

FAMILIAR ESTRANGEMENTS: READING FAMILY IN MIDDLE ENGLISH  
ROMANCE

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the  
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**Abstract**FAMILIAR ESTRANGEMENTS: READING FAMILY IN MIDDLE ENGLISH  
ROMANCE

by

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This dissertation, *Familiar Estrangements: Reading Family in Middle English Romance*, explores the varied representations of marriage and family in Middle English romance. While Middle English romances often act with disciplinary force to cultivate and popularize ideals about the family, many romances also stand in ambivalent relationship to this disciplinary function. Even if they end up valorizing the nuclear family, they do so through circuitous routes—such as depicting surrogate father-child relationships, inter-racial marriages, the loss of family members, and adultery—as they imagine alternative means by which families cohere. The chapters take up each of these themes in turn, through readings that are historicized against political and social realities, and informed by psychoanalytic theory. The dissertation begins with a discussion of how three popular romances—*Sir Tryamour*, *Sir Cleges*, and *Sir Isumbras*—idealize the nuclear family so as to advance the interests of their likely audience, the bourgeois-gentry class. Chapter two shows how this idealization is problematized, tracing the alternatives to nuclear families by examining the presence of surrogate fathers in *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*,

and *Bevis of Hampton*, contextualizing this against the practice of wardship in the thirteenth century. The next chapter reads the inter-religious marriages of *The King of Tars*, *The Sultan of Babylon*, and *Richard Coer de Lyon*, arguing that the anxieties over inter-religious marriage and miscegenation reflect England's evolving attitudes towards its French heritage over the course of the Hundred Years War. Chapter four focuses on a single romance—Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre"—arguing that how the loss of family members is memorialized creates a "virtual" family that is turned towards political ends. Chapter five examines how adultery is related to the conception of the family in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, contextualizing the work against the dynastic strife created by the Wars of the Roses. In general, the thesis argues that while ecclesiastical ideas about the family in the high and late Middle Ages began to produce what we would now recognize as nuclear families, the Middle English romance remained a vigorous site where alternatives to doctrinal ideals about the family were imagined.

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## Introduction

In the world of Middle English romance, a landscape populated by great feats of prowess, spectacular violence, fantastic beasts, magical adventures, exotic journeys, and romantic love, the family would appear to be a rather mundane subject of study. Even though it is an omnipresent backdrop of practically every romance, its very ubiquity suggests that it is a familiar space that does not play an important role in shaping romance narratives. In these stories, the family as point of departure, as well as place of eventual return, can appear to structure romance in an uncomplicated and self-evident manner. Further, unlike with other works in Middle English—most notably, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*—no overt instruction, philosophizing, or argument over the family and the roles of family members is carried out in romance. Compounded by action driven romance plots that feature stock characters who seem to lack psychological complexity, the representation of family in middle English romance appears to be a domestic institution that has little bearing on how these romances were read.

However, by examining texts that span the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, I aim to show that far from being entities that provide a stable backdrop against which romance protagonists act out fantastic adventures, families in romance are portrayed as institutions that are at the center of competing ideas regarding what was recognized as "family life." Integral to my project is the use of various psychoanalytical models that illuminate the force of these ideas on individual and collective subjectivities. By the late Middle Ages, key ideas about marriage and the ideal family had been established. While various aspects of church teaching idealized what we would now recognize as nuclear family life,

in Middle English romance, the idealized family often acts in tension with social realities such as extended households and the imperative to procreate. Further, the idealization of family in romance often has a disciplinary function, offering a means for members of the newly emergent bourgeois–gentry to create and enforce behaviors and values that promoted their class interests.

Exploring these issues in detail, chapter one provides an overview of medieval thought about the nuclear family by tracing the theological and social developments that led to the rise of the nuclear family as a church-sanctioned institution. This chapter demonstrates how debates about the status of marriage as a sacrament of the church, the constitution of a proper marriage, and the growing emphasis on a nurturing relationship between parents and children provide an important interpretive context for three romances from the fourteenth century—*Sir Tryamour*, *Sir Isumbras*, and *Sir Cleges*. Immediate family relations also feature prominently in these works in the forms of the suffering that these protagonists endure. *Sir Tryamour* dramatizes how tragedy can strike when a husband does not place complete trust in the integrity of his marriage and questions the legitimacy of his son. The heroic deeds undertaken by Tryamour are guided by a desire to re-establish the family unit that has been broken by his father's lack of trust. *Sir Isumbras* and *Sir Cleges* show how the misfortune brought upon the head of the family is shared by the rest of the nuclear family unit, and all members of the family play a crucial role in the path to restoration. In this way, the affective bonds between the protagonists and their parents, spouses, and children actively shape the protagonists' decisions and actions. Through these depictions of family in their plots, these romances show how the cultural work of establishing certain ideals about marriage and family life

extended beyond the preacher's pulpit or the theologian's pen. In addition, the chapter argues that while the overt didactic function of these romances seems to involve normalizing moral values and spiritual attitudes, such romances also played a role in socializing members of the bourgeois–gentry class into socially acceptable forms of family life.

Even though the first chapter does not employ psychoanalysis as a framework for textual analysis, an approach that is used in subsequent chapters, it plays an important role in mediating between the historicist and psychoanalytical readings of the thesis. Grounding the thesis in a sense of the historical moment by focusing on the theological and social history of the nuclear family, the first chapter establishes a historicized reading of the family in Middle English romance that the later chapters depend on and respond to. One of the challenges of using psychoanalytical insights or structures in reading pre-modern texts involves answering the charge of anachronism. By thinking about how the nuclear family is produced and reinforced as an idealized form of the family in the late-medieval period, chapter one is a response to the warning about the narrowing effects of psychoanalysis in its ahistorical oedipalization of desire that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari issue in *Anti-Oedipus*:

The father, the mother, and the self are at grips with, and directly coupled to, the elements of the political and historical situation ... [which] constantly break all triangulations, and who prevent the entire situation from falling back on the familial complex and becoming internalized in it. In a word, the family is never a microcosm in the sense of an autonomous figure, even when inscribed in a larger circle that it is said to mediate and express. The family is by nature eccentric, de-

centered.... Families are filled with gaps and transected by breaks that are not familial: the Commune, the Dreyfus Affair, religion and atheism, the Spanish Civil War, the rise of fascism, Stalinism, the Vietnam war, May '68—all these things form complexes of the unconscious, more effective than everlasting Oedipus (97).

By paying attention to the historical circumstances that contribute to an understanding of medieval families, I attempt to ensure that the application of psychoanalysis in the thesis does not exist in a theoretical vacuum, where the nuclear family is assumed to be part of an unchanging transhistorical horizon of psychoanalytical fact. Instead, the subsequent chapters of the thesis explore how various depictions of family in romance stand in ambivalent relationship to the idealized family discussed in chapter one. For instance, these representations may well valorize the nuclear family, but do so through circuitous routes—with plots that involve surrogate fathers, interracial marriages, the depiction of grief and mourning, and the revelation of adultery—as they imagine alternative means by which families cohere. In order to analyze such circuitous routes, I employ an eclectic range of psychoanalytical theories which prove useful in providing insights into how family structures, relationships, and desires are represented in each text.

I do not claim that these romances reflect a "psycho-history" of the medieval mind; indeed, anachronistically applying late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century concepts to reconstruct medieval experiences of the family would be critically naïve. That being said, the thesis shows that psychoanalytical perspectives deepen historicized readings in fruitful ways. As L. O. Aranye Fradenburg points out,

[p]sychoanalytic medievalism is contributing to the development of historiographical approaches that are neither naïvely "transhistoricist" nor naïvely "discontinuist," but are instead attentive to prospectivity and repetition, to the ways cultures wish to script their cultures as part of their historicity, and to the unpredictable but nonetheless decisive ways in which those scripts mark succeeding desires and subjectivities. ("Not Alone" 255)

Coupled with readings that are sensitive to the historical structures and practices that governed family life, psychoanalytical theory enables us to consider how the representation of the family in romance does more than mirror prevailing social institutions. Instead, these romances can be read as symptomatic of how medieval people organized their sense of identity in ways that often resisted and complicated dominant ideas about family life. Indeed, a "psychoanalytic medievalism" that looks forward to "succeeding desires and subjectivities" enables a rethinking of foundational psychoanalytical assumptions as well. While much psychoanalytical thought focuses on the individual, the way that individuals are linked to each other and to larger groups also forms a significant element of psychoanalytical theory. The historicized family enables psychoanalytical readings of Middle English romance that take into account how medieval subjectivity is predicated on one's relationship to the nuclear family as well as a broader range of familial structures and practices that made up medieval family life. By focusing on medieval families as a crucial hinge that connects individuals to larger social entities, I emphasize how psychoanalytical thought can be fruitfully used to theorize about how desires, drives, and fantasies make up class and religious affiliation and contribute to a sense of national consciousness. The psychoanalytical theories that I use

have the analysis of nuclear family relations at the foundation of their explanatory frameworks, an inevitable legacy of Freud's oedipal complex. However, I aim to show that various psychoanalytical structures, such as Klein's object-relations, Butler's notion of disavowal in the psychoanalytic "turn," Lacan's symbolic order, and even Freud's totemic father figure, can be used to analyze a range of family arrangements that extend beyond the nuclear family. Also, psychoanalysis proves useful in describing and analyzing affective and psychic experiences such as anxiety, feelings of persecution, loss, and fantasy, which shape how romance protagonists grapple with issues concerning the family.

Together with viewing these romances through psychoanalytical theory and the social history of the medieval family, I also examine how these works resonate with their particular political contexts. By focusing on how various English monarchs dealt with the process of consolidating their authority or responding to threats against their power, I show that questions concerning family affiliation, lineage, and legitimacy, issues which are taken up in the romances, connect these romances to the political concerns of the day. These political contexts, which range from Edward I's ascension to the throne in the late thirteenth century to the Wars of the Roses that spanned the second half of the fifteenth century, are invoked in order to clarify the way that the nuclear family and various other family structures and practices featured in the political thinking of late-medieval England.

This combination of psychoanalytical theory and social-political history informs my readings in chapter two. The chapter begins to complicate the picture of the idealized family unit by examining romances where the protagonist loses his family, which he never fully regains, through an early trauma. These romances, which all have Anglo-

Norman antecedents and date from an earlier period than the works studied in the chapter one,<sup>1</sup> seem to emphasize how the solitary hero is able to establish his authority without the help of the nuclear family, perhaps borrowing from the heroic ethos of an earlier tradition. However, while the breakdown of the nuclear family in *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, and *Bevis of Hampton* initiates the action of these romances, these stories are not entirely bereft of family structures, even if these are non-nuclear. In place of close-knit nuclear family relations, surrogate father figures as well as the haunting presence of the memory of the dead father structure the protagonists' journeys. In this process, Havelok and Horn gain authority by learning how to control and manipulate their physicality. Havelok gradually learns about how his body is an important symbol that legitimizes his right to rule, and Horn has to adopt several disguises to hide his immediately recognizable good looks, en route to regaining the right to rule. Bevis is not tied to his body in the same way, but is governed by his impulsiveness. In the maturation process, Bevis learns to control his penchant for acting on the spur of the moment. Because my analysis of these romances emphasizes these protagonists' movement away from the purely physical and the deferral of the immediate as the adoption of a more symbolic mode of being, this chapter uses the Freudian myth of the primal horde and the return of the repressed as a means of exploring how the desires of the group and individual interact in formulating symbolic authority figures. Reading these texts against the social institution of wardship and the political context of Edward

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<sup>1</sup> *King Horn* is regarded as the earliest Middle English romance and is traditionally dated to 1225, though scholars have argued for a date later in the thirteenth century (Herzman 11). *Havelok the Dane* is "placed at the end of the thirteenth century, between 1280 and 1290" (Herzman 73), and *Bevis of Hampton* is thought to have been written in the first quarter of the fourteenth century (Herzman 187).

His own ascent to power, I argue that heroic identity is assumed through a process that does not derive from individual merit alone, but is also dependant on actual and symbolic father-figures.

Chapter three examines the stress placed upon the sacramental status of marriage by showing how representations of inter-racial and inter-religious marriages in romance can complicate conjugal unions. *The King of Tars*, *Richard Coer de Lyon*, and *The Sultan of Babylon* each feature Christian encounters with the Saracen Other, and dramatize the potential and limits of marriage as a tool for religious and political assimilation. *The King of Tars* illustrates how marriage to the Other can go wrong, and how even the conversion of the Saracen spouse may not restore marriage to its sacramental status. *The Sultan of Babylon*, on the other hand, shows how a more carefully orchestrated alliance between Christian and Saracen characters affirms the spiritual power of the Christian marriage to convert the Other. *Richard Coer de Lyon*, offers another perspective on how narratives represent the perils of inter-racial marriages and English encounters with the foreign. While the romance begins by imagining the dangers of marriage to the non-European Other, in the marriage of Richard's parents, the romance remains silent on Richard's own marriage, refusing to weave into the narrative the fact that the historical Richard married his queen on foreign soil, Cyprus, while he was crusading in the East. In reading these romances, I explore the ambiguities of the conversion process and how this creates a tension between fidelity and betrayal within marriage and the family. The earliest versions of these romances appear around 1330, with later manuscripts preserving and altering these stories into the early-fifteenth

century.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the production and circulation of these romances coincide with England's long-running conflict with France, The Hundred Years War. Using Melanie Klein's ideas on anxiety, this chapter argues that these romances illustrate how the English national psyche in the late-fourteenth- and early-fifteenth- centuries felt threatened by the French, while being unable and unwilling to disavow its continental heritage.

The next chapter focuses on loss within the family unit as I deal with the question of how the commemoration of dead family members is crucial in constituting the ideal family in John Gower's late-fourteenth-century version of "Apollonius of Tyre" from the *Confessio Amantis*. If one of the "goods" of medieval marriage is its additive function in procreation, what then is the place of loss, grief, and mourning in the conception of family? While Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre" remains true to its sources by featuring its titular hero as a good husband and successful monarch because he does not repeat the sin of incest that opens the tale, his version exhibits a pre-occupation with grief, mourning, and the commemoration of loss that is not present in other versions of the story. Reading Gower's tale against late-medieval practices of commemorating the dead and Richard II's own interest in memorializing his union to Anne of Bohemia as a spiritual marriage, this chapter explores the impact of loss on how medieval families fashioned group identities through the experience of death. Because this chapter considers how the political aspects of memorialization, as private grief comes to be expressed in acts of public mourning, it

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<sup>2</sup> The *King of Tars* and a fragment of *Richard Coer de Lyon* appear in the Auchinleck manuscript, which has been dated to 1330. Various versions of *Richard Coer de Lyon* continue to circulate in manuscripts well into the fifteenth century. The Sultan of Babylon has been dated to the "late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century since it contains echoes of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*" (Lupack 1).

also takes up Judith Butler's ideas on the constitutive power of loss in the formulation of socialized subjects.

Having examined various aspects of marriage and family life that question the integrity of the idealized nuclear family laid out in chapter one, the final chapter reconsiders the ideal family whose status as social fantasy is complicated by adultery. Reading Malory's *Morte Darthur*, I focus on acts of revelation within the work. Discovering the truth about his origins and kinship relations is a source of tremendous stability for Arthur, who experiences an abrupt shift in his identity on being crowned King of the Britons. Yet his slow decline—as he grows increasingly out of touch with the intrigues that swirl around him—is also marked by his clinging to the fantasy that his marriage and family continue to be sources of strength, even though suppressed rumors of the queen's adultery and the divisions these cause critique the efficacy of Arthur's fantasies about family. In this chapter, I use Lacanian theory to demonstrate how desire, knowledge, and social fantasy produce individuals that are subject to the family, examining how Malory's work resonates with questions concerning the legitimacy and lineage of the ruling elite that became prominent in the Wars of the Roses.

This thesis shows how Middle English romance was actively engaged in representing how individuals were connected to larger social groups through familial institutions. The dual nature of family life in its various forms, being both private and public, emphasizes how intimacy amongst its members never entirely insulates them from society. Hence, reading these romances against the nuclear family and various other familial structures and practices demonstrates how the family is a crucial transitional space that connects the individual to broader societal concerns involving

religion, class, and politics. The way that these romances represent the family also suggests that romance was a site where the clash between emerging ideals about the family and older and widely practiced arrangements could be imagined, and the thesis aims to show that the role of romance in shaping the various discourses about family is significant, and that examining the representation of family in Middle English romance is an important way of accessing how medieval cultures thought about individual and societal identities.

**Chapter One: Teaching Family in Late-Medieval England: *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Tryamour*, and *Sir Cleges***

**I. Introduction: Approaching the Nuclear Family**

Families hover over a large body of Middle English texts and feature even more prominently in Middle English romance, where the quest for identity and establishment of lineage is often rooted in the family unit. Because virtually all romances feature families at the heart of their narratives, their ubiquity often causes them to be read in the light of modern assumptions about the family. From a critical perspective, because families within romance often show great structural similarity with modern nuclear families, it is convenient to assume that medieval families played the same function and that medieval people shared an affective experience that corresponds to the emotional vicissitudes of modern family life. In short, the recurrence of recognizable familial structures in Middle English romance makes it seem that families as we know them today and as they appear in Middle English literature exist as transhistorical social units.

Another factor that may reinforce the notion that the medieval family as depicted in romance does not warrant special consideration is the fact that historians of the medieval family have observed the emergence of the nuclear family as the most common family structure by the late Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the medieval nuclear family as depicted in romance still deserves examination because what it signifies may be very different from modern notions of the nuclear family. For instance, a nuclear family

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<sup>3</sup> The nuclear family can be simply defined as a unit consisting of a man and his wife living with their children under the same roof. Ideally, this union would be monogamous and indissoluble. Parents were primarily responsible for children until they were old enough to set up their own nuclear families.

arrangement in the late medieval period may or may not have been the institution of social stability that is often a feature in the discourse surrounding the modern nuclear family with its foundational importance for the bourgeois subject and the civic society organized around it. Indeed, as Michael Sheehan points out, the shift towards the nuclear family in the later Middle Ages actually constituted a loosening of family ties because it involved opening up the family to the influence of the Church and eliminated previously stabilizing structures such as extended kinship, less strictly exogamic unions, and parilineal (as opposed to strictly patrilineal) modes of inheritance (*Marriage* 252–3). Further, even if the nuclear family's outlines are discernible by the late Middle Ages, it occurs in a context of social realities that would have shaped the experience of the nuclear family in ways that would not coincide with the experiences of a modern family. To give one prominent example, the spousal and parent–child relationships in a rich merchant family in fourteenth century London would have been situated within large households with a full complement of apprentices and servants. As the romances read in this chapter reveal, this household context often led to pressures on the family unit while affording unique opportunities for romance to delineate the boundaries between family and household.

A useful approach for re-thinking an institution that appears to be a natural entity both in the present and in medieval times is found in Karma Lochrie's *Heterosyncrasies*. Like the nuclear family, which is often read as a transhistorical phenomenon that appears everywhere and is experienced identically by everyone, Lochrie sees a normalized heterosexuality as erroneously assumed in many critical analyses of medieval sexuality. Lochrie targets the concept of heteronormativity by arguing that the notion of the norm

did not exist in medieval times. Instead, she distinguishes the idea of "the norm" from the "ideal" and the "natural," concepts which the late Middle Ages did use to theorize with, but which became muddled with "the norm" as a result of nineteenth century statistical thinking (xxii–xxiii). She argues that critics, having inherited a way of thinking that opposes normalcy against deviance, make the mistake of allowing heteronormativity to operate as an obfuscatory fiction in analyses of medieval sexuality, even as these critics stake a claim for subversive or marginalized sexualities. In contrast to sexuality, thinking outside a norm–deviant binary is less challenging where family practices, arrangements, and structures are concerned. This undoubtedly has to do with the fact that a wide range of practices on which non-nuclear family affiliations could be built, such as wardship, god-parenthood, and marriages arranged for political and economic advancement, received ratification from social and religious institutions even while the Church idealized the nuclear family based on consensual marriage. Still, Lochrie's observations about the folly of normative thinking are applicable to a study of the family in romance. Holding back from measuring medieval families against our notions of "normal" nuclear families enables us to disrupt the belief that the necessary evolution of modern family life can be accounted for by pointing to its earlier developmental stage in the late medieval period.

The value of examining a social institution in this manner has been demonstrated by Glenn Burger's reading of the *Wife of Bath*. Focusing on conjugality within marriage, Burger shows the dangers of resisting masculine readings of the *Wife* by turning to readings that consider her a proto-feminist icon (82). Instead, Burger's analysis dwells on the *Wife's* hybrid experience of conjugality as a prime example of "a 'becoming-

historical' that embodies a moment of libidinal excitement at the social level that cannot be contained by future narrowings of what such subjects can mean" (57). Similarly, instead of dwelling on how late-medieval nuclear families prefigure modern ones, I attend to how the representation of the family in fiction was a means for readers of Middle English romance to explore, experiment with, and occasionally attempt to reconcile a range of identities that emerged in the socio-economic changes that they were caught up in.

This chapter begins by briefly identifying features of the family that became prominent as Christian ideals of marriage and the family evolved during the High Middle Ages and began to be consolidated by the middle of the twelfth century in works such as Gratian's *Decretum* and Hugh of St. Victor's *De Sacramentis*. Some of these ideals, which include the primacy of consent in validating a marriage, life-long fidelity, and affection towards children, give the contours that appear to distinguish the late-medieval family unit from earlier familial arrangements. However, complicating this picture is the gap between canon law views about marriage and the family and how families actually lived into the late Middle Ages. Even as the chapter locates the intersections between portrayals of family in romance and medieval theories about marriage and the family, it does so bearing in mind that family structures and practices did not adhere to these ideals in a direct or consistent manner. At the same time, this also does not mean that a study of the family in romance is consigned to the realm of idealization or theory either. Acknowledging the gap between medieval theories about the family and actual familial practices allows us to think about romance as a cultural technology that emerged as medieval people made sense of, imaginatively erased, or bridged the space between

ideals and their lived experiences. As such, Middle English romance does not enshrine these ecclesiastical ideas about marriage or subvert these ideas in any absolute way. Instead, a popular genre like romance gives an indication of how ideals about marriage and the family were received, re-fashioned, and disseminated as cultural products that often suited the interests of the families that read and owned collections of romances. Following Felicity Riddy's suggestion that Middle English popular romances were artifacts of consumption that illustrate the interests of the "bourgeois-gentry" class ("Middle" 237), studying how family is portrayed in these romances is part of the project of understanding how medieval people viewed the gap between the ideals of marriage and family and how they actually lived. Indeed, the tension between the idea of the nuclear family that was becoming idealized and spiritualized and how actual families lived produces some of the narrative drama that emerges in Middle English romance.

As such, by describing the key elements that made up late medieval ideas about the family, I take the position that the nuclear family constitutes a certain ideology of social relations that emerged through the combined processes of medieval canon law and socio-economic pressures rather than a social unit whose primacy is an inevitable given. This ideology of the family, while not singular or monolithic by any means, sanctioned certain characteristics of marriage and family life along principles that became disseminated as *de facto* features of marriage and family in the discourse that represented the various levels of clerical thought, from papal decrees and canonical teachings to sermons by parish priests. While some of these practices emerged out of familial practices that were already in place, other ideas about family represented a break from and contradiction of how marriage and family were perceived and experienced.

This chapter examines three Middle English romances from the fourteenth century—*Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Tryamour*, and *Sir Cleges*—and shows how these prevailing ideas about the family influence the narratives. While the major innovations in canon law regarding marriage and the family were made in the twelfth- and early thirteenth-centuries, more than a century before the romances studied in this chapter circulated in England, they indicate how the cultural work of idealizing the family continued beyond the sphere of canonists and theologians. Instead of being passive templates upon which ideas of the family were written, these romances also played an active role in popularizing, enforcing, and, at times, resisting the ideals surrounding family life. While these romances follow the exemplary and didactic texts of the later Middle Ages such as saints' lives and conduct books in emphasizing the moral and spiritual discipline, instruction and achievements of individuals, they also explore how the family should live as a group. The didactic and exemplary force of these romances not only upheld models for individual behavior but also shaped group identities and social mores concerning family life.

## **II. Idealizing the Family**

By the middle of the twelfth century, the key features of marriage and the family that defined the shape of European family life at least up to the fifteenth century had been established by church authorities, theologians, and canonists. While these ideas continued to be debated and methods of enforcement refined, they also came to be adopted as cultural ideals not only because they were promulgated at various levels of the ecclesiastical hierarchy but also, especially in late medieval England, because they

offered certain social classes a useful model for fashioning group identities. In general, these ideas about marriage and family had the effect of shifting the family away from being conceived in terms of large and extended kinship structures towards the family as a smaller, intimate unit, comprising a married couple and their children: what we would recognize as a nuclear family. Central to the development of the nuclear family unit was the idea that what ultimately validated a marriage and made the union permanent and binding was individual consent. This development was crucial as it shifted the power to decide on marriages away from either parental or social prerogative and provided the basis for the development of affectionate relations between husband and wife in a marriage.

The history of the arguments surrounding the issue of what made a marriage indicate that individual consent was never a natural given in the marriage pact but emerged through successive generations of canonical writing and argumentation. During the Gregorian church reform movement of the eleventh century, there were at least two competing schools of thought on the issue of what validated a marriage. Pitted against the consent theory of marriage was the coital theory, which argued that a marriage was only complete and fully binding after it had been consummated (Brundage 136).<sup>4</sup> This theory, which had been articulated by Hincmar of Reims in the ninth century, persisted in influencing debates over what defined marriage. Peter Damian, for instance, taking the side of consent theory in *De Tempore Celebrandi Nuptias*, mocks adherents to the coital theory of marriage:

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to James Brundage's work are to *Sex, Law, and Marriage in the Middle Ages*.

If they maintain that marriage rests on intercourse then how is it that the holy canons forbid people to be joined in marriage without public weddings? Do they want the man to mount his wife in public? If indeed marriage is made by coitus, then every time a man makes love to his wife no doubt they get married all over again. (qtd. in Brundage 189)

Despite the apparent incompatibility between consent and coital theories of marriage emphasized in statements like Peter Damien's, a more moderate line was pursued by some canonists. The most influential example is Gratian's *Decretum* (ca. 1140)—the text that made prominent the role of consummation in marriage theory—which argued that "a marriage that was simply initiated but not consummated lacked the binding power of a consummated union" (Brundage 236). Opposed to Gratian's view was the position held by Peter Lombard, who set out an affirmation of consent theory in which "the consent of the principals was all that was necessary for the creation of that marriage bond" (Sheehan 98). Even though the popes of the late twelfth- and early thirteenth-centuries, Alexander III and Innocent III, acknowledged the importance of sexual relations in making the marriage bond permanent, they essentially made individual consent the cornerstone of marriage (Brundage 334 & 338), such that by the early thirteenth century, "the simple exchange of consent was eventually adopted and the general tendency to emphasize the role of the couple was vindicated, for their consent and the consent of no other was judged essential to their marriage" (Sheehan 99).

In adopting the consensual theory of marriage, clerical teaching created a problematic relationship between marriage and chastity. If consent was all that was required to validate a marriage, couples could aspire to spiritual marriages where

consummation and the conjugal debt were no longer indispensable elements of the union. Indeed, as Dyan Elliott shows, the ideal of chastity came to be intertwined with the language of marriage, problematizing the idea of the conjugal debt (171–2). At its most extreme, this paved the way for chaste marriage, modeled on Mary and Joseph's union, becoming an ideal attainable by all married people. At the same time, this model came dangerously close to the Carthar heresy that frowned upon sexual relations in marriage. More generally, privileging consent also meant that companionship between spouses in marriage could become prominent as a "good" of marriage, as opposed to marriage simply providing an instrument for procreation and a safety valve for sexual desire.

By privileging individual consent in marriage, canon law came into conflict with traditional lay practices and the interests of the political and commercial elite for whom arranging marriages continued to be a crucial means of securing and maintaining political and economic alliances. Even if ecclesiastical rulings emphasized the primacy of an individual's consent in validating marriage, there were ways by which this consent might be obtained through the pressure of the family and other interested parties such as feudal lords. Indeed, the Church was well aware of these complications and Alexander III's decretals at the close of the twelfth century argued that "[f]orce and fear exerted by parents or others in order to secure consent to a marriage nullified that consent" (Brundage 335). Further, even though the Church frowned upon clandestine marriages by consistently encouraging the announcement of marriages through the marriage banns and participation in marriages officiated by the clergy, their validity was consistently upheld, with Alexander III even arguing that there were legitimate causes for secret marriages (Brundage 336). However, despite the place of free consent in marriage

theory, the impossibility of enforcement meant that "[e]ven where the canonical principle of free consent was in force, marriage remained part of the larger social process of the community and was often treated as a family matter to be decided in light of the common interests of the group" (Brundage 438). Even though the primacy of individual consent was widely known by the end of the fourteenth century and evident in the increase in marriages that were contracted against parental wishes (Sheehan 102), families continued to contract marriages for very young children, even if this practice was an exception even among elite families (Fleming 22). The conflicts between the ideal of mutual affection between prospective spouses represented by the consensual theory of marriage and the other goals of marriage are often resolved in Middle English romance by fantasizing unions that manage to combine economic and political goals with the ideal of a consensual marriage.<sup>5</sup>

Even if the individual choice emphasized in the consensual theory seems to engender possibilities for romantic love (and its extension and promulgation in chivalric literature), the importance of consent also coincided with ecclesiastical teachings that stabilized marriages as permanent unions. This was part of the broader move of the Church to ensure that marriages were monogamous and life-long unions, effectively canceling the validity of other family arrangements such as concubinage. The coincidence of the consensual theory and these ideals of the permanent monogamous

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<sup>5</sup> Notable exceptions in romance involve marriages for political goals without the assent of at least one of the principals involved, most often the heroine of the tale. In these cases, however, there is often a religious or racial impediment and, more often than not, these marriages are not successful. For instance, in Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale", Constance's reluctant marriage to the converted sultan is unconsummated, and leads to genocidal conflict between East and West. In *The King of Tars*, the princess marries the heathen sultan of Damascus against her will in order to save her kingdom.

relationship also suggests "a dawning consciousness of the importance of individual choice, coupled with a new awareness of marriage as a personal relationship" (Brundage 333). One indication of this personalization of marriage emerges in the shifting ideas regarding sex in marriage. While early Christian writers deemed marital sex as always sinful even if it was required for procreation, this view became increasingly marginal by the early fourteenth century, and was even considered heretical.<sup>6</sup> Instead, "all of the major theologians and canonists of the period taught that marital relations were free from sin under some circumstances, although they failed to agree just what those circumstances might be" (Brundage 448). Penny Gold argues that the greater acceptance of marriage and sex as primarily belonging to a natural sphere, and thus not necessarily tainted by its lack of spiritual benefit, was enabled because of a "new acceptance of the bodily nature of man as good" (116). Even though the pursuit of sexual pleasure alone within marriage was still widely held to be sinful, sex performed "in the spirit of love" and coupled with "procreative intentions" was even held by some writers to be "spiritually meritorious" (Brundage 448).

In this same period, historians of the family have also discerned an increase in affect between members of the family, particularly between parents and children, in representations of the family. The familial unit was no longer viewed for procreative purposes alone but marriage was also geared towards rearing and caring for children (Brundage 430). David Herlihy, in surveying the growth of the cult of the Holy Family, with its increased devotion to Mary as mediatrix, the child Jesus, and Joseph as "patron

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<sup>6</sup> In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this heretic strain was represented by Catharism, which considered "marriage worthless and procreation sinful" (Brundage 423).

and provider," speculates that the traces of increased emotional bonds within the familial unit can be discerned ("Making" 203–7). Herlihy also points to how the delights of the affective bond between parent and child consistently feature in the diabolical temptations of saints, and concludes that "[t]he medieval family was not a cold community founded upon indifference; the devil has keener insight than many modern historians" (*Medieval* 125). As I go on to show in my readings of the romances, a parent's responsibility for the well being of the child and the reciprocal bonds of affection that develop between children and parents are themes that Middle English romances develop. Despite these features that emphasized the immediate relationship between spouses and their children as the nucleus of the family, it should be noted that elite families would typically include a large household staff made up of tutors, servants, and apprentices, with whom close bonds might well be formed, thus complicating the notion of "family." Herlihy argues that the administrative practice of treating both the households of the poor and rich as commensurable units for taxation purposes suggests that, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the family unit was thought of as excluding individuals who made up the extended household ("Making" 195–8). While his analysis supports the view that the nuclear family became a privileged entity, it does not necessarily negate the influence of the household in shaping the experience of family life. Indeed, Middle English romances often use the extended household as an important backdrop for the narrative drama that occurs between members of the nuclear family, and in numerous cases a young protagonist learns to become the head of his own family through his participation in the family life of a lord's household. Still, these romances consistently promote the primacy of immediate kinship ties over the bonds between members of the household.

The effort in consolidating ecclesiastical ideas regarding marriage and the family was motivated by the interests of the Church. Some historians argue that the Church's involvement in dictating the structure of the family and governing the relations between husbands, wives, and children was an outgrowth of regularizing and enforcing the celibacy of the clergy. Dyan Elliott argues that Church's interest in regulating marriage stemmed from the need to police the lay-clerical distinction, after celibacy became widely expected of the clergy by the early twelfth century. She writes, "[C]elibacy was the coat of arms that distinguished the clergy from the mass of humanity which formed the base of the pyramid" (132). A more radical theory regarding the Church's interest in regulating marriage is found in Jack Goody's proposition that the Church regularized and governed marriage through its tightened rules regarding co-sanguinity and marriage prohibition, divorce, and the legitimacy of children in order to leave lands without heirs. In Goody's analysis, the Church stood to profit economically from its control over marriage and family as ownership of these alienated lands would be transferred to the Church, thereby enriching it. More generally, marriage and family were important sites where elements of Church influence—from papal decrees to the admonitions of parish priests—were felt, as the great majority of the laity would have been influenced by ecclesiastical teaching about marriage and the family. At the same time, the legacy of thinking about marriage as an institution ordained by God, and thus one that had a spiritual dimension, meant that marriage had to fit into a broader theological framework. The challenge that this posed to medieval theologians is clear in the controversies surrounding the status of marriage as a sacrament.

By the end of the thirteenth century, the status of marriage as a sacrament of the Church was assured through the teachings of Thomas Aquinas. This development gave spiritual value to the companionship between husband and wife, which also translated into a spiritual sanction for the relations between parents and children. Hugh of St. Victor, emphasizing the non-carnal elements of marriage, shows the power of conceiving of the union in spiritual terms:

See now the nature of the contract by which they bind themselves in consented marriage. Henceforth and forever, each shall be to the other as a same self in all sincere love, all careful solicitude, every kindness of affection, in constant compassion, unflagging consolation, and faithful devotedness. And this in such a way that each shall assist the other as being one's own self in every good or evil tiding, the companion and partner of consolation, thus proving that they are united in trial and tribulation.

(qtd. in Brooke 278–9)

However, the history of the sacramental status of marriage was not unproblematic. Augustine's three "goods" of marriage—fidelity, procreation, and its sacramental status—meant that later theologians had to wrestle with theological concepts in order to justify the revered Church Father's formulation (Gold 115). Prior to the teachings of Aquinas, the status of marriage as a sacrament was troubled by the fact that most theologians held marriage to have a remedial function that came into conflict with its potential sacramental status. Following Paul's remarks on the subject in his first letter to the Corinthians, they believed that marriage, by providing an outlet for sexual desire, rescued a couple from the sin of concupiscence but was incapable of imparting the grace necessary for true

sacramental status according to Peter Lombard's formulation of sacramentality (Heany 93). Aquinas, however, reconciled the remedial function with the efficacy of marriage to dispense grace by arguing that the remedial function of marriage was its sacramental grace. Thus, marriage was sacramental because it was "directed primarily against concupiscence itself, as distinguished from the acts of concupiscence," and thus the "perfect remedy" for concupiscence (Heany 128 & 135). Still, there were those who disagreed with Aquinas. For instance, the Franciscans Peter Olivi and Duns Scotus continued to reject the sacramental status of marriage (Brundage 431–2; Heany 135–6). While the disagreements over the sacramental status of marriage illustrate the difficulties of establishing a link between the elevated practices of the spirit and the more mundane affairs of ordinary existence, the fact that the theologians and canonists maintained its sacramental status indicates the ideological value marriage brought as an institution of the Church. The special status of Christian marriage is celebrated as a source of spiritual strength and even appears as an ideological bulwark against anti-Christian forces in Middle English romance.

### **III. Homiletic Romance**

By the fourteenth century, the period in which the romances studied in this chapter were produced and read, the major canonical and theological innovations concerning marriage and family had been laid out. This chapter concentrates on how some romances were used to reproduce and strengthen dominant ideas about marriage and the nuclear family while adapting these ideas to the interests of the English bourgeois–gentry class. The didactic and exemplary elements are so prominent in the

romances that I study in this chapter that there are sections where the educative and moralizing function of the romances overshadow the fact that these were also stories read and listened to for pleasure. Of the three romances examined, *Sir Isumbras* is the most prominent example of this element in romance. Following critical tradition, I refer to *Sir Isumbras* and *Sir Cleges* with Dieter Mehl's term—"homiletic" romance (120)—in order to emphasize the didactic and exemplary elements of the romances. While *Sir Tryamour* is not usually classified as a homiletic romance, it displays a certain affinity with some homiletic romances through the motif of the calumniated queen. Even if the didactic and exemplary elements are not so obvious in *Sir Tryamour*, studying it in tandem with *Sir Isumbras* and *Sir Cleges* provides a useful example as to the way the idealization of family life enters into romance more generally.

Despite the critical tradition of categorizing particular narratives as homiletic romances, the validity and value of the category has been vigorously contested. This has to do, in part, with its origins as a compromise category, created to suggest a group of romances that feature heroes who cannot be neatly characterized as either national or chivalric champions, and whose quests focus on "illustrating some particular Christian virtue in the hero" or to "commen[t] on the exemplary pattern of the action" (Mehl 121).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The problem of categorizing romance or even picking out features that make a text a romance presents itself in practically every critical discussion of romance. As Yin Liu puts it, "One of the more fascinating histories in the study of medieval literatures is the history of scholarly attempts to define Middle English romance as a genre" (335). Liu's suggestion to overcome the problem of defining the generic features of romance is to move away from classical categorization theory and use "prototype theory" instead. In prototype theory,

a category is defined not by its boundary but by its best examples (its prototypes); [...] the attributes of the prototypes are not necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in the category but rather describe relationships between members; and [...] membership is graded, so that some members of the category are

Much of the controversy over the category centers on readings of *Sir Isumbras* largely because of its affinities with and modifications of the legend of St. Eustace, the saint's life from which it ultimately derives. Diana Childress supports the view that *Sir Isumbras* is indeed a homiletic romance in that it represents a hero whose source of strength is located in God, who passively endures hardship, and who experiences moral transformation (315–20). Refining the idea that the romance promotes spiritual values, Andrea Hopkins demonstrates that *Sir Isumbras* extends the spiritual piety found in the life of Saint Eustace by adapting the Eustace story to "accommodate the theme of the penitent sinner [which was] originally foreign to it" (121). The romance, in emphasizing Isumbras's penitential journey, is thus not so much a trial of faith as an experience of penance.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Susan Crane argues that, despite the surface indications that *Sir Isumbras* exemplifies Christian virtues, it actually aligns itself "with lay resistance to the constraints that supervision imposed" and ratifies the "validity of private achievement within such structures" (100–1). In her view, instead of advocating the primacy of spiritual values and rejecting worldly desires, the romance "substantiates Isumbras's belief that Christian faith can support personal initiative and commitment to earthly goals" (117). Taking a more critical view of the romance, Anne B. Thompson compares

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considered better examples of that category than are others. (338)

Liu's comments would apply to types of romance as well, allowing us to think about *Sir Isumbras* as a more prototypical homiletic romance than *Sir Cleges* or *Sir Tryamour* while acknowledging that similar concerns emerge in all three.

<sup>8</sup> In Hopkins's analysis, the romance does not replicate the Church's emphasis on confession to a priest and the practice of penance that had become legislated by the Fourth Lateran Council as a practice expected of all Christians. She argues that with the regularization of confession and penance, penance also becomes an interior and private affair. On the other hand, *Sir Isumbras* dramatizes an earlier idea of penance, where the individual, without the guidance of a priest, undergoes dramatic and public suffering (35–45).

*Sir Isumbras* to the Middle English verse *Life of St. Eustace*, and concludes that the genre blending *Sir Isumbras* is a flawed work that poaches elements from hagiography and chivalric romance in a piecemeal manner without elaborating the various thematic elements in a satisfying manner (388). One implication of her critique is the idea that the homiletic romance is an unhelpful category; in this view, *Sir Isumbras* does not have a coherent or consistent message that it can convey.

Despite the way that the notion of the homiletic romance has been problematized by these studies, the term is still useful because it conveys the idea that certain Christian spiritual and moral principles are conveyed by these romances even if the message is neither precise nor an unreserved exchange of Christian values for worldly ones. Indeed, my analysis moves away from a narrow notion of the homiletic romance because I argue that the didactic element of these romances does not only concern individual attitudes and behaviors but also exemplifies what ideal families should be like. While the instructional element of the homiletic romance is generally geared toward exemplifying individual behavior and virtue, I propose that the romances studied in this chapter instruct the family unit on how it should live. These romances convey a view of the nuclear family sanctioned by various theologians and canonists, exemplifying positive models of behavior within the family unit and warning against external threats to the family.

The probable audience and manuscript contexts of the three romances studied in this chapter also shape the way that these romances could have provided instruction about family life as well. Riddy has argued that the likely owners of manuscript compilations where the vast majority of popular romances are found consisted of what she labels the "bourgeois-gentry" class ("Middle 237). Part of this heterogeneous class would have

been upwardly mobile merchants, the new urban rich whose wealth and social status had been won through commercial success. The other part of this group would be the lower elements of the landed classes, who were increasingly distanced from the nobility by the early fourteenth century, and which was made up of knights, and the ranks of "esquire," and "gentleman." Sylvia Thrupp's study of the merchant class of late-medieval London shows the interconnectedness of the bourgeois–gentry due to their commercial and social dealings. For instance, the gentry would often invest in merchant ventures and would also send their younger sons and daughters to work as apprentices in merchant companies. These apprentices would often become merchants in their own right (218).<sup>9</sup> As such, the gentry would often be related to family members who were merchants. The connections also worked in the other direction, where a merchant might live like a gentleman but retain links to his business. For example, a successful merchant might move away from the city to a country manor, living off rents from his property holdings, while a junior branch of the family would continue to run the business (Thrupp 230). Further, merchants and the gentry were often connected through marriage. Even though the gentry were wary about marrying their daughters to non-landed merchants, this obstacle was overcome because merchants often held properties or were themselves connected to gentle blood. On the other hand, the daughters and widows of merchants were much sought after as prospective wives by the gentry (Thrupp 264–5).

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<sup>9</sup> For girls, being apprenticed would also improve their prospects for making good marriages. Hanawalt observes: "Young women were usually apprenticed to makers of silk thread, to dressmakers, or to embroiderers. Theirs would be a trade that they could take into a marriage. [...] For a woman with a modest dowry [...] the added advantage of a skill that could be practiced at home and contribute to the household economy was of considerable value in the marriage market" (*Growing* 132 & 142).

While the gentry continued, like the nobility, to live off the lands they held and the work of others, Riddy observes that the "gentry and urban elites, the groups that seem to have been readers of romances, also converged [...] in their private identities" ("Middle" 236–7). This convergence might well have been the result of the commercial connections and the web of social relations outlined above. Her suggestion agrees with Harriet Hudson's conclusion that "the romances appealed to the country gentry and to prominent merchants and city bureaucrats, among others. These are not members of the lower classes, though they are also not members of the court elite" ("Toward" 36). Hudson argues that, as the landed classes became increasingly stratified in late-medieval England, romances became popular with the gentry because they captured the double consciousness of being connected through lineage to ancestral roots in the same manner as the aristocracy and yet not possessing the same level of wealth, power, and status. Romances, which often feature noble subjects who are dispossessed and who succeed in affirming their noble status through individual merit, provided a way of registering this conflicted sense of identity ("Toward" 46). For the emergent urban rich, romances would have appealed in a different way. As an aspirant group, they would have owned and read romances in part because it was culturally fashionable. Additionally, the emphasis on individual effort and perseverance in contributing to the success of the protagonists may have struck a chord with self-made merchant elites.

With Riddy's and Hudson's suggestions regarding the likely consumers of Middle English popular romance, it is possible to examine the gap between the ideals about the family promulgated by romances and the realities experienced by the families that made up the bourgeois–gentry class. For instance, Hudson argues that the gentry had "an

obsessive concern for the preservation and extension of property and the advancement of family through marriage," preferring to marry in order to gain estates rather than purchasing them ("Class" 81–2). This concern to make advantageous marriage alliances runs against the consensual theory of marriage that church teaching spread as an ideal. The way that the romances studied in this chapter deal with the tension between consensual marriages that privilege individual choice and marriages made for social advancement or the preservation of class status illustrates how romance could act to rationalize disjunctions between ideals and actualities. Another example of the gap between ideals and actual realities emerges in Riddy's observation that elite urban merchant households did not solely consist of parents and children. Instead, "[i]n the preindustrial town the household was the locus of production and trade, and its members consisted not only of the kin group but of apprentices and live-in servants as well" ("Mother" 67). The importance of the extended household in the lived realities of the urban elite complicates how parental affection toward children was realized within the nuclear family unit, despite its increased prominence in representations of the family. A head of a household would not only be responsible for his own children, but for the discipline, education, and nurture of the broader group that included apprentices and servants. As Barbara Hanawalt observes of apprentices, this "meant that the master's family would have young non-kinspersons in their household for all their working lives," and that "the living arrangement was a potentially uncomfortable mix of familial and professional roles" (*Growing* 131). And although court records show that the abuse of servants was rampant, the master–servant relationship could be very close as well: "Servants frequently took their masters' names and, when called on to do so, risked life

and limb for their masters" and were frequently rewarded in their masters' wills (Hanawalt, *Growing* 174). As with the tension between the ideal of consensual marriage and the need to arrange marriages, romance affords an imaginative space where the tensions between the household and nuclear family are worked through.

Given these complications stemming from the gap between the ideal and the actual, if these romances provided models for family life, their cultural effect cannot only be characterized as straightforwardly didactic, even if this may have been part of their intended function. Instead, a more sophisticated sense of how they shaped bourgeois-gentry identities can be derived by considering these romances as encoding the values and fantasies that supplied the bourgeois-gentry with the cultural capital needed to fashion their identities. Georges Duby's arguments about how chivalry was a symbolic construct that was fuelled by the cultural fantasies of the French aristocracy in the twelfth century offer a model of how the "family values" of popular romance may have been an important element in defining the identities of the bourgeois-gentry class. Duby concludes that at the beginning of the thirteenth century, "[t]he consciousness of class which gradually caused the French aristocracy to become a homogeneous group was thus crystallized around the knightly ideal, its ethic and the virtues of valor and loyalty" (180). Operating along the same lines as the French aristocracy, but more than a century later, the English nobility and aristocracy appropriated romance for its purposes to create an elite culture in the fourteenth century. Thomas Hahn and Dana Symons make the case that in these courtly re-fashionings of popular romance, the "shared gratification in familiar, preordained plots" was exchanged for works that referenced "refined social behaviors and achieved cultural capital" (346). These elite versions of romance are most

evident in works such as *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The case for romance acting to encode the interests of the political elite has been made by Stephen Knight, who in analyzing the social function of Middle English romance, concludes that romances "confront problems seen from the viewpoint of a landowning, armed class, and resolve these problems with values felt to be potent and admissible." As such, Knight sees romance as producing "a self-concept for the powerful ... [while] present[ing] an acceptable image of power to those without it" (102–3). Knight's analysis, however, neatly splits society into those with power and those without it, neglecting to account for the fact that some of the most avid consumers of romance—the aspirant bourgeois–gentry class—would have had a certain measure of economic and political power, but also would have had that power circumscribed in ways that might have prevented them from identifying wholly with chivalric ideals.

Even though Hahn and Symons focus on the way the appropriation of popular material acted as a form of "subtle censure" of the populist elements of romance (347), they point out, too, that the classes below the aristocracy were active consumers and owners of books: "English audiences beginning around 1300 took their reading matter more determinedly into their own hands, with individuals or households (rather than ecclesiastical authorities or institutions) sponsoring the production or seeking the ownership of vernacular texts" (354–5). Carol Meale points out that, despite the fact that "England did not match other European countries in respect of a continuous output of deluxe manuscripts[, ...] the middle classes led the way towards an expansion of the manuscript book-trade" by consuming lower end productions (201). Meale attributes this phenomenon to the way that

the gentry, or professional or mercantile classes, [who] had previously acquired the skills of reading and writing in order to conduct their business affairs with greater efficiency, were now increasingly directing those same skills to other ends, using the written word for edification and entertainment. (216–7)

Given what is known about the ownership of collections of medieval popular romances, it is possible to assume that members of the bourgeois–gentry consumed these less "literary" works because they wished to emulate their social betters in compiling and owning books but did not have the wealth or influence for commissioned works. Further, the bourgeois–gentry would have been positioned at a distance from such symbolic ideals as "chivalry" that populated elite commissions. As such, the values and themes of popular Middle English romance would have readily presented themselves for appropriation by this class.

Thus the idealization of the family that becomes prominent in Middle English romance may have played a role in fashioning a group identity for this class that was analogous to how chivalry shaped the cultural fantasies of the aristocracy. Along these lines, Kathleen Ashley, in her study of the symbolic power of female honor for the emergent bourgeois families in later medieval England, concludes that "[t]he worthy woman's social prestige in an essentially bourgeois ideology is equivalent to the honor of a knight in the aristocratic status system" ("Miroir" 101). In the same way that the aristocracy had adopted chivalric ideals as the fuel for cultural fantasy, romances that idealize the family also acted as vehicles that conveyed acceptable sets of values, of cultural discipline and instruction that reflected the social structures to which the emergent elite merchants class owed their prosperity and which the gentry wished to

preserve. This is true especially since the collections that households owned would have been read not only by the adult heads of households but by the various members of the household as well. Riddy notes that the diversity of genres and texts that made up manuscript collections suggests that these collections would have "cater[ed] to the reading needs of a range of household members, including children and servants in both gentry and mercantile households, and apprentices in the latter as well" ("Middle" 237). Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson observe that the composition of these "relatively cheaply produced miscellanies" would have been "directed either wholly or in large part by the suitability of the material available for family readership" (297). Amongst the examples that Boffey and Thompson give of miscellanies that would have catered to the entire household are Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38 and Bodleian MS Ashmole 61 (297), collections which contain the three romances discussed in this chapter.

In this light, romances have much in common with the conduct literature that began to circulate profusely in the fourteenth century, especially for the elite merchants who formed part of the bourgeois-gentry class. As Kathleen Ashley and Robert Clark point out, in this period of social and economic flux, where the possibilities of commercial success could translate into social mobility, "conduct books provided a guide for literate readers to negotiate new sets of social possibilities" (x). Riddy posits that conduct literature reveals the value structures of urban elites, and was "part of their process of self-definition, one of the means whereby this group articulated a set of values that endorsed worldly and material success" ("Mother" 69). Not only did conduct literature circulate together with popular romance amongst the bourgeois-gentry class, it

was also mixed into fictional narratives. The incorporation of conduct elements into popular Middle English fiction has been noted by critics. Jonathan Nicholls observes that Middle English romances which feature the adventures of a young male hero often depict explicitly pedagogic moments, where "the early training given to the hero in the form of advice from a tutor or parent is often meant to be of material benefit to the audience" (51). Ashley argues that in the Towneley *Salutation of Elizabeth*, "the greetings, gossip, and leave-takings between Mary and Elizabeth model behavior for the medieval audience, especially its women members" ("Medieval Courtesy" 29). In fact, Ashley points out that the exemplary thrust in mystery plays is so prominent that "the incorporation of norms from conduct literature may produce interesting distortions of earlier exegetical traditions" ("Medieval Courtesy" 31). These texts seem, at points, more interested in exemplifying and idealizing proper conduct than in remaining true to biblical narrative or illustrating spiritual truths.

While the overlap in the themes and pedagogic strategies of conduct books and homiletic romances derives, in part, from the fact that they were often fashioned from and influenced by similar exemplary precursors, the popularity of these romances with the same class that consumed conduct books indicates how the cultural work of these romances should be read in tandem with the pedagogical intent of conduct literature. Even if homiletic romances did not have the same explicit instructional thrust as conduct manuals, they encoded values that defined group identity in ways that enabled the bourgeois-gentry to fashion an identity that served their class interests rather than aristocratic or clerical ones.

The link between popular romances that have a homiletic thrust and conduct literature is also materially present in the manuscript contexts of these romances. The collections in which romances appear were often compilations that were owned by the bourgeois-gentry. In his study of the various manuscript contexts of *Sir Isumbras*, Murray J. Evans concludes that the varied contexts in which the work occurs makes any attempt to categorize the work as religious or secular futile (78–82). However, he shows that one of the contexts in which *Sir Isumbras* occurs with a group of items exclusively made up of courtesy literature in MS Ashmole 61, a collection that also contains *Sir Cleges*.<sup>10</sup> The proximity of these romances to courtesy literature suggests that even if they were not thought of as explicitly governing conduct, they were read and perhaps even thought of in the same context as conduct literature. It is thus possible that both these romances, in dealing with the trials of the family, were considered to exemplify the virtues that a family should possess.

In the readings that follow, I examine some themes in romance that intersect with the history of the late-medieval family outlined above. First, how the extended household and the nuclear family are depicted in these romances will be contrasted. Next, I look at the spousal relationship, focusing on the importance of consent, life-long fidelity, and companionship in marriage. Finally, how children figure in the family life of these stories supports the view that these romances attempted to bolster affectionate

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<sup>10</sup> MS Ashmole 61 is a "late fifteenth- / early sixteenth-century paper manuscript of Leicestershire provenance" (Evans 72). Preceding *Sir Isumbras*, are two advice pieces—"A Father Instructs his Son" and "A Good Wife Instructs her Daughter." Following it are the Ten Commandments, Lydgate's "Stans Puer ad Mensam" and "Dame Curtasy's Moral Instructions" (Evans Table A4).

and loyal relations between parent and child and made this the basis for strengthening bourgeois–gentry class interests in lieu of nobility of blood.

#### **IV. Representing the Household and the Nuclear Family**

In the three romances studied in this chapter, the well-being of the family is measured by the household's health and prosperity. The intimate bonds between spouses and parents and their children thrive in an environment where the broader household is efficiently run and constitutes a loyal social group. However, the romances also uncover how members of the household can pose a threat to the well-being of families either by betraying the family or being less than loyal in times of crisis. These romances ultimately vindicate the family unit as more dependable than the extended household, and often go to fantastic lengths to affirm this position. Given the importance of the extended household in the lived realities of the bourgeois–gentry class, these narratives expose a tension between the household and the nuclear family. In the readings that follow, I show that even if these romances offer the idealized picture of the nuclear family as being the most important source of identity and social interaction, they simultaneously show how the nuclear family is still very much entwined in a complex, even vexed, relationship with the extended household in the late-medieval English experience and imagination.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In contrast to bourgeois–gentry households that would have the means and need to maintain an extended household, peasant families would have been much more typically 'nuclear' in nature, consisting of only parents and children. Richer peasant households might swell in size on a seasonal basis—employing help during the harvest, for instance—but would generally consist of the parents and two or three children (Hanawalt, *Ties* 90–104). In this light, it is appropriate that with their diminished wealth and status, all that remains for Isumbras and Cleges is the nuclear family.

In *Sir Tryamour*, the household is a key determinant in several moments of the narrative. The different households in this romance influence what happens to the family unit that is made up of Ardus, Margaret, and later, Tryamour. The fortunes of the nuclear family can be mapped against what goes on in the different households that the family either heads or becomes attached to. The opening tragedy of the poem, in which Ardus questions his wife's fidelity with the result that he banishes her and his soon-to-be-born son, Tryamour, can be attributed to the failure of the household to operate along the lines of established hierarchy. When Ardus leaves to fight in the Holy Land to fulfill his vow made to God in order that he might be blessed with a child, he leaves Margaret in the care of his steward, Marrok: "He comauwndyd Marrok, on hys lyfe, / That he schulde kepe wele the quene hys wyfe, / Bothe in wele and woo" (55–7).<sup>12</sup> This charge to Marrok represents Ardus's dependence on his household and the loyalties of those in her service to act as surrogates of his authority in his absence. The stewardship assigned to Marrok is important to the integrity of the family as he is meant to protect Margaret from threats that may come from outside the household: other men might take advantage of her husband's absence. Furthermore, the household's role in constituting the family is also made clear in the fact that Ardus must leave in order to fulfill personally the vow he has undertaken so that he might make his family complete with a child. In the narrative logic of this opening, in order to have the long desired child, the father temporarily vacates his position as protector of his wife and relies on members of his household to play this role in his absence.

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<sup>12</sup> Citations of *Sir Tryamour* and *Sir Isumbras* refer to editions of the poem in *Four Middle English Romances*, edited by Harriet Hudson. References to *Sir Cleges* are taken from *The Middle English Breton Lays*, edited by Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury.

Marrok's evil designs demonstrate how the household can be opposed to marriage and the nuclear family. This is obvious when he takes advantage of the position of trust that he has been accorded by Arduus and begins to make sexual advances towards Margaret. Marrok's persistent attempts to bed his lord's wife are described in terms that invert the sanctity of vows—both the marriage vow as well as Arduus's vow to fight in the Holy Land—as Marrok promises himself that he will sleep with Margaret and tries her steadfastness with cunning words:

He wowyd the quene bothe day and nyght,  
 To lye hur by, he had hyt hyght,  
 He dredyd no peryle.  
 Feyre he spake to hur aplyght;  
 Yf he hur thocht turne myght  
 Wyth wordys, hyt was hys wylle. (67–72)

Margaret's love for and fidelity to Arduus are not assaulted from without by an external threat but from within her own household by one of its trusted members. Even so, the threat that Marrok represents is even more insidious precisely because he is a member of the household. Margaret is no passive victim of Marrok's advances and she responds by threatening him with physical punishment: "Y trowe Y schall nevyr ete bredd / Tyll thou be broght to the dedd, / Soche balys then schall Y the brewe" (103–5). However, Marrok manages to worm his way out of the difficult situation by claiming that he never meant to act upon his sexual advances. Instead, he claims to have carried them out in order to test Margaret's fidelity to Arduus: "Y seyde hey for no velanye / But for a fondyng" (110–1). While Margaret's credulous acceptance of this explanation appears

to be extremely unrealistic and merely a convenient plot device to further the story, Marrok's position as a trusted member of the household deputized with the task of protector of his mistress goes some way in explaining why he is believed.

The steward's privileged position finally undoes the marriage when Ardus returns from the Holy Land. Ironically, the marriage is secure in his absence but unravels on his return because Ardus comes to place more trust in Marrok than in his own wife. Marrok accuses Margaret of having an affair with a knight and tells Ardus that the child she is carrying is not his own. Ardus's immediate response is an interesting gauge of his assumptions about the loyalty of the members of his household. Instead of pressing Marrok for proof, Ardus assumes that Marrok's accusation is true and directs his anger towards Marrok for not affording Margaret adequate protection from the predations of other men:

“Allas,” seyde the kyng, “What may that be?

Betoke Y not hur to the

To kepe hur in weyle and woo?

Sche was undur thy kepeyng

Why letyst thou hur do that wyckyd thyng

Alas! Why dud sche soo?” (175–80)

As the king's trusted steward, Marrok is blamed, but never suspected by Ardus of harboring treacherous intentions of his own. In the events that follow, Ardus ceases to interact with Margaret as arrangements are made for her exile. The mistake for which Ardus will bear the consequences involves trusting a member of the household above the faith he ought to have in his own wife. In believing Marrok's accusation about the

queen's adulterous liaison, Ardus ends up losing not only his wife but the heir to his throne as well. In this sense, the household, in the person of the evil steward, becomes an institution that challenges and threatens the primacy of marriage and family.

Yet, in *Sir Tryamour*, the household and its members also act in redemptive ways that ultimately serve the interests of the nuclear family. If Marrok is a self-serving member of Tryamour's household, the old knight Roger, who accompanies Margaret in her exile and protects her at the cost of his own life represents how the loyalty of members of the household protects the interests of the family. The power of the household to shape familial relations positively continues as the narrative ensues. After Roger's death, unprotected and alone in the forest, Margaret gives birth to Tryamour and finds herself in an extremely vulnerable situation. A stranger knight, Sir Barnard, rescues her from the forest and establishes her as part of his own household. Sir Barnard does this because he recognizes that she is "of gentyll blode" (440), and even though Margaret only expresses her misfortune in the most general terms, he readily comes to her aid. Significantly, Barnard ensures that Margaret will enjoy the comforts of an aristocratic household, replete with servants at her beck and call:

He toke hur up full curtesly  
 And hur sone that lay hur by  
 And home he can them lede.  
 He let hur have wemen at wylle  
 To tent hur, and that was skylle,  
 And broght hur to bede.  
 Whatsoevyr sche wolde crave

All sche myght redyly hyt have,

Hur speche was sone spedd. (442–50)

While she has been deprived of family by Arthus, Barnard restores some measure of the security and protection that a family offers by giving her a position of status and ease within his own household. The authority that she regains in having servants who respond to her needs is significant as she was effectively stripped of the power of speech and response when her husband did not give her an opportunity to defend herself against Marrok's accusations. Within this household, she regains a measure of her noble status.

More significantly, Barnard's household becomes a surrogate family in exile for Tryamour. It is within Barnard's household that the infant Tryamour is "cristenyd ... wyth grete honowre" (451) and is brought up by a faithful "norse" (454). The provisions of Barnard's household enable Tryamour to thrive, for it becomes Margaret's permanent dwelling:

Sche [Margaret] techyd hur sone for to wyrke,

And taght hym evyr newe;

Hur sone that then dwellyd hur wyth,

He was mekyll of boon and lyth,

And feyre of hyde and hewe. (464–8)

Even though these household arrangements practically make Barnard Tryamour's surrogate father, the narrative is careful to demonstrate that, despite the generosity which repairs the wrongs done to Margaret and her son, Barnard never becomes a replacement husband or father. Throughout the narrative, Barnard is shown to neither be married nor to have children of his own, and it is reasonable to assume that having opened his

household to Margaret and Tryamour, Barnard could have intended to marry Margaret and adopt Tryamour given that the conditions of Margaret's exile make her a widow for all intents and purposes. However, the romance consistently privileges the original family unit over this possibility. Nestled within the description of how Margaret is treated well and respected in Barnard's household is a line that indicates that despite the "myrth" that surrounds her, she remains inconsolable about her husband's betrayal: "But ther gamyd hur no glewe" (461–2). In exile, the memory of how she has been wronged by her husband persists and the promise that the nuclear family will be restored remains. Further, when Tryamour comes of age and desires to participate in a tournament, he approaches Barnard as his liege lord to ask for permission to participate in the tournament and to request a loan of armor and weapons. While Barnard's initial desire to protect Tryamour from the dangers of combat and his subsequent willingness to equip Tryamour with his own armor raise the possibility that Barnard acts as Tryamour's surrogate father, Tryamour still seeks his mother's blessing before leaving for the joust, giving priority to the biological bonds of the nuclear family.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, part of the quest motif in the romance is driven by Tryamour's desire to learn his father's identity and be restored to his true inheritance. Barnard's household may be a crucial space for Tryamour's growth and maturity but it cannot fully replace the nuclear family.

In a similar way, the household is an important marker of the fortunes of the family in *Sir Isumbras*. While out on a hunt, the prosperous Isumbras receives a divine

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<sup>13</sup> Barnard's interaction with Tryamour also differs from the older men who act more clearly as surrogate fathers in other romances such as *King Horn* and *Bevis of Hampton*. In those instances, the father figure is generally more affectionate rather than courteous and rather enthusiastic about the protagonist's social promotion and views it as an extension of his own prestige. Also, any weapons, armor, or horses are typically bestowed as gifts rather than as loans.

message—"Thow haste forgete what thou was / For pryde of golde and fee" (44–5)—and is given a choice whether to suffer in his youth or old age. Isumbras chooses to suffer in his youth and as a fulfillment of the decision he makes, he is progressively stripped of all his wealth and power. On making his decision, his horse falls dead under him, and his hawks and hounds flee. The first report of bad news that he receives relates to the destruction of his home and household:

And as he by the wode wente  
 A lytyll knave was to hym sente,  
 Come rennyng hym ageyne.  
 Worse tydynges he hym tolde,  
 "Syr, brent be thy byggynges bolde,  
 Thy menne be manye sleyne.  
 Ther is noght left on lyve  
 But thy children and thy wyfe." (73–84)

It is significant that despite the extensive destruction to his household, Isumbras's family remains intact, with his wife and children largely uninjured, if badly traumatized and humiliated by the attack. Even though Isumbras's diminishing wellbeing is marked by the destruction of the household, his immediate family is spared a similar fate for the moment. Because the family is preserved from destruction, it must undergo the penitential suffering for Isumbras's pride together with him.

In this light, the family is constructed as an integral part of Isumbras's identity. Unlike the household that is the exterior symbol of Isumbras's wealth and prosperity, his family comes to represent the elements within that must undergo change in a very

fundamental manner; the family cannot be conveniently erased and restored like the rest of the household. The pride that Isumbras is punished for cannot be atoned for by solitary suffering as his family is implicated by it as well. This solidarity of the family in suffering is very graphically depicted when Isumbras's wife and children emerge from their ravaged home:

A dolfull syghte thenne ganne he se,  
 His wyfe and his chylderen three  
 Owte of the fyre were fledde.  
 As naked as they were borne  
 There they stode hym byforne,  
 Were browghte out of here bedde. (97–102)

Elizabeth Fowler has observed the effect of descriptions of clothes in symbolizing Isumbras's journey through a range of "social persons" in his penitential quest to be "reinvested" with status and prosperity (100–1). Similarly, by stripping the entire family of the physical accoutrements of rank and privilege, the scene foreshadows the elemental suffering that the family will undergo.

The family suffers along with Isumbras because the family unit itself is a source of Isumbras's sinful pride. Indeed, the progressive loss of members of the family that Isumbras must endure on his journey to the Holy Land emphasizes this. Early in the romance, after Isumbras's prosperity and largess are described, the poem suggests an implicit link between the pride for which he suffers and the family life that he enjoys:

A fayr lady hadde hee  
 As any man myghte see,

With tungge as I yow nevene.  
 Bytwen hem they hadde chyldren thre,  
 The fayreste that myghte on lyve be  
 Undyr God off hevene.  
 Swyche pryde in his herte was brought,  
 On Jhesu Cryst thoghte he nought  
 Ne on His names sevene. (25–33)

While there is no causal link stated indicating that Isumbras's obsession with his fair family has led to his neglect of spiritual matters, it is implied in this sequence. The superlative description of his children—they were "The fayreste that myghte on lyve be / Undyr God off hevene"—suggests that Isumbras has ignored the fact that his cherished family proceeds from the blessings of God. When Isumbras first receives news that his entire household, save his family, has been killed, his reaction is a telling indication of where his priorities lie. He responds, "If they [the family] on lyve be, / My wyfe and my children thre, / Yet were I never so fayne" (82–4). Given how central the family is to the way the romance constructs Isumbras's sin of pride, his family must not only be reduced to a state of physical abjection but also subsequently wrenched away from Isumbras.

