of medieval England, *Sir Orfeo* provides fertile ground for exploring the significance of supernatural encounters. Angana Moitra summarises the changes neatly when she writes that "the pagan universe of the original legend has been supplemented by a quintessentially Celtic apparatus of fairy mythology, Orpheus' kingdom has been transposed to the explicitly English milieu of medieval Winchester, and the entire tale has been subtly suffused with the shimmering grace of the poet's Christian consciousness" (13). While taking this into account, I argue in this chapter that, alongside the Christianisation of the story, the differences between the two supernatural encounters presented in the romance is a deliberate choice of the poet to demonstrate the risk

associated with Heurodis' slightly careless behaviour. By allowing both Orfeo and Heurodis to interact with the same fairy king but with vastly different outcomes, the poet makes use of the supernatural encounter in the romance to expand on the medieval expectations of female behaviour pertaining to protecting one's chastity, that have been previously laid out in conduct literature.

The changes made to *Sir Orfeo* from the Greco-Roman myth that inspired it have been done so in order to make it more accessible to the medieval audience that would have engaged with it. This, in turns, affects the way the characters act and react in the story, along with its eventual, restorative ending. As a king of a Christian-coded kingdom, Orfeo needed to succeed in his quest of rescuing his wife from a fairy Otherworld--replacing the Greco-Roman Underworld--and its fairy king. The setting of the poem has also moved from Orpheus' Thrace to medieval England: Orfeo is said to be a king "in Inglonde" (line 40). This lends itself to the way through which certain events happen in the plot, particularly those to do with Heurodis and her encounter with the fairy king.

Medieval conduct poems addressed the way a woman ought to carry herself and conduct herself in and out of her household. The poems sought to disseminate instructions aimed at different age groups and aimed separately at men and women, and were more directly didactic than narrative. For this thesis, I will be focusing on a conduct poem aimed specifically at young girls, instructing them on how to behave in the future. Women were expected to guard their chastity and the integrity of their bodies, saving themselves only for their husbands, for whom they were expected to produce viable heirs. While this was an expectation for all women, it was particularly important for those associated with the nobility because of the need to maintain the purity of their lineage. In *Sir Orfeo,* the woman in question is Heurodis, the wife of King Orfeo and hence, the queen of England. As I will show, the poem presents a sexually charged interaction between Heurodis and a supernatural

creature that ends with a negative outcome for the woman. In the didactic poem *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter,* the girl is instructed by her mother to "love aboven all thinge" (34) that man who she "wedde with rynge" (33). Towards the end of the poem, the mother advises her daughter to ensure that any daughters that she may have in the future are married off quickly as "meydens [...] be lonely" (183). This of course, carries the suggestion that getting married would mean that the girl, now woman, is protected and staying unmarried means that she would remain unprotected. This also of course, suggests that a woman's ideal protector would be her lawfully wedded husband, to whom she can turn to keep herself safe from the dangers she may encounter. All women, but especially noblewomen, were expected to be loyal to their husbands and careful when out of their company. In *Sir Orfeo,* of course, Heurodis remains a loyal wife. Her encounter with the fairy king is not because of any rebellious adulterous tendency she holds but rather because she failed to take the necessary precautions to protect herself from a potential fairy abduction, as I would lay out later in this chapter.

In *Sir Orfeo,* the supernatural encounter, that is, the encounter between Heurodis and the fairy king, is the central event that informs the instructional thrust of the poem in terms of commenting on female behaviour. Fairies such as the one depicted in *Sir Orfeo* are not strange to the medieval imagination. Though not an official part of Christian doctrine, fairies continued to be associated with pre-Christian pagan beliefs and remained present in the medieval imagination, both through stories and the words of preachers. In fact, the way the fairy in *Sir Orfeo* operates seems to correspond to concerns raised by John Bromyard, a preacher from fourteenth century Hereford, who wrote about women

> who say that they are seized by a certain people and taken to certain beautiful and unknown places; and who also say they ride with them and in the silence of the night transverse many spaces of the earth and pass over very many places.

(Translation from the original Latin by Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England,* 75)

The details laid out by Bromyard in this grievance almost directly reflect the fairy-related events of *Sir Orfeo.*

The romance starts off by describing the time of the month and the time of the day, both of which have been traditionally associated with the world of the fairy:

Bifel so in the comessing of May

When miri and hot is the day,

…

This ich quen, Dame Heurodis
Tok to maidens of priis,
And went in an undrentide
To play bi an orchardside
(57-8, 63-6)

After some time, Heurodis falls asleep "under a fair ympe-tre" (70) well "til after none" (75). The "the use of details conventionally associated with the fairy: the tree, the heat of the day, and the 'undrentide' (41), the noon hour, when the powers of the supernatural, fairy or devil, are supposed to be strongest" (Saunders, 201) are a foreshadowing leading to the arrival of the fairies. The poet therefore allows the audience of the romance to recognise the elements and anticipate the fairy abduction narrative that forms the crux of the plot.

With the elements detailed in the romance, the audience is expected to recognise the signs as those of a potential fairy abduction. Hence, in a similar fashion, Heurodis could also be expected to do so. Since the circumstances surrounding fairy abductions were consistent and knowable, Heurodis might be expected to take precautions to protect herself from the

dangers posed by such an encounter. She, being a woman and a queen, bears the responsibility of having to take care of herself and her body. However, because she has been careless and has either not recognised the danger or decided not to take any precaution against it, Heurodis becomes the victim of the fairy abduction that follows. By presenting Heurodis as the victim of a predictable abduction, the supernatural encounter is framed as an inevitable consequence of her lack of caution. The inevitability of the fairy abduction occurring in spite of Heurodis taking the right actions to attempt to stop it, and Orfeo's steps to protect her, suggests that her initial lack of care was a serious misjudgement on her part. She ought to have been responsible in ensuring that she took the necessary precautions which would have meant that the dream encounter with the fairy king would not have happened in the first place.

Heurodis' minor act of carelessness is thus met with a consequence that seems to outweigh the seriousness of her act. The characterisation of Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo* presents her not as a person in her own right, but as the queen and wife of Orfeo, hence emphasising her role as a wife and a queen. She is introduced in relation to her husband, with the poet saying "[t]he king hadde a quen of priis / That was y-cleped Dame Heurodis" (51-2). The word 'hadde' places Heurodis in the position of a possession of her husband, the king of England. As such, the audience views Heurodis not as an individual herself, but in relation to Sir Orfeo. Such indicators of the importance of marriage to a woman's identity were not unique to medieval romance. In the conduct poem I am using for the thesis, *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter,* the title itself, suggests that the advice being parted to the girl, the daughter, though from her mother, is from the words of a good wife. In the poem, first thing that the wife character tells the daughter is "thou wylle be a wife" (5) effectively framing the advice given in the rest of the poem towards ensuring that the girl grows up not only into a good woman, but more importantly, a good wife. Though values imparted to her are meant to

be followed by her, the fact that her future state as a wife is mentioned suggests that the advice she takes from her mother as a child would be useful for her in the future to be a good wife to her husband. Her importance and value, and hence, the actions that she takes, ought to benefit her husband and not only herself. This type of mindset thus segues into the way Heurodis' abduction is framed in the story, where she is taken away by the fairy king after he initially intrudes into her mind.

Heurodis' abduction in spite of her husband's attempts to protect her reveals that her act of carelessness caused her to come face to face with the fairy kings. Heurodis is expected to have understood and noticed these signs of an oncoming fairy abduction and taken steps to have avoided putting herself at risk. After her failure to protect herself from the dangers of a fairy abduction, Heurodis is unable to defend herself against the fairy king. Her first encounter with him happens when she is asleep, and hence, not in an active state at all. Even upon waking up from the dream in which she encounters the fairy king, she is unable to do or say anything until she is prompted to. While Heurodis is a queen of England, she is still described and portrayed as weak and subservient. This is particularly evident when her actions are compared to either her husband or the fairy king.

The way Heurodis reacts to her impending abduction, and the fact that she does later get abducted even with her husband's knowledge, places her in a position of subjugation to the two male characters she is interacting with. The fairy king is a male and a supernatural creature and is hence more powerful and stronger than Heurodis, a female human. As a human and a female, she faces two levels of subjugation by the fairy king. First, as a woman, she would have been perceived as weaker by her medieval readers, in opposition to a man. Second, as a fairy who is exempt from the laws and moral codes of the human world, he does not provide any reasonable motivation for his actions. The fairy king's magical abilities far surpass the reasoning of any humans associated with Heurodis, as at the time of her abduction

“not only do those present not understand [the fairy’s magic] but they do not even see it” (Williams, 542). The threat that Heurodis faces is for her and her alone because she, as a queen and a wife, ought to have taken the responsibility for herself. The magic of the fairy king is dangerous precisely because it is targeted and invisible, to the extent that, even in the presence of Orfeo and his knights, Heurodis gets abducted just as the fairy king had informed her earlier in her dream.

However, the passivity shown by Heurodis is broken by a single act of active decision-making, which occurs immediately after her initial dream-encounter with the fairy king. The only action that she takes is to self-mutilate. Once she wakes up from her dream, Heurodis is so affected by the encounter that she scratches her own face:

> Sche crid, and lothli bere gan make;
>
> Sche froted hir honden and hir fete,
>
> And crached hir visage - it bled wete -
>
> Hir riche robe hye al to-rett
>
> And was reveyd out of hir wit (78-82)

Heurodis’ only reaction to the fairy king who intruded into her mind while she was sleeping is to enact violence upon herself. She recognises the threat that she is facing and makes this decision in her desperation. This demonstrates that she is utterly powerless in comparison to the fairy king, in that he does not even need to be physically present in order to elicit such an extreme reaction from Heurodis. This becomes the first time she does something of her own accord after her encounter with the fairy king as a direct reaction to the threat he just posed to her in the dream.

Although the violence of fairy magic becomes evident later in the poem, particularly through the gallery displaying the bodies of abducted humans, the only present enactment of violence upon a character within the span of the romance is that of Heurodis enacting violence on herself. The fairy king does not actually do anything to her, and neither does he instruct or threaten her to perform this act of self-mutilation; it is a choice made by Heurodis alone in recognition of the nature of the threat the fairy king has posed to her. However, he is definitely capable of enacting physical harm upon her. Later in the romance, the Gallery of Bodies shows what the fairy king is actually capable of, which has been foreshadowed in his threat to Heurodis prior to her abduction:

> thou schalt with ous go
>
> And live with ous evermo.
>
> And yif thou makest ous y-let,
>
> Whar thou be, thou worst y-fet,
>
> And totore thine limes al
>
> That nothing help the no schal;
>
> And thei thou best so totorn,
>
> Yete thou worst with ous y-born
>
> (166-174)

The fairy king thus approaches Heurodis and intrudes into her mind when she is at her most vulnerable as she is asleep, makes an active threat against her physical body if she does not comply with his orders, and leaves her in such a frightened and shocked state that the only way she can respond is by harming herself. It is precisely in this scene that the sexual

connotations of Heurodis' seemingly non-sexual encounter with the fairy king begin to reveal themselves, if not to the audience but more obviously to Heurodis.

Though the fairy king makes no explicit sexual threat against her, Heurodis recognises it as so. Her immediate reaction to this threat upon waking up from her dream-encounter being her mutilating her face demonstrates that she has indeed established that the connection the fairy king's abduction threat is indeed sexual. This is especially poignant since the audience has been introduced to her striking beauty earlier in the romance, and she is a married woman. Actions taken by Heurodis, in particular, her self-mutilation, have captured the attention of scholars like Ellen Caldwell, who argue that "the key to reading *Sir Orfeo*, thus, is written on the mutilated body of Orfeo's queen, Heurodis" (291). She acknowledges that Heurodis' self-mutilation "connects her to a tradition of holy and chaste women in the early Middle Ages who disfigured themselves in order to appear unappealing to would-be attackers" (291). In fact, stories of several examples of female saints who mutilated their faces in order to avoid a sexual threat to their bodies and maintain their ritual purity were circulating in late thirteenth century England at the time *Sir Orfeo* was written. Such stories would have established the status of self-mutilation, particularly of the face, as an act done by a woman who wished to keep her chastity from being tainted by a potential male sexual assailant.

Examples of such female saints who wished to avoid sexual encounters include St. Margaret of Hungary, St. Margaret of Cortona and Oda of Brabant, "each of whose lives feature an episode of actual or near-mutilation of the face" (Skinner, 184). It was "the fear of sexual violation" (Skinner, 189) that drove St. Margaret of Hungary to harm herself. Though not threatened with rape, another saint, St. Brigit of Ireland, "went as far as to gouge out her own eye when threatened with marriage" (Bitel, 35) in order to avoid an unwanted sexual

advance. In all these cases, the woman in question decides to remove the beauty from her face in a violent manner, in order to avoid an undesired sexual encounter. Just as St. Margaret of Hungary mutilated her face to avoid being raped by her assailants and St. Brigit gouged her own eye out in order to make herself unsightly and avoid an unwanted marriage, Heurodis' response can be read as assuming that if her face has been maimed, the fairy king will no longer be interested in abducting her. In fact, Corinne Saunders shows that the fairy king's initial appearance into Heurodis' mind does carry sexual implications, as this "intrusion of the fairy into Heurodis' sleeping mind is deeply sinister, and presages the ravishment of her body by the King of Faery" (201-2). That, read alongside Heurodis' reaction to it, implies that she has recognised that the fairy king is a sexual threat to her and is doing what she knows is best in order to escape her situation.

Heurodis encounter with the fairy king and her subsequent reactions to it thus serve as a foreshadowing of the romance's eventual restorative ending. Caldwell further reads Heurodis' act of self-mutilation and her relationship to her husband, Orfeo, as placing her in the surprising company of the 'loathly lady'" (292). By reading Heurodis in tandem with the 'loathly lady' archetype, Caldwell suggests that Heurodis's self-mutilation and later, abduction and successful rescue by her husband, all serves to fulfil Orfeo's quest for his kingdom. The 'loathly lady' mentioned here refers to a literary trope featured in Celtic folklore, who typically transforms into a beautiful woman once the knight in concern marries her. He must, however, remain unaware of this transformation. The folkloric trope is a test of the knight's loyalty, which then ends in him both getting a beautiful wife and "sovereignty of the kingdom she represents" (292). I, however, read Heurodis' decision to self-mutilate differently. While I, like Caldwell, make the connection between the act of self-mutilation and the tradition that existed in the Middle Ages with the examples of the several saints mentioned above, I read this as a decision taken by Heurodis in order to protect her chastity

as a result of having interpreted the fairy king's threat to her as a sexual one. By understanding the weight of the threat, Heurodis takes the next appropriate action by ensuring that she does whatever she can within her power to protect herself from this abductor-to-be, and thus protect her chastity that she rightfully reserves for her husband alone. By doing so, Heurodis fulfils her duty as a good wife. Though the first thing she ought to have done is to ensure that she was cautious during the time she was out and kept herself safe from the dream encounter in the first place, this was the next best thing she could do. Hence, this correct decision, followed by the choice she makes to speak of it to no one except her husband, who is supposed to be her protector, could be read as a reason for the restorative ending – while the abduction had to occur because of Heurodis' initial act of lack of caution, she is rescued by her husband and brought back to her kingdom because of the correct decisions she had made to mitigate the initial threat.

Heurodis' perception of the fairy king's threat in the dream-encounter as a sexual one is also supported by ideas perpetuated by certain medieval laws. These, coupled with the fact that she was indeed abducted even though her husband was with her, paint the incident in a sexual light. Linguistically, in modern English, abduction and rape are two distinct crimes. The former refers to kidnapping, while the latter is forced sexual intercourse with an unwilling party. In medieval England, however, the two were less clearly separated. The word rape, or rather its Latin equivalent, *raptus,* was employed in medieval law and case studies to refer to "theft of property, seizure of male and female dependents, and sexual rape" (Dunn, 88). This shows the close relation between the two kinds of crimes, that of sexual assault, and that of abduction and stealing away, be it a person or an object. Although the crimes of rape and kidnapping were not legally conflated until the Statute of Rapes in 1382, several decades after *Sir Orfeo* was composed, the late thirteenth century saw the two crimes treated in increasingly similar ways. Suzanne Edwards describes how in the late thirteenth

century, “the Statutes of Westminster effectively “turned the law of rape into a law of elopement and abduction” (6), which then paints the event in *Sir Orfeo* as a possible sexual crime against Heurodis. As such, this accentuates the severe consequences of Heurodis’ initial act of carelessness in not paying attention to the signs of a fairy abduction. This is precisely the kind of threat that she, as a woman, was vulnerable to and hence, ought to protect herself against. As a woman and especially as a queen, sexual threat is a danger not just to her, but also to her husband’s lineage and the royal succession.

However, Heurodis’ encounter with the fairy king is not the only supernatural encounter that appears in *Sir Orfeo.* Sometime after she is abducted by the fairy king and brought into his fairy Otherworld, Orfeo manages to find his way into this world in order to try and rescue his beloved wife. Following the myth, Orfeo sets out to rescue his wife not from the classical Underworld but from the fairy Otherworld, where he meets the fairy king himself. This is the second time the same fairy king is interacting with a human character and the way he behaves, and the outcome of the interaction, is markedly different from his interaction with Heurodis. With Orfeo, the fairy king interacts with him on Orfeo’s own terms, without intruding into his mind as he had done with Heurodis. He speaks to him without making any threat against him and goes as far as to listen to what Orfeo has to say. Indeed, Orfeo controls the interaction to some extent by appearing unexpectedly at the fairy court, rather than the fairy king appearing unexpectedly at the human court. While Orfeo remains conscious and in control of his mind and his actions during his interaction with the fairy king, Heurodis is unable to do so. Even throughout this rescue scene, Heurodis is sleeping “under an ympe-tre” (407) and possibly staying quiet and still and perhaps hidden away to the extent that Orfeo recognises her not by her face but “bi her clothes” (408). It seems here that after her self-mutilation, Heurodis has now returned to the passivity ascribed onto her initially in the romance. Orfeo, on the other hand, remains in control of himself.

Instead, the interaction between Orfeo and the fairy king is presented by the poet as one in which both males are equal, and the king does eventually admit Orfeo's victory over him calmly and with no sign of the violent threats he made against Heurodis.

The successful outcome of the interaction between the fairy king and Orfeo, combined with the happy ending of the lay as opposed to the original myth, reveals the poem's push towards representing Orfeo as a Christian king. Orfeo is a king, and so is the fairy king, each in charge of their own respective kingdoms. Furthermore, Orfeo is portrayed as a king who "mest of ani thing / lovede the gle of harping" (25-6), which I will later show is an instance of the poem's Christian conscious informing the narrative. As such, the interaction between Orfeo and the fairy king can be read as a clash between the Christian and non-Christian worlds, as embodied by the respective kings. *Sir Orfeo* thus paints the world of the fairy king as a contrast to the human world occupied by Orfeo and his wife. This also then places the romance's happy ending in place of the tragic ending of the original myth, within the same reading: that Orfeo wins in his battle of wits against the fairy king and emerges victorious by bringing back his abducted wife.

The idea of the 'Christian consciousness' within the text is a curious one, given that it is not made explicitly clear that Orfeo, or his kingdom, is Christian. The romance itself, however, was composed in the late thirteenth century, when England was fully Christian. *Sir Orfeo,* as a romance written during this period and in which a non-Christian fairy Otherworld is depicted in negative light, becomes associated with Christian values since Orfeo and his world is depicted positively as compared to the fairy world. Even though it is not made explicit that Orfeo was Christian himself within the story, certain elements within the story seem to point toward Christianity, thus marking Orfeo as at least a representation of a Christian king. The repackaged story with reimagined characters thus would have reinforced the social values and customs of medieval England, which are closely associated with

Christian doctrine. The Christianity associated with Orfeo rises in the text when he meets his steward after returning from the fairy kingdom.

"Sir steward!" he seyd, "merci!

Icham an harpour of hethenisse;

Help me now in this destresse!" (513-5)

That Orfeo mentions 'hethenisse' and associates it with being in 'destresse' paints the word in a negative light. The meaning of the word 'heathen' can be traced to the Old English word *hǣthen* which is a noun used to refer to anyone who does not believe in the God of the Testament. It is mentioned in several sources, such as the *South English Legendary,* a hagiographic work published in the late thirteenth century, around the same period as *Sir Orfeo,* where in the section on St Augustine, it is stated that "Engelond he louede muche. Me tolde him þat þe lond was god, and þat it heþene was" (4-5). Augustine was the one who had "Christendom brouhte in-to Englonde" (1), and hence, the status of England before that would be pre-Christianity, referred to here as "heþene" (5). Here, it is clear that the word and its variations such as heathenship, is used to refer to the pagan, polytheistic religions that were in place and being practiced by the population before Christianity had been ordained as the religion everyone ought to follow. In the romance, Orfeo makes it clear to his steward that his distress is related to the heathen world that he had returned from, which probably refers to the kingdom of the fairy king he had managed to bring his wife back from.