While the family is that unit that must suffer and be stripped away from Isumbras for him to experience genuine penance, it also emerges as the only social group that can be depended upon after Isumbras has gained forgiveness. After he is reunited with his wife and made ruler of her kingdom, he begins an aggressive program of converting the kingdom to Christianity: he "comaundyd crystenyd to be swythe / Tho that hethene ware" (693–4). Yet his newly converted kingdom fails him at a most inopportune moment.

While preparing for battle against the armies of two Saracen kings, Isumbras suddenly finds himself deserted by his own forces. The poem even conjures up the image of his closest retainers—the members of his new household—deserting him after they help him onto his horse: "Whenne he was horsyd on a stede / Hys men fayleden hym at nede, / Hys folk wenten hym froo" (709–11). Nevertheless, he proceeds to face the Saracen host alone, even though death is a certainty. This desertion, as well as Isumbras's fidelity to the Christian cause, sets the stage for the triumphant reuniting of the family. Initiating a stunning series of miracles that reverses Isumbras's bad fortune, his wife boldly declares that she will ride out into battle with Isumbras. But as soon as she is with "armes as it were a knyght" (725), their three sons re-appear, mounted on the beasts that had stolen them previously, and armed to fight the battle alongside their father, which they win against overwhelming odds. This spectacular turn of events indicates that Isumbras's folly of valuing the family too highly has indeed been forgiven, and that the family can be restored to him. In *Sir Isumbras*, the household is relegated to an institution of secondary importance, and only the nuclear family can be truly depended upon in a moment of ultimate crisis. At the same time, the romance cautions that this dependence on the family can only be countenanced if it does not interfere with one's devotion to God.

In *Sir Cleges*, the primacy of the family over the household parallels the situation in *Sir Isumbras* even if the family there does not experience the same intensity of testing and miraculous reunion. While Cleges's generosity rather than his pride leads to

poverty,<sup>14</sup> he is, like Isumbras, stripped of all his household retinue and left with only his family:

Hys ryalty he forderyd ay,  
 To hys maners wer sold away,  
 That hym was left bot one,  
 And that was of lytell valew,  
 That he and hys wyfe so trew  
 Oneth myght lyfe therone.  
 Hys men, that wer so mych of pride,  
 Weste away onne every syde;  
 With hym ther left not one.  
 To duell with hym ther left no mo  
 Bot hys wyfe and his chylder two. (73–83)

When Cleges falls on hard times and is no longer able to maintain a large and extravagant household, the loyalty of his retainers comes into question. The men that leave Cleges are not painted as entirely mercenary, for a good measure of what happens to Cleges involves his own mismanagement of the household. Cleges's folly is that he is much too liberal in the organization of his household, and fails to regulate the size and appetites of his household. In her analysis of John Lydgate's poem "Dietary," Claire Sponsler argues

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<sup>14</sup> Critics tend to think of Cleges's flaw as centering on his spendthrift ways rather than pride in what he owns. Line 96 of the poem, however, does note that "fallyd was his pride," leading to some critics to interpret his fall as a judgment on pride (Hudson "Four" 399). However, in context, the line seems to refer to the loss of the way of living that he has come to be accustomed to rather than pride. Cleges's flaw, in my view, derives from an inability to manage his resources that stems from a sincere desire to bring pleasure to others rather than pride.

that the poem helps the consumer navigate the body "through a world of plenitude" by giving directions for the proper consumption that would benefit an individual's health (7).<sup>15</sup> If Lydgate's poem responds to a growing interest in the creation of a private sphere through the care of the self, *Sir Cleges* serves as a warning pertaining to the management of the household economy. Food and feasting must be properly managed for the well-being of the entire household and the family. Even if the annual feast is held to honor God, the practical bent of the poem shows that religiosity does not absolve the individual from making prudent household choices. This moment also intersects with the phenomenon, well developed in England by the fourteenth century, where a knight's loyalty to his lord became a matter of contract, rather than based on sacral fealty to the person of his lord (Strohm, *Social Chaucer* 14–5). The dissolution of Cleges's household parallels this broader shift in social relations between the great lords and their retainers, and the romance explores how Cleges and his family must end up forming an identity that is separate from the contractual relationships that govern the household.

While Cleges's generosity and benign execution of his status as feudal lord are celebrated at the opening of the poem, there are also indications that he is not circumspect regarding his expenditure. This comes across when, already low on resources, Cleges pledges his manors as security in order to finance his great Christmas feasts. His desire to continue holding the Christmas feasts also indicates not only a failure in the economic elements of household management but his penchant for maintaining a household to

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<sup>15</sup> "Dietary" survives in "fifty manuscripts [...], making it the most widely disseminated of Lydgate's poems and the most popular didactic verse in Middle English" (Sponsler 5). One of the collections in which it appears is MS Ashmole 61, which contains *Sir Cleges* and *Sir Isumbras* as well.

which all and sundry have access. This is apparent in the way that "[h]ys mete was redy to every man, / That wold com and vyset hym than" (23–4), how all manner of men, "[b]oth gentyll and comenere" (65) are welcome at his table, and in the "gyftes ... / That wer both rych and gode" (51–2) that minstrels who perform in his home receive. Allowing the flow of riches and goods to move out of his control becomes an indication of how difficult it is for Cleges to strike a balance between protecting the interests of his own family and maintaining the virtue of Christian generosity with a household that invites "both fre and bond" (114) as guests. This conflict becomes clear in Cleges's sorrowful complaint to God when he mourns the lack his family must experience because of "[t]he myrth, that [he] was won to make / In this tyme fore Thi [Jesus's] sake" (112–3).

While Cleges's mismanagement of his household and his wealth has disastrous consequences for his family, the romance does not provide an idealized alternative in the other key household setting—Uther Pendragon's Christmas court at Cardiff. Instead, while Cleges can be faulted for granting access to feasts and wealth indiscriminately, the king's household fails because it has become a restrictive and insular world of noble privilege. When Cleges appears at the castle in his "pore clothyng" (260), he is subjected to ridicule and scorn by the members of the king's household. The bribes that he must promise to the porter, the usher, and the steward, who each demand a third of the reward he will receive in bringing the basket of Christmas cherries miraculously grown out of season to the king, are symptomatic of a household whose members do not serve their lord out of loyalty but for personal enrichment. These members of the household stand as barriers of access to the king's person, and the king remains quite unaware of the abuse of

power that takes place in his name until Cleges makes his outrageous request that he be given twelve strokes of the staff to mete out for his reward.

Both the failure of Cleges's household and the manipulation of royal authority by self-serving members of the king's household express the difficulty of securing personal and group identity in a society where temporary contractual arrangements have usurped the place of absolute loyalty. Yet the realities of commercial and social life for bourgeois-gentry families required the continued maintenance of households and the close interaction of non-kinspersons within the same house. In working out the relationship between family and household, and affirming the primacy of the family unit, these romances express, as well as allay, anxieties about the loyalty of household members. By naturalizing the integrity of the family in the face of the household's dissolution and corruption, these romances promote the family as a more stable alternative for structuring society. As an ideology that structures class identity, this in turn suggests that, to be a proper member of the bourgeois-gentry class, an individual would have to value his immediate familial relationships above all others.

#### **V. Consent, Companionship, and the Sacrament of Marriage**

While the household is valued differently in each romance and depicted as both a threat to and surrogate of the family, these romances affirm the importance of consent, the development of companionship between the spouses, and the sacramentality of marriage in rather unambiguous ways. Not only is marital affection between the spouses constantly emphasized, it also features as a central plot device in the narratives. Further, the importance of the monogamous Christian marriage marked by life-long fidelity, an

idea encapsulated in the sacramentality of marriage, is also used as an ideological bulwark in these romances.

In a recent study, Emma Lipton argues that late-medieval English texts were interested in representing "sacramental marriage"—the form of marriage that privileges consent and mutual affection over its procreative or patriarchal components—because it provided a tactical space where the middle strata of English society could express its resistance to clerical and aristocratic authority (6–12). For instance, Lipton's analysis of the "Franklin's Tale"—the most "romance-like" of the texts she studies—shows how the relationship between Averagus and Dorigen "critiques and transforms that genre's frequent association of marriage with knightly prowess and public display, replacing them with an emphasis on individual choice and mutual love characteristic of the sacramental marriage model" (22). Lipton goes on to argue that this shift is enacted to enable a vocabulary through which the middle strata of society could re-formulate social and political bonds that emphasized horizontal social connections in place of vertical ones, for the language of the companionate marriage offered a "well-developed discourse of mutuality" (50). In making this argument, she follows Burger's assertion that "conjugalit[...y] is clearly a category that is 'good to think with' for the late medieval laity, a representational category with which new social interests can assert themselves within and against the hegemonic power of established hierarchies like a clerisy and nobility" (44).

While Lipton's analysis of how the rhetoric of consent and companionship provided the middling strata of society a cultural technology to resist political and social power is incisive, it tends to emphasize the consensual elements of marriage to the

exclusion of equally important features that define the marriage pact. The rise of consent as the enabling factor in marriage cannot be separated from the notion of absolute and life-long fidelity. In fact, consent could be seen as becoming prominent in order to facilitate the fact that it also is an absolutely binding union. As James Brundage puts it, with the rise of consensual marriage, marriage became "easier to contract and more difficult to dissolve" (333). This dual emphasis on consent and fidelity in marriage becomes interesting given the shifts in social relations occurring in fourteenth century England. Paul Strohm, refining K.B. MacFarlane's notion of "bastard feudalism," observes that hierarchical relations shifted away from absolute loyalty to the person of the feudal lord toward more temporary contractual arrangements secured by salaries and annuities, such that "indenture was no longer considered a sacralized or sworn relationship, but rather was wholly contractual and secular in nature" (14–5). Despite this change, hierarchical relationships still thrived; in fact, they could persist precisely because they found a new basis in contractual agreements. In a similar way, while the interest in representing consent within marriage points to certain resistances against established hierarchical relations, consent also becomes a means of stabilizing familial relations in a way that circumscribes individual agency.

In this section, I show that, while the consensual theory of marriage emerges as a crucial component in Middle English romance, it continually jostles against other more "conservative" concerns such as the importance of fidelity, the procreative aspects of marriage, and concerns about lineage and succession. In effect, even if Lipton is right to highlight that the depiction of companionate marriages in certain Middle English texts constitutes a space where traditional hierarchies are challenged, when this space appears

in popular romance, it is seldom wholly de-stabilizing. Instead, romance shapes consent to co-exist with other concerns in marriage, indicating that the ideological function of romance does not consist of merely resisting clerical or aristocratic authority. Thus, by representing consent alongside marriage as a political tool and a procreative institution, these romances indicate how the bourgeois-gentry did not readily jettison more traditional views of marriage and family. However, despite the fantasies of these romances, social practices continued to punish women who tried to exercise their right to choose in marriage to the detriment of their marriage prospects. Two examples from the Paston family illustrate how this tension between consensual and arranged marriages continued well into the fifteenth century. Elizabeth Paston, the twenty-year-old daughter of John and Agnes Paston suffered at the hands of her family for failing to secure a marriage. As a consequence, she was kept in isolation—"sche may not speke wyth no man, ho so euer come, ne not may se ne speke wyth my [Elisabeth Clere's] man ne wyth seruauntes of hir moderys"—and was physically abused—"sche hath ... be betyn onys in þe weke or twyes, and some tyme twyes on o day" (Davis 32). Elizabeth Clere, the writer of the letter and in secret contact with Elizabeth Paston, portrays Elizabeth Paston as so desperate to escape her circumstances, that she had agreed to marry Stephen Scrope, a disfigured fifty-year-old widower: "sche will have hym whethir þat hir moder wil or wil not, not-wythstandyng it is tolde hir his persone is symple, for sche seyth men shull haue þe more deynte of hire if sche rewle hire to hym as sche awte to do" (Davis 32). In a sense, Elizabeth Paston's "consent" might not be valid because it was a product of a confinement and abuse. Yet, the phrase "whethir þat hir moder wil or wil not" suggests that Elizabeth Paston had communicated the consent as her own, or at least Elizabeth

Clere recognized the importance of depicting it as such. The second example involves Elizabeth Paston's niece, Margery, who in 1466 contracted a secret marriage with the family bailiff. The family tried to ignore the union, and continued to seek a match for Margery. When the family brought the marriage before the bishop of Norwich for annulment, the bishop investigated the matter by interviewing Margery, and "[d]espite his evident disapproval of the marriage itself, of Margery's disobedience of her family and of her disrespectful behavior more generally, the bishop ultimately had little choice but to acknowledge that it [a valid marriage] had actually taken place" (Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing* 139). As a result of her actions, "Margery Paston's punishment was social ostracism, both as a member of her family and as a member of a specific class of society ... [and] she was permanently barred from home" (Haskell 468).

The ideal that the marriage ought to be based on consent, and by implication mutual affection between the parties,<sup>16</sup> leading to absolute fidelity is emphasized at the beginning of *Sir Tryamour*. Ardus and Margaret represent this ideal in that they are described as having great affection for each other. This is dramatized when Ardus must make his journey to the Holy Land in order to fulfill his crusading vows: "Betwene the quene and the kyng / Was grete sorowe and mornynge / When they schulde parte in twoo" (58–60). The affection between them is also expressed after Ardus has "maked al hys message" and journeyed to "Bedlem" and "the borogh of Jerusalem" (140–3). His yearning for home is expressed in how he misses Margaret's companionship for "[t]hen longed he at home to bene / And for to speke wyth hys quene / That hys thocht was evyr

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Sheehan has observed, by considering material ranging from papal decrees to marriage sermons, that the nature of consent implied a depth of affection which was expected to grow as the marriage progressed (263–76).

upon" (145–7). The marriage is also grounded in Margaret's fidelity to Arduus. Not only does Arduus love his queen "[f]or scho [i]s semely on to sene" (26) but also because she is "trewe as stele on tree" (27). The phrase "trewe as stele" is also used earlier in the poem (at line 17) when an overview of Marrok's treachery is presented. What distinguishes Margaret as a good wife is not only her beauty but her fidelity to Arduus.

While it may be argued that this emphasis on Margaret's fidelity (and her subsequent exile and suffering) employs the misogynistic stereotypes of advice literature for wives by aiming the example of the patient long-suffering Margaret at the female readership, the romance also suggests that the tragedy is brought about by the failure on Arduus's part to honor the marriage compact. While he pines for Margaret's companionship while on crusade—he desires "for to speke wyth hys quene" (146)—once Marrok sows seeds of suspicion and doubt in his mind, Arduus no longer interacts with his wife and the next time that they exchange words is when they are re-united at Tryamour's wedding. In this sense, Margaret's fidelity is not enough to hold the marriage together. If Arduus had turned to the companionship that he had previously enjoyed with Margaret, the tragedy might have been averted. In this sense, the romance not only exemplifies ideal behavior for wives, but also shows that the companionate elements of marriage are also required for the institution to work.

The reciprocal relationship between husband and wife was probably most fully elaborated by medieval canonists and theologians in considering the central role of the conjugal debt. Discharging the conjugal debt was a crucial responsibility of spouses, and in keeping with traditional views on the matter, "canonists of the late twelfth- and early thirteenth-centuries maintained that husbands and wives had equal rights to marital sex"

(Brundage 358). Elliott, however, cautions that "the rhetoric of equality that surrounds medieval and modern discussions of the debt is only convincing if all awareness of social mores and biological differences is suspended" and concludes that "[i]t is impossible that the debt alone should be free from all inequalities built into the gender system" (148).<sup>17</sup> Even so, if reciprocity were not actual, it is significant that it becomes prominent as an ideal within marriage. For later theologians, sex in marriage became more than a responsibility to be discharged. Indeed, Nicholas of Lyra, writing in the early fourteenth century, "observed that mutual pleasure in marital intercourse created a bond of attraction that helped to keep married couples together," and "[i]t was generally agreed that a satisfactory relationship between spouses was a desirable, even necessary ingredient of marriage" (Brundage 447–8). This has interesting implications for Arduus and Margaret, since Marrok accuses Margaret of committing adultery "[i]n the fyrst fourtenyght" (187) after Arduus's departure on crusade. Prior to Innocent III's papacy, honoring the conjugal debt was viewed as so central to the well-being of a marriage that "a man who wished to go on Crusade must secure his wife's permission, since during his absence she would be deprived of his sexual services and might be led to commit adultery" (Brundage 359). Even though Innocent III ruled that men could take up the cross without consulting their wives, "academic canonists found this ruling so anomalous that they generally passed over it in silence when they lectured" (Brundage 359). Given this context regarding the primacy of the conjugal debt in theories about marriage, Marrok's accusation of adultery and his own attempts to seduce Margaret resonate with these canonical concerns

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<sup>17</sup> Elliott argues that the emphasis on rendering the conjugal debt swelled in a way that reinforced male authority in marriage. She sees this as a backlash to the way that chastity within marriage diminished male authority as well as the special status of the celibate clergy.

regarding the constitution of a healthy marriage. The marriage is potentially threatened by Ardus's absence not only because he cannot protect his wife, but also because crusading means withholding sex from his wife, thus making her susceptible to sexual temptation. While this exploits medieval stereotypes about the dangers of uncontrolled female desire, Ardus is subtly implicated by Marrok's accusation as well, for his prolonged absence contributes to weakening the marital bond, despite the fact that he pines for Margaret while he is in the Holy Land.

Complicating the situation is the fact that Ardus's absence results from fulfilling a religious vow that is made because of the couple's desire to have a child. In undertaking the vow, Ardus subjects Margaret and himself to a period of sexual abstinence, not unlike the abstinence that would have been practiced by couples during seasons of spiritual discipline. However, because his vow is made to achieve a worldly goal—their desire for a child is depicted as the fruition of an affectionate marriage and their desire to produce an heir to the throne—the spiritual element of his abstinence is troubled by the value placed on marriage and family. While the separation between Ardus and Margaret is not meant to be permanent, it inadvertently becomes a long period of chastity between the two after Margaret is accused of adultery. Because the long separation does not occur by mutual consent, it does not fit into Elliott's strict definition of spiritual marriage, where conjugal relations are suspended for spiritual goals. However, the period of abstinence initiated by Ardus's journey to the Holy Land reflects a certain influence of chaste marriage on how romance finds a middle ground between the worldly elements of marriage (such as the clear affection the couple share for each other as well as their desire for a child) and the potential for marriage to be shaped by spiritual devotion. As Elliott

observes, "Popular representations of spiritual marriage were by no means confined to devotional works but also made inroads into the romance tradition" (174). In referencing this motif, the romance shows how chastity intruded into marriage ideals, even becoming an important, if somewhat contradictory component of consensual marriage theory.

The centrality of consensual marriage resulting in affection and companionship is ratified in more positive terms in the union between Tryamour and Helen, which is the second key story arc of the romance. Helen is the only heir to the recently deceased king of Hungary, and her marriage predicament is highlighted by the fact that she is now advised to marry as an act of governance. For in order to quell civil strife, she needs a husband who can establish male authority as king:

When hur fadur was dede  
 Moche warre began to sprede  
 Yn hur lande all abowte.  
 Therefore sche ys gevyn to rede  
 To take a lorde to rewle and to lede  
 Hur londe, wyth hys rowte.  
 A nobull knyght that cowde or myght  
 Rewle hur londe wyth gode ryght  
 That men myght drede and dowte. (631–9)

As such, Helen's marriage would potentially be one that could be manipulated by the nobles who surround her and give her advice. A match could be made against her wishes to further the political ambitions of the ruling elite. Stacking the odds against the

possibility that Helen will have any say in the matter of her marriage is her youth: she is only "seven yerys elde" (626).

However, as the romance would have it, Helen is a vocal advocate for her own choice of marriage partner. She asserts herself by stating the terms on which she will accept marriage:

And sche answeyd them there on hye  
 That they schulde faste hur wyth no fere,  
 But he were prynce or prynceys pere,  
 Or ellys chefe of chyvalry. (642–4)

A tournament is thus convened in order to appease her. Despite her youth, it is significant that Gratian's *Decretum* laid out that seven years was the minimum age for a child's consent to be valid in the marriage contract (Brundage 238). While her conditions do not fundamentally alter the political basis of the marriage, the fact that she has a say in the conditions by which those political exigencies might be answered ratifies the importance of individual consent in marriage.

The importance of individual consent to marriage comes across after the tournament when the knights assemble before Helen for her to make her choice of husband. While watching the combatants during the tournament, her heart becomes set on Tryamour due to his martial prowess—"Hur love was on hym lene" (795)—and when she does not see him amongst the knights assembled for her to choose from, she still insists on her prerogative to choose Tryamour for her husband: "Londyngys, where ys hee / That yysturday wan the gree? / I cheese hym to my fere" (925–7). In fact, Helen

manages to broker another deal with the barons who are eager to marry her off, further asserting agency in the matter of her marriage:

Hur barons were before hur broght  
 Sche prayed them to graunt hur hur thocht:  
 Respyte of yerys two.  
 Sche seyde, “Lordyngys, so God me save  
 He that me wan, he schall me have.  
 Ye wot wele yowre crye was so.”  
 The lordys assentyd wele ther tylle  
 For sche seyde nothyng but skylle  
 And that sche wolde no moo. (931–9)

While the ability of a seven-year-old to dictate the terms of her own marriage with the authority that Helen does is part of the fantastical world of romance, the fact that this fantasy is articulated with such force in the story affirms its allegiance to the idea that for marriage to be legitimately contracted, the consent of the parties was primary. In fact, Helen's insistence on this does have dire consequences on the kingdom. In her unmarried state, she is victimized by Burlond, who forcibly claims the right to wed her unless a champion fight and defeat him on her behalf. In taking up the challenge, defeating Burlond, and thus winning Helen a second time, Tryamour not only wins his wife but defends the principles of choice and consent in marriage. *Sir Tryamour* thus demonstrates the centrality of consent and companionship through two generations of marriage. By placing Tryamor's hard-won marriage of consent to Helen in counterpoint to Ardu's marriage gone awry, the romance redeems the institution of the consensual and

companionate marriage from the threats that face it. It re-affirms the marriage of consent as the de facto pattern for marriage despite the social and political pressures that come against it. If economically and politically expedient arranged marriages were condemned by church teaching, *Sir Tryamour* suggests that political and economic advancement can co-exist with marriage where consent and mutual attraction initiate the union.

Marriage plays a quieter, but no less crucial role in *Sir Cleges*. While the union between Cleges and Clarys is never threatened in the way the marriages are in *Sir Tryamour*, the companionate relationship between husband and wife is depicted as a valuable source of strength and encouragement when Cleges is close to despair. When he mourns his misfortune and borders on sinning by blaming God for it, Clarys comes to comfort him:

Als he stode in mournyng so,  
 And hys wyfe com hym to,  
 In armys sche hym bente.  
 Sche kyssed hym with glad chere  
 And seyde: "My trew wedyd fere,  
 I here wele what ye ment.  
 Ye se wele, sir, it helpys nought,  
 To take sorow in your thought;  
 Therefore I rede ye stynte." (121–9)

Clarys's initial gestures and words underscore the strong affective bond between husband and wife, but she also plays an important role in giving him advice. In the lines that follow, she goes on to caution him against being sorrowful during Christmas, suggesting

that to do so would be sinful. By balancing Clarys's tenderness towards Cleges with her practical words of advice, the passage models an effective marriage, where a wife's counsel to her husband can be readily acceded to because of the positive affective relationship that binds husband to wife.<sup>18</sup>

Another instance where Clary's advice has a positive impact on the fortunes of the family involves the miraculous Christmas cherries. When Cleges sees the cherries that have miraculously grown out of season, he is caught in a moment of doubt and fear. Even though he tastes a cherry and it turns out to be the "best that ever he had sene, / Seth he was man wrought" (212–3), he begins to worry that "it is tokenyng / Be cause of ouer grete plenyng / That mour grevans is ny" (220–2). However, his willingness to speak to his wife about his misgivings is precisely the means through which his doubts are cleared up. Unlike the former episode where Clarys offers her advice after overhearing Cleges's complaints, the text makes it clear that this time, Cleges goes to Clarys on his own accord—"he wold schewe it hys wyfe" (216)—to voice his concerns. In her response, which structurally parallels Cleges's statement of doubt, Clarys provides a more optimistic view of the miracle. She replies, "It is tokenyng / Off mour godness, that is comyng" (223–4). Not only does she assure him that the cherries are a sign of God's blessing on their family, she also makes the clear-minded suggestion that Cleges should bring a basket of the cherries as tribute to Uther Pendragon. Ultimately, this quick

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<sup>18</sup> The support rendered by Clarys and accepted by Cleges stands in contrast to less congenial relations between spouses in other romances. For instance, in *Amis and Amiloun*, when Amiloun is stricken with leprosy, his wife exiles him from his home to a hut and eventually makes arrangements for him to leave for good. In *Athelston*, the queen's attempt to offer counsel is met with violence that destroys the family: Athelston kicks her in the stomach and causes her to miscarry his own heir.

thinking on her part has the effect of restoring the family's fortunes. While Mary Ellzey is right in observing that Clarys's counsel is performed, on each occasion, within the domestic sphere, her conclusion that Clarys's advice only "affects the outside world indirectly" (48) underestimates her role in furthering the family's fortunes. Even if she does not make a public appearance at Court with Cleges, her suggestion is the key contribution to the family's wellbeing. Thus Clarys's good counsel, coupled with Cleges's willingness to act on his wife's advice, leads to positive outcomes for the family. The marriage where husband and wife are partners is the model of marriage that is advocated by this romance.

Cleges and Clarys, of course, do not undergo the same level of hardship and suffering that Isumbras and his wife must endure. The fidelity of the wife and strength of the marriage bond is made even more prominent in *Sir Isumbras*, where it is pointed to obviously ideological ends. This occurs when the couple encounters the Saracen sultan, who becomes enamored with Isumbras's wife and makes Isumbras an offer that tests his devotion to the marriage:

The Sawdon beheeld that lady thare,  
 Hym thoughte an aungyl that sche ware  
 Come adoun from hevene.  
 "Man, I wold geve the gold and fee,  
 And thou that wymman wole selle me,  
 More than thou can nevene.  
 I wole the geve an hundryd pound  
 Off penyys that be hool and round

And ryche robes sevene.  
 Sche schal be qwene of my lond,  
 And alle men bowe unto her hond  
 And non withstonde her stevene." (268–79)

Within the penitential framework of the romance, this offering is a temptation and test that allows the romance to declare its fidelity to Christian values. As Laurel Braswell notes, "[t]he threat of heathenism ... receives special emphasis" in *Sir Isumbras* in comparison to the life of St. Eustace and other analogues to the tale (150). The sultan's offer gives Isumbras a quick way of regaining his wealth and riches, the very things that he had so much pride in possessing. The terms of the sultan's offer are especially pertinent given the images that have governed Isumbras's descent into poverty. The most graphic sign of their poverty is the fact that Isumbras and his family are reduced to wearing rags. A dramatic reversal of his abject condition is possible if Isumbras accepts the sultan's offer of "ryche robes." Underlying the sultan's offer is the idea that marriage can be made equivalent to a commercial transaction, and that a man trapped by poverty should capitalize on the institution to improve his lot.

While the sultan's offer is a hyperbolic instance of financial concerns intruding into the marriage compact, it is not without relevance to attempts by parents in the late Middle Ages to arrange economically advantageous marriages for their children or use marriage as a strategy to form commercially profitable alliances. The connection to wedding contracts is alluded to in the specificity of the sultan's offer by which Isumbras stands to gain "an hundryd pound / Off penyys that be hool and round / And ryche robes sevene." The contractual elements of the offer are also present in the way that sultan

promises that his wife will be made queen and have her own servants. Of course, the sultan's offer is flagrantly inadmissible on the grounds that he asks Isumbras to part with his wife. However, it does parallel a situation in which a privately contracted marriage between two individuals comes under social pressure because another match would serve the family's economic interests better. Church teaching on the consensual nature of marriage consistently upheld the prerogative of the individual over commercial interests, even if matches continued to be made with this aim in mind. In fact, canonists of the early thirteenth century questioned the validity of marriage as a sacrament of the Church based on the perceived link between contemporary marriage practices and simony. For if it were a spiritual matter, then commercial transactions involved in marriage were tantamount to buying and selling spiritual benefits, and marriage could not be efficacious in bestowing sacramental grace (Heany 106–7).

The sultan's proposal also takes on an ideological bent, for acceding to it would mean jettisoning marriage and the Christian values it embodies. Further, the narrative context in which the offer occurs highlights the ideological elements as well. This offer is the second one that the sultan extends to Isumbras. The first, which Isumbras rejects before the sultan makes this proposal to buy his wife from him, involves an offer for Isumbras to serve the sultan by turning away from Christianity and embracing the sultan's beliefs. In that offer, the sultan promises that "[r]ede gold schal be [his] mede" (253) if Isumbras will serve as his knight. Isumbras staunchly declares that he will never "fosake [his] lay," even if rejecting the sultan's offer of employment means that his family will have to starve. Isumbras's response to the second offer uses the sanctity of his marriage

to express a similar sentiment, announcing his fidelity to Christian marriage despite the generous terms of the sultan's offer:

Ser Ysumbras sayde, "Nay!  
 My wyff I wole nought selle away,  
 Though ye me for her sloo.  
 I weddyd her in Goddys lay  
 To holde here to myn endyng day,  
 Bothe for wele or woo." (280–5)

The response affirms marriage as a sacred institution in which commercial interests should not intervene. In these lines, Isumbras echoes the English Sarum rite for marriage, which "produce[d] that masterpiece of medieval vernacular liturgy, the marriage vow" (Stevenson 83). By highlighting the fact that their marriage is sealed "in Goddys lay" and repeating elements of the marriage vow that would have been spoken in English in a public Christian ceremony, Isumbras announces his allegiance to a model of marriage that had been shaped by the Church and opposes the sultan's commercial valuation of marriage. Not only does he affirm his love for his wife in choosing death over parting with her, he confirms the fact that marriage represents and stabilizes Christian ideology. Marriage has this ideological force partly because of its sacramental status. Even though Isumbras's penitential journey is conducted without institutional order or sanction, marriage comes to represent the abiding influence of insitutionalized Christianity in his actions. Like the other sacraments of the Church, such as baptism and the Eucharist which feature as points of religious contestation and miracles in romance as

well as other Middle English texts,<sup>19</sup> marriage becomes an important symbolic marker of the Church's power within the narrative. Because one of the important meanings that gave marriage its sacramental status was the fact that it figured the union between Christ and the Church (Heany 6), Isumbras's fidelity to marriage also represents his loyalty of the Church, despite being dispossessed from civilization and alienated from institutional structures.

By disregarding Isumbras's defence of his marriage vows and taking his wife despite Isumbras's protestations, the sultan interferes with more than Isumbras's family life. As Fowler puts it, the sultan commits the crime of *raptus*, the unlawful act of abduction through "force rather than by consent" (108) and violates the principles central to Christian marriage. In showing how Isumbras's marriage vows have been ignored by the sultan, the romance "underwrite[s] the later war that will be waged by Isumbras for the heathen culture's dispossession and forcible conversion. The vow is designed to extinguish any right to consent to rule or religion we might accord the Saracens" (Fowler 111). The romance thus uses the marriage as a symbol of Christian values and ideas that must be protected against non-Christian Others. Marriage becomes the tangible, if simplistic, rallying point around which ideas about the superiority of Christian morality coalesce. This theme resurfaces later on in the narrative, in a sequence that breaks the pattern of Isumbras's individual penitential journey. Here, Isumbras rides out as a knight who fights on behalf of a Christian king against the sultan who has made war against the Christians for seven years, thereby gaining revenge by slaying the sultan and securing a

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<sup>19</sup> Baptism features in many romances that feature a conversion narrative, with the baptism scenes in *The King of Tars* and *Sultan of Babylon* being amongst the most memorable moments of Middle English literature. The Eucharist features in spectacular fashion in *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*.

great victory for Christianity. Further, the triumph of marriage as a Christian institution is evident in the way that Isumbras's wife's sexual fidelity is protected by the narrative as she is deputized to govern the lands where the sultan is not physically present, thus never needing to consummate her marriage to him. This narrative device stands at odds with the physical attraction that causes the sultan to desire her for his queen in the first place, and indicates the lengths to which the romance goes to protect the sanctity of Christian marriage.

The romance's affirmation of Christian marriage is underscored by the reunion between Isumbras and his wife. On learning their true identities, the couple hold a marriage feast that doubly functions as the occasion to crown Isumbras as king:

Aythir off hem was ful fayn,  
 No lenger thenne cowde they layn:  
 To knyghtes they it tolde.  
 A ryche brydale dede they bede,  
 Ryche and pore thedyr yede,  
 Welcome who so wolde.  
 They corownyd Ser Ysumbras ryght  
 And made hym kyng, that noble knyght,  
 For he was stout and bolde. (679–87)

The unusual staging of a second marriage ceremony indicates how the romance conceives of the husband–wife relationship, in a performative gesture that is unique to *Sir*

*Isumbras*.<sup>20</sup> A "ryche brydale" has to be re-staged because, despite Isumbras's fidelity to his marriage vows, the marriage has been violated by the sultan's forcible abduction of the queen. However, more central to the narrative at this point is the fact that their marriage must take place as a public ceremony. It cannot remain a secret in this new kingdom, for without public ratification, the marriage is devoid of the force that makes it a powerful social institution. The importance of this is evident in how the news is first revealed to the queen's knights, and then extended outward in the bridal feast where all of the people, regardless of their status, are invited. Through celebrating the marriage in this public manner, Isumbras the humble pilgrim is transformed into a king. Marriage as a public institution, celebrates the affection and fidelity between the couple while also functioning as a tool for conferring the authority Isumbras needs to govern this new kingdom.

*Sir Isumbras* thus shows how consensual marriage can be employed as a powerful weapon in the arsenal of Christian ideology because it is conceived as a sacramental bond. At the same time, even if the romance warns against the mercenary use of the marriage contract of further economic or political interests through Isumbras's coronation, it shows that these elements can be reconciled with the love and companionship that characterize marriages based on consent and affection.

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<sup>20</sup> While numerous husbands and wives are reunited after long periods apart in romance (for instance, Arduus and Margaret in *Sir Tryamour*, Constance and Alla in "The Man of Law's Tale," and Apollonius and his wife in Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre"), no other narrative, stages a second ceremony for the re-united couple.

## VI. Bonds of Affect and Experience: Parents and Children

In this final section, I turn to the affective relationships between parents and their children in these romances. The crucial shift in how parent–child relations were conceived by the late medieval period involves the way children were no longer merely thought of as objects to extend one's lineage. Instead, representing the affective relations between children and parents becomes more common and greater emphasis is placed on the idea of the family as the place of nurture and care for children. Yet, if the focus on representing affective bonds shifts attention away from dynastic and lineal concerns, these romances still raise the all-important question of succession. However, they incorporate the affective bond between parents and children into dynastic concerns by naturalizing the connection such that it replaces the blood tie as the basis for securing an inheritance and extending one's lineage. As such, these romances played a part in creating and sustaining a discourse of parent–child affect such that the bourgeois–gentry class could displace nobility of blood as the major rationale for dynastic thinking within their commercial and political spheres of influence.

The events involving the children in the romance confirm the affective bonds between parents and children and also indicate how the affective bonds must be managed so that they do not jeopardize one's spiritual state. For Isumbras and his wife, the trauma of losing their children is a crucial part of the suffering that they must experience. When the older sons are taken by the lion and leopard, the affective bonds between the mother and her child are shown in the depth of her grief:

The lady cryde and grette ful ille  
 And thoughte hereselve for to spylle

On londe ther sche lay.  
 The knyght bad the lady, "Be stulle  
 And thanke we God of His wille,"  
 Thus thenne gan he say. (181–6)

The affective bond between the mother and her children takes on a primal quality insofar as her own existence is threatened by their loss. The loss of the children threatens the purpose of the penance, for there can be no redemption of the family if their grief prevents them from continuing on their journey. In this sense, while the romance shows the strong affective bonds between parent and child as the natural state of affairs, Isumbras's stoic warning also indicates that these bonds could be an impediment to the individual's spiritual growth.

Isumbras's own ability to master his affection for his children is tested when his youngest son is taken from him by a unicorn. With the loss of his last remaining child, the romance shows that Isumbras experiences the greatest of sorrow that he has ever felt—"Offte was hym wele and woo / But never so sory as he was thoo"(364–5)—and this can be regarded as the worst moment of his suffering. Isumbras's redemption, however, also begins here. Bereft of the final remaining member of his family, he finally speaks to God in direct address:

He sayde: "Lord, ful woo is me,  
 I have lost wyff and my children three.  
 Now am I lefte alone.  
 Jesu that weredest in hevene coroun  
 Wysse me the way to sum toun,

Al amis am I gone." (367–72)

Prior to this moment, his words about giving thanks to God and trusting in God's provision have been directed at instructing his family members in the right attitudes they should have in the face of suffering. In contrast to those moments where Isumbras has to give direction to this family, he now literally takes direction from God as he asks God for his steps to be directed for he is now "[a]l amis." The direct plea to God, coming so late in the narrative, suggests that even though Isumbras begins his penitential journey much earlier, it is only when he is stripped of his entire family that he can truly begin the road to redemption. In this sense, there is a measure of ambivalence regarding how the affective relations between parents and children are depicted. While they feature as a natural element in the parent–child relationship and the affect invested in the relationship comes under testing as well, the romance also warns against excessive or uncontrolled experience of affect in the relationship between parent and child. Even so, the restoration of all three sons at the end of the romance is a ratification of the close bonds between children and parents rather than a repudiation of them.

In *Sir Cleges*, close bonds between the parents and children also exist, even if they are not put on such dramatic display. However, they do not distract the individual's redemptive process as they threaten to do in *Sir Isumbras*. This has to do, in part, with the nature of the trial in *Sir Cleges*. Unlike Isumbras, Cleges does not have to endure an extended period of testing or penance. Though his trust in God is tested during the period of poverty, his children are not taken away from him. In fact, like his wife, Clarys, his children play a role in preventing Cleges from falling into the sin of despair. After Cleges's first bout of despair and Clarys's warning against making a complaint against

God, Cleges manages to pull himself together and "thei wesch and went to mete / With sych god as thei myght gete" (154–5). The meal, a simple affair, in contrast to the extravagant celebrations that they customarily have, is a quiet statement regarding the value of family-life in restoring one's happiness:

When thei had ete, the soth to sey,  
 With myrth thei drofe the dey away,  
 The best wey that they myght.  
 With ther chylder pley thei dyde  
 And after evensong went to bede  
 At serteyn of the nyght. (157–62)

Hudson comments that the picture of Cleges playing with his children, "an altogether rare scene in medieval poetry," is "an attempt to maintain emotional equilibrium in the face of profound loss" (*Four* 370). In this poignant scene, the time that Cleges spends with his children substitutes for the grand feast that he has held every year. Stripped of the social standing that they would derive from holding such a lavish event, the routines of ordinary life now lift their spirits. In this sense, *Sir Cleges* explores the power of idealizing the moments of family intimacy, creating a private space that helps Cleges recuperate from the very public loss of wealth and status that he has experienced. The private relations between family members take over in shaping Cleges's identity.

Being surrounded by the family, both his wife and children, is the factor that sustains Cleges's spirits. The poem cautions against the individual's absolute isolation from social contact, for each time that he is alone, Cleges begins to fall into despair. Instead, the family becomes an intermediate point where Cleges can withdraw from

public life while remaining emotionally and intellectually connected to the world. After the family returns from church on Christmas morning, he is confident that "his sorow [is] overgon" (182) and he sends his wife and children away: "He made hys wyfe before hym gon / And hys chylder everychon" (184–5). While he is alone, he comes upon the miraculous cherries and begins to have doubts about what they signify, assuming the worst by thinking that they portend more suffering to be visited upon the family. After Clarys offers the alternative interpretation of the cherries and convinces Cleges to take a basket to Uther Pengdragon, she also suggests that Cleges not make the journey alone. Instead, she sends their eldest son with Cleges, telling him, "Take up this pannyere gladly / And bere it at thy bake esyly / After thi fader so fre" (244–6). While the ostensible purpose of the son's journeying to Cardiff with Cleges is so that he may do the physical labor of carrying the cherries, the companionship provided by the child can be seen as built into Clarys's plans, given Cleges's propensity to fall into despair while he is by himself. While the romance shows that it is Cleges who is responsible for winning the day by working out how he may mete out punishment on the corrupt members of the king's household, his journey out of sorrow is constantly supported by the presence of his children. The romance indicates that the individual is thus most effective and successful when he is emotionally connected to members of his family.

*Sir Tryamour* develops the parent–child relationship more fully than the other two romances. While one branch of Tryamour's quest involves finding out who his father is and reuniting with him, the romance also depicts the affective relations between Tryamour and his mother quite fully. This special bond between Margaret and Tryamour begins from the moment of his birth in the forest. With the knight Roger killed, Margaret

is alone in the forest and tormented by labor pains; indeed, she begins the birthing process "wyth sorowe ynogh" (409). Once the child is born, however, her spirits are lifted:

A feyre sone had sche borne,  
 When sche herde the chylde crye hur befor  
 Hyt comfortyd hur full swythe;  
 So when sche hurselpe myght styr,  
 Sche toke up hur sone to hur  
 And lapped hyt full lythe. (412–7)

While these lines primarily refer to the physical relief that comes after she successfully gives birth, they also indicate that the child comforts Margaret in her time of trouble. The affective bond is communicated in the way the tail-rhyme ("Hyt comfortyd hur full swythe ... / And lapped hyt full lythe") creates the idea that Margaret is responding to the comfort that the child brings by holding it close to her and protecting it, despite her vulnerability in the wilderness of the forest.

The bond between Margaret and Tryamour develops more fully over the course of the romance. Even though they are situated within Barnard's prosperous household, Margaret continues to be personally involved in raising and caring for Tryamour. Specifically, Margaret assumes the role of a tutor: "Sche techyd hur sone for to wyrke, / And taght hym evyr newe" (464–5). The narrative states that this has a positive effect, for as Tryamour "dwelleth hur wyth," he grows "mekyll of boon and lyth / And feyre of hyde and hewe" (466–8), replete with the physical features that the chivalric hero conventionally possesses. The reciprocal closeness between mother and child is shown

in Tryamour's dependence on his mother for support at crucial moments in his development and adventures. Before he fights his first tournament, he goes to Barnard to make the practical arrangements of borrowing armor and weapons, then goes to his mother before the joust begins and "prey[s] hur of hur blessinge" (705). Tryamour's growing independence is also shown in this scene because his mother would rather he remain with her—"Sche wolde have had hym at home fayne" (706)—but nothing she says can keep him from participating in the tournament.

However, Tryamour does not assert this newfound independence from his mother in a way that severs the mother–son bond. After the tournament, Tryamour is wounded in a surprise attack by James, the son of the German emperor. Even though he is badly wounded, he does not do the logical thing and stay with Ardus until his wounds are healed. Instead, he returns to Barnard's household and his mother in order that his injuries be tended to in his mother's presence:

That lady sorowed in hur wede  
 When sche sawe hur sone blede,  
 That all wan was hur blee and hur blode.  
 Tryamowre kyssed hys modur in hye  
 And seyde, "Modur, let be yowre crye;  
 Me eylyth nothyng but gode."  
 A leche was sent aftur in that stownde  
 For to serche the chydys wounde  
 And for to stawnche the chydys blode.  
 Tryamowre he undurtoke belyve

To save hym upon hys lyfe,  
 Then mendyd hys modurs mode. (904–15)

The fact that his mother does not have the expertise to heal him and must send for a physician underscores the fact that Tryamour makes the journey home for his mother's companionship rather than for any practical help that she can offer. The passage's emphasis on Margaret's alarm at the sight of her wounded son suggests that Tryamour knows that his mother would worry for him. The episode also gains importance from the fact that it is a significant narrative detour that disrupts the economy of the story. In returning to his mother, Tryamour parts company from Ardus, but then returns to Ardus's court in the next stage of the narrative. In this moment of crisis, the parent–child bond is shown to be intimate and symbiotic: mother and son depend on each other at a very instinctual level.

Despite the importance of the parent–child relationship in the romance, Margaret refrains from revealing his father's identity to Tryamour until the very end. Margaret's hesitation in making this information known to Tryamour involves anxieties about the best way to go about securing an inheritance for her son. Even though she has nothing to offer to Tryamour in the form of inheritable land or property—they have subsisted thus far on the good graces of Sir Barnard—Margaret does not give Tryamour any inkling that he is the true, if dispossessed, heir to the crown of Aragon. It seems that Margaret keeps this knowledge from Tryamour because she thinks that it will be a distraction for Tryamour, who has proven his own mettle by winning the right to marry Helen and rule Hungary. Margaret's concern is that premature knowledge of who his father is will lead

Tryamour on a futile quest to regain his lost inheritance, and distract him from securing his claim as the ruler of Hungary, which he has already won through the tournament.

Tryamour's interest in the matter first arises after he has impressed Helen in the tournament and has recuperated from his wounds in Barnard's household. He asks Margaret who his father is, explaining, "Wyste Y who my fadur were, / The lasse were my care!" (1040–1). Given that he has just been healed from terrible wounds, this interest suggests that his encounter with death has piqued his interest in his own identity and origins. However, Margaret is not forthcoming with an answer, even though she is portrayed throughout as a rather indulgent mother. Instead, she makes her only demand of Tryamour in the romance and outlines a condition that Tryamour must fulfill before she will give him the information he seeks:

"Sone," sche seyde, "wele schalt thou wytt

When thou haste done that thou hett,

Be God that for us dye can!"

"Modur," he seyde, "yf ye wyll soo,

Have gode day, for Y wyll goo

And speke wyth my lemman." (1042–7)

Margaret's response may well be read as enigmatic, instead of conditional. The line "wele schalt thou wytt / When thou haste done that thou hett" could refer to a general sense that once Tryamour has fulfilled his destiny, knowledge of his father will be apparent to him. However, given the specificity of what Tryamour must do—assume the throne of Hungary that he has won by marrying Helen—interpreting this as a condition is more appropriate. This is confirmed by the fact that Tryamour understands her words as

such and renews his request for knowledge of his father's identity after he has secured Helen's hand in marriage:

Now Y wolde my fadur kenne,  
 For now have we well spedd!  
 Telle me now, modur free,  
 Who ys my fadur and what hyt hee?  
 For nothyng be ye adredd. (1592–6)

Margaret is now willing to tell him that Arduis is his father because Tryamour's status and wealth no longer hang in the balance. Tryamour has established an inheritance for himself by proving his own ability and prowess and there would be little incentive for him to challenge Arduis for his right to the throne of Aragon. Thus, because Tryamour is now recognized as possessing authority in his own right, there is no longer any fear that Arduis might still pose a threat to their safety. As such, even if familial relations in *Sir Tryamour* concentrate on portraying the affective relationship between a mother and her child, the romance still manages to address itself to dynastic concerns through the affective and personal nature of that relationship. However, these dynastic ambitions are realized outside the boundaries of patrilineal inheritance, at least before the ultimate scene of recognition and resolution, because Tryamour's position as a dispossessed heir means that he has to secure his future by an alternate route. The way that the family and individual are involved in this solution creates an all-encompassing, if doubled, response to the question of the relationship between inheritance and individual merit.

Given their focus on establishing the horizontal ties amongst immediate family members, the manner in which dynastic ambitions are fulfilled in the romances is a

significant measure of how these romances put the affective relationship between parents and children to use. Despite the emphasis on the immediate family and spousal relations, these romances affirm the centrality of succession in the way that they end, but substitute its basis in blood with the shared experiences and affect between parents and children. This shift in the principle for inheritance could represent a practical compromise for the bourgeois-gentry, who were caught up in thinking about extending their family lines while not sharing the same degree of exclusiveness and privilege as their social superiors. In the dynastic logic of these romances, the rewards of ambition and service become transferable because children either share in the sufferings of the protagonist or have proven themselves worthy by performing deeds of arms with, or on behalf of, their parents. The affective and experiential connection between parents and children dramatized by these romances shapes the dynastic fantasies of the bourgeois-gentry.

Demonstrating this shift is *Sir Tryamour*, which cautions against thinking about lineage in narrow terms. If Ardu's desire to establish an heir of blood for his kingdom originates the tragedy in the romance, his decision to abandon this narrow model for succession marks the point where his fortunes take a turn for the better. When Aragon is threatened by Moradas, Tryamour agrees to fight on Ardu's behalf. This offer on Tryamour's part wins Ardu's admiration and gratitude, which are expressed in his response: "The kyng kyste hym and seyde hym full feyre, / 'Tryamowre, Y make the myn heyre, / And for me thou schalt fyght!" (1192-4). This offer is not merely made to encourage Tryamour's martial spirits. After Tryamour defeats Moradas, Ardu makes good on his pledge: "The Kyng profurd hym full feyre / 'Tryamowre, Y make the myn heyre, / Of londe and of lefe" (1267-9). Even though Tryamour rejects the offer, Ardu's

decision to make Tryamour his heir at this point, when he does not know that Tryamour is his son, is significant. In doing so, Arduš moves away from viewing inheritance as purely an extension of his bloodline. Instead, he adopts a model of inheritance that rewards skill and promotes social mobility. Tryamour deserves to be his heir because of his courage and skill in defeating Moradas and because proffering his aid causes an emotional bond between Arduš and himself to be formed. At the same time this connection bolsters the fact that Tryamour is already Arduš's "natural" heir by blood: that Tryamour and Arduš share this bond is only fitting because they are already linked biologically. To the reader, who already knows about the father–son bond while this is happening, this sends the message that the emotional connection based on Tryamour's courage and skill is as important as the kinship that exists between the two to restore him as Arduš's successor.

Despite this shift on Arduš's part, the romance neatly combines the extension of lineage through blood and individual merit when it ends by restoring to Tryamour his patrilineal inheritance. However, it is significant that Tryamour does not take up the throne of Aragon for himself. Instead, he stays to rule Hungary with Helen, privileging the kingdom that he wins solely by the strength of arms rather than the one partially inherited by blood. Instead, after Arduš's death, the crown passes on to Tryamour's younger son:

Kyng Tryamowre and hys qwene,

Mekyll joye was them betwene;

Man chylder had they twoo. ...

Hys yongyst sone then ordeygned hee

Aftur hys fadur kynge to bee,

God grawnt hym wele to rejoyse! (1705–13)

The threat of being left without an heir, in a manner that would replicate Arthus and Margaret's situation at the beginning of the romance, is remedied by Tryamor's fathering two sons. At the same time, the danger of competition between siblings for power is eradicated in the production of just the right number of sons to inherit the thrones of Hungary and Aragon. Thus, while the romance explores how the bond between individuals created through affect and experience restores order to troubled lines of succession, the fantasy of perfect succession and inheritance through blood relations continues to be emphasized.

A similar arrangement occurs at the end of *Sir Isumbras*, indicating the importance of distributing lands to all the sons such that no one is left either without an inheritance or with an inferior share of territory. After Isumbras and his three sons defeat the great host of Saracens, the narrative states that they conquer three more kingdoms in quick succession:

Thenne three londes gunne they wyne

And crystenyd alle that was therinne,

In romaunse as men rede.

Thenne was the kyng Ser Ysumbras

Off more welthe thenne evere he was,

Thre londes hadde he thare.

Everylkon he gaf a land

And corownyd hem with hys owne hand,

Whedyr so they wolden fare. (757–65)

As with *Sir Tryamour*, the kingdom is not divided, but each son is made a ruler in his own right. In this manner, the shared experience of father and sons through the military campaign becomes the basis for this inheritance. The unspecified setting of the final section of *Sir Isumbras*—we only know that these are lands in the East held by Saracens—creates an amorphous and malleable space where the fantasies of dynasty and lineage can be extended at will by the concerted actions of the family unit.

In comparison to these endings that extend the family's holdings, the disbursement of honors and riches in *Sir Cleges* is more muted. Unlike *Isumbras*, *Cleges* and his family are kept within a structure that retains Uther Pendragon at its head: the knight regains his wealth as he is given the castle of Cardiff and his son is made a squire by the king. As a sign that *Cleges* has learned how to manage resources through his experience of poverty, the romance also adds that the king eventually makes *Cleges* "stuerd / Of all hys londys afterwerd, / Off water, lond and frythe" (547–9). In this manner, the narrative still concludes by showing that *Cleges's* family will be well provided for in the future. In adding that *Cleges's* son is made a squire, the romance includes the detail that this comes "[w]ith a hundryth pownd of rente" (555). Further, as he becomes rich as the king's steward, *Cleges* himself has the power to be a patron and furthers the economic interests of his extended family as well: "He vansyd hys kynne, mour and les" (569). Even though the family does not gain the same degree of independence as in the dynastic fantasies of *Sir Tryamour* and *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Cleges* restores a family that has fallen on hard times to the inner circle of aristocratic privilege. This hope of advancing the family's interests by gaining royal favor may indeed have

been a more resonant fantasy for the bourgeois–gentry class than the dynastic endings of the other romances. For them, *Sir Cleges* offers the hope that service in or commercial transactions on the behalf of royal or aristocratic households could promote or restore a family's fortunes. In doing so, *Sir Cleges* embraces a conservative social structure and remains satisfied with how wealth and status are disseminated through the hierarchical chain. Cleges's wife and son, who provide both practical and affective support, reap the rewards along with Cleges. The family's shared experience of poverty becomes the justification for their new wealth.

In exploring how the family is positioned in these dynastic endings that modify the basis of inheritance and succession, the romances offer a fantasy about patrilineal inheritance based on primogeniture for the bourgeois–gentry class. The new dynastic possibilities created would have appealed to this class precisely because the realities for familial inheritance for this group would not have matched the scope of what is presented in these romances. This would have been especially true for the segment of this class made up by urban merchants. For merchants, the unique situation in England, and in London in particular, re-circulated wealth in such a manner that long patrilineal lines were not established by merchant families because single family lines would not accumulate wealth over a long period of time (Hanawalt, *Wealth* 96–109).<sup>21</sup> As such, the dynastic

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<sup>21</sup> Barbara Hanawalt observes that "London seemed to have more horizontal social ties than the vertical ones that were common in Venice, Florence, and Ghent" (*Wealth* 96). She offers two explanations as to why this was the case. First, "London's laws were generous with daughters, wives, and widows, with the result that a significant amount of London's real estate and liquid wealth passed through the hands of women." Second, the strong guild structure meant that widows would often marry "within the same guild" in order that capital was kept within the guild rather than transferred to another kinsperson who might not be part of the guild (*Wealth* 96).

possibilities offered by these romances would have appealed to this group in depicting how the ideal family would be able to preserve and extend one's legacy in the face of socio-economic realities. These dynastic endings offer a fiction of stability and permanence that would have reinforced male authority over the family, regardless of the realities of the inheritance situation, and thus would have appealed as a patriarchal fiction for this class.

*Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Tryamour*, and *Sir Cleges* each promote the ideals of marriage and family that proceed from ecclesiastical teaching on marriage. At the same time, the romances dramatize the tensions between these ideals and more traditional ideas about the family that constituted the realities of family life for the bourgeois-gentry. While the depiction of marriage and family in the romances provides the bourgeois-gentry a means of consolidating group identity that moves beyond the orbit of aristocratic or clerical definitions of proper living, there is no absolute break from more conservative elements of family life involving the extended household, marriage alliances, procreation, and concerns about lineage and inheritance. Instead, the tensions inherent in these presentations of the family also indicate how they play a disciplinary role in creating ideals that will hold members of the class accountable to social expectations that are in concert with the economic and social agendas of this group. As these romances show, the subversive potential of identities within marriage and families that afford the bourgeois-gentry ways of resisting more traditional forms of social power is thus tempered by its regulatory effect.

**Chapter Two: Dead Fathers, Returning Sons: Surrogate Fatherhood in *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, and *Bevis of Hampton***

**I. Introduction: Fathers and Sons in Romance**

*Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, and *Bevis of Hampton* are romances that investigate how heirs are dispossessed and then return to claim their inheritance. Most critics have studied how the process of exile and return signals the maturity and growth of the protagonists. However, most view this movement as an individual venture; indeed, bereft of a natural family by natural causes, invading pagans, or unscrupulous parents, these heroes seem to find their way back to their inheritance through individual skill, merit, and luck.

However, I aim to show that throughout this process of maturation, each protagonist is shaped by his relationships with older and more established male figures who stand in as surrogate fathers. These father figures are multiple and temporary, and neither are the alliances long-lasting nor is the help rendered absolutely definitive in ensuring the protagonists' success. This complicates general critical opinion by showing that these protagonists do not become authoritative rulers in a progressive, linear manner. Instead, I propose that establishing one's claim on an inheritance, even if it is assured by birth and blood, is not an easy process in these romances, but one that requires multiple alliances and associations. Further, the complicated and contradictory alliances that are formed are validated not only because they enable the protagonists to regain their inheritances, but also because these alliances are couched in terms of surrogate father-son relationships. In effect, these romances are also about restoring authority to father

figures in general and enabling the protagonists to become father figures in their own right through clever alliance making. Instead of viewing the movement to maturity in these romances as a mere proving ground that enables the protagonists to exhibit their noble qualities through action, the transformations enacted through the surrogate father relationships enable a movement towards establishing meaning and authority through symbolic means, as opposed to individual merit or action. At the end of the romances, a rhetorically constructed common realm that is held together by strong feudal ties is regarded as the best evidence of successful and benign paternal authority.

In this light, Freud's speculations about the beginnings of culture and civilization, and the role that father–son relationships play in shaping authority and power within the group provide a useful analogy for thinking about how Havelok, Horn, and Bevis consolidate power through associations with surrogate father figures and eventually become authority figures themselves. To this end, I take up Freud's early ideas about guilt and the ambiguity of the father–son relationship found in *Totem and Taboo* as well as the later refinements found in *Moses and Monotheism*. While Freud may have considered his ideas about the origins of civilization to be definitive statements on the subject, my readings avoid using his account as if it were verifiable historical or anthropological fact. Instead, I show that there is value in thinking along Freudian lines because he shows how the private dramas of the father–son relationship resonate with cultural, and ultimately political concerns; a parallel that illuminates how these romances may have reflected the concerns of an English ruling elite in the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth century.

Thus, reading with an eye towards history, I consider the formative years (1258–63) of Edward I's experiences with power as well as the baronial crisis of 1297. From a perspective that leans more heavily on social history, the system of wardships and surrogate parenting that solidified economic and political networks amongst the ruling classes also provides a relevant context as it shows how surrogate father–child relationships would have resonated with the social concerns of the ruling elite. Further, the system of wardship in England was a microcosm of all feudal relationships because lands were ultimately held in tenure through royal grants.

Noël James Menuge has shown that wardship is an important context for a number of Middle English romances. In the four romances that she studies—*Bevis of Hampton*, *Havelok the Dane*, *William of Palerne*, and *Gamelyn*—she finds features of wardship that would resonate with audiences of these romances. These involve the "legal status [of wards], waste [of a ward's inheritance], disparagement, possible de facto guardianship, and the suitability of kin as carers" (14). Menuge's study defines wardship very strictly, looking for elements in romances that correspond directly to the social institution.<sup>22</sup> Extending Menuge's work, I use a looser idea of wardship, which involves guardianship, not necessarily formalized or instituted, by an older person, who usually is

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<sup>22</sup> Nicholas Orme provides a succinct overview of the institution of wardship:

Wardship arose when a member of the aristocracy who held his land by feudal tenure died while his eldest son, or his daughter if he had no son, was under the age of majority. The care of his land and children immediately returned to the hands of his superior feudal lord, who might be variously an abbey a bishop, a lay magnate or the king. The children were taken away from their own family and brought up by the lord, who was free to grant or sell their custody to someone else, in which case they were brought up by that person. Wardship endured until the eldest son attained the age of 21 or until the daughter was married, the marriage lying also in the power of the custodian. (46)

a father figure to the young protagonist. In broadening the notion of wardship, my readings show how the anxieties and concerns that governed the narrowly defined social institution manifested themselves in romance, and how this constituted both a sense of dislocation and re-constitution of paternal authority.

Two elements of wardship are relevant to the romances and the political context of Edward's reign. First, the institution of wardship was required because the feudal service tenants owed their lords for the land they held ultimately included military service. If an heir had yet to reach his majority and thus was unable to render the military service required in pledging fealty, a guardian would hold his lands in trust for him until he could assume his role in the feudal structure (Menuge 1). This is relevant to the romances because they each feature protagonists who must mature into warrior knights before becoming effective within the feudal structure. Second, the rights guardians possessed over the lands they held in wardship as well as the rights to a ward's marriage meant that guardianship could be used for political and economic alliances. Wardship was thus a technology of social control that acted in tension against the rising emphasis on the importance of natural affective bond between parents and their biological children. As such an instrument of social ordering, the bureaucratic nature of wardship ensured that the affect presumed to exist between parent, usually the widowed mother, and child was subordinated to the judicious or advantageous management of an inheritance. The wardships that individuals possessed could also be granted as favors and traded like commodities. Indeed, one of the complaints against Henry III in 1258 was that he showed favoritism unbecoming a monarch by granting a disproportionate number of wardships to courtly factions related to him by marriage (Waugh 243–43). Since

wardships came with the use of the ward's land as well as the rights to his or her marriage, wardships were important for securing social advancement and political alliances. Although this system of wardship appears to make wards passive subjects, the romances imagine a more active role for wards, who use the institution to empower themselves. Through their relations with surrogate fathers, the protagonists of the romances gain agency in military prowess and alliance building.

## **II. Three Deaths of the Father**

The narratives of *Havelok*, *Horn*, and *Bevis* are underwritten by the desire for revenge even if avenging their fathers' deaths does not exclusively drive the plot of each romance. Still, the death of the biological father forms the starting point of each romance and they tacitly imply that the hero only comes into full possession of the rights to land and title that were his by birth by avenging the father's death. These deaths, which come within the opening lines of each romance, also have an idealizing effect. Dead fathers become figures that are to be emulated and despite their absence, they shape the father-son relationship in important ways.

The opening of *Havelok the Dane* makes this clear. The parallel deaths of Athelwold (Goldeboru's father) and Birkabeyn (Havelok's father) are the occasion to memorialize their benevolent and successful reigns over England and Denmark. As Robert Rouse argues, the opening of the romance registers nostalgia for a time when the rule of law guided the exercise of absolute power, for a "utopian age of universal application of law" (72). The fantasy of the perfect realm is more evident in the description of England under Athelwold's reign. For instance, his rule is characterized by

its universal appeal to all his subjects, who appreciate the laws that he makes and upholds:

Hym lovede yung, him lovede holde—  
 Erl and barun, dreng and thayn,  
 Knict, bondeman, and swain,  
 Wydues, maydnes, prestes and clerkes,  
 And al for hise gode werkes. (30–4)<sup>23</sup>

The ideological obfuscation involved in describing Athelwold's reign in extremely benevolent terms has not escaped comment by critics. Ananya Kabir observes that even though Athelwold's reign is judged to be benign, peace and order in the kingdom are achieved through "methods [that would] fit comfortably within a Foucauldian paradigm of medieval 'discipline and punish'; outlaws and thieves are bound and hung from gallows, and would-be rapists of widows and maidens are fettered and promptly castrated" (40). The process of memorializing Athelwold's reign positively by containing these acts of judicial violence within the formulation "hise gode werkes" indicates how idealizing the dead father manages to naturalize the ideological bias which favors the inherited right to rule. In fact, as far as narrative detail is concerned, the 'evil' reign of the steward Godrich, which causes "al Engelond" to be "of him adrad" (278), is far less violent:

Schireves he sette, bedels, and greyves,  
 Grith sergeans with longe gleyves,  
 To yemen wilde wodes and pathes

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<sup>23</sup> Citations of *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, and *Bevis of Hampton* are to editions of the works collected in *Four Romances of England*, edited by Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury.

Fro wicke men that wolde don scathes. (266–9)

The narrative sleight of hand that idealizes Athelwold's reign achieves a compound effect through the parallelism of the narrative. The parallel structure, which first describes Athelwold's reign and death quite fully and then proceeds to outline Birkabeyn's rule and demise, creates the impression that the political climate in Denmark is similar to the English situation. In actuality, nothing substantive is offered as evidence of Birkabeyn's good rule over Denmark, even though the parallel implies it. Athelwold's death, paired with Birkabeyn's, idealizes the latter and his reign. This parallel enables the romance to associate Havelok's future reign over England with Athelwold's rule as well, even though he only inherits the crown of England through marriage to Goldeboru. But Havelok does not rely on this marital connection alone to legitimize his future reign as an English king. In memorializing Birkabeyn while it idealizes Athelwold, the romance gives Havelok an English connection as well. Through the associations created by the deaths of the kings, Havelok is placed in relation to the first non-biological father figure that has a positive impact on his right to rule in the person of Athelwold.<sup>24</sup> This is a key narrative association because it allows Havelok to accrue legitimacy to rule over England when he essentially enters the country as a Danish invader at the end of the romance.

By idealizing the figures of Athelwold and Birkabeyn, the romance ensures that Havelok's and Goldeboru's return to power at the end is not merely a matter of taking

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<sup>24</sup> While I confine my observations to how the parallel deaths create this connection, other critics have observed how the romance builds the parallels between Athelwold and Havelok. David Staines, for instance, notes the parallel between their reigns, observing that "like Athelwold, Havelok commands the homage of all classes" (611). Michael Faletra argues that the reigns of Athelwold and Havelok "fram[e the] narrative with two golden ages in order to naturalize the intertwined ideas of the divine right of kings and national identity" (360).

personal revenge on Godard and Godrich. Because Godard and Godrich do not honor the wishes of the deceased king-fathers who attain the status of idealized father figures of their respective families and the kingdoms, Havelok and Goldeboru act as if they are avenging wrongs done against their fathers and the nation. This is true even though both men die of natural causes and do not come to the violent and degrading ends that the fathers in *King Horn* and *Bevis of Hampton* suffer. Thus, even though the fathers in *Havelok the Dane* are accorded "good" deaths—the proper death rites are performed for them and they each manage to convene a gathering of the ruling class to designate their heirs and specify their plans for succession—it is as if they are 'murdered' by Godard and Godrich because the faithless stewards do not honor their wishes and thereby preserve their legacy. The extremely violent punishments meted out to Godard and Godrich at the end of the romance are a form of vengeance carried out by the rulers' biological children as well as the body politic of England and Denmark.

In contrast to the "good" deaths of Athelwold and Birkabeyn, Horn's father, Murry meets with a violent end at the hands of Saracen invaders, a death that shapes Horn's desire for revenge and his subsequent encounters with his foes in specific ways. Unlike *Havelok*, *King Horn* barely mentions what Murry's rule as king is like, and his battle against the Saracens becomes the occasion when he is idealized as ruler and father figure. When he encounters the Saracens by the sea, they make plain their intention to slay "[t]hy lond folk ... / ... alle that Crist luveth upon" (47–48). Despite being vastly outnumbered, Murry fights the Saracens, in defence of his land as well as Christianity. Significantly, after the Saracens kill Murry, no other resistance is offered by the inhabitants of Suddene: the Saracens slaughter them at will and convert the nation to their

religion. Because of this, Murry gains heroic status despite his failure to fend off the Saracens because he is, after all, the sole resistor of the Saracen onslaught. Murry's death transforms him into an idealized warrior figure for Horn, and the child's actions aimed at avenging his father's death feature much more literally than in *Havelok the Dane*.

This initial battle scene is important for Horn's subsequent development as a knight and king. Not only does the desire for revenge motivate Horn but his father's battle against the Saracens also initiates a pattern for the conflicts that shape Horn's future. With the exception of his final battle against the traitorous Fikenhild, each battle that marks a new stage in Horn's growth involves Saracens who conveniently appear in the narrative. More specifically, he fights them under conditions that echo his father's battle, encountering them by the sea's edge; and, on at least one occasion, he is vastly outnumbered as his father was: "He slogh ther on haste / On hundred bi the laste" (620–1). This mirroring occurs in the stylistic details as well, for as Georgianna Ziegler points out, Horn's first conflict with Saracens uses a couplet that is identical to one found in Murry's battle (404).<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, in his second battle against Saracens, Horn specifically fights a Saracen champion to defend Christian honor as his father does, when he protests that it is not right "[a]ghen one hunde / Thre Christen men to fonde" (738), and volunteers to tackle the Saracen alone. Indeed the parallels are even registered within the narrative, as this very Saracen warrior observes that Horn's "dentes so harde" remind him of "King Murry, / That wes swithe sturdy" (870–1). In this manner, Murry's death in battle becomes a touchstone against which Horn's development as a warrior is

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<sup>25</sup> The couplet first occurs when Murry asks the Saracens to explain why they have landed in his kingdom: "He axede what hi soghte / Other to londe broghte" (43–4). The same couplet is repeated when Horn encounters his first Saracens at lines 603–4.

measured and the dead father influences how the narrative portrays Horn from beyond the grave.

The active fashioning of Horn in his father's image and Murry's enduring influence is made more apparent by the fact that Horn's mother, Goldhild, actually survives the Saracen attack but is unable to either protect or nurture Horn. Instead, she withdraws from all human contact and hides in a cave so that she can continue practicing her Christian faith:

He [Goldhild] wente ut of halle  
 Fram hire maidenen alle  
 Under a roche of stone  
 Ther heo livede alone.  
 Ther heo servede Gode  
 Aghenes the paynes forbode.  
 Ther he servede Criste  
 That no payn hit ne wiste.  
 Evre heo bad for Horn child  
 That Jesu Crist him beo myld. (75–84)

Even though Goldhild prays for Christ's protection over Horn, and in this sense contributes to his well-being, the romance does not register the efficacy of these prayers in any way. For example, Horn escapes death at the hands of the Saracens because of his "fairnesse"(91) and is inspired in battle by the ring that Rimenhild gives him. No mention is made of him being protected by Christ, much less the prayers that his mother offers in hiding.

Goldhild's inconsequential role in Horn's development is further underscored at the end of the romance. On returning to Suddene with his faithful companion Athulf, they meet a Christian knight who stands guard on behalf of his Saracen masters. This knight happens to be Athulf's father and a joyful reunion ensues between the two. However, even though Athulf tells Horn that Goldhild would rejoice to learn that her son is still alive, the romance only offers a vague description of their reunion after Horn reconquers Suddene:

Horn let wurchen  
 Chapeles and chirche;  
 He let belles ringe  
 And masses let singe.  
 He com to his moder halle  
 In a roche walle.  
 Corn he let serie,  
 And makede feste merie;  
 Murye lif he wroghte. (1393–1400)

In this sequence, his re-union with Goldhild does not take center stage in his re-establishment of Christian rule over Suddene. The couplet that describes him seeking out his mother pays lip service to the mother and child re-union that must be mentioned as an obligatory fact rather than a narrative highlight. It is not even clear whether Horn brings the corn to celebrate the kingdom's liberation with his mother. Most strikingly, the line that summarizes Horn's success in his re-conquest of the kingdom—"Murye lif he wroghte"—is a pun on his dead father's name. For all intents and purposes, Goldhild,

despite surviving the Saracen invasion, is still entombed within her rock sanctuary, whereas the dead Murry's presence is felt throughout the narrative as it shapes Horn's quest.

As with *King Horn*, the death of Bevis's father, Guy, also plays a key role in structuring the narrative as a literal revenge quest. However, in comparison to the heroic stand that Murry takes against the Saracens, Guy's death can only be described as a cold-blooded murder, for he dies as the unsuspecting victim of a murder plot concocted by his wife and executed by her lover, the German emperor. Even so, Guy's death is the most complicated portrayal of the father's death because his wife's own agenda directs the murder. The immediate reason for the murder is that his young wife desires a different kind of knight for her husband:

Me lord is olde and may nought werche,  
 Al dai him is lever at cherche,  
 Than in me bour.  
 Hadde ich itaken a yong knight,  
 That ner nought brused in werre and fight,  
 Also he is,  
 A wolde me loven dai and night,  
 Cleppen and kissen with al is might  
 And make me blis. (58–66)

Thus, Guy's death is not the result of a heroic struggle but rather the consequence of his own neglect of his wife. Of course, in the romance's misogynistic portrayal of his wife, this neglect quickly turns into the insatiable excess of dangerous female desire.

However, her complaint emphasizes that her marriage to Guy is contracted against her will by her father, the Scottish king, and that Guy is much older than she is. The marriage is thus both an alliance-building arrangement between Guy and the Scottish king and an attempt on Guy's part to produce an heir in his old age. This patriarchal marriage system, which subjugates women to its interests, comes under some measure of critique in how Guy, the aged husband, is described.

The romance portrays the elderly Guy in unflattering terms. Even though the opening lines celebrate Guy as a consummate warrior—"Never man of flesch ne felle / Nas so strong. / And so he was in ech strive" (14–6)—they are contrasted with the signs of weakness that attend his decision finally to marry in old age: "Whan he was fallen in to elde, / That he ne mighte himself welde, / He wolde a wif take" (19–21). Underscoring how old age has affected Guy's judgment, the narrator interrupts the narrative to make the sententious pronouncement that "Man, whan he falleth in to elde / Feble a wexeth and unbelde / Thourgh right resoun" (46–8). Even if Guy does not exactly come off as the *senex amans* of medieval fabliaux, his murder invokes that tradition. Confronted with his wife's feigned illness and eager to please her, Guy rides out into the forest, under her directions, to hunt for "wilde bor" (184) in the hope that such a meal will make her feel better only to fall into a trap laid by her and her lover. Menuge suggests that Bevis's mother's craving "seems to be playing with discourses of pregnancy" and that she "invites her husband to his death under the misapprehension that she is carrying his child" (115). If Menuge is right, Guy rides to his death not only uninformed about his wife's dangerous plotting but also under the false impression that he is still virile, and by extension, still

able to fulfill his young wife's sexual desires. In this respect, Guy comes close to the *senex amans* figure.

However, despite this unflattering portrayal, Guy's reputation enjoys a process of recuperation after Guy is ambushed by the treacherous emperor. In the ensuing battle, Guy manages to gain the upper hand, unseating the emperor from his horse: The emperor only manages to escape because his men, who number "ten thosent" (245), rescue him. Despite being vastly outnumbered, Guy offers outstanding resistance, managing to cut off "[t]hre hondred hevedes ... / With is brond" (248–9). In this battle, Guy is no longer a doddering old lover but a heroic knight. Indeed, when Guy is finally overpowered, the narrative of exaggerated feats of arms is transformed into a moment filled with pathos. Kneeling before the emperor, Guy offers him all his possessions, save his wife and son:

For thine men, that ichave slawe,

Have her me swerd idrawe

And al me fe:

Boute me yonge sone Bef

And me wif, that is me lef,

That let thow me! (265–70)

Ultimately willing to sacrifice all that he has, even the symbol of his knightly prowess ("Have her me swerd ..."), Guy still protects his wife and son. This idealizing depiction on the part of the narrative restores Guy as a powerful head of the family unit and a father figure that Bevis should emulate.

The romance also idealizes Guy by demonizing his wife. In addition to his heroic qualities being preserved in the description of the battle, the wrongs done against him by

uncontrollable female desire also elevate him. The clearest instance occurs when Bevis responds to his father's death with tremendous grief and vehement anger directed against his mother. He calls her "[v]ile houre" (302) and extends his tirade against his mother into an attack against women in general:<sup>26</sup>

Allas, moder, thee faire ble!  
 Evel becometh thee, houre to be,  
 To holde bordel,  
 And alle wif houren for thee sake,  
 The devel of helle ich hii betake,  
 Flesch and fel! (307–12)

Bevis's elaborate insult, which places his mother at the center of a system where women disrupt the well-ordered moral universe, suggests that the action that Bevis takes on his father's behalf, while primarily motivated by revenge, is also undertaken to defend male prerogative and protect the patriarchal status quo. Indeed, Bevis's later alliances with surrogate father figures reinforce the primacy of a patriarchal marriage system, regardless of their cultural or religious differences, and Bevis's growth as a knight and ruler is as much about personal development as it is about mastering the nuances of patriarchal structures of power that will benefit him.

By idealizing dead fathers, the romances eliminate, in advance, the possibility of an antagonistic relationship between fathers and sons. Without assuming that all father–son relationships are inevitably antagonistic at some level, the ideological underpinnings

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<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Fellows, referring to this sequence, concludes that "*Bevis* is, by and large, a pretty misogynistic text" (53) and that Bevis's mother is seen "most explicitly as a threat to patriarchal values" (52).

of these romances may be discerned in how every option other than a positive relationship between the son and the dead father is foreclosed. By elevating the dead father to a special position at their beginning and constructing absent fathers as role models for action, the father–son relationship is made static and relieved from ambiguity or the effects of change. Most generally, idealizing the dead father smooths out succession difficulties that may have originated within the father–son relationship. Instead, disinheritance in these romances comes from threats that lie outside a system of patrilineal primogeniture: evil stewards, invading Saracens, or lustful mothers. The ideological value of promoting unproblematic succession that follows patrilineal primogeniture is evident when a historical perspective is considered. While most critics contextualize these romances against Edward I's struggles and achievements after he became king in 1272,<sup>27</sup> these romances could also be contextualized against his path to the crown as well. While Edward I's succession of Henry III was never in serious doubt, there were moments, especially during the years when the power of the baronial

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<sup>27</sup> Because *Havelok the Dane* is commonly dated to the last quarter of the thirteenth-century, the romance has been read to reflect both the ideals and ruling techniques of Edward I's reign. Discussing how *Havelok* reflects both a theocratic notion of rule and the social contract required for a monarch to rule in thirteenth-century England, Delany and Ishkanian suggest that the co-existence of these two models of monarchical rule closely reflect the perceived basis and limitation on royal power that were prevalent by Edward I's reign (297). David Staines sees the poem as a "mirror for princes", where solutions to Edward I's difficulties at the beginning of his reign are suggested by the idealized portraits of benign rule in the poem (617–9). Ananya Kabir, remarking on the tussle between oral performance and writing in the poem, argues that the poem reflects concerns about Edward's attempts to strengthen centralized power through the "relentless deployment of [...] documentation" embodied in the Hundred Rolls of 1275 (31). Christopher Stuart places the romance at the end of Edward's reign, in the 1290s, when Edward's earls became disgruntled with royal power, and Edward faced difficulties in Scotland. Stuart argues that the romance was part of court flattery, meant to combat baronial questions about Edward's power by unambiguously stating the divine right of kings to rule, for while *Havelok* appears "even-handed," he is undoubtedly "elect" (352–9).

movement was in its ascendancy, that Edward I concluded alliances that bordered on treason against his own father. In this sense, the production as well as the circulation of these romances, which idealize the relationship between the son and his dead father aim to free inheritance from problems that may have arisen in less than perfect relationships between fathers and sons, and might reflect recent tensions within the English royal family.

One way of understanding the ideological impulse that lies behind idealizing dead fathers is through Freud's ideas regarding the role that the figure of the dead father has in shaping individual and societal psyches. Freud's insistence on the antagonistic father-son relationship and his argument that the process of idealizing father figures is bound up with the guilt sons feel for either wishing or causing the death of the father suggests questions of motivation regarding the eagerness of these romances to idealize the father. Idealizing the dead father may be symptomatic of anxieties regarding the male succession and inheritance. In Freud's myth of the primal horde, he argues that the basis of cooperative group existence and civilization founded on the rule of law begins when a group of sons oust a dominant male (the horde's "father") by killing him out of jealousy. This group then agrees to prevent a replication of the dead father's tyrannical dominance by making sexual relations with the women within the kin-group (i.e., their mothers and sisters) taboo (*Totem and Taboo* 915-7). Within what Freud sees as the psychic dynamics of the group, however, the guilt resulting from having killed the father leads to making the father sacred, associating the father with a particular totem animal, and venerating that animal as well (*Totem and Taboo* 918). Without accepting Freud's speculations as historically or anthropologically verifiable fact, the suggestion that the

process of idealization is linked to the organizing power of guilt over a group's psychic life provides a compelling way to read the idealization of dead fathers in these romances.

While the overt responsibility for the deaths of fathers is never placed upon the sons in these romances—Athelwold, Birkabeyn, Murry, and Guy are not murdered by their sons—there are incidents in each narrative where the son's guilt for the dead father enters the picture. Predictably, these are moments that occur early on in the narrative, when the sons are particularly vulnerable because their lives are threatened. For instance, in order to be spared by Godard after witnessing the deaths of his sisters, Havelok strikes a bargain that involves paying Godard homage and giving up his claim on the Danish throne. Havelok says, "Al Denemark I wile you yeve, / To that forward thu late me live" (485–6) and promises never to take up arms against Godard in the future. Effectively, Havelok betrays his father's memory. Horn, spared certain death by the very Saracen invaders who kill his father because of his fair looks, may be said to suffer the guilt of the survivor, a complex that may be compounded by the fact that the other children of Suddene are slain:

Muchel was his [Horn's] fairhede,

For Jhesu Crist him made.

Payns him wolde slen,

Other al quic flen,

Yef his fairnesse nere:

The children alle aslaye were. (87–92)

Not only is Horn spared, he expresses resistance against the invaders only when he is no longer in direct danger. His vow to take revenge only occurs once he is out of ear-shot of

his persecutors, and takes the form of an inconsequential apostrophic command to the ship that has carried him into exile to "seie the paene king / ... That ich am hol and fer" and that the pagans will experience "[t]he dent of myne honde" (151–3 & 156). This rhetorical posturing on Horn's part could be an effect of the guilt he feels at being unable to take more concrete action against his father's killers.

Unlike Havelok and Horn, Bevis tries to take action to honor his father's memory immediately, but his failure to have an impact could be seen as creating a guilt complex as well. His initial attempt at revenge involves impulsively storming the castle during the nuptial celebrations of his mother and the emperor, where he manages to injure, though not kill, the emperor, by clubbing him with a "mace" (443). Unlike the refined knight that Bevis later becomes, this scene shows him in the grip of instinctive and primal violence, and Bevis is depicted as an untrained and unskilled assailant.<sup>28</sup> Even though he manages to escape from the castle after his assault, Bevis is quickly apprehended and sold off as a slave to the Orient, a fate befitting an irritant rather than a threat. Even though Bevis acts with greater urgency than Havelok or Horn to restore the dead father's legacy, his ineffectiveness in exacting revenge could also result in guilt.

If these traces of guilt are present and also shape the idealization of dead fathers in these romances, the journey for these protagonists in reclaiming their inheritances is not only about avenging the deaths of their fathers but also about making reparation for

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<sup>28</sup> At other points in the romance, the club appears in situations where primal violence is emphasized over trained and skilled combat. Trapped in a dungeon and without any other weapon, Bevis uses a club in his battle against a serpent (1545). A club is also used by the brother of king Grandeur, a giant who tries to club Bevis to death (1903). The mark of Bevis's refinement and success as a knight occurs when Ermin presents him with the sword called "Morgelai" (861).

the fact that they were unable to prevent the loss of their fathers or uphold their legacies. Creating some ambivalence over the dead father's legacy is the fact that the dead fathers lacked foresight and were ineffective in one way or another, creating the precarious situations that their sons find themselves in. The process of becoming an authority figure is made ambivalent because it is fraught with identification as well as competition; the sons need to succeed where their fathers failed. Hence, while modeling their careers on their dead fathers is one component of the hero's development, another involves forging alliances with living father figures who provide the resources and opportunities to succeed where their fathers failed.

### **III. Against the Father: Edward I and the Baronial Movement of 1258**

Before examining how each romance uses the hero's association with a surrogate father to augment the notion of identification with the idealized father, we might examine how Edward I's career, before he became king, might provide a political context for the way surrogate fatherhood appears in these romances, for it shows older men of the English political elite clearly influencing Edward's decisions. Edward's early career displays contestation against his father through his alliances with the English barony, whose interests were often at odds with Henry III's. Reading these romances in the light of Edward's shifting alliances prior to his kingship is particularly fruitful because Edward's early alliances with various members of the baronial movement run parallel to the relations of surrogate fathers and sons that feature in these romances.

These romances, particularly *Havelok the Dane*, have been read against a historical context but usually with an eye on Edward's later accomplishments and

troubles as monarch. Critics do not read these romances against Edward's formative years before he assumes the crown. However, this context seems quite relevant as Edward experienced a long apprenticeship with numerous political trials, like the protagonists of these romances. In particular, I argue that Edward's involvement in factional politics prior to his assumption of the throne can be a useful context that explains why these romances are fascinated with surrogate fathers and how these alliances prove to be important in shaping a monarch's rule.

An obvious reason for why parallels are not drawn between Edward's political career and the experiences of our romance protagonists is the fact that Henry III lived well past Edward's majority, and Edward only ascended to the throne at the age of thirty-three. Thus, Edward's claim on the throne never appeared to be threatened while he was a child in the manner of the heroes of the romances. However, Edward's youth was marked by conflicts between the leading barons and the crown that culminated in civil war in the 1260s, and these tensions could be seen as resonating with the acts of dispossession in the romances. More intriguingly, Edward's willingness to form alliances with members of the baronial movement prior to 1260, often to further his interests against his father's, suggests a more complicated political context for these romances than is usually acknowledged by the critics. These romances, in idealizing a dead father and then dramatizing largely beneficial alliances with surrogate fathers, suture together the discordant phases of Edward's career that emerged out of the fickle factional politics of the mid-thirteenth century.

An early incident that offers a view of less than harmonious relations between Edward and Henry was a dispute over Gascony which Edward held and where he

attempted to exercise his power independently of his father. In 1255, a rift between father and son emerged because Edward instead of Henry was approached "by Gascon merchants who objected to the exactions of royal officials" (Prestwich, *Edward I* 15). According to the chronicler Matthew Paris, "Henry was furious that they should have complained to Edward, not him, and fulminated that there was only one king in England who could do justice" (Prestwich, *Edward I* 15). The rift between father and son expanded when, in 1256, Edward explicitly went against his father's policy of mediation and took sides with a particular faction in Gascony, the Soler family, "aim[ing] to create a party in the city loyal to his interests" (Prestwich, *Edward I* 15). Even so, Edward's limited power in Gascony meant that he had to "conduct his policy of alliance with Gaillard del Soler in a secretive, underhand manner, and must have resented the position in which he had been placed" (Prestwich, *Edward I* 16).

A more openly subversive period for Edward's relations with Henry occurred after the Provisions of Oxford in 1258. Two important baronial concerns that led to the Provisions involved the influence of foreigners at Henry's court and Henry's expansionist ambitions, factors that were seen to be at odds with the interests of England's native elite.<sup>29</sup> These anxieties about a foreign presence in England as well as the strain that

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<sup>29</sup> "[T]he hatred between the English and the foreigners" was aimed at the non-native noble families, the Lusignans and Poitevins, who benefitted from royal grants because of their relation to the crown through marriage (Prestwich, *Plantagenet England* 95). One of the Provisions of Oxford stated that "all royal castles should be put in charge of native-born Englishmen" (Prestwich, *Plantagenet England* 102), and the Lusignans were evicted from England after 1258. The nativism inherent in this policy was also present in the second key complaint: Henry was spending too much English money and resources to build an overseas Empire that benefitted his own family's interests and not the nation's. Seeking the Sicilian throne for his second son, Edmund, Henry ended up being short on the money he had promised for the claim and tried to send men to fight for the throne.

Henry's foreign interests put on the baronial elite in the form of taxation are significant in relation to the romances because similar concerns arise in them. The narratives of dispossession in *King Horn* and *Bevis of Hampton* involve foreign elements usurping the throne, and all three romances respond by concluding with the idealized possibility of an expanded empire overseen by an English monarch or Englishmen. The baronial elite, concerned about how their interests were compromised by these aspects of Henry's reign, accused Henry of maladministration, and gained control of the central government through conciliar supervision. One result of this was that Edward's independence of action was curtailed.

Once again looking out for his Gascon interests, Edward allied himself with leading barons, first with the earl of Gloucester and later, Simon de Montfort, the earl of Leicester, who became the leading figure of the baronial reform movement. Edward's actions were motivated by the hope that moving toward the great magnates of the realm would put some distance between Henry and himself, so that he would be free from conciliar control when making appointments in the lands he held (Carpenter 249).<sup>30</sup> Matters came to a head in November 1259 after Henry left England to conclude the Treaty of Paris with the French. Edward's agreement to support baronial demands and his alliance with Montfort were sealed by the impending peace with France. Because he viewed the peace treaty as compromising his power in Gascony, Edward leaned towards the barons who would support his independence in Gascony. Edward and Montfort thus

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The barons objected to Henry's venture, stating that the "the king had undertaken the business without consultation and consent" (Prestwich, *Plantagenet England* 103).

<sup>30</sup> Edward's alliance with the earl of Gloucester was temporary. It became antagonistic when Edward realized that Gloucester would not offer him the support for freedom of action that he sought.

"were the leaders of a militant faction" of the baronial movement (Maddicott 194 & 197). While in France, Henry was "told that his son was plotting with various magnates to capture and depose him" (Prestwich, *Edward I* 32), and by March 1260, "both sides were raising troops" (Maddicott 194). The potential rebellion was averted through the negotiations of the king's brother, Richard of Cornwall, and although it was suggested that Edward should be tried for treason, the matter was dropped. Of this incident, Michael Prestwich concludes, "Edward had not distinguished himself in his first major political venture, one which scarcely deserves to be called a rebellion" (33). There is some evidence that Edward took up with the barons again for a short time, in the spring of 1261, as there is evidence from that year that Henry "raised the question of his sons's behavior in the arguments he put forward against the baronial councillors" and that "by the counsel of a certain man, Edward had been seduced from his father's friendship and obedience" (Prestwich, *Edward I* 35). However, this association was once again short-lived and by 1263, when Simon de Montfort tried to push baronial interests more forcefully, a move that led to civil war, Edward was clearly on his father's side.

D.A. Carpenter argues that "[t]he years of 1258–60 were perhaps the most formative of Edward's life. The revolution of 1258, with its novel threats to his power and independence forced him to cast around for support" (250). Even though Edward's association with the barons in opposition to his father is overshadowed by his storied role in the battles of Lewes and Evesham as he defended the crown's interests in the civil war against the baronial elements that opposed the crown from 1263 to 1267, that fact that he was willing to form alliances against his own father to further his interests parallels the way that the romance heroes form temporary associations with father figures in order to

further their own interests. While Havelok, Bevis, and Horn do not form alliances that are in direct opposition to the legacy of their dead fathers, the surrogate fathers that they encounter do not explicitly guide them to re-conquer their father's lands or titles either. Instead, like Edward's brief dalliance with factional politics, they find leverage in the usefulness and power of temporary protections and alliances, eventually regaining their patrimonies through the circuitous and transformative routes enabled by these alliances.

#### **IV. *Havelok the Dane*: Surrogate Fathers and the Symbolic Body**

Ad Putter, making a general observation about how critics have responded to Middle English popular romance, neatly summarizes the two categories that most critics of *Havelok the Dane* fall into, calling them the "romantic" and "revisionist" positions (3). Adherents of the "romantic" position view popular romances as "the improvised compositions of minstrels" that were "intended for the ears of ordinary folk, for the 'people'" (3). On the other hand, the "revisionist" view holds that they were "composed and copied for the amusement and edification of the newly literate classes—not the lower orders but the gentry and the prosperous middle classes" (3). Thus, for *Havelok the Dane*, critics who tend toward a "romantic" view focus on how the concrete details of the poem indicate that the poem is rooted in a folk tradition. For instance, Nancy Mason Bradbury, in making a case for the folk-tale roots of elements of the poem argues that it is "close to the human lifeworld" and is "concrete and personal rather than theoretical or objective" (130). On the other hand, the "revisionist" view is represented by a reading like Roy Michael Liuzza's, where those very details are seen as creating a "reality-effect" rather than transparently representing lower-class livelihoods. In his view, the details of

everyday life presented in the poem involve a specific economic message that would resonate with a bourgeois audience because of the "relation between the reality described and the reality of the audience" (509). John Halverson posits that the Middle English version of *Havelok the Dane*, in comparison to its Anglo-Norman analogues, gives a view of a hardworking middle class ethic and ends with a "peasant fantasy" predicated on the dominance of middle class interests, where the social order is overturned (147–50). Taking the view that the romance shows how elite and middle-class concerns become allied in the poem, Susan Crane argues that the poem "reinvigorates the characteristic structures of the romances of English heroes, and extends their appeal to the bourgeoisie by associating traditional themes of baronial concern to middle-class concerns for profit making and social stability (47). Another strand of *Havelok* criticism, which extends the "revisionist" position, finds that the romance serves the interests of elite groups more exclusively. Robert Levine concludes that the depiction of the lower classes in the poem is employed by the aristocracy to validate their violence and rule, and that the "praise of the lower classes [...] functions as blame of some other group" (101–4). More recently, Kabir has posited that the feigned oral style of the poem, as well as the way the narrator insists on refraining from describing aristocratic activities while creating a fantasy of peasant life, indicates how the romance was meant to serve the interests of the ruling elite by picturing a harmonious society that accepts the violent rule of law (37–9).

The critical arguments involving how the embodied descriptions of the poem are to be read—whether they represent life itself or are a fictionalized construct meant to serve elite interests—can also be seen as a tussle over the body and its symbolic uses. *Havelok's* own body, which looms large in the romance in literal and figurative ways, can

be read as an allegory for the tension between the literal and the fictive that characterizes critical debates over the romance. As I argue in this section, Havelok's journey through various levels of society, and through a range of surrogate fathers, parallels the way that his body gains the symbolic value he needs to rule as king over England and Denmark through accretions of meaning that become associated with his body. The range of surrogate fathers that Havelok associates with is crucial in showing how his body is transformed and readied for rule. After the evil steward Godard's failure to carry out the responsibilities of a surrogate father, each subsequent father figure plays a part in protecting Havelok's physical body as well as conferring meaning on his body in ways that enable him to become a powerful symbol of rule.

The child Havelok actually begins the romance already having a significant amount of symbolic authority to rule invested in his body. The last thing that Birkabeyn does in his preparations for death is to transfer as much symbolic power as he possesses to Havelok in an effort to ensure that Havelok will succeed as king when he attains his majority. The poem shows how this transfer of symbolic power is given public significance as Godard is required to take a ritual oath to affirm his loyalty:

Here biteche I thee  
 Mine children alle thre,  
 Al Denemark and al mi fe,  
 Til that mi sone of helde be,  
 But that ich wille that thou swere  
 On auter and on messe gere,  
 On the belles that men ringes,

On messe bok the prest on singes,  
 That thou mine children shalt wel yeme,  
 That hire kin be ful wel queme,  
 Til mi sone mowe ben knieth. (384–94)

The religious elements of Godard's pledge also suggest that he is entrusted with a sacred charge, effectively making his guardianship of Havelok a divinely appointed responsibility. Consequently, Havelok himself gains symbolic authority through this ritual: he is to be specially protected by Godard and has that pledge of protection guaranteed by the symbolic power of ritual elements of the Church.

In spite of his best efforts, Birkabeyn's attempts to confer symbolic authority on Havelok fail. Liam O. Purdon observes that the usurpation by Godard is made easier by the fact that the rites of vassalage requested by Birkabeyn are incomplete. While Birkabeyn requests that Godard pledge fealty, he does not have "his chosen regent do homage to his heir or to himself on behalf of his heir before swearing the oath of fealty" (27).<sup>31</sup> Without the payment of homage, the pledge becomes inadequate because Godard does not personally submit to Havelok. While Purdon's insight is valuable in explaining why the symbolic order breaks down, Godard's betrayal can also be seen in terms of the raw power he wields over Birkabeyn's defenseless children. In comparison to Godrich, whom the romance describes as being seduced into keeping power permanently for himself because he grows jealous of Goldeboru and harbors ambitions for his own son, Godard's decision to discard his role as guardian and assume power for himself appears

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<sup>31</sup> According to Purdon, there were three different components of vassalage:

That the order of the rite's enactment placed homage first, fealty next, and investiture of the fief last, and rarely deviated from this sequence except in instances in which investiture of the fief was excluded from the rite. (26)

unmotivated by such concerns. What the romance does emphasize, however, is that Godard seizes power for himself because he has complete control over the children's vulnerable bodies. Managing to isolate the children from contact with the outside world, Godard keeps them in a state of "hunger" and "kold" (416) and "[h]e hem clothede rith ne fedde, / Ne hem ne dede richelike bebedde" (420–1). The negations of this line emphasize how Godard attains power by withholding from the children necessities for survival, thus maintaining total control over their bodies. The symbolic weight of the oaths that he pledged earlier at Birkebeyn's command are now meaningless in the face of this physical deprivation: "He ne yaf a note of his othes" (419). The ease with which Godard reneges on his oaths is a product of the sheer power he experiences over the physical weakness of the children.

The fact that the poem features Havelok's vulnerable body as an important trope has not escaped critical notice. Donna Crawford argues that Havelok's vulnerable body features in the poem's conception of nationhood and rule, for in an analogical reading, "threats to the hero's body make visible the vulnerability of the English kingdom" (n.p.). Julia Nelson Couch argues that Havelok's vulnerability is integral to the development of a romance hero that is unlike the invincible warriors of the genre. Instead, even though Havelok's kingly identity is revealed early on in the romance, the anxiety that results from Havelok's vulnerability is "not sublimated from the narrative plane by means of an abiding presence of invincibility; [instead, it is] incorporated into the very structure of heroic identity" (332). Couch notes that unlike its Anglo-Norman antecedents, the Middle English *Havelok* pays inordinate attention to Havelok's childhood, inscribing a sense of vulnerability that Havelok ultimately uses for symbolic ends when he

consolidates his power at the end of the romance (341). What both critics omit in their analyses of Havelok's vulnerability is the way in which he first becomes aware of his vulnerability, and how he actually plays a role in accentuating his own weakness. In the passage already referred to in the previous section, Havelok pays homage to Godard during his captivity in exchange for his life and thus gives up the symbolic power that was conferred on him in the public ceremonies. Havelok is motivated to do this because he is made painfully aware of his vulnerability, having witnessed his sisters' violent deaths:

Ther was sorwe, wo-so it sawe,  
 Hwan the children by the wawe  
 Leyen and sprawleden in the blod.  
 Havelok it saw and therbi stod—  
 Ful sori was that sely knave.  
 Mikel dred he mouthe have,  
 For at hise herte he saw a knif  
 For to reven him hise lyf. (473–80)

In response to the physical danger that Havelok finds himself in, he bargains on the symbolic value of his own body and life. In offering Godard homage—"Manrede, louerd, biddi you" (484)—Havelok recognizes the symbolic meanings potentially invested in his own body, strips himself of them, and thus highlights how vulnerable he is willing to become in order to preserve his life. At the same time, the scene is not one of cool calculation on Havelok's part. Commenting on this sequence, Crane argues that Havelok's "desperate pleas give dramatic intensity to the abstract concepts of

disinheritance and repossession" (51). The efficacy of Havelok's gesture is demonstrated in how it evokes the only instance of pity in Godard that is narrated in the romance. Paradoxically, confronted with the purely vulnerable Havelok, Godard decides to spare his life.

Havelok's action has consequences beyond saving his life. In the narrative design of the romance, after he surrenders his right to rule to Godard, he becomes almost entirely oblivious to his heritage as heir to the throne. Robert W. Hanning observes that "by offering homage to Godard, Havelok is symbolically denying his identity as king and lord of Denmark" (592); and indeed, Havelok seems to go into denial for a substantial portion of the narrative after this point for he loses all sense of the symbolic meanings attached to his body. Instead, the narrative portrays how he becomes distracted and trapped by the sheer fact of his physical needs and abilities. Yet if this moment throws Havelok into a perpetual present in which he is confined to experiencing the immediacy of his bodily needs and is unable to imagine a future for himself, Godard, on the other hand, can only imagine a future where Havelok's body will return for revenge: "Yif I late him lives go /... He may me waiten for to slo" (509–12).

Thus, the depiction of his physical weakness is obviously important because Havelok later grows up to become renowned for his extraordinary strength; the symbolic divesting of power makes this moment crucial because it is at this point that Havelok becomes caught up in the body alone. At no point does the romance describe Havelok undergoing training to become physically strong or skilled enough to defeat his erstwhile oppressor Godard. This development is assumed throughout to be a 'natural' one. However, his association with 'good' surrogate fathers leads him to reclaim the symbolic

power initially associated with him that he surrenders to Godard here. Thus, Havelok's journey also involves regaining the ability to make symbolic meanings, a faculty that is indispensable at the end of the romance when he himself becomes installed as a father figure over England and Denmark.

While I have emphasized the role that Havelok himself plays in divesting what little power he has from himself, this by no means detracts from the fact that Godard's ambitions are crucial in causing the dispossession. Godard, like his English counterpart Godrich, fails to be an effective surrogate father because he is so caught up with the experience of power that he can only take a competitive view of power and envision a loss of social standing once his ward is old enough to rule. Similarly, Godrich becomes disgruntled with the prospect of surrendering power to Goldeboru when it becomes clear that Goldeboru has the qualities to be an effective ruler in her own right:

Quanne the Erl Godrich him herde  
 Of that mayden—hw wel she ferde,  
 Hw wis sho was, hw chaste, hw fayr,  
 And that sho was the rithe eyr  
 Of Engelond, of al the rike;  
 Tho bigan Godrich to sike,  
 And seyde, "Wether she sholde be  
 Quen and levedi over me?  
 Hwether sho sholde al Engelond  
 And me and mine haven in hire hond? ..." (286–93)

Godrich's concerns mar his ability to act as a father figure and introduce emotional and psychological ambiguities into the parent–child relationship, complications between the parent and child that were dispelled by instituting dead and idealized fathers at the beginning of the romance. In this sense, Godrich's jealousy is a regressive development, and it undermines his authority while corrupting the institution of wardship. If the role of an officially appointed guardian works as an efficient technology of control and stability because, in its ideal operation, it strips the parent–child relationship of the vicissitudes of emotion by transforming fatherhood into an administrative function, Godrich's negative re-investment of emotion into the relationship prevents wardship from functioning smoothly.

Both Godrich and Godard abuse their power as guardians because they begin to think about how the power they have over Goldeboru and Havelok can be used to further their own lineages rather than preserve the royal line of succession. In justifying his decision to ill-treat Goldeboru, Godrich imagines a future for his successor: "Ich have a sone, a ful fayr knave; / He shal Engeland al have! / He shal king, he shal ben sire" (308–10). Similarly, dynastic ambitions color Godard's judgement. He decides to kill Havelok after having spared him because he desires that his "children wolden thrive" and that they "[l]ouerdinges after me / Of al Denemark micten he be" (513–5). The problem with their application of surrogate power is that they do not seek to do it through socially acceptable means and are far too reckless in trying to establish their family fortunes.

This becomes clear when the way in which wardships were actually used to further familial interests in medieval England is considered. For instance, one of the benefits of wardship was that the guardian was responsible for arranging his ward's

marriage. A common tactic to advance one's family interests would have been to obtain a wardship of a young person who came from a family of higher social rank or greater wealth, and achieve social promotion by marrying one's children to that ward (Waugh 208–14). More questionable means of self-advancement were used within the institution of wardship, though these were still more civilized than the outright deprivation and physical harm that Godrich and Godard threaten their wards with. For instance, if a guardian obtained wardship over two siblings, he might marry one to his own children and prevent the other child from marrying. This ensured that the wards' inheritance would be kept within his own family: In the event of the death of the unmarried ward, the inheritance would transfer to the ward who was married to his own family (Waugh 199). The social codes that governed the exercise of power over a ward were also supported by the law, and an abusive guardian might well find himself before the king or court of law. The institution of wardship, even where it was manipulated for personal aggrandizement, was one that was governed by social convention and the rule of law. It was a symbolic structure that extended the political and economic benefits of "having" children beyond the confines of biological parenthood.

From this perspective, Godrich and Godard's use of wardship to advance their own interests is not problematic per se, because wardships were commonly used for economic and political gain. Instead, the extent of their ambition means that they do not use their wardships in socially acceptable ways. For instance, Godrich might have attempted to marry his son to Goldeboru and retain power in that manner; similarly, instead of killing Havelok's sisters, Godard could have also married them into his family. These more acceptable alternatives would, of course, mean a slower, less absolute build-

up of power and wealth for their families. Instead of careful alliance building, the unscrupulous surrogate fathers make a quick grab for power that ultimately proves to be unsustainable, as is evident in the way the ruling elites of England and Denmark turn against them at the end of the romance. In this sense, it is the short-sighted use of wardship that makes their ambitions threatening to social stability, and, in effect, their abuse of wardship disregards the boundaries which govern symbolic fatherhood. Hence, if Havelok loses sight of the symbolic value attached to his body after pleading for his life, the desire for immediate gratification by the evil stewards also contravenes the conventions that govern wardship, jeopardizing the order of a hierarchical society.

The way that the symbolic value of Havelok's body is submerged by his own physicality and by the disruption of the social conventions of wardship is made clear in the pair of father figures that come after Godard: Grim and Bertram the cook. Grim is the father figure who functions most like a father would within a nuclear family, and while Bertram only makes a fleeting appearance in the romance, the protection that he gives Havelok by offering him employment plays a role, albeit an unintentional one, in advancing Havelok's return to power. However, both these surrogate fathers fail to help Havelok recover the symbolic value of his body and to capitalize on the fact of his divine right to rule. In a sense, because they, like Havelok, are so caught up in meeting Havelok's bodily needs, the physicality of the body becomes all that they can see.

This is made apparent in the ways that Grim and Bertram offer aid to Havelok. In Grim's case, after he realizes that Havelok is the divinely appointed heir to the throne and must not be harmed, he pledges to protect Havelok and offers Havelok anything he desires. Havelok, starving at this point, requests food, and this establishes the basis as

well as extent of the surrogate parent–child relationship. Grim's wife, Leve, brings Havelok a meal that is described in careful detail:

I shal thee fete  
 Bred an chese, butere and milk,  
 Pastees and flaunes—al with swilk  
 Shole we sone thee wel fede,  
 Louerd, in this mikel nede. (643–7)

While this attention to the care of Havelok's body is crucial at this point in the narrative when he is starving, Grim's actions never move beyond meeting Havelok's physical needs. When the family flees to England, for instance, the narrative again pays much attention to the way that Grim provides for Havelok and the rest of the family. Not only does the romance offer a long list of the different kinds of fish that Grim becomes skilled at catching, it also emphasizes the range of food and necessities required for his occupation that Grim manages to buy after selling his catch:

For hom he brouthe fele sithe  
 Wastels, simenels with the horn,  
 His pokes fulle of mele and korn,  
 Netes flesh, shepes and swines;  
 And hemp to maken of gode lines,  
 And stronge ropes to hise netes,  
 In the se weren he ofte setes. (779–85)

These descriptive lists, which are often invoked to support arguments for the realism and lower- or middle-class ethic of the poem, form the basis of Grim's

relationship with Havelok. Hence, his surrogate fatherhood is firmly lodged in the concrete and embodied experience of satisfying bodily appetites. The narrative is clear that Grim's efforts are aimed at satisfying the material needs of his family: "Thusgate Grim him fayre ledde: / Him and his genge wel he fedde" (786–7). This message is not lost on Havelok. The material realities involved in sustaining his huge physical appetites—"Ich am wel waxen and wel may eten / More than evere Grim may geten. / Ich ete more .../ Than Grim an hise children five" (792–5)—motivate him to contribute to the household economy by carrying baskets of Grim's fish out for sale. Furthermore, when a famine strikes and Grim can no longer provide for the family, he advises Havelok to make for Lincoln to seek his fortune. Even at this parting moment, Grim does not remind Havelok of his destiny to reign as king of Denmark. Instead, Grim attends to Havelok's physical needs as best he can:

"... But wo is me thou art so naked,  
 Of mi seyl I wolde thee were maked  
 A cloth thou mithest inne gongen,  
 Sone, no cold that thu ne fonge."  
 He tok the sheres of the nayl  
 And made him a covel of the sayl,  
 And Havelok dide it sone on. (855–60)

The way that Grim focuses solely on the physical is striking because the Middle English *Havelok* differs significantly from the Anglo-Norman versions at this point in the narrative. Where Havelok in the Middle English version is forced to go to Lincoln out of physical necessity, the Anglo-Norman *Lai d'Havelok* has Grim sending him away so that

he can gain opportunities for social advancement by being at court.<sup>32</sup> Also making Grim's limited vision of Havelok's embodiedness in Middle English poem interesting is the fact that Grim encounters the symbolic marks that establish Havelok's right to rule as king of Denmark. In fact, Grim and Leve, the only characters to turn from evil in the romance, are converted to Havelok's cause because they witness fire issuing from Havelok's mouth and the "kynemerk" (605) on Havelok's shoulder. As Sheila Delany and Vahan Ishkanian observe, these "signs of divine appointment" are crucial in taming Grim's malevolence at a crucial juncture, even if they do not immediately confer the social consensus that eventually becomes the basis of Havelok's rule (293). Grim is therefore well aware of the metaphysical meanings that are attached to Havelok's body. On recognizing the marks of kingship, Grim's first utterance in response to the signs sounds very much like a prophetic summary of how the rest of the romance will unfold:

"Goddot!" quath Grim, "this ure eir,  
 That shal louerd of Denemark!  
 He shal ben king, strong and stark;  
 He shal haven in his hand  
 Al Denemark and Engeland.

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<sup>32</sup> G.V. Smithers suggests that "[t]his motivation for Havelok's departure for Lincoln—which is sufficiently explained in the *Lai* by Grim's wish that Havelok should there be able to make his way in the world—is possibly an innovation in the ME version, though perhaps not on an imaginary basis" (114). The *Lai d'Haveloc* describes the circumstances of Havelok's leaving as follows:

One day Grim summoned him, "My dear son," he said, "listen to me. here we live quietly, with fishermen, with poor folk, who support themselves by fishing. You know nothing of their trade: here you can acquire nothing good or ever gain anything. Go to England, my dear son, to learn wisdom and seek your fortune, and take your brothers with you. Enter the court of a mighty king, dear son, and take service with his servants." (Weiss, *Birth* 145)

He shal do Godard ful wo;  
 He shal him hangen or quik flo,  
 Or he shal him al quic grave.

Of him shal he no merci have." (607–15)

In fact, Grim's pronouncement, prompted by viewing the "kynemerck," foreshadows the dream that Havelok's has later on when his huge arms embrace both England and Denmark as well as Godard's violent end. Following this recognition, he immediately pays homage to Havelok, calling him "Louerd" and identifying himself and his wife as "[t]hine cherles, thine hine" (620–1). However, this recognition of the symbolic power of Havelok's body is not translated into direct action that restores Havelok to his true inheritance, and Grim's own insight is obscured once Havelok's huge physical appetites are manifested. Thus, despite recognizing Havelok's right to rule, Grim does very little as a surrogate father to establish Havelok's ability to do so.

In a similar fashion, the cook Bertram who hires Havelok because he is impressed by the strength that Havelok demonstrates as a porter also fails to help Havelok move beyond the immediate needs of his body. Although he does not have the knowledge that Grim possesses about Havelok's heritage and has no reason to attend to anything but Havelok's physical needs, Bertram's actions reinforce the way the narrative traps Havelok within the immediacy of his bodily desires. No interest or curiosity about Havelok's past ever emerges from Bertram and their relationship remains bound by a world of physical objects. For instance, replicating the way that Grim attends to Havelok, Bertram eagerly meets Havelok's sole request that he be given "inow to ete" (912):

Go thu yunder and sit thore,

And I shal yeve the ful fair bred,  
 And made the broys in the led.  
 Sit now doun and et ful yerne—  
 Datheit hwo the mete werne! (922–7)

Bertram also repeats Grim's concern that Havelok have clothes and brings him "clothes al spannewe: / ... bothe hosen and shon" (969–70).

By attending so single-mindedly to Havelok's physical needs, it could be argued that Grim and Bertram cause Havelok to forget his royal heritage. Unlike Havelok, Goldeboru never has any other surrogate father apart from her captor Godrich to mitigate the effects of her physical deprivation. Yet she manages to remember her father's wishes when she is forced to marry Havelok:

She answerede and saide anon,  
 By Crist and bi Seint Johan,  
 That hire sholde noman wedde  
 Ne noman bringen hire to bedde  
 But he were king or kinges eyr,  
 Were he nevere man so fayr. (1112–7)

Her response captures the spirit of her father's wishes, while Godrich's cynical application of Athelwold's conditions is based on an extremely literal interpretation. Havelok, on the other hand, never recalls his heritage while in England. In fact, his objection to the arranged marriage is predictably tied to anxieties about his physical well-being. This is an expected outcome given how his perspective has been limited by his surrogate fathers:

Hwat sholde ich with wif do?

I ne may hire fede ne clothe ne sho.

Wider sholde ich wimman bringe?

I ne have none kines thinge—

I ne have hws, I ne have cote,

Ne I ne have stikke, I ne have sprote,

I ne have neyther bred ne sowel,

Ne cloth but of an hold whit covel. (1138–45)

Thus, under the influence of the first two "good" surrogate fathers, Havelok's body is never directed towards reclaiming its heritage despite the recognition of its exceptional dimensions and abilities. Given surrogate fathers with limited means and influence, whose material realities restrict them to the mundane care of the body, Havelok initially experiences surrogacy as an interruption of identity, where the child's sense of his history and future are obscured by the concerns of the present. Unlike the idealized dead father who provides an abstract model for behavior and power, these surrogate fathers demonstrate how the messy details of everyday life can quickly efface the poem's initial depiction of power and authority.

Still, even though Grim and Bertram do not point Havelok toward his destiny to be king, they do attend to his body in ways that transform it. Even if these transformations only occur at a superficial level, cumulatively they do contribute to moving Havelok's body to the point where it can be recognized and utilized as the symbol of his right to rule. In the portions of the text already quoted that are related to clothing Havelok, Havelok's body moves from being naked and cold to being well-appareled after successive interventions by Grim and Bertram. While the surrogate fathers do not make

much of this transformation and wearing new clothes does not appear to ready Havelok to re-claim the throne, the narrative voice uses this physical change to indicate Havelok's progress towards his destiny:

Hwan he was clothed, used, and shod,  
 Was non so fayr under God,  
 That evere yete in erthe were,  
 Non that evere moder bere;  
 It was nevere man that yemedede  
 In kinneriche that so wel semede  
 King or cayser for to be  
 Than he was shrid, so semede he. (972–9)

If the material realities of physical deprivation distracted Havelok and his surrogate fathers from pursuing his right to rule, Havelok's body, transformed by their attentiveness to its physical needs, now points the way to power. This progression that the narrative patterns on the transformation of Havelok's body parallels the progression noted by Hanning with regard to the scenes of feeding and feasting in the poem. Hanning, after tracking how the feasting scenes in the romance develop from the depiction of "homely fare" to elaborate ceremonial feasts, concludes that the shift in these scenes "accord[s] well with Havelok's progress from an impotent child to a strong adult" (596–9).

The final father figure who protects Havelok is Ubbe, the nobleman who meets Havelok and his retinue when they return to Denmark. Even though Havelok already seems to have a firm sense of purpose by this point in the narrative, Ubbe's role as a father figure is important as he not only recognizes the symbolic meanings etched on

Havelok's body but acts on those signs to ensure that Havelok overthrows Godard and is finally restored to the throne of Denmark. Ubbe's initial interaction with Havelok revolves around material concerns. Havelok, in the guise of a merchant, requires Ubbe's permission to sell his wares in the area under Ubbe's influence. Despite this materially bound interaction—Havelok gives Ubbe a gold ring worth "[a]n hundred pound" (1633) to seal their agreement—Ubbe takes an interest in Havelok that goes beyond the commercial transaction. Interestingly, in a reversal of the way that Havelok's body previously obscured his destiny, this very same body, the fact that he is "[b]rod in the sholdres, ful wel schaped, / Thicke in the brest, of bodi long" (1647–8), is now the impetus for Ubbe to wonder about why Havelok's professed vocation does not match his physical gifts. While Havelok's strength and fair looks have been commented upon by the narrator, this is the first time that such detail is given to the description and that such an observation is made by a character within the romance. Further, Ubbe does not just marvel at Havelok's physique but allows it to pique his curiosity. Specifically, Ubbe wonders,

Qui ne were he knith?

I woth that he is swithe with!

Betere semede him to bere

Helm on heved, sheld and spere,

Thanne to beye and selle ware. (1650–4)

By positing an alternative possibility for Havelok's identity, based on the physical fact of his body, Ubbe demonstrates the ability to read Havelok's body differently. Even though Ubbe's thoughts echo Grim's and Bertram's acts of clothing Havelok by imagining

Havelok fitted out with "[h]elm ..., sheld and spere," his thoughts go beyond satisfying Havelok's physical needs. Earlier on, both Grim and Bertram were satisfied to be limited by Havelok's own discourse about his bodily needs, never providing him with more than the food or clothes that he asks for. Ubbe, on the other hand, begins to see how Havelok's body might signify something other than what Havelok himself professes. Despite keeping these speculations to himself, Ubbe's fascination with Havelok causes him to pledge protection of Havelok and Goldeboru.

This fascination with what Havelok's body might signify leads to the final revelation of Havelok's signs of kingship, a revelation that is public, unlike the earlier private revelations. After the attack on Havelok and his retinue, Ubbe fulfills his pledge to protect Havelok by inviting him to stay in his own castle, an act of providing shelter which allies him with the previous two surrogate fathers. Ubbe's curiosity about Havelok leads him to investigate when he sees a "mikel lith / In the bowr thar Havelok lay" (2093–4). Unlike the other two instances when light emanates from Havelok's mouth, this time, the sign does not occur in the presence of witnesses already present and must be sought out actively by Ubbe. Even though Ubbe's first assumption about the origins of the light in the room are wrong—he thinks that Havelok may be "wesseylen" (2098) or participating in some evil activity—Ubbe's desire to get to the root of the physical phenomenon enables him to stumble upon Havelok's symbolic body. Indeed, this desire to find out about signs and their meaning is summed up by his initial response to the light—"Deus! ... Hwat may this be?" (2096). This remark recurs a few moments later when he sees the light for himself and wonders what it may signify: "Deus ... Hwat may this mene!" (2114).

What occurs next is quite remarkable in terms of how Havelok's body is given meaning through a process of becoming vulnerable again. Ubbe, unsure about what the light issuing from Havelok's mouth may mean and yet curious to find out, translates his private encounter with Havelok's body into a public event, transforming the interpretation of the sign into a public referendum of sorts. This move differs from the two previous occasions where Grim and Leve, and later Goldeboru, keep the viewing of the sign to themselves. In this sense, although Ubbe has consistently followed the path of protection charted by earlier surrogate fathers, he now exposes Havelok's body to the prying eyes of the court in order to seek out its meaning:

He calde bothe arwe men and kene,  
 Knithes and serganz swithe sleie,  
 Mo than an hundred, withuten leye,  
 And bad hem alle comen and se

Hwat that selcuth mithe be. (2115–9)

Allowing this exposure is more risky than it might at first appear to be because not only is Havelok lying asleep, both he and Goldeboru lie "[b]i the pappes ... naked" (2132). In fact, some of the knights appear unimpressed by the miraculous sight and "thouth of hem god gaman, / Hem for to shewe and loken to" (2135–6), enjoying the voyeuristic moment as if it were an entertaining spectacle. However, in taking the risk to expose Havelok's sleeping and naked body to the public, Ubbe ends up orchestrating the recognition that Havelok is Birkabeyn's heir when Havelok's "kunrik" (2143)—the cross on his shoulder that marks his kingship—is exposed.

Havelok's naked, vulnerable body now takes on a different meaning and becomes a figure at the center of a spiritual tableau. The assembled spectators express their joy at discovering the long lost heir to the throne and show their respect by venerating his sleeping, naked body: "Hise fet he kisten an hundred sythes— / The tos, the nayles, and the lithes—" (2162–3). Thus Ubbe's decision to put Havelok's body on display plays a role in effecting yet another transformation. Now, even though its physicality comes under intense scrutiny, it becomes a body that paradoxically transcends its material limits through the magnification of its embodied nature. Even though Ubbe's actions later on continue to support Havelok's claims to the throne, this moment, which allows Havelok's body to regain its symbolic power, is the key transformation that Ubbe facilitates in his role as a father figure.

Taken as a whole, Havelok's associations with Grim, Bertram, and Ubbe complicate the model of the father figure that is instituted by the idealized portrayals of the dead kings Athewold and Birkabeyn. If traces of guilt at surrendering his inheritance to Godard affect Havelok, this guilt is worked out through the body, in the various ways that his body is cared for and how it eventually has its symbolic function restored to it. Havelok's association with several surrogate fathers is interesting in itself. Critics have noted that Havelok's journey is patterned as an ascent through the various strata of the class-system, and that the "experience of all classes will enlarge his political sympathies when he is king, and teach him the needs of his entire population" (Delany & Ishkanian 297). In a similar manner, the surrogate fathers that appear in the narrative and momentarily protect Havelok without any social or legal obligation to do so indicate the non-linear associational logic that the poem explores even when Havelok is clearly meant

to emulate the achievements of the idealized dead fathers. Interestingly, it is the surrogate fathers that emerge out of the unforeseen exigencies of Havelok's dangerous circumstances—Grim saves Havelok's life, Bertram offers him a livelihood, and Ubbe protects him after an attack—who enable Havelok's transformation. Ironically, Godard, the surrogate father who receives the fullest measure of social and political legitimization, is the one who turns out to be the most flawed.

Even though the treatment of Havelok's body is key in creating the conditions for his re-gaining of the Danish throne, the moment that precipitates Havelok's own consciousness of his royalty comes outside the body in a dream that transforms how he views his body. After he is married to Goldeboru, Havelok returns to his surrogate family, which now consists of Grim's sons and daughters. Even though they show Havelok tremendous respect by presenting him with all their wealth and pledging to serve him, explaining that this is what Grim has ordered them to do, nothing within Havelok is stirred to recall his past or wonder why Grim has made these arrangements. However, that night, he has a dream in which his body expands to epic proportions:

And mine armes weren so longe  
 That I fadmede al at ones,  
 Denemark with mine longe bones;  
 And thanne I wolde mine armes drawe  
 Til me and hom for to have,  
 Al that evere in Denemark liveden  
 On mine armes faste clyveden;  
 And the stronge castles alle

On knes bigunnen for to falle—

The keyes fellen at mine fet. (1295–1304)

Additionally, within the dream, his body defies earthly boundaries and flies across the sea from Denmark to England, and "[a]l closede it intil [his] hond" (1311). From a structural perspective, the Middle English version, which pairs the dream with the discovery of the "kynemerck" by Goldboru, compresses the major turning point of the poem, which was otherwise spread out in a series of revelations in the Anglo-Norman tellings of the tale (Hanning 603). Apart from being a key narrative climax, the dream shows how Havelok's body now takes on greater significance for himself. Up to this point, Havelok has put his body to good use, using his amazing strength to earn a living as well as distinguishing himself through feats of strength amongst the people of Lincoln. In this respect, Havelok's body has given him an individual identity by serving his own purposes. However, through the symbolism of the dream, his body shows Havelok the potential that he has to create and unite communities. The associational logic of surrogate fatherhood that has afforded his body protections by Grim and Bertram now applies in reverse with his body becoming the protector of entire nations—he embraces Denmark ("fadmede") and the people cling to him ("clyveden")—and Havelok literally becomes the body politic in his dream. Diane Speed suggests that the way that the dream relates the geographical with Havelok's body promotes the idea of the nation's landscape as the "inscape of national identity" and "Denmark is thus an image for the nation [... which is ...] signified as a people related to each other in the two-way structure of feudalism" (155). Not only does this dream show Havelok beginning to conceive of his body in more symbolic terms, it also shifts the function of his body from being an entity

that is in need of protection to one that manages to protect entire communities. As Michael Faletra points out, the dream offers the only view of England "as a contained and containable totality" and creates an ideological space where "the prerogative of kingship is reinstated and reaffirmed" (377). This shift in awareness regarding the possibilities of his body foreshadows Havelok's regaining of the Danish crown and his becoming a father figure over nations.

These changes that occur while Havelok sleeps cannot be directly traced to the influence of surrogate fathers, for, up to this point, they have not explicitly directed Havelok to think about his destiny to rule. In fact, Havelok's inability to interpret symbolically is demonstrated when he wakes up bemused from the dream and requires Goldeboru to make the dream's meanings explicit for him. Yet the way that Grim and Bertram have taken care of his body could be seen as nurturing the raw material out of which Havelok's growing sense of its symbolic importance emerges, a fact that is unconsciously registered in the way that the body features in the dream. Unlike the corresponding dream in the Anglo-Norman versions of the poem, where Havelok and Goldboru are attacked by wild beasts,<sup>33</sup> and their well-being is the result of miraculous divine intervention, indicating that "the right to rule is bestowed by higher, impersonal and presumably divine forces" (Faletra 374–5), Havelok's dream allows the unconscious to find a way of re-figuring identity by once again featuring the body that has already

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<sup>33</sup> In the *Lai D'Haveloc*, Edelsi (Goldeboru) has a dream that features attacks as well as protection by wild beasts.

There they found the wild bear; there were foxes accompanying him, quite covering the countryside. These were about to attack Cuaran (Havelok), when, from the other direction, they saw pigs and boar coming, who defended him and protected him from the foxes. When the foxes were defeated, one of the boards went at full strength towards the bear and attacked it, laying it low and killing it. (148)

become the central trope of the romance. In short, the somatic is not divorced from the psychological, and the physical care that the surrogate fathers give Havelok forms the indirect basis for his awakening sense of destiny.

The second key shift in Havelok's consciousness occurs after the dream is interpreted by Goldeboru and Havelok is motivated to reclaim the throne of Denmark for himself and restore Goldeboru's inheritance in England. Having never mentioned his past up to this point, Havelok begins to use the memory of his vulnerable past to create a new sense of purpose and to rally people to form a community around himself. Couch observes that from this point onwards, the narrative repeats the story of Havelok's childhood suffering several times and that these "reiterations attempt to reconcile anxieties about the vulnerability of childhood and the consequent permeability of social status [...] by recasting the hero's past [...] in order to create the proper king" (344). Tellingly, these re-tellings also mark the expansion of Havelok's ability to craft a rhetorical performance, another way that he begins to move beyond his physical body. Up to this point, he relies on his physical strength to get by. However, with the new conception of himself revealed by the dream, he begins to speak about his past in rhetorical acts that purposefully shape his future. He uses this new rhetoric to gain support from God, to win over his foster siblings to his cause, and allows it to become a public discourse that connects him to the people of Denmark.

In these acts of re-narration, the death of his sisters is used to evoke sympathy from his listeners; additionally, Havelok figures his surrogate fathers in ways that advance his cause. The surrogate father-child relationship is transformed, for Havelok now uses his experiences with surrogate fathers in rhetorically deliberate ways instead of

just relying on father-figures for physical protection. For instance, when he calls upon Christ, he offers a very specific view of Godard and his subsequent experiences:

He hath mi lond with mikel unrith,  
 With michel wrong, with mikel plith,  
 For I ne misdede him nevere nouth,  
 And haved me to sorwe brouth.  
 He haveth me do mi mete to thigge,  
 And ofte in sorwe and pine ligge. (1370–5)

While he is right in asserting that Godard rules over Denmark unjustly, Havelok ignores the fact that he himself has paid homage to Godard. The repetitive phrases—"mikel unrith," "michel wrong," and "michel plith"—gloss over the past but indelibly mark the description with traces of Havelok himself, for throughout the narrative, he is literally the "michel" man. Furthermore, when he describes how Godard's actions have led to a life of sorrow and beggary ("mi mete to thigge"), Havelok slides over how much protection and provision his other surrogate fathers have afforded him. The clearest evidence that Havelok now recognizes the power of remembering and re-shaping the past to his own purposes occurs when he relates his relationship with Grim to his foster siblings. Addressing them because he wants their support for his planned return-invasion of Denmark, Havelok lauds his surrogate father on very specific points:

Deplike dede he him swere  
 On bok that he sholde me bere  
 Unto the se and drenchen ine,  
 And wolde taken on him the sinne.

But Grim was wis and swithe hende—  
 Wolde he nouth his soule shende;  
 Levere was him to be forsworen  
 Than drenchen me and ben forlorn...  
 Forthi fro Denmark hider he fledde,  
 And me ful fayre and ful wel fedde,  
 So that unto this day  
 Have ich ben fed and fostred ay. (1418–35)

Havelok conveniently skips over the way that Grim ill-treated him in the first instance and only experiences a change of heart when he observes the miraculous marks of kingship on Havelok's body. Instead of explaining how Grim falls onto the side of good only at the revelation of divine signs, Havelok tells a tale of how Grim defies his feudal vows ("Levere was him to be forsworen") in order to save Havelok. Grim's sense of what is morally right is made innate— "Grim was wis and swithe hende"—with the implication that the Grim's children should follow the course of nature by pledging their loyalty to Havelok. This narrative of the past transforms Grim into a saint-like hero, idealizing him so that Havelok can inspire his foster family to aid in his efforts. Rather than being threatened or protected by surrogate fathers, Havelok now actively uses his association with surrogate fathers for his own ends, demonizing Godard and idealizing Grim in order to assemble the beginnings of his own kingdom.

The third and final time that Havelok's past is re-told, it is performed on his behalf. On the morning after the public revelation and veneration of Havelok's body in Denmark, Ubbe tells the Danes Havelok's story in order to prove that he is worthy of

their homage. Havelok's experiences, re-told by another character within the story, take on a different tone. His personal trauma becomes a foundational narrative that activates a new national consciousness that will expel Godard and institute a new reign. Ubbe's re-telling is essentially the same as the earlier two in that Havelok's vulnerability is emphasized, Godard's evil is reviled, and Grim's actions are valorized. However, at the end of the narrative, Ubbe bridges the "pastness" of the narrative with the present by inserting Havelok's body into the narrative:

Lokes hware he stondes her!  
 In al this werd ne haves he per—  
 Non so fayr, ne non so long,  
 Ne non so mikel, ne non so strong.  
 In this middelerd nis no knith  
 Half so strong ne half so with. (2240–5)

In this moment, Havelok's physicality and the rhetorical performance combine, and his physical presence authenticates Ubbe's narrative. The truth value and its desired impact on the audience is made apparent because Havelok stands before them as a large body whose presence cannot be denied. Havelok no longer needs to speak in order to plead his case, for his story has been taken up for him and transformed into the nation's history. His movement out of the body towards the symbolic is achieved in this moment, where his narrative and its attendant implications of the right to rule and his inheritance are guaranteed by his body.

Thus, while surrogate fathers play a role in sustaining him and recognizing his right to rule through their varied responses his body, Havelok himself ultimately uses his

surrogate fathers by offering a narrative about his past that takes up his experiences with surrogate fathers in order to fashion an identity in his present. The experience of his physical appetites and how surrogate fathers meet those needs are also transformed through his narrative, but that experience is never entirely discarded, for Havelok's physical presence ultimately secures his successful return to power.

### **V. *King Horn*: Disguise and Deceit**

Where *Havelok the Dane* explores the movement of the physical body toward the symbolic, and illustrates the complicated ways by which literal bodies accrue meanings, *King Horn* dramatizes a similar process but uses the tropes of deceit and disguise more actively. While critics tend to assert that no real development of character occurs in *King Horn*, I argue that there is great variation in what Horn is willing to divulge about his character and intentions at different stages of the romance. For Mary Hynes Berry, there is no psychological complexity governing Horn; hence, he never really develops over the course of the romance. Instead, the romance presents a static conception of heroic action: "Interest in *King Horn* is in the action, not in why or in the details of how something is done, but in the fact that heroes do what they say they will do, that they do what must be done" (654). Anne Scott also presents a perspective on Horn that does not view change or character development as a possibility. She argues, "Horn's character is, so to speak, 'given'" (41), because the romance employs narrative predictions that are consistently fulfilled to highlight only "that aspect of Horn's character which is public, community-oriented, and in a way inflexible" (50). Even so, might it not be possible to trace shifts in the manner in which Horn carries out his deeds even if the structure of the romance

guarantees that he will perform them, and posit that his character and quest can be seen as less certain? Without imposing a *bildungsroman* view on Horn as a character who inevitably grows in moral stature while attaining physical and psychological maturity, it still would be worthwhile to consider Horn's range of action when interacting with the other characters, especially the ones that act as his surrogate fathers.