The liminality of the fairies in *Sir Orfeo* is revealed through layered means, by the revelation of the dual nature of the Otherworld, simultaneously beautiful and dangerous, and the usage of the word 'faerie' and its variants within the romance. Within the romance, the word 'fairy' refers to the fairy king, his people, and even the space he inhabits. The second mention of the word is, in fact, referring to the Otherworld, when the poet writes that "mani

ther beth of fairy" (10), which linguistically conflates the land of the Fairy - the Otherworld - with the beings -the fairies - who inhabit it. Through this conflation, the marvel associated with the fairies in the romance is attributed to both the fairy and the Otherworld that they occupy. Therefore, the paradoxical nature of the Otherworld, which is simultaneously linked to Christian paradise and to the classical Underworld of its source. This replacement then superimposes Celtic folklore onto classical mythology, and the parallels imply a threat to the Christianity that is upheld through Orfeo and his court. The king threatens Heurodis and takes her to his fairy kingdom against her will, but when Orfeo faces him, he challenges him as an equal. He recognises Orfeo as a man and an equal opponent while he saw Heurodis as someone he would be able to subjugate to his will, hence posing a threat to both Orfeo and Heurodis.

One of the instances through which the threat imposed by the fairy king is shown is through the paradisiac mirage of his kingdom. When Orfeo first follows the fairy ladies into the court of the fairy king, he observes that it resembles "the proude court of Paradis" (376). This 'Paradis' obviously refers to the Christian paradise, which is supposed to be most perfect of places in the Christian imagination. Ad Putter writes of the fairy Otherworld in *Sir Orfeo* being "suspiciously like Heaven" (239), adding that "Heaven is the place beyond all superlatives" (239), which seems to present the beauty of the fairy kingdom as being depiceted as dangerously close to the Christian idea of perfection. And since writers of romance strive to create superlative worlds, they often come close to transporting us to "the proud courts of paradise" (239). The association of the Otherworld with Paradise then seems to demonstrate the extent of the threat posed by the fairy king not only to Heurodis, but to Orfeo and the integrity of his Christian-coded kingdom as a whole. The fairy king's threat to Heurodis then seems to be amplified here since she is the queen and wife of Orfeo, and the one who is supposed to be bearing the legitimate heirs to Orfeo's kingdom, who had been

abducted against her will. Furthermore, this adds to the emphasis on the establishment of a reliable and Christian leader to take over as king after Orfeo, preferably through his own bloodline through his wife, Heurodis. As shown previously, the threat of abduction to Heurodis would have been perceived as a rape threat to the queen, which not only harms her physical body but threatens the legitimacy of the future heirs of their kingdom. By kidnapping Heurodis, the fairy king takes away the means through which Orfeo would be able to produce a viable heir for his kingdom through her.

The potential of the threat posed by the fairy king is later revealed by the poet's generous dedication of lines to describing the Gallery of Bodies in the fairy kingdom. Whatever shimmering façade the fairy king's kingdom seems to show at first is immediately overridden by the shocking display of what is revealed to be other abducted humans in the very court. The Gallery of Bodies is the first thing that Orfeo sees upon entering the court, as the porter opens the gate towards where he would later meet the fairy king. There, Orfeo is greeted by a spectacular and shocking gallery of humans, not revealed to be dead or alive, in various distressing conditions. They are said to be "folk that were thider y-brought" (389), of whom "sume stode withouten hade" (391) while others "thurth the bodi hadde wounde"(393). Others are in childbirth and battle, drowned and burnt with fire. To the imagination of a person listening to or reading the romance, the starkness of the detailed and almost hellish descriptions of the people caught in between death and life, almost immediately after the court was described to resemble Paradise, is poignant. While paradise was supposed to be a place where humans were at ease and comfortable, the tortured humans here seem to be reminiscent of hell rather than heaven. Therefore, the Gallery of Bodies functions as a warning to deter the minds of the projected audience of the romance from being too attracted by the immense beauty of the fairy kingdom that the author describes in great detail. It is here that the poet once again reminds the audience of the fairy king's penchant for violence, which

was last seen in his open threat to Heurodis the day before her abduction. The striking scene ensures that the fairy king, and his kingdom as an extension, will always be held in negative connotation when compared to the human kingdom of Orfeo. To both Orfeo and Heurodis, the fairy king serves as a reminder of the potential of his danger. To Heurodis, the gallery of bodies serves as a chilling reminder of the initial threat that he made to her directly before her abduction while to Orfeo, the gallery of bodies serves as a reminder of the power possessed by the fairy king.

The ambiguity of the fairy Otherworld is more threatening when Heurodis is the one who interacts with it, rather than Orfeo. Unlike Orfeo who enters the Otherworld willingly when he enters it through "a roche" (347), Heurodis is forcibly abducted by the fairy king after he directly makes a threat against her personal well-being. Therein lies the fundamental difference between the two supernatural encounters. While it can be argued that Orfeo was grieving for the loss of his beloved wife, declaring that he will go "into wildernes" (212) and "live ther evermore" (213) after her abduction, he still eventually acts upon his own will and no one is actively making any threats of violence against him when he decides to follow the women into fairyland. Once he arrives in fairyland, Orfeo is able to interact with the fairy king on his own terms.

At the beginning of his arc in the story, Orfeo is hero-coded in the sense that he is the one who ultimately rescues his abducted wife from the reins of the malicious fairy king by beguiling him in spite of wandering about in the wilderness for a period of time after the abduction has occurred. In fact, scholars have studied the role of Orfeo in the romance, arguing that "self-imposed exile [in the romance] is of vital importance since it serves as a preparatory interlude before the poet can initiate the final chain of events which will culminate in Orfeo's successful recovery of Heurodis [from the fairy king]" (Moitra, 17)

Here, Moitra reads Orfeo's decision as the one that led to events causing the final victory of the romance, the happy ending where Heurodis is rescued, as opposed to the tragedy of the original Greco-Roman myth.

Furthermore, the victory of Orfeo against the fairy king is a game of wits, in which the fairy king refuses to return Heurodis only to be thwarted by his own choice of words at the last moment. After Orfeo played to him his harp, the fairy king enjoyed it and tells Orfeo to ask him "what it be" (450) and "largelich" (451) he will pay, effectively telling him that he will give him whatever he wishes. The fairy king's defeat at the hands of Orfeo then posits the fairy king, and his kingdom, as inferior to the orderly society as represented by Orfeo, the king of England. To make this point, I shall bring up the comparison of the fairy kingdom to 'Paradis' once again. Early in the romance, Orfeo's skill with the harp is applauded to the extent that it is compared to "on of the joies of Paradis" (37). Considering the two instances of comparison to 'Paradis' side by side, it has been argued that "the *paradis* of the Otherworld holds beauty and sorrow, just as Orfeo's songs can, but the *paradis* of sound, Orfeo's music, is powerful enough to restore the dead to life and to break the boundaries between the two realms, whereas the beauty of the fairy castle is static and its visual beauty does not restore the dead" (Lakskaya and Salisbury). Even though the fairy magic is depicted as being threatening because "all human efforts prove completely ineffective against [it]" (Williams, 542), Orfeo is able to defeat the fairy king and take his wife back. Orfeo's apparent victory over the threat posed to Heurodis is sealed in the scene where he manages to outwit the fairy king by using his own words against him. This is, of course, different from the ending of the Greco-Roman myth, since Orfeo emerges victorious and Heurodis is reunited with her husband. Orfeo is a king and a man, and hence, manages to outwit the fairy king and therefore contributes to the happy ending of the story. His harp playing, though not typically masculine, is associated with Christianity and is hence a marker of the poem's

Christian consciousness. The association of the harp with Christianity would have stemmed from appearances in several stories in the Bible, particularly that to do with King David, as recorded in Book of Samuel:

> So whensoever the evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul, David took his harp, and played with his hand, and Saul was refreshed, and was better, for the evil spirit departed from him. (1 Samuel 16:23)

The poem's medieval audience would likely have recognised the parallel between Orfeo's harp and David's, which drives away evil spirits. Not only does Orfeo succeed in his quest, but the fairy king who had abducted Heurodis in the first place tells the couple to go and to "be blithe" (471), thus acknowledging his defeat and taking no further action against Orfeo or Heurodis. The restorative ending of *Sir Orfeo* is thus informed by the two sub-plots of Heurodis' abduction and Orfeo's self-exile, and their subsequent return. Unlike the Greco-Roman myth, Heurodis does not die and is instead abducted, and is hence able to return from where she has been abducted to. Orfeo does not go to the Underworld unlike his Greco-Roman myth counterpart and is hence able to return with the victorious rescue of his wife. This phenomenon has been featured in Angana Moitra's essay, where she argues that the "motif of absence [through abduction and exile], however, which thematically unites the two episodes; […] is the yarn which is used to spin the narrative cloth [of the romance]" (25). Through this, both Orfeo's and Heurodis' subplots are read as contributing factors to the romance's restorative ending. In a previous paragraph in this chapter, Moitra also shows that Orfeo's decision to willingly go into self-exile was the act that led to his successful rescue of his wife from the fairy king and how this ultimately led to the combined return of the royal couple to the kingdom. While this is a contributing factor to the ending of the romance, Moitra does not consider Heurodis' independent actions prior to her abduction as possible factors as well. I argue, however, that Heurodis' appropriate actions, that she had taken after

her initial encounter with the fairy king, that is, taking steps to protect her chastity immediately upon waking up to inform her protector, her husband, of the danger she is facing, are key to the romance's restorative ending.

Therefore, in spite of Orfeo's Christianity being positioned as the reason for the romance's restorative ending, it is dependent upon Heurodis' initial decisions made earlier in the romance. While it is true that Orfeo rescues his wife because of his ability to outwit the fairy king, it cannot be denied that Heurodis remains physically unharmed, at least as far as the romance describes it, not only because of her husband but because of herself. As a woman and a wife, Heurodis is very sure that the first person she informs of about the fairy king is not any of her handmaidens, but her husband. As she wakes up from the dream in which she meets the fairy king, her first instinct is to scratch her face and hence protect her chastity from any immediate risk. By doing so, she manages to behave in accordance to what is expected of her as a woman and as a wife of a king, and the restorative end thus serves as the reasonable outcome for the correct actions that she has taken. Reading the supernatural encounter in a didactic way similar to the conduct poem discussed earlier in the chapter would reveal that the arc involving Heurodis functions in the following way: As a woman, the onus is on Heurodis to take the necessary precautions to guard herself from risky situations. However, in spite of being in a situation that the audience would have recognised as risky, Heurodis fails to take precaution and falls asleep outdoors. This act leads to her first encounter with the fairy king in her dream. Upon waking from this however, she acts according to what is expected from a chaste woman facing a threat, by reacting in a way that is reminiscent of saints protecting their chastity that the audience would have recognised. Next, she takes the next appropriate step by recognising her husband as her protector and informing him of the danger she is facing. However, in spite of this, the abduction still occurs because the story of Heurodis will not be complete without emphasing that as much as her

initial error was small, it is not free of consequence. Nevertheless, Heurodis is rewarded for the appropriate steps that she took following the initial dream encounter.

Sir Orfeo thus presents two levels of power dynamics: gender and religion. On both spectrums, Heurodis appears to be on the passive end; she is the one who is not only abducted but instructed to present herself in a state in order to allow for her own abduction. She is not only the sole character in the romance upon whom physical violence is rendered, but she is also reduced to a state where she decides to enact it upon her own face. While in the presence of her rescuer and husband towards the end of her ordeal in the fairy Otherworld, she "slepeth under the ympe-tree" (456) as Orfeo and the fairy king interact, offering no word or action of her own; her rescue is solely determined by Orfeo's successful thwarting of the fairy king. After her rescue, she disappears from the story and makes no more contribution to the plot. Even her childbearing capacity, a cause for concern when she was abducted by the fairy king since the sexual threat to her would threaten the integrity of the child she produces, is not mentioned. Though Orfeo and Heurodis "lived long afterward" (595), "sethen was king the steward" (596), and not any of the couple's own children. Hence, it is likely that the king and queen died without bearing any children, and the loyal steward was installed as king. In short, because of her gender and the fact that she was the one who encountered the supernatural being in the orchard first, she is reduced to a passive partaker in events initiated by the male, be it the fairy king, or her husband, Orfeo, the king of England, despite being a queen herself. However, it is in fact these very actions that she partakes in, after her initial encounter with the fairy king, that has contributed to the restorative ending of the romance, alongside the Christianity associated with her husband, Orfeo.

Chapter Two

Responsible Female Agency and Dynastic Heredity in *Sir Degare*

This thesis argues that supernatural beings in Breton lays operate as agents of punishment for the women that they interact with. In *Sir Orfeo*, discussed in the previous chapter, the same supernatural being - the fairy king - interacts with Orfeo and Heurodis in markedly different ways. I argue that the differences relate to the human character's gender. Furthermore, I argue that through the inclusion of elements that the medieval audience of *Sir Orfeo* would have been familiar with, the lay frames Heurodis' encounter as a punishment brought about due to her own oversight. *Sir Degare,* composed in the early fourteenth century and discussed in this chapter, follows a similar pattern. However, *Sir Degare* places a stronger focus on the need for women to use their agency in an appropriate way by amplifying the level of responsibility the female character must exercise in order to guard herself. The stakes in *Sir Degare* are also high, as the female character in question is both a princess and the sole heir to her father's kingdom. The future of the country therefore rests on her ability to marry well and produce a legitimate heir of her own, which requires that she protect her body and, especially, her chastity. The princess encounters the fairy knight when she fails to take measures for her own security, framing the encounter as a punishment for her careless behaviour.

In *Sir Degare*, as in *Sir Orfeo*, there is little outright display of agency by the female character before the supernatural encounter. Instead, she acts in ways that lie on the fence between agency and obedience. At the end of the romance, the smallest exercise of her agency is punished while her obedience is rewarded. The themes of gender, agency, and obedience in the lay also coalesce around the idea of inheritance. By bringing such concerns into the picture, *Sir Degare* ultimately shows that female obedience is favoured over female

volition, especially in the context of the feudal landscape shown in the romance. The supernatural encounter functions as a punishment for the very minor expression of female volition. Simultaneously, the outcome of the encounter functions as a reward for female obedience by solving the problem of inheritance as raised initially in the romance.

The principal characters in the romance are all royal; there is a king, his daughter the princess, and her son, Sir Degare. The importance of inheritance is magnified because it involves not just personal property but also the fate of the kingdom. At the beginning of the romance, the poet depicts a king in his prime, with all of the qualities needed to lead his kingdom successfully. The king is described in the beginning of the romance as a man who had “gret poer in all thing” (10). He is “mochel idouted" (12) on the battlefield, and on horseback he cannot be defeated "in were ne in tornament, / Ne in justes for no thing” (14). These achievements are attributed to his physical strength when he is described as a man who is “So strong [...] of bone and blod” (18). The emphasis on the king’s military strength assures the audience that the kingdom is safe from external threats.

However, it is soon revealed that all is not well with this seemingly perfect kingdom. Though it is assumed to be safe from external enemies due to the military prowess of the ruling king, the future of the kingdom is revealed to be in doubt. Early in the poem, the poet explains that the king “hadde none hair / but a maidenchild” (19-20). Furthermore, any prospect of the king having a son in the future is lost since “the Quene his wif / in travailing here lif she les” (24-5). The lack of a male heir could cause significant political problems, as can be seen from parallel situations in history.

The most prominent English parallel to the king’s situation in the years before the composition of *Sir Degare* is the succession of Matilda, the daughter of Henry I. Matilda, who reigned from 1141-1148, was one of the contenders for the throne during The Anarchy,

a civil war that raged from Henry I's death in 1135 until 1153. Matilda had been left as Henry's only living child following the death of his son, William Adelin, in a shipwreck in 1120. As Henry I's heir not only by "blood right as his only legitimate child" (Hanley, 55) but also as his named heir to whom his court had sworn loyalty, Matilda tried to become queen in her own right. However, though there "was no official or legal bar to female rule in England or Normandy" (Hanley, 58), her cousin Stephen of Blois eventually managed to usurp her position with the help of his brother. Throughout the period of time it seemed that England had a female monarch, there was strife enough to cause a bloody civil war. Besides Matilda, no medieval queens ruled England in their own right. The political turmoil Matilda's reign caused is a warning that resonates in *Sir Degare,* where the kingdom is left with only a female heir.

Matilda's experience also emphasises the importance of marriage for medieval royalty. Although she was a legitimate daughter of Henry I, she still needed to marry well and produce a preferably male heir, who would be more suited for the throne than she was. When Matilda expressed that she was unhappy with her marriage arrangements in 1128, she received a letter telling her to "stop causing distress to her father through her 'disobedience'" (Hanley, 62). From this historical example, it can be seen that female obedience was generally favoured over the woman's expression of her opinion, especially if she was important to the throne. Some even thought that Matilda's "arrogance was off-putting and she showed a lack of judgement and understanding of her people" (Ward, 133). As a woman and a potential queen, Matilda was expected to put the interests of her people and her kingdom before the consideration of her personal comforts, particularly in the matter of her marriage prospects.

It was expected that a medieval king would control the marriages of his children, and the king in *Sir Degare* is no exception. The age of consent for a woman to be married in

medieval England under canon law was twelve, but royal marriages could be agreed even earlier, typically for political gain. Hence, it is clear that royal children might have hardly any say in selecting their future spouses. Historical examples of such marriages include those of Eleanor of Provence, who was arranged to be married to Henry III of England (r.1216-1272) at a young age and never saw her husband before she married him. Born in 1223, she was "on the 14th of January 1236, married to King Henry III" (Strickland, 369). The daughters of Edward I (r.1272-1307) were also betrothed at very young ages: his daughter Margaret's marriage to John, the heir to the duchy of Brabant, was arranged "when the bride-to-be was only three years old" (Salzman, 92), while her sister Elizabeth was the same age when the arrangements for her marriage were made. It was therefore not unusual for the daughter of a noble family to be expected to be obedient to her father's wishes for her marriage.

However, the method the king in *Sir Degare* uses to choose a husband for his daughter is unusual. We are told that "kynges sones" (27) and "emperours and dukes" (28) wish to marry the princess "for love of here heritage" (30), clearly linking her marriage to the idea of the kingdom and her inheritance of it. In order to select a suitor, the king ordains "that no man sschal here halden ever / but yif he mai in turneying / him out of his sadel bring" (32-4), effectively measuring the suitors' worthiness of his daughter's hand against his own prowess. This demonstrates that the king is the ideal to match up to. However, it has been previously mentioned in the romance that it is impossible to defeat the king. The requirement for a successful suitor to "him out of his sadel bring" is an exact repetition of a line from earlier in the poem. In its first appearance, the line explains that

> "Ther nas no man, verraiment,
>
> That mighte in werre ne in tornament,

Ne in justes for no thing,

Him out of his sadel bring"

(14-16)

The king thus takes charge of the kingdom's future by determining who the princess gets to marry, but the poet's repetition of the line reveals that the conditions he has set for his daughter's marriage may be impossible to fulfil. This method of controlling his daughter's marriage prospects to the level of near over-possessiveness by the king demonstrates the importance of this choice, since he would need a strong king like himself to be able to maintain the peace and prosperity of his kingdom.

In the poem's opening, then, the reader's focus is driven towards the danger faced by this promising kingdom because of the lack of an heir, which the princess is expected to produce. Alongside the concern of finding a husband, the focus on the need for an heir highlights the need to maintain the princess' virginity. In short, a woman's virginity was thought to be the factor that "corroborated her uncontaminated contribution to her husband's bloodline through childbirth once she married" (Blamires, 4). The princess' virginity is given more importance because of her royal status. During a medieval queen's coronation ceremony, the names of women from the Old Testament were often invoked, "but of greater importance was the invocation of the Virgin Mary" (Ward, 121). The invocation of the Virgin Mary was to emphasise both the woman's virginity upon marriage and her capacity for motherhood, since she was later "expected to bear the king's children" (Ward, 122). In stressing the kingdom's lack of a male heir, *Sir Degare* places the princess in a position where her virginal body is the means through which the heir to the kingdom, and the solution to its problems, can be produced. As I explore below, the symbolic connection made between

a queen and the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages also resonates in an unexpected way with the supernatural encounter in which Degare is conceived.

Since the princess's capacity for reproduction will lead the kingdom to salvation, it is striking that she first appears in a procession to commemorate the death anniversary of her own mother, who died in childbirth, which reveals the risk associated with childbirth that the princess might be facing. This is the first scene of action after the characters have been introduced. The introduction of the characters in such a moment, in conjunction with the lay's initial introduction to the kingdom's situation, causes the audience to begin thinking of the princess in terms of her potential for motherhood. Thus, with the idea of motherhood associated with the presence of the princess and her body's biological capacity for producing a child, the story proceeds as it approaches the central supernatural encounter.