Part of the difficulty in looking past Horn as an uncomplicated stock romance hero is created by the way Horn's key physical attribute appears to be an unchanging element in the romance. Horn is first described in the following manner:

Fairer ne mighte non beo born,  
 Ne no rein upon birine,  
 Ne sunne upon bischine.  
 Fairer nis non thane he was:  
 He was bright so the glas;  
 He was whit so the flur;  
 Rose red was his colur.  
 He was fayr and eke bold,  
 And of fiftene winter hold. (10–18)

Undoubtedly, the romance commonplace of describing the protagonist of royal birth as the fairest person alive is present in this passage. However, making this description somewhat memorable is how Horn's attractive appearance is placed against the context of natural phenomena, causing the valuation of Horn's looks to appear to be universally

agreed upon.<sup>34</sup> Horn's attractive appearance also features throughout the romance as a key factor that enables his success, and his attractive looks are the motivation for key decisions within the plot. For instance, Horn's attractiveness prevents the Saracen invaders from executing him and also convinces his surrogate fathers, first Aylmar and later Thurston, to take him under their wing. The fact that Horn's physical beauty transcends several cultural boundaries, most notably even influencing his pagan persecutors to act against their own interest, implies this essentialized physical attribute advances his cause such that his restoration is inevitable. At first glance, this seems to be quite similar to the way Havelok's body operates in terms of how his physical stature, strength, and marks of kingship influence key points of the narrative. However, it does appear that Horn's looks influence the plot in a less complicated manner because only good comes as a result, whereas Havelok's exceptional body proves to be both an asset and a threat to his well-being. However, because Horn's adventures involve the complication of a romantic entanglement with Rimenhild, which is also predicated on his looks, it could be argued that physical perfection poses its own problems for Horn.

Even if Horn manages to be placed under the protection of powerful men based on how he looks, the father figures in *King Horn* are more ambiguously portrayed than in *Havelok the Dane*. This is especially true of Aylmar, the king of Westernesse who takes an immediate liking to Horn and his twelve companions and makes arrangements for them to be brought up at his court. At the beginning of the relationship, Aylmar's immediate attraction to Horn is made apparent when he cannot "forlete" (222) Horn

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<sup>34</sup> While the idealizing description is a romance cliché, an early editor of the poem, Joseph Hall points out that this kind of description occurs in the description of women, and that no other romance hero is described in these terms (cited by Herzman et. al, 58).

because he is "so swete" (221). Aylmar also seems to have great hopes for Horn. He promises that Horn's renown will one day "springe / From kynge to kynge" and that his "fairnesse" and "strengthe of ... honde" will spread "[i]nto everech londe" (215–20). Aylmar's grandiose vision for Horn's future immediately translates into a form of possessiveness. The narrative characterizes the foster father–child relationship by calling Horn Aylmar's "fundling" (224), a term that Aylmar himself uses when he orders his steward to "tak nu here / My fundlyng for to lere / Of thine mestere" (231–3).

Yet there is something noticeably missing from Aylmar's vision for the future as well as his plans to make Horn into a skilled knight: At no point does Aylmar state that he will help Horn regain his kingdom of Suddene. In contrast, Aylmar does not even seem to be aware that Horn is the dispossessed heir to the throne of Suddene. This omission is significant as taking revenge against the pagan invaders and re-claiming rule over Suddene are key goals that motivate Horn. In fact, D.M. Hill's observation that "revenge does not satisfactorily exist as a theme in its own right" (169) precisely reflects the way Horn disguises his motives from the surrogate fathers that he gains help from. Horn, on landing in Westernesse with his companions, pledges that the pagans will one day feel the "dent of myne honde" (156). Furthermore, whenever Horn battles Saracens within the poem, there are always references made by the Saracens to Horn's father, often inspiring Horn to re-double his efforts and gain victory. However, this element falls out of the narrative whenever Horn speaks to his surrogate fathers. A clear instance occurs a few lines after Horn makes his exhortation addressed to the ship, when Aylmar comes upon him and his companions. With Aylmar, he does not demonstrate the same desire for revenge, only indicating to the king that he and his companions are of "gode kenne"

and "Christene blode" (180–1) and have been driven into exile by invading pagans. It is interesting that Horn withholds both his desire for revenge and the fact that he is heir to the throne, figuring himself as a hapless victim of an invasion who does not have a claim and whose future has been disrupted as a result. While Horn does not falsify his identity or his predicament, Aylmar is kept at a distance through Horn's omission of detail. In this sense, even though Aylmar commissions Horn's general education along courtly lines and eventually knights him, acts which are crucial for Horn to possess the ability and authority to rule, the romance still locates the inspiration for Horn's recapturing of Suddene in his dead father, Murry. Hence, the romance indicates that it is still up to Horn to effect the transformation necessary to gain revenge, even if he obtains help in practical matters from Aylmar.

Another way in which the surrogate father–son relationship is complicated in *King Horn* involves how Aylmar is not directly involved in Horn's education but designates the steward Athelbras to attend to it. While this is not strange in and of itself, for kings could hardly be expected to personally involve themselves in the education of their children or wards, Athelbras's active role as Horn's protector in his romance with Rimenhild not only designates Athelbras as another father figure but also shows how symbolic fatherhood operates differently when it is bound up with questions of class, power, and intimacy. On one hand, Aylmar functions as an official surrogate father in the sense that Horn would be legally acknowledged to be his ward in Westernesse, and provides Horn with the protection and acceptance into his court that makes everything else possible. On the other, Athelbras's intimate involvement with Horn's interests, especially the way he tries to manage Horn's relations with Rimenhild and his position at

court, shows another side to the surrogate father who recognizes Horn's limited social status in Westernesse because he is in such a position himself.

Athelbras's role as a protector first emerges when Rimenhild makes the request that Horn be sent to her room, causing Athelbras to have "[g]ret wunder" (282) at the command. His suspicions and concerns about Rimenhild's request are based on the fact that "[h]eo wolde Horn misrede" (296), distract Horn from his quest for knighthood, and eventually compromise Horn's reputation and standing at court. Athelbras's approach to the predicament is interesting because he demonstrates the instincts of a protector whose authority is limited by his position at court. Unwilling to anger Rimenhild by ignoring her request, and yet knowing that to send Horn to the rendezvous would ruin his reputation, Athelbras takes matters into his own hands and sends Athulf as a substitute for Horn. Even though Rimenhild exposes the ruse and finally gets her private meeting with Horn after angrily denouncing Athelbras—"Schame mote thu fonge / And on highe rode anhonge" (331–2)—Athelbras's trick pays off as he now knows exactly what Rimenhild has in mind and offers Horn precise advice as Horn goes off to Rimenhild's chamber. By substituting Horn with Athulf, Athelbras also imparts a useful tactic to Horn—deceit and disguise—that Horn himself adopts with much flair later on. Further, those later incidents are comparable to this one because they also involve situations where Rimenhild must be approached under dangerous conditions. Hence, it could be argued that Horn's actions later in the romance are inspired by Athelbras's tactics of deception, and Athelbras ends up guiding Horn in a very practical way.

Athelbras's ways of protecting Horn are also interesting because they emphasize what a surrogate father with limited social status and influence has to do when he is

caught in the midst of a difficult situation. Unlike Aylmar, whose absolute power as king translates into protecting, or, as is the case later on, withdrawing his protection with direct and immediate effect, Athelbras's protection is only effective after it negotiates complex layers of power. As Horn's protector, Athelbras recognizes that his lack of authority clashes with his responsibility to look out for Horn's interests, and when his power is challenged by Rimenhild's desires, he has to make adjustments to how he realizes his responsibilities. Even though he appears to crumble before Rimenhild's threats, his delay tactics actually make her re-consider her request, for when she orders Horn to be brought to her chamber the second time around, she suggests that he come disguised "[o]n a squieres wise" and decides that the meeting should take place when Aylmar is out "[t]o wood for to pleie" (363 & 365). Athelbras achieves some measure of safety for Horn, even if he fails to prevent the meeting, and his actions have the added effect of causing Rimenhild herself to be more alert to the dangers of a romantic tryst with Horn. In this manner, Athelbras's protection takes on a rather complex nature as he achieves a balance between desire and safety within the world of courtly power.

Not only does Athelbras use disguise as a technique to procure knowledge and cause Rimenhild to adjust her plans, his advice to Horn also involves the art of disguising one's intentions. He advises Horn, "Wordes swthe bolde, / In herte thu hem holde" (379–80), telling him to hold back on any speech that would either offend Rimenhild or bind him to an agreement that he cannot fulfill. In effect, Athelbras teaches him how individuals with less social or political power can gain leverage in situations where they must deal with their social superiors by disguising their true intentions with feigned speech. While the narrative states that Horn takes Athelbras's advice to heart—

"Horn in herte leide / Al that he him seide" (383–4)—it also suggests that Athelbras's fears are unfounded because Horn engages Rimenhild with "faire speche," which "[n]e dorte him noman teche" (391–2). In the exchanges that follow, both in this episode and Horn's subsequent meeting with Rimenhild, Horn speaks a lot more than might be expected if he were to follow Athelbras's advice strictly. However, his manner of speech still conforms to the general guidelines of Athelbras's caution. Scott notes that Horn's exchanges with Rimenhild are filled with a large number of conditional statements (35–42). For instance, in their first meeting, he agrees to be Rimenhild's lover only if she arranges for him to be made a knight, and later on, he puts off marriage by saying that he must first fulfill several conditions to cement his new knightly status. For Scott, this form of conditionality upstages feudal loyalty, for these conditions are not imposed by Aylmar but are personal goals, and replaces them with "loyalty to the very conditions themselves—that is, performing certain deeds before performing others in the way he has specified" (57). In this sense, Horn's careful speech, which creates some personal agency despite his limited social position, is an elaborate variation of Athelbras's advice. The way that Athelbras helps to position and prepare Horn for this meeting with Rimenhild indicates how this surrogate parent–child relationship, while lacking the authority and institutional ratification of Aylmar's guardianship, plays an important role in shaping Horn's identity.

Apart from the differences in social and political power affecting how Aylmar and Athelbras behave as surrogate fathers, other contrasts show how surrogate fathers figure in complex ways in *King Horn*. As has been noted above, Athelbras is intimately involved with Horn's affairs. Aylmar, however, appears to be fixated on the idealized

vision of Horn that he has constructed for himself and remains unaware of the covert desire circulating between Rimenhild and Horn. As Horn's guardian, he expects Horn's absolute loyalty and obedience, and is therefore thrown off-guard when he catches Horn in Rimenhild's arms after Fikenhild spreads rumors about Horn's planned treason. In banishing Horn from his kingdom, Aylmar uses words that almost exactly mirror Rimenhild's on her discovery that Athelbras was deceiving her:

"Awey ut," he [Aylmar] sede, "fule theof,

Ne wurstu me nevremore leof!

Wend ut of my bure

With muchel messaventure.

Wel sone bute thu flitte,

With swerde ich thee anhitte.

Wend ut of my londe,

Other thu schalt have schonde." (711–4)<sup>35</sup>

Even though Aylmar exiles Horn and thus passes judgment on Rimenhild's desire vicariously, his echoing lines show that he remains staunchly allied with Rimenhild along class lines. It is apt that his reaction is worded almost like Rimenhild's because both father and daughter feel betrayed by subjects from whom absolute obedience is expected.

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<sup>35</sup> The corresponding lines from Rimenhild's chastisement of Athelbras read:

Hennes thu go, thu fule theof,  
 Ne wurstu me nevre more leof;  
 Went ut of my bur,  
 With muchel mesaventur.  
 Schame mote thu fonge  
 And on highe rode anhonge. (327–32)

The first four lines are almost identical, and while the lines that follow are different, both threaten some form of physical violence.

The class distinction between Aylmar and Horn, at least before Horn regains his throne, structures the surrogate parent–child relationship such that Aylmar's protection is contingent on Horn's fealty, and is quite unlike the relationship between Athelbras and Horn. Contrasting Aylmar and Athelbras allows the romance to show how surrogate fatherhood can become a complicated institution when the ward encroaches on the guardian's political plans, which Horn seems to do in becoming romantically entangled with Rimenhild. Even if Aylmar is not the clear-cut embodiment of evil Godard and Godrich are in *Havelok the Dane*, he shows how easily the surrogate bond can be broken when social boundaries are crossed. Even if Aylmar acknowledges that Horn is his favorite ward—he calls him "mi derling" (492)—this special relationship must be contained within certain class and feudal assumptions that make any independent action on Horn's part immediately suspicious and threatening. Unlike the biological relationship between the dead father and his son that leaves no room for change or disruption once it is idealized, the romance shows that the affection of a surrogate father can be a fickle matter. In his article on the "double antagonists of *King Horn*" (79), Matthew Hearn argues that two kinds of threats—the Saracen invaders and Fikenhild's betrayal—register the "double nature of the feudal crisis," by which the crown was threatened from within by the baronial movement and from without by broader social upheavals in the thirteenth century (83). I would argue that Aylmar represents a third kind of antagonist to Horn, one who is problematically placed on the margins of Horn's successful career. Enabling and yet thwarting Horn's regaining of his patrimony, being somewhat close to Horn because he is Horn's guardian and yet distanced and threatening because he governs that relationship along the strict lines of liege obedience, Aylmar shows how the surrogate

parent–child relationship is a useful figure for raising questions about the exercise and abuse of feudal power.

Under the influence of the authority and advice of his first two surrogate fathers, Horn's instinct for revenge, already repressed in the first instance, becomes shaped into a form that enables him to fit it within social structures in order that he may realize his ambitions. Positioned uneasily at the margins of power as Aylmar's ward at Westernesse, Horn experiences how his instinct and impulses must be restrained and controlled after the disastrous affair with Rimenhild. The next surrogate father–child relationship enables the romance to show how Horn has learned to use the relationship to his advantage rather than be placed at the mercy or protection of the father figure. Even though the familiar pattern of the surrogate father taking Horn under his wing emerges in his sojourn in Ireland, Horn uses his association with the surrogate father for his own ends more actively. When he is first introduced at Thurston's court, Thurston immediately observes how Horn's attractive looks can become a source of contention for his own sons. Thurston notes how Horn, who now assumes the name Cuthberd, will upstage his sons:

Go nu, Berild, swithe,  
 And make him ful blithe.  
 And whan thou farst to woghe,  
 Tak him thine glove:  
 Iment thou havest to wyve,  
 Awai he schal thee dryve;  
 For Cutberdes fairhede  
 Ne schal thee nevre wel spede. (797–804)

While these lines are spoken in jest, Thuston shows how attuned he is to the potential for Horn to upset the social order with his presence, just as Horn does in *Westernessee* through the romantic liaison with Rimenhild. Thuston's observation ironically uses Horn's recent status as an exile by saying that if Berild has any intention to marry, Horn "[a]wai ... schal thee dryve," unwittingly transforming Horn's literal circumstances into a playful jibe at his own son. Could these lines also serve as a subtle warning to Horn? This is possible, as Thuston uses courtly conventions to insinuate that he is well aware of how the newly arrived Horn could challenge the social order.

However, Horn seems to have learned his lessons well from his time in *Westernessee*, and is cautious about how he conducts himself with Thurston. In the first instance, he does not replay the same story of victimization that he uses when he first meets Aylmar, nor does he tell Thurston about his recent bad fortune in *Westernessee*. Horn keeps these things to himself. Instead, he presents himself as a man without a history. On landing in Ireland, he reveals very little of himself to Berild and Harold:

"Cutberd," he [Horn] sede, "ich hote,

Icomen ut of the bote,

Wel feor fram biweste

To seche mine beste." (773–6)

Not only does Horn transform himself by giving himself an assumed name, he is deliberately vague about his origins—"feor fram biweste"—and about his goals. He does not offer any more information to the princes or their father Thurston, and this demonstrates how Horn has learned the value of a good disguise. Thus, if he kept some

information from Aylmar, he goes one step further to de-contextualize his relationship with this newest surrogate parent.

Distinguishing Horn's conception of this new relationship with a surrogate father from his earlier ones is Horn's failure to use this relationship for personal advancement. Rather, he focuses on how he can serve Thurston. One of the more problematic aspects of Horn's relationship with Rimenhild and Aylmar is how Rimenhild is pressured into petitioning for her father to knight Horn. It is a strange request because Aylmar never indicates any prejudice against Horn but considers Horn his favorite ward. In contrast, Horn eagerly volunteers to serve Thurston rather than use Thurston for his own social advancement. When Ireland is challenged by a Saracen champion, Horn volunteers to fight on behalf of the kingdom. Even though Horn also fights Saracens in Westernesse, that encounter is figured in a different light as those Saracens are fought to prove his prowess rather than to protect the kingdom. Indeed, after his victory over the Saracens in Westernesse, Horn brings back the head of the leader of the Saracens to prove that he has been worthy of Aylmar's trust in making him a knight.

That heved I thee bringe

Of the maister kinge.

Nu is thi wile iyolde,

King, that thu me knighty woldest. (645–8)

While Horn's focus in this instance is to show that he deserves the social advancement that he has been given, the later episode shows him offering his service to Thurston by fighting against the Saracen giant alone and thus winning honor for Christendom, and trying to prevent the king's sons from endangering their lives. In doing this, Horn shifts

into the position of protector of Thurston's interests rather than only being the beneficiary of the relationship.

Horn's different approach to the surrogate father–child relationship is also seen in the way he reacts to Thurston's offer to reward Horn by making him heir to the throne and offering Horn his daughter's hand in marriage. Horn demurs on accepting the offer though he does not reject it absolutely:

O Sire King, with wronge  
 Scholte ich hit underfonge,  
 Thi doghter, that ye me bede,  
 Ower rengne for to lede.  
 Wel more ich schal thee serve,  
 Sire Kyng, or thu sterve.  
 Thi sorwe schal wende  
 Or seve yeres ende.  
 Whanne hit is wente,  
 Sire King, yef me mi rente.  
 Whanne I thi doghter yerne,  
 Ne shaltu me hire werne. (913–24)

Instead of either accepting or rejecting the offer, Horn gives a response that is marked by conditionality. This is the first time that he negotiates with a father figure in the romance and it marks a new level of awareness in his conduct with figures of authority. While his hedging appears to be reminiscent of his earlier dealings with Rimenhild, especially in the way he placed conditions on a marriage union, there is a significant difference in this

situation. His conditionality is not stated to either advance his own interests or defer desire; instead, it is used to demonstrate subservience to Thurston's authority.

Horn's subservience is also indicated by a level of awareness about and sensitivity to the king's emotional state, another new development in his relations to a father figure. Even if the reader suspects that Horn's real motive is to buy himself some time with which he can work out how he can return to Westernesse and Rimenhild, his stated reason for putting aside both the offer for inheritance and the marriage is based on ascertaining that Thurston's grief at the death of his sons affects his ability to make sound judgments: "Thi sorwe schal wende / Or seve yeres ende." Horn knows that Thurston's decision to hand over the kingdom in a time of grief could pose problems for his own authority later if he were to accept the offer. In this way, Horn continues to withhold information from Thurston and does not mention his engagement with Rimenhild as the key objection to accepting Thurston's offer. Horn thus manages to see beyond the present and restrain the impulse to benefit himself, demonstrating his awareness of how his relationship with his surrogate father has to be properly managed to order to bring success in the longer term.

This implicit trust, generated by Horn's gesture as he subordinates his own interests to Thurston's through his use of conditional statements, finally allows Horn to abandon Athelbras's advice never to speak carelessly, advice that has served him well up to this point. After the seven years have passed, Horn comes clean about his claim to the throne of Suddene for the first time in the romance, and also speaks openly about his desire to regain Rimenhild as his betrothed:

Horn cam to Thurston the King

And tolde him this tithing,  
 Tho he was iknowe  
 That Rimenhild was his oghe;  
 Of his gode kenne  
 The King of Suddenne,  
 And hu he slogh in felde  
 That his fader quelde. (991–8)

Within the space of a few lines, the narrative reports that Horn reveals everything to Thurston, and does so with severe compression by offering brief, de-contextualized excerpts that jog the reader's memory rather than convince Thurston of the urgency of his situation. Unlike Havelok (and Ubbe), whose elaborate rhetorical performances about the past aim at constructing a sense of a personal, familial and public history that forms the basis for a new community, Horn's past only needs to be alluded to briefly because the past per se is not the basis of his request for Thurston's aid. Instead, Horn says to Thurston, "King the wise, / Yeld me mi servise" (999–1000), demonstrating his assumption that the reciprocal feudal bond is well established between them, and that his surrogate father will honor his commitment to help Horn.

Horn's relationship with Thurston is the most mature version of the surrogate parent–child relationship because it reaches a point where Horn no longer withholds information from Thurston. Yet this relationship only achieves this status because Horn has been guarded in his dealings with Thurston, only offering his full story at the opportune moment. Horn's newfound ability to manage his instincts, groomed through his relationship with Thurston, prepares him for a successful return to Westernesse and

Suddene. For example, unlike his earlier encounters against the Saracens where challenges are brazenly issued and the foe is met on the open battlefield, his return to Suddene is a covert affair. He sneaks into Suddene under the cover of night—"That schup gan arive / Abute middelnichte" (1308–9)—and exploits the fact that the Saracens have posted Athulf's father, himself a crypto-Christian, on guard duty to slip past their defences and launch a surprise attack on the Saracens. Having learned the value of deception and disguise, Horn adopts these stealth tactics very effectively and in no time at all—the narrative only devotes four lines to the description of this climactic battle—regains rule over his father's kingdom.

With regard to Horn's return to Westernesse, he literally goes into disguise. On his initial return, Horn disguises himself as a fisherman, deliberately obscuring his attractive looks in order to come into Rimenhild's presence incognito:

Horn tok burdon and scrippe

And wrong his lippe.

He made him a ful chere,

And al bicolmede his swere.

He made him unbicomelich

Hes he nas nevremore ilich. (1071–76)

While there is the practical matter of being exiled and therefore unwelcome at Aylmar's court, Horn also symbolically repudiates his former identity as Aylmar's favorite ward and the court's most comely knight, by deliberately taking on a foul appearance. He exchanges physical appearance and biological fact for the far more intricate discourse of riddle and rumor, which he exploits to the fullest when he introduces the news of his own

supposed death through a series of puns that allude to Rimenhild's dream of the fish and Horn's name. Horn repeats the disguise motif when he infiltrates Fikenhild's stronghold at the end of the romance by pretending to be a minstrel. By erasing his famed fairness, Horn becomes deft at withholding and submerging his identity, using this to gain what he desires.

Horn's association with surrogate fathers in his quest parallels the way surrogate identities feature as a powerful means by which he achieves his own ends. In contrast to his idealized father Murry, Horn's surrogate fathers are less than perfect: Aylmar withdraws his protection of Horn because he is paranoid about Horn's intentions; Athelbras, despite his good intentions, has his power circumscribed by his social position; and Thurston, despite his generosity, ends up being a surrogate father who needs to be protected from his own grief. Through experiencing the varied ways that authority and protection are administered, Horn also learns how to fashion identities that augment his position as dispossessed heir and lover as well as disguise his obvious good looks. In short, the uneven figuration of surrogate fathers acts as a foil to the idealized father, and provides Horn with alternative means of identification with paternal power, while expanding the possibilities of what it may represent.

## **VI. *Bevis of Hampton*: Surrogate Fathers and the Impulsive Body**

*Bevis of Hampton* further complicates how surrogate fathers are represented, the role they play in augmenting the vision of the idealized father, and how they shape the protagonist. In *Bevis of Hampton*, cultural and religious difference registers more strongly than in *Havelok the Dane* and *King Horn*, influencing how the various surrogate

fathers are represented. While there are significant similarities in the main narrative structure of *Bevis of Hampton* and *King Horn*,<sup>36</sup> Bevis's involvement with a non-Christian surrogate father offers a complication to the father–child relationship that questions whether identification with or competition against the father figure takes precedence in shaping the individual. Further, even though the romance ends with what appears to be an ideal situation of inheritance and restoration, I argue that the societies that are left behind are far less secure than the ones Havelok and Horn establish.

Of the three romances, *Bevis of Hampton* opens with the most complicated surrogate parent–child relationship. The German emperor becomes Bevis's stepfather through his marriage to Bevis's mother, a complication on the surrogate father motif, and yet one that would have been extremely pertinent for the romance's fourteenth-century audience. As Menuge notes, part of the reason for the centrality of wardship as a social institution lay in how it allayed anxieties about the fate of children of first marriages when a mother re-married (105). Wardship, which removed the administration of an heir's inheritance from the new family, was meant to protect the children of a first marriage. The need for this was especially strong if a wife and her new husband tried to profit by exploiting the deceased husband's property or by withholding the inheritance from his children. By becoming Bevis's stepfather through his marriage to Bevis's mother, the German emperor is unlike Godard and Godrich who are entrusted with their charges as social inferiors extending their lord's authority by performing the fealty they owe. Even though the emperor is an evil surrogate like Godard and Godrich, he compromises the symbolic power vested in male authority figures because he comes off

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<sup>36</sup> This similarity takes the form of a double exile predicated on a foreign invasion and a covert romantic attachment between the protagonist and his surrogate father's daughter.

as a pawn in the intricate schemes by which Bevis's mother manifests her desires. Hence, if the surrogate fathers examined so far fall short of an idealized father, the emperor not only fails as a surrogate father but also demonstrates that the most threatening surrogate "father" in a patriarchal structure is the mother who oversteps her boundaries and makes decisions that affect a child's inheritance and future. I agree with Menuge on this point, who argues that for a woman to become the child's guardian would be for her to become the surrogate father and that "[i]n adopting such masculinity she [Bevis's mother] rejects the ideas of motherhood and good guardianship" (105 & 113).

Even though the emperor is nominally Bevis's new father figure—Bevis refers to the emperor as "me stifadre" (464), a term that he uses even when he takes revenge by making war on him at the end—it is his mother who controls the action, from planning Guy's murder up to when Bevis is sold as a slave to the East. When Bevis protests and accuses her of being a whore, she puts him in his place by striking him herself: "That child she smot with hire honde" (320). Following this, she orders Saber to "sle me yonge sone Bef," declaring that she does not care "what deth he dighe, / Sithe he be cold" (338–42). Later, when Bevis breaks into the castle to spoil her wedding celebrations by clubbing the emperor, she is the one who orders her knights to seize him—"Nemeth that treitour!"(449)—while her new husband swoons from the blows. Finally, she issues stern orders to the four knights who manage to apprehend Bevis:

Yif ye seth schipes of painim londe,  
 Selleth to hem this ilche hyne,  
 That ye for no gode ne fine,  
 Whather ye have for him mor and lesse,

Selleth him right in to hethenesse! (496–500)

This sequence of events demonstrates the fearsome power that Bevis's mother wields and how threatening the mother who assumes the position of guardian can be. In fact, even when Ermin, the non-Christian ruler of Armenia whose court Bevis joins, turns against Bevis, he never confronts him with direct violence as she does. Additionally, the threat of Bevis's mother is magnified by the fact that she is a foreign element who cannot be trusted to protect the patrilineal assumptions that govern her deceased husband's plans for succession. The fact that Bevis's mother is a Scottish princess makes her "the foreign influence which represents the first moment of contamination by an outside people" (Campbell 221), and her union with the German emperor intensifies the injustice of Bevis's dispossession. Bevis's mother thus exposes the fears about the viability of patriarchal inheritance within a contentious political climate where non-English elements threaten the purity of the nation's lineage.

After Bevis is sold into slavery, he manages to win favor at the court of Ermin. This second surrogate parent–child episode replicates Horn's fate in *Westernesse* and Ireland, where the hero wins over the local ruler because he has physical qualities that make him appear exceptional. On meeting Bevis, Ermin remarks

Be Mahoun, that sit an high,

A fairer child never I ne sigh,

Neither a lingthe ne on brade,

Ne non, so faire limes hade! (535–8)

Like Horn, whose physical appearance is a truth universally acknowledged, even by invading Saracens, Bevis's attractive, well-formed body also provokes cross-cultural

admiration. Ermin's valuation of his body, prefaced by the oath "Be Mahoun," illustrates this fact. Ermin immediately recognizes how Bevis will have practical value to his empire, if Bevis chooses to embrace Saracen beliefs. He remarks that "Mahoun ... might be proute" (531) if Bevis converts to their faith, an observation that leads to him offering Bevis Josian's hand in marriage and thus the inheritance of the kingdom:

I nave non eir after me dai,  
 Boute Josian, this faire mai;  
 And thow wile thee god forsake  
 And to Apolyn, me lord, take,  
 Hire I schel thee yeve to wive  
 And al me lond after me live! (555–60)

While Ermin's offer and Bevis's rejection are positioned as a temptation for Bevis which he overcomes, thus demonstrating his loyalty to the Christian faith, the proposition and its refusal also become the basis for Ermin's and Bevis's surrogate parent-child relationship. Struck by Bevis's courage, Ermin still makes Bevis his "chamberlain" and honors him with knighthood (572–4), and the narrative emphasizes their close bond by stating that "[t]he king him lovede also is brother" (578).

Clearly, Ermin's willingness to forge these bonds despite Bevis's intransigent otherness goes beyond the practical motives of employing Bevis's physical gifts to his own advantage. For instance, the narrative gives unusual attention to the nuances of Ermin's emotional response as he listens to Bevis's history and religious convictions. In the first instance, Bevis gives a full account of his experiences in England, and concludes by requesting a horse from Ermin so that he can avenge his father's death. After Bevis

ends with a very emphatic statement about his goal—"Me fader deth ich schel wel wreke!"(552)—Ermin's response is given in the narrative: "The kinges hertte wex wel cold, / Whan Beves hadde thus itolde"(553–4). The most appropriate interpretation for "wex wel cold" is that Ermin becomes "disconsolate or distressed"<sup>37</sup> on hearing Bevis's story and his request. But why does Bevis's story provoke such a response in Ermin? It seems that having become enthralled with Bevis's physical perfection, Ermin is now dismayed at the prospect that Bevis will waste his gifts on a self-destructive revenge quest. This may be one motivation for offering Bevis an alternative future in Armenia. Another example of Ermin's protective instinct occurs within the space of a few lines. After Bevis refuses to convert to the Saracen faith, Ermin's response is registered again: "The king him lovede wel the more, / For him ne stod of no man sore" (569–70). Here, Ermin determines that Bevis will not be victimized by the resentment of the Saracens because of his refusal to convert. This second impulse to protect Bevis is also tinged by admiration on Ermin's part that Bevis will not compromise his beliefs. Thus, while Ermin displays the protectiveness that exists as part of the surrogate father function in these romances, it is not necessarily a response to Bevis's helplessness. Rather, this surrogate parent–child relationship emerges out of respect and admiration. Ermin's emotional bond with Bevis represents a utopian moment in the romance, where the Saracen breaks the rigid boundaries of religious identification by positioning himself as a surrogate father.

However, the Other who acts as a surrogate father becomes the victim of the irreducible differences of religion affiliation. The centrality and persistence of this

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<sup>37</sup> See *MED* s.v. *cold* adj. 4.

difference is well worth noting. Without religious difference, Bevis would have easily become Ermin's successor through marriage to Josian, and would not have to endure the relatively marginal status as an adopted outsider. Thus, religious difference keeps Bevis in a marginal position despite his winning of the king's approval, a marginality that is key to creating the obstacles by which he proves himself as worthy to regain his stolen inheritance. Further, despite Ermin's support for Bevis, the religious difference places boundaries on Bevis's behavior that, once transgressed, cause the relationship to sour.

This occurs when Bevis's Saracen enemies come to Ermin with the accusation that Bevis has seduced and "forlain" Josian (1209). Taking a cue from his mismanagement of an earlier incident where Ermin wrongly sentenced Bevis to death after Bevis had slain some of Ermin's men in self-defence, Ermin's response to Bevis's accusers appears rather circumspect:

Sethe he com me ferst to,  
 So meche he hath for me ido,  
 I ne mighte for al peynim londe,  
 That men dede him eni schonde!  
 Ac fain ich wolde awreke be,

Boute I ne mighte hit nought ise. (1221–6)

On one hand, his dedication to Bevis is shown in the lines "I ne mighte for al peynim londe, / That men dede him eni schonde," where his hyperbolic vow that weighs his religious and territorial commitments against his relationship with Bevis may indicate his commitment to finding out Bevis's side of the story. Yet the couplet that concludes his response is puzzling. Even though he is grateful for all that Bevis has done for him,

Ermin seems to be eager for some form of punishment to be meted out on Bevis, except that he cannot bear to witness or order it himself. As much as Ermin acknowledges that Bevis has done much to defend him and the kingdom, the accusation that he has slept with Josian, doubly insulting to Ermin because Bevis rejected Josian's hand in marriage on what appeared to be religious principles, causes him to desire vengeance.

Hence, at the suggestion that Bevis's death can be arranged without confronting Bevis directly or executing Bevis personally, Ermin's resolve to find out the truth immediately crumbles. When the Saracens suggest that he send Bevis to deliver a letter that condemns Bevis for seducing Josian to Brandemond, a provocation guaranteeing that Brandemond will kill or imprison Bevis, Ermin authorizes the plot without further protest. The religious affinities that bind Ermin to the Saracens, even to his erstwhile enemy Brandemond, overrule the surrogate father–son relationship. The other who becomes a surrogate father remains prone to treachery and this sense of irreconcilable difference also governs Ermin's willingness to betray his surrogate son.

Ermin's actions following his betrayal of Bevis also indicate the hardening of the Saracen–Christian boundary. Josian, wondering about Bevis's whereabouts, asks her father about them. In response, Ermin lies, saying that Bevis has returned "to is owene eritage, / And hath a wif of gret parage, / The kinges doughter of Ingelonde" (1439–41). Although Josian remains unconvinced, Ermin's fantasy about Bevis's departure demonstrates his belief in the logic of racial and cultural impermeability. Even though his explanation is untrue, it is exactly the kind of perfect romance ending that would reward Bevis's own unwavering commitment to Christianity and England. In imagining

this end for Bevis, Ermin disowns Bevis as his surrogate child and disavows the utopian vision of Saracen–Christian family that was made possible by surrogate fatherhood.

Even though the romance shows Bevis remaining adamant and uncompromising about his Christian identity, Bevis's identity as a Christian knight begins to exclude all other possibilities only after his betrayal by Ermin. Prior to Bevis's realization that Ermin has betrayed him, an episode in which Bevis finds himself poised between Saracen and Christian worlds occurs when he encounters Terri. Terri, sent by his father Saber to locate Bevis, offers Bevis the opportunity to return to the Christian fold when he explains his mission to Bevis. Yet by not revealing his true identity to Terri and telling Terri that "I segh the Sarsins that child [Bevis] anhonge" (1308), Bevis rejects the opportunity to return to England and ironically places himself in great danger because of Ermin's treachery. While it is strange that Bevis does not grasp at the opportunity to return to England, it is also clear that he derives a good part of his identity from his association with Ermin's court. As Siobhan Bly Calkin remarks, in making this decision, Bevis disconnects himself from his English heritage. Instead, his choice "connects himself to a Saracen family [... and is] a logical outgrowth of the fact that Ermin treats Bevis more as a son than does Bevis's own mother" ("Anxieties" 141). Thus, even though Bevis consistently identifies with Christian values and beliefs, only after his betrayal by his surrogate father does Bevis become more dependent on aid from his Christian god.<sup>38</sup> For

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<sup>38</sup> Prior to his betrayal, Bevis does staunchly profess his Christian identity. However, the incidents arising from this identification demonstrate Bevis's impulsiveness rather than his dedication to God. For example, when his Saracen companions mock him for not knowing that it is Christmas even though he professes to be a Christian, he slays them because he feels a personal insult. Later on, when Bevis arrives at Dammas to deliver the letter to Brandemond, Bevis entertains himself by desecrating the Saracen temple:

And ran to her mameri ful righte

example, commenting on Bevis's epic battle with the dragon that comes after his escape from imprisonment, Corinne Saunders argues that God plays a key role in his victory, as the miraculous healing of the frail hero is the focal point of the encounter rather than the hero's martial prowess (35–6).

Mirroring the failure of the surrogate parent–child relationship between Saracen and Christian is Ascopard's brief acceptance into Bevis's family group. Like Bevis, Ascopard is a marginalized figure, a giant who cannot fit in with the rest of his kind because he is "so lite and so merugh" that he is "clepede dwerugh" (2525–6). However, Ascopard is a far from a perfect image of Bevis, retreating from the fight against the dragon when the threat becomes too grave, placing Josian in danger because of his incompetence, and finally betraying Bevis because of jealousy. Instead, Ascopard's character is a farcical reiteration of how alliances that cut across cultural and racial difference are bound to fail. Unlike Josian, who gladly converts to Christianity for Bevis's sake, Ascopard first agrees to be baptized and then refuses. His refusal is not even made on principled grounds; rather, he objects to the physical discomfort he will experience when the priest tries to push him into the baptismal font: "Prest, wiltow me drenche? / The devel yeve thee helle pine, / Icham to meche te be cristine" (2594–6). While the text never indicates that Bevis adopts Ascopard as a surrogate son—for no signs of an emotive bond ever develop between them and Bevis treats Ascopard more as a servant—the alliance is doomed to failure much in the way that Bevis's relationship

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And slough here prest, that ther was in,  
 And threw here godes in the fen  
 And lough hem alle ther to scorn. (1354–7)

Even with the Christian bias of the poem, the narrative does not frame these incidents as Christian victories but uses them to show how Bevis is still uncontrolled in his actions.

with Ermin's is because of cultural and religious incompatibility. In fact, this is demonstrated most clearly in the situation that causes Ascopard to betray Bevis. Bevis, on his second exile from England, takes Terri with him and chooses Terri for his steward over Ascopard. Even though Terri has not proven himself in battle or served Bevis previously, he is privileged over the giant because he is, like Bevis, a Christian and an Englishman. Emphasizing his outsider status, Debra E. Best writes that Ascopard can only enter the family to betray it, and concludes that "[t]he family of Bevis and Josian may domesticate Ascopard temporarily, but this pagan threat resurfaces when Bevis's political position is undermined" (64).

A competing model of the surrogate father in *Bevis of Hampton* centers on Saber. The narrative first introduces Saber as Bevis's tutor—"meister" (323)—and later as Bevis's uncle—"em" (1264). Like Athelbras in *King Horn*, Saber's attempts to protect Bevis are compromised because he does not have the authority to openly contradict Bevis's mother's orders. Instead, contravening his mistress's order to put Bevis to death, he resorts to deceit. He slays a pig instead of Bevis and "al a bisprengde [Bevis's clothes] with that blode / In many stede, / Ase yif the child were to-hewe" (350–2). Despite his resourcefulness on this occasion, Saber knows that he is unable to provide Bevis with the upbringing and education befitting Bevis's social status. Hence, he plans to have Bevis secretly shipped out of England after the conclusion of the nuptial festivities:

In to another londe I schel thee sende

Fer be southe,

To a riche erl, that schel thee gie

And teche thee of corteisie

In the youthe. (362–6)

Saber's wisdom is also evinced in the way he works out the long-term effects of his plan to smuggle Bevis out of England. While Bevis's immediate safety is a key goal, Saber also intends for Bevis to return when he comes of age to re-claim what has been taken from him:

And whan thow ert of swich elde,  
 That thow might the self wilde,  
 And ert of age,  
 Thanne scheltow come in te Ingelonde,  
 With werre winne in to thin honde  
 Thin eritage. (367–72)

In the meantime, Saber disguises Bevis as a lowly shepherd and cautions Bevis not to attract attention to his own person. Despite being well thought out, the plan fails because Bevis is unable to heed Saber's advice and impulsively storms the nuptial celebrations in an attempt to kill the emperor, an act that leads to his capture and exile into slavery. Saber's plans for Bevis's education were meant to tame Bevis's impulsiveness ("thow might the self wilde") but they fail because Bevis cannot restrain himself. Saber's short-lived role as Bevis's protector in the early stages of the romance highlight the central character flaw in Bevis—his impulsiveness—that must be modulated in order for Bevis to reclaim his heritage and be a successful ruler.

Despite Saber's brief role as a surrogate father who is directly involved with Bevis, the romance shows how Bevis's interests are protected *in absentia* through Saber's efforts. Despite being placed at a distance from Bevis, Saber continues to act as a

surrogate father by trying to protect Bevis's inheritance. In this sense, Saber's actions are much akin to those of an idealized guardian within the institution of wardship, whose primary function was to protect the property interests of his ward against the predations of other family members after the child's father died. For instance, the text details how Saber refuses to let the issue of the illegal usurpation rest. For "ech yer on a dai certaine / Upon th'emperur of Almaine / With a wel gret baronage / A [Saber] cleimede his [Bevis's] eritage" (1341–4). Even though Saber does not know of Bevis whereabouts or fate (until Terri returns from his mission), he continues to protect his interests against the threatening rule of the emperor and Bevis's mother. In doing so, Saber places himself in considerable danger even though he cannot be certain that Bevis will return. In fact, Saber's loyalty to Bevis's cause extends even after he believes that Bevis is dead. After Bevis subdues the dragon, he learns from Bishop Florentine that Saber is making preparations to go to war against the German emperor even though with Bevis's supposed death he does not stand to gain from risking such an action:

Saber, thin em, is in Wight,  
 And everi yer on a dai certaine  
 Upon th'emperur of Almaine  
 He ginneth gret bataile take,  
 Beves, al for thine sake;  
 He weneth wel, that thow be ded. (2916–21)

Unlike a guardian who would profit materially during his period in which a ward's estates were held through enfeoffment, Saber accrues no tangible rewards in the present. By acting as a surrogate father from a distance, even though Bevis is supposedly dead, he

preserves the abstract principles of patriarchal succession. Because of this, despite his long exile and the existence of an alternative line of male succession to the earldom of Hampton,<sup>39</sup> Bevis can return and legitimately state his claims. This is particularly necessary as Bevis's long association with Saracens might make him suspect and even viewed as a foreign invader.<sup>40</sup> Saber's efforts are even more important considering how the emperor, who usurps Bevis's inheritance has his own version of how Bevis came to lose his inheritance. In an ironic moment, the emperor tells his version of how he came to inherit Hampton to Bevis himself, thinking that Bevis is the Frenchman Gerard. Apart from slandering Bevis's heritage—"is fader of proud mode, / Icomen of sum lether blode" (2991–2)—he also claims that Bevis, on coming into his inheritance, sold Hampton to the emperor and "spente his panes in scham and schonde" (2997). Hence, the emperor characterizes Bevis as a wastrel who has surrendered his claims to the earldom, and Saber's efforts counter the efforts to dismiss Bevis's legitimate claims. Further, by keeping Bevis's claims to legitimacy alive in England, Saber ensures that Bevis remains English, and it could be argued that Bevis's Englishness (as opposed to his more generally Christian identity) is metaphorically engendered by his surrogate father's efforts.

While Bevis's experience of father figures is far from ideal, having been betrayed by one and only benefitting from the actions of the other at a distance, Bevis's relative independence from protective fathers turns out to be a positive quality, at least in

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<sup>39</sup> The German emperor has a son with Bevis's mother who gets killed in an accident caused by his father's own wrath.

<sup>40</sup> This stands in contrast to *Havelok the Dane* where Godrich actually uses the "foreign invader" argument to rally support against Havelok, despite the fact that Havelok returns to England with Goldeboru, the legitimate heir to the throne.

comparison to how the other father–son relationships are portrayed in the romance. For instance, being in close proximity to one's father literally endangers one's life, as is the case with the son of the German emperor. The German emperor, having learned from a messenger that he has been tricked by Bevis,<sup>41</sup> tries to kill the messenger by hurling a knife in his direction. The knife, however, misses its mark and "smot his sone thourgh the bodi" (3102). While the incident is given a comic tinge by the messenger's response to his would be assailant—"Thow gropedest the wif anight to lowe, / Thow might nought sen aright to throwe" (3105–6)—it is also a judgment on the emperor, who presumably produced this son with Bevis's mother. The emperor's inability to protect his own son despite keeping him in his presence effectively discredits his attempts to establish an alternative line of succession in the place of Bevis's claim. Given that Anglo-Norman *Bevis* has the emperor killing his brother, and not son, by accident,<sup>42</sup> the Middle English version of the romance appears to be interested in drawing out the self-destructive nature of the emperor's designs on the father–son relationship.

The biological father–son relationship is also portrayed as an impediment to good rule when Edgar, king of England, seeks unjust recompense for his son's accidental death. In this case, the prince, assuming that he should be honored with whatever he desires, decides to steal Arondel, Bevis's horse, after Bevis refuses to give it to him. However, in the process, the prince comes too close to Arondel, who "fot hot, / With his hint fot he

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<sup>41</sup> Disguised as the Frenchman Gerard and pretending to offer his services to fight against Saber, Bevis deceives the emperor into equipping him with an army and weapons that he then turns upon the emperor.

<sup>42</sup> "The emperor heard him [the messenger] and siezed a sharp knife, meaning to stike the messenger through his body, but he missed and struck his beloved brother, felling him dead at his feet" (Weiss, *Boeve* 66).

him smot / And todaschte al is brain" (3561–3). Edgar, upset that his heir is dead, immediately swears that "Beves scholde ben anhonge / And to-drawe with wilde fole" (3568–9), oblivious to the fact that it is the prince's greed that has caused his death.<sup>43</sup> Even though the sentence is mitigated by the barons—Arondel, not Bevis must die—the king's harsh judgment indicates the dangers of the close father–son relationship to Edgar's rule. As a result of this incident, Bevis is forced into a second exile from England and Edgar loses a very competent marshal. This incident has lasting ramifications because later on in the narrative, when Bevis seeks a peaceful resolution to troubles issuing over Hampton, he visits Edgar to pay homage in return for the lands. The two are on the cusp of an agreement when a steward of Edgar's reminds the king of his son's death, and preys upon the king's emotions with a skewed version of the past:

This forbanniiste man  
 Is come to the land aghan,  
 And hath thin owene sone slawe.  
 He hath ydon aghenes the lawe,  
 And yif a mot forther gon,  
 A wile us slen everichon! (4309–14)

This causes the agreement to fall apart and a battle between Bevis and the Londoners ensues. The romance thus indicates the fragility of power when the person in authority is easily swayed by his emotions involving his children.

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<sup>43</sup> Commenting on how spoiled children were thought of in the Middle Ages, Nicholas Orme notes: "A tradition of writing as old as as the thirteenth century asserted that wealthy parents overindulged their offspring, and pointed to the fate of Eli and his sons in the First Book of Samuel as God's punishment on a lax father and his two spoilt children" (47). This incident highlights this danger and justifies Bevis's freedom from being overly attached to doting fathers.

In contrast with Edgar and the German Emperor, Bevis's own relations with his sons seem to be modeled on the somewhat distant relationships with his surrogate fathers, rather than the emotive bond formed between biological kin. As with Horn and Havelok, the experience of surrogate sonship affects how Bevis becomes a father figure to the family and nation at the end of the romance.

### **VII. Return of the Repressed: Sons become Fathers**

Even though these romances end in restoration, with the stolen lands and titles returning to the protagonists, the way that succession works in them still relies heavily on the principle of surrogation at the expense of the biological father–son relationship. There is some variation in how each romance charts the futures of Havelok, Horn, and Bevis as they become fathers in their own right; however, in essence, the romances do not secure literal patrilineal successions that would dispel the anxieties created by the protagonists' own experience of dispossession. Instead, by showing the restored rulers cementing their power through the distribution of the territories and titles accumulated during their adventures, the emphasis is on how the protagonists rule a vast empire through a host of surrogates, rather than how their descendants inherit and secure an original homeland.

The surrogate rule of a large empire is most clearly demonstrated in *King Horn*. After Horn's double victory in which he regains Suddene and rescues Rimenhild from Fikenhild, the romance catalogues how Horn disburses the lands that he has won or inherited to those who have been loyal to him. This catalogue is a summary of the romance from a spatial perspective, retracing the various stages of Horn's journey from founding to conquering king by allowing him now to link the territories that he accrues to the persons who aided him in his struggles:

Horn makede Arnoldin thare  
 King after King Aylmare  
 Of al Westernesse  
 For his meoknesse.  
 The king and his homage  
 Yeven Arnoldin trewage. ...  
 Ther King Modi was sire.  
 Athelbrus he makede ther king  
 For his gode teching:  
 He yaf alle the knightes ore  
 For Horn knightes lore. ...  
 He arivede in Yrlonde,  
 Ther he wo fonde,  
 Ther he dude Athulf child  
 Wedden maide Reynild. (1507–30)

This sequence is interesting because it narrates a process of conquest in benign terms, as if rewarding those loyal to Horn justifies the violent process of empire building. This is especially true in the first two cases, where Horn takes away rather than inherits lands from Aylmar and Modi. By indicating that Aylmar capitulates by offering Arnoldin "trewage" and that Athelbras is gracious to Modi's knights, granting them favor on Horn's advice instead of punishing them for supporting Horn's enemy, the text emphasizes that pacification rather than conquest takes place. Any violence that might have been involved in wresting rule away from Aylmar and Modi is glossed over in this account.

Instead, the focus is placed on the positive consequences of supporting the hero of the romance: Arnoldin receives his reward "[f]or his meoknesse" and Athelbras his "[f]or his gode teching."

Horn now becomes a symbolic father over an empire, taking over not only the authority of his surrogate fathers but also becoming the idealized father figure of the romance. This role is clearly seen in Athulf's marriage to Reynild and his inheritance of Ireland. This marriage is brokered by Horn earlier in the romance, when Horn asks for Thurston's help for his invasion of Westernesse and Suddene. As part of the alliance agreement, Horn promises Athulf to Reynild: "Heo schal to spuse have / Athulf, mi gode felaghe, / God knight mid the beste / And the treweste" (1005–8). In arranging this marriage and seeing it through, Horn acts as a guardian would with a ward, using a marriage for his own political advantage. Of course, there is no indication that either Athulf or Reynild are compromised by this alliance building, another sign not only that Horn's authority is benign but also that his judgment is infallible. Yet even as Horn becomes a father figure over an empire, not only regaining Suddene but also multiplying the territories that owe him fealty, nothing is said about Horn's own biological lineage. The romance conceives of Horn's return to his ancestral home, formation of a new family unit with Rimenhild, and being surrounded by kin as important, as these are the details that it offers at its conclusion: "Horn com to Suddenne / Among al his kenne; / Rymenhild he made his quene" (1531–3). However, the omission of who inherits Suddene after Horn is especially glaring, since the romance has emphasized the magnitude of Horn's dispossession and the broken line of succession between father and son from its beginning. By describing the web of feudal arrangements that center upon

Horn rather than the line of descent of Horn's progeny, the romance shifts its attention away from vertical lines of descent to horizontal ties of alliance.

*Havelok the Dane* also sidesteps the issue of the fate of Denmark and England after Havelok's rule, even though more detail about Havelok's descendants is offered than in *King Horn*. As with *King Horn*, those who have aided Havelok are rewarded with marriages and the distribution of titles and land. Bertram the cook receives the earldom of Cornwall and the hand of Levive, one of Grim's daughters. Gunnild, Grim's other daughter, is also socially elevated through her marriage to the Earl of Chester. In making these arrangements, Havelok exercises his power, not only elevating individuals from the lower ranks of society but also determining the course of elite alliances through marriage. Unlike Godard and Godrich, who dispensed with the need to build alliances when they had power within their grasp, Havelok insures his rule by using marriage as a political tool. The alliances that Havelok forges through these unions make him the father of a new hybrid culture that joins the Danish and the English, a symbolic amplification of his own union to Goldeboru. As Thorlac Turville-Petre argues, through this "intermarriage between Danes and English [and their] Anglo-Danish offspring ... Danes become part of the English national stock" (133) in a narrative that offers a revisionist view of the Viking invasions of England.

However, if the romance offers elaborate detail to show how Havelok becomes the surrogate father of a new Anglo-Danish England, its account of the fate of his biological line does not stand up to the same level of scrutiny. The romance mentions that Havelok rules over England for many years—"was ther-inne / Sixti winter king with winne" (2964–5)—yet no account about his successor is given. This is particularly

strange as the romance makes it a point to mention that Havelok and Goldeboru have the good fortune of producing a large number of children:

He geten children hem bitwene  
 Sones and doughtres rith fivetene,  
 Hwar-of the sones were kinges alle,  
 So wolde God it sholde bifalle,  
 And the douhtres alle quenes:

Him stondes wel that god child strenes! (2978–83)

Even though the narrative claims that all of Havelok's sons and daughters become kings and queens, nothing is said about how this establishes the succession of Havelok's line to the English and Danish thrones. In fact, overcompensating Havelok with a large number of children to prove the security of his line of succession has the curious effect of raising the question of how the double crowns of England and Denmark, now unified under Havelok and Goldeboru, will become shared out amongst such a vast brood of children. The specter of inter-familial strife hovers menacingly over this large family. Instead, of working out the complexities for succession that must result from such a large family, Havelok and Goldeboru's large number of children symbolize the promise of a thriving Anglo-Danish race. Thus, like *King Horn*, horizontal ties, this time between Denmark and England, take precedence over the longevity of Havelok's line.

*Bevis of Hampton*, on the other hand, is more specific about the succession arrangements that take place between Bevis and his two sons, Guy and Miles. However, the way that succession works out in *Bevis of Hampton* confounds the model of direct hereditary succession as well, a development that is at odds with Bevis's quest to avenge

his father and regain his earldom. Even though Guy and Miles inherit lands where Bevis has travelled, their inheritance does not contribute to a sense of dynastic continuity between Bevis and themselves.

Bevis himself does not end up with lands in either England or Armenia, the two places where he spends most of the romance. Instead, upon the death of Ermin, the crown of Armenia goes to Bevis's son, Guy:

Er he [Ermin] out of this world went,

After Beves children a sent.

He clepede to him Sire Gii

And with is croune gan him crouny

And yaf him alle is kenedom. (4009–13)

This is an interesting development as the succession skips a generation: neither Josian nor Bevis are named heirs to Ermin's throne. There could be a range of reasons for this that would be supported by the narrative—Bevis's own tainted history with Ermin's court, his early refusal of Ermin's offer, the fact that he takes Josian away from Ermin—but the fact remains that Ermin does not include Bevis in his plans for dynastic succession. This is largely a symbolic gesture rather than one that legally excludes Bevis from all involvement in the kingdom; after all, Bevis aids his son Guy in ruling Armenia, especially in converting the population to Christianity "with dent of swerd" (4019). However, by excluding Bevis from ruling Armenia, a line of succession running through Bevis is broken.

In England, a similar situation arises that prevents Bevis from continuing a paternal lineage. During his second exile from England, which he undertakes because he

refuses to allow Arondel's execution, Bevis cedes Hampton to Saber, thus foreclosing the possibility that he or his sons will continue as earls of Hampton. However, Bevis's attempt to entrust Hampton to Saber comes under threat because Edgar decides to contest Saber's right to hold the land and disinherits Saber's heir, Robaunt. This threat to his ancestral lands, even though they no longer belong to him, causes Bevis and his sons to return to England. After the battle, Bevis and his sons agree to terms with Edgar and an interesting alliance is forged. Edgar gives his daughter's in marriage to Miles, effectively pacifying the Bevis–Saber faction with this alliance. Once again, another of Bevis's sons is promoted to the highest echelons of another important kingdom in the romance instead of merely inheriting Bevis's lands and titles.

In fact, for the greater part of the romance, Bevis never actually owns any land or titles that he can distribute to his sons. He attains high positions in Armenia and England, and wins the kingdom of Aumberforce, which he cedes to Terri, but does not permanently establish himself until very late in the romance. In an episode that occurs after his son Guy's inheritance of the Armenian crown and before Miles's promotion to heir of the English throne through marriage, Bevis defeats an old nemesis, Yvor, and wins the kingdom of Mombraunt: "Tho crowned that Beves king in that lond, / That King Yvore held in hond" (4253–4). Mombraunt is a strange choice for a permanent kingdom for Bevis, especially in light of the great inheritances that his sons earn. Compared to the career defining victories in Armenia, England, and Cologne, Bevis's history with Mombraunt is largely personal and much less heroic. It is from Mombraunt that he first rescues Josian, a feat accomplished by smuggling her out under false pretences rather than by fighting a battle. Also, his final conquest of Mombraunt has its

origins when Yvor tries to steal Arondel from Bevis, another personal affront rather than one with significant political consequences. Seen in this light, making Bevis the eventual ruler over Mombraunt is an idiosyncratic choice, for this kingdom does not have the significance of England or Armenia in the narrative.

The romance thus undercuts the idea of lineal succession between father and son, even though Bevis's dispossession from the earldom of Hampton is the very event that begins the romance and guides his subsequent actions. Instead of concentrating on developing a single geographical location that Bevis can secure and then pass on to his descendants, the romance is more interested in spreading out Bevis's network of affiliation over a large empire. At the same time, Bevis would be too problematic a figure to be part of either an English or Armenian line of succession, because of his peripatetic existence that straddles several cultures. Thus, as Calkin observes, "the grandiose dreams of expansionism [in *Bevis of Hampton*] are not unalloyed by serious worries about assimilation or loss of Christian English identity" ("Anxieties" 148–9).

The manner by which Havelok, Horn, and Bevis assume complicated identities as biological fathers as well as father figures of nations and empire, makes them unlike their own idealized dead fathers. In an earlier section of the chapter, I suggested that traces of guilt influence the actions of the protagonists, and that from a Freudian perspective, this guilt drives the idealization of the dead father. Returning to Freud, I now argue that the skewed identification with and against the father that emerges through the diverse encounters with surrogate fathers can be identified as a version of the Freudian return of the repressed. In Freud's explanation for how the murder of the father becomes coded as the cultural neurosis of religious belief, he charts a three-stage process. After the father's

death, which is the first stage, the guilt felt by the perpetrators encodes the dead father into the totemic animal, whose veneration restores authority to the father and invests power in a patriarchal structure. A third stage follows, when the totemic animal is replaced by the original perpetrator of the murder, the son, and where the full extent of the repressed guilt returns in myths about a son to appease a God-Father's wrath (*Totem and Taboo* 915–8). Similarly a three-stage development of the father–son relation in these romances, can be discerned, though there is some variation from Freud's model. In these romances, the father who dies is already idealized or becomes instantly idealized at the time of this death. The second stage then consists of the protagonists' associative relationships with surrogate fathers, which simultaneously strengthen the hero and question the authority vested in the idealized father. A third stage involves the way the protagonists set up empires that undermine direct lineal succession in favor of feudal networks; in a sense, this is the death of sonship because the heirs are not placed in direct lines of succession.

Freud's early formulation of the return of the repressed, found in *Totem and Taboo*, argues that the ambivalent feelings toward the father shown by young children can be explained by how totemism is a guilt effect of the murder of the father, where rights and authority are restored to an abstract Father symbolized by the totem animal, and power is re-invested in a patriarchal system. For Freud, the return of the repressed happens when a culture reaches the point where the death of the father, first encoded within the totem animal, is transformed to involve a sacrifice of the son, where cultures find "the most complete expiation for this deed in the sacrificial death of the son" (925). In this early work, Freud uses these speculations about the origins of religion to

illuminate individual psychological development, arguing that the ambivalent feelings a child feels towards his father is the residual effect of deep psychological structures that also characterize the unconscious of cultures and civilizations.

Given how the protagonists's histories of identification with and against father figures in these romances influence the way they rule at the end of each romance, Freud's attempt to find parallels between the individual and the group psyche might be instructive. Read in the light of Freud, the heroes' journey connects the imperialist, expansionist project of these texts with the transformation of the father–son relationship. Instead of adopting a model of succession that strengthens the linear and local connection between father and son that is centered upon a single geographical location, the colonial ambitions of these romances shift the nature of political relationships such that horizontal ties between the father and his sons or his vassals become more important. In a metaphorical sense, sonship—conceived of as the linear inheritance from father to son, where the son models and identifies himself primarily upon his biological father—is repudiated, as it is sacrificed to the conditions required for imperial ambitions to thrive. The father–son relationship, the absence of which drives our protagonists on their quests, is hollowed out by the end of each romance. In the case of *King Horn* and *Bevis of Hampton*, the return of expansionist impulses first represented by the foreign invasions that caused the death of the father and deprived the protagonists of their inheritance are a form of the return of the repressed, for they now operate in place of the father–son relationship. While the scale of fantasized expansionism is not as vast in Havelok's case, the empire that spans England and Denmark and establishes an Anglo-Danish race also replaces the more localized view of nationhood and succession that the poem begins with.

In a later work, *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud places the return of the repressed more firmly within the socio-cultural sphere. He extends his early observations beyond the ramifications on the individual's psychological development and makes a stronger case for the operation of the return of the repressed as a phenomenon of a social psyche in the link between Christianity and its Mosaic roots:

In reality this crime [Pauline original sin], deserving of death, had been the murder of the Father who was later deified. The murderous deed itself, however, was not remembered; in its place stood the phantasy of expiation, and that is why this phantasy could be welcomed in the form of a gospel of salvation. A Son of God, innocent in himself, had sacrificed himself, and had thereby taken over the guilt of the world. It had to be a Son, for the sin had been murder of the Father.  
(109–110)

While this stronger statement of the return of the repressed as a dynamic that has shaped cultural consciousness is evident in Freud's formulation of Christianity, the romances also show how sonship is displaced within the narrative of national expansionism.

In the imperial fantasies of the romances, this is precisely what happens for Havelok, Horn, and Bevis. Not only is the dynamic of the father–son relationship at the end of these romances different from what it is at the beginning, the protagonists also expand their spheres of influence to encompass more territory than their fathers would have handed over to them. Bevis, Horn, and Havelok not only regain their ancestral lands, they multiply them as well. This multiplication effect creates a narrative of national and cultural progress: When sons become fathers in their own right, they also manage to outdo their fathers. Further, through their quests to regain their inheritances,

these protagonists establish a nationalist fantasy where the integrity and security of their inheritance and the nation depends on building an empire through the structures of feudal affiliation. The troubles created for the nation that are emblemized by the disruption of lineal succession at the beginning of each romance are answered by this vision of the nation that is secured by the sheer size of its empire.

By 1297, when Edward I faced a crisis to his rule, the son who sought protection through baronial alliances in 1258–60 had come into his own as father of the nation. As with the complaints made against Henry III in 1258, the barons complained against the king's authority, claiming that Edward was placing his continental connections and interests above his responsibilities as England's king. Specifically, in an attempt to support his war against the French with money and men, Edward had issued new taxes on the Church, wanted to impose heavy customs duties on wool exports, and attempted to summon the barony to provide the military service that was part of their fealty (Prestwich, *Plantagenet England* 165–8). The tension between the crown and his ruling elite that started brewing in January 1297 came to the fore in July, when the English barony, led by Roger Bigod and Humphrey de Bohun, the earls of Norfolk and Hereford, issued the Remonstrances, stating their grievances against Edward's rule (Prestwich *Plantagenet England* 169).

While Henry's response in 1258 was to capitulate to baronial demands by cutting back on his expansionist ambitions and agreeing to policies that privileged native concerns and interests, Edward's response to the criticism against his rule emphasized his imperial ambitions as the basis of English security. In one sense, Edward was 'fortunate' that his nascent attempts to subjugate the Scots with military force actually impacted his

barons directly. After William Wallace's victory over Earl Warrene at Stirling Bridge in September 1297, for example, the barons could hardly withdraw support for Edward's Scottish campaign because the Scots posed a direct threat to lands held by the barons, unlike far off Sicily where Henry had been forced to withdraw after baronial censure. But even on the issue of France, where it was clear that Edward was acting without the support of his barons, Edward tried to couch his plea for support in terms of the common profit. In a letter he wrote in August in response to the Remonstrances, he invoked the reciprocity of the feudal relationship:

Edward argued that he could not do more for his people than put his life at risk on their behalf, and stressed the duty that men should have for their liege lord.... Edward pointed out that he could not defend the realm without the assistance of his subjects, and he apologized for burdening them so heavily. He pointed out that he was not using the money raised to buy lands or castles. The need to bring a quick end to the war was stressed and Edward warned his subjects about the troubles that had occurred in the past as a result of disputes between ruler and subjects. (Prestwich, *Edward I* 424)

Like Edward, the protagonists of romance attach the nation's integrity to the strength of the empire after they become fathers. Even if the ostensible goal of retrieving or defending one's patrimony is achieved, empire building rather than preserving one's lineage becomes the focus in the romances. Both these aims, of course, would not have been mutually exclusive for Edward but the propaganda possibilities of empire building for the sake of the realm were far more attractive, and perhaps justified, than seeking to protect his family's inheritance. Indeed, Edward's justification of his desire to campaign

on the continent was surely propaganda, for the Gascon and French interests that Edward held so dear were the most direct link to his Angevin forebears and the holdings of his great-grandmother, Eleanor of Aquitaine. However, Edward seems to have perceived that dressing this up in the rhetoric of empire that served the interests of the realm as a whole, just as the romances do in their endings, would go down better with the opposition.

Edward's earlier dealings with the baronial powers in 1258 also gave him experience in the matter of alliance building with the ruling elite. In the crisis of 1297, he managed the baronial opposition effectively, building alliances with some members of the barony and preventing them from forming a united front against him. Like the protagonists of the romances who secure their legacy through webs of affiliation and patronage rather than insisting on the direct application of power, Edward warded off the threat to his power by using factional politics to his advantage. One of the key opponents to Edward's policies was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Winchelsey, who stood by a papal bull which ordered the refusal of payment of taxes to the crown except in times of grave danger (Prestwich, *Edward I* 415). However, Edward was shrewd enough to never allow Winchelsey to form an alliance with the earls who opposed the crown's policies, managing to negotiate a settlement that reconciled him to the Archbishop in July 1297, just as the barons issued the Remonstrances (Prestwich, *Edward I* 420). Edward also showed skill in dismantling baronial opposition. Even though the earls of Warwick and Arundel, John Hastings and Edmund Mortimer, were initially part of the group of magnates that opposed Edward's demand for overseas service, he managed to divide the

opposition, "detaching the earls of Warwick and Arundel from Bigod and Bohun" (Prestwich, *Edward I* 433).

Given the historical challenges to the crown in 1258 and 1297 and the way that wardship and surrogate fatherhood were emblematic of the reciprocal functions of service and protection that marked the feudal relationship, the romances examined in this chapter are indications that the family romance in the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth century registered the complicated way that fatherhood featured in models of authority. Even though paternal authority is successfully enacted at the end of each romance, it does not operate through a single authoritative mode and does not depend exclusively upon the succession of biological children. Instead, the romances show that patriarchal authority operates most successfully by creating and exploiting the alliances formed through the protagonists' association with surrogate fathers.

**Chapter 3: Marrying the Other: Deceit, Betrayal, and Family in *The King of Tars*,  
*Richard Coer de Lyon*, and *The Sultan of Babylon***

**I. Introduction: Reading Hybrid Marriages**

In this chapter, I study *The King of Tars*, *Richard Coer de Lyon* and *The Sultan of Babylon*, arguing that these romances invest the representation of marriages and family formed from the union of Christians and Saracens with fantasies about religious and racial purity. I term these inter-faith and inter-racial unions hybrid marriages, for in spite of the assimilative conversions that take place in the romances, conversion never fully domesticates cultural and racial otherness. Further, hybridity also underscores the fact that while religious difference seems to be the most prominent distinction between the spouses, unyielding physical, cultural, and political differences are never eclipsed by religion. While these romances are a means of fantasizing the positive and absolute christianization of the Saracen Other through marriage, the effects of hybridity are evident when anxieties concerning imperfect conversion emerge in these works. In these romances, the anxiety over conversion centers on the fact that the converted Saracen betrays his or her faith, nation and family in embracing Christianity. Even after conversion and marriage, the possibility that the Other will betray his or her new faith and community remains. The prospect of family, despite being the social institution that motivates, effects, and manages conversions in these romances, is itself vexed by the possibility that when the family brings the Other within its intimate bounds, it also runs the risk of being betrayed. These insecurities gnaw at the heart of the family and are symptomatic of broader medieval attempts to define a stable group identity at the expense

of an Other while worrying that the Other has become intimately invested within the conception of the group itself in a fashion that potentially threatens that very identity.