The king, the princess and their company are riding through the forest "toward the abbai" (47) where the queen "was beryed" (40) in order to give offerings. It is during this solemn occasion that the princess asks to be excused to "don here nedes and hire righte" (54): in other words, to relieve herself. This moment has been read by critics as an "extraordinary intrusion of the body into the ceremonial" (Robson, 85) since it is unusual for such attention to be given to the body in courtly literature. With the looming awareness of the princess' potential for motherhood, the focus on her material body draws the attention of the audience towards her body's physical capacity for producing a child, which, in the right circumstances, will solve the kingdom's problem of a lack of an heir. Hence, the importance of the princess' body is amplified as it is presented as the means through which this can be achieved.

The poet's shift to focus on the physical body of the princess relates more clearly to childbirth in the context of medieval ideas of gendered anatomy. Medieval doctors believed that there was a connection between the body's waste removal process and menstruation, and

the discharge of menstrual blood was seen as being “similar to the evacuation of the bowel or bladder” (Blumenberg, 12). It is therefore possible that a medieval audience would have made a connection between the princess's need to leave the procession and the idea of her body's reproductive potential. By shifting the focus of the narrative to the body of the princess, the poet effectively highlights her body’s capacity for reproduction. This is what the supernatural encounter hinges on.

The princess’s decision to leave the procession to relieve herself has been discussed by scholars because of its bizarre appearance in a romance. Margaret Robson reads the moment as reflecting the princess’s “ability to speak her own story [and] to recognise her own desires” (83). She links this to the princess’ recognition of her sexuality, and hence a recognition of her agency. However, where Robson sees this as a form of agency, I would argue otherwise. It was the princess’s need to relieve herself, a physical need that she could not control, that caused her to decide to leave her father’s company, rather than any deliberate choice of her own. To exercise her own agency would entail that she had made a deliberate choice for herself, probably to meet a need or a desire over which she has control. However, what happens in *Sir Degare* at this juncture is anything but that. The princess has not shown any personal agency and is only stepping out of her father’s company in order to meet a physical need that she is not in control of. By stepping out of the ceremony, her lack of control over her physical body becomes the reason for which she symbolically leaves the protection of her father and his court, moving towards circumstances that place her and her body at risk. Ultimately, she becomes pregnant with the titular Degare, who becomes the much-needed heir to the kingdom. However, his birth is not, at first, a cause for celebration: he is half-fairy, and the product of rape.

In my reading of the poem, the princess's first act of agency comes only when she leaves her handmaidens to gather flowers and listen to the wild birds sing. After the princess

leaves to relieve herself, she and several of her handmaidens become lost because they have "token the wai amys" (62). After they call and cry for help, the two handmaidens fall asleep. "[T]he damaisele alone" (76) remains awake, and it is here that she shows a very minimal level of expressing her agency and decision-making power. The poet tells us that the princess went "aboute and gaderede floures / and herknede songe of wilde foules (77-8). Unlike answering the call of nature, what the princess deals with here is presumably boredom as the rest of her maidens have all fallen asleep and it does not seem that anyone is coming to their rescue anytime soon. It is therefore the first – and indeed only – time in the poem that she makes a decision that completely serves her own desires. As I discuss below, in the subsequent occasions in which we see her make decisions, her actions serve her father's interests instead of her own and are in line with her responsibility as a princess safeguarding her dynasty.

The small act of gathering flowers is what leads the princess to encounter the fairy knight. She goes "fer in the launde" (79) and is soon lost once again. Such reckless and potentially dangerous behaviour is discouraged especially for young girls, seeing how in conduct poems such as *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter,* where the daughter is specifically warned against wandering around "hyderward [and] thederward" (58) when outside of her house and not in the company of someone who can protect her. She is further warned against going about as if she were "a gase" (61) before a list of places are given for her to avoid, including the "merket" (63) and "the taverne" (65). She is advised to stay "at home" (77) unless it is needed of her to leave. It is clear here that the outside world poses dangers to a woman, typically one that threatens her chastity. This encouraged behaviour is precisely what the princess in *Sir Degare* ignores when she decides to not just wander around but do so after she knows that she and her other female companions are lost in the wilderness.

This becomes even more apparent after she stops wandering around and begins to lament that she is now even more lost than she already had been.

Moreover, the princess seems to be aware of precisely the type of dangers that she might possibly encounter now that she has wandered out alone, and this is what happens in the romance. After she cries out that she will be attacked by “wilde bestes” (87) before “ani man” (88) shall find and rescue her, the fairy knight appears. Described as a “gentil, yong, and jolif man” (91) who has a “countenaunce right curteis” (94), the fairy knight seems noble, harmless and almost as if he is here to rescue the princess from her peril. He even assures her to be “afered of none wihghte” (99) and greets her politely. He then tells her that he has loved her “mani a yer” (105). Initially, this might seem to point towards a potential romance, leading to marriage and perhaps the eventual solution to the kingdom’s need for a male heir. However, all this potential immediately falls apart when he reveals, in a cruel twist of fate, that he intends to ensure that she becomes his lover, whether she “liketh wel or wo” (108).

The fairy knight, once poised to be her saviour, is now the rapist who destroys her virginity and the marriage prospects on which the kingdom relies. As she “wep and criede” (110), he “dide his wille” (112) and “binam hire here maidenhood (113). This violent rape of the princess is laid out in graphic detail by the poet, once again bringing into focus the physical body of the princess, and, more starkly, the capacity of her body to reproduce. It is this act of violation upon her body that causes her to become pregnant with the titular Degare, ultimately fulfilling the purpose her physical body has been set up to serve in the previous sections of the romance. The princess's minor act of agency in gathering flowers, which puts her body at risk, is punished.

In these moments then, leading up to the princess' encounter with the fairy knight, questions about her agency begin to rise. Her small act of agency proves to be a costly mistake. The princess does not seem to have engaged in too great a transgression. However, her punishment is hefty and is too extreme for such a minor act of carelessness. This incongruence between the act and the consequence therefore reveals the importance placed on a woman's virginity in medieval England and how even the slightest careless act putting that at risk might warrant a hefty punishment. The princess does demonstrate other instances of using her agency later in the story, but it is not for her own needs. The problem at hand is hence not the agency itself, but what the agency is being used for – the punishment is for doing something to serve her own interest and disregarding the responsibility that she has. As a princess and a sole heir to her father's relatively stable kingdom, she has a responsibility to safeguard her body and her virginity in order to produce a viable heir after her marriage. In failing to do so by putting her need to curb her boredom before thinking of her father or her dynasty, the princess has deliberately placed herself and her body in danger. She is immediately punished for her error, emphasising its gravity to the medieval audience.

If the romance is interested in issues of inheritance and the production of heirs, then the fact that Degare is conceived through rape raises a new set of questions. The main issue at hand is the problem of the princess' purity being maintained in spite of her rape. Of course, the fact that she was raped is the ultimate violation of her will and agency. However, medieval canon law considered that in cases of rape, "the primary issue [was] loss of chastity rather than the woman's will" (Saunders, 87). The injury caused to the woman's will and agency through rape were only a secondary concern, as opposed to the fact that her virginity - that aspect of her that ought to have been preserved for her lawful husband - was lost. Saunders further argues that medieval canon law became more concerned about chastity just as secular law became more concerned about property. This establishes the parallel between

virginity and property viewed from the perspectives of religious and secular law respectively – a parallel which also reveals itself when the events of the romance are viewed in relation to its concerns about inheritance. Either way, the legal focus in medieval rape cases was on the man who would be affected by loss of the woman's chastity, such as her husband or her father, rather than on the woman herself.

Although physical chastity was important in the Middle Ages, medieval thinkers did not hold chastity to be defined solely by a woman's physical condition. St Augustine, whose views were circulated widely in medieval Europe, wrote in his *Free Choice of Will* that chastity, being a virtue located in the mind, "cannot be taken away by a violent rapist" (11). Another influential medieval theologian, Peter Lombard, wrote in his *Four Books of Sentences* that "the body cannot be corrupted unless first the mind has been corrupted" (IV, xxxiii, 4). Therefore, by taking these ideas stemming from Christian teachings and canon and secular law, a woman's chastity was not solely determined her physical condition. The idea of chastity was connected to the mind rather than the body, as established by prominent Christian theologians.

This confirms that the princess's struggle during her rape is in the interest of her dynasty. This clearer act of the princess's will aligns with her dynastic responsibility to protect her virginity for the husband her father will choose for her. Her actions thus preserve her moral status in spite of her rape – protecting her usefulness as a princess to her father's dynasty and kingdom. In fighting against her rape, the princess is acting in the best interests of her kingdom. We see this elsewhere in the poem as well, where she is portrayed as a generally obedient daughter to her father, the king. Thus, the princess is characterised not just by her agency, but also by her continued display of obedience to her father's expectations of her. Other than the one moment in the forest where she apparently tries to satisfy her own

need to stay out of boredom, the princess does not show any other type of self-serving agency.

Although *Sir Degare*, as the title shows, is the story of the male hero Degare, more than a hundred lines in the beginning of the romance are "devoted to Degare's mother and the circumstances of his conception" (Lawton, 5). As much as this may seem to be a way of showing the princess' perspective of the story or, as Robson had suggested, a display "of [her] ability to speak her own story" (83), I argue that this is in fact not quite the case. The purpose of the princess being subjected to the rape by the fairy knight is to make way for the birth of Degare and his quest of identity, in which "female experience precedes and prepares for that of the hero" (Lawton, 5). The story picks up when she becomes the mother of Degare through her encounter with the fairy knight, even though her experience in it is an unpleasant one. Even in her traumatic and violent rape, the princess becomes a means through which Degare can be born. Cheryl Colopy reads the king's apparent possessiveness of his daughter speculatively as carrying notes of incest based on the princess' distress over her pregnancy, where she worries that "people will assume her own father fathered the child" (31). With this incestuous notes in mind, Colopy thus posits that the fairy knight becomes, "the lover who cannot be denied – the only sort of lover [the princess could ever get] given her father's possessiveness" (Colopy, 33). The fairy knight's act of violence is positioned as an act that was needed to mitigate the impacts of her father's excessive possessiveness, acting like an Oedipal wish fulfilment in the process. The princess' encounter with the knight is, in Colopy's reading, necessary in order to bring her out of the Oedipal trap that she seems to be trapped in with her father. The incestuous notes in *Sir Degare,* according to Colopy, continues with the princess' connection to her father's possessiveness. Her desire to protect her father's reputation outweighs the anxiety surrounding the fact hat she has just been raped, and not to say that she is unaffected by it but she quickly realises that there is something more

important for her to consider and try to see if it can be fixed as quickly as possible. Later in the romance, the threat of incest comes up again because of the princess' marriage to her own son, Degare.

Colopy thus suggests that through the incestuous notes and comments on sexuality that *Sir Degare* seems to hinging on, "there is an inevitable connection between sexuality and discovery of self" (31). She reads this trajectory that the romance seems to be moving towards as a coming-of-age tale of sorts, particularly when it comes to Degare, whose entire story revolves around such moments. She further focuses on Degare's story, and how the gloves and the pointless sword are all symbols to establish "the connection between incestuous desires and growing up [… where] the importance of a male heir is the central social problem in the story" (35). Colopy recognises the importance of a male heir, but in doing so she fails to consider the important role the princess plays in the story. By contrast, I am going to argue that as much as Degare is the eponymous hero of the romance, it is his mother's acts that give rise to his birth and the furthering of his arc, which ultimately leads to him finding out about his father and getting his parents married and establishing himself as the legitimate male heir to the previously heirless kingdom. The princess, having previously engaged in a careless act that led to her impregnation, later directs the exercising of her agency towards protecting Degare, her father's reputation, and ultimately, the reputation of the kingdom. Where Colopy claims that the shadow of incest and the reflection of Oedipal relationships inform the crux of the narrative in *Sir Degare,* I would argue that while these moments of near-incest in the text occur at moments that highlight another more pressing concern of the text, the anxiety of inheritance. In both instances, the near-incest moments occur with the princess' bodily capacity for childbirth – the first with the paternity of Degare and the next, an almost consummation of her marriage with her son – where her body and sexuality is highlighted not in terms of her own person but rather how her body is connected

to maintaining the assurance of inheritance for her kingdom. The paragraphs that follow will elaborate further on how the issue of inheritance continues to pervade the narrative.

After her rape and pregnancy, the princess shows agency that is exercised correctly – to protect her newborn son, and to protect the reputation of her father. These actions can be seen as correct because, far from being punished, they eventually result in the poem's happy ending. Even as she deals with the unwanted pregnancy, the princess thinks of her father rather than herself. She is afraid that "men wolde sai bi sti and strete / That [her] fader the King hit wan" (168-9), as she herself "was never aqueint with man" (170). The possibility that people might think the child is the king's has weighty implications, as in the Middle Ages "incest was seen as the most extreme manifestation of lust and bodily appetite" (Archibald, 6). To preserve her father's reputation, the princess secretly leaves her new-born son at the door of a hermitage. To protect the child himself, she leaves him with gold and silver, "a paire glove / that here lemman here sente of fairi londe" (194-195), and a letter asking that he be christened and cared for. The letter further details that her son should always keep the gloves with him and take no woman as his lover unless he has let her try them on first. The princess therefore manages to protect both the reputation of her father, by ensuring that his name is not smeared, and also the safety of her son. Her actions here never go against her father's wishes or dynastic interests in any way. The princess continues to remain obedient to her father when she returns after ensuring that her son will be in safe hands, waiting for him to choose a husband for her.

The poet's attention then shifts to Degare's life and adventures, and we next see the princess after many years have passed. Degare, now fully grown, has defeated her father in the duel for the princess's hand in marriage. Her father's continued control of her agency is revealed perhaps most starkly when he announces that "child Degarre hath wonne the pris"

(584) - the prize here, of course, referring to the princess herself. In an ironic mirroring of her situation with the fairy knight, the princess here is forced to marry Degare whether she likes it or not, because her father insists on the marriage happening. The poet gives the audience rare access to the princess' own thoughts about this: that she was "sori" (586) to be espoused "to a knight that sche never had sen" (589). Out of continued obedience to her father's wishes she does not voice this opinion of hers, and neither is she asked if she has an opinion in the matter.

The princess thus obediently marries Degare, her own son and a man she was not at all acquainted with prior to the tournament, but does not consummate her marriage with him because he mentions the gloves that she had previous left with him. Here, again, the princess correctly exercises agency in order to prevent herself and her son from committing incest. Although Degare first mentions the gloves, he does not offer them to the princess. She has to ask for them directly, saying "Shewe hem hider, leve sire" (665). When the gloves fit, she is the one to interpret their meaning, explaining that "Thou art my sone hast spoused me her, / And ich am, sone, thi moder der" (670-71). Once her actions have averted the danger to the king's bloodline, control over the princess's marriage transfers to Degare. As a woman, her agency is never hers – it belongs to her father first, and is then snatched away by the fairy knight, before being handed over to Degare at this juncture in the romance. Once Degare is aware of who his mother is, he sets out to look for his father, with the intention of marrying his parents to one another.

The princess's loss of agency in *Sir Degare* can be linked to the role of gender in the Middle Ages. Women were expected to be subservient to men, and society generally operated under a patriarchal system. Female agency was seen as a threat, while men were expected to exercise agency. The drastic difference in the treatment of the genders in terms of agency and

volition is perhaps best displayed when Degare finds his fairy knight father, tells him who he is, and politely tells him that he should go and look for his mother if he "wille" (1072). Although Degare is unaware of what exactly happened between his parents, the poem's audience is keenly aware that choice is being made available to the fairy knight, the rapist. Meanwhile the princess, the victim, is denied any such free will in making her decisions, even though she is not always comfortable with them.

The poet's description of the meeting between Degare's parents emphasises the princess's discomfort and lack of control. When Degare presents his father to his mother, she recognises him instantly, and immediately after realising "wel sche knew the knyght" (1080), "sche chaungyd hur colowr aryght" (1081) and later "swounyd in that plass" (1089). The progress of her actions, from recognition, to the paling of her face and later, her fainting, reveal that she both recognised him and was frightened, given that she did not speak a word after that. Swooning is not unique just to the princess, since Degare too "fel iswone" (1063) upon recognising his father but this came after the fairy knight declares Degare as "sone mine" (1058), which draws a clearer link between his swooning upon recognising his father. In this way then, gender once again plays into the reading of these swooning episodes. For Degare, it was the recognition of his father. Another swooning episode in *Sir Degare* occurs earlier, where the lady he is rescuing swoons because she is afraid that her pursuer "wynne" (903) her and she is forced into a marriage that she does not want. She seems to be thus, a parallel to the princess, who is meeting her rapist, whom she is set to marry. For the princess, it is due to fright coupled with the recognition of the fairy knight. In spite of all of this, "the knyghtt weddyd the lady" (1091), the effect of which would be to legitimise Degare as an heir to the throne. Although canon and secular law diverged on this point, it was generally the case that children "born before their parents were espoused or married were legitimate just as if they had been born after marriage" (Seabourne, 96), provided that their parents were

subsequently legally married. The princess's marriage to the fairy knight therefore solves the anxiety over the inheritance of the kingdom as presented earlier in the romance: the kingdom now has a legitimate male heir. The princess's duty to the kingdom entailed exercising her agency in ways that would provide her kingdom with a suitable heir. With her marriage, her duty is therefore complete. Her agency is now being completely overridden since the motive of saving the kingdom has now been achieved, and the princess remains the obedient daughter of the king, obedient wife of the fairy knight, and obedient mother of Sir Degare.

The poem's continued insistence on the princess remaining obedient to her father's wishes, in spite of the many drastic and traumatic situations she faces, can be used to explain a moment earlier in the romance, where her encounter with the fairy knight seems to ironically mirror the Gospel scene of the Annunciation to the Virgin. The irony lies in the fact that the princess is forcibly raped, and the effects of this unpleasant experience continue to exhibit themselves in her reactions towards the end of the romance, where she is horrified to see the fairy knight again. By contrast, Mary is rewarded for her obedience by being the mother to Jesus Christ, considered to be the saviour of the world. In the romance, the moment immediately following the princess' rape is this:

> And seththen up toforen hire stod.
>
> "Lemman," he seide, "gent and fre,
>
> Mid schilde I wot that thou schalt be;
>
> Siker ich wot hit worht a knave (114-117)

Here, the fairy knight himself is aware of the result of this sexual encounter with the princess, and even reveals it to her. There is no explanation given as to how it is possible that he happens to know that she is pregnant, but the fact that he does adds on to the nature of this supernatural encounter. On top of that, he adds that "whenne that he is of elde" (119), she

should give her son the sword that the fairy gives her, and her son should be sent “to sechen his fader in eche londe” (122). Thus, he gives her the assurance that the child that she is carrying is a son who will live to see adulthood, and that once he reaches maturity he will be strong enough to wield a sword and go on a quest to find his father.

The fairy knight's announcement that the princess will give birth to a boy can be compared with the account of the annunciation in the Gospel of Luke:

> And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.
>
> Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus.
>
> He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father; and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever.
>
> And of his kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke 1:30-33, Douay-Rheims Bible)

Both women have been visited by a supernatural being while still unmarried and therefore unable to legitimately bear a child. The supernatural being announces the child’s gender, along with some glimpses into the child’s future and the role that the child will play when he is of age. The prophesised child in the Gospel is Jesus Christ, who is heralded as the saviour of humanity, and it can be assumed that medieval Christians would have been familiar with kingdom-related metaphors used in the Gospel. In the line, “and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:33), the kingdom refers to the Kingdom of God, which in turns refers to humanity as a whole being saved by the Christian religion. This also suggests the possibility of reinstating a condition that was once deemed lost, as the birth of this prophesised child through Mary allows humans to access heaven again. In a similar vein, the birth of the titular

Degare saves the kingdom in the poem because it eventually results in it having a viable male heir, effectively saving the kingdom from the problem it was initially shown to be facing, based on the parallel that the audience might have drawn between the two.

It is also significant that both Mary and the princess in *Sir Degare* embody the value of obedience. This connection established between the princess and Mary could gesture towards the ending of the romance, in which the kingdom is restored, problems are solved, and couples are married. Through the princess' obedience, the problem of there being a lack of an heir at the beginning of the romance, and the illegitimate heir brought about by the supernatural encounter is solved. As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, female obedience and subservience were valued traits, as was the appropriate use of agency in order to serve others. On the other hand, the poem suggests that a woman's acts of decision making taken to serve her own needs might be met with punishment.

At the end of the romance, the initial problem of inheritance has been solved, but at the expense of the princess' volition and will. She marries the fairy knight, the same man who had raped her while she struggled, just because she has been instructed to, in spite of being afraid of him to the extent that she faints. The romance ends with the marriage, and we hear no more of the kingdom or the princess. Her agency has been completely overridden in favour of the kingdom's stability. Perhaps the princess' repeated acts of obedience shown towards her father, and the poet's approval of this behaviour best shows itself in her son, Degare being mild-mannered and courteous child who becomes the saviour of the kingdom in spite of the circumstances surrounding his birth. Degare being not only a child of rape, but also a half-fairy, half-human child carries "uncomfortably Antichrist-like connotations" (223), as Neil Cartlidge suggests, later arguing that "the 'mani masse and riche offringes' [148] [in the church service] seem designed to emphasize, not just the court's relief at the

princess' return, but also to neutralize the rather diabolical implications of his birth" (223). The stability of the kingdom, hinted at in the parallel with the Annunciation, along with her son's mild manners, therefore become a reward for the princess's obedience. Since she has been repeatedly shown to display obedience towards her father's wishes, even at the expense of her own comfort and personal desires. By showing obedience, she can fulfil her duty to the kingdom and her role in the narrative.

The princess's interaction with the fairy knight reveals medieval cultural ideas of obedience that frame as risky even the slightest act of agency taken to serve a woman's own desires, rather than the interests of the kingdom or family in general. The parallel established between the princess and Mary, between saving the kingdom and saving humanity, is a vast one, but one that the poet has deliberately chosen in order to celebrate the princess' determination to stay obedient in spite of her circumstances. In *Sir Degare,* the smallest and most innocuous exercise of the princess' agency to curb her own boredom is met with punishment in the form of her encounter with the fairy knight, while her continued obedience is eventually rewarded.

Chapter Three

Being Evil Has a Price: Demonic Paternity and Female Speech in *Sir Gowther*

The two romances studied so far seem to have an interest in encouraging women to behave in certain ways; the stronger violation leads to an initially more severe outcome. Like Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo* and the princess in *Sir Degare,* the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* displays an act of transgression that is followed by an encounter with a supernatural creature that poses a sexual threat to her. However, when read in comparison to the previous two women, the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* engages in two acts of careless speech, one prior to meeting the demon, and the next immediately after the encounter. The first is a reckless prayer for a child after being threatened with potential divorce by her husband. The second, is a lie she tells her husband after her encounter with the demon, drawing parallels between herself and the Virgin Mary by comparing her situation to that of the Annunciation. I will elaborate further on these two instances later in this chapter, explaining how the explicitly religious nature of her errors led to her encountering a demon, a being present in Christian doctrine, as compared to a fairy, which is not. Though fairies and demons were often conflated as one being in medieval society, the explicit presence of a demon in *Sir Gowther* suggests that the poet treats these types of behaviours exhibited by the characters in the romance were more serious ones. The threat in *Sir Gowther* is hence amplified through the presence of a demon, reflecting the severity of the transgressions discussed by the poet.

Given that the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* engages in two acts of reckless speech, one more serious than the other, and that she was, in both instances, acting upon the Christian faith, it then follows that she meets a demon, and not a fairy later in the story. Her two offences, because of their connection to Christian religion, are not treated as slight ones as her resultant encounter with the deceiving demon and her status as Gowther's mother. The

seriousness of there being a demon included in the story rather than a fairy in the previous two romances, comes along with the more explicitly religious references made in *Sir Gowther*.

Demons and fairies, in the medieval imagination, were conflated as one being, with the former granted valid status through Christian texts while fairies existed in pre-Christian beliefs. This way these two classes of creatures could have received by the medieval audience is perhaps best demonstrated in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales.* In *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, the eponymous Wife of Bath argues that fairies and elves – which she conflates as one type of being – disappeared from the land with the coming of Christianity. She contrasts "tholde dayes of the king Arthour," in which England was "fulfild of fayerye," (857-59) with her present day. Describing the elf-queen, she says "I speke of manye hundred yeres ago; / But now can no man see none elves mo." (863-4) The reason for this change, she claims, is that the country is now full of friars "As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem, / Blessynge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures, / Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures, / Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes - / This maketh that ther ben no fayeryes" (868-72). Christianity thus becomes the reason why the Wife of Bath believes that fairies no longer exist in her reality. In place of the threat posed by fairies, Chaucer satirically highlights the sexual threat posed to women by religious officials, comparing them to an "incubus" (880), a type of demon known to impregnate women. In doing so, he makes clear the connection between religion, fairies, demons, and the sexual threat both types of supernatural being posed to women.

As mentioned previously, medieval Christian texts claimed that fairies and demons were the same creatures. Richard Firth Green, for example, addresses this amalgamation of fairies and demons by listing and analysing several medieval religious and secular texts, all of which aim to address the question of whether or not fairies had a place in Christian belief. He

quotes from the Middle English translation of the *Elucidarium,* in which the faithful are told that fairies do exist but that "they are quite simply devils" (15). But these 'devils', according to the text of the *Elucidarium,* only showed themselves to "people of þat tyme, for they were paynyms, ydolatres and without fayth" (Green 15). While this seems to be implying that demons only bother non-Christians, it is also taken to suggest that the best defence against such demons is Christianity, and Christian prayers and rituals.

However, as much as fairies and demons were seen as belonging to the same category of creatures – conflated as demons – actual demons, that is, creatures that were explicitly stated to be demonic, were seen as being more dangerous since they were real according to Christian teachings. This seriousness of demons posing threats to people shows itself in the way the romance is constructed. In the beginning of the romance, which opens with a prayer intended to shield the audience from "the fowle fende" (4). By starting his poem in such a way, the poet organises the experience for the audience by inviting them to collectively partake in a prayer, whether literally or simply in intention. The poet therefore situates the issues dealt with in the narrative of the poem within the reality of the audience, while ensuring that the exact events of the story stay within the narrative itself. By contrast, the romances that deal with fairies do not begin with such a prayer. Rather, they begin with an introduction to the plot and characters that point toward the story to follow. For example, *Sir Orfeo* introduces the story as a lay while the narrator in *Sir Degare* begins by introducing to the audience the tale he is going to "telle of Sire Degarre" (2). Though there are cautionary elements present in the previous lays, the danger that the audience recognises arises from the impact of the situation caused by the fairies' presence. In the stories featuring fairies, they were perceived as threats to the characters in the stories and because of the dangers they posed to the characters, they were perceived as cautionary tales by the audience. The lays did not begin with a call for prayer intended to protect the audience from the kind of creatures

appearing in the story. However, in *Sir Gowther,* the audience is invited to realise that, as much as the story itself is fictional, the threat of incubi demons that "makyd [women] with chyld" (15) is real to the audience and hence, a more significant threat.

The inclusion of the demon in *Sir Gowther* is also necessary so as to allow for the completion of Gowther's redemption arc, which includes noticeably religious elements such as penance, crusading and the achievement of knighthood, which would not have been logical if a fairy had been involved instead.

The demon the Duchess encounters in *Sir Gowther* outrightly deceives her into laying with him by disguising himself as her lawfully wedded husband. Hence, unlike Heurodis and the princess in *Sir Degare,* the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* remains unaware of the danger she is in until after the demon has revealed himself. The very fact that the demon could deceive her into thinking that she is not committing a sin, when in fact, she is, once again amplifies the seriousness of this moment, as opposed to that in the previous two romances. The demon goes as far as to deceive her into thinking that he is her husband, and she only realises he is not after she has lain with him. At this point, the demon reveals that the Duchess is pregnant with his child. The seriousness of this encounter, as opposed to the previous two, could perhaps be attributed to the nature of the Duchess' transgression, which takes the form of a carelessly worded prayer directed to the Christian god, in short, careless speech. Though her transgression comes in a moment of distress, the severity of her careless speech is amplified through the supernatural encounter which leaves her with a half-demon child, Gowther, who becomes a physical threat both to her and to the Christian society they belong to.

The Duchess' transgressions in *Sir Gowther* are directly associated with religion, unlike those of Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo* and the princess in *Sir Degare*, whose acts of carelessness were related to acts that they have done which were not specifically religious in

nature. While Heurodis and the princess in *Sir Degare* both demonstrate acts of careless behaviours of varying degrees that culminate in their individual encounters with the fairies, the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* does not place her physical body in harm's way. She is not outside of her home or wandering alone in the wilderness when her moment of transgression occurs. Rather, she is at home, a safe space for her, and furthermore, she is with her husband at the moment of her first transgression. Her transgression is through words, and particularly a prayer directed at God and Mother Mary for want of a child. After her husband tells her that he believes she is "sum baryn" (56), she "preyd to God and Mare mylde/schuld gyffe hur grace to have a chyld/on what maner scho no roghth" (65-6). Though her prayer was directed at the correct Christian deity, she ought to have been specific, asking for a natural pregnancy through the natural means of conception, without carelessly saying that she did not mind the method of conception of the child. Given that this is the mode of her transgression, it seems appropriate that rather than a fairy, the being she instead encounters is a demon, which is a creature mentioned in official Christian doctrine.

It therefore initially seems that *Sir Gowther*, like *Sir Degare*, presents the woman's act of carelessness as the incident leading to the supernatural encounters that ends in negative outcomes for the mothers of both Gowther and Degare. The woman appears to be held accountable for the impact of the supernatural encounter brought down upon her and her society, particularly so in *Sir Gowther* since the eponymous Gowther is a half-demon child who grows up to wreak havoc and inflict violence upon the rest of his society. In *Sir Gowther*, the Duchess does indeed bring about the circumstances leading to her encounter with the demon to a certain extent. However, by reading *Sir Gowther* in relation to its French analogue, *Robert the Devil*, this chapter will reveal that the *Gowther* poet has deemphasised the blame placed upon the woman and has instead chosen to reveal a different threat posed to society, that of excessive and unbridled masculinity. We can see from this example that texts

such as *Sir Gowther* can warn women about the dangers of careless speech without necessarily blaming them harshly, and how they can also depict positive models of female behaviour as in the case of the princess in *Sir Degare* who exhibited obedience to her father and later, as I will show, the Duchess here who makes a change from her previous behaviour.

In spite of making an explicit link between the Duchess' religion-related acts of reckless speech and her encounter with the demon, the poem later shifts away from placing the blame entirely on her and towards bringing to light a different concern – the excessive masculinity as embodied by Gowther. Hence, in a way that is different from the previous two romances, *Sir Gowther* makes the supernatural encounter the pivot through which the behaviours of both women and men are critiqued.

There are several differences in the romance as compared to the French analogue including the Gowther poet's emphasis on Gowther's "acts against the church as his most evil deeds" (Marchalonis, 17). Further in Shirley Marchalonis' essay, she also points out how "Robert's evil nature is a result of the sinful prayer to the devil [while] Gowther is […] sired by the fiend" (17). Gowther being a half-demon child then already shifts some of the reasoning for his violent behaviour towards his literally diabolical paternity, as opposed to Robert, who is the legitimate and fully human child of the Duchess and her husband in *Robert the Devil.* While the Duchess' prayer to the devil had a direct affect on her naturally conceived child in *Robert the Devil,* it is not the case in *Sir Gowther* since his mother's prayer was not blasphemously made.

In *Robert the Devil,* Robert's crimes are constantly linked back to his mother's blasphemous prayer throughout the story. This is, however, not the case in *Sir Gowther*. Unlike the Duchess in *Sir Gowther,* the Duchess in *Robert the Devil* is not threatened with a separation from her husband. She laments about her fate, about how God grants children "to a

powerless pauper" (39) but not to her, who has "riches and wealth" (41). She even goes on to call God "powerless" (43) and directs her request to Satan. Hence, unlike Gowther's mother, the Duchess in *Robert the Devil* is thus presented as a woman who is self-centred, arrogant because of her wealth, and then even openly declares that she is seeking help from Satan rather than God. The influence of the Devil on Robert remains clear, as the reader is told that the Devil "arranged it all to his liking" (68). Robert's vile acts are thus related to his mother's direct request to Satan prior to his conception. However, this is not the case in *Sir Gowther.* By placing the Duchess in a position where she is desperate to have a child because of her husband's threat to separate from her, the *Gowther* poet does not completely absolve her of blame, but rather mitigates the blame associated with her when compared to the Duchess in *Robert the Devil.* Within the broader context of medieval ideas about women and speech, the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* seems to have committed the error that was expected of her gender and, because of that, to have brought harm to herself and to her society as a whole. However, upon reading *Sir Gowther* alongside its French analogue, *Robert the Devil,* the Middle English romance is revealed to have deemphasised the blame upon the woman.

As mentioned above, another major difference between the two texts is that in *Robert the Devil,* Robert is a natural child of the Duchess and the Duke. No supernatural encounter is involved in his conception. However, as Robert grows up, he becomes an increasingly violent individual who kills and plunders "just as the Devil dictated" (350). The poet uses repeated reminders of the Devil working behind Robert, from his birth to his actions as a young man, in order to encourage readers to trace everything that Robert does back to his mother's plea to Satan. All of his bad deeds are due to the Devil's presence in his life, brought about by his mother's request to Satan himself and calling God weak, prior to Robert's conception. The fault behind his acts lies with his mother, rather than any supernatural entity directly associated with him.

Throughout the beginning of the romance Gowther, like Robert, is “wekyd in all kyn wyse” (148). He slays people “with his fachon” (166) and “gurde hor horssus backus in too” (167), both extreme acts of violence that would not otherwise have been expected of a regular man. The poet goes into detail, describing how he is particularly violent towards religious figures, explaining how he makes “frerus to leype at kraggus” (199), and “parsons for to heng on knaggus” (200), frightening them to the point that they were driven to suicide. His violence, though at first seemingly random, is actually directed towards certain groups of people in his society, namely women, the poor, and religious figures, all of whom he – as a knight - ought to be protecting instead of attacking.

Gowther’s characterisation too, is different from Robert with Marchalonis commenting how “Gowther has a kind of dignity that Robert’s buffoonery prevents him from achieving” (19) and Kari Sajavaara noting how the details on Gowther’s sharp teeth as an infant with which he “rofe tho hed fro tho brest” (130) of his mother, “is not found in the French” (337). The focus on Gowther’s physical body, his excessive appetite and unnaturally sharp teeth, point towards his demonic father instead of being fully influenced by the mother’s words alone as is the case in *Robert the Devil*. The poet’s emphasis on Gowther’s diabolical paternity diverts the poem’s focus from the Duchess and her careless speech, to the story of Gowther’s youth which incorporates different forms of masculinity: the patriarchal system that leads to the duchess’s despair, the demon father, and the corrupted form of knighthood that he embodies.

Sure enough, the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* is also deceived by the “felturd fende” (74) who only reveals himself to be so after he has impregnated her. The presence of a demon here rather than a fairy does not discount the threat posed to women by fairies, but rather places the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* in a position where her apparent punishment is treated in a religious way. After her encounter with the demon, the Duchess returns home to her husband

and in an effort to mask her now-pregnant state, she tells him a lie that deliberately replaces her demonic encounter with an angelic one, paralleling the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary. She tells her husband, the very night after her encounter with the demon, that "a nangell com fro hevon bryght" (85) and told her that their worries will cease soon. This parallels the Annunciation in the Gospel of Luke that reads as thus:

> And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.
>
> Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus.
>
> (Luke 1:30-31, Douay-Rheims Bible)

Though this is similar in a way to the situation in *Sir Degare,* the main difference is that the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* went as far as to draw parallels between her urgent situation – being pregnant with a child of a demon – and linking the demon telling her that she has "geyton a chylde" (76) to the actual Annunciation where, as given above, the angel announced to the virtuous Mary that she is to bear Jesus, can be read as somewhat blasphemous. Not only is the Duchess telling an outright lie, she is also masking an unholy situation, getting impregnated by a "felturd fende" (74) in what Samantha Zacher reads as a "distorted Annunciation scene" (432). This lie is what leads the Duke to have intercourse with his wife that same night and when Gowther is born, he believes that he is indeed his son. It thus makes narrative sense that not only the creature she meets is a demon but that she has a half-demon son who later engages in violent acts against members of his society.

This aspect of the Duchess' misbehaviour, perhaps on a greater scale as compared to her initial reckless prayer, is what is addressed in conduct poetry such as *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter.* In it, the daughter is advised by her mother to be not only "suete of

speche" (53) but be "trow in worde and dede" (54). Though of course, speaking the truth is a virtue that meant to be followed by both men and women, that it specifically appears in the conduct poem would bring to mind the negative notion associated with women and speech in the medieval Christian imagination. Reckless speech, the risky behaviour criticised in both *Sir Gowther* and *Robert the Devil,* was a gendered sin in medieval Europe. Medieval texts established a sharp binary between women's silence and men's speech, which might have stemmed from associations made with the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis, which at times held Eve at blame for the couple's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Fifteenth century preacher William Lichfield once spoke of "cackling" Eve, who "held long talks with the adder" (Owst, 387) and "in her feebleness and unstableness" (Owst, 387) led to her husband's expulsion from Paradise. Eve was blamed for the Fall, an accusation which became associated with the fickleness of her gender and the reckless conversations that she willingly held with the Serpent, allowing her to be tempted to go against God's words. In medieval interpretations, it was Eve's decision to continue engaging in conversation with the Serpent that ultimately gave rise to the events that led to the expulsion from Paradise. Adam, on the other hand, was often depicted as the victim of Eve's recklessness. The connection between Eve and the danger of women's reckless speech was widely recognised, as can be seen in literary texts. In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Nun's Priest's Tale,* for example, the narrator writes that the counsel of women has "been ful ofte colde" (3256) and was what "made Adam fro Paradys to go" (3258). In both religious and literary texts, therefore, it is Eve's act of reckless speech that leads to events causing the Fall, resulting in the association of danger with women's speech.

Though teachings about reckless speech were meant to be followed by both women and men, the medieval clergy apparently "feared that mortal women were much more prone to follow the example of Eve" (Bardsley, 51). This may have been because women were generally

assumed to be weaker and less able to control their emotions, as demonstrated by Biblical women such Eve. Theologians such as Thomas Aquinas argued that it "is appropriate for [a woman], that she is silent, [which] proceeds from the modesty which is owed to women; but this does not relate to the ornament of a man, instead, it is fitting that he speaks" (Aquinas). The negative association with crimes related to illicit speech varied through the Middle Ages but around the fifteenth century, "women accounted for more than half of those accused as defamers in the English court" (Bardsley, 145) and "greatly outnumbered men among those charged with the crime of scolding" (Bardsley, 146). Hence, women's speech became associated with being a disruption to society and was punishable according to law. Moving away from legislation, women's speech was also regarded as being dangerous to her own chastity. As a means of regulating women, the association was made between a woman's speech and her chastity, where "concerns with women's speech, movement and sexuality were all bound together in a belief that all made a woman promiscuous" (French, 13). Although women were not prohibited from speaking, they were expected to be careful of their speech, as it could present a risk both to themselves and to their society.

However, further study of the plot of *Sir Gowther* reveals that the lessons imparted are not just for women, but for men as well. By making the decision to shift away the blame from the Duchess and instead focus on Gowther and his crimes as his own acts rather than linking it back to either of his mother's transgressions, the poet draws the attention instead to the evil in Gowther's actions. His excessive masculinity, as embodied in his acts of extreme violence, becomes the main problem in the romance that needs to be solved, and not the Duchess' initial errors.

In fact, Gowther's moment of change comes about when an old earl encounters him, takes note of the things that he has done, and tells him that he suspects he is "sum fendys son" (209). The romance emphasises Gowther's demonic paternity in several places. For

example, he is referred to as "eyvon Marylon halfe brodur" (98). This is, of course, a reference to Merlin, the Arthurian prophet and magic-user, who was usually portrayed as a "child of a demon and a nun" (Lawrence-Mathers, 50). This "essential element of [Merlin's] demonic origin" (Griffith, 104) was retained in most of the accounts of Merlin circulating when *Sir Gowther* was written, giving a literary history to the demon appearing in *Sir Gowther.* The audience may have been familiar with Merlin, and how in the stories he appears in, he is not typically violent in the way that Gowther is though they allegedly share the same father. This then suggests that the poet may have included the passing reference to Merlin as a way of signposting his choice to pin down the responsibility for the violence and crime onto Gowther, rather than his mother's recklessly worded prayer, which is stepping away from the focus of *Robert the Devil.* As much as it seemed that the romance was blaming the Duchess' carelessly worded prayer for leading to the circumstances of Gowther's birth, its focus on Gowther's actions being separate from his mother's initial act, and his later decision to seek repentance, places the blame instead on Gowther himself.

It is here that the significance of the demon in *Sir Gowther* is further accentuated by the poet's approach to the paternity of Gowther. Gowther is a half-human child, much like Degare in *Sir Degare.* Both lays feature a moment of recognition where the titular character comes to terms with his paternal origins. However, while Degare seeks to reconcile with his father, Gowther does not, which suggests that a demon father is not one worthy of reconciliation. He is too dangerous and rather than bringing him back into the family, his relationship to the family should be erased through legitimate, religious means. In *Sir Gowther,* this points toward Gowther's repentance journey, that he undertakes upon realising his true parentage, Gowther sets out on a quest to repent for the sins he has committed, and never once does he mention his supposed father again after that discovery. The pattern of association with Christian beliefs in *Sir Gowther* further plays out with the way Gowther

responds to his realisation that his father is a demon. Just like how his mother, the Duchess, turned to a religious ritual, the prayer, when she was in distress, her son too, adopts a similar approach. Rather than react with violence, as might have been expected of him given his tendencies prior to meeting his mother, or seek out his father, as Degare did in *Sir Degare,* Gowther sets out to seek penance to make up for the error of his ways, a noticeably Christian act. It is a personal journey for him, involving just him and not others in his society. While Degare's decision was to reconcile with his father and get his parents married, Gowther's was to take active steps to protect his soul from further sinning. In this way, the poet asserts that a demonic parent is too dangerous to be reconciled with, unlike the fairy parent in *Sir Degare,* and that the only way to dissipate the threat was through a Christian-ordained approach of serving penance.