These ambivalent psychic investments are part of the dynamic that Steven Kruger has identified as the complex relation of Christianity to its "Jewish 'parent'" in the period spanning 1050 to 1200, where the "intensification of anti-Judaism" paradoxically emerges at a time when "Jewish-Christian communication and collaboration appear to be especially intense" (30). Instead of focusing on the attempts of Christian ideology to consolidate its identity against Islam or Judaism, this chapter reads unions between Christians and Saracens as revealing the familial dynamics that colored the relations between England and France in the fourteenth century. While critics have noted that these romances are symptomatic of the attempt to define nationhood as well as Englishness against the French, less effort has gone into specifying the link between the Saracens and the French as Others that substitute for each other in the English imagination.<sup>44</sup> For instance, recent scholarship on the nationalistic fantasies embedded in *Richard Coer de Lion*, while mindful of the problematic presence of Richard's French allies who are derided in the romance, tend to focus on English national identity as emerging out of the representation of the Richard's cannibalism. Both Alan Ambrisco and Geraldine Heng focus on how cannibalism in the romance is the basis for a distinctly English identity for Richard. Ambrisco argues that, paradoxically, a unique national

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<sup>44</sup> In this regard, the chapter builds on recent scholarship that traces the nationalistic fantasies embedded in the romances studied here. On *The King of Tars*, see Sobian Bly Calkin's "Marking Religion on the Body: Saracens, Categorization, and the King of Tars." For nationalism in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, see "The Romance of England" in Geraldine Heng's *Empire of Magic*, Alan S. Ambrisco's "Cannibalism and Cultural Encounters in *Richard Coeur De Lion*" and Suzanne Conklin Akbari's "The Hunger for National Identity in *Richard Coer De Lion*."

identity for Richard and the English forces is fashioned out of the barbaric act of cannibalism, a strategy that reflects an ambivalence surrounding English identity because cannibalism is normally not used for self-identification but for othering (510–1). Heng argues that the romance's humor draws on unique English language resources to create a sense of common national identity. She contends that cannibalism is central to the process of nationalistic identity, but as a joke writ large, when a prank involving cannibalism played against Richard is transformed into "collective hostile joke against the enemy ... extrapolating, in the process, a community called 'England,' made up of 'good,' 'English,' 'Christian men' who are defined by their appetite for Muslims" (75). Suzanne Conklin Akbari, studying the image of eating and feasting in the romance in broader terms, emphasizes the religious and theological overtones of the romance are akin to the political strategies used by Lancastrian politicians to create a sense of English community. She argues that the romance "relies upon Eucharistic symbolism in which the community is united through a sacrificial act, performed by one of its members on behalf of the group as a whole ... [and that] Eucharistic symbolism is the framework out of which the discourse of the nation emerges, with the king located at the same liminal point inhabited by the priest who celebrates the mass" (199).

Building on this work, this chapter aims to specify the process by which the fantastic and often distant Other (the Saracens) comes to be mapped upon Others that are closer to home (the French). Explaining how these two very different Others are intertwined often runs the risk of becoming an argument grounded in the convenience of proximity; that is, Saracens *must* stand in for the French because the French threat was the one most keenly felt by the English in the fourteenth century. While this may be

partially right, this chapter argues that the English national psyche expresses this link quite explicitly in the way conversion and betrayal play out in the familial contexts of Middle English romance and the family fortunes of the Plantagenets, with the most prominent instance occurring early in the fourteenth century with Edward II's betrayal by his wife, Isabel of France.

As a means to elucidate the relationship between conversion and betrayal in social and national terms, I turn to Melanie Klein's theories of psycho-sexual development.<sup>45</sup> Klein's theories may seem an odd choice in an account of nationalist fantasy since Klein's work focuses on individual psycho-sexual development and has not been elaborated to account for social psychologies. While elements of Freud's psychoanalytic oeuvre have been used by critics of culture, such as Herbert Marcuse, Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and Fredric Jameson, to explain the development of culture as well as how to read culture, Freud's own turn towards an analytical reading of culture set a clearer precedent for this kind of movement from the individual to an analysis of culture and society. In contrast, Klein's published work does not move towards taking culture or society as a whole as an object of analysis. However, several arguments can be made for applying Kleinian theory to a reading of larger group psychologies.

In an unpublished paper presented in the summer of 1940, after France had fallen to the Germans, Klein speculates about how her theories might account for the anxieties

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<sup>45</sup> All references to Klein are taken from the collection of her essays compiled by Juliet Mitchell. Klein's ideas regarding partial objects and the earliest persecutory anxieties are laid out in two essays: "Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse" (1929) and "The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego" (1930). In two later essays, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States" (1935) and "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940), Klein explains how the ego progresses from the early schizoid-paranoid position to greater integration in the depressive position.

felt at the prospect of war with Germany as Hitler's armies overran Europe. The paper, titled "What does death represent to the individual?," contains an interesting statement where Klein seems to endorse a necessary regression of the psyche in order to cope with the threats represented by German aggression. She writes that "an important step in development is the capacity to allow oneself to split the imagos into good and bad ones.... Only thus it is possible to hate with full strength what is felt to be evil in the external world" (qtd. in Stonebridge 200). Even if Klein was commenting on the individual developing a capacity to respond to the political and military crisis, the fact that the observation was made within the context of national conflict does suggest that Klein herself was not closed to the possibility of her theories having consequences for the analysis of historical-political phenomena. From another perspective, Klein's shift towards object-relations in psychoanalytical theory has been the basis for a broader application of Klein's theories to group analysis. Eli Zaretsky argues that Klein's shift away from the paternal figure that ruled Freudian analysis freed psychoanalysis from taking the family as the basis for analysis. With Klein, "[t]he main terrain in which this 'relational' ego or self was envisioned was the terrain of personal life, a terrain of friends, colleagues and relations, not the narrowly conceived family any more" (34). Even if Zaretsky's observation does not extend to considering how the relationality of individual psyches constitute a national psyche, it emphasizes how the terms of Kleinian theory offer the possibility of thinking about an aggregate "national psyche" since the "relational ego" is no longer confined to familial relations.

Lastly, the emphasis of Klein's work on anxiety makes it useful in examining nationalistic psyches that define themselves against the Other. Klein's explanations, by

making anxiety a central psychic force, prove more valuable than a theory of drives or lack in examining the response to the Other. In a theory of drives, one that adopts the Freudian Eros and Thanatos, for example, the Other is made secondary to these forces that act upon the world in a somewhat autonomous fashion. While, in a certain light, Klein's anxiety ridden psyche seems to endorse the "bleak belief in the primacy of the death drive" that creates a "pessimistic solipsism," Klein's emphasis on the relations between the psyche and the Other tells a more nuanced "story of the ego's survival in a world which constitutes it, not as whole, but as shattered through the vicissitudes of its own anxious being" (Stonebridge 195–7). A psychoanalytical theory centered on lack would also be unable to account for the determinative role of the psyche's relation to the Other. In a Lacanian account of desire, for example, the Other, while important, plays a structural role. Its fictionality as a term whose illusive fullness and ultimate emptiness are required by a theory of desire that is bound by the Symbolic order downplays the visceral response to Otherness that Klein's theory of anxiety highlights.

In a Kleinian schema, the earliest psychological impressions for the infant consist of interactions with partial objects that are either persecuting bad objects or idealized good objects. At this stage of development, the psyche cannot relate to whole persons but experiences a fragmented world, designating these partial objects as "good" or "bad" on the basis of whether they fulfill or frustrate its needs.<sup>46</sup> Klein's theory of partial

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<sup>46</sup> Klein uses the example of the mother's breast to illustrate the notion of partial good and bad objects. When the child receives nourishment from the mother, the breast is considered a good object and becomes idealized as such. Yet the same breast can simultaneously be regarded as a persecuting object when it is withdrawn before the infant is satisfied or when the child's hunger pangs are not immediately satisfied. The absent breast becomes a persecuting "bad" object. In Klein's view, the infant regards these as

objects is essentially an account of how the mind's earliest operations are fraught with the anxiety of being persecuted by bad objects, as if the nascent ego is constantly under siege by these objects from the external world. Klein calls this the "paranoid-schizoid" psychological position (116–8). As it matures, the ego manages to identify more fully with the internalized good objects and wishes to protect them from the persecution of bad objects. At the same time, the psyche begins to relate to whole persons instead of partial objects. This change is brought about when the psyche is more able to domesticate the dangerous otherness of persecuting objects by coming to terms with the fact that these persecuting objects are really parts of real people and not separate entities bent on attacking the ego. The radical otherness of bad objects is assuaged by the relation that connects them to good objects, and a link between good and bad objects is forged as the psyche begins perceiving them as parts of whole persons. This more mature psychological state Klein calls the "depressive position." This process is crucial for Klein as it indicates the mind's ability to shift gears with regards to how it copes with anxiety. Once the mind desires to protect its good object relations and is able to relate to whole persons, the previously dominant persecution anxiety is transformed into the fear of losing one's good objects and loved ones (141–2).

However, this process is not without its threatening aspects. As partial objects become reconciled with wholes, the ego is confronted by the fear that it is incapable of providing adequate protection for the good objects from the persecutions of the bad objects. Second, if expelling bad objects from the psyche is a strategy the ego employs to deal with them, the ego suffers the attendant fear that it may inadvertently expel good

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separate partial objects and does not yet have the ability to discern that they are the same breast that are merely a part of a whole person, its mother.

objects as well (Klein 119). Thus, even when the ego is consolidated, the process itself is fraught with the anxiety of losing the good objects that strengthen it.

While Klein's account of the emergence of the ego in this dichotomizing schema may seem simplistic, it is useful because she proposes psychic mechanisms through which the anxieties pertaining to objects are managed. One specific way to adapt Klein's theories for the purpose of explaining the development of nationalist psyches is to think of her mechanisms of anxiety management as paralleling acts of conversion and assimilation. This parallel affords insight into the anxieties that are present when attempts are made to convert the Other and to secure that conversion. The analogy between Klein's theory of ego development and the vicissitudes of national psyches is especially keen in late-fourteenth- and early-fifteenth-century England, a period where a sense of Englishness was consolidated through actual and perceived threats from the French. The intra-psychical process that Klein describes is also pertinent to the English national psyche in the fourteenth century because the romances re-write English history in order to distance England from its own French heritage. In this context, the developmental elements of Klein's schema are useful in showing how the romances each register a different response to the threat of otherness even if these responses do not necessarily unfold in a developmental manner.

One possible objection to this approach is that it posits a single, monolithic attitude towards the French that crystallizes into a nationalist psyche, a view that cannot be supported by the historical evidence. Indeed, from a historical perspective, the notion of a national psyche is problematic as English attitudes towards the French and the Hundred Years War were not always in uniform support of the war. In the early years of

the conflict, for instance, the system of purveyance, through which food and necessities to provision the army were taken from the general populace through collecting agents, was "a major cause of dispute between the crown and its subjects," though matters improved by the middle of the fourteenth century as abuse by royal agents lessened (Allmand, *Hundred Years War* 98). Specific groups were also particularly affected by the financial drain of the war and may not have supported it whole-heartedly. For example, the most effective way for the crown to support the war was to increase taxation on exports. The 1360s saw several increases in export levies on wool to finance the defense of Calais and the Aquitaine, a move that would have cut merchant profits (Allmand, *Hundred Years War* 105). Other dissenting voices were found in clerical arguments against the war, which manifested themselves in sermons preached against warring with another Christian nation and about the immorality of how the English conducted the war on the continent (Allmand, "Non-Combatant" 175).

At the same time, there was much support for the war from the very same constituencies that would have opposed it. For the general populace, the fact that the war was not conducted on English soil played a role in creating support for the venture. Apart from coastal communities, most English people were exempt from the actual horrors of war, unlike their counterparts in France. Further, campaigning on the continent also provided opportunities for Englishmen to profiteer. As C.T. Allmand notes, "[a] large variety of sources ... show that the incentive motive, largely an economic one, was very powerful in gathering an army together" ("Non-Combatant" 170). Even merchants, who may have seen their profits dip from the steep increases in taxes levied to fund the war, did not necessarily take a pacifist stance against the war. For example, the

tract *The Libelle of English Polycye*, which is dated to 1436, advocates an aggressive English war policy with a view to gain monopoly over channel trading for English merchants: "The trewe processe of Englysh polycye / ... Is thys ... / Cheryshe marchandyse, kepe thamyralte, / That we bee maysteres of the narowe see" (1–7).

Despite this evidence of a range of views on the conflict, which also altered according to the different phases of the war, W.M. Omrod has argued that the war did generate a "developing sense of a collective experience," and that the rhetorical productions commemorating the events of the war, such as "William Caxton's continuation of the Brut chronicle and Lord Berners's translation of Froissart" are "a powerful reminder of the extraordinary psychological and cultural response that the Hundred Years War had provoked in the population of England" (85). Thus, even if range of attitudes towards the French war resists the notion of a single national psyche, it is possible to argue that the romances studied in this chapter participated in the enterprise of creating a vision of what a certain form of Englishness could look like, a fantasy that would have struck a chord with the great numbers that supported warring against the French for various reasons. In effect, by operating as cultural fantasy, these romances produce identities for the English nation from a singular perspective, creating the illusion, if not the reality, of a monolithic sense of Englishness. At the same time, as my readings of anxiety in the texts will show, this sense of Englishness is never fully confident and assured, and is perpetually marked by the paradoxes that emerge from the disavowal of and identification with the Other.

While the sections that follow treat each romance in turn, they aim to build a composite picture of how betrayal and the family map onto English–French relations.

Beginning with *The King of Tars*, a romance that dramatizes the difficulties of the hybrid marriage most acutely, the chapter examines how duplicity and betrayal direct the action of the romance and how the rite of baptism and the conversion of the Saracen sultan does little to alleviate the vexed question of the hybrid marriage. The anxieties caused by the marriage are examined from both the sultan's perspective and the Christian one, and Klein's contrasting psychological positions provide a useful template for schematizing the differences between the two. By drawing links to the crisis that ended Edward II's rule that involved the betrayal by his wife, Isabella of France, I argue that this betrayal left a traumatic mark on the English national psyche.

The subsequent sections examine the effects of this trauma in *Richard Coer de Lyon* and *The Sultan of Babylon*. After the humiliation of betrayal and the deposition of Edward II in 1327, matters improved for the English in their relations with France, in so far as they enjoyed significant military successes that were not reversed until the end of the 1420s. From the time that Edward III laid claim to the French crown to Henry V's securing of the French succession, England's steady expansion against the French could be seen as gains that would erase Edward II's humiliation at the hands of a foreign wife. I argue that *Richard Coer de Lyon* is a romance that responds to the threat of otherness with persecution anxiety. Despite the fact that the romance probably evolved over the span of time that the English enjoyed military successes against the French, its version of nationalism can be thought of, in Kleinian terms, as a "paranoid-schizoid" response to otherness. In my reading, *Richard Coer de Lyon* asserts an Englishness that remains fraught with the threat of persecution. The romance attempts to exorcise the Plantagenet-French connection through maternal displacement—Eleanor of Aquitaine is written out

of the romance—and by making Richard the victim of French betrayal. On the other hand, *The Sultan of Babylon* manifests a different response to the same set of nationalist traumas and fantasies. The very fact that it is an English appropriation of the matter of France during a period of English–French hostility marks it as a more assured work. By celebrating Charlemagne's exploits against an imagined Saracen empire and his peers' success in converting the Other, the romance enables English identification with a certain French past without necessarily contradicting the fact that England was still very much at war with France in the present.

## **II. Difference, Duplicity and Betrayal in *The King of Tars***

The fragmentary romance, *The King of Tars*, demonstrates the anxieties over securing the conversion of the Other. The racially and religiously mixed marriage between the princess of Tars and the sultan of Damascus is represented as a union that fails to secure the ostensible political aims of the marriage; instead, it becomes the site of duplicity and betrayal. The failure of the union to establish a family that can mediate between different cultures and empires signals the limits of the family as an institution capable of grounding social and national stability. Within the Christianizing ideology of the poem, difference cannot be contained by the family and the alien must be subjugated and homogenized before the family can be properly established.

The irreducible difference between the kingdom of Tars and the sultanate of Damascus is figured most crucially by how the respective kingdoms are described.<sup>47</sup> The physical description of the princess of Tars emphasizes her fair skin and immense beauty:

A douhter þai hadde hem bitven,  
 Non feirer woman miȝt ben,  
 As white as feþer of swan. ...  
 Wiþ rode red so blosme on brere,  
 & eȝen stepe & gray,  
 Wiþ lowe scholders & white swere. (10–16)<sup>48</sup>

As Geraldine Heng observes, the description of the princess's complexion, eyes, neck and shoulders makes her "the archetypal true European beauty of romance ... an image culled from rhetorical treatises and repeated *ad infinitum* in manuscript illustrations" (*Empire* 231). Not only does this physical description reside in the princess, it is treated as a familial trait as well. Several lines prior to this description, her mother is described rather more succinctly but in the same hyperbolic terms: "Þe king of Tars hadde a wiue, / Feirer miyt non ben oliue" (7–8). Even though the description of the queen of Tars does not provide the same level of detail, the crucial assertion that she is the fairest lady alive is repeated in the description of the princess as well. While it is easy to dismiss the logical

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<sup>47</sup> Still, the kingdom of Tars, while obviously Christian in the poem, is problematically so. Robert Giest has pointed out that the king of Tars is a conflation of the Christian king of Armenia and the non-Christian Tartar King Ghazan, who was christianized in the medieval European imaginary as he was perceived to be an ally against the forces of Islam (262). Heng notes that the skin and fairness of the princess is used to secure the European nature of an Eastern princess as all possible candidates for the kingdom of Tars refer to an oriental location (*Empire* 231).

<sup>48</sup> References to *The King of Tars* are taken from the Judith Perryman's edition of the work.

impossibility of both assertions co-existing as mere rhetorical convention, the fact that the conventional phrases do indeed occur within two lines of each other speaks volumes about how the phrase allows romance to quickly access an idealized physical description. The princess and her mother, and by implication, their family and nation, are identified as undeniably European and as the culture that possesses the best physical virtues. Extending these physical associations into the spiritual realm is the re-assuring vision at the end of the princess's nightmare. In it, she is menaced by "an hundred houndes black" (420) and is particularly threatened by one that presumably represents the sultan. But she is saved from her fate when one of the hounds is transformed, and appears "in manhede, / In white cloþes als a knight" (447–8). In opposition to the darkness of the Saracens, Christianity is represented by whiteness as well.

The extent to which *The King of Tars* participates in medieval assumptions that joined race and religion as a seamless category and which "suppos[ed] the normativity of whiteness, and of the white racial body, as the guarantor of normalcy, aesthetic and moral virtue" (Heng *Empire* 231), lies in the way that the sultan does not need to be described as dark-skinned early on in the poem in order to be assumed as such and considered irreconcilably foreign. The sultan is indeed "blac" (793)—a fact confirmed later in the narrative, just in time to emphasize his own miraculous transformation to a light complexion when he is baptized.<sup>49</sup> However, it is enough for the poem to emphasize the fair complexion of the princess and her family in order to evoke the image of the sultan who must be dark-skinned if he is Saracen. At the same time, the otherness of the sultan

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<sup>49</sup> Calkin argues that this late revelation of the sultan's skin color, indicates that the text is only explicit about his complexion "after the horror of religious and biological indeterminacy has been raised and rejected" (230).

is secured by describing his uncontrolled descent into bestial behavior when he learns that the king of Tars has rejected his marriage suit. In this scene, the sultan is figured in beastly terms—"wilde bore" (98) and "loked as a lyoun"(107)—as he tears at his clothes and destroys the furniture of his palace. His loss of self-control and the destruction of the trappings of civilization distinguishes the sultan from the princess and her world. While I read the sultan's beast-like depiction as his reaction to the rejected marriage suit, Jane Gilbert points out that his reaction is also specific to being called a "hepen hounde" (93) by the king and that his response "ironically exceed[s] the designation to which he objects" ("Putting the Pulp" 105). If the descriptions of the princess's physical beauty are the result of color conventions conveying a somewhat static image of her, they contrast with the uncontrolled transformation from human to beast in this description of the sultan. The princess's description joins her to her mother as well as to Christianity but the sultan's reaction dissolves both communal and religious affiliations as he curses his gods such that his men do not dare approach him in his mad fury: "Al þat day & alle þat niȝt; / Noman miȝt him schast" (110–1). The stereotyping agenda of the romance affirms that as individual representatives of their respective cultures, the princess and the sultan are extraordinarily different.

The incompatibility of the union and its subsequent failure is also emphasized in the description of the battle. Like their leader, the sultan, the Saracens are violently dangerous, fighting in a manner that resembles beasts devouring prey:

þer hewe houndes on Cristen men  
 & feld hem doun bi niȝen & ten;  
 So wilde þai were & wode

Þat men might sen alle þe fen  
 Of Cristen boþe fremd & ken,  
 Þe valays ren on blod.       (169–174)

The Saracens' prowess in battle is not attributed to knightly skill or superior tactics but to sheer brutishness as they manage to "hewe adoune wiþ grimli wounde / Mani a frely fode" (176–7). The Saracen world is one of men who behave like beasts. In contrast, the only act of individual skill and heroism in the battle is attributed to the king of Tars. Taking in the terrible onslaught of the Saracen hordes, the king manages to pick out the sultan from the mob of combatants and almost manages to kill him:

He [The king] hent in hond a spere  
 & to þe soudan he rode ful riȝt,  
 Wiþ a stroke o michel miȝt  
 To grounde he gan him bere.  
 Þer he hadde þe soudan slawe,  
 Ac ten þousand of heþen lawe  
 Saued him in þat were.       (183–9)

Not only is the king distinguished from the indiscriminate killing of the Saracens by his skill in single combat, he is different from the invading sultan in the way he is moved to battle by the sight of his own people being killed and tries to save his people from more violence by targeting the cause of the war. However, the poem emphasizes that there are limits to individual skill, and the king's efforts are in vain because he is ridiculously

outnumbered when he tries to slay the sultan.<sup>50</sup> Later on, during the truce in which the king of Tars and his daughter must decide on their course of action given the Saracens' battlefield success, the same valuation for life and rational judgment informs the princess's decision to wed the sultan. She cannot bear to see more of her people die for her sake:

Sir, lete me be þe soudans wiif  
 & rere namore cuntek no striif,  
 As haþ ben here bifore.  
 For me haþ mani man ben schent.  
 Cites nomen & tounes brent. ...  
 Certes, y nil no lenger dreye,  
 þat Cristen folk for me dye. (223–36)

Unlike her prospective husband, the princess sacrifices her own desires for the good of her people and nation. These contrasts indicate that the difference of skin color signals a broader matrix of incompatible values and actions that concretize the distance between Christian and Saracen in the poem. Given the ideological slant of the poem, it is no wonder that the Christians are depicted in positive terms, even if they lose the crucial opening battle and have to sacrifice the princess to the sultan in order to broker a peace treaty. Yet, as the next section argues, the simple polarization between good civilized Christians who are beautiful and fair-skinned and evil sub-human Saracens is

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<sup>50</sup> This trope of being vastly outnumbered is common in Western romance depictions of the Saracen enemy. As William Winstar Comfort observes, "The numerical advantage of the Saracens is a constant feature in popular Christian poetry. Their advantage in this respect is, of course, offset by the superior bravery of the Christians, who knew no fear" (631).

complicated by a more nuanced view of both sides which emerges as the narrative develops. While English audiences of the poem in the early fourteenth century might be prone to identify their national interests with the Christian kingdom of Tars and its beautiful princess, the romance makes this identification difficult by dramatizing duplicity and betrayal within the family.

### **Keeping Up Appearances**

While the incompatibility between Christian and Saracen beliefs and cultures is figured in general terms by the oppositional imagery discussed above, the marriage between the princess and sultan manifests the absoluteness of this difference by showing how duplicity and betrayal operate in their marriage. The first instance of deceit and betrayal involves the Christian princess's duplicity. She feigns her conversion to the Saracen faith and manages to keep true faith to her Christian beliefs:

& þei sche al þe [Saracen] lawes couþe

& seyð hem openliche wiþ hir mouþe,

Jesu forʒat sche nouʒt.

Wher þat sche was, bi norþe or souþe,

No minstral wiþ harp no crouþe

No miʒt chaunge hir þouʒt. (505–10)

Siobhain Bly Calkin has read this duplicitous conversion on the princess's part as symptomatic of the confusion of categories that the poem demonstrates as dangerous. By dressing up as Saracen, confessing Saracen creeds, and yet preserving an inwardness of belief that cannot be disrupted by the cultural influences around her, "the princess ...

represents a substantive and serious case of category confusion and exemplifies the challenges of determining individual's religion from their physical appearance and deportment" ("Marking" 224). Heng argues that the incidence of the princess's duplicity illustrates the way religious signification is wrapped up with the conception of the biological for the medieval mind and makes whiteness and Christianity the representation of the normative; indeed, in contrast to the Sultan's conversion to Christianity, the princess's fair complexion remains unchanged ("Marking" 234). The ideological bias that excuses the princess's duplicity is apparent in the illustration that heads *The King of Tars* in the Auchinleck manuscript. The illustration is a diptych that contrasts before-and-after panels that dramatize the conversion of the sultan. The first panel shows the sultan alone, praying to an idol. The second panel shows the sultan in the exact same posture. However, he is now converted to Christianity and is joined by the princess as they both kneel before a crucifix (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 is found on f.7r of the Auchinleck Manuscripts and can be viewed at the following website: <http://www.nls.uk/auchinleck/mss/tars.html>

To be true to the action of the romance, the illustration would have had to depict the princess bowing before the sultan's gods as well. However, the princess's false conversion is understood by the illustrator as an acceptable ruse that does not complicate the representation of genuine conversion, and only the movement toward Christianity needs to be visually recorded.

While the princess's feigned conversion certainly participates in this ideological bias, her duplicitous behavior, even if it affirms the Christian faith, is not presented in the poem as an unproblematic, spiritually sanctioned solution to her impending marriage to the sultan. Gilbert discerns this when she argues that despite being presented as a mediatrix along the lines of the Virgin Mary, "an elemental quality she owns as a mother remains alien to the Christian-paternal regime ... [and] opens her figure to dual and equivocal interpretation" ("Putting the Pulp" 112–3). While Gilbert is certainly right in observing that the poem's gendered assumptions shape any reading of the princess, it is not motherhood per se that makes her "dual and equivocal" but how she negotiates her difficult position in the forced marriage by using a substantial amount of duplicity. Indeed, her decision to feign the conversion is represented as an unacceptable compromise position, especially since she has received a vision of Christ that comforts her and tells her to "noping drede, / Of Teruagaunt no of Mahoun" (453–4). The vision of Christ does not offer her the option of false conversion as a legitimate strategy of personal and political survival. Instead, the words of Christ in the vision remind the princess that he "þat suffred passioun" (455) will offer her help in her time of need, alluding to the fact that she herself should be prepared to be martyred if she is forced to renounce her faith. Even if she is threatened into submission by the sultan's violence—

the sultan warns, "bot þou wilt [convert] anon / Þi fader y schal wiþ wer slon" (475–6)—the narrative does not condone her false conversion, for she suffers the consequences by giving birth to a lifeless lump-child.<sup>51</sup> Even though this reading of duplicity traces the cause of the monstrous child to the princess, it still differentiates her from the stereotype of medieval misogyny where "[t]he mother's individual sin or essential female nature often appear to be the cause of her child's deformities" (Gilbert, "Unnatural Mothers" 330). Even if her false conversion to the Saracen faith might be regarded as a sin of sorts, it is by no means straightforwardly so, for she does not entirely abjure Christianity. Instead, the romance seems interested in placing the princess in an ambivalent familial situation in order to create a drama of deceit and betrayal in that most trusted of spaces.

Adding to the ambivalence surrounding the princess's actions is the fact that, while the narrative takes pains to Europeanize her from the outset, the various places that the medieval Europeans would have associated her homeland of Tars with would inevitably refer to "oriental" locations outside the Latin West. Even if Heng's observation that despite these associations, the poem uses the physical descriptions, especially her whiteness, to locate her in the tradition of typical European conception of beauty is true (231), her connections through the kingdom of Tars with a non-European Christianity would go some way in explaining her capacity for trickery for a medieval audience, especially if Tars is a reference to the Tartars.<sup>52</sup> Even if Tars is a reference to Cilician

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<sup>51</sup> Her conversion and marriage under duress contrasts to the constancy of other Christian heroines. For example, Constance of "The Man of Law's Tale" and its analogues, converts her Saracen and pagan suitors before agreeing to marry them. In caving in to the sultan's threats, she is unlike the female saints (such as St. Margaret and St. Cecilia) who manage to preserve their virginity in spite of being espoused to pagans.

<sup>52</sup> As Lillian Hornstein argues the identity of the kingdom of Tars emerges from a western fantasy about the Tartars that began in the thirteenth-century. She notes that at a

Armenia, a kingdom that was regarded as Christianity's final bastion in the East after the fall of Acre in 1291, and which featured in European plans to stage a re-conquest of the Holy Land throughout the fourteenth century, there were Europeans who regarded Armenian Christians with suspicion (Collette and DiMarco 324).<sup>53</sup> The eastern connection makes it possible for the princess to be identified as an Other as well.

The princess's duplicity places her in an interesting position that complicates the more common depiction of the female Christian protagonist as a saint-like figure who is entirely dependant on a miracle-working God. Indeed, the position she occupies prior to the birth of the lump-child is a politically savvy one even if it is spiritually disingenuous. The princess's crypto-Christian identity is also a risky one, as she appears to be anxious that she will be exposed. This is apparent when she and the sultan learn that she has conceived a child:

Pat leuedi, so feir & so fre,  
 Was wiþ hir lord bot moneþes þre  
 Pan he gat hir wiþ childe.

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time when the Tartars were an increasing threat to the West, they were also seen as potential allies against the Islamic empires. She notes that "[t]hroughout the second half of the thirteenth-century reports of Tartar cruelties alternated with those dealing with the baptism of Tartar rulers. Tales of the secret conversion of great Eastern potentates became common" ("Historical" 406-7). More generally, an eastern Christianity would be suspect because of the West's historically difficult dealings with the Byzantine empire during the First Crusade. See Steven Runciman's *The First Crusade*, especially chapters 8 and 9.

<sup>53</sup> Carolyn Collette and Vincent DiMarco offer two examples of this suspicious attitude. In discussing plans to attack the Mamluks at the beginning of the fourteenth century "Jacques de Molay, grand master of the Templars, argued against using Armenia as a base of operations for reasons of climate, differences in tactics, and the Armenians' uncertain loyalty to the Franks" (322). A crusading propaganda treatise written in 1332, the *Directorium ad Philippum Regem*, "warned against relying on the Armenians" because of "suspicion[s] of their fidelity to the Catholic faith" (324).

When it was geten sche chaunged ble,  
 Þe soudan himself þat gan se  
 Jolif he was & wilde ....  
 Þerwhile sche was wiþ child, apliȝt  
 Sche bad to Jesu of miȝt,  
 Fram schame he schuld hir schilde. (565–73)

The phrase in the middle of this passage "sche changed ble," is richly suggestive. The word "ble," in a context that would fit the most literal meaning of this passage, would mean "condition, manner" (*MED*). Thus she literally looks different physically because of the pregnancy. But as the *MED* indicates, "ble" has other resonances pertaining to "color," "hue," "complexion," and "guise" as well.<sup>54</sup> So when the princess changes "ble," it also reflects shock at the knowledge of her pregnancy as she begins to worry that her duplicity will somehow be exposed by the pregnancy.<sup>55</sup> This reading is also supported by the fact that the passage begins with a renewed emphasis on the princess's beautiful and noble appearance: "so feir & so fre." Presumably, these looks, whose reputation awoke the sultan's desire for her in the first place, have also abetted her subterfuge. Ironically, it is the European Christianity symbolized by her "feir" and "fre" appearance that causes her anxiety. Further down in the passage, she also makes a worried prayer to Christ, that

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<sup>54</sup> See *MED* s.v. *ble* n. 2b. & 3a.

<sup>55</sup> Unlike male romance protagonists who are able to control the use of disguise, the female disguise is circumscribed by biology. So when Guillame, the Christian protagonist of *La Prise d'Orange*, desires to have a closer look at the Saracen princess Orable, he is able to enter her palace by darkening his skin with herbs and passing as Saracen. He "easily manipulates outward signs of race, religion, and class, the better to accomplish his political goals" (Kinoshita, "Politics" 279). Unlike maternity, race is more easily adopted or taken off.

he will "[f]ram schame ... hir schilde." This anxiety on her part seems unfounded except that she suspects that something untoward is going to happen with the pregnancy; something will arise directly out of her deception. Her anxiety certainly reflects fears concerning the effects of miscegenation but it does so in a manner that also implicates her as an agent of this unsanctioned inter-religious union. To push the argument further, her altered "ble" subtly foreshadows the sultan's miraculous change of complexion, and like that later change, this alteration suggests that any attempt to hide a Christian identity beneath a Saracen mask will inevitably be exposed.<sup>56</sup>

That her changing complexion is a marker of her shifting fortunes reflects how close to the surface the deception lies in her marriage. On learning that the baby is a lifeless lump of flesh, the sultan immediately accuses the princess of false conversion:

Oȝain mi godes þou art forsworn,  
 Wiþ riȝt resoun y preue:  
 Þe childe, þat is here of þe born  
 Boþe lim & lip it is forlorn  
 Alle þurth þi fals bileue. (590–94)

The sultan reads the monstrous child as an effect of the princess's "fals bileue." He views the product of their union as incontrovertible proof that the princess has acted falsely; for him, the unnatural child is evidence of the princess's unnatural trickery. The sultan does not merely dwell on the princess's deceit for he finds himself implicated as well. Concluding his deductive argument that the lifeless child must be a product of the

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<sup>56</sup> Earlier in the poem, at line 392, the word "ble" also appears. Here, it is used to contrast the appearance of the princess and the Sultan: "Gret diol it was forto se, / Þe bird, þat was so bright on ble / To haue so foule a mett" (391-93). By way of contrast, the visages of the princess and the Sultan are linked at this point in the poem.

princess's false belief, he states, "[n]o wonder þei me greue" (600), referring to his gods punishing him, and thus framing the lump-child as a punishment for his inability to secure the princess's genuine conversion prior to their marriage.

Making this fact even more prominent is the way the sultan insists that the princess convert to his Saracen beliefs before he will publicly celebrate the union and consummate the marriage. With a puritanical zeal that is completely at odds with the depiction of the sultan and the Saracens as uncontrolled beasts, the sultan manages to withhold his desire for her and insists on the princess's conversion:

Þe leuedi was to bed ybrouȝt;  
 Þe soudan wild com þerin nouȝt,  
 Noiþer for fo no fre[n]de;  
 For noþing wold he neyȝe þat may  
 Til þat sche leued opon his lay,  
 Þat was of Cristen kende.  
 Wel loþe was a Cristen man  
 To wedde an heþen woman,  
 Þat leued on fals lawe:  
 Als loþ was þat soudan,  
 To wed a Cristen woman. (403–13)

Indeed, his self-control and insistence that the princess first "leued opon his lay" is so at odds with what has been presented as his wild nature that the poem turns to a most unlikely parallel to explain the situation: It makes a positive comparison between the Sultan and the "Cristen man" who will not "wedde an heþen woman." By implication,

the Sultan's unwitting betrayal of his own religious principles by his inability to see through the princess's ruse might well apply to the Christian man who is duped into marrying a non-believer or led astray by his unbelieving wife. Indeed, except that the religious polarities are reversed, the princess of Tars recalls how Richard's mother, Cassodorien, is imagined in *Richard Coeur De Lyon*. Like Cassodorien, whose inability to sit through the celebration of the Eucharist exposes her tainted identity as either closet-heathen or false believer, the princess of Tars, although she crucially believes in the "right" creed, becomes the point around which anxieties regarding the consequences of admitting the untrustworthy Other into one's family and nation coalesce. Thus, while critics are undoubtedly correct in arguing that the poem continually demonizes Saracens and normalizes the cultural and moral superiority of European Christians by expressing "horror at integration and miscegenation" (Calkin 221), the poem also expends a considerable amount of commentary on the dangers of the unconverted Other who manages to infiltrate the intimacy of the family and simultaneously gains access to the head of the nation.

Unlike Cassodorien who magically flies out of the chapel and thus exits the narrative when she is exposed by king Henry, the princess of Tars proves to be an inspired defender of her position. After the sultan correctly lays the blame for the lump-child on her false conversion, she manages to dodge the accusation by re-directing it into a challenge to the sultan:

Leue sir, lat be þat þou ʒt.

Þe child, was ʒeten bitven ous to;

For þi bileue it farþ so,

Bi him, þat ous hap wrou3t:  
 Take now þis flesche, & bere it anon  
 Bifor þine godes euerichon,  
 Pat þou no lete it nou3t;  
 & pray þine godes al yfere,  
 Astow art hem leue & dere,  
 To liue þat it be brou3t!      (603–12)

Through her pluck in turning the incident around and suggesting that the sultan has not only been deceived by her but that he himself has been falsely led to believe in the power of his gods, the princess gains a tactical advantage as she lays the burden of proof on the sultan.<sup>57</sup> Rhetorically, she also manages to assume a position of power as she badgers the sultan with demanding imperatives such as "[t]ake now..." and "pray þine godes." Her challenge also implies that she believes that her deception is somehow mitigated by the fact that she deceives her husband in order to be true to her faith. While it is true that her deception, in the logic of the *felix culpa*, is vindicated to some extent because God manages to work miracles through it that eventually convert the sultan and enable the Christians to conquer Damascus, her duplicity is never whole-heartedly sanctioned by the text. As has been pointed out, the Christian perspective is troubled by her compromised position in adopting Saracen customs, and the consequences of betraying her husband by pretending to convert are only forgotten because of the subsequent miracles. Indeed, the

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<sup>57</sup> Comparing the princess to other wives who attempt to give advice or make demands on their husbands, Mary Housum Ellzey notes that the princess manages to get her way with the Sultan rather easily: "her husband responds directly and immediately and does not really argue or disagree with her" (45).

princess's duplicity and outspokenness place her at a point of intersection in how female protagonists are depicted by conversion stories. In Jennifer Goodman's analysis, two types of heroines predominate in medieval romances that involve conversion. The first is the Christian heroine (like Constance of "The Man of Law's Tale") whose silent suffering manages to effect change. The second is the Saracen princess (like Floripas in *The Sultan of Babylon*), whose "active and forceful" character is contrasted with the passivity of her conversion to Christianity (115). The princess in *The King of Tars* combines both these types by being a Christian princess who is an active agent in persuading, even bullying, the sultan into conversion.

Given how the princess is by no means a passive victim of the sultan, despite the obvious ways in which the sultan is demonized in the poem, the romance depicts his betrayal by his wife by detailing his reaction to the tragedy of the birth of the lump-child in rather compassionate terms. This view of the sultan emerges in part because he is already joined to the princess in a familial bond and has produced a child with her, and dramatizes the fact that even in a poem that leans so heavily upon a crusading ideology, the dichotomies between Christian and Saracen are not always clearly demarcated. The affective response of the sultan is rather uncharacteristic, as analogues of the romance that also feature the birth of a monstrous child never feature the Saracen father as even remotely emotionally invested in the birth.<sup>58</sup> Instead of commanding that the child be

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<sup>58</sup> Lilian Hornstein's studies ("New Analogues to *The King of Tars*" and "A Folklore theme in *The King of Tars*") survey a range of analogues to the tale. In all instances—whether the child is born hairy, of mixed complexion, or unformed—the Saracen father commands the disposal of the child. The only analogue where the father is interested in saving the child is the account involving Eric II, the king of Norway in the entry from the year 1280 in the Lanercost Chronicle. The chronicler explains that the king is already Christian, a pious Franciscan at that, and it is he who commands that the "formless lump

disposed of or taken from his sight, which is what commonly occurs in analogues which contain variations of the deformed child, the sultan is "agreued sore / To sen þat selcoupe siȝt" (686–7). Indeed, his tenderness toward the lifeless lump-child is evident when he refers to it as a "litel faunt" (599) rather than just "flesche" (580, 607, 621 & 662), which is the term that the princess and the narrator of the poem use for the lump-child.<sup>59</sup> The way that he takes up the princess's challenge to bring the lifeless lump before his gods, and his anger that his gods remain unresponsive, also indicate his emotional investment in the child. The representation of his desperate actions may draw on stereotypical depictions of Saracens as gullible and easily manipulated, or prone to emotional extremes that verge on burlesque.<sup>60</sup> Yet because the context is the intimate setting of the family, and his aim is to bring his own child to life, the sultan's response also dramatizes the frustration of being betrayed by one so close to him. Hence, while the central contest of the poem is between religious and cultural systems, the deception and betrayal is first felt at the level of the family. This underscores the imagined failure of marriage and family

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of flesh" be wrapped in "clean linen" and placed on the "altar of St. Francis at the time of the celebration" (22).

<sup>59</sup> Gilbert also observes that the Sultan is the only character that refers to the lump of flesh in humanizing terms. However, she regards these as "wistful references [that] only reveal his lack of understanding of the symbolic situation, in contrast to the princess whose unsentimental and precise terminology underlines her accurate perception of the causes of and remedies for the lump's inhumanity" ("Putting the Pulp" 112).

<sup>60</sup> The passionate destruction of the idols is a stereotypical behavior of Saracens in the *chansons de geste*. For instance, in Laisse 187 of the *Chanson de Roland*, King Marsile's defeated Saracen army, on returning to Saragossa destroy their idols and hurl abuses on their gods. This stereotype is played out to exhaustion in *The Sultan of Babylon*, where Laban curses his gods several times but quickly repents for having done so on each occasion at the urging of his priests. In comparison to these scenes, the sultan's outburst at the lump-child is more poignant.

to convert one's fundamental religious and political allegiances, especially if one is, like the princess, already assumed to be a believer of the truth.

A Kleinian perspective helps to schematize the difficulties involved in assuring genuine conversion and their impact on a psyche of the group, at both the familial and national levels. The princess's duplicity indicates how domesticating the Other, the "bad" object, is a process fraught with anxiety. For the sultan, his sense of family and nation comes under assault with the princess's betrayal for once her deceit is uncovered she becomes the threatening object of Klein's schizoid-paranoid position. Her religious difference disconnects her from the social and familial groups that the religious rituals, outward appearance, and her marriage have joined her to. In this sense, she reverts to being the partial object that stubbornly refuses to be subsumed into a greater whole, in spite of the sultan's efforts at assimilating her, and thus threatens the integrity of the sultan's family and nation. Her outspokenness and conniving behavior make her a threat to the family and nation.

### **Isabella's Betrayal**

Like the union between the princess of Tars and the sultan, the marriage between Edward II and Isabella of France was first of all a political arrangement meant to bring hostilities between England and France to an end. The outbreak of conflict over the duchy of Gascony in the 1290s raised issues regarding the English king's liege relationship to the French king, for while he was a sovereign in his own right, the English king held the Aquitaine inheritance, or at least what remained of it, as a duke who owed liege loyalty to the French crown (Prestwich, *Edward I* 377–379). While the terms of

this relationship had been set out in the Treaty of Paris in 1259, the latest round of troubles occurring in the duchy of Gascony in 1294 led both parties to seek a more secure peace arrangement by 1298. Hopes for this more lasting peace rested on a marriage alliance negotiated by Pope Boniface VIII between the heir to the English throne, Edward Caefornan, and Philip IV's daughter, Isabella.<sup>61</sup> Yet these hopes proved relatively short-lived when a new round of troubles occurred in Gascony in 1324. This time, the quarrel sparked off over whether the French crown had the jurisdiction to arbitrate in a case involving the murder of a French official by Gascons. The tensions, of course, went much deeper and also involved Edward II's repeated excuses for not making the journey to pay homage to the French king as well as the fact that Paris was increasingly becoming a safe-haven for exiles from the English court (Haines 315). The troubles came to a head in May 1324 when the reigning French king, Charles IV, Isabella's brother, annexed Gascony. In retaliation, Edward arrested Frenchmen in England in July of the same year, and more disturbingly, took away Isabella's lands in September (Haines 316). This move suggests that, even if Isabella were queen and had been living in England from the age of fifteen, and even if she had given birth to the heir to the English throne, her foreign origins made her loyalties uncertain: she was still considered a threat. In this light, like the anxieties regarding betrayal that surface in the princess of Tars's false conversion,

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<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that in the initial outbreak of hostilities, early in 1294, Edward I had already decided on the marriage alliance that would eventually join himself with Philip IV's sister, Margaret, in 1298. This had been part of a complicated secret agreement that was designed to preserve the dignity of both sides: parts of Gascony would be publicly ceded to the French who would then restore the lands to Edward; Philip would also withdraw his summons of Edward to the French *parlement*. However, the French reneged on this agreement (Prestwich *Edward I* 379). The 1298 arrangement to marry the Prince of Wales to Isabella of France reflects a longer-term view to solving the problems between England and France.

Isabella's otherness could not be tamed by the fact that she was part of the English royal family. In this moment of crisis, the elements of the national psyche represented by the crown began to view Isabella as a threatening outsider who was dangerously placed at the heart of Englishness. Even though French otherness might well be mapped onto the Saracens of the *King of Tars*, the connection between the princess of Tars and Isabella shows that the romance touches on fears involving political and national betrayal by members within the family and that these were integral in forming the national psyche.<sup>62</sup>

Of course, Isabella did end up betraying both her husband and the English crown. In a decision that historians have struggled to explain, Edward, despite his reservations about Isabella's loyalties, sent her as an emissary to Paris. There, Isabella joined forces with the exiled Roger Mortimer, used her son, the future Edward III, to secure a military alliance with the Duke of Hainault, and mounted an invasion of England. The fears regarding the duplicitous wife reflected in *The King of Tars* were most fully realized by 1326 when Isabella and Mortimer had Edward II deposed and subsequently murdered (Prestwich, *Plantagenet* 213–20). Like the princess of Tars, Isabella's betrayal of her husband and adopted nation raises questions about the efficacy of the marriage and familial alliances in securing the loyalties of a foreigner. Indeed, if we take English identity as indelibly tied to mobilizing Frenchness as a boundary that demarcates the difference between the two cultures and thus securing Englishness, marriage alliances

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<sup>62</sup> Isabella herself understood the value of rallying support for her cause by depicting her marriage as an intimate space that had been disrupted by unscrupulous political ambition. Isabella's speech against Despenser's influence over Edward, which was set down in the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, makes this clear: "[S]omeone has come between my husband and myself, trying to break this bond; I protest that I will not return until this intruder is removed, but, discarding my marriage garment, shall assume the robes of widowhood and mourning" (qtd. in Prestwich, *Plantagenet* 214).

between potential enemies become extremely vexed as the foreign wife of the English king must retain some element of her otherness in order to secure both peace and an English identity. As I argue in the next section, this mistrust in the ability for marriage alliances to sustain the peace emerges in the conversion fantasy involving the Sultan's change of skin-color.

### **Saving One's Skin: The Sultan's Conversion**

In dramatizing the princess's charade, the *King of Tars* articulates the fear that the outward profession of faith and adopting a culture's dress and behaviors, instead of confirming the allegiance of the Other to the new religion and culture, can be instrumental in hiding what the individual genuinely believes in. The narrative ensures that there can be no question of the sultan's sincerity by effecting his miraculous change of skin-color when he is baptized: "His hide, þat blac & loþely was, / Al white bicom, þurth Godes gras / & clere wiþouten blame" (928–30).<sup>63</sup> While this conversion in the body is a most graphic change, it does not take place without a series of events occurring prior to it. The poem indicates that the conversion of the sultan's body follows what has already occurred in his mind. For instance, in the scene where he angrily destroys his idols, the sultan effectively makes a break with his gods who do not respond to his pleas to bring the child to life. Further, he agrees to stake his conversion on the possibility of a Christian miracle, and even allows a jailed priest to be released for this purpose. Yet, the

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<sup>63</sup> On the more common representation of Saracen princesses converting, Sharon Kinoshita makes the following observation about Orable of *La Prise d'Orange*: "With her dazzling complexion as white as hawthorn (X, 279) or as shining snow (XXI, 666), she is indistinguishable from French Christian beauties in everything but degree. In a way, she is the site of excess that effaces the absolute opposition between Christianity and heathendom" ("Politics" 271).

centrality of the Sultan's complexion change leaves little doubt that the transformation of the body, which discards his monstrous and bestial traits, is the very thing that seals the authenticity of conversion. Given how the inauthentic conversion on the princess's part is enabled by the façade associated with bodily postures, the false confession of her lips, and the adoption of Saracen dress, the miraculous transformation of the sultan's body constructs a fantasy of authenticity. This fantasy is not only fuelled by the Christian ideology of the poem, but also by the lingering suspicion that absolute conversion is impossible.

While these suspicions are raised by the princess's own ruse, the sultan also becomes tainted with the possibility that his conversion is less than whole-hearted when he makes the following calculated suggestion:

Preye now þe prest he com ous tille  
 & teche me Cristen lay,  
 As priueliche as it may be,  
 Þat noman wite bot we þre,  
 Als forþ as ʒe may  
 & ani it wist, heghe or lowe,  
 Þou schalt be brent & y todrawe,  
 & we forsake our fay. (881–9)

While there is no evidence to doubt that the sultan willingly believes that the God who has miraculously brought his child to life is also the God that will save his soul, this desire for secrecy is informed by the difficult knowledge that he is about to betray his own people. His plea for caution does not match the princess's hypocrisy but is still an

attempt to preserve some semblance of his former loyalties. Hence it is almost as if the miracle of his physical change is imposed upon him and proclaims his new religious affiliation against his better judgment. Beyond the fact that the miraculous transformation is the poem's way of affirming the religious truth, the change of complexion also bars the sultan from adopting the duplicitous guise that the princess managed to preserve so well. The poem forces the sultan to be a true convert, for with the physical change, he is indelibly marked on the surface as a Christian, and has no choice but to fend for his new religion in order to save his skin.

### **Re-constituting the Family**

While the sultan's change of complexion is a key achievement in the narrative's Christian triumphalism and remains the romance's ultimate statement of Christian cultural superiority, the constitution of the family unit plays no small part in the events that lead up to the Sultan's miraculous change. In a reversal of the marriage terms that the sultan lays out for the princess in refusing to ratify the marriage with public ceremony nor privately consummate it until the princess agrees to convert to his Saracen faith, the princess declares that the sultan will have no part in the child after the miraculous baptism of the lump of flesh gives shape and life to the child: "Bot þou were cristned so it is / Þou no hast no part þeron, ywis, / Noiþer of þe child ne of me" (814–6). In effect, the princess dissolves the marriage arrangement that was predicated on political necessity. In withholding not only herself but also the child from the sultan, she forces him to make a decision between his religion and his heir (as well as the prospect for future progeny). She no longer needs to be party to the inter-faith marriage that she

agreed to in the first place, a decision she made in order to save her people, because the miraculous transformation of the lump-child offers the possibility that her marriage to the sultan can be transformed into a Christian one, and lead to the procreation of a Christian race.<sup>64</sup> This is underscored in the way that the princess offers him the promise of family in order to secure the sultan's conversion: "& 3if þou were a Cristen man / Boþe were þine, sche sayd þan / Þi childe & eke þi wiue" (823–5).<sup>65</sup>

With the sultan's baptism, not only is he assured of keeping his wife and child, he is also initiated into a new family. The uncomfortable hybridity of the family that arose out of political compromise is now exchanged for the family that is homogenous in race and creed. However, undergoing baptism augments the sultan's position as head of family and the nation in ways that undermine his authority.<sup>66</sup> The rite of baptism figures

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<sup>64</sup> Not only does the miracle of the lump-child underwrite this prospect, but the Sultan's release from his prisons of "[t]en þousend Christen men" (1059) who are given arms and horses and replace the Saracen nobles who are slain for their refusal to convert to Christianity also guarantees that the land will be re-populated with Christians.

<sup>65</sup> While my argument here focuses on how the Sultan is dispossessed in the interim between the miracle of his child's transformation and his own conversion, Gilbert discerns that the Sultan is robbed of his role as father in the very fact that the child is a lump of flesh. As she puts it, "the lump-child is a fictional approximation to Aristotelian matter, the results of a conception in which the paternal role has failed .... The particular monstrosity of the lump in *The King of Tars* results from the fact that it is exclusively its mother's child" ("Putting the Pulp" 107).

<sup>66</sup> Steven Kruger has observed that masculinity is figured in problematic ways in medieval conversion. While Jews and Saracens were often figured as deviant in ways that defined European medieval masculinity, conversion did not mean they came into possession of stable masculine identities. Instead, because the conversion to Christianity often necessitated giving up worldly status and authority, a male convert like the sultan would find himself stripped of his former modes of power. As Kruger puts it, "What we most often find in medieval acts of conversion is not a straightforward rectification of gender and sexuality but their further problematizing: conversion most often entails a 'gender trouble' and a 'queerness' that continues to circulate around the figure of the convert" (100).

the sultan as a child. Introduced by his title—"Of Dames þe Soudan" (6)—early in the poem and only referred to as the "soudan" throughout the poem, baptism gives him a name. This exchange of identity comes across in how the re-naming is described: " Þe Cristen prest hiȝt Cleopas; / He cleped þe soudan of Damas / After his owen name" (925–7). By stating the Sultan's full title and thus invoking his Saracen dynastic inheritance, the lines indicate how baptism re-issues him into the world with a new identity. Unlike his child who is christened "Ion" (773) in commemoration of the conjunction between the natural and the spiritual—the day of the child's birth and christening happens to be John the Baptist's feast day—the Sultan's name links him to the priest, who thus becomes the sultan's spiritual father of sorts. Previously depicted without any family—only the princess of Tars is shown with her mother and father—the Sultan is now doubly bereft of his national and familial heritage when he is figured as the priest's child.

Indeed, not only is the sultan made a spiritual child, the subsequent political maneuvering in the poem also places him in a position of deference with regard to parental authority. Even though it is the sultan who eventually gives the command for Cleopas the priest to make secret contact with his father-in-law, the plan is crafted by the princess. He now defers to his wife's ideas and only carries out the decisions that she has made. After the sultan's miraculous change, she quickly suggests that the sultan send for her father:

Sende now þis prest in priuete

To mi fader þe king.

& pray him, for þe loue of me,

þat he com swiþe hider to þe  
 Wiþ alle þat he may bring.  
 & when mi fader is to þe come  
 Do cristen þi lond, alle & some,  
 Boþe eld & ȝing.  
 & he þat wil be cristned nouȝt,  
 Loke to þe deþ þat he be brouȝt,  
 Wiþouten an duelleing.       (950–60)

Not only is the Sultan's authority compromised by his wife, in carrying out this suggestion, he effectively cedes his rule to the king of Tars. Granted, this alliance between the former foes is possible because of his religious conversion and physical change and is also necessitated to develop a fresh bout of violence within the narrative when the "fiue heþen kinges" (1072) decide to gang up against the sultan once the news of his conversion spreads. However, the initial reason for calling on his erstwhile enemy stems from the decision to convert his people, to purge his land and lineage, as it were, of the Saracen faith. Incapable of engendering a Christian nation on his own, an impotence signaled by his earlier fears that if his conversion were made public he would be executed, the sultan turns to another father figure in the king of Tars. Thus, even if he manages to retain his position as father and husband of his immediate family unit by agreeing to the princess's demands of conversion, his authority as a masculine figure is diminished when he agrees to form an alliance with the king of Tars. While the alliance appears to be a happy re-union of the family, the underlying anxiety that colors the alliance is that the newly converted Sultan may still prove incapable of championing the

Christian cause.<sup>67</sup> Ironically, to assume the position of being the father that he is by biological or natural right, he gives up his hold over symbolic fatherhood.<sup>68</sup>

### **Baptism and God-Parenthood**

In *The King of Tars*, baptism provides the occasion for two miracles: the transformation of the lump-child and the change of the Sultan's complexion. In the Christianizing logic of the poem, it seems fitting that a rite universally experienced and administered in the Christian West has such miraculous effects within the hybrid marriage. The sacramental power of the rite is also evident in the fact that baptism acts as a surrogate wedding ceremony as well, since the princess is first married to the sultan according to Saracen rites and will only accept him as her husband after the miraculous transformation of the lump-child if he will undergo conversion. The baptismal scene not only operates as a sign of the sultan's conversion in the poem, but also initiates the sultan into broader familial and social networks as well. Baptism becomes a means by which the affinal bond is supplemented by spiritual kinship. The fact that these coincide and overlap in the poem in a manner that would have been prohibited by canon law suggests a

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<sup>67</sup> Dorothee Metlizki notes this anxiety regarding the Saracen who is newly converted to Christianity in her reading of the converted Saracen in *Otuel and Roland*. She points out that although Otuel, the convert from Islam, confronts his former liege lord, the Saracen king Garcy, it is Oliver who takes Garcy prisoner. Metlizki attributes this to "some hesitation to bring about the 'official' surrender of Islam through a Christian made not born" (180).

<sup>68</sup> Gilbert makes a similar observation by analyzing the Sultan's own fatherhood and relations to his father-in-law in Lacanian terms. She writes, "Patrilineage ... is not established with the baptism of the son but must wait until the father takes the plunge .... The Sultan's insertion into patriliney is thus confirmed as he gains not only a son but also a father: the King of Tars" ("Putting the Pulp" 109). However, my reading differs from Gilbert's to the extent that I argue that the Sultan's entrance into "patriliney" is neither secure nor empowering. It is vexed by the possibility that the Sultan, who has shown his ability to turn against his own people, might well turn against this new family as well.

certain anxiety at work that results in an over-determination of the relationship between husband and wife, ironically undermining the validity of the marriage. This stands in contrast to *The Sultan of Babylon*, where the hybrid marriage between the Saracen princess Floripas and Guy of Neymes, one of Charlemagne's Twelve Peers, involves a clearly demarcated sequence that begins with the promise to convert, proceeds with the pledging of troth, and concludes with baptism and an officiated wedding ceremony. That the sultan of Damascus is baptized in order to confirm the political and marital alliance, which should have already been secured by marriage itself, suggests that the validity of the hybrid marriage as a sacramental act comes under question.

Two key relationships emerged from the medieval practice of baptism. The first was the godparent–godchild relationship, which carried with it life-long moral and social obligations on the part of the godparent. The second relationship, one that is no longer as prominent as the godparent bond in most present-day conceptions of baptism, was the co-parent relationship formed between the biological parents of the child and the child's godparents. From the sixth century, the co-parental relationship was prized as it enabled political and economic alliances to be forged between families while strengthening ties of patronage as well. Furthermore, it was a social bond that was guaranteed, by virtue of its sacramental nature, by ecclesiastical authorities (Lynch 181 & 193). In *The King of Tars*, the spiritual bonds created between the sultan, the princess, and Cleopas, the baptizing priest, supplement the affinal bonds between husband and wife and prefigure the political alliance between the sultan and the king of Tars.

Yet baptism raises questions about the integrity of the marriage between the sultan and the princess as well. It has already been noted that the poem effectively re-

casts the sultan as a child through the rite of baptism and he loses a certain amount of prestige and authority in the process. This fact is even more pronounced when the evolution of baptism in Europe is considered. By the fifth century, baptism began to be figured as a birth, as opposed to the earlier conception of "baptismal font [as a] tomb," and by the ninth century, the analogy between the physical birth and spiritual birth was firmly established (Lynch 115, 124–5).<sup>69</sup> Additionally, as Christianity became the dominant religion of the state and child-baptism became the norm, adult baptism, once conceptualized as distinct from child-baptism, became modeled on child baptism and "even adults were baptized to some degree as if they were infants" (Lynch 334).

Along with this re-positioning of the sultan as a child is the problematic fact that the princess herself is the agent who instructs her husband in Christianity. When she explains to him the central tenets of Christianity, the poem describes her instruction in terms that match the Apostles' Creed, which along with the Lord's Prayer, would have been the basic element of doctrine in which godparents were expected to instruct the children they sponsored. The Sarum version of the baptismal rite, the order most widely used in England, had a vernacular section that charged the godparents to "lerne or se yt be lerned the Pater Noster. Aue maria. and Credo. after the lawe of holy churche" (qtd. in Spinks 150). John Mirk, addressing parish priests at the beginning of the fifteenth century spells out this responsibility clearly:

Godfader and godmoder þou moste preche

þat þey here godchyldere to gode teche,

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<sup>69</sup> The birth metaphor initially involved conceiving of the "parents" of the baptized in allegorical terms: God the Father used the womb of Mother Church. By the ninth century, this had a more concrete nature and the human godparent was thought of as birthing a spiritual child during baptism (Lynch 115-125).

Here pater noster and here crede

Techen hem they mote nede. (151–4)

Effectively acting as the Sultan's baptismal sponsor, the princess complicates the affinal relationship by becoming his godparent of sorts.<sup>70</sup> Supplementing the marriage bond in this manner is problematic given the manner in which the Church had developed rules governing the separation of spiritual and natural kinship. As Michael Bennett puts it, "It was felt that participation in the sacrament of baptism rendered the relationship between husband and wife ambivalent and incestuous by the creation of the new spiritual bond" (116). Indeed, by the time that Gratian compiled the *Decretum* in the middle of the twelfth century, there were proofs (consisting of a mixture of authentic papal texts, council decisions, and apocryphal material) that forbade individuals linked by spiritual kinship from being married (Lynch 251–2).<sup>71</sup> Again, John Mirk's words bear testimony to the fact that these prohibitions continued to be taken seriously in later medieval England:

And also þow moste, as þou dost preche,

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<sup>70</sup> The sultan listens to his wife, but then calls for the priest to instruct him further, perhaps reflecting the thought that the affinal bond is incompatible with the institutional structures of spiritual kinship that emerge out of such instruction. But the priest never instructs the sultan and only carries out the baptismal rite. Granted, the priest also doubles up as the sultan's godfather in that he gives the sultan his name but the princess's role in his conversion also links her spiritually to her husband in a manner that would have been inappropriate in the rigid prohibitions governing spiritual kinship.

<sup>71</sup> By the ninth century, the prohibition was firmly in place and evidence of godparenthood or co-parenthood was regarded as legitimate grounds to invalidate a marriage and allow for divorce. The prohibitions were known enough for abuses to be attempted. The Councils of Mainz and Chalons, convened in 813, warned against women who, unhappy with their marriages, would try to carry the child out of the baptismal font and become the child's godparent, thus invalidating their marriages (Lynch 277-81).

The cosyngage of folowyngge teche;  
 And þow wolt that conne wel,  
 Take gode hede on thys spel.  
 In the myddel the chylde stont,  
 As he ys folowed in the font.  
 Alle these be cosynges to hym for ay,  
 That none of hem he wedde may;  
 The preste þat foloweþ, þe prestes chyldere, þe preste, And the chyldes fader &  
 moder, þe godfader & hys Wyf knowe before folghthe, þe godfader chylderen, the  
 chyldes moder and hys godfader, &c. (169–78)

In *The King of Tars*, the vexed bond between the princess and the sultan caused by the interracial union and the earlier betrayal is not resolved by the sultan's baptism. Instead, securing the sultan's loyalty through multiple means—affinal, political, and spiritual—highlights how tenuous the alliance is. Indeed, evidence shows that god- and co-parenthood were used more regularly to extend the social network rather than to intensify pre-existing kinship arrangements (Bennett 131), as is the case in *The King of Tars*. While baptism and the social implications of god- and co-parenthood acted, in many cases, as a spiritual ratification of the family and supplemented its stability by allowing a family to extend itself in networks of alliance and patronage, the institution potentially invalidates the sanctity of the hybrid marriage in *The King of Tars* even as it attempts to make right the tabooed marriage between the Christian princess and the Saracen sultan.

If the princess's false conversion parallels the psychic processes that are fraught with persecution anxiety, instability, and dissociation—the symptoms of Klein's

paranoiac—the various means by which the sultan's conversion is secured—the physical change, his diminished authority, and the spiritual kinship network—are signs of the narrative working in overdrive to ensure that the converted bad object stays in its place. The anxieties shift towards those of the depressive position, where the ego fears not so much the persecution of bad objects as the loss of good ones. These negotiations are not without pressures on the psyche. There is the need to fulfill the incessant demands of good objects, which are now dominant, and "the constant uncertainty as to the 'goodness' of a good object, which causes it so readily to become transformed into a bad one." Through these experiences of the ego, "bad conscience," which is the super-ego emerges (Klein 122). Likewise, the multiple codes that signify the sultan's conversion fit him into the nation in an anxious manner and are akin to the forces that shape the development of the super-ego. In this sense, the rigid strictures that determine behavior and belief after conversion are not only external prescriptions and prohibitions but are also inscribed within the nation's psyche by the pressures inherent in the conversion process.

### **III. *Richard Coer de Lyon*: Schizoid-Paranoid Romance**

*Richard Coer de Lyon* offers an opportunity to examine how anxieties over foreign elements within the family motivate re-writing the French ancestral links that the Plantagenets traced through their Angevin heritage and the Aquitaine inheritance. As Ambrisco argues, the romance is a project involved in "the recouping of a francophile king for an increasingly English national audience," in order to present an Englishness that overwrites "the twelfth-century Richard, an Anglo-Norman king reared in a French culture, [who] was French throughout" (510). Ambrisco argues that the English identity

fashioned for Richard and English nation by the poem problematically relies on cannibalism; Englishmen are distinguished from both Frenchmen and Saracens, through a transgressive and barbaric activity that is normally used to allocate otherness, not a national trait, in romance (518–20). This use of cannibalism as the foundation of a national identity Ambrisco reads as signaling the English romance's "fundamental ambivalence toward the French culture, language, and people" (522). Like Ambrisco, my reading of *Richard Coer de Lyon* views the romance as ostensibly about Richard's exploits against Saladin's armies and the Islamic world in the Third Crusade while reflecting an Englishness that is defined against the French. However, I do not think "ambivalence" is sufficient to explain the peculiarly strong hostility toward the French forces who are allied to Richard in the text. While the anti-French sentiment of the romance can be accounted for generally by Edward III's expanding wars against the French, its particulars are marked by a persecution complex that stands at odds with the military success the English were enjoying in France at the time that the romance was circulating and evolving. This sense of victimization is also tinged with paranoia as the romance exploits its own status as a work of fiction to re-imagine the origins of the Angevin empire: a re-working that distances the English crown from its historical familial links to the French nobility as it tries to purge from its account of lineage the contaminating taint of otherness. In what follows, I focus on two ways in which *Richard Coer de Lyon* re-writes the past. The first deals with Eleanor of Aquitaine's marriage to Henry II and the second with Richard's own relations with the French. In the romance, both these moments of re-imagining the past involve situating marriage (or non-marriage, in Richard's case) as a problematic encounter with the Other.