By turning the focus to Gowther's actions, the poet moves the attention of the poem away from the recklessly worded prayer of the Duchess. Instead, there is another more pressing concern at play in *Sir Gowther*: the threat of excessive masculinity. Here, this romance seems to diverge from the previous two, with a focus on male behaviour as much as female behaviour. The female readers of the romance would have looked at the Duchess' behaviour and understood that it was wrong, but at the same time, may have understood the extent of the danger a demon poses not only to women, but also to men. The presence of the demon in *Sir Gowther* is a threat to all named and unnamed characters in the story, which builds itself upon the severity of the threat as demonstrated by the prayer at the beginning of the story. Though the Duchess' initial act of reckless speech triggered her encounter with her demon, the fact that Gowther is the son of this demon does not divorce him from the fact that he too, is affected by the demonic presence through his behaviour. While his mother is faulted for her female-coded sin, Gowther is then, faulted for his male-coded sin. Hence, this

adds on the poet's use of this particular supernatural encounter to comment both on female and male behaviours that were critiqued in medieval society.

While the more obvious display of masculinity can be attributed to Gowther himself, masculinity also provides the reason for Gowther's birth, since it can, in fact, be traced back to the Duke's insistence on the maintenance of masculine systems. Although the Duke blames the Duchess for their lack of a child, the poem is ambiguous, saying simply that "He chylde non geyt ne sche non bare" (55). Nevertheless, it is the Duke who threatens the Duchess with a separation since he deems her to be "sum baryn" (56), telling her "Y do bot wast my tyme on the" (60). His concerns are linked to patrilineal inheritance as he argues that he is doing this lest his duchy remains "eireles" (59). This declaration is what prompts the Duchess into making her desperately worded prayer, in order to avoid getting herself into the situation of a possible annulment.

Gowther is associated with symbols of masculinity throughout the poem, from the time he is born until his moment of repentance. As a baby, he grows "breme and brathe" (108) and suckled his wet nurses until "thei lost ther lyvys" (113), already indicative of his excessive appetite. At fifteen years of age, he forges his own weapon, a "fachon bothe of style and yron" (142), and this signals the beginning of the change of his appetite, from milk to violence where Emily Huber observes that "the falchion he forges himself replaces his natal weapons of teeth and mouth" (295). It is with this falchion, and his body that had grown from where he was fed "rych fode" (136) "full mych as hym behovyd" (137), that Gowther carries out his acts of violence against his community. Interestingly, the falchion becomes tied in to Gowther's identity so much so that he does not let go of it even during his penance at the end of the poem.

The Duke's supposed solution to curbing his violent tendencies, knighting him, cannot have any impact on him since it just introduces him to yet another a masculine-coded institution. It was his father, the Duke, whose duchy Gowther was set to inherit under the patriarchal system he belonged to, who had knighted him, and initiated him into this other masculine institution. However, Gowther continues being violent, if not worse than he had been before, and the Duke soon dies, hence showing that the various patriarchal and masculine institutions that were supposed to keep Gowther in check have failed to do so. Since Gowther demonstrates excessive violence that is targeted at the wrong people, the best way to curb it would be through not a masculine system, but a feminine one.

In the Middle Ages, masculinity and physical prowess, and hence also violence, were interconnected. Karras observes how in the court model of masculinity, "one must be a man as opposed to a woman, and demonstrate this through the use of strength in violence" (Karras, 151). In the courtly space, a man's physical prowess, demonstrated best through controlled means of violence in demonstrations such as organised sparring matches and tournaments. To a knight, "women were a distraction from the real world of violence" (Karras, 65) and his duty would be to his lord, and to the kingdom he belongs to, allowing him to participate "in the male military culture" (Karras, 65). Richard Kaeuper goes as far as to suggest that "knights were indeed the privileged practitioners of violence in their society" (130). Knighthood itself was therefore, a masculine system in place for men to partake in and engage in actions that would assert their masculinity through appropriate acts of violence.

This type of violence is prevalent in *Sir Gowther,* seeing that it is a romance that tells the story of a knight and features elements typically present in other chivalric tales influenced by crusader narratives. When the crusades were still active, there were "about thirty sermon texts from the thirteenth century by well known authors [… that] contained idealised models of crusading and idealised modes of masculinity" (Maier, 20-1). However, it must be noted

that crusaders were not, of course, encouraged to partake in senseless violence. The kind of violence they engaged in involved emotions, and crusaders "were encouraged to acknowledge and embrace these feelings and turn them into a motivational force" (Maier, 27) and furthermore, their identities were also built by "their relations with feudal lords and above all with the women of their families and family clans" (Maier, 28). Hence, a crusader did not only partake in violence, his was directed at groups of people and for the purpose of protecting not only his religion, but the people in his social life as well.

Hence, chivalric violence was acceptable and even admired: the idea of chivalry was associated with Christianity, particularly with Pope Urban II's declaration of the First Crusade in 1095, when the church promised knights "remission of their sins in exchange for violence against the Muslims in the Middle East" (Sposato and Claussen, 102). This then points towards a model of appropriate violence. Gowther's violence early in the romance is depicted as evil because it is directed towards Christians. In addition to that, based on the way crusades and crusaders were depicted in thirteenth century sermon literature, Gowther's disregard for his lord, his father and his mother, all therefore render his masculinity and violence senseless – until he is later directed towards his penance after his encounter with his mother. Later in the romance, upon the completion of his penance, Gowther becomes a saint because his violence has been redirected towards the correct group of people, the Saracens, who were the enemies of Christianity. It is the kind of violence that Gowther shows before his penance, towards the Christians, that is directly associated with his demonic paternity, and is depicted in a way that is negative and evil-coded given that he uses this violence against the people he should have been protecting. As a knight, Gowther is not only the son of a Duke, but also "part of a fixed social group [...] accepting a particular way of life" (Karras, 23). As a state in which men were expected to "learn aristocratic masculine behaviour" (Karras, 28), knighthood is supposed to force Gowther into conditioning himself and

disciplining his strength and penchant for violence in a way that was deemed appropriate by Christian society. Knights were expected to carry themselves in a way that demonstrated the discipline and courtesy ascribed to them by the chivalric code they were supposed to follow. In short, a man "who had achieved knighthood could serve as a model for others" (Karras, 29). Hence, knighthood was a masculine institution in itself, and it is employed by the Duke, Gowther's supposed father, to help control and curb Gowther's excessive masculine violence.

Therefore, the Duke's decision to knight Gowther upon hearing of his acts could be an act of his affirmation that knighthood would indeed help his son curate his violent tendencies into a more acceptable form. The Duke chooses not to "chatyse" (149) Gowther but to make "hym knyght" (150). Violence in itself, as previously discussed, has been associated with medieval masculinity with scholars such as Sara Butler arguing how "men chose to reassert their masculinity in the home through violence suggests that it was a vital component of general late medieval expectations of masculinity" (39). The Duke's instantaneous response to realising the extent of Gowther's violence being one that turns to an established masculine mode of control, knighthood, suggests the significance of this in the medieval aristocratic imagination. This shows that the Duke sees the institution of knighthood as a solution to Gowther's excessive violence.

Becoming a knight, then, ordains that Gowther be subject to the expectations required of other knights within the same institution. Knighthood allowed for the appropriate exercise of violence, all of which makes it a seemingly ideal solution to Gowther's excessiveness. By being inducted into this social institution, Gowther's penchant for violence could, in theory, be directed into suitable and appropriate behaviours. Geoffroi de Charny, a famed fourteenth-century knight, wrote in his treatise on knighthood that good knights "should commit themselves eagerly, boldly and gladly to […] deeds of arms and adventures, fearing nothing" (Charny, 95). As such, Charny accentuates not only the need for discipline in the life of a

knight, but also the importance of exercising the appropriate type of violence. Violence should be directed at the appropriate groups of people, rather than curbed completely. Therefore, rather than stopping violence altogether, Gowther needs to use "violence to the proper degree and against the appropriate targets" (Hostetter, 499). The function of a knight's use of arms and violence were many, including bearing arms "for his lord or for his lineage or for himself or for the Holy Church or to defend and uphold the faith or out of pity for men and women who cannot defend their own rights" (Charny, 95). Hence, it was the responsibility of anyone who accepted knighthood to protect the rights of those who were unable to defend themselves. However, Gowther's masculinity "works to undermine the proper function of community and society" (Oswald, 170), thereby performing the very opposite of what knights were expected to do.

The inefficacy of the system of knighthood, and of the very values that one like Charny would valorise, are made more prominent in the poem with Gowther's continued violent behaviour. When Gowther continues to bring about all kinds of harm and destruction to "all that ever on Cryst con lefe" (193), and continues with his violence towards women as it is stated that "meydyns maryage wolde he spyll"(196), he is of course portrayed in a negative light. However, even during and after his period of penance, he still engages in violence. Towards the end of the poem, Gowther marches "stythe in stowre" (613) with the Emperor against Saracens "so mykull of strenthe" (616) whom he defeats in battle. As much as Gowther is praised for his participation in this battle against the Saracens, the fact that he is violent remains and has not changed. All that has changed is its target.

The early sections of the poem demonstrate the failure of patriarchal systems such as his father-figure and the institution of knighthood to correct, alter and change Gowther's behaviour. Gowther's continued acts of violence highlight the "destructive virility" (Oswald, 159) that needs to be tamed. In short, he ironically "disrupt[s] the hierarchy of paternal

inheritance" (Oswald, 159) that the Duke had previously been anxious about. Gowther's violence is seen as a problem early in the lay, and the solution posed to it is determined by the man who ought to be his father, the Duke, who siphons the influence of the institution of knighthood. In what is supposed to be a stable, medieval feudal landscape, Gowther's demonic heritage exposes the weakness of the usual masculine and patriarchal systems that are supposed to help maintain stability. The *Gowther* poet therefore establishes that the typical masculine institutions have failed as means through which Gowther's excessive masculinity might be curbed and controlled.

When Gowther speaks to his mother, he once again makes use of the falchion he has crafted for himself – a repeated symbol of his masculine violence - in order to fish out the answer he needs from her. The falchion hence persists as a symbol of the masculine behaviours that had trapped Gowther in his cycle of violence, that he seems to be unable to shake free from even when about to recognise his demonic father. The falchion is the reminder of the vile acts he has committed prior to meeting the old earl and, through its association with his violence, of the truth of his demonic father. Gowther's mother then reveals to him that he is the son of a "fende" (231), functioning as the turning point for Gowther. His mother's confession presents itself as a feminine alternative to solving the problem posed by his excessive masculinity. By confessing to her son, the Duchess is being honest – something that she was not at the beginning of the romance. She makes up for her mistake, and as *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter* puts it, she is now "trow in worde and dede" (54). The impact of this decision by her to be honest serves as the dramatic turning point for Gowther; this is what pushes him towards his penance. Even with the use of his falchion, however, it is his mother, a woman, who allows him to successfully move towards his penance, in contrast to the failure of the late Duke to do so. Where the systems ordained by masculine conventions have failed, Gowther's arc causes him to turn to more effective

methods instead. Following the conversation with his mother, he accepts Christianity and sets out to seek absolution for his sins.

Instead of the usual masculine systems of control, the *Gowther* poet brings into the picture a different system that helps Gowther instead. The change begins when the earl's comments spark Gowther's recognition of his demonic father, and how that relationship has resulted in his violent behaviour. Gowther immediately seeks out his mother after the conversation with the Earl, marking the beginning of his interactions with "the female and canine figures of the romance [who] teach [him] bodily restraint to help reform his bestial nature" (Adler, 51). Though Adler here suggests that both the dogs and the women were teaching Gowther similar lessons, I would argue otherwise by pushing it further that the women, particularly his mother the Emperor's daughter, represent a system that is the opposite of the one that he has been inculcated into. The transformation of Gowther from the violent destroyer of his Christian society, to a crusading knight who later becomes a saint, seems to inform the narrative of the poem in a circular way. The events of the poem begin with the Duchess' recklessly worded prayer that led to her encounter with demon and hence, Gowther's birth, and ends with the feminisation of Gowther's penitential journey. Gilian Adler notes how "the poem leverages these conventionally feminine and maternal qualities into the very ethical and religious virtues that shape Gowther into a decent knight (51) and how these "female figures evoke the practices of imitatio Christi in the late Middle Ages and other affective spiritual paradigms that centered on the body and empowered an intimate relationship between women and God" (51).

The women instead emphasise the theme of speech and silence that began with the Duchess initially in the romance. In fact, at the end of the romance when "the princess releases Gowther from his penitential responsibility restrictions when she awakens miraculously, delivering the happy news from God with her newfound power of speech,

Gowther remains largely silent" (Huber, 313). By being subjected to the kind of behaviour that was expected of women, and subverting it by having Gowther's mother speak – honest words, but she speaks – while Gowther is silenced, the poet then demonstrates how codes of behaviour in the Middle Ages, though gendered, need not necessarily be completely so. Though what Gowther's mother and Gowther eventually did do fall in line with their respective expectations of women and men, the nuances of the type of behaviour they are being directed towards in the romance is telling. Of course, the presence of the Emperor's daughter functions as a foil to the Duchess, since she does not speak at all and hence is in no state to commit the same kind of mistakes that the Duchess did and when she finally speaks, she merely transmits the word of Gowther's full redemption from God. Gowther is being directed towards embodying the silence that would have been served to his mother as a punishment for her careless prayer at the beginning of the romance, which demonstrates the poet's segueing away from the trajectory of *Robert the Devil*. Thus, the systems that are directing this change are no longer masculine-coded and are, instead, feminine-coded. Where the usual masculine systems are presented as failures, the non-masculine, female-coded behaviour and an association with animals eventually help Gowther ease out of his sinful past.

Gowther's penance, as prescribed to him by the Pope, ironically forces him to be subject to the conditions of silence that were seen as suitable for women. He is no longer allowed to engage in the acts that were the markers of his identity as a knight and a man, and is instead relegated to the background when he is instructed to speak "no worde--" (298), be it "evyll ne gud" (298). Besides being forced to stay silent, Gowther is also instructed by the Pope to "eyt no meyt" (296) but that which is snatched from a "howndus mothe" (296). By doing so, Gowther is subject to a life of absolute subservience under his penance, which forces him to embody characteristics that run counter to his previous behaviour. Hence, the

penance here serves as a punishment for Gowther for the deeds that he had committed, while his mother the Duchess is no longer held accountable for what he had been doing thus far. She is not separately punished by any authority figure for her interaction with the demon, and it is Gowther who is held fully accountable for his crimes. Thus, the *Gowther* poet imposes typically feminine-coded behaviour upon Gowther, the figure of hyper-masculinity, taming his tendencies into a more acceptable form. The culmination of Gowther's penance comes with three battles against the Saracens, for which Gowther is miraculously provided with armour. In these battles, Gowther's violent tendencies are redirected in ways that are both more acceptable to the poem's Christian audience and divinely sanctioned by the miracle of the armour, demonstrating the transformation through which his unbridled masculinity is disciplined and moulded.

Gowther's initial shift to good behaviour comes with his mother's confession of the events that happened after her reckless prayer, and his final redemption comes with the introduction of another woman. This is the daughter of the Emperor that Gowther fights for, a woman who had been incapable of speech. The Emperor's daughter, who is described as being "soo dompe as hee" (375), aids Gowther during the period of his penance, during which time he also partakes in the fight against the Sultan and the Saracens. By being mute, the Emperor's daughter becomes the extreme example of the silent woman, since she literally is unable to speak. Where Gowther's mother's careless speech led her to an encounter with a devil, the Emperor's silent daughter is rewarded with the sight of God after her apparent death following a fall from her tower. When preparations for her funeral are made, she wakes up and begins to speak, breaking her silence for the first time. Her first words are "my lord of heyvon gretys the well" (661), suggesting that she is speaking not of her own accord but with some form of intervention by God. She states that Gowther "schallt be won of His" (666), referring to the Christian god. The pope declares that Gowther is now "Goddus chyld" (673)

and is thus cleared of his association with his demonic father, effectively completing his cycle of penance.

By presenting the Emperor's daughter as an affirmation of the success of Gowther's journey that the Pope later asserts, the poet contrasts the Emperor's daughter with the Duchess, and presents correct female speech as not only safe from danger but beneficial to those around the speaker. The Emperor's daughter breaks her silence not recklessly or of her own accord, but with controlled speech, ordained by a legitimate figure of authority - in this case, the Christian God. By reporting God's words, she manages to formally acknowledge Gowther's completion of his penance and help him shake himself free of the bonds placed on him by his diabolical paternity, which had been indirectly brought about by the careless speech of another woman, his mother, the Duchess.

In conclusion, *Sir Gowther* shows that, more than the occasional slip of the woman's tongue when she is in emotional distress, masculinity and its related institutions threaten social order. Although the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* is in a parallel situation to the Duchess in *Robert the Devil,* the *Gowther*-poet de-emphasises the blame placed upon her by focusing attention on Gowther's paternity, his excessive masculinity, and the failure of masculine institutions to control his behaviour. The supernatural encounter with the demon, which is absent in *Robert the Devil,* serves as a physical manifestation of the threat of excessive masculinity posed not only to the Duchess, but to her society as a whole. Though the blame placed upon the Duchess is reduced, her speech is compared to that of the Emperor's daughter at the end of the poem. Though the Duchess' errors may have led to the supernatural encounter, the problem is revealed to be masculine structures that fail to contain the excessive violence shown by Gowther. What ends the troubles later in the poem is the Emperor's daughter's correct use of female speech. Where masculine structures fail, Gowther's adoption

of feminine-coded behaviour succeeds, assisted and confirmed by the Emperor's otherwise silent daughter.

The poem features two supernatural encounters with women and male supernatural beings, the demon on one hand, and presumably the Christian God on the other. Both encounters affect Gowther's development. That his mother's interaction resulted in his violent behaviour and the Emperor's daughter's resulted in his reclamation as "goddus chyld" (673) could be read as the romance's stance that while uncontrolled female speech caused the troubles in the romance, the correct form of female speech, ordained by God, completed Gowther's redemption. While the Emperor's daughter's moment of speech in Gowther's arc is ordained by God and serves as the signal for the completion of his redemption, the Duchess' initial speech gave rise to the problem and her later honest speech propelled Gowther towards this very penance for his own sins. Hence, by being a commentary on the actions of both women and men, *Sir Gowther* opens up the discussion of controlled behaviour to encompass both genders. However, in spite of the fact that women seem to affect Gowther's fate, it is the male supernatural beings encountered by the female characters who remain in charge. The women do not act of their own accord and neither are they truly determinant of the outcomes that they cause. Given the general medieval preference for women to be subservient and silent, the next chapter's discussion of *Sir Launfal* asks whether this dynamic changes when male characters encounter female supernatural beings.

Chapter Four

Fairy in Shining Armour: Identity and Courtship in *Sir Launfal*

The final lay to be covered in this thesis is *Sir Launfal,* attributed to Thomas Chestre. Although this lay was composed in the late fourteenth century, before *Sir Gowther*, I have reserved it for the end of my discussion because it features a central encounter between a supernatural woman and a human man. Although some of the other lays I have discussed include encounters between human men and supernatural creatures, *Sir Launfal* differs from them as it places the encounter with a human man at the centre of the plot. The man is the one who features in the initial encounter with the supernatural creature, and the creature is female rather than male. The spatial conditions under which Launfal meets the fairy are similar to the instances in *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Degare* though the circumstances are drastically different. Launfal remains in control of himself, and his mind, throughout the duration of the meeting. Where the initial supernatural encounter of the three lays discussed previously featured a human woman and a male supernatural being, *Sir Launfal* presents a switch of gender between the two. This switch creates space for analysis of the dynamics caused by such a change, and a glimpse into the romance's relationship with conduct literature. The poem also features a secondary encounter between a woman and the same female supernatural being. This features the same female fairy interacting with a woman, Queen Guinevere, falling back into the pattern of punishment for women as demonstrated in the previous chapters. We see, therefore, that regardless of the gender of the supernatural creature, the nature of the outcome in the Middle English Breton lays seems to be determined by the gender of the human participant. As long as the human at the centre of the encounter is female, she faces a negative outcome when interacting with any supernatural creature, male or female and her actions would always produce a negative consequence for her.