### **Eleanor of Aquitaine: Cassodorien of Antioch**

The textual history of *Richard Coer de Lyon* represented by the extant manuscripts allows for the possibility that romance elements were added to an earlier, and less fantastic, version of the poem (Finlayson, "Richard" 160). The earliest extant version of the poem is found in the Auchinleck manuscript. Dated to 1330, this version of the poem begins the romance with Richard's crusading adventures and represents what has been designated the "B" version of the poem. It is the "A" version of the poem, which is represented by later manuscripts—the earliest of which is Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College MS. 175/96 (ca. 1425–50)—that includes an elaborate prelude to the account of Richard's crusade: what John Finlayson calls the "fabulous and tournament material" ("Richard" 160). If we accept Finlayson's argument that "the A version clearly is an expansion of the B, or original, version, which sways the tenor of the Richard story quite firmly into the ethos of the romance of adventure" ("Richard" 160), it is possible to argue that the "A" version takes root and circulates in the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth century because the fantastical elements resonate with the national psyche at that particular moment. As Heng puts it, *Richard Coer de Lyon* is a "sedimented repository of cultural patterns, investments, and obsessions that were deemed important enough to be inscribed, and reinscribed, over a span of centuries," and that "a reading of *Richard Coer de Lyon* is thus truly a reading of sedimented locations of culture" (*Empire* 67).

A key element of the "A" version is an account of the marriage between Richard's parents. In the romance, Richard's father is Henry II but his mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, is written out of its account of Richard's origins. Replacing her is

Cassodorien, who is the daughter of the king of Antioch. The substitution is interesting because it does not merely efface the threatening otherness of Richard's continental heritage (and his connections with the problematic Aquitaine inheritance) but replaces it with a figure who represents the *impossible* otherness of the East.<sup>72</sup> Given the later date of the extant manuscripts that offer this account of Richard's mother, it is possible that, as England's wars against the French expanded over the course of the fourteenth- and early fifteenth century, this version could have held a greater attraction for romancers as it distanced the English crown from the French more aggressively.<sup>73</sup> In the poem, the union between Henry II and Cassodorien occurs in a context that seems devoid of all political considerations that would normally motivate marriages between royal families. Instead, the machinery of fantasy conspires to have Henry's future wife come sailing towards him because her father, the king of Antioch, has received a vision whose instructions are to

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<sup>72</sup> As Geraldine Heng has observed in a reading of "The Man of Law's Tale," Constance's marriage to the pagan king Alla is more allowable to the Western imagination than her marriage to the Syrian sultan, even if he converts to Christianity (*Empire* 232-3).

<sup>73</sup> A more speculative version of this argument would be that the additions of the "A" version occurred *during* the second half of the fourteenth century in response to the hostilities against the French. This hypothesis is at least plausible because the early episodes involving Cassodorien do not appear in the earliest extant manuscripts—the Auchinleck and London British Library MS. Egerton 2862 (ca. 1390)—both of which represent the "B" version of the poem. Further, it is the "A" version manuscripts from the fifteenth century that also include more anti-French invective during Richard's crusade. The Auchinleck MS. breaks off after the siege of Acre and does not include any of the passages detailing the French betrayal except for the incident en route to the Holy Land, at Sicily, which is also the only account of English–French tension in the poem that has some basis in historical fact. The version in MS. Egerton 2862 includes the French betrayal at the siege of Babylon and Philip's demand for Jerusalem, but omits Philip's failure to destroy the Saracen cities on their march south from Acre. The earliest manuscript in which all the descriptions of the French betrayal are present is Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge Ms. 175, which has been dated to 1425–50. However, it is equally plausible that this version of the poem existed prior to the late fourteenth century, even if there is no manuscript witness of the fact.

proceed to England with his daughter. The ship transporting Cassodorien is described in terms of excessive opulence, a description that makes it an otherworldly vessel with golden stave and nails, an "yuory" mast, "samyte" sails and "sylk" ropes (63–7). With this description, the romance account of Richard's origins tends toward fantasy for Cassodorien enters the narrative in terms that efface her political contexts and replace these with a supernatural air. In fact, the description of the ship makes Cassodorien like a fairy-princess who crosses over into the realm of court and politics without bringing any contaminating agenda or conflicting political interest. In one sense, this is a fantasy of replacing the problematic legacy of Eleanor of Aquitaine with a figure who is without the burden and blemish of history.

Subsequently, however, this fantasy of joining Henry II with a figure who is without a past or context is subverted by details that draw problematic links between Cassodorien and Eleanor. This demonstrates that imagining an alternative to history is fraught with the dangers of transgressing the very limits of family that exist to authenticate an authorized Angevin past. To begin with, Cassodorien is identified as the princess of Antioch; indeed, her entrance into the narrative on a ship headed for England means that she literally comes from *Outremer*. While Antioch was a crusader state during Henry II's reign, the eastern connection becomes a problem that the romance elaborates further along in the narrative. But Antioch is also significant because of Eleanor's own participation in the Second Crusade with her first husband, the French king Louis VII. Antioch figures prominently in the account of Eleanor's own participation in the Crusades because during their sojourn in the East, she and Louis were guests of the Prince of Antioch, Eleanor's uncle Raymond of Poitiers in 1148. Making Cassodorien's

connections with Antioch even more intriguing are chronicle reports of the Crusade which entertain rumors that Raymond, disappointed with Louis VII's lack of support for his military plans, seduced Eleanor and committed incest with her for revenge (Weir, *Eleanor* 64–66).<sup>74</sup> Peggy McCracken observes that chronicles that allude to this "scandalous secret" and make moral judgments about Eleanor's character reveal the anxieties provoked "by the prospect of the influence over the king enjoyed by the woman who legitimately shared his bed" ("Scandalizing" 250). In *Richard Coer de Lyon*, these anxieties about the power of feminine otherness mingle with the threat posed to the purity of an English lineage by Eleanor's first marriage to the French king. Although the historical Eleanor never inherited titles or lands involving the principality of Antioch, making Cassodorien princess of Antioch enables a pointed referencing of Eleanor's prior marriage to Louis VII.<sup>75</sup> If Eleanor's connections to Antioch and the Second Crusade raise the specter of her intimate links to the French crown, Cassodorien's links with the

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<sup>74</sup> The two chief contemporary sources that make direct reference to this rumor are William of Tyre and John of Salisbury (Chambers 461). Modern historians vary in their assessment of the probability that this affair took place. Alison Weir is the stoutest believer that it happened: "In the face of all the reliable contemporary evidence, it is puzzling to find that most of Eleanor's modern biographers do not accept that she had an adulterous affair" (*Eleanor* 66). Marion Meade is more ambivalent in her judgment on the issue: "The exact relationship between Eleanor and her uncle will never be known exactly [...] Had Raymond not been her uncle, there is reason to believe that she would have slept with him" (110). Even so, whether or not the affair took place does not affect my argument. The fact that Eleanor's reputation was connected to the affair by the time *Richard Coer de Lyon* was written is reason enough for her substitution by Cassodorien.

<sup>75</sup> In contrast to this particularly English narrative strategy of simultaneously disavowing and referencing Eleanor's connections to the French by turning her into a princess from the East, French chroniclers used the otherness of the East in a different way. Beginning with the *Récits d'un Menestrel de Reims*, French chronicles give accounts of Eleanor's adulterous desire for Saladin. McCracken observes that, through these accounts, "Eleanor's transgressive desire for a Muslim prince ... explains how France lost a queen and her lands and how England gained control of French territories" ("Scandalizing" 254).

East are used in the romance to turn oblique anxieties into a spectacular eruption of the dangers of joining with the Other. The otherness of Cassodorien's origins in the East merge with the desire to purge England's heritage of its French connections by dramatizing an element within Cassodorien that cannot be tamed or converted: her inability to sit through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The first indication of Cassodorien's secret occurs immediately after the marriage is consummated:

þe spousyng was jdon þat nyȝt:  
 þeratte daunsyd many a knyȝt:  
 Mekyl ioye was hem among.  
 A preest on morwe þe messe song;  
 Befforn þe eleuacyoun  
 þe qwene fel in swowne adoun  
 þe folk wondryd and were adrad;  
 Into a chaumbyr sche was lad,  
 Sche seyde: "For j am þus jschent  
 I dar neuere see þe sacrement." (185–92)<sup>76</sup>

While nothing malicious emerges from this first incident—the narrative reports that Henry and Cassodorien produce several children in the years that follow—it casts suspicions on Cassodorien's religious beliefs, for in desiring "neuere [to] see þe

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<sup>76</sup> Citations of *Richard Coer de Lyon* are from Karl Brunner's edition, *Der Mittlenglische Versroman Richard Lèowenherz*.

sacrement," she effectively places herself on the margins of religious orthodoxy.<sup>77</sup> Cassodorien's origins in the East, a fact emphasized by her father's return to Antioch after the incident—"No lengere wolde he þere beleue" (196)—become the cause for her shocking reaction to the Eucharist. Even if Cassodorien is assumed to be Christian—no effort is made to convert her before the marriage—she remains a danger to the royal family who must be exposed. It is an earl who pressures Henry to force Cassodorien to sit through Mass in order to trap the queen into showing her true colors. Even if Cassodorien is not as threatening as the Saracen husband of *The King of Tars*, she must be expelled from the narrative as an unconvertible Other:

And whene þe belle began to ryng,  
 The preest scholde make þe sakeryng,  
 Out off þe kyrke sche wolde away. ...  
 Sche took here douȝtyr in here hond,  
 And Johan her sone she wolde not wonde;  
 Out of the rofe she gan her dyght,  
 Openly before all theyr syght.  
 Johan fell frome her in that stounde,  
 And brak his thygh on the grounde

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<sup>77</sup> McDonald observes that "Cassiodorien's alterity is a function not of her obscure origins, her otherworldly beauty, or her exotic attire, but of her inability to sit through mass" ("Putting the Pulp" 140). Ambrisco attributes a narrative function to the Cassodorien episode arguing that it "helps to explain Richard's subsequent barbarism, and especially his cannibalism, by providing a proximate and hereditary cause for Richard's brutal character" (507). My emphasis on this episode differs from these readings because I take into account the historical allusions that derive from Cassodorien's origins in Antioch—a particularly eastern embellishment that is not included in analogues to the episode.

And with her daughter she fled her waye,  
That never after she was isey. (222–34)

Cassodorien's flight out of the church, with two of her children in tow, demonstrates the dangers that the wife from a foreign land can pose to the family unit if she possesses irreducible difference. The mother who cannot be contained by the mores of her new land contaminates the line of succession. Instead of being converted to true belief, Cassodorien is depicted as a witch-like figure who is readily exorcised from the romance. In replacing Eleanor of Aquitaine with this fantastic figure from the East, the romance disavows Richard's maternal inheritance and therefore re-imagines the Plantagenet past as well. But it does so by preserving traces of the historical Eleanor in a way that enables the romance to demonize her by imagining a substitute with dubious origins in the East.<sup>78</sup>

While I have argued that replacing Eleanor of Aquitaine with a fantastic figure is a strategy that coincides with general attempts to distance the English from the French, this argument can be further refined. After all, it may be argued that Eleanor could have been celebrated by the romance instead of written out of it; for from a certain perspective, the historical Eleanor can be seen to represent the Duchy's independence from the French crown, especially after Eleanor's marriage to Louis VII was annulled on their return from the Second Crusade in 1152 (Meade 147–8). Yet *Richard Coer de Lyon* does not pick up

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<sup>78</sup>Akbari analyzes the replacement of Eleanor with Cassodorien in more absolute terms. She observes that the name of the King of Antioch in the romance, Corbaryng, derives from the "Corborans", the historical Kerbogha, a Muslim leader who, according to the *Chanson d'Antioche*, "ultimately converted to Christianity and fought on the side of the crusaders" (201). This, Akbari argues, constructs an account of Richard's origins in the East, and she proposes that "Richard lays claim to both supernatural powers and legitimate descent from the former Saracen rulers of Antioch and its region" (201).

on this potentially nationalistic thread, preferring to replace Eleanor with the fabulous incident of the demon-queen.

This particular narrative slant incorporates a legend regarding Henry II's ancestor, Fulk Nerra of Anjou who marries a lady whose origins are unknown. The tale is recounted by Gerald of Wales in *De Principis Instructione* (Boughton 78). Like Cassodorien's story, it tells how a duke of Anjou married a beautiful lady who could not sit through the Mass:

[W]hen she had come to the church, and was preparing to depart at her usual hour, she saw that she was kept back by four soldiers at the command of the count; and immediately throwing off the robe by which she was held, and leaving there with the rest her two little sons ... she took up under her arm the two others, ... and in the sight of all flew out through a lofty window of the church. And so this woman, more fair in face than in faith, having carried off her two children with her, was never afterwards seen there. (Stevenson 224)<sup>79</sup>

While Gerald of Wales's account does not name this particular duchess of Anjou nor tell of her origins, he includes this myth about the House of Anjou in the section of *De Principis Instructione* where he castigates the Angevins for the sexual indiscretions involving Eleanor, Henry II and Henry's father, Geoffrey of Anjou. According to Gerald of Wales's account, Geoffrey of Anjou was supposed to have had an affair with Eleanor while he was her seneschal in Poitiers when she was still married to Louis VII. Despite

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<sup>79</sup>While Gerald's account is the legend that is most akin to the version the romance uses, other chroniclers also told versions of the demon-queen story that linked Eleanor to a diabolic figure. For instance, Walter Map tells the story of Henno-with-the-Teeth, a version of the Melusine legend, where the lady married is a serpent-maiden who flies away when her snake-like form is discovered as she is bathing. Philippe Mouskes, writing around 1240, tells a similar story involving Eleanor's mother (Chapman 394-6).

having warned his son Henry to have nothing to do with her, Henry went on to marry Eleanor, thus binding himself in an incestuous union to a woman who had had carnal relations with his father. This, of course, is the stuff of rumor, though at least one recent historian argues that the affair was at least probable.<sup>80</sup> Taken together with the story of Eleanor's incestuous liaison with her uncle, Raymond of Poitiers in Antioch, it becomes apparent that the romance chooses to substitute Eleanor with Cassodorien to circumvent the tainted reputation that Eleanor acquired while still referencing her Angevin connection. Indeed, despite the romance's penchant for reveling in the tabooed—successive accounts of Richard's cannibalism animate the poem later on—*Richard Coeur de Lyon* shies away from mentioning Eleanor's purported incest, largely because this would bring into question Richard's own status as legitimate ruler of England and effectively undermine the legitimacy of the Plantagenet line. The legend of the demon-queen allows the romance to replace the unspeakable rumors of incest with a form of otherness that can be more readily evacuated from the narrative. In this sense, the marriage to a princess from the East who subsequently flies out of the narrative is a more convenient way of disavowing Eleanor and her links to the French than indulging in rumors of incest that might have repercussions on the purity of the English royal line. Hence, in its attempt to allude to desires that lie beyond the boundaries of legitimacy, the romance modifies the ready-made legend about the dukes of Anjou and makes the

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<sup>80</sup> This is Alison Weir, who provides circumstantial evidence to support her claim that "it seems likely that she did indeed have an affair with Count Geoffrey" (*Eleanor* 53). D.D.R. Owen dismisses the rumors of her affair with Geoffrey as the stuff of legend, stating that "with this loquacious Welshman history was already becoming liberally seasoned with legend" (113). Marion Meade dismisses Gerald's claim because of his "strong personal antipathy to Henry" (146). As with her rumored affair with Raymond of Poitiers, my argument does not depend on whether or not the affair actually took place.

unconvertible Other the fantastical trace of what it dares not utter. While the inter-faith marriage of *The King of Tars* eventually gives way to a somewhat triumphant affirmation of Christian ideology, the hybrid marriage between Henry and Cassodorien is used to mask the political divisions that lay at the core of the Plantagenet family line.

The queen's early departure from the narrative and Richard's life also shows how the romance uses the mother who is othered as a political non-entity. Coming from Antioch, Cassodorien is depicted without continental political influence, interests, or connections that might make her dangerous to the English royal family. On the other hand, Eleanor of Aquitaine was considered to be prime instigator of the 1173 uprising that Henry the young king and his brothers, Richard and Geoffrey, attempted in order to wrest power from Henry II. In fact, Eleanor was instrumental in the rebels' gaining the support of her former husband and king of France, Louis VII, which enabled Henry the young king to receive logistical support and shelter from Paris (Meade 268–71). After the rebellious sons were defeated and pardoned in 1174, Eleanor was made "Henry's captive, courteously but closely watched for the rest of his life" (Warren 138). While the romance leaves out the fractious family in-fighting, it alludes to it when Cassodorien rises into the air and drops her son John, who "brak his thygh on the grounde" (232).<sup>81</sup> Yet, the allusion also limits the queen's role in the politics depicted in the romance, for in literally flying out of the narrative, Cassodorien never becomes the mother that Eleanor

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<sup>81</sup> John, Henry's youngest son, was too young to participate in his brothers' uprising and became his father's favorite after the failed rebellion. Henry II's decision to give him lands for an inheritance instead of placing him in the church further chipped away at the power of Henry's heir apparent, Henry the young king, because it was lands from his inheritance that were taken (Warren 117-8). After the succession passed to Richard, John figured again when it was rumored that Henry would pass over Richard and give the crown to John (620 & 622-3).

was, whose political influence lasted into the reigns of her sons Richard and John, even if her role was limited from 1173 to Henry's death in 1189. The Other as spouse is transformed into a site where the threats of foreignness can be hinted at, dealt with by the narrative, and never allowed to develop into the full-blown dangers of actual political intrigue and betrayal that materialized with the historical Eleanor.

By insisting on providing a narrative of origins for Richard and the Plantagenets while re-casting Eleanor of Aquitaine in ambivalent terms, the romance exhibits a psychic defense associated with paranoia. Not only is Eleanor transformed into a bad object from the East, the fragmented allusions to the historical Eleanor indicate that the maternal whole is now split into pieces, a disconnected mélange of fact and fantasy. In Klein's explanation, when the immature infant psyche is thrown into "states of frustration and anxiety, the oral-sadistic and cannibalistic desires are reinforced" and the threatening object is "felt to be in fragments" (180). This splitting is a schizoid defense mechanism that the psyche employs in the paranoid-schizoid position, where "the result of splitting is the dispersal of the destructive impulse which is felt as the source of danger" (180). The longer term effect of splitting, however, is that the ego itself is shattered in the process, as "the more the object is felt to be in pieces, the more the ego is in danger of being split in relation to the internalized object fragments" (181). In this sense, it is not Cassodorien's Eastern origins that explain the exotic cannibalistic side of Richard. Rather, it is the way the romance splits up Eleanor of Aquitaine by transforming her into Cassodorien, that pre-figures the aggressive cannibalistic violence that typifies English nationalism in *Richard Coer de Lyon*. Indeed, this split in the ego also explains the uneven characterization of Richard himself in the romance. As Carolyn B. Anderson argues,

despite the use of various romance conventions, they "cannot always contain Richard's alien violence, and he seems a fragmented character" (86). She points out, in decidedly Freudian terms, that Cassodorien "threatens the symbolic order of identification with the father" and that "Richard's character keeps signifying aspects of the introjected maternal imago, and wavers between hostility to, and attempts to become, as like his ideal ego as possible" (102). Furthermore, if Klein is right about the ego being shattered in the process, the efforts taken to distance Englishness from its French heritage and alliances in the romance evinces splitting at work in the national psyche as well.

### **Sacrilegious Acts: Marriage as Taboo**

The substitution of Eleanor with the unconvertible and othered Cassodorien is interesting also because of the implication that this maternal substitution has on the status of the sacramental, marriage, and family for the rest of the romance. Henry's union with Cassodorien already undermines the sacramental status of marriage but, unlike in *The King of Tars*, other sacraments, such as baptism, are not used to restore what has been fractured. As Cassodorien cannot be converted, the only alternative would be for Richard's own actions to restore some sanctity to his family. Yet, instead of turning to sacramental structures, such as god-parenthood, that either strengthen the family's authority or augment it by providing a stable alternative, Richard's actions parody the sacramental.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Akbari, in "The Hunger for National Identity" reads the romance in sacramental terms, focusing on the sacrament of the Eucharist and the idea that Richard's actions place him in the liminal space of a priest who performs sacramental acts on behalf of the people and deploys similar rhetoric that emphasizes the sacramental associations of kingship that Henry IV used propagandistically to consolidate his power. My argument differs from

First, there is the scene by which he gains his sobriquet "Coer de Lyon." In a parody of the baptismal rite, Richard gains his name through his capacity for shocking violence. After he viciously reaches down the throat of the lion, rips out its heart and eats it raw, he so shocks the Emperor of Alemanyne that the Emperor pronounces:

Iwis, as J vndyrstonde can,  
 Þis is a deuyl and no man,  
 Þat has my stronge lyoun slawe,  
 Þe herte out of hys body drawe,  
 And has it eeten wiþ good wylle!  
 He may be callyd, be ryȝt skylle,  
 Kyng jcrystenyd off most renoun,  
 Stronge Rychard Coer de Lyon! (1111–8)

Richard is "christened" in a rite that substitutes the symbolic power of the sacrament of baptism with the literal fact that he deserves his new name because he has ingested a lion's heart. As ritual that depends on a coherent system of symbolic codes, the baptismal naming of the child allows for the spiritual to find tangible expression in a structure that parallels the biological and derives its power from the analogical link between the two. As McDonald has it, "[t]he romance undoes the violation inherent in the metaphoric epithet and renders it mimetically coherent" (138). But as a reaction to Richard's literal ingestion of the lion's heart, this "baptism" by the Emperor disrupts the operations of the metaphorical. Further, instead of affirming the coherence of the baptismal rite, the

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Akbari's in that I do not focus on the Eucharist but on baptism and marriage in *Richard Coer de Lyon*. Further, I argue that the way in which the sacramental is parodied shows it up as an ineffectual means of both purifying the history and consolidating power.

Emperor's initial reaction—"Þis is a deuyll and no man"— as well as the recognition, in "Coer de Lyon," of a hybrid human–beast identity makes this a sacrilegious moment. Spiritual ideologies and embodied acts are not neatly joined in this parody of the baptismal act, and this incident exposes the rite of baptism as a powerful stabilizing fiction of Christian identity-making.

Richard's actions on the battlefield also parody the sacrament of baptism. In the climactic battle on the outskirts of Jaffa, Richard wins a decisive victory through superior battlefield savvy. He manages to drive a large group of Saracen warriors into a miry swamp where many of them drown or are easily picked off when they try to emerge. The description of the action is an unruly parody of a mass baptismal scene, where the Saracens do not die the symbolic death of renouncing their former beliefs and arise as Christians but die literal deaths by Richard's sword.

The mock sacramentality of the scene derives from the way it is staged as a spectacle as Richard drives "þree þousand [Saracens] into þe myre" (7020). The physical description of the Saracens floundering in the water and coming up for air—"l]yggen and bapen" and "wolden haue come vppe" (7022–3)—also recalls baptism and parodies a mass conversion of the Saracens. The slaughter also ends with an uncharacteristic flourish. Throughout the romance, when Richard kills his enemies, the violence is described in straightforward terms of his axe opening up heads and bodies. Here, however, the deaths of the Saracens who manage to come up for air are described in metaphorical terms as they "drank off Kyng Richardis cuppe" (7024). Even though this line would be more strongly associated with the Eucharist, the ceremonial overtones add to the sense that this scene is conceived of as a ritualized act, and the ceremonies of the

church blend into one another in an uneasy affirmation of Richard's violence. In this case, as with Cassodorien's marriage to Henry, the sacramental becomes sacrilegious when it meets with the limits of conversion in the figure of the Other who will not betray his or her beliefs to adopt Christian ones.<sup>83</sup>

The poem's uneasy relationship to the sacramental comes to the fore in the way the more fantastic "B" version of the romance suggests romantic liaisons for Richard but omits Richard's marriage. While it is true that the focus of the poem shies away from developing relations between men and women, Richard is given a lover in Margery, the daughter of the Emperor of Alemanyne. However, the narrative of their relationship is not developed beyond the fact that she goes behind her father's back and conducts an affair with Richard while he is supposed to be imprisoned (905–20). After she aids Richard in overcoming the lion by warning him of the challenge he will face, her father disowns her, decreeing "my doughter for her outrage / Shall forgoe her herytage" (1147–8). However, no lasting relationship forms between Richard and Margery and he returns alone to England after he is freed from captivity even though the Emperor forces Margery to "deuoyde his land" (1236). Later on, when Richard sets out on his crusade and enters Germany, Margery plays a role in making peace between Richard and the Emperor (1573–92). Unlike Floripas, the Saracen princess of *The Sultan of Babylon* who forms a

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<sup>83</sup> Heng comments on the virtual non-existence of the attempt by Christians to convert Muslims during the Crusades as part of her argument that the Saracen other in the romance blend together, in the accretive logic of persecution, with the Jews of thirteenth-century England who suffered systematic disenfranchisement and were forced into conversion more than Muslims (*Empire* 83). Benjamin Kedar, on the other hand, makes an argument for "quite extensive evidence of Muslim conversion in the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem [which] has been ... largely ignored" by scholars (191). Kedar, however, deals mainly with conversion in already conquered lands, and not the idea that the Crusade was pursued in order to secure the conversion of Muslims.

long-term attachment with a Christian knight after aiding her father's prisoners, Margery drops out of the narrative once Richard heads East. Another moment in the poem where the narrative offers an opportunity for Richard to cultivate a love affair occurs when Richard invades Cyprus. Here, the princess of Cyprus is kidnapped and held hostage by a steward who betrays his lord: "Gentyll lord, awreke thou me! / The emperours doughter bryght / I the betake, gentyll knyght" (2250–2). The Emperor of Cyprus finally surrenders to Richard's terms because he fears for the safety of his daughter (2343–56). Nothing remotely amorous occurs between Richard and the princess in the Cyprian episode, though the possibility is raised as the princess is given to Richard by the traitorous steward.

Richard's historical marriage to Berengaria, the daughter of Sancho of Navarre, took place on Cyprus in May 1191, as Richard was making his outward journey to *Outremer* (Gillingham 149).<sup>84</sup> Eight lines describe the union in late manuscripts of the "A" version of the poem, but it does not appear in "B" versions of the romance even though it could have been featured in the crusade narrative.<sup>85</sup> Instead, the poem seems, in its incidental depiction of women, bent on figuring them as markers of Richard's political savvy and military conquests. Indeed, based on the narrative sequence that these early episodes inaugurate, one would expect that Richard's conquests in the Holy Land might offer more possibilities for amorous encounters as he conquers territory, possibly

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<sup>84</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to John Gillingham's work are to his historical biography *Richard I*.

<sup>85</sup> The manuscripts of the "A" version of the poem that contain these lines are London, College of Arms, MS Arundel 58; London, British Library, MS Harley 4690; and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 228. All of these date from the fifteenth-century. The two "A" version manuscripts from the fourteenth century (Auchinleck and Egerton) do not describe the incident (Brunner 16 & 213).

involving a Saracen princess who will betray her own people and religion. Yet as Richard moves East in his conquests of the Holy Land, all romantic elements drop out of the poem. In the marriage between Henry and Cassodorien of Antioch, the limits of what may be preserved with regards to rumors of incest are governed by displacing the unspeakable onto the fantastical figure from the East. In the more fantastical "B" version of the text, Richard's marriage cannot even be re-imagined. Instead, it is erased from the narrative because there were historical reasons why its status as the sacramental celebration of a holy union that supplements political interests would place Richard in a bad light. In the romance's conception of Richard, marriage itself, especially the prospect of marriage to the Other, becomes taboo for reasons I examine below.<sup>86</sup>

After he became king of England in 1189, Richard reneged on a marriage arrangement made between England and France, involving himself and King Philip Augustus's sister, Alice. This betrothal arrangement, made in 1169, had become a cornerstone of English–French relations. As Ann Trindade observes, the marriage agreement "had been ratified no less than five times since its inclusion in the Treaty of Mortain in 1169, and it must have looked to the outside world, in July 1189, [...] as if the wedding would finally take place" (74). Richard had practically lived all his life prior to inheriting the throne of England engaged to Alice. However, in the intervening time, it was rumored that Richard's father, Henry II had seduced Alice (Gillingham 82 & 142;

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<sup>86</sup> Obliquely related to his non-marriage in the romance is the historical Richard's rumored homosexuality. Heng deals with this against Richard's hyper-masculinity in the poem (*Empire* 91-8).

Meade 282).<sup>87</sup> Thus, when Richard finally succeeded to the English throne and neither he nor Eleanor intended to honor the betrothal arrangements for political reasons, the incest argument was brought into the picture.<sup>88</sup> This placed Richard in a difficult political position as Philip Augustus expected the marriage to go through in ratification of the supposed friendly relations between Richard and himself. In Philip's eyes, reneging on the marriage agreement was tantamount to betrayal. Philip, after all, had supported Richard when he conducted military operations against Henry II aimed at guaranteeing Richard's succession to the English throne (Gillingham 94–100).

Indeed, the anti-French invective that animates the action of the poem may be related to the nascent anti-French nationalism that would culminate in Edward III's successful campaigns against France beginning from the middle of the fourteenth century. However, the anti-French sentiment of the fourteenth century must also be considered in light of how the romancers re-wrote the legendary life of Richard to

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<sup>87</sup> W.L. Warren, dismisses the possibility of Henry's affair with Alice out of hand because there are no French sources on the matter (611). John Gillingham argues that it is probably true because it is "difficult to believe that Richard simply invented the story in order to extricate himself from an unwelcome marriage" (142). Marion Meade goes further and asserts that Henry even plotted to annul his marriage to Eleanor, thus disinheriting all his sons, and began a new plan for succession with Alice.

<sup>88</sup> The political reasons in deciding against the marriage involved the Norman Vexin, which was held by the Plantagenets and coveted by Philip. Marriage to Alice would allow Philip to "claim that this vital territory was his sister's marriage portion" (Gillingham 82). Also, Richard needed an alliance to strengthen his position in the Aquitaine because of the southern threat from Raymond of Toulouse: This materialized in his marriage to Berengaria of Navarre; marrying Alice would have closed off this option. As Gillingham observes in "Legends of Richard," the marriage of Berengaria was part of an emerging Angevin strategy to secure their lands in the south. To make his point he writes: "Let us listen to the names of the five queens of England to reign between the mid-twelfth century and the end of the thirteenth: Eleanor of Aquitaine, Berengaria of Navarre, Isabella of Angoulême, Eleanor of Provence and Eleanor of Castile" (65).

distance him from the French and avoid yet another instance where the threat of incest, if credence was placed in the rumors concerning the affair between Henry II and Alice, would mar the Plantagenet line.<sup>89</sup> In the romance, Richard's historical betrayal of the French in repudiating the English–French alliance is transformed into scenes where Philip becomes the traitor through his dishonest dealings with the Saracen forces. English dishonor in renouncing an important political arrangement is deflected onto the French and their dealings with the Other. The cowardice and betrayal on the part of the French king that the romance narrates are patently fabricated as they all occur after the crusaders capture Acre. The historical Philip returned to France after the successful siege of Acre and thus the incidents of French deviousness and cowardice are projections on a conveniently absent target.<sup>90</sup> In the romance, however, the crusader armies head south toward Jerusalem after taking Acre, which is when Richard instructs Philip to spare no city or its inhabitants unless they convert to Christianity:

Ane looke þou doo as j þe seye.  
 Toun, cytee, and castel 3yff þou wynne,  
 Slee alle þe folk þat be þerinne!

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<sup>89</sup> Ambrisco comments on how the anti-French invective in the poem is largely incidental and based on duplicity while on Crusade. He argues that this serves to mask the fact that Richard's political disagreements with Philip were based on his position as a Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and that he was first "French" rather than English (516).

<sup>90</sup> Heng, commenting in a similar vein on how the romance creates battles such as the siege of Babylon, that never took place, concludes that "[I]oss, failure, and absence in history thus engender success, victory, and presence" (*Empire* 78). While I argue that these projections are engendered by the English attempt to obscure Richard's own betrayal, Philip's withdrawal from the crusade in July 1191 was also widely considered an act of betrayal in itself, and the exaggerated accounts of his devious dealings with the Saracens in the poem may also be a response to this. Indeed, even chroniclers partial to the French king find themselves hard pressed to defend his decision to return to France, and they resort to attributing to Richard the same behavior that the romance accuses the French of, such as accepting bribes from Saladin (Gillingham 164–6).

In Goddes name j þe forbede  
 Ffor gold syluyr, ne for no mede,  
 Þat þey may profere and geuen,  
 Ryche ne more lat non leuen,  
 Hosebode ne wyff, mayde ne grome,  
 But ʒiff he wole take Crystyndom. (3821–8)

The armies led by Richard and his English commanders swiftly dispose of several cities, slaughtering all inhabitants who refuse to convert. Philip, however, is paid off by two cities, Taburette and Archane, and this spells trouble for the crusaders for these cities subsequently mount revolts, causing Richard to have to re-capture them. Unequivocally, the anti-French bias is announced when the narrator pre-empts the narration of French deceit by attributing the French betrayal to a weakness of character that is a national attribute:

Ffrenssche men arn arwe and ffeynte,  
 And Sarezynys be war, and queynte,  
 And off here dedes engynous;  
 Þe Ffrenssche men be couaytous.  
 Whenne þey sytte at þe tauerne,  
 Pere þey be stoute and sterne  
 Bostfful wurdes ffor to crake,  
 And off here dedes ʒelpyng to make. (3849–56)

The invective continues to attack the French with the accusation that their actions do not match their words. For while "[f]yʒte þey cunne wiþ wurdes lowde," they will retreat

and "drawe in here hornes / As a snayl among þe þornes" (3858 & 3863–4) during the heat of battle. Since Richard is the Lion-Hearted, this comparison of the French with snails is especially damning. The emphasis on French boastfulness and the disjunction between word and deed is significant in light of the Richard's own failure to honor the agreement to marry Alice and his subsequent marriage alliance with the King of Navarre that would be beneficial to the security of his territories in Aquitaine. The poem directs the reader's attention away from Richard's historical betrayal of the French alliance and the impact that this would have on the distribution of power in Europe, and condenses these elements into accusations of French lack of honor. It is a loss of honor on the part of the French that is made all the more insidious because it results from their dealings with the Saracen Other at the expense of the holy enterprise of crusading.

A second incident of French betrayal occurs when Richard and Philip join forces to lay siege to Saladin's stronghold, the city of Babylon. Richard and Philip attack different parts of the wall and just as Richard is experiencing some measure of success,

[A]lle of his [Saladin's] folk on R[ichard] ffylle,

For þat oþir syde was styлле.

Kyng R[ichard] wende þat Phelip ffouzte

And he and hys men ded nouzte,

But maden hem merye al þat nyzte,

And weren traytours in þat ffyzte.

He louyd no crownes ffor to crake,

But doo tresoun, and tresore take. (5459–66)

This second imagined betrayal, timed for when the Christian forces face their greatest challenge as they fight their arch-enemy, Saladin, allows the romance to assert that English might is undermined by the fickle nature of political alliances, including those secured by marriage. Indeed, even though they fail to tear down Babylon's walls because of the French betrayal, Richard still wins the day when he defeats Saladin in single combat, emphasizing England's independence from allies that cannot be trusted. And unlike the French king, who has dishonest dealings with the Saracens, Richard only comes close into close contact with the Other when he slaughters them with his battle-axe or cannibalizes Saracen bodies.

However, the romance's portrayal of Richard's distance from his Saracen foes masks yet another instance where a proposed marriage alliance, if recorded in the romance for posterity, might taint Richard's legendary stature, especially his uncompromising positions against the Saracen world which constitute an integral part of his Englishness. While the romance accuses the French of self-serving dalliances with the enemy, the historical Richard did in fact, through protracted negotiations, try to secure peace through power-sharing agreements with Saladin after the crusaders took Acre and the coastal towns en route to Jerusalem. One of the more striking diplomatic moves that Richard made involved proposing that his widowed sister, Joan, marry Saladin's brother, Al-adil. The union would have given Al-adil and Joan a kingdom comprising Jerusalem and the coastal territories that Richard had captured (Gillingham 184–5 & 188–9). In effect, Richard and Saladin considered the hybrid marriage as an option that might lead to a lasting solution in the Holy Land. While historians agree that such a proposal took place as part of the negotiations between Richard and Saladin, they

differ on whether Richard and Saladin considered the offer seriously or treated it as a rhetorical gesture.<sup>91</sup> It is, however, significant that reports of the marriage alliance are only found in Muslim accounts of the crusades and not European chronicles (Gillingham 184).<sup>92</sup> Like the omission of Richard's own marriage from the romance, the notion of marrying the Saracen Other is an unmentionable act of sacrilege that would pollute the English nation. Instead, consorting with the enemy in a very intimate manner becomes pushed aside in favor of the spectacular acts of cannibalism in the romance, where the sacrilegious does not contaminate the purity of the English nation; instead, it becomes the very act that defines Englishness and encapsulates the uncompromising attitude of an imagined Richard.

Indeed, Richard is never duplicitous in the romance and never betrays either the crusading cause or his principles of honor. The romance takes its commitment to this view of Richard to extremes. When a Saracen hostage decides to betray Saladin, he leads Richard to a great hoard of Saladin's treasure and stores and suggests that Richard

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<sup>91</sup> Steven Runciman thinks that Richard "may have been quite serious about it." He notes that Richard suggested that Joan's marriage to Al-adil could be legitimized through Papal dispensation and in the event that this was not obtained, Al-adil could marry Richard's niece, "Eleanor of Brittany, who as the King's ward could be married off without Papal interference" (*History* 59 & 60). More recently, Christopher Tyerman, while categorizing the marriage proposal as part of "a wide, and even more bizarre range of possibilities" that emerged in the negotiations, has pointed to the impact of the proposal because "the suggested terms, the question of marriage and suzerainty apart, outlined a partition very similar to what was finally agreed a year later in the Treaty of Jaffa" (461). Gillingham thinks that the marriage proposal could have been a serious offer because there was precedent in a report where "Saladin himself offered to convert when proposing a marriage between a son of his and a daughter of Frederick Barbarossa in 1173" (188).

<sup>92</sup> Francesco Gabrieli's collated translation of Baha ad-Din's and Imad ad-Din's accounts of the treaty makes Al-Adil the originator of the plan. In this account, when Al-adil's secretaries bring the plan to Saladin, he "immediately approved the terms, knowing quite well that the King of England would never agree to them and they were only a trick and a practical joke on his part" (227).

proceed with a surprise attack. Even though he has the opportunity to do so, Richard refuses to kill the sleeping Saracens as his guide suggests but proclaims that he is "no traytour / ... to sloo men whyl þey slepe" (6449–50) and fights the Saracens in open battle. Even so, Richard remains surrounded by intimates who would betray him. When Richard first learns of Saladin's final assault on Jaffa, he sends his "nevew," "Henry off Champayn" (6673–5) to lead an advance force to hold off the Saracens. Henry, however, shocked by the huge host assembled by Saladin, returns without engaging the enemy. Richard condemns Henry, calling him a "vyle coward" and stating that he will "neuere, be God aboute, / Trustene vnto Frenssche-mannes loue" (6706–8). Such is the romance's distaste for cowardice, which is associated with betrayal, that it transforms a family member into a Frenchman.<sup>93</sup> Significantly, the cruelest act of betrayal occurs within Richard's family itself, when he receives news that his brother John is trying to usurp the

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<sup>93</sup> Ambrisco's comment on this incident emphasizes the power of nationalist feeling when he concludes that "consanguinity cannot stand up to national propaganda" (515). Henry of Champagne is an interesting figure because his familial links to Richard are referenced later in the romance when Richard heroically defeats Saladin's forces at Jaffa. In the later episode, Henry is transformed into Richard's "eme", and Richard, ever loyal to his own, rides to Henry's rescue (7036-42). The way that Henry of Champagne is split into two figures who are portrayed quite differently by the romance suggests the poem's ambivalence regarding the historical Henry of Champagne. The historical Henry was not only Richard's nephew but Philip Augustus's nephew as well, a fact that enabled him to play a leading role in the Third Crusade (Gillingham 192). When Richard left the Holy Land, the kingdom consisting of Richard's coastal conquests, stretching from Ascalon in the south to Antioch in the north was ruled over by Henry (Gillingham 202), effectively making him Richard's heir in the Holy Land. John Finlayson notices another nationalistic move in the way Thomas Multon and Ffoulke D'oyly feature as Richard's key lieutenants in the romance. While there is no record of these knights crusading with Richard, they were members of prominent baronial families who owned large estates in Lincolnshire, were also "important during the reign of Edward III, and were linked by marriage to major aristocratic families" ("Legendary" 304-5). Using these names emphasizes the imagined "Englishness" at the core of Richard's forces even if the romance includes troops supplied from Richard's continental possessions.

English crown in his absence. In fact, the romance makes this the central reason for the truce that allows Richard's departure from the Holy Land. It is John's meddlesome ambitions to be "[c]orowne at Estren" that thwart Richard's noble plans to "slayn þe Sawdon" and "aveng[e] Jhesu oure Lord" (6368–72). John's planned usurpation is accounted for by the text in terms that reference the unholy union between Cassodorien and Henry directly when he is described as "hys broþir Jhon, / Þat was the fendes fflesch and bon" (6335–6). By dramatizing the dangerous effects of betrayal within the family that arise out of a contamination of Englishness or connections with a foreign heritage, the romance comes full circle in its disavowal of the hybrid marriage. Apart from the contradictory fact that Richard himself is a product of the same marriage, the romance uses John's betrayal to gloss over the reasons for Richard's historical retreat from the Holy Land which had more to do with war weariness and his calculated decision not to mount an attempt to re-take Jerusalem, which, at that point in the campaign, was the only objective that could have held the quickly fragmenting crusader coalition together (Gillingham 209).<sup>94</sup> As with the broken marriage alliance with Philip and the negotiations involving the marriage proposal between his sister Joan and Al-Adil, Richard's decision not to take Jerusalem would have been a blemish on his reputation. In this case, it would have marked him out as betraying his holy vows. The romance masks this by transforming Richard into the victim of familial betrayal instead.

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<sup>94</sup> John was restive while Richard was in the Holy Land and was positioning himself to be heir to the throne; however, William Longchamp, Richard's chancellor, still retained control over England. Even after Longchamp had to flee to Flanders after he mishandled Geoffrey's (Richard's half-brother and Archbishop of York) attempt to return to England, John was unable to seize power. (Gillingham 228-9). John only openly moved against Richard in 1193, after the latter had left the Holy Land and was hostage of Leopold of Austria.

This narrative of persecution and betrayal that governs how the romance transforms the historical episodes of Richard's relations with the French and the forces of Islam offers further evidence that the romance fits Klein's description of the "paranoid-schizoid" position. If the substitution of Cassodorien for Eleanor shows schizoid mechanisms at work, the narrative's incessant sense of victimization constitutes paranoia. This description would be particularly apt as Kleinian paranoia is rooted in a defense mechanism where the subject disavows its own aggressive impulses and projects these upon external objects which are then felt as attacking it from the outside (Klein 116 & 183). Since the historical Richard's close relations with the French and willingness to negotiate with Saladin are regarded as liabilities to the version of self-sufficient nationalism that the romance cultivates, it projects these historical episodes, now regarded as detrimental to the national self-image, onto the Other.

*Richard Coer de Lyon* is thus an anxious response to the French threat and may have retained its popularity because such a threat had been palpably experienced in Edward II's betrayal by his French-born wife. It expresses a nationalism that is tinged with fears of persecution, victimization, and betrayal. Despite the military successes that the English enjoyed against the French in the early phases of The Hundred Years War, up to the Battle of Poitiers in 1356, *Richard Coer de Lyon* continued to be disseminated as a text that carried the trauma of French treachery, preserving and even magnifying its anxieties with regard to French otherness into the fifteenth century. It would be a very different romance, *The Sultan of Babylon*, that fantasized national identity through English-French relations in a more assured and confident manner.

#### **IV. *The Sultan of Babylon*: Attaining the Depressive Position**

The *Sultan of Babylon* gives a different perspective on how marriage and conversion are regarded and offers another view of how the prospect of hybridity within the family maps upon English–French relations. The key Christian and Saracen union—between Floripas and Guy of Burgundy—is not tinged with as much insecurity and fear about betrayal as the relationships in *The King of Tars* or *Richard Coer de Lyon* are, even if the union is regarded as exceptional and not unproblematic in the poem. Indeed, betrayal and traitors have almost no effect on the Christians once Charlemagne and the peers become involved in the battles, even if Genelyn's treachery briefly threatens the Christian order. Instead, it is the sultan, Laban, who suffers the full effects of betrayal by his own family. Because *The Sultan of Babylon* is also an English appropriation of the matter of France, it presents the opportunity to think about how Middle English romance celebrates an enemy's legendary past in glowing terms without necessarily contradicting nationalist sentiment. Through its less frantic treatment of the Other and its ability to incorporate select Saracens into a national whole, *The Sultan of Babylon* is a shift away from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position for the national psyche. Instead of the feelings of persecution and victimization, *The Sultan of Babylon* exemplifies how the Middle English tradition adapts the Matter of France to bolster "Englishness" by appropriating it as part of a common Christian heritage. In doing so, the romance fantasizes a certain unified Christian past where the French could be identified with as they were a heroic bulwark against the Saracen Other. In this sense, the romance enacts the nostalgic recovery of a sense of wholeness with regard to England's continental heritage and territorial claims.

### Floripas: Feminine Desire and Political Marriage

The union between the Saracen princess Floripas and Guy of Burgundy originates not as a political or military treaty but enters the poem as a statement of female agency and desire, even if it represents the *chanson de geste* fantasy of the enamored Saracen princess.<sup>95</sup> Despite her declaration of irrational desire for Guy of Burgundy—"A, him have I loved many a day / And yet knowe I him noght" (1891–2)<sup>96</sup>—the response to her desire quickly transforms the union into a calculated political tactic that the peers decide upon. The Duke of Neymes, Roland, and Oliver pressure Guy to pledge his troth to Floripas and use extremely pragmatic arguments to overcome his initial reservations about the match:

Tho spake Roulande and Olyvere,  
 Certifyng him of here myschefe,  
 Tellinge him of the pavelles that thay in were,  
 For to take this lady to his wedded wife.  
 "But thou helpe in this nede,

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<sup>95</sup> William Winstar Comfort characterizes the type: "They are all paragons of beauty, they are usually more forward in their amorous declarations than we would have them, and they end regularly by being baptized and marrying the hero" (422). F.M. Warren, traces the trope as "reach[ing] back through its Mohammedan revision to the Greek tale of the rescued captive" (356), and proposes that Floripas is a "worthy specimen of those resourceful infidel princesses who compelled the unqualified admiration of the romancers of Christian France" (358). More recently (Comfort's and Warren's studies come from the beginning of the last century), critics have argued that the paradox in idealizing a treacherous character exposes an uneasy dismantling of chivalric fantasies. For instance, see chapter three of Jacqueline de Weever's *Sheba's Daughters*.

<sup>96</sup> The edition of the poem referred to is edited by Alan Lupack in *Four Charlemagne Romances*.

We be here in grete doute.

Almyghty God shalle quyte thy mede;

Elles come we nevere hennys oute." (1915–22)

The subsequent pledging of vows (the officiated marriage only takes place at the end of the poem) builds an alliance that is born of the uneasy combination of political expedience on the part of the peers and desire on Floripas's part. Unlike the sultan of Damascus, who desires the princess of Tars but still insists that she convert to his faith, Floripas's desire is purified by her willingness to be baptized even though she exercises her desire from a position of power: "For his [Guy's] love wille I cristenede be / And lefe Mahoundes laye" (1895–6). Further, she secures this arrangement on her own behalf and shows no concern for the consequences on her nation or the family that she betrays. This promises to be a hybrid marriage made in heaven since autonomous female desire coincides perfectly with Christian opportunism.

While the poem progresses to show the benefits of this union for the Christians, with Floripas providing the cunning that eventually leads to the Christian victory, her quickness to renounce her beliefs and embrace the Christian faith do not erase the threat posed by her cultural difference, in spite of the way she aggressively champions the Christian cause. Indeed, Floripas's enthusiastic desire, one fulfilled in securing Guy as her lover, overflows with suggestions that corrupt the purity of the Christian cause and undermine the idea that her union to Guy is a model for conversion through marriage. The first instance occurs after the peers have ousted Laban from Egremoure and are preparing to fend off the sultan's siege. In an attempt to lift the spirits of the peers for the impending battle, Floripas makes this suggestion:

Therefore go we soupe and make merye  
 And takith ye alle your ease;  
 And thirti maydens lo here of Assye,  
 The fayrest of hem ye chese.  
 Take your sporte and kith you knyghtes  
 Whan ye shalle have to done. (2083–8)

Her suggestion that the peers enjoy the pleasures of the flesh, to the extent of providing them with "thirti maydens ... of Assye," illustrates the values that come into conflict with the sacrifice and duty that the peers are more accustomed to expressing. Instead of motivating them for battle with a message of religious and feudal duty, her offer of her women to the peers equates sexual enjoyment with prowess on the battlefield, a connection emphasized by the construction "Take your sporte and kith you knyghtes / Whan ye shall have to done." In fact, her suggestion that the best preparation for the peers on the eve of battle is for them to indulge their sexual appetites recalls the Saracen ritual of drinking "beestes blode" (684 & 1007) because both are acts of excessive and transgressive consumption. Concluding her speech to the peers, Floripas reminds them that on the next day they will have to defend the castle walls "with shotte of quarelles and dart," which she and her maidens will bring to them in great quantities: "My maydyns and I shall bringe goode wone, / So everyche of us shalle bere hir parte" (2092–4). These lines may be read as filled with double entendre, with Floripas and her ladies offering to do their part on the night before the battle to ensure that the peers are sexually satisfied and raring to go the next day. The poem, however, is tantalizingly silent on whether the peers take up Floripas's offer and gives the impression that so forward an offer threatens

the Christian cause and should not be elaborated upon. Floripas's offer is also a particularly English embellishment to the story; Stephen Lappert notes that she "makes no such statement" in the French *Fierebras* (409). The English text thus raises the possibility of miscegenation much more directly, registering its own status as an English work that disrupts the purity of the French *chanson* through its own version of what French heroes might do on the eve of battle.

A second incident, however, gives a Christian response to Floripas's exuberant desire. After her betrothed, Guy of Burgundy, is rescued from certain death in a daring raid by Oliver and Roland, Floripas expresses her gratitude to Roland by insisting that he "moste chese ... a love / Of alle [her] maydyns, white as swan" (2748–9). As with the offer of "thirti maydens," this incident has no antecedent in the French *chanson* (Lappert 435). But unlike the earlier example, here, we are not left with ambivalent silence. Instead of being flattered by her offer, Roland responds with a stern rejection that manifests the unspoken discomfort that he has with her own arrangement to marry Guy:

Quod Rouland, "That were myscheve;  
 Our lay wole not that we with youe dele  
 Tille that ye Cristyn be made,  
 Ner of your play we wole not fele  
 For than were we cursed indede." (2750–4)

In this offer, Floripas tries to minimize the distance between the races by mentioning only one physical attribute of the maidens that Roland may choose from: the fairness of their complexion. However, even emphasizing this European attribute of beauty does not erase the central fact of their religious difference. To all intents and purposes, Floripas

and her maidens have converted to the Christian cause, in so far as they betrayed the city of Egremoure and continue to do their part in defending it against the sultan's siege. Yet Roland will not concede the possibility of intimacy, based on the fact that Floripas and her maidens have not been formally baptized. Roland's disavowal of hybrid unions is an ironic echo of the earlier scene when he presses Guy into accepting Floripas's marriage proposal. In the earlier scene, he appeals to Guy by telling him of the danger—"myschefe" (1916)—that they face without an ally in Floripas. Now, in his response to Floripas, he argues that a union between Christian and Saracen would be "myscheve" (2750), this time alluding to the danger that he would place his soul in. His unfeeling and self-righteous response is a rebuke that reminds Floripas that her marriage to Guy is a matter of political expedience and that the amorous nature of her race—"your play"—will not be condoned. While Floripas may entertain the fantasy that she and Guy are bound by romantic love, Roland continues to view the union as an abrogation, only supporting it because of the exigencies of the situation they were caught in.

Roland's attempts to contain the effects of the hybrid marriage are a telling reminder that such a union, even if it involves the willing conversion of Floripas, has profound consequences on the ideals of family and nation. This becomes clear in the ways by which Floripas is initially brokered as a unit for exchange among men by Laban and her brother, Ferumbras. Early in the poem, the Saracen knight Lucafere makes a deal with Laban. He requests Floripas's hand in marriage in the event that he manages to capture "[t]he Kinge of Fraunce ... / And the Twelwe Dosipers alle in fere" (240–1). Floripas's response highlights the near impossibility of achieving such a feat for she points out to Laban that he should only agree to Lucafere's proposal after he has

accomplished the deed. This marriage proposal indicates two aspects of marriage that will stabilize the nation. If Laban can offer his daughter's hand in marriage as a reward to a knight who serves him faithfully, he affirms his own power within the system of liege loyalty. Further, if Lucafere indeed manages to capture Charlemagne and the peers, he would effectively become a significant leader of the Saracen empire, and marrying the sultan's daughter would place him in a position to either inherit the empire or at least play a role in perpetuating the sultan's dynasty. Floripas will be kept within the empire and help with the procreation of the nation. The way that this arrangement preserves the racial integrity of the sultan's empire is emphasized by the incident in the narrative that directly precedes Lucafere's proposal. In preparation for the Saracen assault on Rome, the most terrifying act of violence against non-combatants in the romance is committed:

Lukaferre, Kinge of Baldas,  
 The countrey hade serchid and sought,  
 Ten thousande maidyns fair of face  
 Unto the Sowdan hath he broghte.  
 The Sowdon commanded hem anone,  
 That thai shulde al be slayn.  
 Martires thai were everychon,  
 And therof were thai al ful fayne.  
 He said, "My peple nowe ne shalle  
 With hem noughte defouled be,  
 But I wole distroie over all  
 The sede over alle Cristianté." (224–35)

The sultan's genocidal strategy is a pre-emptive measure that alludes to the fear that the Saracen cause will be corrupted by the allure of Christian women. The sultan's bloodthirsty act is far more brutal than Roland's admonition to Floripas about racial purity. But both essentially manifest the same kind of racial thinking: Hybrid unions pose a grave threat to the integrity of the nation and a women's proper place should be in preserving the purity of her race.

The second time that Floripas is used as an object that is trafficked between men occurs during Ferumbras's epic battle with Oliver. The battle reaches a point where Oliver is at an obvious disadvantage because Ferumbras has slain his horse. But Ferumbras is impressed enough with the martial prowess of the hitherto unknown knight (Oliver is in disguise) to offer him generous terms of surrender:

Nowe yelde the to me—  
 Thou maiste not longe endure—  
 And leve on Mahounde, that is so dere,  
 And thy life I shalle the ensure.  
 Thou shalt be a duke in my contré,  
 And men have at thyn owen wille.  
 To my sustir shaltowe wedded be—  
 It were pité the for to spille! (1219–26)

Even though Ferumbras has the upper-hand at this point in the battle, he does not force Oliver's conversion to the Saracen faith. Instead, his offer—the promise of a dukedom, men to lead, and his sister's hand in marriage—would give Oliver the power and status that would not be due to a defeated enemy. Indeed, compared to the almost impossible

conditions that Lucafere must fulfill in order to win Floripas's hand, Oliver would be a fool not to take up Ferumbras's terms of surrender. To the Saracen king who is already loyal to Laban's cause, Floripas has already been promised as a reward; but now, in order to win the enemy's loyalty, she is offered as an incentive to the prospective convert. Again, Floripas is of value to the nation because she can be used to procure the loyalty of a worthy opponent. Ferumbras is obviously thinking along these lines when he makes the offer to Oliver for he says, "It were pité the for to spille!" In the hybrid marriage that is governed by the interests of the state, Floripas would be used to strengthen the Saracen race by procuring the best qualities of a man like Oliver. However, when Floripas joins herself to Guy, it is an act that not only subverts the interests of her nation and family, but also threatens the power of patriarchy to define race and nation.

Yet this threat is contained at the end of the poem through endorsement by the state in which her loyalties now lie, when Charlemagne thanks Floripas for her part in the campaign and she is baptized and formally married to Guy. In the end, Floripas transforms into Guy's dutiful wife, who inherits, along with the converted Ferumbras, Laban's former territories: "[a]lle the londe of Spayne" (3195).<sup>97</sup> This ending, along with Roland's admonition against Floripas's overtures, indicates that the threat that Floripas represents will never seriously undermine the Christian cause, even if her betrayal was instrumental in dismantling her Saracen nation and family. In fact, Floripas never

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<sup>97</sup> This containment is also observed by Kinoshita in her reading of Bramimonde, King Marsile's outspoken queen in the *Chanson de Roland*. The assertive Saracen queen must "relinquish the defiant spirit that has defined her" on becoming Christian, even though that spirit has championed the Christian cause, precisely because it is that which the poem uses to distinguish between Christian and pagan identities. Also, Kinoshita notes that to begin with, "[h]er display of self-determination is less an act of feminist agency than part of a scripted role in the construction of Frankish Christianity" ("Pagans" 101).

threatens to become the dangerous Other that the Sultan of Damascus or Cassodorien are because, as Jaqueline de Weever reminds us, the Saracen princess who betrays her own family and people so energetically is always already a Christian fantasy that originates in the expansionist agenda of the crusading West (xxix). In Jeffrey Cohen's reading of the poem, the exotic excess represented by Floripas's desires is the displacement of enjoyment in the violence of conquest that the conventional pieties of Christianity would claim to deny. As Cohen puts it, "the text locates its joy in *Saracen* belonging and envisions a Christianity integration into which is death" (217, emphasis author's own). Thus, in a text where the exotic Other grounds the conditions of national and religious fantasy, it is no wonder that select members of the Other can be so easily co-opted and converted to the Christian cause.<sup>98</sup>

### **Laban and Ferumbras: Failed Assimilation and Forced Marginalization**

In contrast to the Other's anxious inclusion in *The King of Tars* and expulsion from the narrative in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, *The Sultan of Babylon* assimilates Floripas and Ferumbras quite easily into the structures of Charlemagne's Christian empire. The way in which the Christians try to convert and assimilate Saracens within their social structures betrays a sense of religious and racial superiority that is far more assured than in the other two romances. Even if these attempts sometimes fail—as they do with the attempts to convert Dam Barrok's gigantic children and Laban himself—almost no threat of betrayal exists as unconvertible Others either die or are executed. The attempt to baptize Laban at

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<sup>98</sup> Cohen makes a stronger case for how exposing the construction of otherness dismantles Christian fantasy: "Western eyes are faced not just with the constructedness of Saracen alterity, but their own passionate complicity in its enduring vitality" and the poem, in traversing this fantasy, ultimately denies its power (Cohen 218).

the end of the poem is an important case in point. The proposed conversion would not only turn him into a Christian but also strip him of his status, much in the same way that the sultan of Damascus loses his authority in *The King of Tars*. Charlemagne's orders to Turpin are couched in a language that emphasizes the humiliation and loss of power that Laban must suffer if he is to be properly converted:

Unarme him faste and bringe him nere;

I shal his godfader be.

Fille it fulle of watere clere,

For baptysed shalle he be.

Make him naked as a childe;

He moste plunge therinne,

For now most he be meke and mylde

And i-wassh awaye his synne. (3155–62)

Baptizing Laban is meant to subjugate him to the symbolic structures of Christianity and the act proposes to use the structures of spiritual kinship to inaugurate a new hierarchy of social relations. Charlemagne's offer to be his "godfader" rejects Laban's status as an equal in power even though he holds the position within the Saracen empire that mirrors Charlemagne's leadership of Christianity. Further, Charlemagne's offer to be Laban's godfather reinforces the failure of Laban's own nuclear family unit. Earlier in the poem, Charlemagne has already presided over the conversion of Ferumbras, and made him his godson by giving Ferumbras the baptismal name "Floreyne" (1480). By proposing to be Laban's godfather as well, Charlemagne displaces the primacy of the father–son relationship between Laban and Ferumbras, disrupting that bond with the relations of

spiritual kinship. Charlemagne's power to constitute family on his own terms is evident in the rhyming lines " I shal his godfader be / ... For baptyseed shalle he be," where Laban's identity now proceeds from Charlemagne's dictates. In taking up the position of godfather, the power Charlemagne enjoys over Laban is not just physical—"He moste plunge therinne;" Charlemagne believes he is able to compel Laban's interior into postures of humility—"For now most he be meke and mylde."

More literally, Laban is divested of his authority as leader of nation and family because Charlemagne's command also emphasizes the physical helplessness that Laban must endure if his conversion is to be secured: He is to be stripped "naked as a child" and "plunge[d]" into the baptismal fount. It is the embodied nature of his humiliation that also becomes Laban's point of resistance. Instead of submitting his body to the ritual, Laban strikes bishop Turpin and "spitt[s] in the water clere" (3165–7). At the same time, he disavows his children one final time, calling Floripas "hore serpentyne" and Ferumbras "fals cursed" (3171–2). Given Charlemagne's dominating actions, Laban's only choice in preserving his own sense of what his children should be—loyal to their faith and father—comes about in renouncing those children that he once held dear.<sup>99</sup> Without any other recourse, Laban's vitriol and desperate physical defiance are his only defense against the polluting effects of Christianity. Even if Laban's final moment of resistance is effective in disrupting a potentially absolute victory for Christianity, the

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<sup>99</sup> Given Laban's bloodthirsty actions and uncontrollable fits of rage, the poem's introduction of the relationship between the father and children is surprisingly tender. When he first receives news that the ship carrying his wealth and possessions has been robbed off Rome, he seeks comfort in surrounding himself with his family:

Sire Ferumbras, my sone so dere,  
 Ye muste me comforte in this case:  
 My joye is alle in the nowe here  
 And in my doghter Dame Florypas. (93-6)

narrative manages to contain the moment relatively easily. There is no passionate outburst or violence meted out in response. Ferumbras calls for his father's execution in a logical, matter-of-fact statement: "Lete himm take his endynge / For he loveth not Cristyante" (3181–2) and Charlemagne agrees, telling the Duke of Neymes to dispatch of the sultan quickly so that they can "goo [...] to mete anoone" (3186). The Other who refuses to be assimilated is handled without fuss, and even in death he is placed within a Christianized after-life: "His soule was fet to helle / To daunse in that sory lande/ With develes that wer feul felle" (3188–90).

If Floripas's exuberant desire, her mark of otherness, is finally domesticated at the end of the poem and Laban's resistant otherness is contained by his death, what of Ferumbras's end? The poem takes pains to emphasize that Ferumbras does indeed become a true Christian convert, and after the description of his baptism midway in the poem, a proleptic description of the holy life that he leads after the events of the poem is given:

Nought for than Ferumbras  
 Alle his life cleped was he,  
 And aftirwarde in somme place,  
 Floreyne of Rome cité.  
 God for him many myracles shewed,  
 So holy a man he bycame.  
 That witnessith both lerned and lewde:  
 The fame of him so ranne. (1483–90)

In this account, Ferumbras leaves behind his warrior identity and becomes a saint-like figure. This intrusion into the narrative is significant because Ferumbras's actions at the end of the poem position him very differently from what is foretold in this description. Instead of retiring from arms, he plays a crucial role in two key events. The first occurs when Charlemagne becomes trapped between two gates in the assault on Montriebe. Genelyne betrays his king, manages to convince the peers to leave Charlemagne for dead, and begins to lead the army back to France where he is to be crowned (2967–82). It is Ferumbras who exposes Genelyne's treachery by "reskow[ing] the Kinge at his nede" (3005). These heroics affirm his role as a worthy knight, not the saint-like figure he supposedly becomes.

Ferumbras's second crucial intervention comes when Charlemagne has Laban within his sword's reach. Ferumbras intervenes on his father's behalf at this climactic moment:

King Charles met with Laban  
 And bare him down of his stede.  
 He lighted down and ceased him than;  
 He thought to qwite him his mede.  
 He brayde oute Mownjoye wyth gode wille  
 And wolde have smeten of his hede;  
 Ferumbras prayde him to abyde stille  
 To crysten him, er he were dede. (3107–14)

In this second instance, Ferumbras affirms his allegiance to the Christian cause by desiring his father's conversion. At the same time, he opts for a course of action that

would preserve his father's life. In both cases, Ferumbras operates in a mediatory manner and crucially saves the lives of his biological and spiritual fathers, even if it is only a momentary reprieve from death in Laban's case. In rescuing Charlemagne from Genelyn's treachery and attempting to convert Laban, Ferumbras occupies the position within the Christian empire of the trusted outsider—an individual who completely embraces the dominant ideology and yet does not pose a threat from the inside as Genelyn does. Ferumbras is the individual who is poised to unite Christendom and the lands formerly constituting the Saracen empire and bring peace to the warring factions. Yet the narrative is uncomfortable with this prospect. Instead, he is left on the margins of Christendom to share Spain with Guy and Floripas. The poem also does not show Ferumbras as marrying and potentially having heirs. Instead, it emphasizes the harmonious bond between Guy and himself that is formed through Floripas's marriage: "And brethern both thay were" (3200). In this sense, the narrative prolepsis, which describes Ferumbras's legacy as a holy man, works in tandem with this ending to diminish his role as a military and political leader.

### **V. Conclusion: Accommodating Otherness**

In its ability to accommodate Floripas and Ferumbras within the structures of Christianity while decisively dealing with Laban, the romance can be associated with how the ego masters the schizoid-paranoid position of Klein's psychic schema. The anxieties regarding the Other that do linger in the romance are managed by domesticating Floripas, disempowering Ferumbras, and placing them within familial and religious structures that will ensure their conversion. While this shares some similarities with how

the Sultan of Damascus's conversion is secured in *The King of Tars*, *The Sultan of Babylon* does not demonstrate the same levels of anxiety, and the mechanisms for ensuring the goodness of the converted object are less overt. In this light, the poem reflects a more assured achievement of Klein's depressive position, where the dominant anxiety is the fear of losing good objects as the psyche moves toward a more integrated experience of the world.