Chestre took inspiration for *Sir Launfal* from Marie de France's twelfth century French lay, *Lanval,* and its subsequent earlier fourteenth century translation *Landevale.* Though *Landevale* is also written in Middle English, it lies outside the scope of this thesis as it is not considered to be a Breton lay. However, I address it briefly below because it informed Chestre's work. While much of Chestre's material was adapted from *Lanval* and *Landevale,* he also made some significant changes and additions to his source texts. His changes include the wedding of Guinevere and Arthur, the inclusion of tournaments that Launfal participates in, and Guinevere's more significant presence throughout the story, particularly affecting Launfal's initial departure from King Arthur's court. Guinevere features as a negatively coded character throughout the romance, and while *Lanval* portrays Arthur as a negligent king, *Sir Launfal* places Guinevere's deliberate isolation of Launfal as the reason for his departure from the court. This departure from the court does not occur in *Lanval* and is unique to Chestre's version. That way, Guinevere becomes the reason for the events leading to Launfal's supernatural encounter.

In Chestre's version of *Sir Launfal*, Launfal lies about his father's death with the apparent intention of leaving King Arthur's court permanently. Chestre therefore directs the audience's attention to this decision, which is not present in *Lanval* or *Landevale.* By rejecting his affiliation with the court, which had provided him with his identity as a knight and a steward of the king, Launfal places his identity at stake. The romance thus traces Launfal's attempts to reclaim his decayed identity within the Arthurian society he belongs to. In a way, Chestre's "additions to the story draw attention to the problems of forming and, especially, of maintaining a masculine and knightly identity" (Guy Bray, 33), which forms the crux of Launfal's arc in the story.

The plot of *Sir Launfal* traces the development of Launfal's identity as he goes from being a knight of the renowned court of King Arthur, to departing from the court, to

encountering the fairy in a state where he has been stripped of his previous identity as a knight. His meeting with the fairy princess, Dame Tryamour, occurs at an opportune moment where she decides to assist him by providing him with the means through which he can achieve his goals. Launfal's encounter with the fairy princess is thus not only non-threatening to Launfal, as opposed to the encounters in the previous romances, but is also nurturing in that it reconstructs his decayed masculine identity through the restoration of the symbols of knighthood that were bestowed upon him.

Sir Launfal begins by displaying a stark change in the type of masculine identity associated with the knights of King Arthur's court before and after Arthur's marriage to Guinevere. The difference in the status of the court before and after the arrival of Guinevere is made clear by the poet's choices in *Sir Launfal.* Prior to Guinevere's arrival, we are introduced to several well-known knights of the Round Table such as Sir Percival, Sir Gawain, Sir Agravain and Sir Lancelot, who "well couthe fyghte yn playn, / Bateles for to take" (17-18). Military prowess of this kind was associated with knightly masculinity, as laid out by the fourteenth-century French knight Geoffroi de Charny in *The Book of Chivalry.* Charny argued that "the honor of those who primarily joust (one knight against another) will not match that of the men who engage in the tourney [… who] must in turn, yield pride of place to those who engage in actual war" (22). Charny was one of Europe's most admired knights of his time, "ranked among the most renowned knights of his age" (Kaeuper, 284), giving authority to his instructions and opinions on how a knight ought to behave.

Knighthood in the Middle Ages was not only about military prowess. It gradually became more associated with wealth and power, and therefore with status and identity. Being granted a knighthood could "endow an individual with territory, material wealth and power" (Velasco, 302), as well as adding to the individual's social status. It is through this characterisation of the protagonist, Launfal that Chestre shifts very quickly from the

emphasis on military prowess to court politics, reflecting a broader cultural change in attitude observed by historians such as Ruth Mazo Karras, who argues that towards the later Middle Ages "knighthood remained important socially and culturally but less so militarily" (Karras, 23). In his poem, Chester staggers Launfal's identity as a knight away from this military notion, and hinges on its social meaning.

The poem thus begins with a typical introduction to the world of knights and the type of masculinity that was typically associated with them, that of military prowess. The knights' military prowess places them within the spectrum of the expectations of knights as laid out by Charny's manual, especially when it comes to their duties on the battlefield. However, all of this is only mentioned in the brief section of the poem in which King Arthur "was a bacheler" (25), when there was no queen present in their masculine space. This form of military prowess, however, is no longer mentioned once Guinevere arrives at the court. In fact, she seems to also take away the responsibility that had been ascribed onto Launfal, who is introduced in terms of his capacity for generosity. While his peers are known for their skills in battle, Launfal is known a man who "gaf gyftys largelyche" (28). As a result of his generosity, Launfal becomes King Arthur's steward, in charge of his household expenses. While he holds the position of steward, it can be assumed that the wealth Launfal is able to give away so freely comes from Arthur's treasury. As a steward, Launfal is in charge of this distribution of wealth and gifts to his other knights and has hence established his identity around it.

Gift giving in late medieval England, particularly in aristocratic households, "was an important social function, sometime with political implications" (Mertes, 93). Hence, what Launfal was doing till Guinevere's arrival was not just a result of his generosity, but also maintaining a politically important position in Arthur's court. Guinevere is particularly unfair towards Launfal, deciding not to give him a gift at her wedding feast. By ignoring Launfal

when she gives a gift to every other knight, she slights him in the area of social conduct with which he is associated. Launfal's generosity is drawn in part from Arthur's patronage, and hence his gift giving becomes inscribed with socio-political significance. We are told that when Guinevere "yaf nothyng" (71) to Launfal during the feast, it "grevede hym many a sythe" (72). Isolated and humiliated, he leaves the court, a place in which he no longer feels that he belongs, where he once used to be the one who occupied the position of the gift giver.

However, when Guinevere arrives, she quickly takes over this position and becomes the one who "yaf yftes" (67) of "gold and selver and precyous stonys" (68) to the knights and lords gathered during her wedding feast. Not only that, but she purposely isolates Launfal by refusing to give him any gifts, an episode I will be addressing later in this chapter. Hence, Guinevere's decision to not give a gift to Launfal is not just a personal attack, but also an insult to the political position Launfal had previously occupied in Arthur's court prior to the king's marriage. As a queen and the wife of King Arthur, Guinevere is, of course, expected to care for and be mindful of the other occupants of her husband's home. In the medieval conduct poem aimed at young women, *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter,* the young girl is advised by her mother to "wysely loke" (125) after the servants in her home, and to reward the one who does "hys dede" (135). The poem is aimed at regular citizens, which makes Guinevere, the queen, all the more expected to abide by it. Launfal and the knights are, of course, not the servants of the castle but because they are knights, they fall under the care of Arthur – and his future wife, the queen – and hence, by deliberately singling out Launfal and refusing to provide him with his rightful gifts, Guinevere fails to live up to her duties as a wife, and a queen.

Guinevere's arrival at Arthur's court thus disrupts the solely masculine space of his bachelorhood and leads directly to Launfal's departure from the court, since she does not act like she is expected to. Guinevere is a foreign queen, the daughter of "Kyng Ryon of Irlond"

(40). Being both female and foreign, she presents a new threat to the stability of King Arthur's English court. In addition to being a foreign queen, Guinevere also has a reputation as a disloyal and adulterous wife, for taking "lemmannys under her lord, / So fele ther nas noon ende" (47-8). Hence, Guinevere's arrival creates an immediate shift in the dynamics of the court. In a space previously reserved for the knights and the king, Guinevere brings disruption. Arthur and Guinevere's marriage and the feast that follows is an addition to the poem by Thomas Chestre which is absent from both *Lanval* and *Landevale.* It is during the feast that Guinevere leaves Launfal out in her gift-giving and hence causes him to leave the court. While in Chestre's source text *Lanval* the action of the poem begins because Arthur is a neglectful king who does not engage with Lanval, and it is not mentioned in *Landevale*, Chestre's *Sir Launfal* shifts the blame for Launfal's mistreatment to Guinevere alone.

With Guinevere's entry into the court, therefore, Arthur's relationship with his knights is no longer as strong as it once used to be. He "appears weak and ineffective as a ruler" (Beecher Smith, 59). He is no longer influential and he does not seem to make any more active decisions in court. Instead, Launfal's fate comes to lie in the hands of "the two oppositional, but equally powerful, women" (Beecher Smith, 59), Guinevere first and later, Dame Tryamour, his fairy lover. After Guinevere's arrival, Arthur's main royal act is to give Launfal permission to leave, since Launfal falsely claims that "a lettere was to hym come" (76) informing him of his father's death. Though I agree with Beecher-Smith that both Guinevere and Dame Tryamour are women with power, I disagree with her claim that they are equally powerful. There is a very clear difference between the power that Guinevere wields and that of the fairy, Dame Tryamour. While Guinevere is in charge in Arthur's court, she is powerless once Dame Tryamour appears in the same place as her. In the court, while Arthur sends Launfal off with two of his nephews as companions, the eponymous knight's departure comes as a result of Guinevere's actions. The woman here, Guinevere, is the one in

power in terms of the story and it is through her that Launfal is forced to split his identity from that of King Arthur. Later, it is once again a powerful woman, Dame Tryamour, who redeems Launfal's knightly identity. Instead of isolating Launfal from his peers, she offers him valuable gifts in a gesture that directly contradicts that of Guinevere. So far, it seems that "the poet has successfully balanced Gwennere's[1] destruction of Launfal with Dame Tryamour's reconstruction of his chivalric identity" (Beecher Smith, 63). Women determine the journey that Launfal takes in the lay, rather than King Arthur, the ineffective king.

Launfal's identity as a knight is not only attached to its social meaning but also derived from symbols associated with his status. In order to become a knight, one had to hold "enough land to finance the purchase of a war horse and armor" (Karras, 23). This then attributes a symbolic meaning to knighthood, which is measured through the successful attainment of the objects visually associated with the position of being a knight. Land, horse, and armour become symbols of knighthood, and hence are crucial to the building and maintenance of Launfal's identity as a knight. Furthermore, knighthood was closely linked to the formation of a masculine ideal in the Middle Ages. Masculine ideals in the Middle Ages were structured around "three factors: impregnating women, protecting dependents and providing for one's family" (Stuber, 7). A knight engaging in military roles would be able to fulfil at least one of those three factors, that of protecting dependents by keeping enemies away from the kingdom. As knights had enough wealth to hold land and purchase armour and horses, they were also in a good position to fulfil another factor, that of providing for their families. Guinevere becomes the disruption to Launfal's potential formation and maintenance of this identity, in opposition to Tryamour's restoration and nourishment of it. It is thus not

[1] Taken from Laskaya and Salisbury: "Contracted forms of Guenevere's name are common in ME (see lines 157, 164). In the Welsh tradition, references to her extend back to the *Triads*, collections of Welsh myth, history, and legend; there, her name is "Gwen-hwyfar" meaning "White Phantom." The standard edition of the *Triads*, including a discussion of the texts, is *Trioedd ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads*, ed. and trans. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961; 2nd. ed., 1978; 1991)."
For the rest of this chapter, I will be using the spelling "Guinevere" when I am not quoting from the poem.

only Launfal's identity as a knight that is at stake in this romance, but also his identity as a man. As I discuss below, once Arthur marries Guinevere, she becomes the propellant that drives the steady decay of Launfal's masculine identity as he leaves Arthur's court. As Launfal's knightly identity disintegrates, he becomes incapable of protecting or providing for his dependent servants. The third key element of masculine identity, heterosexual intercourse leading to reproduction, is also called into question when Queen Guinevere accuses Launfal of homosexuality, telling him "Thou lovyst no woman, ne no woman the" (689), accusing him, though not explicitly mentioned, of homosexuality.

Launfal's departure from Arthur's court marks the beginning of the gradual decay of his masculine identity. As he leaves the court and starts living independent of King Arthur and his influence, it becomes increasingly evident that Launfal struggles to hold onto his identity as the generous knight once he is outside the court. This is best demonstrated when Launfal reaches Karlyoun and asks the mayor, who used to be "hys servaunt" (90), to be granted a place to stay. The mayor initially responds positively, instantly recognising Launfal as one of Arthur's knights and beginning to inquire about the king. However, the tone of his welcome changes instantly when Launfal informs him that he is "departyd fram the Kyng" (101) and that his relationship with the king no longer defines him, explaining "Ne ther thar no man, benethe ne above, / For the Kyng Artours love / Onowre me never more" (103-5). Therefore, even a man who once used to be be Launfal's servant no longer treats him with respect now that Launfal has left Arthur's court. Launfal himself becomes aware of this difference in treatment and laments about it to the two nephews of Arthur who have been sent to accompany him. However, he does nothing to change his situation, and loses money until Arthur's nephews leave him on account that their "robes beth torent and [his] tresour […]all yspent" (139-140). Later, Launfal also loses his horse. He wanders alone into the forest in this desolate state and rests under a tree, completely stripped of every marker of his identity

that he once clung onto. It is here, in this state of despair, that he meets the fairy, Dame Tryamour.

Launfal's meeting with Dame Tryamour thus becomes restorative, propelling him towards reclaiming his now decayed identity. Rather than put him into further risk, Launfal's meeting with Tryamour is almost too good to be true. She grants him "Blaunchard, [her] stede lel" (326) and "Gyfre, [her] owen knave" (327). When she gives Launfal a purse from which he can withdraw "a mark of gold" (323) at any time, Launfal once more achieves the wealth that had defined his identity at the beginning of the poem. In place of King Arthur, Launfal now has a new patron – and lover – in the form of Dame Tryamour. Launfal's meeting with Dame Tryamour grants him a means through which he can regain "hys largesse and hys bounté" (31), which had been previously stripped away from him by Guinevere's actions. This is yet another difference from Marie de France's earlier version, where only the pouch containing the gold is mentioned, but not the horse or the knave. These gifts come at a convenient moment for Launfal, and Tryamour even goes as far as to declare that "in werre ne yn turnement / ne schall [him] greve no knyghtes dent" (331-332), further accentuating his complete restoration to the typical image of the knight. She is not only a nurturing lover, but also a patron who is able to restore Launfal to his status as a knight, which was destroyed by Guinevere's entry into Arthur's court. In short, she serves as the spark that signals Launfal's return to his former state as a fairly reputable knight of Arthur's court.

The moment the mayor sees Launfal's new wealth, he invites him to eat with him in his hall. By doing so, the mayor reveals his hypocrisy as he had previously rejected his request to stay at his castle prior to having met Dame Tryamour. The poet, by writing this scene, comments on the importance social status has in Arthurian society, particularly for a man like Launfal. His personal connections to the king only mattered previously because that would entail that he too, was a man of status. However, Launfal rejects the mayor's invitation

and proceeds to live as he always had. He holds “ryche festes/ [that] fedde povere gestes” (421-422), in clear contrast to the mayor’s refusal to provide him aid when he needed it most. Having lost a patron in the form of King Arthur, therefore, Launfal has now gained a new one in the form of Dame Tryamour. The romantic and sexual relationship he shares with her reinforces the ideals of masculinity previously laid out in this chapter: those of engaging in heterosexual intercourse and becoming a lover, alongside the reconstruction of his masculine identity as a knight. The very fact that he needed to be in possession of all these symbols of knighthood in order to be accepted back into the society that he once was shunned away from demonstrates the importance placed upon such mere symbols by the society. This then reveals the instability of such institutions that are determined by the presence and absence of objects, rather than the value of individuals.

The final element of Launfal’s attempt to reestablish himself as a knight is through his military prowess, which he can demonstrate because he is guaranteed victory thanks to Dame Tryamour’s gifts. Though his dependence on Tryamour’s gifts may undermine his efforts in the eyes of the reader, the fact that simply having the symbols of knighthood proves that he is indeed a knight reveals the instability of the social landscape depicted in *Sir Launfal.* Even his ability to demonstrate his prowess is linked to Tryamour, as a tournament is held at Karlyoun for two reasons: first “for the love of Syr Launfel” (435), whose generosity with Tryamour’s money has benefitted the whole region, and second to test the prowess of Launfal’s impressive horse, a gift from Tryamour. Launfal’s victory at this tournament confirms the restoration of his knightly identity and its reliance on his new lover, Dame Tryamour. Her gifts of a horse and a knave, alongside his newfound wealth, have helped to restore Launfal’s knightly, and hence masculine, identity. His previous degradation is reversed by the fact that he wins a tournament conducted in his honour at a place that once rejected him. His wealth also restores his position at King Arthur’s court, as Arthur asks him

to return and act as steward because of his famous generosity. Although Arthur is the king, both Launfal's downfall and his subsequent restoration are instigated by women, rather than men, which reveals the poem's displacement of masculine dominance in place of feminine influence.

The two women that Launfal interacts with assert their dominance over him through their decisions. Guinevere is cunning in the way that she seems to be aware of the kind of reputation that Launfal has built up, one founded on gift-giving and generosity. She uses this reputation against him during her wedding feast in order to isolate him from the rest of the men at Arthur's court. The poem's editors, Laskaya and Salisbury, in their notes to lines 67-72 of the poem, suggest with reference to other medieval analogues that Guinevere may have decided to not give Launfal a gift in order to keep him financially dependent on the court, forcing him to stay nearby where he would be subject to her advances. If that is the case, then Guinevere's act of not giving Launfal a gift takes on an additional, more sinister significance, which lends the queen even more hand in the stripping away of control and power from Launfal's once comfortable space he occupied in Arthur's court. Her initial intention is to keep Launfal trapped so as to use him to her benefit, stripping him of autonomy which in a way, parallels the stripping of autonomy that Degare's mother experienced with the fairy knight in *Sir Degare*.

In a similar vein, Dame Tryamour, too, interacts with Sir Launfal out of her own volition. She sends out her maidens to fetch Launfal to where she is resting, and once he arrives she calls him her lover and declares that there is "no man yn Cristenté" (304) that she loves as much as him. She takes charge of the relationship and announces her affections in her own terms. Tryamour becomes Launfal's new patron by granting him money and gifts, and even adds a condition to maintaining this relationship with her: that he should "make no bost" (362) of her and keep their relationship a secret. Though Lanval is not forced into the

relationship, she is still the one with power over him. Of course, this places Launfal in a situation that is different from the expected behaviour of a knight or a male lover in a typical romance, where he is the one who pines after and later declares his love to a female love interest. A knight is typically expected to pursue his lady and "to win feminine affection" (Aurell, 343) through his own pursuit, rather than the other way around. Later in the story, Guinevere too, pursues Launfal instead of the other way around. By doing so, the narrative shifts the focus away from the male to the female, and in spite of Launfal being the eponymous protagonist, it is the two women that the reader's attention is being directed towards.

By shifting the focus away from King Arthur to Guinevere and, later, Tryamour, *Sir Launfal* thus furthers the question of Launfal's identity and its connections to masculinity. Rather than being in a safe space with King Arthur, in a masculine landscape where his position as a knight is unthreatened, Launfal instead faces a serious threat to his identity not only as a knight, but also as a man. Like in the case of Gowther, the masculine systems that were supposed to be his aid, have failed and towards the end of the romance, he leaves not just the court but the human world as whole, for Tryamour's fairy world. Launfal was already a knight, having a relatively stable social identity in Arthur's court. He has established himself comfortably within the court, and the system of knighthood, going as far as to use his wealth to generously give gifts to others. Arthur, who is supposed to be Launfal's patron, fails to fulfil his duty and responsibility owed to Launfal, and should thus be held to blame. However, as much as Arthur's failure to exercise strength and control as a king is to be blamed for the neglect that Launfal faces, there is no doubt that it is Guinevere's initial decisions that cause the knight to decide to leave the court. As such, Arthur is unable to exercise control as would be expected of a king in the Middle Ages. In short, Arthur is never a good king in any version of the *Lanval* story, be it Marie de France's version, *Landevale* or

Sir Launfal, and hence whatever power he holds is very quickly transferred over to Guinevere.

The faulty patronage system that Launfal faces is shown to stem from King Arthur, the head of the court. At the same time, Chestre's decision to place the blame on Guinevere demonstrates the extent of the new queen's power. Guinevere's behaviour towards Launfal becomes an example of a "detrimental patronage system […] depicted specifically as bad female patronage" (Vines, 124), which ultimately leads to Launfal's self-exile from the court. Furthermore, Chestre's version in particular places emphasis on the knight's social function in his society, where Launfal "is a knight whose relationships involve mutual dependence [… and] who rarely works alone" (Stewart, 123). When he is forced to leave Arthur's court of his own accord, he loses this mutual dependence he relied on and hence, slowly loses the symbols of his status as a knight. Later, upon his encounter with Dame Tryamour, these relationships are restored when she provides him with the means through which he can repair his image as a knight. This, in turns, further adds to my stand that Tryamour's relationship with Launfal is beneficial not only because she treats him well and does not harm him, but also because she becomes the new aspect of his life that not only restores what he had once lost, but perhaps goes as far as to enhance his previous status. When he is rescued from the court at the end of the romance and brought back into Tryamour's fairy land, Chestre emphasises that Launfal is not only a knight whose minor fault of breaking the lover's promise is forgiven, but one who no longer fits into the corruption of Arthur's court and belongs in the uncorrupted fairy world instead.