As a romance that was adapted from French *chansons de geste* around 1400, *The Sultan of Babylon* manages the anxiety provoked by the encounters and threats of otherness in a manner that is different from *Richard Coer De Lyon*'s frantic response. Unlike the fragmentation and projected persecution that characterizes *Richard Coer De Lyon*, *The Sultan of Babylon* presents a nationalist fantasy that is more assured in its relations with the Other. This is evident in two main ways. As has been argued, the otherness of the Saracen threat can be contained and assimilated to the dominant ideology. Unlike Richard's cannibalistic final solution, *The Sultan of Babylon* shows how select Others can be accommodated within the structures of Christendom, while those who resist conversion are summarily dealt with and not allowed to linger on as fantasized persecutors. Second, the fact that the poem is based on the matter of France during a time of English expansionism against France is also a telling sign of greater assurance in English cultural superiority. This is a nationalist sensibility that can appropriate the legends of an enemy by embellishing it with distinct moments of Englishness—for instance, the stylistic homage to Chaucer in a passage introducing Laban at the beginning

of the poem<sup>100</sup>—without fearing that the heroic exploits of the French that the romance recounts will undermine English national feeling. In fact, if *Richard Coer De Lyon's* strategy in re-writing the Angevin past focuses on distancing the Plantagenets from their French origins and alliances, *The Sultan of Babylon* goes even further back in history, by memorializing the heroics of the Carolingian empire in English. Thus, it distinguishes between the French who were the military foes of the England in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries and a more mythic and exemplary version of the French as defenders of Christendom, an element of an imagined French heritage that the English readily embraced.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, the English identified with a certain legacy of Frenchness and the Middle English translation becomes a figurative heir in the French *chanson de geste* tradition.

While this strand of English identification with the French contradicts the nationalist strategies of *Richard Coer de Lyon*, the viability of buttressing English power by claiming the lineage of the Other was an option that Edward III elected to exercise when he claimed his right to succeed to the French crown and pursued that claim until peace resolutions were agreed upon in 1360 with the Treaty of Brétigny (Allmand 10 and 18). When Charles IV died without an heir in 1328, the line of directly descended

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<sup>100</sup> Cohen locates this referencing in an England "preoccupied with the racial purity of its vernacular." He argues that the poem's "silent citationality establishes Chaucer as a literary authority" and "construct[s] an ideal community of readers with a knowledge of English as a *literary* language, of what proper English poetry sounds like" (220, author's own emphasis).

<sup>101</sup> The symbolic strategy in constructing differing versions of Frenchness is not unlike medieval Christianity's distinction between the Israelites of the Old Testament and the Jews that were its contemporaries. Heng observes this strategy in the Hereford *mappamundi*, where Jews are "depicted as idolaters, so that the biblical group of Israelites ... can be embraced as the predecessors of Christians, even as the group of post-biblical Jews is condemned in the very moment of their naming" ("Jews" 252).

Capetian kings ended and the French succession shifted to the House of Valois. By claiming his right to the French crown through Isabella of France, the queen who had betrayed his father, Edward III demonstrated how the threat presented by the Other could be turned into an advantage. Tracing one's lineage through a mother of foreign origins could be used to justify English expansionism, in the inheritance logic similar to that which occurs in *The Sultan of Babylon*, where Guy does not merely wrest lands away from Laban but also "inherits" them through his marriage to Floripas. The value of marrying one's erstwhile enemy, a tactic that had proven fatal for England in Edward II's match with Isabella, was re-discovered in Richard II's marriage to Isabella of Valois in 1396 and with the union between Henry V and Catherine of Valois in 1420. Unlike Edward's marriage to Isabella, these later unions proved less threatening to the royal family, in part because they were both short-lived owing to the deaths of Richard and Henry soon after the marriages, but also because they were negotiated from a position of relative strength. This was especially true in Henry V's case, for the marriage to Catherine sealed the Treaty of Troyes, which along with significant territorial concessions by the French involving Normandy and Aquitaine, also made him Regent of France and formally conferred the French succession to him after the reigning king, Charles VI, died (Allmand, *Hundred Years War* 30).

But joining with the Other in marriage creates complications in English identity. The symbolic resonance of Henry's regency and promised succession to the French crown reflects the complicated dynamics of identification and disavowal in dynastic inheritance. This is evident in the language of the Treaty of Troyes itself. At the

beginning of the Treaty, Henry refers to Charles VI as "our Fadir of Fraunce" (916).<sup>102</sup> Even though the treaty would have Henry marry Charles's daughter Catherine, thus logically making Henry Charles's son-in-law, the identification achieved through the familial terms resonates beyond the prospective affinal relationship. In fact, when the marriage clause is introduced, the logical and symbolic registers combine to strange effect, and the references to family and marriage hover on the brink of becoming incestuous:

First it is accordid betwene our sayd Fadir of France and Us, that, for as much as, by the Bond of Matrimonie maad for the good of Peas, betwene Us and our most dere and moste beloved Kateryne, the Daughter of our sayd Fadir and of oure most dere Moder Isabell his Wife, thairefore thaim as our Fadir and Modir we shall have, and worship, and, as it fittith suche and so worthy a Prince and Princesse, for to be worshipped principally to fore all other Temporal Persons of this World. (916)<sup>103</sup>

Through the insistence on familial terms, "our sayd Fadir of France" and "Moder Isabell his Wife" become doubly parental through marriage: "thaim as our Fadir and Modir we shall have." This is not unlike the anxious over-coding of the marriage relationship between the princess of Tars and the sultan of Damascus, where the affinal bond is reinforced to the point of taboo and transgression, by the bonds of spiritual kinship.

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<sup>102</sup> The French version of the treaty, written from Charles's perspective, uses reciprocal terms for Henry, referring to him as "nostre treschier Fils" (985). Both English and French versions of the Treaty of Troyes are taken from volume nine of Thomas Rymer's *Foedera*.

<sup>103</sup> The English version of the marriage clause emphasizes the symbolic familial relations more strongly than the French. For instance, from Charles's perspective, the phrase "oure most dere Moder Isabell his Wife" is rendered in more formal terms: "nostre treschiere & tresamee Compagne la Reyne" (896).

The obverse effect of this familial language displaces the relationship between Charles VI and his son, the future Charles VII. The Treaty of Troyes effectively disinherits the Dauphin by making him an alienated entity. Henry is to wage war to reclaim the territories that are "Inobedient and Rebell to our sayd Fadir," whose loyalties lie with "that Partye comonely called Dalpin or Ermyak" (917). The Dauphin is further alienated when the treaty terms state that "nother oure said Fader, ne We, nor our Brother the Duke of Burgoyne, shall begynne ne make with Charles, beryng hymself for the Dolphin of Viennes, any Trety of Peas or Accord" (920). The symbolic family born out of Henry's political and military might supplants the biological one much in the manner that the Sultan of Babylon loses his children to Charlemagne and his peers.

Yet by associating himself so intensely as Charles VI's heir, Henry was effectively acknowledging the legitimacy of the House of Valois's rule and no longer claiming the crown through his slender Capetian heritage; he no longer pursued the claim that his great grand-father, Edward III, first invoked (Curry 89). By embracing his new French "fadir," he silently disavowed some elements of his English heritage. The tension between the anxious dissociation from the French and Henry V's identification mirrors the different responses to otherness registered in *Richard Coer De Lyon* and *The Sultan of Babylon*. Lee Patterson, summarizes the irreconcilable nature of the symbolic strategies the English used to muster support against the French and justify its military campaigns in France:

On the one hand, it had insisted on English integrity versus French duplicity, presenting England as politically united and ethically coherent while France was riven by internal divisions and corrupted by duplicity. Yet on the other hand, it

had also claimed that the war was undertaken to heal the rift between the fraternal nations England and France, to bring back to unity—to oneness and integrity—two crowns that were in truth parts of a single whole. ("Making Identities" 89)

By depicting hybrid marriages, these romances thus participate in a complex web of cultural production that simultaneously disavow, assimilate, and identify with the Other with effects that may seem contradictory, but that did not necessarily cancel each other out. This turbulence in the national psyche reflects the various responses to anxiety that arise in a Kleinian analysis of the mind. For Klein, both the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions are states that the psyche masters in order to achieve integration with the real world: the failure to do so leads to various psycho-pathologies. The value of good objects and whole persons is validated by positive experiences which affirm a child's "inner reality by means of outer reality" and "the child passes through his infantile neurosis, and among other achievements, arrives step by step at a good relation to people and to reality" (149–50).<sup>104</sup> However, in the case of the national psyche, it is these positions that constituted the "reality" of English–French relations by mobilizing and suppressing the anxieties provoked by imagined marriages to the Other.

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<sup>104</sup> In this respect, Klein differs significantly from Lacan. Her belief that the mind relates the inner fantasies with the real world through a symbolizing process does not account for external reality itself being structured by a super-structural entity like Lacan's Symbolic. What Klein would see as bringing a child's imaginary object relations in line with the real world is read as a form of symbolic violence by Lacan: "It is Melanie Klein's discourse which brutally grafts the primary symbolizations of the Oedipal situation on to the initial ego-related inertia of the child. Melanie Klein always does that with her subjects, more or less implicitly, more or less arbitrarily" (*Freud's Papers* 85).

**Chapter 4: Constructing the Virtual Family: Memorializing Grief in John Gower's  
"Tale of Apollonius of Tyre"**

**I. Introduction: The Loss of Family**

As a romance about loss and recuperation, John Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre," the final tale of the *Confessio Amantis*, is a story underwritten by the persistence of the nuclear family. Its longevity and popularity as a medieval tale told in several Latin versions and disseminated in a host of vernacular re-tellings and adaptations can partially be explained by the way the wild vicissitudes of fortune are instrumental in dismantling and then re-forming that which is ordinarily taken for granted: the nuclear family. Indeed, with a tale that celebrates "the triumph of 'honeste love' ... in reunion, extension, and political establishment of Apollonius's family," Gower appears to end the *Confessio* with "tenacious optimism" (Dimmick 136). Elizabeth Archibald observes that as a tale that avoids the traps and tragedy of incest, "Apollonius of Tyre" is a fitting final tale to the work because "it combines his chosen themes of good love and good kinship, which are expounded through stories illustrating the Seven Deadly Sins" ("Incest Stories" 28). While Gower keeps the main contours of the Latin story of Apollonius intact, he inflects his version with a particular emphasis on loss, grief and mourning.<sup>105</sup> His additions may

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<sup>105</sup> This source is the Latin *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyrii*, which exists in two main versions, called RA and RB. As Elizabeth Archibald observes, these versions tell exactly the same story and differ only in details such as the names of characters (*Apollonius* 7–9), I refer to the *Historia Apollonii* throughout as if it were a single text. The edition and translation of the *Historia Apollonii* that I make reference to and quote from is by Elizabeth Archibald and appears as the second part of her study *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations*. Although Gower says that *The Pantheon* of Godfrey of Viterbo is his main source—"Of a cronique in daies gon, / The

be regarded as exaggerating elements of an already melodramatic story of loss and recovery. However, I argue that in his portrayal of loss, Gower shows that anxiety about identity and the integrity of the family is not confined to the episode of incest that begins the tale. Even if the nuclear family is restored at the end of the tale, Gower's version raises questions about the value and nature of what is lost and the authenticity of that which is re-formed.

By positing that the extended scenes of loss and mourning are key innovations on Gower's part, I argue that his version of the tale constructs an idea of family that is founded on loss. Instead of assessing these scenes of loss as the suffering and sacrifice that Apollonius, his wife, and their daughter Thaise must experience in order to become moral subjects who are worthy to be happily re-united as a family, I consider loss itself as the dynamic that constitutes the nuclear family unit in the tale. From a theoretical perspective, I engage with Judith Butler's close readings of Freud and Lacan in her formulation of the constitutive power of loss. Other readings of the tale by María Bullón-Fernández, Georgiana Donavin, and Diane Watt have, to varying degrees, engaged Butler's ideas as well. However, these readings tend to focus on Butler's argument that the incest taboo not only forbids certain desires but simultaneously generates the desire for the forbidden. As such, they take the incest taboo as a foundational law: "Thus, the repressive law effectively produces heterosexuality, and acts not merely as negative or

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which is cleped Pantheon, / In loves cause I rede thus ..."—(8.271–3), it was not his sole source as Gower consistently makes references to events that do not occur in Godfrey's version but which are present in the *Historia Apollonii* (Archibald, *Apollonius* 192). The major additions and expansions that I study occur in the following sections of the poem: Apollonius's grief after his wife appears to die during childbirth at sea (8.1059–83); the funeral rites held for Thaise (8.1510–40); and Apollonius's first return to Tyre, when he holds a feast in memory of his wife (8.1547–67).

exclusionary code, but as a sanction and, most pertinently, as a law of discourse, distinguishing the speakable from the unspeakable ... the legitimate from the illegitimate" (*Gender Trouble* 83–4). In my reading, I trace how Butler produces this conclusion of sorts through her examination of loss and its constitutive power in *Gender Trouble* and also take up her extensions of the subject in *The Psychic Life of Power* and *Antigone's Claim*. I argue that these perspectives on loss help us understand the instrumental role of mourning and memorialization in Gower's version of the tale. By highlighting how Butler's argument links the incest taboo with the power of loss in influencing gendered subject formation, I extend her perspectives into the realm of the family by showing that the force of socially sanctioned memorialization on Apollonius's part creates the enduring fantasy of the nuclear family.

Such an account of family formation may appear counter-intuitive, for family is more ordinarily formed through the additive acts of procreation, marriage or adoption. However, the history of incest that begins Book Eight, which acts as the narrative frame which occasions the telling of "Apollonius of Tyre" as a cautionary tale, offers a link between loss and the family, with its emphasis on procreation. Genius's narrative opens by using a medieval commonplace to explain why God creates Adam and Eve and orders them to procreate:

He made Adam the sexte day  
 In Paradis, and to his make  
 Him liketh Eve also to make,  
 And bad hem cresce and multiplie.  
 For of the mannes progenie,

Which of the womman schal be bore,  
 The nombre of angles which was lore,  
 Whan thei out fro the blisse felle,  
 He thoghte to restore, and felle  
 In hevene thilke holy place  
 Which stod tho voide upon His grace. (8.26–36)<sup>106</sup>

The procreative function that God designates to humanity has its origins in a loss of cosmological proportions, in the "voide" created by Lucifer's rebellion. In this explanation, procreation, an element that was regarded as one of the benefits of marriage by St. Augustine, is necessitated as a response to loss. The relationship between loss and procreative recompense continues to shape Genius's narrative. He points out that the last moment when incest between brothers and sisters was acceptable in human history occurred after Noah and his family survived the Great Flood:

Tho was mankinde of litel weyhte;  
 Sem, Cham, Japhet, of these thre,  
 That ben the sones of Noe,  
 The world of mannes nacion  
 Into multiplicacion  
 Was tho restored newe agein  
 So ferforth, as the bokes sein,  
 That of hem thre and here issue  
 Ther was so large a retenue,

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<sup>106</sup> Quotations of the poem are from Rusell A. Peck's edition of the *Confessio Amantis*.

Of naciouns seventy and tuo,

In sondri place ech on of tho

The wyde world have enhabited. (8.82–93)

Their success in transforming a small family group of "litel weyhte" into "so large a retenue, / Of naciouns seventy and tuo" is explained by the fact that "Thei token thanne litel hiede, / The brother of the sosterhiede / To wedde wyves" (8.95–7). The procreative function plays a crucial role in response to loss, where loss is now felt by humanity itself. The need to restore the human population destroyed in the flood becomes an explanation for why incest at that stage of human history was acceptable.

It is only after this moment in human history, when "[t]he nede tho was overrunne, / For ther was poeple ynough in londe" (8.100–1) that the incest taboo begins to operate. Genius's attempts to demarcate a point in history when incestuous relations are no longer needed as a means of procreation is interesting given how Antiochus's incest with his daughter in "Apollonius of Tyre," by preventing her from circulating out of the family unit, is shown to restrict the procreative function. Because the raw need to replace numbers is no longer keenly present, there is no procreative justification for incest.

In this light, the family as a unit of procreation can be said to act in response to loss. Thus, the family that is constituted through loss is not as odd as it may seem. However, even if this procreative function lurks in the background of "Apollonius of Tyre," the romance does not focus on procreation as a response to loss. While the story does end with Apollonius having more children by his long-lost queen, the tale itself is interested in staging acts of commemoration as the response to loss. If procreation is a response to loss that looks toward the future, a fact made clear in Genius's progressive

unfolding of human history, commemoration is an act that holds on to the past to make sense of loss. The formative powers of commemorating loss are demonstrated in the way families of the later Middle Ages were profoundly invested in remembering the dead. The memory of the dead was often used to shape a particular narrative of family legacy and prestige. The cost and artistry involved in erecting monuments to dead family members and the elaborate nature of funerary and commemorative rites not only established a familial connection to the one lost, but also marked out a space for the family's identity in the broader social consciousness. More often than not, this manner of constituting family identity through loss was influenced by decidedly patriarchal interests.<sup>107</sup>

By responding to loss through acts of private and public mourning, Apollonius forms what might be called a virtual nuclear family: one that is never gathered in the flesh nor socially active for much of the narrative and yet a construct that remains instrumental in shaping Apollonius's public identity as patriarchal figure and ruler of Tyre.<sup>108</sup> Despite its virtual status, the nuclear family operates powerfully throughout the tale, and most significantly at the end, to block other social groupings that may have

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<sup>107</sup> Paul Binski's *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* deals with the patriarchal element in mourning and the erection of monuments. See especially chapters one and two. Nigel Llewellyn's article "Honour in Life, Death and in the Memory," which focuses on funeral monuments in early-modern England, makes similar arguments about how patriarchal interests are enshrined in monuments to the dead.

<sup>108</sup> The idea of the virtual family owes a debt to Sylvia Tomasch's essay, "Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew." Tomasch examines "medieval representations of Jews so as to understand the ways in which post/colonial English conditions fostered the creation of virtuality and the paradox of Jewish absent presence" (245). She argues that "'the Jew' was central not only to medieval English Christian devotion but to the construction of Englishness itself" in the later Middle Ages in spite of the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290 (244).

provided alternative ways of communal living for Apollonius's wife and Thaise. While I am in agreement with most critics that the tale installs Apollonius as a somewhat benign patriarchal figure, I examine how Gower gives voice to the agency and identities that Thaise and Apollonius's wife have to give up in order for them to take their place in the nuclear family that is constituted at the end. This stands in contrast to most readings, which while conceding varying amounts of female initiative in determining the outcome of the tale, eventually orientate the women—usually Thaise—as agents of Apollonius's renewal or analogies of his growth as an effective ruler. Misty Schieberle's assertion that "Gower envisions the ideal political relationship of a counselor to a powerful lord through the female-male relationship" (93) is a conclusion that informs most readings of Thaise and her mother. Bullón-Fernández observes that "[a]s Apollonius was honest in his relationship with his wife, and as he was honest in his relationship with his daughter, he is also honest in his relationship with his city. The city for its part also takes the initiative in ensuring a good relationship with its ruler, thus behaving like the good daughters ... Thaise, Constance, and Peronelle" (64). Reading the encounter between Thaise and Apollonius in the ship's hold as a moment that threatens incest, Donavin sees Thaise as a redemptive figure: "[C]haste Thaise is the Virgin's representative. By her intercession, Apollonius finds himself metaphorically in Heaven .... [T]he confrontation between Apollonius and Thaise, initially resembling that of Antiochus and his daughter, is transformed into a meeting between the sinful soul and the Mother of God" (85). In a similar vein, Kurt Olsson states that this scene "represents ... a consolation of philosophy," with Thaise playing the part of Lady Philosophy (218). Larry Scanlon reads both Thaise and her mother as helping to assure Apollonius's position: "Sent by

Athenagoras to comfort Apollonius, as her mother had been sent by her grandfather at the court of Pentapolis, she secures for him the full coherence of paternity" (118). Watt's reading amplifies the role of women in the tale, noting that in it, "the role of women as wives and mothers is crucial to the proper functioning of the household" (*Amoral* 134). However, she argues that Gower limits female agency rather than explores its possibilities by reading Thaise's time in Mitilene and the Queen's dedication to the Temple of Diana as moments where female chastity is preserved until it can enter the patriarchal universe and be restricted by the status quo (*Amoral* 144–5). Their apparent loss within the tale is mourned by Apollonius but they themselves lose other modes of being when they subordinate themselves to Apollonius at the story's "happy" conclusion.

If Apollonius creates and preserves the notion of the nuclear family through extravagant acts of mourning for his family of lost women, the women, on the other hand, mourn in much more measured ways. This jarring disconnect, where Apollonius displays much more affect than the female characters, is crucial in the production of alternatives to the narrative of family that only re-inscribes patriarchal familial relations. Rather than read this as a sign of fortitude or resignation on the part of the female characters, I propose that their lack of mourning represents how the women seize opportunities to carve out spaces where female agency becomes more evident. By belonging to and forming all-female communities, during the time when they are orphaned daughter and widowed wife, Thaise and her mother challenge the normalcy of the patriarchal nuclear family. The tale does end up re-constituting the nuclear family but it is very much a fiction, a product of Apollonius's melancholia that is circulated as social grief, one that effaces alternative modes of incorporating loss into collective identity.

I conclude the chapter by showing that these ideas intersect with Richard II's own sense of how he would represent himself and his sense of family in death. By studying the funerary monument that he commissioned for his first wife, Anne of Bohemia, I argue that Richard was well aware that representations of loss could influence how his rule was perceived. Further, his insistence on commissioning a double-tomb for Anne and himself while he was still alive had unintended, but powerful effects on his political legacy.

## **II. Reading Incest: Antiochus's Riddle as Monument**

It is almost a given in the critical history of Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre" that any reading that attempts to interpret the tale must first encounter Antiochus's incest and its public expression via the gnomic riddle and work out their implications for the rest of the story. As Scanlon notes, most critics approach incest in the tale by taking it to epitomize more abstract concerns relating to moral behavior or governance. Scanlon, however, opts to examine incest itself because he views Gower's interest in incest as a polemical act that challenges ecclesiastical control over marriage. He argues that the tale plays against the opening of Book VIII, where Gower shows how the legal structures governing incest have proceeded from the Church's influence over medieval politics and society. As such, he reads the tale as an attempt to "redefine the boundaries of marriage regulation in less clerical terms" (99). In reading the implications of incest into the rest of the tale, I take Scanlon's lead but focus on the institution of the nuclear family instead. In order to understand the implications of incest on the family it is crucial to examine what causes incest in Gower's version of the story.

It is quite clear in Gower's version that Antiochus's incestuous desire emerges out of the grief he experiences from the loss of his wife. While critical readings acknowledge this fact, they usually choose to focus on Antiochus's abuse of paternal authority rather than the incest as an effect of loss. For instance, in a recent reading of the tale, Sebastian Sobecki equates incest to poor rulership, and posits that the tale's message is that the "antidote to bad kingship and incest is administered in the form of good governance and marriage, two concepts that were undergoing radical reform at the time, namely the introduction of consent in their foundation" (206). Watt mentions that "[t]he events at the beginning of Gower's version of the tale (although not the *Historia Apollonii*) are precipitated by the loss of Antiochus's wife" (*Amoral* 131), but does not discuss the implications of this fact. Bullón-Fernández makes the interesting observation that at the beginning of the tale, Antiochus's existence is essentially a private one, for he "is surrounded only by his wife and daughter [and n]o men appear in his world until later on, when his daughter's suitors approach the court" (49). As an extension of this observation, it is possible to argue that this world of women would have been traumatically disrupted by his wife's death. The link between incest and grief is significant because it is a connection that does not appear in all sources and analogues of the tale. In other versions of the tale, what instigates the incestuous union is the king's encounter with the suitors.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon* suggests a link between loss and incest, mentioning the queen's death and Antiochus burning with desire in the same line (153). The *Historia Apollonii* makes no connection between the death of the queen, Antiochus's grief and incest. In the RA variant, there is no mention of the queen's death at all. In variant RB, the Queen's death is mentioned in passing to explain how Antiochus ends up with a daughter but without a wife. Instead, incestuous desire arises in the process of searching for a husband for his daughter: "While her father was considering to whom best to give his daughter in marriage, driven by immoral passion and inflamed by lust he fell in love with his own daughter, and he began to love her in a way unsuitable for a father" (113).

In those versions, the paternal act of seeking a husband for his daughter arouses unnatural appetites in Antiochus, and plants in him the idea to have his daughter for his own pleasure; no indication is given that grief from the loss of his wife causes Antiochus to turn to his daughter as a substitute. In contrast, Gower's decision to link the wife of Antiochus's death to his unnatural desires is expressed with dramatic fanfare:

Bot such fortune cam to honde,  
 That deth, which no king mai withstonde,  
 This worthi queene tok aweie.  
 The king, which made mochel mone,  
 Tho stod, as who seith, al him one  
 Withoute wif, bot natheles  
 His doghter, which was peiereles  
 Of beaute, duelte aboute him stille.  
 Bot whanne a man hathe welthe at wille,  
 The fleissh is frele and falleth ofte,  
 And that this maide tendre softe,  
 Which in hire fadres chambres duelte,  
 Withinne a time wiste and felte. (8.279–92)

In this passage, the death of the queen is given great prominence and it becomes the event that directs the subsequent tragedy. Even prior to the description of Antiochus's grief, the passage indicates how the authority of a king is challenged by the processes of death for it is such that "no king mai withstonde." The weakened power of a king's

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authority, indicated by this general comment on the inevitable and precarious workings of Fortune, finds specific expression in the way Antiochus behaves in grief for he makes "mochel mone." The loss also disrupts the family structure, complicating how the family is described. With the queen's death, Antiochus is now entirely alone ("al him one / Withoute wif"), and yet not quite, because the very same line reminds the reader ("bot natheles") that his daughter is still with him, and even manages to work in a subordinate clause that describes her: "which was peiereles / Of beaute." These lines are an awkward statement of family. Unlike the straightforward description of the family unit that precedes this passage on loss—" [Antiochus] was coupled to a noble queene, / And hadde a dowhter hem betwene (277–8)"—these lines register the impact of loss through the complex interplay of the inevitability of death, the king's state of distress, his almost total isolation, and the ominous hint that the daughter might well become a substitute for the dead queen.

What remains of Antiochus's family—his beautiful daughter—is then linked to the subsequent tragedy of the rape and continued incest by the couplet "Of beaute, duelte aboute him stille. / Bot whanne a man hathe welthe at wille." The account transforms the state of grief into one of imminent danger. Also, the word "duelte," first used in a consolatory context at line 287 to indicate that at least Antiochus still has his daughter with him, gains a darker meaning when it is reiterated to indicate that the daughter physically stays within the King's chambers at line 291. Through the sequence of events in the narrative and specific choices of diction, Gower's version weaves an indelible link between Antiochus's grief at the loss of his wife and the subsequent rape of his daughter.

A crucial effect of grief is to transform how paternal authority operates. Instead of reading Antiochus's incest as the abrogation of paternal authority, it is possible to consider the rape and incest as a function of that very authority. The ease with which despair transforms Antiochus from protector to predator demonstrates the contradictions at the heart of sovereign power, contradictions that have only been held in check by social conventions.<sup>110</sup> María Bullón-Fernández has noted that in response to his wife's death, Antiochus absconds from his public responsibilities as ruler and withdraws into the private spaces of his bedchamber by committing the crime of incest with his daughter. This failure of social authority on Antiochus's part occurs because he removes himself from the openness and accountability that governs the public exercise of power (49). To extend Bullón-Fernández's arguments, the same failure to keep his authority in the public eye can be discerned in the act of mourning itself. Antiochus's hidden crime is also linked to unnatural grief because he does not mourn in a public manner that would acknowledge that the queen's death has social implications as well. In the narrative, despite the centrality of the queen's death, no one else in Antioch, not even her daughter, is described as mourning it. Antiochus's grief that motivates the incest produces a state of affective blockage in the political sphere as well because the experience of loss is condensed upon the body of the tyrant alone and kept alive through his abusive power.

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<sup>110</sup> Bruce Boehrer, writing about how incest was figured in Henry VIII's attempts to divorce Catherine of Aragon, indicates the paradoxical relationship between the incest prohibition and a monarch's power: "[The incest taboo] becomes a central conundrum of royal authority, for it requires the monarch to compromise his or her own characters as monarch; it forces the ruler to accede to the necessity of politics while claiming the transcendent dominion of a petty god, and to marry beyond the edges of an ever expanding royal kinship group, even though the concept of royal authority itself hinges upon keeping that kinship group limited, determinate, and determinable" (41).

In the absence of public rites that would normally attend the death of a public figure, Antiochus's socio-pathological behavior becomes the only trace of the city's grief. Further, because the loss of the queen is now entwined with the incestuous relationship, the loss becomes socially unmournable within the conventions of social grief.

However, even if the poem does not describe the funeral rites or sepulcher of the dead queen of Antioch, her memory is not entirely effaced. If incest occurs as a response to loss, the riddle that signifies the unspeakable act becomes the only monument to memory of the dead queen. In coding incest and making it possible to allude to the deed in public, the riddle becomes the mystifying focus of the city's loss. Unlike most memorials to the dead that are unambiguous representations of the deceased, the riddle is a perplexing and paradoxical monument that manages to distort the effects of loss while it commemorates the queen's death in a most public and perverse manner.

In this way, the riddle as a test for suitors, despite contravening conventions that guide state and public affairs in the way it rewards the suitors for marriage with death, does not represent an absolute withdrawal into Antiochus's narcissistic tyranny nor does it entirely dismantle the processes of courtly conduct. Instead, it functions within the liminal space akin to the one represented by the medieval tomb, where the intimate experience of death and loss is joined with a more public attempt to commemorate the dead. Indeed, Antiochus's encoding of incest within the riddle can be read as the manic arrogance of a tyrant, but the case for such hubris can only be made if the riddle's answer were obvious to all. However, because the riddle itself does not employ the ritualistic formulae of mourning that are the recognizable and socialized responses to loss, it fails as a monument, precisely because it cannot regulate the desires that have emerged from

Antiochus's grief. Instead, the riddle connects his grief to the public sphere without mitigating its destructive effects: it perpetuates his grief by operating as the locus of his desire to continue his incestuous relations with his daughter while allowing him to prosecute the deaths of the suitors. The courtly setting in which this takes place offers a form of public ratification of the situation, even if social participation in this perverse act of mourning is unconscious.

The curious wording of the riddle has generated a range of critical interpretations. P. Goolden argues that Gower's version of the riddle is based on a corruption of the Latin but can be unraveled by using the "in-law" relation as a key to sorting out the relationships coded in it (246–8). Scanlon indicates that the complexity of the riddle may very well be its message: "The most plausible explanation of these contradictions is that the point of the riddle is precisely that it is irresolvable" (125). Donavin reads the riddle as encoding an Oedipal dimension, that Antiochus seeks his father because he desires his mother, and that raping his daughter "expresses a sexual yearning sublimated for a generation" (72). Watt says that psychoanalysis cannot account for the enlarged "role of the mother" in Gower's version of the riddle and that it indicates how the tale is "littered with absent and often nameless women" (*Amoral* 131). She also points out that the quest for the father in the riddle "draws our attention to the homosociality ... of patriarchal society" and that Antiochus's incest is connected with that other form of tabooed desire: homoeroticism (*Amoral* 135–6). Yet a commonality amongst interpretations is the attempt to specify a speaker of the riddle, and thus deduce whom the riddle refers to. In his comparative study of the Latin source, Gower's version, and Shakespeare's *Pericles*, Goolden shows how the identity of the speaker of the riddle can easily shift with slight

modifications to the riddle. He also notes that in the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre* the riddle is spoken by both Antiochus and his daughter, with each uttering different sections (247). These observations, along with the array of critical interpretations of the riddle, suggest that the riddle does not function most profoundly when it posits only a single subject as speaker and perpetrator of incest.<sup>111</sup> Instead, the riddle highlights how the incest taboo governs a range of subject positions within the family and that anyone identifying with these familial positions becomes a potential perpetrator and victim of incest. Further, the riddle also acts as a rhetorical structure that implicates a broader range of individuals—the nurse who allows the abuse to continue, the suitors who fail to uncover its meaning, Apollonius, who gains access to the secret but cannot act on his knowledge—in sustaining the incestuous relationship. In this way, the riddle becomes a troubled memorial to the queen's death in that it does not preserve the memory of the queen, but troubles familial relationships as it seduces auditors and spectators to participate in the construction (as well as obfuscation) of her memory.<sup>112</sup> While the riddle perversely memorializes the dead queen by referencing incest, its message is

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<sup>111</sup> Along similar lines, Scanlon observes that "[t]here is simply no 'I' that can fill all the slots that the riddle requires." But he goes on to argue that this demonstrates how "[f]ather–daughter incest radically collapses the distinctions on which familial categories depend" (124–5).

<sup>112</sup> Late medieval tomb monuments and epitaphs to the dead were meant to connect the living and dead, a link necessitated by the doctrine of Purgatory. The memorial acted as an *aide memoir*, reminding the living to pray for the souls of the dead, and not just commemorate the memory of the dead. M. Bryan Curd observes that by reminding the viewer to pray for the souls of the deceased or by urging the viewer to take the deceased as an example of virtue, tomb monuments established the living in a continuum with the dead. Monuments also assumed distinctions of class—such as the fact that one would pray for the soul of one's lord, or that the tombs of prominent individuals would be placed near the altar within a church—and these "associate the contemporary monument with established hierarchies, implying continuity" (283–4).

hardly transparent; further, its transgressive nature makes any attempt to respond a delicate matter. Apollonius's own careful and indirect response to the riddle—"It toucheth the privity / Betwen thin oghne child and thee, / And stant al hol upon you tuo" (8.425–7)—demonstrates how the riddle dares the one who hears and understands it to speak the unspeakable. If memorials to the dead elicit obvious responses from the living by operating as *memento mori* or appeals for prayers on behalf of the souls of the departed, the riddle invites response while effacing the possibility that such a response can exist within the boundaries of civilized society.<sup>113</sup> Even hinting at knowledge of what the riddle represents is enough to send Apollonius fleeing for his life across the Mediterranean. In this brush with loss and excessive grief, Apollonius learns valuable lessons. In his own experience of loss later on in the story, he ensures that he moves towards modes of mourning and memorialization that are framed by the socially endorsed structures of the nuclear family.

### III. De-gendering Loss

Antiochus's response to loss in the opening movement of the tale dramatizes the dangers of excessive grief as it plays a crucial part in the genesis and preservation of incest. Apollonius himself experiences, at least for a season, the loss of his loved ones, and one of the strongest parallels between the two rulers is the depth of their grief. However, Apollonius responds to grief quite differently, managing to differentiate

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<sup>113</sup> Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray show how certain forms of transgression are unspeakable within the boundaries of certain dominant discourses: "Dominant discourses have assisted such silencing strategies through formation rules that invalidate 'rapist father' or 'rapist boyfriend' as an object of discussion or analysis; one's boyfriend or father could not simultaneously be one's rapist" (266).

himself from Antiochus by the more rigorous attempts to control himself. Yet the narrative spells out Apollonius's tendency toward excessive grief quite clearly. In the longest passage detailing the emotional state of any character, Gower describes Apollonius's response when he learns of his wife's death on the ship during childbirth:

Appolinus whan he this knew,  
 For sorwe a swoune he overthrew,  
 That no man wiste in him no lif.  
 And whanne he wok, he seide, "Ha, wif,  
 Mi lust, mi joie, my desir,  
 Mi welthe and my recoverir,  
 Why schal I live, and thou schalt dye?  
 Ha, thou fortune, I thee deffie,  
 Nou hast though do to me thi werste.  
 Ha, herte, why ne wolt thou berste,  
 That forth with hire I myhte passe?  
 Mi peines weren wel the lasse."  
 In such wepinge and in such cry  
 His dede wife, which lay him by,  
 A thousand sithes he hire kiste;  
 Was nevere man that sih ne wiste  
 A sorwe unto his sorwe lich.  
 For evere among upon the lich  
 He fell swounende, as he that soghte

His oghne deth, which he besoghte  
 Unto the goddes alle above  
 With many a pitous word of love.  
 Bot suche wordes as tho were  
 Yit herde nevere mannes ere,  
 Bot only thilke which he seide. (8.1059–83)

In his editorial notes, Russell Peck observes that "[m]ost of this section is original with Gower" (337) yet there is hardly any critical commentary on this passage.<sup>114</sup> While the passage is marked by conventional gestures and figurations of grief, these center upon the loss of bodily and affective control. The fact that he swoons twice in the passage (at lines 1060 and 1077) and is overcome by weeping identifies him with the affective effusiveness conventionally used to depict women in grief.<sup>115</sup> The description also shows

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<sup>114</sup> Bullón-Fernández analyses how Apollonius manages his grief by opposing it to Antiochus's but she does not deal with this passage. Instead she makes the observation that Apollonius only seeks Thaise out once he has mastered his grief, thus avoiding the danger of incest (53–4). In the Latin *Historia Apollonii*, Apollonius is not without emotion but his mourning is structured around his concern about how he will answer to his father-in-law, the ruler of Pentapolis, for his wife's death: "Dear wife, beloved only daughter of a king, what has happened to you? How shall I answer for you to your father? What shall I say about you to them who took me in, poor and needy, when I was shipwrecked?" (139).

<sup>115</sup> While the excess of Apollonius's grief may be linked to the conventions of courtly love poetry, Paul Binski notes that there were injunctions against men expressing grief so dramatically, even if death and the funeral ceremony was the space where the overt display of male affect was granted the most latitude. Further, he points out that "usually in medieval art the codification of grief is the special preserve of women" (51–2). Watt notices a feminization of Apollonius in the poem as well but does not refer to this show of grief. Instead, she references his inaction on hearing and solving the riddle as indicative of an effeminizing "father-fixation" as well as his reputation for eloquence which "may actually threaten his masculinity since the use and abuse of rhetoric is associated with femininity and effeminacy" (*Amoral* 136–7). The observation by Archibald that in the Constance group of stories, it is the daughter who flees in response

him so overtaken by his wife's death that in fainting he himself seems to die ("no man wiste in him no lif") and even becomes like one who desires his own death ("He fell swounende, as he that soghte / His oghne deth"). Behind these dramatic effects of grief, a series of displacements and identifications takes place. In the apostrophizing speech that Apollonius makes, important shifts occur in how Apollonius conceives of himself in relation to his dead wife. The first addressee is appropriately his wife ("Ha wif ..."). In the appositive structure of this part of the speech, his wife is only mourned in relation to what he has lost ("Mi lust, mi joie, my desir, / Mi welthe and my recoverir"), not for qualities, or indeed, a life that has been lived apart from him. Only the unbridgeable distance between life and death—"Why schal I live, and thou schalt dye?"—offers her an identity that is separate from his. Even then, it is a tenuous separation because the parallelism of the phrases knits her closely to him.<sup>116</sup> Yet, after the brief address directed

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to incest ("Flight" 259) has some bearing on this point as well. By fleeing in response to Antiochus's incest, Apollonius takes the place of the daughter in flight.

<sup>116</sup> It is also possible to discern in these lines the operation of the idealization–victimization dynamic that David Aers has incisively analyzed in other masculine mourners of Middle English poetry. In his reading of books four and five of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Aers views Troilus's grief as operating through the process of idealization, where the masculine figure idealizes the feminine as the source of healing, but simultaneously blames her for being the source of his grief ("Reflections" 54–5). Aers sees the same operation of idealization–victimization in the mourning that occurs in *Pearl* and *The Book of the Duchess*. At the same time, Aers notes that a process of identification takes place in *Pearl*: For in it the mourner "falls on the grave where he thinks the lost pearl lies, identifying as closely as possible with her through the very prison that encases her. In this action we see how we may try to *become* that which we mourn" ("Reflections" 58). As I go on to argue, Apollonius's grief operates more along the lines of identification rather than victimization. While he first identifies with the lost object (i.e. his wife), he later makes shifts by incorporating himself (and his lost ones) into an absent family in order to socialize his loss. Unlike the isolation that Aers sees as defining Chaucer's grieving knights or the speaker of *Pearl*, who turn to the language of chivalric discourse to assert masculinity in their grief ("Reflections" 57–62), Apollonius finds community and authority by commemorating loss in specifically social ways.

to Fortune, the subordination of his wife's identity to his own breaks down. Apollonius's experience of who he is becomes displaced such that he identifies with his wife. He fragments himself, directing his address to his innermost being ("Ha herte ..."), and expresses a desire to die like his wife: "why ne wolt thou berste, / That forth with hire I myhte passe?" This process of identifying with the dead wife comes to a head at lines 1076 and 1077. In the only instance of *rime équivoque* in this passage, Gower uses the word "lich" to create an uncanny link between the unknowable and undecipherable nature of Apollonius's grief ("Was nevere man that sih ne wiste / A sorwe unto his sorwe lich") and the ineffaceable physicality of the corpse ("For evere among upon the lich / He fell swounend"). Apollonius's grief reformulates his identity by displacing the sure sense of self against which his wife is defined, and leads him towards identifications with his wife and death.<sup>117</sup>

In her discussion of Freud's *The Ego and the Id*, Judith Butler shows that the processes of mourning and melancholia—the incorporation of lost objects into the ego—are not unrelated to the psychic processes that produce gendered subjects. These ideas are drawn into sharp focus in Butler's formulation of the "double disavowal" which she uses to propose that melancholia grounds gender (*Gender Trouble* 62). Butler points out that the incest taboo and the resolution of the oedipal complex assume heterosexual

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<sup>117</sup> Butler makes the observation that within the logic of heterosexual disavowal, a man would want the very thing that he would not identify himself with. "Indeed, the desire for the feminine is marked by that repudiation: he wants the woman he would never be. He wouldn't be caught dead being her: therefore he wants her" (*Psychic* 137). As I have shown, and go on to suggest more fully, being caught by death confuses the effects of repudiation and allows identifications that would be refused under more emotionally regulated circumstances. If, as Butler also suggests, "[g]ender itself might be understood in part as the 'acting out' of unresolved grief" (*Psychic* 146), Apollonius's excess grief could be the occasion for previously foreclosed identities to act up.

desire. They silently presume that same-sex desire does not exist. Yet if the resolution of the oedipal complex is the moment that stabilizes gender, there is no reason why same-sex desire cannot exist. Indeed, Butler points out that the normalizing assumption of heterosexual desire demands that same-sex desire is always already disavowed. Thus, in Butler's analysis, attaining hetero-normative gender positions involves two prior disavowals. The first involves the refusal of same-sex desire and the second occurs when the first refusals are themselves refused, when the subject does not even acknowledge the possibility that same sex desire exists in the first place. In this view, the resolution of the oedipal complex, instead of proceeding through a single disavowal of desire for the mother and identification with the father, works more indirectly by foreclosing certain positions of desire that ironically preserve non-heterosexual desires and objects of desire through the "internalizing strategies of melancholia" (*Gender Trouble* 75). Paradoxically, the logic of the double disavowal installs as foundational the very thing that hetero-normative gendered positions ultimately strive to reject: the incorporation of the one that could not possibly have been loved (and thus is always already lost) through the "melancholic absorption of the one who is, in effect, twice lost" (*Gender Trouble* 62).

These processes of disavowal have implications for Apollonius's moment of unmanly grief. If gendered identities are formed by the preemptive strategy of disavowing the possibility of sexual attraction or attachment to a person of the same-sex, should not Apollonius's grief at the loss of his wife, because it appears as an uncontrolled, and thus "natural" outburst of affect, be an affirmation of heterosexual identity instead of a moment that unmans him? Yet if we extend Butler's insight that gendered identities are achieved through a process of loss and disavowal, it becomes possible to read

Apollonius's experience as one that unhinges the gendered position that he occupies as an authority and father figure. While Butler shows that a key consequence of the melancholic formation of gender is "a culture which can mourn the loss of homosexual attachment with great difficulty" (*Psychic* 133), the readiness to mourn his wife's death is characterized by the ease with which Apollonius slips out of gendered norms. Even if the lost object and Apollonius's desire never come under the prohibitions of incest or heterosexuality, his grief does indeed reveal the contingency of gendered identities precisely because those identities are founded by the dynamics of loss. If we consider Freud's suggestion that the "character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices" (368), the overwhelming grief Apollonius experiences at the loss of his wife would agitate the order of his inner world as the ego would have to work out how to accommodate, preserve, and identify with yet another lost object. As my analysis of the passage shows, his grief initiates a series of displacements, and in mourning his dead wife, Apollonius begins to identify with her. As such, a moment like this could de-stabilize the gendered ego and cause prior disavowals and forbidden identities to emerge. To view things from another direction, encountering loss again and being put through the processes of mourning enable Apollonius to achieve a differently gendered position.<sup>118</sup> At the same time, his increased identifications with his dead wife (taken in concert with the histrionic expressions of

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<sup>118</sup> Butler points out that thinking of gendered identities as "accomplishments" rather than pre-existing "dispositions" is a prerequisite to analyzing how loss and disavowal structure gender (*Psychic* 135). In analyzing Apollonius's "unmanly grief," and "womanish behavior" in Gower's passage, I may have given the impression that these masculinity and femininity are self-evident and stable modes of behavior but I do so not so much to affirm them as such but to suggest how Apollonius himself (in the light of his actions after the emotional outburst) may have conceived his own effusiveness.

grief) could also be seen as putting him into a position where mourning his wife is no longer socially legitimized, precisely because he is feminized in his act of mourning. As his expressions of grief crystallize around this gendered position, mourning her loss would be mourning a forbidden object of desire. To use a term from Butler, he approaches a position where his grief becomes "unperformable" (*Psychic* 147).<sup>119</sup> This perhaps explains the aporetic moment at the end of the passage describing Apollonius's grief. This moment signals the climactic impasse brought on by acts of mourning that destabilize notions of gender. The lines are as follows: "Bot suche wordes as tho were / Yit herde nevere mannes ere, / Bot only thilke which he seide" (8.1081–3).

It is difficult to work out the meaning of these three lines because of the ambiguous demonstrative "thilke" in line 1083. In glossing the lines, Peck takes "thilke" to refer to the men onboard the ship. In this reading, only those present hear Apollonius speak the rest of his lamentations. This reading is somewhat unsatisfactory because it necessitates a significant addition to the meaning of line 1083. On the other hand, "thilke" could very well refer to the words themselves, instead of the men within earshot of Apollonius's cries. If this were the case, the paradoxical formulation—"But such words as then were, no one yet ever heard, except for those which he spoke"—is constructed. Sense may not be easily made of this alternative but it emphasizes the element of the unspeakable within his grief. In both cases, however, the lines indicate

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<sup>119</sup> The de-stabilizing effect of Apollonius's effusive emotion on gendered positions calls to mind Butler's comments on drag. "[D]rag exposes or allegorizes the mundane psychic and performative practices by which heterosexualized genders form themselves through renouncing the possibility of homosexuality, a foreclosure that produces both a field of heterosexual objects and a domain of those whom it would be impossible to love" (*Psychic*). By mourning for his wife like a woman, Apollonius performs a position that would be impossible within a heterosexual matrix.

that Apollonius's grief contains untranslatable elements. The description of Apollonius's grief must break off here because it begins to disrupt too many structures of social stability.

If excess grief unmans Apollonius in this unnatural manner, and disturbs the narrator such that he has to contain the moment of grief, it also parallels Antiochus's violation of the incest taboo. And if the proper resolution of the oedipal complex that creates clearly gendered positions is itself governed by the incest taboo, Apollonius's unmanly grief also buckles under the taboo's repressive force. But unlike Antiochus, Apollonius falters in his position as male figure of authority only temporarily. His subsequent actions in dealing with this loss show the awareness that the grounds of his masculinity have shifted and that he must compensate, or as Apollonius ends up doing, overcompensate for this.

In order to restore the clearly delineated gender demarcations that the incest taboo holds in place and re-assert his heterosexual identity, Apollonius must reconstruct family. But how does he do this with a dead wife and a daughter that is soon to be lost? This section has shown that gendered norms can be unhinged in acts of mourning and the next section demonstrates how the very same dynamics of disavowal that form the melancholic basis for gendered identity can also act to frame the nuclear family as a normative institution. If the logic of disavowal bars the individual from certain kinds of grief and modes of mourning, what then are the socially authorized workings of grief? In a disavowal of his de-gendering outburst, Apollonius moves on, gathering and consolidating his claim on a family that he has only experienced fleetingly. He does this

through the processes of public mourning, and in so doing, strives to reinstate himself as a male authority figure.

#### **IV. Mourning Becomes Public: Socializing Grief**

The actions with which Apollonius gathers himself after the initial outburst restore him to a position of authority. Even if the poem does not occur within a specifically Christian framework, his wife's death at sea and the urgency with which the sailors wish to get rid of the corpse emphasizes the impossibility of according her the complex array of rites and protocols associated with death in the late fourteenth century. Paul Binski notes that dying in the late-medieval West would have involved at least three groups of rituals, the "preliminal," the "liminal" and the "postliminal." The basic rituals prior to death were confession, extreme unction, and final communion, the *viaticum*. The liminal rites would involve either the Office of the Dead or the Requiem Mass (29–33). In Apollonius's case, he can only hope to fulfill the "postliminal" rites, which often involved masses and prayers on behalf of the dead. In his wife's case, Apollonius tries to preserve her memory in commissioning whoever finds her body to build a monument, and later, he conducts rites to remember her when he returns to Tyre. But in so far as he can influence the outcome of casting the coffin into the sea, Apollonius makes provisions for the queen to have a proper burial. By hoping that someone will accord her a burial fitting her status, Apollonius participates in more socially sanctioned beliefs involving how one should die and be remembered. If the queen's sudden death out at sea during childbirth can be considered a "bad" death, one which provoked Apollonius's drastic response, these subsequent arrangements for funeral rites and a burial are retroactive attempts to re-locate

her within the sphere of the "good" death.<sup>120</sup> Apollonius is determined to secure the memory of the queen as a social fact by nurturing the hope that a monument to her will be erected:

And for he wolde unto hire winne  
 Upon some cooste a sepulture,  
 Under hire heved in aventure  
 Of gold he leide sommes grete  
 And of jeueals a strong beyete. (8.1116–20)

Further, the re-assertion of control and authority is evident in the letter that he includes with the gold and jewels in his hopes to secure a good burial and monument for his wife. The letter asserts his authority in no uncertain terms—"I, king of Tyre Apollonius / Do alle maner men to wite" (8.1122–3)—and demonstrates his confidence

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<sup>120</sup> Christopher Daniell notes that even as late as the thirteenth century, there was no firm consensus on whether a woman who had died in childbirth could receive the status of a good death, as some believed that "the body of a woman who died in childbirth must stay outside the church for her obsequies" while others argued that even if the death was violent, it was not the mother's fault (44). The queen's death at sea, even if it is not the result of a shipwreck or drowning, would also have provoked anxieties associated with death by water. Daniell observes: "Death by drowning was not considered a symbolic baptism. Those who drowned died in a terrified state and 'lost' their souls. The bodies were also lost in the deep. The danger of the body not being recovered was a tragedy for relatives of those drowned in shipwrecks" (72). Prior to the queen's miraculous revival at the hand of Cerymon, the discovery of her coffin would itself be a miracle as "finding the body after drowning [was] itself unusual" (Daniell 75). In the later Middle Ages, the importance of the "good death"—one that prepared the soul to face the hereafter—is most evident in the development of the *Ars Moriendi* as a literary genre. Appearing in late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, these manuals were "the how-to-do-it of death, a practical handbook for the ordinary (i.e. venial) sinner *in extremis*" (Binski 39). A prominent English example of this late medieval fascination with the *Ars Moriendi* is Hoccleve's translation of Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*, which appears as the fourth poem in "The Series": "Sone, the art to lerne for to dye / Is to the soule an excellent swetnesse, / To which Y rede thow thyn herte applie" (37–9).

that the authority encapsulated in his title will cause the reader to carry out his bidding, even though he is not present to enforce the order. From this position of authority, he then makes a contrasting rhetorical move by asking for the sympathy of the reader by referring to the helplessness of the corpse: "That helpeles withoute red / Hier lith a kinges doghter ded" (8.1125–6). The displacements and identifications that marked the earlier scene of overwhelming grief are now repudiated and replaced with the clear hierarchy that grounds Apollonius's royal identity. He not only establishes the distance between himself and his intended audience by re-assuming a position of authority but also delineates the gulf between him and his dead wife. The formally worded letter makes no appeal to his personal grief as an impetus for the reader's compassion. Instead, Apollonius appeals to the more abstract ideal of "charité" (8.1128). In sum, Apollonius's arrangements return him to the world of gendered expectation, where enacting his duties as husband will help ensure that his wife's memory will be preserved in a socially recognizable manner. By disavowing the initial troubling scene of loss, Apollonius begins to re-constitute his family by performing the necessary rituals that affirm the coherence of the family.

However, if holding the structure of his family together were his aim, Apollonius's next act seems puzzling. Instead of keeping Thaise with him, he sends her to Tarsus to be brought up by Strangulio and Dionise. While this may indeed appear to be an act that dissolves the family, for with a dead wife and distant daughter Apollonius seems to be freed from all family bonds, sending Thaise away is really an affirmation of the sanctity of the nuclear family. Left alone with his daughter at the death of his wife, the specter of incest would haunt Apollonius, even though Thaise is only an infant.

Sending Thaise away can be seen as a preemptive measure, another act that affirms the role of social structures and prohibitions in governing grief. By refusing the possibility of incest even before it rears its head, Apollonius is foreclosing certain modes of desire, and thus affirming the normalizing structure of the nuclear family. Indeed, in reference to the forms of kinship ties that emerge out of the incest taboo, Butler points out that "their legitimacy is established precisely as the normalized solutions to the oedipal crisis [...and] proceed as structural necessities from that taboo" (*Antigone's Claim* 30).<sup>121</sup>

In Gower's version of the tale, because Apollonius's decision to leave Thaise with Strangulio and Dionise is not motivated by other considerations, the link between his grief and fear of replicating Antiochus's crime becomes more apparent.<sup>122</sup> When Apollonius places Thaise in Strangulio's care, he makes a solemn oath:

And this avou to God I make,  
That I schall nevere for hir sake

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<sup>121</sup> In *Antigone's Claim* Judith Butler works out some of these implications and possibilities of refusing to accept the symbolic function instituted by the incest taboo as the "final arbiter of kinship life" (21). I engage these arguments later in the chapter when I consider the fact that the text does not show Thaise and her mother mourning either their loss or hardships with the same intensity as Apollonius, and suggest the implications of this alternative response to loss.

<sup>122</sup> In the *Historia Apollonii*, the reason for leaving Thaise with Strangulio and Dionise appears to be a rather practical one. Disappointed at his wife's death, and feeling that he is unable to answer to her father for it, Apollonius decides to give up his claim to the lands he would inherit through his wife and become a merchant instead. His travels would make bringing up Thaise impractical. Even so, the concern that he has failed the family is present in this version of the tale. He could, after all, have returned with Thaise to Pentapolis and have her brought up at court. Yet this would mean placing Thaise under the jurisdiction of her grandfather, effectively canceling Apollonius's own sense of family. In this regard, it is interesting that he chooses Strangulio and Dionise as surrogate parents for Thaise, as if doing so would enable him to participate in the nuclear family vicariously.

Mi berd for no likinge schave,  
 Til it befalle that I have  
 In covenable time of age  
 Beset hire unto marriage. (8.1301–6)

With this pledge to return, Apollonius does not leave Thaise in Tarsus in order to free himself from either the responsibilities of family or the haunting memory of his wife. He will return, but only when Thaise can be given away in marriage and thus not fall prey to her own father. The pledge to not shave his beard until Thaise is old enough to be married is also interesting. On one hand, it is a dedication to continue grieving his dead wife, for to remain unshaven would be a sign of physical neglect associated with the state of mourning. At the same time, it makes Thaise's future marriage the single event that he looks forward to with hope. If his wife's death has placed his family in jeopardy, his hope rests in the belief that his daughter will not become entrapped in the same manner as Antiochus's daughter was, but that she will be joined in a union that will affirm exogamic familial relations. As such, the ideology that governs the integrity of the nuclear family remains very much intact even though the members of Apollonius's family are now literally scattered across the Mediterranean.

His efforts to preserve the family in spite of the absence of its members becomes even more pronounced when Apollonius returns to Tyre. He convenes a parliament and as part of the order of business makes arrangements for rites that honor the memory of his wife:

He let somoune a parlement ...  
 And preide hem alle to abyde,

For he wolde at the same tyde  
 Do schape for his wyves mynde,  
 As he that wol noght be unkinde.  
 Solempne was that ilke office,  
 And riche was the sacrifice;  
 The feste reali was holde. (8.1551–63)

These rites are significant as they show the way personal grief can be held up and shared as social grief. In this sense, Apollonius differs from Antiochus in the way that he is willing for his grief to be made recognizable according to the social conventions of his city. Further, it should be noted that this is the first time that Apollonius returns to Tyre after his flight from the city.<sup>123</sup> As such, these rites of remembrance are the first occasion on which the citizens of Tyre are introduced to Apollonius's wife. This motif gets replayed later on when Apollonius returns to Tarsus: the first contact that Apollonius has with Thaise after many years is the visit to her tomb. Mourning in this public sphere also becomes an act of governance. With a dead wife and daughter in another city, his position as ruler may seem somewhat compromised as he returns now as an older man

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<sup>123</sup> In making the transition to this section of the narrative, Gower writes, "Bot for to clare mi matiere, / To Tyr I thenke torne agein, / And telle as the croniques sein" (8.1544–6). However, it should be noted that Apollonius's return to Tyre does not occur in the *Historia Apollonii*. In the Latin source, Apollonius re-appears at Tarsus after many years as a merchant in Egypt (143 & 155). In Godfrey's *Pantheon*, the misfortunes at sea occur as Apollonius is journeying to take up rule at Antioch at the urging of his father-in-law. Apollonius leaves Thaise to proceed to Antioch to take up his inheritance and he returns to Tarsus from Antioch (160–2 & 167). Perhaps Gower invokes the authority of "the croniques" in order to mask his embellishment to the tale. Since this short return to Tyre focuses on an act of public mourning and memorialization, this direction in Gower's narrative further supports my claim that Gower is indeed fascinated with the dynamics of loss and responses to it.

but still without family or heir. Memorializing his wife with this amount of public ceremony places her within the city's collective consciousness as their ruler's queen, and also serves to consolidate his own position of authority. Discussing the ending of the tale, after Apollonius is re-united with his wife and he is crowned ruler of Pentapolis, Sobecki points out that the coronation scene "fuses the two streams of assent or consensus, the political and the matrimonial one, in a final expression of marriage as a metaphor for a harmonious polity" (215). The memorialization that takes place in this earlier moment, when Apollonius's wife is still regarded as lost, demonstrates how the matrimonial can still contribute to a ruler's authority, for commemorating the absent wife enables Apollonius to present himself as a faithful husband who is capable of conjugal love, and thus also possessing the qualities of a judicious ruler.

The commemoration also places the memory of the dead queen in the public mind by grafting her death onto the cyclical rhythms of religious rites and observances that would have been observed annually. Again, while there is no explicit christianization of the commemoration, the fact that Apollonius gets authorization from Parliament for commemorations to be held for his wife does suggest that the commemoration becomes institutionalized, and perhaps repeated annually. The closest late-medieval practice would be the practice of remembering the anniversary of the death by re-enacting the funeral liturgy. As Clive Burgess observes, setting up chantries and commemorating the anniversary enabled the dead to be "remembered, and even celebrated, in parallel with the liturgy of the church year by succeeding generations" (48).<sup>124</sup> It is striking that Gower

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<sup>124</sup> The increasing popularity of commemorating anniversaries in the later Middle Ages in England is evident in the fact that "by the later fifteenth century perpetual anniversaries were almost always a part of a benefaction made to the local parish" (Burgess 58).

includes this return to Tyre at the mid-way point of the narrative, for as other versions of the story show, the narrative logic of the story does not require this return to Tyre. Apollonius's return emphasizes how the individual is indelibly linked to the social and that making his family visible to Tyre even though it is not corporally present is crucial in establishing and maintaining his affective bonds with the city. The last time that Apollonius was at Tyre, the city mourned the going away of a native son. By returning to the city in order to mourn his dead wife, Apollonius transforms her foreignness and makes her one of the city's own.

The three responses to loss discussed in this section—Apollonius's attempts to secure a burial for his wife, sending Thaise to be brought up at Tarsus, and the rites at Tyre—can be read as acts of socializing his grief in a controlled and structured manner. These acts contrast with the unmanly excess of his initial response to loss. If his initial response shows how grief can de-stabilize identity, these subsequent actions re-claim Apollonius's identities as husband, concerned father and decisive ruler. Also, these public acts of mourning preserve Apollonius's family in the public eye, even though those familial bonds have been threatened by death. In effect, Apollonius transforms his family into a virtual one: it becomes a family that is not actually present but continues to be imagined as a coherent unit and remains influential in conferring identities on Apollonius, his wife, and Thaise within the social structures that Apollonius inhabits. The narrative allocates more space to elaborating scenes of loss and memorialization than depicting actual interactions between Apollonius, his wife, and Thaise as family, and in this manner, the integrity of the family unit depends on these representations of loss. Not

only does loss constitute the individual in specific ways, it also determines how the family is thought of as a "natural" unit of society.

### **V. Fraudulent Mourning: Monument as Riddle**

In showing that Apollonius socializes his grief in different ways, I do not mean to suggest that he cynically appropriates the death of his wife for his own political advantage. Even if his position as a figure of authority is indelibly tied to sustaining the integrity of his absent family, there is no indication that his grief is not genuine. However, the cynical appropriation of death does occur in the story, in the way that Strangulio and Dionise commemorate Thaise's death after they plot to have her murdered and have it reported to them that the deed is done. Not only does Dionise adopt the behaviors of one in mourning—"Sche wepeth, sche sorweth, sche compleighth" (8.1513)—she makes a spectacle of her grief by commissioning grand funeral rites. The extent of Dionise's deceit is traced in the extravagant funeral that is held and the monument that is erected to honor Thaise's memory:

And for to give a more feith,  
 Hire husbande and ek sche bothe  
 In blake clothes thei hem clothe,  
 And made a gret enterrement;  
 And for the poeple schal be blent,  
 Of Thaise as for the remembrance,  
 After the real olde usance  
 A tumbe of latoun noble and riche

With an ymage unto hir liche

Liggende above thereupon

Their made and sette it up anon. (8.1520–30)

The only deceitful act of public and ritualized mourning is also the one described with the most attention to detail. The spectacular display reveals the power that public mourning has on shaping social consensus. Not only do the rites give the impression that Thaise is a treasured part of Strangulio and Dionise's family, the monument also reminds the public that Thaise is Apollonius's daughter, a fact that is memorialized even though Apollonius has not had contact with Thaise for many years. Strangulio and Dionise manipulate the notion of family to their advantage, knowing that their willingness to mourn Thaise's death by celebrating her life and heritage will efface any hint that they themselves are culpable. This certainly works perfectly because no one suspects them of murdering Thaise, least of all Apollonius when he visits the tomb later on.

Beyond being a ploy that uses assumptions about the family to conceal the involvement of the guilty parties, the monument itself is a powerful statement on the way the familial ties are preserved in the face of loss. The main physical details of the monument—the tomb with an effigy of Thaise and the epitaph—are key elements that link Thaise to Apollonius and would have been recognizable as such to audiences in the late fourteenth century.<sup>125</sup> In what follows, I first argue that the description of the tomb places Thaise within a very patriarchal version of the family. Then I show that the

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<sup>125</sup> The *Historia Apollonii* does not offer any details of the tomb and the epitaph is markedly different. This difference is discussed below.

epitaph complicates this picture, suggesting how Thaise might be perceived as an independent individual whose life is not solely defined by a patriarchal narrative.

Although Gower is right when he says that the tomb made for Thaise would have been one reserved for individuals of royal or noble status when he describes it as being "[a]fter the real olde usance," he is less correct to claim that it was an ancient practice. Using effigies on the tombs of women was a relatively recent innovation, barely a hundred years old at the time of the *Confessio's* composition, and in England, "few can be dated to before 1280" (Hadley 155). But in Gower's story, it is a symbol that links Thaise to her father. Her father also has a statue made to honor him after the stores of wheat that he brings to Tarsus save the city from famine. Like that statue, the effigy of Thaise is made of "latoun," making it quite distinct from the more common marble or alabaster effigies that adorned tombs. It would have called to mind the gilt-bronze royal effigies of Eleanor of Castile (Edward I's queen) at Westminster who died in 1290, and the more contemporary effigies of the Black Prince and Edward III that lay on their tombs at Canterbury and Westminster (Duffy 85, 141 & 148). If marble effigies were reserved for the social elite, bronze-gilt ones were even more prestigious, and in most cases only commissioned for royalty (Binski 95).<sup>126</sup> With this detail, Dionise and Strangulio (as well

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<sup>126</sup> Paul Binski goes on to note: "Bronze tombs were restricted to those holding office, sovereigns (in England) especially. Lying behind this restriction was a sense of the poetics of materials as acute as that favoring marble and porphyry: the tough, ineluctable and untarnishable character of gilt bronze metaphorically represented the stability of office itself" (95–6). In discussing how the role of effigies to represent the "body politic" in funerary rites in the development of the doctrine of the "King's Two Bodies," Ernst Kantorowicz notes that the funeral of Edward II in 1327 was the first recorded to use an effigy on the coffin during the funeral and not just to adorn the tomb. This practice was continued for subsequent royal burials. Kantorowicz argues that while this might be convenient in the instance where the body was disfigured (or absent, as is the case with Thaise), the practice also showed how "royal dignity," which is a precursor to

as Gower) make an overt display of Thaise's link to royal lineage. Her familial links to royalty are the ones that are commemorated in death, even though she has lived all her life amongst the people of Tarsus. In this way, the text positions Thaise in a manner that mirrors the representation of her mother. In her supposed death, she is publicly incorporated into Apollonius's identity even though neither Apollonius nor Thaise's body is physically present during these funeral rites. Her position as daughter to Apollonius becomes the central fact of her existence and this manages to sustain the virtual family along patriarchal lines.

The power to create family through these monuments is evident in the way that the tomb evolved in late medieval England. Paul Binski shows that by the middle of the thirteenth century, tombs were invariably symbolically linked to a broad sense of family, especially through genealogical devices such as heraldic displays that might even adorn women's tombs. At the same time he notes that "[b]y the fourteenth century the tomb indicated the consequences of ties of affinity by developing family imagery ... [and that late-medieval tombs, with their canopies and exhibitions of family identity, amount to an encastlement of the family, a celebration of the line of ancestry and descent" (105–6). For instance, Edward III's tomb had figures around his effigy representing his twelve children. Mark Duffy observes that this was "a variation on the dynastic imagery of the earlier Plantagenet tombs,... which have ancestral kings and queens.... Unlike the others, Edward was sufficiently eminent to be identified by images of his children alone" (149).

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the idea of the "body politic," never dies: "[I]n the image the dead king's jurisdiction continued until the day he was buried" (420–3). Thus the effigy of Thaise is not only commemorative. It is also a powerful political symbolization of Apollonius's influence over Tarsus, even though both Apollonius and Thaise's body are absent from the scene.