I would further argue that *Sir Launfal* essentially depicts a situation where female power overrides the type of masculine power that is typically depicted in romances, in a way that affects the male protagonist both negatively and positively, demonstrating that it is a versatile force. Guinevere's initial act of refusing him gifts causes Launfal to leave the court

and find himself in financial ruin, a state which he never fully recovers from in spite of Tryamour's later gifts to him that offer a temporary respite. Launfal's dependency on Dame Tryamour is not the most stable way for him to try and get back his lost identity, but it seems to work at least for a while. In fact, he has just moved from one unstable patronage system to the other. Guinevere and Tryamour are laid out as rivals to each other in winning Launfal's affections, and the parallels established between them function as a means through which the *Launfal* poet comments on the gendered norms and expectations of medieval England. The women also both function as means through which Launfal's identity is first threatened and then reformed. Dame Tryamour, in particular, is depicted in a way that is of great and very convenient advantage to Launfal. She meets him at a time when he has just lost his horse, after the two knights sent to accompany him have left, and his money has all been all spent. Almost as if she were completely aware of his situation, Dame Tryamour gives him precisely all that he has lost - wealth, a horse and a man to help him - in addition to becoming his lover. She is named and also given a history, as Chestre introduces her as the daughter of the "Kyng of Fayrye" (280) in a way that is similar to how Guinevere is introduced as the daughter of the king of Ireland. Both Guinevere and Tryamour are foreign women, and both cause a significant change to Launfal's life. Where Guinevere causes Launfal to lose his position and status as a knight, Dame Tryamour's intervention results in the opposite.

Guinevere continues to pose a threat to Launfal after he returns to the court, once again using her power to threaten his newly regained masculine identity. She speaks to him privately and declares to him that she has "lovyd [him] with all [her] myght" (677), in a moment that can be read as parallel to Dame Tryamour's previous declaration of love. Just like the fairy princess, Guinevere here takes the confession of love into her own hands. She pursues the male subject of her affection, instead of the other way round. But once Launfal

denies her affection, her attitude immediately changes. She calls him a coward and declares that he deserves hanging.

The most damning accusation, however, comes when Guinevere becomes so upset with Launfal's denial of her affections that she says that he "lovyst no woman" (689) and no woman him, effectively accusing him of being homosexual. The influential theologian Thomas Aquinas wrote in his *Summa Theologica* that homosexuality is the "greatest sin among the species of lust" since it goes against nature. In the context of the poem, it also subverts the previously laid out expectations of an ideal man, as engaging in heterosexual intercourse and finding oneself in an established heterosexual relationship was a marker of masculinity in the Middle Ages. The accusation causes Launfal to be ashamed to the point that he sees no choice but to admit that he already has a lover, Tryamour, whose "lothlokest mayde" (697) would be far more beautiful than Guinevere is. Launfal's revelation of his relationship, and thus his breaking of the vow he had given to Dame Tryamour upon their initial meeting, only happens because Launfal wishes to defend himself from Guinevere's insinuations. Later, when her husband returns, Guinevere absolves herself of any blame and tells him that Launfal attempted to shame her and told her that he has a lover who "myght be a quene" (720) above her. Hence, Arthur immediately takes offence and decides that "Launfal schuld be sclawe" (723). Therefore, even upon the successful reclamation of his knighthood and masculine identity with the help of Tryamour, his need to defend his masculinity against Guinevere's accusation forces him to break his contract with Dame Tryamour, leading him almost to his death.

The end of Launfal's journey of self-realisation and the restoration of his masculine identity also leads to perhaps the more significant encounter in the romance – that between the two women who have been affecting his life, Dame Tryamour and Guinevere. Having established the parallel between the two women, particularly when it comes to the way that

they interact with and affect Launfal throughout the romance, the final encounter between Guinevere and Dame Tryamour is the culmination of these two opposing forces. Both Guinevere and Dame Tryamour are powerful women who make their own decisions out of their own volition without any outside influence. They are both women who seem to defy the typical expectations of women during the Middle Ages, particularly when it comes to making advances in pursuing a romantic relationship with the person of their interest and their depiction in romance texts. Courtship was often seen to be in line with establishing a chivalric identity for men, where "courtship extends masculine identity by providing a new arena of interaction for men" (Crane, 17). In short, it was a pursuit undertaken by men that culminated in the successful attainment of the female love interest, rather than the other way around. By taking charge of the courtship, both women have affected Launfal throughout his journey in the story, both negatively and positively. The culmination of the tense encounter between Guinevere and Dame Tryamour, the two powerful female figures that Launfal interacts with throughout the poem, reveals that the "two types [one human and one fairy] of female sponsorship cannot co-exist" (Vines, 137). This creates tension not only between Launfal and Guinevere, and Launfal and Arthur, but also between Guinevere and Dame Tryamour. Since both Tryamour and Guinevere partake in this reversal of courtship with Launfal as the object of their affections, they are competitors and are hence in conflict with each other, and one needs to out win the other and Launfal can only be with one of them. The main difference between the two is, of course, Tryamour's love for Launfal is returned by him while Guinevere's 'love' is just lust masked as thus.

However, what makes Launfal's relationship with Dame Tryamour particularly significant for this thesis is that it is in fact free of conditions, in spite of the fairy insisting that there are rules to follow at the beginning of their relationship. Even after Launfal breaks his vow, Dame Tryamour appears at the end of the romance when his life is at stake. After

Guinevere accuses him of saying that there is a queen above her, Arthur sentences Launfal "to be hongeth and todrawe" (726). The court of King Arthur agrees that "they gonne hym skere; […] yf he myghte hys lemman brynge" (795-6) since he has been accused of boasting that she was indeed more beautiful than Queen Guinevere. By doing so, it may seem that Launfal "disregards [Tryamour's] warning and compounds his suffering by attempting to take an easy way out by sidestepping its consequences and ignoring the fact that he may be victimized eventually" (Taşelden, 423). It seems to be implied here that Launfal did not consider the impact of his breaking of Tryamour's promise, or rather, was aware of it but did not think it applied in the current situation. Guinevere's accusation made Launfal "sore aschamed" (698) and let him blurt out that he has "loved a fayryr woman than [Guinevere] ever lydest [her] ey upon" (700-701). In the same moment from Marie de France's *Lanval,* one of the influences for Chestre's retelling, Guinevere's accuses the knight of "[having fine-looking boys with whom [he] enjoy[s] [him]self" (281-282) to which Lanval responds, with the narrator noting that "he said something out of spite that he later regret" (289-290), that "of that activity [referring to sex with boys] I know nothing but I love and am loved by one who should have the prize over all women I know" (291-295). William Burgwinkle notes that Lanval's response in Marie de France's poem "recalls similar formulae in other accusations of sodomy" (Burgwinkle, 164). Even though this explicitly stated accusation is absent in *Sir Launfal,* Launfal's response to Guinevere's words do mirror those of Lanval's, especially in the momentous desperation leading to letting out of Tryamour's secret. Hence, I would argue here that Launfal's reason for doing so was probably because he was desperate to avoid getting himself involved in an accusation that holds long-term legal consequences for him both as a knight and as a member of his Christian society.

Hence, even while taking this into consideration, if Dame Tryamour's condition that he keep their relationship secret were stringent, then Launfal's breaking of the vow would

entail the end of their relationship, and Launfal would therefore be doomed since he would be unable to prove that he has a beautiful lover. However, that condition does not seem to apply since Tryamour does appear riding into Arthur's court. When Launfal declares her as his "lemman swete" (970) she does not protest, indicating that she continues to see herself as his lover, and he, hers. She even goes so far as to approach King Arthur and announce that she has come to rescue Sir Launfal, declaring that "he never, yn in folye,/besofte the queen" (994-5). Tryamour thereby acquits him of all charges and asserts his innocence, exposing Guinevere as a liar. Dame Tryamour's appearance at Arthur's court is the way through which she asserts herself as the lover and the new patron of Launfal, proving that Guinevere's influence can no longer affect Launfal the way she may have intended it to at the beginning of the romance. In short, Launfal's relationship with Tryamour has in fact rescued him from the traps of Guinevere, just as he might have expected it to when he first broke his promise to Tryamour by revealing their secret.

Here, I turn to the second supernatural encounter of the romance, that between Guinevere and Tryamour. Although the human man in this narrative benefits from his encounters with the fairy world, the human woman, as in the poems discussed in previous chapters, is punished. Tryamour supports Launfal financially, stops his execution, and proves herself to be his lover and patron. By contrast, Guinevere – who had sworn to "put out [her] eeyn gray" (810) if Launfal produced a lover more beautiful than she is – is blinded. In fulfilling Guinevere's own words, Dame Tryamour demonstrates her supernatural ability. The stand-off between the two powerful women ends in the clear triumph of one over the other, that of the supernaturally powerful Dame Tryamour over the powerful yet only human Guinevere.

Like the women in the previously discussed romances who have negative encounters with male supernatural beings, Guinevere has a negative encounter with a female

supernatural being. Though her declaration that she should be blinded if Launfal could ever bring forth his lover is rather extreme, it is, just like the declaration made by the Duchess in *Sir Gowther,* an example of words uttered in haste. However, in the case of Guinevere, the fact that she is blinded frames the encounter as a punishment not only in the context of the story but also historically, to a medieval audience. Here, it is of note that Guinevere's blinding is an addition of Chestre's, suggesting that he would have been aware of the association that his audience may have drawn from it. Blinding, in medieval thought, was at times perceived as a "punishment for crimes against royal power, such as treason" (Pearman, 138). Guinevere has been previously presented as a deviant woman, and her adulterous nature is known to all the knights, including Launfal. Her adulterous nature is held in contrast to Dame Tryamour's monogamous loyalty to Launfal, in spite of him breaking his promise to her. Guinevere's punishment is thus fitting since she, through her adulterous nature, "directly jeopardizes the legitimacy of [Arthur]'s lineage and, as such, poses a threat to the stability of the body politic, a crime akin to an assault on the king's body that is punishable by blinding" (Pearman, 139). By being adulterous and by lying about Launfal, Guinevere has effectively engaged in behaviour that positions her as a traitor to her king, and to the kingdom at large. Like the women in the previous chapters, her punishment is carried out by a supernatural creature, whose powers far surpass her own abilities and from whom she is unable to escape. Dame Tryamour does not even touch Guinevere, she just walks up to her and blows on her "swych a breth/that never eft myght sche se" (1007-8). Guinevere's punishment is very quick, administered in a supernatural way, and is in accordance with Guinevere's own terms. In an ironic way, the fact that Guinevere's blinding is indirectly her own fault remains in line with her characterisation as a woman who does everything only of her own volition.

Other than her excessive sexuality that threatens the legitimacy of the heir to Arthur's throne, Guinevere also exhibits unbridled and careless speech, brought about by the pride in

her physical beauty that makes her take offence at Launfal claiming that other women exist who are far more beautiful than she is. In this display of vanity and pride, and her awareness that she is suggesting the beginning of an adulterous relationship with a man who once used to be the steward and under the patronage of her husband, the king, Guinevere makes a careless statement that her eyes may be put out if Launfal's lover appears. Therefore, not only does Dame Tryamour deliver the punishment for Guinevere's presumed previous and intended current sexually deviant behaviour with Launfal, she also punishes her for her careless speech, not doing anything more than what Guinevere had stated in her own terms to happen if a woman more beautiful than her did appear in court. In addition to her sexually deviant behaviour, it is fitting that Guinevere is also seemingly punished for her maltreatment of Launfal previously, given that Tryamour is now both Launfal's lover and patron. Since Guinevere's interactions with Launfal, she manages to convince her husband that Launfal disrespected her by saying that there "myght be a quene" (720) above her. This caused Arthur to become "well wroth" (721). The king goes as far as to declare that Launfal be brought to "be hongeth and todrawe" (726) for his crimes. However, all does not go as planned for Guinevere since Tryamour does arrive – and thus proving that Launfal did not lie – while also subsequently, proving that she, and her maidens, are indeed as beautiful as Launfal describes them to be. By appearing, and thereafter, blinding Guinevere, Tryamour becomes the punisher that Guinevere has to face for her crimes, even though the humans around her did not bear witness to what she has done. She cannot run away from what she has done, and her punishment is swift, in spite of the queen drawing so close to victory in punishing Launfal for not responding to her sexual advances.

While Guinevere is punished for her speech, Launfal's careless violation of his vow to Dame Tryamour is overridden by the fairy's loyalty to him. Indeed, Launfal eventually "exchang[es] the social world of the dance and the tournament for a fantasy of fulfillment in

the person of the infinitely powerful and forgiving mistress" (Diamond, 136). Not only does Dame Tryamour save his life by appearing in Arthur's court in spite of Launfal's breaking of the promise he made to her, she also takes him away from the human world that he no longer seems able to belong to. However, even though it is unclear exactly what Tryamour's world is like, the fact that she and Launfal left Arthur's court "wyth solas and wyth pride" (1020) posits that unlike the women explored in this thesis thus far, Launfal had a happy ending with his fairy lover.

The supernatural encounters in *Sir Launfal* reveal that the outcome of such encounters is related to the gender of the human participant, rather than the supernatural one. In *Sir Launfal,* both Launfal and Guinevere act in ways that would have incurred the wrath of Tryamour in one way or the other, though of course, Guinevere's false accusation of Launfal is a more serious one than the knight's slippage of his secret relationship in his desperation to keep himself safe from legal consequences. Of significance in *Sir Launfal* is that Tryamour explicitly acts as the punisher for Guinevere's continued transgressions throughout the romance, delivered in an obviously punitive style that would have been recognised by the medieval audience. Her transgressions, when compared to the other women explored in this thesis, are the most severe and hence, her supernatural encounter serves as a most identifiable punishment. To a female medieval reader, Guinevere's example would have served as a reminder that serious transgressions such as hers, even when carried out in private, will be met with the appropriate punishment in time to come as it will not remain unseen. Another aspect that lets *Sir Launfal* fall outside of the type of stories explored in the romances thus far is that it features two female characters, Guinevere and Tryamour.

While Guinevere is presented in an obviously negative light, and serves as a warning to female readers against transgressive sexual behaviour, Tryamour is presented differently. While she is loyal to her lover, Launfal, and saves him from death, she never marries him in

the length of the romance. Furthermore, she also engages in premarital sex and exposes her nude body to Launfal, a man she is not married to. Tryamour, though female, is a fairy and hence, falls outside of the scope of expectations for women's behaviour. Granted, she is loyal to Launfal, her lover, but she is never legally married to him, in contrast to Degare's parents getting married at the end of *Sir Degare.* If Tryamour was a human, it is likely that these acts would have been considered as sexually transgressive, though not at the level of Guinevere's adultery, and she might have faced some sort of negative consequence as well. However, since she is a fairy, Tryamour's example could have been Chestre's choice to allow her to operate outside of the laws and moral codes of human society.

In conclusion, the women in the romances explored thus far have demonstrated some level of transgression, be it small acts of careless behaviour or outright attempted adultery and false accusation, but no matter what the extent of the transgression is, none of them had positive encounters with supernatural beings. The only three people to have relative balanced or positive encounters with supernatural beings are all male – Orfeo, Degare and Launfal. As long as they have somehow demonstrated a transgression, punishment is meted out to them through a supernatural creature that they have no escape from. Male characters, however, are exempt from the rules imposed onto them even by the supernatural creatures themselves, as in the case of Launfal, where Tryamour's love and affection towards him seem to transcend even the conditions she herself has set. Hence, as a man, Launfal's encounter with the fairy was not only non-dangerous but beneficial to him, and even provided a better end for him than that he would have gotten if he had chosen to remain at Arthur's court. Her behaviour at the beginning of the romance perhaps could have been considered a sexual crime similar to that of Guinevere, but nothing negative happens to her. Perhaps this can be yet another favourable scenario for Launfal, the man who had been benefitting from his relationship with the fairy, since any negative repercussions she faces might affect his happiness. Either way,

in the supernatural encounters discussed thus far, the woman always faces a negative outcome, only differing by the degree of her transgression.

Conclusion

This thesis began by exploring the connection between the way a medieval audience would have read explicitly didactic literature and seemingly secular literature such as medieval romances. As cultural products which were popular among both men and women in the aristocratic circles, medieval romances were being read for purposes other than just entertainment. Examples of conduct poems and medieval romances being found compiled in the same manuscript by the same scribe, suggest that they would have been read together by medieval readers, with similar purposes being derived from them. While it would be a stretch to suggest that all aspects of a medieval romance's plot would have been strictly didactic, the thesis took a narrower approach in examining a particular pattern that was common across the four romances, more specifically, Breton Lays – encounters between supernatural creatures and human characters. Attention was paid particularly to how such moments in the four lays would have been understood by a medieval audience – and specifically, women – in terms of the types of advice and lessons they were attempting to convey, in a way that may have resonated with conduct poems.

The observed pattern shown across the four romances resonates with this: when supernatural creatures make an appearance in these stories, their interactions with women always end up with a negative outcome. The woman in question, would have partaken in some level of transgression from what is expected behaviour of her as laid out by Christian teachings, and those demonstrated in conduct poems such as *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter.* The women in each of the four romances interact at least once with one supernatural creature and though the extent of the outcome differs, the nature remains the same. None of the four women emerge from the encounter completely unscathed. Being in the presence of a fairy or a demon always means danger for women, but the situation changes if the human is male instead. The men also do not interact with clearly negative-coded

supernatural creatures such a demons; only the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* did. The two men who interact with the supernatural creatures emerge instead unscathed and either accomplish their mission in the case of Orfeo or are granted a better life in the case of Launfal.

The female character always faces a negative outcome, no matter what the gender of the supernatural creature is. The supernatural creatures serve only one purpose for these women: to remind them of the wrongs that they have committed by manifesting the very danger that these women ought to have avoided, or in the case of Guinevere, act as a punisher for sins committed in secret. Each of the four women engage in acts of varying levels of carelessness, though with no negative intention. However, their interactions with the supernatural creatures end up with negative outcomes anyway. Each of these women transgressed from the behaviours that were expected of them as women. I have used the conduct poem, *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter* as evidence that these general behavioural expectations were being circulated in popular literature. By taking this poem as a standpoint, I have demonstrated that each woman is shown to have broken one of more of the rules expressed in it. The presence of the supernatural creatures amplifies the seriousness of these behavioural transgressions and the negative outcome they face as the unavoidable consequence of their actions. Of these women, only Guinevere actively acts against her husband's interests, and hence her encounter with Dame Tryamour is framed as a punishment for her transgression, in a way that the medieval audience would have recognised, leaving her permanently blind. The remaining three did not harbour any actual ill-intention, which may explain why their negative encounters with the supernatural beings were not framed in a way that the medieval audience would recognise as punishments; they are all still encounters that occurred somehow by chance and in two of the three, not directly related to the women's transgressions. Furthermore, in these cases, their situations were mended at the end of the stories; Heurodis is reunited with her husband, the princess in *Sir Degare* is reunited with her

son and their issue of lineage is solved through her marriage to the knight, and Gowther's mother is married to the earl who sparked Gowther's journey of repentance.

Overall, the texts are concerned with the regulation of behaviour for women, even though this trajectory differed slightly in *Sir Gowther,* where aspects of what was exposed as deviant male behaviour was also criticised alongside deviant female behaviour. In Chapter Three, I have demonstrated that Gowther's masculinity becomes the concern of the poem after his birth. The focus shifts away from his mother and her recklessly worded prayer, which is in contrast to *Robert the Devil,* where the reader is constantly reminded that the cause for Robert's evil acts is his mother's prayer to the Devil himself. This allows the poet to shift the blame away from the Duchess, and instead allow the romance space to explore and criticise male behaviour, alongside female ones. Chapter Four moves onto *Sir Launfal,* where the character encountering the supernatural creature is a man rather than a woman, and the dynamics are switched, especially since the fairy is now female. The switching of genders in *Sir Launfal* delivers the favourable outcome for the titular Launfal, but continues in its punishment meted out to Guinevere. In *Sir Launfal,* Launfal benefits the most from the presence of the fairy; not only does she become his benevolent lover, she also punishes Guinevere, who nearly leads him to his death even though the queen's acts of injustice went unseen by other human characters in the romance.

As might be expected from texts that seem to address the dangers of unregulated speech, supernatural creatures across the four lays are generally depicted as being stringent about language. The attention paid to language by the supernatural creatures reflects the attention that women were expected to pay both to their conduct and their own language, as well. They are particular about the way they use and respond to language, both their own and the language of the affected humans, as in the case of the fairy king in *Sir Orfeo,* Dame Tryamour in *Sir Launfal* and the demon in *Sir Gowther.* Both fairies adhere strictly to the

words that they use. Dame Tryamour does stop seeing Launfal after he reveals their secret and his gifts do disappear, and the fairy king returns Heurodis to Orfeo. However, in *Sir Launfal,* Dame Tryamour eventually lets go of her adherence to her own words and arrives at the court to rescue Launfal from execution. Her choice to let go of her own stringency is clearly beneficial to Launfal. In that same episode, however, Dame Tryamour acts upon Guinevere's own words and blinds her. To Guinevere, this acts as a punishment for her, a reminder to readers that even transgressions committed in private with no witnesses do not go unseen. In *Sir Orfeo,* the fairy king's insistence on staying true to his word reinforces the inevitability of Heurodis's abduction, but later allows Orfeo to leave with his wife. In *Sir Gowther,* the demon impregnates the Duchess to fulfil her need for a child, regardless of her say in it. This also adheres to every word of her prayer, both intended and accidental, once again drawing attention to the importance of language. Hence, any decision that the fairy or demon makes, be it to adhere to their strictness on language or otherwise, always appears to benefit the man, but not the woman. This is the case regardless of the gender of the supernatural creature.

Fairies, being from the Otherworld, also have motives that are deliberately left unexplained in the romances, such as the Fairy King in *Orfeo,* that add an aura of further mystery to their characterisation. They also bring with them certain rules and expectations when they interact with humans and seem to adhere strictly to their own personal values that are not made known in the text. For instance, the fairy king in *Sir Orfeo* abides by his rule of not lying when Orfeo asks him to return his wife to him, and Dame Tryamour in *Sir Launfal* enforces Guinevere's declaration that she should be blinded if a woman more beautiful than her appears in Arthur's court, even though the request was not directed at her in any way. However, these rules only seem to apply stringently to women when they are facing the fairies or the demon, and not to the two men who do. There is therefore a stark difference

established between interactions involving men and those involving women, with the latter resulting in a negative outcome while the former results instead in either an equal or a beneficial relationship for the human male. The gender of the fairy too, does not matter since Christian doctrine and teachings applies to humans. By presenting both male and female supernatural creatures as a threat to women, the poets amplify the importance of the responsibility placed upon women, regardless of who it is that they are facing. Both male and female supernatural beings punish women, and both male and female supernatural beings operate on an equal level to men. To a woman in a Breton lay, encountering a supernatural being always entailed that she is being reprimanded for a shortcoming, or an outright transgression in the case of Guinevere, that she had committed previously.

By using supernatural creatures to police female behaviour, the poets of these lays present supernatural beings not only as threats, but as amplified forms of particularly sexual threat (as in *Sir Orfeo, Sir Degare* and *Sir Gowther*), or as a reaction to a sexual digression in the case of Guinevere in *Sir Launfal*. Though women were supposed to behave in ways that allowed for their natural subordinate position to men, for most women, their most important duty was to be a wife and later, the mother to her husband's children. The importance of marriage and the role of a wife for women can be seen, for instance, in the title of the conduct poem the thesis used, *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter,* itself. A threat to her sexual integrity was probably the greatest threat that a woman, especially an unmarried one would face. It was her duty to guard herself both before, and after marriage, to ensure that she is only engaging in sexual intercourse with her lawfully wedded husband. In these four cases, three involve a male supernatural being while *Sir Launfal* features a fairy princess. Though the presence of supernatural beings in romances has been discussed by several scholars, most of them focus on the romantic relationships between female supernatural beings, particularly fairies, and male humans.

Each of the supernatural encounters involving female humans is either sexual or is presented in a way that might be taken as sexual by a medieval audience. This pattern highlights the importance of the sexual integrity of women's bodies, which were to be the means through which legitimate heirs were produced. As small as the female characters' transgressions are at times, the aspect of themselves that they are transgressing against can produce dire consequences if not treated with the utmost care. Women's virginity and chastity ensured that they would not fall pregnant with an illegitimate child that would threaten the future of their father's or husband's lineage. This concern is emphasised in the four Breton lays because each of the female characters is royal or noble. Producing a legitimate heir was hence one of their biggest responsibilities. They were expected to take care of themselves and guard their chastity so that they would not pollute their bloodlines with illegitimate children. Therefore, since these characters act in ways that place their bodies at even minor risk, the punishments within the texts are meted out in a way that brings to life the very dangers that they were supposed to have avoided.

In addition to commentary on women's agency, the lays seem to share a commentary on female speech and how it must be bridled. As discussed in the introduction and expanded in the chapters, it was preferred that women stayed quiet and even if they chose to speak, they remained obedient to their husbands. Such ideas found themselves being represented in conduct poems, and also reflected in secular literature such as the lays covered in this thesis. The lays provide a space through which these ideas can be discussed further, with the inclusion of supernatural creatures to further demonstrate the possible negative outcomes if such problems were allowed to fester. By having the Duchess in *Sir Gowther* and Guinevere in *Sir Launfal* say things that later affect them adversely, the romances drive home the idea that female speech is hasty and dangerous. The danger is to the woman herself in *Sir Launfal,* while in *Sir Gowther* it leads to danger for others around her. In both instances, the

appearance of the supernatural creature makes literal the words that have been carelessly uttered. In *Sir Gowther,* the poet even presents to the audience what can be read as an example of correct and beneficial female speech that aids rather than disrupts, in the form of the once mute Emperor's daughter who now speaks the words given to her by God. Unlike the Duchess, the Emperor's daughter is not fully in charge of the words that she is saying. Rather, a male figure of authority, the Christian God, speaks through her and directs the closure of Gowther's redemption arc, putting an official end to his rampage as the son of a demon.

The supernatural creatures act to amplify the seriousness of the issue at hand, and so women who even show the slightest of careless behaviour are subject to the negative outcomes of these supernatural encounters. Since women had the physical capacity to bear children, they became the focus of society's need to police the production of viable and legitimate heirs to sustain the future of kingdoms and duchies. The onus of responsibility for retaining the purity of their bodies for their legally wedded husbands then fell upon women, who were viewed as to be subordinate to men under Christian doctrine and teachings. While women were not expected to be completely voiceless and agency was allowed, they were expected to use the agency in order to better the future of their dynasty and to protect the honour of their husbands and other male relatives, rather than to seek out the fulfilment of their personal desires. To emphasise the importance of such a responsibility, the women in the lays are shown to be displaying varying levels of careless behaviour, and every one of them is met with a negative encounter with a supernatural being. Guinevere is an exception, not because she does not face a negative encounter, but that her encounter is framed as a punishment in a way that would have been understood by the medieval audience, since she was actively transgressing against her husband.

In each of these lays, the supernatural creatures are positioned as a way through which the importance of policing women's behaviour can be relayed to the audience. The type of ordained behaviour would have been instructed in official Christian doctrine and exemplary texts, circulating in society in both literature and other ways. The reading of conduct poetry such as *How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter* would have been once such way. There is an emphasis on issues such as female agency and speech, and the respective poets seem to direct the readers towards achieving and exercising agency and talking in the right way instead. For a woman, her agency was present but was never hers to use to serve her own needs and desires. Instead, she needed to use it to serve her male family members and to protect the future of her bloodline. The onus is on the woman to take the necessary precaution to guard herself, and of course, abstain from sinning which the three women, and Guinevere for the latter, fail to do. With regards to female speech, the poems emphasise that it was the woman's responsibility to guard herself by presenting both negative and positive instances of female agency and speech. Women who have transgressed are not allowed to carry on with their lives without the negative consequences they face as a result of their supernatural encounters.

By using a conduct poem as a means of determining the kinds of behaviours that were encouraged through non-religious texts, this thesis has attempted to show a correlation between the two, and how supernatural beings functioned as vessels through which such ideals could be reinforced in the Breton lays. Perhaps this could open up new possibilities to explore the connections between gender and other forms of magic aside from supernatural creatures in texts outside of Breton lays. The relationship between men and women, and magic, may carry different ideals and meanings when the magic is something that they interact with or make use of as humans, rather than it being relegated to supernatural creatures. In the absence of supernatural creatures, the question of the thesis can be

broadened by examining the ways in which gender plays a part in the way human magic-users are portrayed in the texts, and how characters in the story and the audience would have reacted to such portrayals.

CITATIONS

Adler, Gillian. "Canine Intercessors and Female Religious Metaphor In *Sir Gowther*." *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 48, 2017, p. 49-71. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/cjm.2017.0002.

Archibald, Elizabeth. *Incest and the Medieval Imagination.* Oxford University Press, 2001.

Allen, Elizabeth. *False Fables and Exemplary Truth.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica.* Xist Publishing, 2015.

Augustine. *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings,* edited by Peter King. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Aurell, Martin, et al. "Love: Refinement and Self-Control." *The Lettered Knight: Knowledge and Aristocratic Behaviour in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, Central European University Press, 2017, pp. 321–352. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctt1mtz652.13. Accessed 19 Aug. 2020.

Bardsley, Sandy. *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Medieval England.* University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

Beecher-Smith, Caitlin Marissa. "For hys largesse and hys bounte: The Construction of Masculinity in *Sir Launfal". Journal of Undergraduate Studies at Trent (JUST)* Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 59 - 67, Summer 2009

---. *Women's Roles in the Middle Ages.* Greenwood Press, 2007.

Bitel, Lisa M. *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland.* Cornell University Press, 1998.

Blamires, Alcuin. "Love, Marriage, Sex, Gender." *Chaucer and Religion*, edited by HELEN PHILLIPS, NED - New edition ed., Boydell and Brewer, 2010, pp. 3–23. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt9qdk31.8. Accessed 24 April 2021.

---. "The Twin Demons of Aristocratic Society in *Sir Gowther*." *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, edited by Nicola McDonald, Manchester University Press, 2013, pp 45-62.

Blumenberg, Adam. *The Female Body in Medieval Europe: Theories of Physicality versus Practical Gynecology.* 2008.

Burgwinkle, William E. *Sodomy, Masculinity and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050-1230.* Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Burlin, Robert B. "Middle English Romance: The Structure of Genre." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1995, pp. 1–14. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25095911. Accessed 19 Oct. 2020.

Butler, Sara. *The Language of Abuse: Marital Violence in Later Medieval England.* Koninklijke Brill, 2007.

Byrne, Aisling. "Fairy Lovers: Sexuality, Order and Narrative in Medieval Romance." *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, edited by Amanda Hopkins et al., NED - New edition ed., Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY, USA, 2014, pp. 99–110. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt5vj80b.10. Accessed 15 Sept. 2020.

Caldwell, Ellen M. "The Heroism of Heurodis: Self-Mutilation and Restoration in *Sir Orfeo*". *Papers on Language and Literature Volume 43, Issue 3 Literature Online,* pp. 291-310.

Cartlidge, Neil. "Sons of Devils." *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, edited by Neil Cartlidge, vol. 16, Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY, 2012, pp. 219–236. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81fr9.19. Accessed 19 April 2021.

Chaucer, Geoffrey, and Nevill Coghill. *The Canterbury Tales*. Penguin Books, 2003.

Colopy, Cheryl. "Sir Degaré: A Fairy Tale Oedipus." *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 17, no. 1/2, 1982, pp. 31–39. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1316392. Accessed 6 Apr. 2020.

Crane, Susan. *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature.* University of California Press, 1986.

de Charny, Geoffroi. Trans. Elspeth Kennedy. *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry (The Middle Ages Series).* University of Pennsylvania Press. 2005.

Decretum Gratiani, http://www.self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/Decretum_Gratiani Accessed 12 May 2021.

Diamond, Arlyn. "Meeting Grounds: Gardens in Middle English Romance." *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, edited by LAURA ASHE et al., vol. 12, Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY, USA, 2010, pp. 125–138. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81m1z.14. Accessed 9 Dec. 2020.

Douay-Rheims Bible. http://www.drbo.org/ Accessed 12 May 2021.

Dunn, Caroline. *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction and Adultery, 1100-1500.* Cambridge University Press, 2012.

---. "The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England." *Speculum*, vol. 86, no. 1, 2011, pp. 79–116. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41105501.

Edwards, Suzanne. "The Rhetoric of Rape and the Politics of Gender in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and the *1832 Statute of Rapes." Exemplaria, Volume 23, Issue 1.* 2011.

Finlayson, John. “The Form of the Middle English ‘Lay.’” *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 19, no. 4, 1985, pp. 352–368. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25093931. Accessed 12 Sep. 2020.

French, Katherine L. *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion after the Black Death.* University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

Furrow, Melissa. *Expectations of Romance : The Reception of a Genre in Medieval England*, Boydell & Brewer, Limited, 2009.

Green, Richard Firth. *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church.* University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

Griffith, Gareth. “Merlin.” *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, edited by Neil Cartlidge, vol. 16, Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY, 2012, pp. 99–114. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81fr9.11. Accessed 26 June 2020.

Guy-Bray, Stephen. “Male Trouble: Sir Launfal and the Trials of Masculinity.” *ESC: English Studies in Canada,* vol. 34 no. 2-3, 2008, pp. 31-48. *Project MUSE,* doi:10.1353/esc.0.0139.

Hanley, Catherine. *Matilda: Empress, Queen, Warrior.* Yale University Press, 2019.

Hostetter, Aaron. “*Sir Gowther*: Table Manners and Aristocratic Identity.” *Studies in Philology*, vol. 114, no. 3, 2017, pp. 497–516. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/90011222. Accessed 21 June 2020.

“How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter”. *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse,* edited by George Shuffleton. Me dieval Institute Publications, 2008.

Huber, Emily Rebekah. "Redeeming the Dog: *Sir Gowther.*" *The Chaucer Review,* vol. 50 no.3, 2015, p. 284-314. *Project MUSE* https://muse.jhu.edu/article/595502

Jones, David. *Friars' Tales: Thirteenth-Century Exempla from the British Isles.* Manchester University Press, 2011.

Kaeuper, Richard. *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe.* Oxford University Press, 1999.

Karras, Ruth Mazo. *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe.* University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

Krueger, Roberta L. *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance.* Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Lawton, Lesley. "Reconsidering the Use of Gender Stereotypes in Medieval Romance: figures of vulnerability and of power", *Miranda* [Online], 12 | 2016, Online since 02 March 2016, connection on 16 February 2021. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/8646 ; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.8646

Leitch, Megan G. "Introduction.: Middle English Romance: The Motifs and the Critics." *Romance Rewritten: The Evolution of Middle English Romance*, edited by Megan G. Leitch et al., NED - New edition ed., Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY, USA, 2018, pp. 1–24. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1ntgs3.5. Accessed 23 Oct. 2020.

Maier, Christoph T. "Propaganda and masculinity: gendering the crusades in thirteenth-century sermons" pp. 20-34 *Crusading and Masculinities.* Ed. Hodgson, Natasha R., Katherine J. Lewis, Matthew M. Mesley. Routledge, 2019.

Marchalonis, Shirley. "'Sir Gowther': The Process of a Romance." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1971, pp. 14–29. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25093176. Accessed 23 July 2020.

Marie de France. *The Lais of Marie de France*. 1st ed. Trans. Robert W. Hanning and Joan Ferrante. Dutton, 1978. Pp 105-123.

McAvoy, Elizabeth Herbert and PD Watt. *The History of British Women's Writing, 700-1500*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.

McCarthy, Conor. *Marriage in Medieval England: Law, Literature, and Practice.* Boydell and Brewer, 2004.

McDonald, Nicola. *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance.* Manchester University Press, 2004.

Meale, Carol M. *Readings in Medieval Romance.* D.S. Brewer, 1994.

Medieval Conduct Literature: An Anthology of Vernacular Guides to Behaviour for Youths, with English Translations, edited by Mark D. Johnston. University of Toronto Press, 2009.

Mertes, Kate. *The English Noble Household, 1250-1600: Good Governance and Politic Rule.* Blackwell, 1988.

Moitra, Angana. "Abduction and Exile: The Twin Absences of *Sir Orfeo*" *Litterae Mentis: A Journal of Literary Studies,* vol. 4, 1996, pp. 10-27.

Murray, Jacqueline. "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders". *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives,* edited by Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. Pp 34-51.

Oswald, Dana M. *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature.* D.S. Brewer, 2010.

---. "Paternity And Monstrosity In The Alliterative Morte Arthure And Sir Gowther." *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, NED - New edition ed., Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY, 2010, pp. 159–196. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt14brr71.10. Accessed 21 June 2020.

"Otherworld Enchantments and Faery Realms." *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*, by Corinne Saunders, NED - New edition ed., Boydell and Brewer, 2010, pp. 179–206. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt14brqtb.9. Accessed 12 March 2020.

Owst, G.R. *Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters and of the English People.* Kessing Pub Co, 2003.

Perman, Tory Vandeventer. "Refiguring Disability: Deviance, Blinding, and the Supernatural in Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal*." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 1 no. 2, 2009, pp. 131-146. *Project Muse* muse.jhu.edu/article/270155. Accessed 9 September 2020.

Pınar Taşelden, Enchanting the Punishment: Representations of Fairy Lady as Punisher in Sir Launfal and the Romans of Partenay. Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, vol.2, no. 9, October 2013. MCSER Publishing Rome, Italy.

Putter, Ad. "The Influence of Visions of the Otherworld on Some Medieval Romances." *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Carlyn Muessig and Ad Putter. Routledge, 2006. 237-51.

Rider, Catherine. *Magic and Religion in Medieval England.* Reaktion Books, 2012.

Robert the Devil: The First Modern English Translation of Robert le Diable, an Anonymous French Romance of the Thirteenth Century. Translated by Samuel N. Rosenberg.

Robson, Margaret. "How's Your Father? Sex and the Adolescent Girl in *Sir Degarré*." Boydell and Brewer. *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain.* Pp. 82-93. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81sw7.12. Accessed 4 Apr. 2020.

Rouse, Robert Allen. "Crusaders." *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, edited by Neil Cartlidge, vol. 16, Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY, 2012, pp. 173–184. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81fr9.16. Accessed 28 May 2021.

Sajavaara, Kari. "The Sixteenth-Century Versions Of 'Robert The Devil.'" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, vol. 80, no. 4, 1979, pp. 335–347. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43345668. Accessed 3 July 2020.

Salzman, Louis Francis. *Edward I.* Constable, 1968.

Saunders, Corinne. *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance.* Boydell & Brewer, 2010.

--. *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England.* D.S. Brewer, 2001.

Schaus, Margaret. *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia.* Taylor and Francis, 2006.

Seabourne, Gwen. A local rule on legitimation by subsequent marriage, The Journal of Legal History, 18:1, 96-99, DOI: . 1997.

"Sir Degare" *The Middle English Breton Lays.* Edited by Laskaya, Anne, Eve Salisbury. Medieval Institute Publications. 1995.

"Sir Gowther" *The Middle English Breton Lays.* Edited by Laskaya, Anne, Eve Salisbury. Medieval Institute Publications. 1995.

"Sir Launfal" *The Middle English Breton Lays.* Edited by Laskaya, Anne, Eve Salisbury. Medieval Institute Publications. 1995.

"Sir Orfeo" *The Middle English Breton Lays.* Edited by Laskaya, Anne, Eve Salisbury. Medieval Institute Publications. 1995.

Skinner, Patricia. *Living With Disfigurement in Early Medieval Europe.* Palgrave MacMillan, 2017.

Smithers, G. V. "Story-Patterns in Some Breton Lays." *Medium Ævum*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1953, pp. 61–92. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43626509. Accessed 27 Oct. 2020.

Sposato, Peter, and Samuel Claussen. "Chivalric Violence." *A Companion to Chivalry*, edited by Robert W. Jones and Peter Coss, Ned - New edition ed., Boydell & Brewer, 2019, pp. 99–118. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvb937g7.11. Accessed 10 Dec. 2020.

Stewart, James T. "Thomas Chestre's 'Sir Launfal' and the Knight in Need." *Arthuriana*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2015, pp. 111–128., www.jstor.org/stable/24643473. Accessed 22 June 2021.

Strickland, Agnes. *Agnes Strickland's Lives of the Queens of England.* Continuum Publishing, 2011.

Stuber, Leann. "The Contradiction of Masculinity in the Middle Ages," *The Delta*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 4.2009

The early South-English legendary ; or, Lives of saints. I. Ms. Laud, 108, in the Bodleian library. Edited by Carl Horstmann.

The History of British Women's Writing, 700-1500, Volume One, edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt. Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.

Velasco, Jesús. "Knightly Fables, Visual Concepts: On the Affinity Between Chivalry and Bourgeoisie". MLN. 131, pp. 301-319. 2016. 10.1353/mln.2016.0024.

Vines, Amy N. *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance*. Vol. 15, Boydell & Brewer, 2011.

Wade, James. *Fairies in Medieval Romance.* Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.

Ward, Jennifer. *Women in England in the Middle Ages.* Hambledon Continuum, 2006.

Williams, Tara. "Fairy Magic, Wonder, and Morality in Sir Orfeo." *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 91, no. 4, 2012, pp. 537-568. *ProQuest*, https://remotexs.ntu.edu.sg/user/login?url=https://search.proquest.com.remotexs.ntu.edu.sg/docview/1470404944?accountid=12665.

"Writing the History of Merlin." *The True History of Merlin the Magician*, by Anne Lawrence-Mathers, Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 40–69. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bwp5.7. Accessed 27 September 2020.