This also prefigures tomb designs in early modern England, which depicted the family in tableau form, "placing the deceased as if alive among members of the family still living, and looked to the future by including the deceased's progeny" (Curd 283). This ideology of representation was patriarchal in nature and women were often represented as adjuncts to their husbands or fathers, in the manner that Thaise is represented.<sup>127</sup> At the same time, this insistence on the family as the source of Thaise's identity throws Apollonius's family into crisis. With the loss of Thaise, Apollonius, now without wife and heir, is left in a weak position from a political and dynastic viewpoint. His virtual family is now considerably compromised, even if it is reiterated in the funeral ceremonies. After Apollonius returns to Tarsus and is taken to Thaise's tomb, the identity that he has constructed for himself around the ideal of the nuclear family begins to unravel. In a response that is reminiscent of his earlier experience of grief at the loss of the wife, Apollonius curses Fortune and sinks into a deep melancholia.

While Thaise's tomb generally consolidates the ideology of the patriarchal nuclear family as the basic unit of identity, this picture is complicated by elements in the epitaph. Gower's version is considerably different from the one found in the *Historia Apolonii*. There, the epitaph reads: "To the Spirits of the Dead: The citizens of Tarsus erected this monument by subscription to the maiden Tarsia because of the benefactions of Apollonius of Tyre" (149). On the other hand, in Gower's version,

Hire epitaffe of good assisse

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<sup>127</sup> Indeed, John Gillis observes that there were few statues or effigies which commemorated women to begin with and even if a woman were a powerful political figure, she would typically be commemorated in one of her roles prescribed by the nuclear family: as obedient daughter, faithful wife or caring mother. Even so powerful a figure as Queen Victoria, for instance, is commemorated as mother and wife, rather than political leader (10–11).

Was write aboute, and in this wise  
 It spak: "O yee that this beholde,  
 Lo, hier lith sche, the which was holde  
 The faireste and the flour of alle,  
 Whos name Thaisis men calle.  
 The king of Tyr Appolinus  
 Hire fader was: now lith sche thus.  
 Fourtiene yer sche was of age,  
 When deth hir tok to his viage." (8.1531–40)

While the epitaph in Gower's version still emphasizes the crucial link between Thaise and Apollonius ("The king of Tyr Appolinus / Hire fader was"), it shows Thaise possessing more personality. Thaise herself is to be remembered not only because she reminds people of her father's "benefactions." Indeed, the other major change in this epitaph lies in the audience that it addresses. Instead of speaking to "the Spirits of the Dead," the tomb is now an interactive monument, beseeching the one who reads the text to actively participate in remembering Thaise. While the final lines of the epitaph act as a *memento mori* by reminding the reader that death spares no one, not even the young, the opening lines suggest that Thaise's life should be taken as an exemplum as well.<sup>128</sup> Though the phrase "faireste and the flour of alle" focuses on her physical beauty, it could

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<sup>128</sup> Even though the epitaphs on tombs served as exemplum more prominently only in Post-Reformation England, where the tomb no longer needed to serve as a reminder to pray for the souls of the dead, their role to "function as a moral example to the ranks of the living, to set them on the path of righteousness and to remind them of the worthiness of the deceased" (Llewellyn 180) is relevant to Thaise's tomb.

also be taken to refer to the reputation she possesses because of her virtues and accomplishments. In this way, the memory of Thaise is not entirely subordinated to her father and the family to which she belongs and the narrative offers a reminder of her agency.

Further, because of the way that the narrative is ordered, Thaise's funeral occurs after the reader knows that she is alive and relatively well in Mitilene. Having witnessed how she manages to survive the threats to life and chastity from an assailant, pirates, and the men at the brothel through her devotion to God, resourcefulness and intelligence, the commemoration scene and the epitaph take on another layer of meaning. The way that the funeral entombs her and fixes her within a certain patriarchal set of identifications is poised against the fact that Thaise is not only alive, but that she has managed to assert herself so fully despite these tribulations.

As such, Thaise's monument operates like a riddle for the reader, not unlike the one that codes incest at the beginning of the story, even if it does not possess the same level of risk or threaten social cohesion. Like Antiochus's riddle, it becomes a discursive structure that is simultaneously very public and open for all to read while it hides a crime that has been committed. Further, the monument is a riddle in the way that it ostensibly preserves the structures of a patriarchal society that subordinate women to the nuclear family while exhibiting traces of how those structures are contingent and fractured. If Antiochus's riddle provokes a knowing response from Apollonius in the form of secret knowledge that cannot be publicly exposed because of the risks involved in such a confession, the monument to Thaise leads the reader to think about how the possibilities of identity that escape the patriarchal codes of the monument imply alternatives to the

nuclear family. These alternatives cannot be avowed openly by the narrative that is so insistent on recuperating the nuclear family as the *de facto* arrangement of social stability. However, as I argue in the following section, these alternatives exist in the interim period between the movements of loss and recovery over which the nuclear family holds sway.

## VI. Thaise and Apollonius's Wife: Alternative Families

I have argued that mourning the dead constitutes the virtual family in ways that shore up an ideology of the male-centered patriarchal nuclear family. In a sense, Thaise and the queen<sup>129</sup> must necessarily be thought of as dead: for them to be alive and pursuing separate lives would be unthinkable in a patriarchal conception of the family. For the nuclear family to persist, they must be absorbed into its structures through loss. Yet their placement into the nuclear family through death, when juxtaposed against their survival in the narrative, creates a space that reveals the fallibility of normative family arrangements as the marker of being properly human. In *Antigone's Claim*, Butler explores some of the implications of following the shaping function of the incest taboo beyond the formation of the gendered individual. Butler thinks about how Antigone represents the way in which the incest prohibition designates certain ways of living and being as unthinkable. As she puts it, the way in which Antigone dies becomes "a limit that requires to be read as that operation of political power that forecloses what forms of

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<sup>129</sup> I refer to Thaise's mother as the queen even though Gower does not use this for most of the tale. Constantly using "Thaise's mother" or "Apollonius's wife" is clumsy in this section that stresses her independence from family structures. The queen is named Lucina several times in the RA version of the *Historia Apolonii* and is also named Archestrate in the RB version of the Latin text. However, as Archibald points out, in the *Historia Apolonii*, "she is generally anonymous" (*Apollonius* 181). Godfrey's *Pantheon* names her Cleopatra.

kinship will be intelligible, what kinds of lives can be countenanced as living" (29). Butler characterizes Antigone's position as a living death, because she occupies a place that only allows her to be human by the processes of "radical exclusion," where she enables a "confrontat[ion with] a socially instituted foreclosure of the intelligible, socially instituted melancholia in which the unintelligible life emerges in language as a living body might be interred into a tomb" (80–81). While what happens to Thaise and her mother is not as dramatic as being walled into a tomb alive, the fact is that they continue to live while being thought of as dead, embodying a similar "radical exclusion" from patriarchal structures. Unlike Antigone, they do not take their own lives, but demonstrate the possibilities of living under identities that distance them from the patriarchal nuclear family.

Further, while Antigone's challenge to society is encapsulated in an act of mourning, Thaise and her mother confront social arrangements by practically refusing to mourn the loss of family. The narrative does mention their grief at their misfortune and perceived loss but it never dramatizes them expressing it in an extravagant manner either privately or publicly. This fact is even more striking when one considers how often Apollonius is in the doldrums, either mourning how Fortune has ill-treated him, the loss of his kingdom or the loss of his loved ones.<sup>130</sup> For instance, when the queen recovers at

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<sup>130</sup> Critics have noted the disparity between male and female grief in Chaucer's poetry as well. Aers, writing about *Troilus and Criseyde*, notes that Criseyde "neither shows herself obsessed with the need to possess Troilus nor unable to complete the processes of mourning when she is forced to live without him." Aers attributes this to the way that masculine idealization works in the poem, depicting "the female lover as the nourishing, encompassing mother and physician," while the male figure is "the nurtured protected infant" (*Community* 140). In discussing Chaucer's elegaic works (identified as *Anelida and Arcite*, *The Book of the Duchess*, and *The Legend of Good Women* in the article), Louise O. Fradenburg observes that "the capacity for [Chaucer's women] to generate

the hand of Cerymon and learns of how she was found washed up on the seashore, her response is described in very muted tones:

Sche thonketh him that he so wolde,  
 And al hire herte sche discloseth,  
 And seith him wel that sche supposeth  
 Hire lord be dreint, hir child also;  
 So sih sche noght bot alle wo. (8.1236–40)

As for Thaise, even though her weeping must be prolonged and effusive for it to have the effects of preserving her virginity, it is not described in the histrionic terms that characterize Apollonius's grief:

Bot such a grace God hire sente,  
 That for the sorwe which sche made  
 Was non of hem which pouer hade  
 To don hire eny vileinie.  
 ... Whan he [Leonin's servant] hire wofull pleintes herde  
 And he therof hath take kepe,  
 Him liste betre for to wepe  
 Than don oght elles to the game. (8.1428–45)

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narrative from their grief is either problematic or non-existent" ("Voice Memorial" 172). She argues that if inconsolable men are threatened with isolation in Chaucerian elegy, "the dead, the women, and the elegy itself are abandoned in favor of some form of transcendence" ("Voice Memorial" 185). While Aers and Fradenburg both argue that the distance between male and female grief in Chaucer points to how masculine discourses of loss direct women away from the acts of mourning, I read the relative absence of mourning on the part of Thaise and queen as part of the narrative's exploration of female identities lived outside the limits of the nuclear family.

Thaise's sorrow has an effect on the world. It does not leave her unsettled in her identity in the same way that Apollonius's grief does, nor does it re-affirm the status quo after the manner of socialized grief. In her case, sorrow is expressed at close quarters and has the effect of dismantling the structures that hold Thaise captive. Grief becomes a point that preserves her by unmaking the social assumptions that place women in positions of victimization without necessarily taking her out of the location where the threat exists.

In reading the section of the tale between loss and recovery, critics tend to read Thaise and her mother by placing them within patriarchal social systems and fail to consider how the narrative represents the agency of the female characters. For instance, Scanlon notes that even though Apollonius is the good father that Antiochus is not, occupying the position of a father figure always runs the risk of securing it through violent means, and thus raises the possibility of his repeating Antiochus's crime. Scanlon goes on to say that "[Apollonius's] own desire to become the father necessarily means a murderous obliteration of the desires of the daughter" (120–1). While the violence here is only symbolic, in this mode of reading, Thaise is always only an adjunct to Apollonius's masculine subjectivity precisely because the "desires of the daughter" are not recognized as viable in a society governed by patriarchal norms. While I agree that Thaise and her mother are consistently subordinated to Apollonius's identity, I have argued that their "obliteration" does not happen through a straightforward effacement of their being. Instead, of being forgotten, they are incorporated into Apollonius's identity and the structures of the family through the effects of personal and social mourning and memorialization. Further, because the narrative shows them pursuing independent lives

while they are believed to be dead, Thaise and the queen begin to exist in a version of an "after-life" or "life in death" that offers alternatives to family arrangements centered on male figures of authority.

Watt reads the lives that Thaise and her mother lead in the period between loss and recovery as a withdrawal from society (*Amoral* 144). This is certainly the case for Thaise's mother, for after assuming that Apollonius and his baby are dead at sea, she decides that "[w]herof as to the world no more / Ne wol sche torne" (8.1241–2). Even so, it would be wrong to think about this withdrawal as an absolute isolation or seclusion from community. In fact, both Thaise and her mother join or form new communities in this interim period that show how lives can be lived beyond the purview of the nuclear family. The fact that the narrative as well as critics consider their existence as a withdrawal demonstrates Butler's insight that only certain modes of living are readily recognized as properly forming the ties that we would accept as "familial."

The way Gower's version describes how the queen makes the decision to enter into the service of Diana is greatly expanded from the account in the *Historia Apolonii*. In the Latin source, the events are briefly described:

After a few days, when he learned that she was of royal birth, he summoned his friends and adopted her as his daughter. She made tearful plea that no man should touch her. He took heed and supported her and established her among the priestesses of Diana, where all the virgins preserved their chastity inviolate. (141 & 143)

Gower's narration of the same events places less emphasis on how the queen comes under the protections of Cerymon. In fact, instead of adopting the queen, Cerymon is moved by

her tragedy and decision to "among the wommen duelle" (8.1245) to entrust his own daughter to her:

Whan he this tale hir herde telle,  
 He was riht glad, and made hire knowen  
 That he a dowhter of his owen  
 Hath, which he wol unto her give  
 To serve, whil thei bothe live,  
 In stede of that which sche hath lost;  
 Al only at his oghene cost  
 Sche schal be rendred forth with hire.       (8.1246–55)

In taking Cerymon's daughter with her to the Temple of Diana, the queen not only gains a substitute for Thaise but finds the basis for a new sense of community that can exist outside marriage. The decision to dedicate herself to the chaste life does not proceed from the implied threat of being amongst men as it does in the *Historia Apolonii*. Instead, the emphasis in Gower's version is on how the queen is inducted into a community that is run on principles that are very different from the ones that dictate the structures of the nuclear family:

And thus, whan that thei be conseiled  
 In blake clothes thei hem clothe,  
 This lady and the dowhter bothe,  
 And yolde hem to religion.  
 The feste and the profession  
 After the reule of that degré

Was made with gret solempneté,

Where as Diane is seintefied;

Thus stant this lady justefied

In ordre wher sche thinkth to duelle. (8.1262–71)

My point is not that the queen is entirely liberated from submitting to any form of authority. The fact that she and Cerymon's daughter "yolde hem to religion" indicates that surrendering their wills to hierarchical order forms the basis of this community. In fact, the queen chooses a life that is more highly regulated than the one she led at Court. However, despite this highly regulated life, it does not depend on male figures such as husbands or fathers.<sup>131</sup> Further, the ostensible head of this all-female community is a goddess as well. The description of the induction ceremonies ("The feste and the profession / After the reule of that degré / Was made with gret solempneté") may foreshadow the funeral rites that Apollonius will organize in the queen's memory when

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<sup>131</sup> Nancy Bradley Warren, in her study of female monasticism in later medieval England, argues that even if women's religious houses were not entirely free from the influence and decisions of Bishops, "nuns did increasingly have responsibilities for administering their communities' resources and providing for their own needs" (63–4). Commenting on how the popular Marian miracle of the pregnant abbess is a narrative that first suggests divine sanction of female autonomy and desire but then circumscribes this by having the Abbess's son adopted and instructed by the church and later becoming Bishop, Warren concludes that "[f]emale monasticism is therefore suggestive of the opportunities available to women living in the world, and these opportunities in turn provoke cultural anxieties concerning women's work and women's property" (77). That the queen becomes "abbesse" (8.1849) of the Temple is not insignificant as abbesses of important religious houses such as the Benedictine abbey at Barking and later the Brigittine abbey at Syon exercised considerable social and economic power (Warren 56–8).

he returns to Tyre, but these ceremonies represent not only the queen's death to one life but also her birth into another.<sup>132</sup>

Thaise's experience in the portion of the narrative where she carves out a life for herself at Mitilene demonstrates the possibilities of living outside the nuclear family even more starkly. While the queen establishes herself at the Temple in Ephesus through institutional means that give women a certain amount of autonomy from men, the community that Thaise organizes around herself demonstrates even more agency and unorthodoxy. After she has managed to preserve her virginity by causing the attempts to de-flower her to fail, Thaise manages to negotiate a rather remarkable arrangement that will still bring money in for Leonin. She asks to be installed in a place where "honeste wommen duelle" and says

That whanne I have a chamber there,  
 Let him do crie ay wyde where,  
 What lord that hath his doghter diere,  
 And is in will that sche shal liere  
 Of such a scole that is trewe,  
 I schal hire teche of thinges newe,  
 Which as non other womman can

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<sup>132</sup> Critical discussions of the queen tend to center on the earlier episode at Pentapolis, where she plays an active role in denying the three suitors in order to make her preference for Apollonius known to her father. For instance, Helen Cooper observes that, in that episode, "the eagerness of the maiden who chooses her own husband and is prepared to defy her father to do so" (300) stands in clear contrast to the much too obedient victim of incest: Antiochus's daughter. I have not focused on this episode in my discussion of the queen's agency because I wish to emphasize her autonomy in response to loss. At her father's court, she is able to act in the way she does because she still comes under the protections of men.

In al this lond. (8.1457–66)

This arrangement for Thaise to tutor other young women in Mitilene is an interesting variation of what happens in the *Historia Apollonii*. There, the learning that Thaise has acquired is put to different ends. Instead of setting up a school for instruction, she proposes to use her learning as a form of entertainment:

Tarsia replied: "I have the benefit of the study of the liberal arts: I am fully educated. I can also play the lute with a rhythmic beat. Have benches put up tomorrow in some crowded place, and I shall offer entertainment with my eloquent talk. Then I shall make music with a plectrum, and through this skill I shall make more money every day." (155)

In this proposition, Thaisie becomes an entertainer. While she is admired for her skill, she is objectified as a novelty act of sorts who makes a living by pandering to an audience. In Gower's version, instead of becoming the object of public spectacle, Thaise transmits her knowledge to other young women and, in the process, becomes the center of an intellectual community. Thaise's boldness and imagination in proposing an alternative to prostitution, while present in the Latin source, is taken one step further.<sup>133</sup> Archibald notes that this adjustment on Gower's part is striking because there would not have been many school-mistresses in the later Middle Ages and it "also ... assumes that many lords would have been interested in having their daughters taught in a school by a woman" ("Deep Clerks" 293). While Gower's version may well be a fantasy with very slim basis

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<sup>133</sup> Kurt Olsson reads this modification as an extension of the themes of Book 7 of the *Confessio Amantis*. Instead of having Thaise "merely delight others to save herself," he views the arrangement as more socially constructive: "Humbler and more 'gentil' than the Tharsias in other versions of the legend, she helps herself by imparting wisdom" (219).

in the pedagogical practices and preferences of the later Middle Ages, it emphasizes how Thaise asserts her agency in a manner that replaces patriarchal structures that put women in a subordinate position. It is true that her earnings still go to Leonin and that she still depends on the desire of lords to want their daughters to acquire knowledge ("What lord that hath his doghter diere, / And is in will that sche shal liere"). Thaise's motives are certainly conditioned by the norms of patriarchal society to preserve her status as a maid, but it still is, as Helen Cooper puts it, a "fierce virginity ... [which] she preserves ... without any paternal protection, or assistance from miracle, or intervention from God" (301). Further, at least she institutes an alternative community for women, where the prerogative for acquiring knowledge and skill does not lie with men alone. Furthermore, Thaise insists on the uniqueness of this community for she offers to "teche of thinges newe, / Which as non other womman can / In al this lond." What does it mean for Thaise to recommend herself neither on the basis of learning nor skill but on the fact of her status as a female teacher? Perhaps she believes that she will cater to a section of the nobility that only feels secure with a woman instructing their daughters—a real possibility given the tendency for men to be predators in the story. This could also suggest that teaching as a woman brings a different quality to the instruction: other women will be freed to learn in ways that they would not if they were instructed by men. In any case, this gesture founds Thaise's all-female community and extends her identity beyond the limits of the nuclear family.<sup>134</sup> It is true that this community still operates

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<sup>134</sup> While the communities that Thaise and the Queen become members of are all-female communities, there is no indication that same-sex desire replaces male-female desire. However, these communities that lay outside the norms of the nuclear family raise the possibility of these alternative (and unspeakable) desires as well. This might be relevant in a tale where father-daughter incest is the act that disrupts familial structures, for Watt

within the confines of social norms for there is no indication that Thaise's pupils eschew the nuclear family by dedicating themselves to a house of religion. Indeed, learning what they do from Thaise may make them more marriageable. Neither is there a radical dissolution of patriarchal rule due to Thaise's actions: once Thaise is re-united with Apollonius, she is married off to Arthegoras and one can only assume that this intellectual community of women is silently dissolved. Yet the community still represents a point in the text where lives can be lived, with a certain amount of fulfillment and agency, outside the structures of the nuclear family.

The way that the new community forms a different identity for Thaise is evident when she is sent to speak to the depressed Apollonius in the ship's hold, the scene that eventually leads to the recognition and reconciliation of father and daughter. In the climactic moment just before Thaise tells of her past and thus causes Apollonius to realize that she is his daughter, there is a moment of danger brought on by physical violence. Apollonius's spirits are initially lifted by the exchange of riddles with Thaise but this is short-lived and Apollonius is overcome with a deep anger and "half in wrath the he had hire go" (8.1689). However, disobeying his order, Thaise persists:

Bot yit sche wolde nought do so,  
 And in the derke forth sche goth,  
 Til she him toucheth, and he wroth,  
 And after hire with his hond  
 He smot: and thus whan sche him fond

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notes that in the medieval imagination "female homoerotic desire is ... connected conceptually" to father–daughter incest ("Behaving" 266).

Desesed, courtaisly sche saide,  
 "Avoi, mi lord, I am a maide;  
 And if ye wiste what I am,  
 And out of what lignage I cam,  
 Ye wolde nocht be so salvage." (8.1690–1700)

In the *Historia Apollonii*, there is no touching on Thaise's part. Apollonius's violence is provoked when Thaise refuses to take his money (167). The moment in Gower's version is also fraught with the threat of sexual violence and possibly incest. As Kurt Olsson notes, in the *Historia Apollonii*, Thaise enters and immediately makes known to Apollonius that she is not there to console him by offering her body. But there is no such forewarning in Gower's version. While he views this elision as evidence that Thaise is "perfectly secure in herself, and ... betrays no need to make such an opening speech in defense of her honor" (219), it is possible to read the omission as creating a gap in the narrative such that the uncertain relations between father and daughter are sustained. With this omission, Gower preserves the grounds for the possibility that incestuous desire can unknowingly circulate. However, even if the threat of incest hangs in the air, it does not parallel Antiochus's situation exactly, precisely because there is no knowledge of the father–daughter relationship. As Archibald observes, whether or not incest is intentional is crucial for heroes (with the significant exception of King Arthur) commit unintentional incest or come close to it: "This titillating theme of near miss incest with no evil consequences seems to have become popular in the later Middle Ages" ("Appalling" 164–5).

Elizabeth Allen makes the observation that while Thaise's touch disobeys Apollonius's injunction for her to leave, "[s]ince Thaise touches him first, the physical contact is at least potentially affectionate rather than violating," she goes on to argue that Apollonius's violent response misreads Thaise's intentions (638). Allen's suggestive reading about how the touch opens up a gap in meaning and interpretation raises the question of the significance of Thaise's touch. Olsson reads the touch as ineffective because it is merely superficial and sensual: "Apollonius ... finds 'no seker weie' to solace in the merely sensibly familiar or the like; he responds not to the 'touche,' but instead to a deeper likeness of virtue, wisdom, and *gentillesse* in Thaise" (222). Yet the touch can also be read as a form of interaction that possesses depths of meaning that Apollonius fails to recognize precisely because he has never identified deeply with communities that lie outside the nuclear family. Indeed, could the touch be read as a product of the community that Thaise has been part of—the girls' school—and evidence of an entirely different mode of interaction between individuals, one that is alien to Apollonius?<sup>135</sup> Up to the point of the touch, the structure of exchange consists of riddling between Thaise and Apollonius and they participate in what Russell Peck calls "a politics of make-believe" in which "fictions measur[e] fictions" ("Phenomenology" 258). This

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<sup>135</sup> David Townsend, in a reading of the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre* shows how Apollonius, the man of rhetoric and learning, "descends" to the level where he is only appreciated for the skill of his hands by rubbing down the king at the baths of Pentapolis. Townsend's argues that even if these homosocial physical contact does not point towards palpable homoerotic desire, the fact is that the symbolic structure in which Apollonius forms the apex no longer functions efficaciously for him, and he has to resort to being good with his hands instead. In Townsend's view, Apollonius regains kingship but "not until he has suffered both the reversal of worldly fortune and a movement of incipient affection between men that an Anglo-Saxon reader of his story might think unmanly indeed" (191). Being touched by Thaise defies the norms of social interaction between recently acquainted men and women that are underwritten by heterosexual conventions.

rhetorical game of exchange may give clever glimpses into the self but never confronts inner desires head-on. To this weaving of fictions which echoes the opening when Apollonius becomes privy to Antiochus's riddle and is implicated in incest because he refuses to speak out against it, Thaise brings a new element: the physicality of the touch that breaks the phenomenological fantasy. Yet why would Thaise, who is well aware of the dangerous predations of men, initiate physical contact with Apollonius? Does Thaise, moved by the failure of language, resort to physical contact, try to initiate another form of community, only to have its potential denied when Apollonius objectifies her with his violence?

Apollonius's violence immediately dissolves the potential for community that might have arisen from the touch. In fact, the shock of Apollonius's response causes Thaise to be jolted back into the "real" world, the one governed by male hierarchies and heterosexual norms. She asserts herself in two ways that are recognizable as fundamental elements of patriarchal society. First, when she cries out "Avoi, mi lord, I am a maide," she is counting on her virginal status as an unmarried woman to enforce a social prohibition, one that ultimately finds its source in the incest taboo and the nuclear family. It is not so much the force of her words that causes Apollonius to desist but the evocation of social taboos that tames Apollonius's use of physical force. It is a socially sanctioned rhetorical act as well, for the people of Mitilene know that she is yet a "maide" and identifying herself in this fashion returns Apollonius to the world of convention and right behavior. This shows Thaise's acknowledgement that the social codes of patriarchal society are still firmly in place. This recognition is more fully expressed in what follows. Even though she has managed to fashion a life of acclaim and good repute in Mitilene as

well as in Tarsus, she supports her injunction to Apollonius with a reference to lineage: "And if ye wiste what I am, / And out of what lignage I cam, / Ye wolde nocht be so salvage." Once again, she references the norms of patriarchal society by seeking the protections that her nobility will afford her. In a sense, she abandons the alternative modes of living and community and returns to the world where the rhetoric of the patriarchal nuclear family holds sway. If narrating family history in what follows leads to the triumphant scene of recognition and recovery, this prior moment marks Thaise's return to the nuclear family as the ideology that structures her identity and protects her person.

In response to losing both their loved ones and their former lives, both Thaise and the queen manage to find ways of living that are shaped by all-female communities, as if in repudiation of the nuclear family that has failed to cohere for them. However, as Thaise's experience with Apollonius shows, these ways of living are only temporary for the larger narrative movement of the tale depends on the return to the family. For instance, after the reconciliation with Apollonius in the ship's hold, Thaise practically vanishes as an independent character, as she is almost immediately married off to Athenagoras, and never speaks again in the poem. Still, this interim existence for Thaise and the queen can be read as providing a powerful alternative that suggests how women, in the face of loss, could live recognizable lives outside the confines of the nuclear family and a little farther out from under the protections of men.

## VII. Conclusion: Return of the Living Dead

I have argued that the way Thaise and the queen are remembered creates an idea of family that contributes to and stabilizes Apollonius's sense of authority. In a similar fashion, Richard II's plans to memorialize his wife and himself reflects an interest in preserving the unity of the nuclear family in death and in using it as a symbol for his kingship. Gower's emphasis on the power of commemoration in constituting identity intersects with Richard II's concerns about how his rule and legacy ought to be memorialized and the problems that the memory of Richard created for Henry IV's reign.

After the death of Anne of Bohemia in 1394, Richard II commissioned a tomb for his wife, to be placed at Westminster. This tomb was a unique act of royal commemoration, for "[u]nlike earlier English regal monuments it was to be a joint tomb for Anne and himself" (Duffy 164). The tomb that Richard planned is significant in that it represented the union between king and queen as the central fact memorialized by the tomb. The effigies were both to be cast as likenesses of the Richard and Anne and specifications were made "to show the king and queen holding hands, united in death as in life" (Whittingham 12).<sup>136</sup> Richard seems to have staked this monument on the belief

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<sup>136</sup> This detail is no longer extant as the effigies are now without arms. Knowledge of the hand positions comes from Richard's contract with the coppersmiths commissioned to make the likenesses and this states that the right hands of the effigies are to clasp each other. Even though no early drawings of this survive, it is safe to assume that the hands would have been joined in the manner of the effigies of John Beaufort, the duke of Somerset and Margaret Beauchamp's tomb, which was probably constructed in the 1480s, where the husband's right arm forms an "L" to grasp the wife's hand across her body (Duffy 164 & 233). Nigel Saul notes that this was "a conventional posture in contemporary effigial sculpture" (*Richard II* Plate 20). Even so, not all double effigies of husbands and wives opted for clasped right hands: for instance, John of Gaunt's and Blanche's effigies have hands held in an attitude of prayer and the double effigies of Richard's deposer, Henry IV, and Joan of Navarre, have the hands resting on their own bodies (Duffy 202). To designate clasped hands would have been to state the union

that representing the bond between husband and wife would represent his reign in a positive manner. While the tombs of English monarchs had always referred to ancestry and lineage by the heraldry that adorned the tomb, this was not the emphasis in Richard's tomb. Richard placed a premium on the representation of his immediate familial bonds (instead of the more common references to forebears), and he seems to have found this an appropriate representation of his authority and legacy.<sup>137</sup> Richard's decision regarding the tomb is even more striking considering the fact that unlike Edward III, whose tomb was surrounded by figures representing his children, Richard had no children that would flesh out the representation of his family. Richard compensated for this absence by gesturing to the more universal and ultimately more powerful spiritual family that he belonged to. He planned to make reference to this community by commissioning statues of saints and angels for the tomb chest and canopy niches around the tomb (Duffy 164).<sup>138</sup> Hence, Richard planned to constitute a version of the family with this

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between husband and wife as a primary fact of the monument. This is not to say that Richard's effigial sculpture did not possess other symbolic effects as well. Saul views the effigy as working in a similar fashion as the coronation portrait in Westminster Abbey as Richard's way to "promote a loftier and more exalted image of himself" in the early 1390s as a symbolic means of asserting his authority ("Vocabulary" 862).

<sup>137</sup> Another tomb with double effigies was apparently fashioned for John of Gaunt and his first wife, Blanche. This tomb, which lay at St. Paul's was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 but a 1664 drawing shows how different it was from Richard's tomb. John of Gaunt lies beside Blanche, but is in full military regalia, "wearing armor and basinet, a surcoat blazoned with his arms, and hands clasped in prayer." The drawing also shows Gaunt's funerary achievements, his helmet, shield and lance, suspended from the tomb's canopy (Duffy 158–61). This emphasizes his martial qualities rather than the conjugal union.

<sup>138</sup> The planned niches on the base of the tomb for saints and other celestial beings would relate the funerary monument to the Wilton Diptych, which shows Richard backed by his patron saints St. John the Baptist, Edward the Confessor, and Edmund the Martyr. The host of adoring angels that surround the Virgin and Jesus form a community with the kneeling Richard, as they each wear his badge, the white hart. Dillian Gordon's argues

monument, but not one that played up the legitimizing symbolism of his royal ancestry or focused on the continuation of his line, since he had no issue.<sup>139</sup> Instead, the iconography of the tomb mingled the immediacy of Richard's marriage with Anne with a broader community of saints to gesture to the fact that he and Anne, a family without earthly issue, reflected the piety of the Holy Family.<sup>140</sup> John Bowers points to contemporary assumptions about Richard's sexuality that allude to the fact that Richard may have even practiced a chaste marriage with Anne, in order to bolster the idea of his rule by divine appointment. Even though there is no definitive proof of this marital arrangement existing, Bowers finds in a range of Ricardian texts indications that "chaste marriage had become an issue charged with moral energy and political anxiety, though also viewed with deep skepticism and even muffled derision in some quarters" (16–17). The tomb may be an extension of Richard's interest in portraying his union with Anne as a spiritual marriage.

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that the Wilton Diptych shows Richard offering his kingdom to the Virgin, invoking the idea of England as the Virgin's dowry: an idea that was "common parlence" by the end of the fourteenth century (667). This intersects with the way the familial and spiritual form a continuum to represent Richard's rule.

<sup>139</sup> The chasework designs worked into garments of the gilt-bronze effigies also support this fact. On Richard's effigy the patterns include "the couple's initials," "the chained and couched hart, broom plants, and a sun emerging from clouds." On Anne's effigy, there are the initials as well as "a crowned and collared ostrich, and a knot, both of uncertain origin" (Duffy 171). Apart from the sun emerging from clouds, which was an adaptation of his grandfather, Edward III's badge, none of the other designs refer to ancestry. This compares to the more dynastic minded designs on the Black Prince's effigy: the Plantagenet *fleurs-de-lis* and leopards (Duffy, Colored Plate 6).

<sup>140</sup> Paul Binski observes that the architecture surrounding the tomb is decorated to reflect this joining of the familial and spiritual as well: "[T]heir childless marriage [is] reflected in a painting on the tester overhead of the chaste marriage of Mary and the Church, the Coronation of the Virgin" (106).

A comparison with the tomb of Richard's father, the Black Prince, illustrates how this depiction of family and community takes the place of other symbols of authority and power. The comparison is worth making because, like his son, Edward went to great lengths to specify the design and nature of his tomb monument (Duffy 140). The effigy on the Black Prince's tomb at Canterbury depicts him as a soldier, "wearing basinet and plate armor, heraldic tabard and coronet," with a replica of his sword lying beside it (Duffy 141). Suspended above the tomb are the funerary achievements. These consisted of "a helm with cap of maintenance and leopard crest, jupon, gauntlets, sword, scabbard, and dagger" (Duffy 145). Taken together, the Black Prince's tomb represents him first and foremost as a knight and the symbols of chivalry are the devices that shape how he intended to be remembered, offering a markedly different emphasis from Richard's conception of his legacy.<sup>141</sup>

For Richard, commemorating his marriage to Anne on his tomb in such a spectacular way may also have had more immediate political goals. Anne's political

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<sup>141</sup> Richard II's decisions regarding how he was to be represented primarily as a husband and member of a spiritual community on his tomb can be related to considerations about how he should portray himself as king throughout his reign. Lee Patterson has noted that early in his rule, in the 1380s and early 1390s, Richard "made great efforts to fashion for himself a fully chivalric identity" (*Chaucer* 162). Yet as Saul remarks, even if Richard held several tournaments—at Smithfield in 1386 and 1390 and an event at Windsor in 1399—he only participated in 1390, preferring to keep his distance, for "[t]ourneying with his subjects would have required him to come down to their level" (*Richard II* 452–3). Indeed, Patterson observes that it was later in his reign "Richard turned away from his martial lineage and adopted the disgraced Edward II and the unwarlike Edward the Confessor as his political patron saints" (*Chaucer* 187; *Negotiating* 229). The East Anglian king Saint Edmund the martyr also figured as an important patron for Richard, as is evident in the Wilton Diptych, which was probably painted within 1395–99, the last years of Richard's reign. Paul Strohm also observes that a tomb bearing Richard's arms, flanked by representations of Edward the Confessor and Edmund the Martyr appears to have been begun at King's Langley prior to the commissioning of the Westminster tomb in 1395 after Anne's death (*Empty Throne* 242).

influence in Richard's reign is considered minor but Nigel Saul notes that she interceded for Simon Burley's life during the Appellant crisis of 1388 and in 1392 "begged her husband to show forgiveness to the Londoners who had offended him by refusing a loan" (*Richard II* 455). If Richard felt that the Appellant crisis as well as the confrontation with the people of London compromised his image as a benevolent king, presenting himself with Anne on the monument could have been meant to correct this view. Indeed, Lynn Staley notes Richard's interest in presenting the image of benign ruler by using conjugal imagery. In the aftermath of the 1392 crisis with the citizens of London, Richard pardoned the city but required that they escort him in a grand procession as he rode through the city to Westminster. Richard commissioned a Latin poem by Maidstone to record his progress through London:

It describes the reconciliation as taking place between the city of New Troy and its spouse, its king and its master. Torn apart by evil counsel, the two now enact a moment of marital reunion. Richard is presented as beautiful, merciful, kindly, and pious and the city as gaily decked like a bride to receive her husband and lord. (Staley 80)

Depicting himself married to Anne even in her death in the heart of London would have been a visual reinforcement of this politically charged marriage imagery. Further, if Nigel Saul is right in arguing that the 1390s saw Richard increasingly concerned with how he could use forms of address as well as visual depictions of himself to assert his political authority ("Vocabulary" 862), the double-effigy is an instance of how the representation of royal power promotes the iconography of marriage and the family to its advantage.

While Richard's carefully considered preparations for his funerary monument parallel Apollonius's invocation of family in order to achieve social sanction and stabilize royal authority, the events that followed his death—his burial and subsequent re-burial—complicate these intentions. Although Henry IV allowed for Richard's body to be led in procession through London and displayed at St. Paul's, Richard was denied the Westminster burial that he had planned for himself. Instead his body was interred at a much less prestigious resting place—King's Langley. This tension between the monument at Westminster and the fact that Richard's body had not received burial there, but was someplace else instead, contributed to the uncertain legitimacy of Henry IV's reign. This uncertainty found its most powerful expression in the rumors that Richard was still alive in Scotland (Strohm, *Empty Throne* 100–8; Rubin 173–4). The double tomb that Richard had built for Anne and himself as an affirmation of marriage and their place in a broader spiritual family was "conspicuously ready for occupancy" (Strohm, *Empty Throne* 104) but left unoccupied by Richard's body. This fact contributed to the impression that Richard had not really been laid to rest and that Henry's reign could not be legitimate.

The unintended role of family in keeping Richard "alive" through the empty double tomb becomes obvious when its more traditional alternative is considered. All English queens preceding Anne had been buried in their own tombs, and Richard's double tomb for a royal burial was indeed novel.<sup>142</sup> If Richard had not commissioned the

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<sup>142</sup> Notable queens who were buried in their own effigial tombs at Westminster include Edward I's queen, Eleanor of Castile (d.1290) and Edward III's wife, Philippa of Hainault (Dodson 153–6). In fact, Richard's royal double tomb that played a part in haunting Henry IV's reign is ironically ratified as a powerful precedent by Henry's own double tomb with his wife, Joan of Navarre, at Canterbury.

double tomb for Anne and himself and had just built a monument for Anne at Westminster, the problem of Richard's empty tomb would have not existed and perhaps Richard's absence from Westminster would be less jarring. Further, the fact that Richard was kin to his usurper Henry IV may have fuelled the feeling that Richard continued to haunt the new reign. As Miri Rubin puts it,

Richard haunted the living, as did the lively ghosts whose stories circulated in books ... and were told as cautionary tales to relatives who failed to fulfill promises, or whose hands were stained by misdeeds towards the departed. Such were Richard's kin—the Lancastrian cousin and his progeny.... So Richard haunted the land, a revenant, a remnant, the living dead. (174)

Like the memory of Richard, Thaise and the queen "haunt" Apollonius's tale with the lives that they live outside the boundaries of the nuclear family, despite Apollonius's (as well as Tyre's and Tarsus's) belief that they are dead. The tombs built for them are empty ones as well, ironic monuments to the fact that they are alive and thriving in their new communities, but also monuments that keep the nuclear family "alive" such that when the women are found they can be slotted back into a family that has not been together for well over a decade. If Thaise and the queen manage to live beyond the confines of the nuclear family because they are thought of as dead and have their deaths confirmed in the memorials built to them, Richard's grand monument to marriage had the opposite effect. It is a monument that plays a part in creating his uncanny presence that haunted Henry IV's reign.

Finally, the idea that family could be a powerful ideological force finds expression in Henry V's re-burial of Richard at Westminster soon after his accession to

the throne in 1413. Instead of being haunted by the Westminster monument as his father had been, Henry V used its symbolic prominence to his own advantage by organizing a grand ceremony for Richard's second burial. Paul Strohm analyzes the symbolic power of the act:

As sponsor of Richard's reburial, Henry V was able to display himself in a role of rightful successor that was unavailable to his own usurping father. Henry V's capture of the symbolism of rightful succession required, however, an active suppression. Absent from the ceremony, and in fact doubly absent in his Canterbury grave, was Henry V's natural (but dynastically illegitimate) father, Henry IV; in his place was Henry V's chosen (and dynastically legitimate) father Richard, to whose paternity he was about to lay brilliant symbolic claim. (*Empty Throne* 117)<sup>143</sup>

By commemorating Richard's death and affording him burial at Westminster, Henry V capitalized on the fact that family is constituted through loss via acts of commemoration. It was only through the power of spectacle that Henry V could adopt Richard as a symbolic father and disavow the troublesome illegitimacy of his biological father's ascension to the throne. Like Apollonius, Dionise, and Strangulio, who recognize the power of public ceremony to create and sustain the virtual family, Henry V managed to exploit its power to legitimize his rule by constituting his own virtual line of descent.

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<sup>143</sup> In the spirit of observing symbolic exchanges of paternity, it should be noted that Henry IV—the only monarch buried at Canterbury—rests opposite Edward, the Black Prince, Richard II's father.

## Chapter 5: Truth, Knowledge, Rumor: Revealing Adultery in *Le Morte DArthur*

### I. Introduction: Family and Adultery

Malory's *Morte Darthur* is a strange romance, if it can be considered one at all. Because it does not end with reconciliation and order, critics have questioned its status as romance. For instance, Helen Cooper labels it "counter-romance" because it dramatizes "treachery and murder within the body politic or the kin group, the slaying of father by son, the failure to pass on good rule in a strong and righteous order of succession, and ... incest" (820). However, because Malory's work has its roots in the Old French Arthurian romance as well as English metrical and alliterative romances, the *Morte* does participate in the romance tradition, even if it is from a certain critical distance. This thesis has examined how the family is imagined variously within romance, how the representations of the family oscillate between reconciliation and loss, how they present the paradoxical ideals of companionship and the imperative to procreate, and how the family is a space both of the familiar and of otherness. Even though the *Morte* does not come to a "happy" end, these themes which mark the contours of the family in Middle English romance are very much present in Malory's re-working of Arthurian legend.

In this chapter, I examine adultery in the *Morte*, a theme that appears at odds with the constitution of the family but whose oppositional force sheds light on how discourse about the family is shaped by the need to make sense of illicit desire in Arthurian society. Viewing adultery from the perspective of the family is productive in at least two ways. As opposed to the more celebratory way that forbidden love is achieved, thrives in secret, and is eventually included within the sphere of the socially acceptable in many other

romances, forbidden private desire in the *Morte* is shown to lead to public conflict. Second, while a chivalric view of adultery as *fin amor* is undoubtedly present in the *Morte*, viewing the family's impact on adultery (as well as adultery's impact on the family) also highlights how the values of chivalric community come into conflict with the demands of family life. Further, if the *Morte* reflects a late-medieval critique of chivalry in a time when the ambitions of the great aristocratic houses were ruled more by violence and treachery than honor, adultery viewed from the perspective of the family enables us to see how the *Morte* brings up contemporary concerns about legitimacy, lineage, and fidelity.

Religious and social attitudes towards adultery in the late Middle Ages continued to be shaped by the formulations of canon law. By the middle of the twelfth century, along with the rise of the nuclear family as the ecclesiastical ideal for family arrangements, the nature of adultery as an offence against marriage became more clearly defined. Adultery was now clearly distinguished from fornication and "consisted in sexual relations with a married person other than one's own spouse," where "[e]ven the consent of the other party's spouse was not adequate to alter the nature of the crime, nor did mitigating circumstances change the character of the offense, although they might lessen its seriousness" (Brundage, "Adultery" 131). Along with this distinction, canonists held adultery to be a more serious offence than fornication because of its disruptive social consequences on marriages. Commentators in the fifteenth century continued to hold this to be true, some considering it "more serious than rape" and others, "the most heinous of sex crimes, comparable in gravity to heresy" (Brundage, *Law* 519). A crucial development in medieval understandings of adultery concerned the culpability of the

parties involved. Unlike the Roman and Germanic traditions, where women alone were guilty of adultery, medieval writers and canonists took up the arguments of the Church Fathers, especially Augustine, and made both men and women equally culpable if caught in adultery (Bullough 10). In practical matters, however, men continued to have an upper hand. For instance, in the late twelfth century, men were expected to turn their wives out on discovering that they were committing adultery, while a "wife [who was] defiled by her husband's adultery ... was not allowed to dismiss him for that reason" (Brundage, *Law* 307). Further, "men retained the important option of accusing their wives of adultery on suspicion alone, even when definitive proof was lacking" (Brundage, *Law* 321). And even though proof had to be subsequently furnished, this contrasted with the lack of power women had in a similar situation. This discrimination in practice had a very pragmatic basis, for "adultery in a woman jeopardized the inheritance. A man with an unchaste wife could not be sure that the son who was going to inherit his property really was his son" (Given-Wilson and Curteis 39).

Adultery in the *Morte* and Arthurian literature in general has attracted the attention of scholars. The most prominent work on the subject is Karen Cherewatuk's study, *Marriage, Adultery, and Inheritance in Malory's Morte Darthur*, which shows how Malory's work interacts with the late-medieval gentry's and nobility's concerns about marriage and family. Cherewatuk's work is invaluable for the way it traces the development of the adulterous affair between Lancelot and Guinevere, arguing that the companionate relationship that develops between them evolves in reaction to the failure of Arthur's dynastic marriage to his queen, and how the *Morte* is also drawn into the cultural anxieties regarding illegitimacy and lineage that drove at least part of the

tensions in the Wars of the Roses.<sup>144</sup> Building on Cherewatuk's work, I show that adultery within the *Morte* is not merely an alternative to the public conception of marriage, as dynasty and inheritance; it is more than repressed desire that lurks beneath the veneer of acceptable familial practices. Instead, adultery is a means by which the gaps within the ideology of the idealized family become articulated as public discourse. Adultery in the *Morte* is spoken about, actualized, and experienced, and its consequences are explored in political and social terms. In this sense, adultery in the *Morte* is not kept behind closed doors. Instead, it becomes an uncanny reflection of an ideal marriage, where the private consent between individuals is translated into an outward ceremony that initiates a series of social functions for marriage that include procreation and inheritance. When the knowledge of adultery circulates in the public sphere, the ideal of the family as an organizing unit of social relations is pushed to its limits.

But the knowledge of adultery in the *Morte* does not circulate in obvious or distinct ways all the time. Instead, its progress from private to public knowledge is marked by concerns about how the ideology of the family as a symbolic structure can be used to shape and distort this knowledge. When acts of adultery are revealed in the *Morte*, the complex relationship between rumor, knowledge, and truth comes to the fore. This indicates the way in which an individual's seeking refuge in family affiliation is fraught with the stress of identifying with an institution that is itself far from stable or secure. Thus, this chapter uses Lacan's essay, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," to explore the relationship between adultery, the family, and the subject. Lacan's essay is especially useful for examining the

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<sup>144</sup> See chapters two and five of Cherewatuk's book for a full discussion of these topics.

subject's relationship to the family as Lacan illustrates how, by using a series of graphs, the subjectivity is produced by the symbolic order. The four graphs that Lacan develops schematize his ideas about how the subject is constituted in relation to the symbolic order, and how desire emerges as a result of gaps between what the subject wants and what the symbolic order can offer. While the succession of graphs serves a pedagogical function, with each graph building on concepts explained in the previous one, Lacan does not suggest that these graphs represent stages in psycho-sexual development. Instead, the first graph in Lacan's series illustrates how the subject is produced when it is alienated from its biological being by being initiated into the world of language. This graph is used by Lacan to introduce the idea of the "quilting point," how the subject becomes "sewn" into language. Graph two illustrates a situation where the reign of the symbolic order is supreme, where there is no distinction between what the symbolic order demands and what the subject wants. Graph three depicts neurosis, when the subject's sense of being is structured around the fantasy that the symbolic order contains some special element that will complete its sense of being. The final graph illustrates the situation when the subject is disabused of the fact that the symbolic order itself is lacking. Lacan's work enables an analysis of how the ideal family is produced as part of the symbolic order, eventually organizing Arthur's realm through the control of knowledge. Given this chapter's focus on secret and revealed knowledge, the essay is also helpful in providing a theoretical account of the dynamics that lead the subject, in his desire for knowledge, to the inevitable recognition that the symbolic order ultimately fails in providing him with "the truth."

In the following sections, I examine moments of revelation in the *Morte* that involve adultery. In these moments, the tension between the secrecy of adulterous encounters and public knowledge is sometimes diffused but often, these acts of revelation rupture the social fabric. Because much of this revelation occurs through rhetorical gesture, these moments become key points in the symbolic order as processes of signification around which ideals of the family coalesce. A good deal of the promulgation and critique of chivalry within the *Morte* takes place through rhetorical acts. This is both grounded in the Pentecostal oath at the founding of the fellowship of the Round Table and conveyed through narration when knights, defeated foes, victims, and maidens come to Arthur's court to tell stories about quests and deeds performed. Chivalry is constructed not only by deeds, but through the oaths that promise such deeds and narratives that make chivalric behavior known. At the same time, the Arthurian court is also characterized as a liminal space, where the boundaries between secret and public knowledge are blurred. Peggy McCracken, writing about the Old French Arthurian romances, observes that "[t]he court is defined by a desire to discover, accomplish, and recount unknown adventures; it is characterized by a desire to know secrets" (*Adultery* 92). As with chivalry, adultery is constructed rhetorically within the *Morte* where suspicions, revelations, and denials of adultery correspond with attempts to speak about or around adultery in ways that cause epistemological crises to erupt, manifesting the gap between knowledge and action.

The first section of this chapter shows how the revelation of adultery is controlled by the symbolic order of the family. It centers on Uther's bed-trick and how a clandestine instance of illicit desire is transformed, through public knowledge, into the founding fact

of Arthur's rule. The next section re-visits the bed-trick but examines how Arthur's knowledge of Uther's adultery has consequences for his identity as a familial subject that are difficult to contain. By examining further instances of illicit desire within Arthur's family—these involve Arthur and Morgause, Morgan le Fay and Accolon, Lamorak and Morgause—as well as Arthur's vexed relationship with his sisters, I argue that Arthur falls back upon a fantasy about the family as a coherent institution of private and social identity even when it no longer offers the stability that Arthur seeks. Finally, I turn to the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere, focusing on how the accusations of adultery take shape in the final book of the *Morte*. Here, I argue that, through rumor and slander, adultery becomes an event that is beyond verifiable knowledge, a fact that ultimately causes Arthur's fantasy about the family to break down.

## II. Speaking the Truth: Adultery Contained

In this section, I argue that Uther's act of adultery at the beginning of the *Morte* is the founding act that establishes Arthur's claim to lineage and connects him to a broader family clan, the Orkneys. Departing significantly from his source, Malory's discourse succeeds in transforming an adulterous act into the founding fact of Arthur's rule. However, this right to rule is ambivalent and consistently fraught with the threat of overthrow. This occurs in spite of Malory's attempts to control the representation of Uther's bed-trick, where he modifies his source, the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin*,<sup>145</sup> in

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<sup>145</sup> As its title implies, the post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* is a continuation of an earlier work, the Prose *Merlin* attributed to Robert de Borron. While Malory scholars usually refer to Malory's source for "The Tale of King Arthur" as the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin*, it should be noted that the work is virtually indistinguishable from the Prose *Merlin* in the earliest sections of the narrative (Norris 12). The *Suite*, which extends the

ways that transform the subjective, experiential aspects of the adulterous encounter into a more factual incident. As such, I take a comparative approach in my discussion of how Uther's bed-trick is represented, paying attention to the differences between Malory's narrative and the *Suite du Merlin's*.<sup>146</sup> Hence, I argue that through the symbolic order of the family, the dangers associated with adultery are tamed, if not necessarily effaced.

While there is a plethora of critical commentary on the nature and consequences of the affair between Lancelot and Guinevere, scholars are relatively silent on the encounter between Uther and Igraine. However, analyzing what Malory does with the Uther–Igraine relationship is crucial to understanding how adultery figures in the *Morte* and how it shapes the conception of the family. Indeed, the process by which Uther and

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*Merlin* beyond Arthur's coronation, only adds 'original' episodes from the account of Mordred's conception onwards. To avoid confusion, I refer to Malory's source as the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* throughout. The translation of the *Suite du Merlin* I cite is "The Prose Merlin (Episodes)" by Samuel N. Rosenberg, which is based on the version of the narrative found in the Huth manuscript, where the Prose *Merlin* precedes the *Suite du Merlin*. The corresponding Old French passages from the Huth manuscript (edited by Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich) are given in the footnotes. In instances where Rosenberg does not translate the relevant material, I use "The Story of Merlin," trans. Rupert T. Pickens, in *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, Vol. 1, 167–424.

<sup>146</sup> Tracing the extent of Malory's relationship to French sources requires assumptions of Malory's acquaintance with identifiable source material that may be difficult to establish beyond all doubt. P.J.C Field warns that while the

major sources [*of the Morte have been*] identified with reasonable confidence, none of the manuscripts that Malory used is known today ... [and] there must be at any given point a possibility that Malory used a manuscript of the work in question that differed from standard texts in academic libraries, and perhaps from any surviving manuscript of that work. (199)

Even so, there exists a well-established scholarly tradition of such comparative work that has led to many incisive readings that elaborate Malory's intent and narrative design, and demonstrate how the *Morte* interacts with the cultural concerns of late medieval England. For instance, the existence of the Middle English *Prose Merlin*—a much more literal translation of the Vulgate *Merlin*— indicates an approach to Arthurian legend that Malory did not take.

Igraine's encounter is transformed from a lowly bed-trick that provides the cover for an adulterous liaison into the moment of Arthur's conception that secures his rule demonstrates how discourses of the family and lineage can augment and contain illicit desire. Beginning a reading of adultery's relationship with the family in the *Morte* with Uther and Igraine also enables a reading of the more storied affair between Lancelot–Guinevere in terms that attend to the centrality of the family as an ideological construct that forms the basis of Arthurian society.

Malory's account of Uther's bed-trick, in which he takes the guise of Gorlois, the Duke of Cornwall, and spends a night with the duke's wife, Igraine, is a highly compressed version of the *Suite's*. While the general features that characterize Malory's redactive technique can account for his version of Arthur's conception,<sup>147</sup> the *Morte* also registers changes in ways that reinforce the legitimacy of Arthur's rule by establishing his royal identity through the narration of an undeniable fact. This, Malory achieves by dispensing with the more elaborate courtly plot and political negotiations that characterize the *Suite's* version of events, an abridgement that may reflect the influence of John Hardyng's *Chronicle* on his work (Norris 17). Malory's account is a quick summary of Uther's desire for Igraine where the drawn out *fin amor* sequences of the *Suite* are discarded. Malory is less interested in dramatizing Uther's desire for Igraine, or even Igraine's affective attachment to her own husband, than establishing the factual conditions under which Arthur is conceived. The changes that make Malory's version

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<sup>147</sup> Terence McCarthy's general observation about Malory's handling of his French sources holds true for this section of the *Morte*: "Malory has little time for the mysticism and the magic, the religious doctrine and the personal sentiment, the psychological enquiry and the amorous intrigue of French romance. These elements are not entirely absent from his book, but the quantity of them and hence their relative importance are radically reduced" ("Sources" 80).

distinctive emphasize Arthur's origins as an occurrence that can be interpreted as the legitimizing fact that places his right to rule beyond all question through excluding details or perspectives that might register the psychological or affective response of the participants.

By dispensing with Uther's elaborate pursuit of Igraine as it occurs in the *Suite*, Malory propels the action forward to Arthur's conception more quickly, and also places a new emphasis on what is at stake and what is compromised in Uther's desire for Igraine. In the *Suite*, Igraine tells Gorlois of Uther's intentions, re-telling what Uther has done in making his advances, re-interpreting these actions for her husband, and expressing her fear for her safety in a dramatic show of emotion. Igraine's own editorializing comments, which explain her motivation for revealing the king's advances to Gorlois, illustrate how emotion dominates her disclosure and plea to her husband: "I won't hide it from you, for there is no one I love as much as you.... I tell you, I can no longer hold out against him or against that counselor of his, Urfin. And yet I know, having told you as much, I can only expect something terrible to happen" (Rosenberg 333).<sup>148</sup>

Unlike the fear and love that characterize this response, Malory's Igraine shows a different interpretation of matters when she tells Gorlois of her suspicions by warning him against answering a summons by Uther, saying, "I suppose that we were sente for

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<sup>148</sup> Je nel vous celerai jai, car il n'est rein que je tant aim comme vous.... Et vous di bein que je ne puis plus durer a lui, ne a Urfin insien consillier. Et si sai bien que puis que je le vous ai dit, il ne puet mais remanoir san grant mal faire (103). Citations from the Old French *Suite du Merlin* are from *Merlin, Roman en Prose du XIIIe Siècle*, edited by Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich.

that I shold be dishonored" (1.15–6).<sup>149</sup> The directness of her words has led Rosemary Morris to remark that this gives an "impression of courage and resourcefulness" (88). Beyond these personal qualities, Igraine's directness in extricating herself from Uther's advances in the *Morte* emphasizes how her honor, and by extension, the spiritual and contractual boundaries that define her marriage would be transgressed if Uther should have his way. Here, Igraine resists Uther not so much because she is in love with her husband, but because she is "passynge wyse" (1.7) and "a passyng good woman" (1.12). It is not her love for Gorlois that holds her in check but her adherence to the codes of conduct that govern honorable behavior within marriage.

By making Igraine's key objection to sleeping with Uther the transgression of the marriage bond instead of dwelling on the affect Igraine shares with her husband, Malory also augments the conditions under which Uther and Igraine's adultery takes place. This is clear when the *Suite's* account of the bed-trick is compared to Malory's. In the *Suite*, in keeping with the demonstration of affect already expressed between the Duke and Igraine, the love between the two is reiterated during the bed-trick: "The king and Ygerne thus spent that night together, and that night they engendered the good king who was to be known as Arthur. The lady received Uther Pendragon with all the passion she felt for her husband the duke, whom she loved very much" (Pickens 204).<sup>150</sup> In contrast, no mention is made of "love" or "delight" when the disguised Uther comes to Igraine in the *Morte*. Instead of narrating the scene from either participant's point of view, the narrative

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<sup>149</sup> All citations of the *Morte*, by page and line numbers, refer to the third edition of *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, edited by Eugene Vinaver and revised by P.J.C Field.

<sup>150</sup> Ensi jurent li rois et Ygerne cele nuit, et en cele nuit engendra il le boin roi qui fu apieles Artus. La dame fist grant joie d'Uter Pandragon comme dou duc son signour que she amoit moult. (111)

creates an impression of pure factuality, where only the circumstantial details surrounding Arthur's conception are worth mentioning: "So after the deth of the duke kyng Uther lay with Igrayne, more than thre houres after his deth, and begat on her that nyght Arthur" (9.21–4). By stripping the scene of affect, and indeed, of any description of the subjective response by the parties involved during Arthur's conception, the event is framed by language that attempts to stabilize it as a fact of history and chronology rather than an act performed or experienced. Geraldine Heng notes that in the *Morte*, "[t]he function of love ... is the displacement of a purely masculine and primarily martial discourse with another of greater civilizing value: a sophisticated, feminine-presided discourse of emotion and relation" ("Enchanted" 285). Stripping this scene of the "discourse of emotion and relation" contained in its source, Malory gives this scene a different tenor, placing it firmly within the language of law, inheritance, and empire.

Thus, even if Malory's Igraine accedes to sleeping with Uther thinking that he is Gorlois, the incident is made devoid of emotion and subjectivity, demonstrating how a potentially contentious moment of adulterous desire can be transformed, through rhetorical manipulation, into the founding fact of Arthur's right to rule and inherit. This is especially significant because Merlin refers to Arthur's conception in these very terms in order to prove his legitimacy to inherit Uther's throne. When Merlin explains to the kings who are unwilling to submit to Arthur's authority that Arthur is Uther's child, they quickly reply that even if that were the case, he is Uther's illegitimate child—"Thenne is he a bastard,' they said al" (18.3)—and unfit to rule. Merlin then resorts to legal sophistry that reiterates the conditions of Arthur's conception Malory's account of the encounter has already prepared the reader for: "'Nay,' said Merlyn, 'after the deth of the duke more than

three houres was Arthur begoten, and thirtene dayes after kyng Uther wedded Igrayne, and therfor I preve hym he is no bastard" (18.4–7).<sup>151</sup> Hyonjin Kim concludes that Merlin's reply "not only legitimates Arthur's royal lineage ... but also authorizes Arthur's claim to the patrimony of England, to which the lineage entitles him" (31). Reflecting on the same defence that Merlin offers, Cherewatuk observes that the temporal facts surrounding Gorlois's death, Arthur's conception, and Uther's marriage to Igraine are mentioned, at least in part, several times by both Merlin and the narrator. Drawing a different conclusion, she argues that this "legalistic repetition of dates and times casts doubt on Arthur's claim to Uther's patrimony" (114). Kenneth Hodges remarks that Arthur's "success in war is virtually his only claim to the throne," and that Merlin's statement is "only a very withered figleaf of legitimacy to justify the violence" (42). Whether or not one is convinced that Merlin's logic makes a valid case for Arthur's legitimacy, Malory's narrative links the private moment of adultery to the public sphere by using terms that ally the narrative voice to Merlin's. The sensual and affective aspects of the liaison are discarded in favor of terms that try to establish the factual veracity of the encounter.

Additionally, taking away the experiential elements of the bed-trick removes the possibility that Arthur's legitimacy can be tainted by the confusion created by the deceit that marks this event. If the narrative had emphasized Igraine's impressions, stronger objections to Arthur's tainted legacy could be made on the grounds that Igraine's

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<sup>151</sup> Of Merlin's reply, Steven H. A. Shepherd notes, "[t]he conditions of Arthur's conception and birth satisfy the technicalities of medieval canon law" (12). However, this is complicated by the fact that canonists were divided on the question of whether adulterers could ever marry, even after the death of the wronged spouse. Providing a characteristically nuanced solution, Gratian held that "[i]f the adulterer and adulteress plotted the death of the first spouse ... then they should not be allowed to wed" (Brundage, *Law* 247). This scenario that is somewhat applicable to Uther's situation, since his war against Gorlois derives from his lust for Igraine.

cognitive faculties could overwhelm Uther's act of insemination. Vern Bullough points out that, even though medieval theories of procreation held that the "influence of the male was predominant since the *spiritus* of the father proceed[ed] from a greater strength of will and greater mental powers" in an adulterous relationship, leading to the production of a child that would either be male or resemble the father, a woman in an adulterous liaison could still influence the procreative process if she "thought intensely about her husband during her adulterous affair,... [which would] lead the child to resemble her husband and thus prevent someone from suspecting her extramarital activities" (11). What would be a cautionary measure for a woman participating in an adulterous affair knowingly would be a liability for the way this account of Arthur's conception is meant to emphasize his descent from Uther.

To emphasize the non-identification of Arthur's conception with Gorlois, after spending the night with Uther, Igraine immediately receives news of Gorlois's death:

[A]nd or day cam, Merlyn cam to the kyng and bad hym make hym redy, and so he kist the lady Igrayne and departed in all hast. But whan the lady herd telle of the duke her husband, and by all record he was ded or ever kyng Uther came to her, thenne she merveilled who that myghte be that laye with her in lykenes of her lord. So she mourned pryvely and held hir pees. (9.24–30)

Igraine's immediate knowledge of her husband's death and the cognitive and affective dissonance that this causes her ("she merveilled"; "she mourned pryvely") place her in an epistemological crisis that is not present in the French source.<sup>152</sup> As an extension of the

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<sup>152</sup> In the *Suite du Merlin*, nothing is said about Igraine's distress until the scene when Uther shames her into confession about the origins of her pregnancy. In anticipating the

effects of thought on procreation mentioned above, this crisis of perception and knowledge ensures the stamp of the wrong lover—her husband, instead of Uther—will not materialize on Arthur's body.<sup>153</sup> But more than this, Igraine's doubts after the encounter stand in stark contrast to the precision and certainty with which the narrative records the event. The exact knowledge that Merlin and Uther have about the Arthur's conception, a knowledge that only the reader is privy to in full, gives them the power to alter the shape of the adulterous encounter even though the material consequences of that encounter are necessarily contained within the body of an unknowing Igraine.

Another way by which the *Morte* transforms the adulterous encounter into an account that has a firmer eye on the future lies in the way Uther and Merlin discuss Arthur's fate at two points in the narrative—before Arthur is conceived and on Uther's deathbed.<sup>154</sup> In the *Suite*, the exchange between Merlin and Uther underscores the king's haste in fulfilling his sexual desire:

Then Merlin approached Urfin with these words: "If the king were willing to swear on holy relics that he would grant me what, with no offense to his honor, I

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later scene with this addition, the *Morte* also creates a minor narrative arc of suspense and revelation that does not exist in the French work.

<sup>153</sup> At the same time, this epistemological uncertainty is registered in the text in ways that are less productive for the project to legitimize Arthur. For instance, during the troubled beginning stages of Arthur's reign, no one recognizes or alludes to any physical resemblance between Arthur and Uther. The physical similarity between father and son, a most economical and trustworthy recognition device in medieval romance, is oddly lacking in the account of Arthur's youth. This absence is especially striking as other knights—notably Torre and Galahad—have their paternity revealed through their physical resemblance with their fathers. I take up this point in greater detail later in the section when I discuss the ambivalences of knowledge that challenge Arthur's legitimacy.

<sup>154</sup> More generally, Cherewatuk observes that these moments in the *Morte's* account "softe[n] the morally loathsome Uther" of his sources (111).

would ask of him, I would help him obtain the love of Ygerne. But you must swear this likewise before returning to him." Urfin answered: "It can't happen too soon." The king agreed. (Rosenberg 337)<sup>155</sup>

Here, Uther agrees to an unconditional request by Merlin, without any specific knowledge of what the sorcerer will ask of him. Only after Uther's night of pleasure does Merlin reveal to him that Igraine is with the child who Merlin now lays claim to in return for helping Uther bed Igraine.

In contrast to this, matters are quite different in the *Morte*. Instead of holding Uther to an unspecified pledge, Merlin lays out the consequences of Uther's tryst with Igraine and his own plans for the future before Uther assumes his disguise and sleeps with Igraine:

"Syr," said Merlin, "I know al your hert every dele. So ye wil be swon unto me, as ye be a true kynge enoynted, to fulfille my desyre, ye shal have your desyre."  
 ... "Syre," said Merlin, "this is my desyre: the first nyght that ye shal lye by Igrayne ye shal gete a child on her; and whan that is borne, that it shall be delyverd to me for to nourisshe thereas I wille have it, for it shal be your worship and the childis availle as mykel as the child is worth." (8.37–9.5)

This change in the sequence of events is important because, in the *Morte*, Uther beds Igraine knowing the consequences of his deed: there will be a child produced out of that encounter. In at least one respect, this knowledge makes Uther's acquiescence a risky

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<sup>155</sup> Et Merlins vint a Urfin et li dist: "Se li rois me voloiut jurer sour sains que il me donroit un don tel que je li demanderoie sauve s'ounour, je li aideroie a avoir l'amour d'Ygerne. Et toi meismes le convient jurer avant quu tu ne t'en iras a l'encontre." Et Urfins respont: "Che pose moi qui'il n'est ja fait." Et li rois otroie chou que Urfins a dit. (109)

affair, even if the gender of the child is left unspecified by Merlin, for potentially he will provide a male heir for Gorlois, who thus far, has only produced girls with Igraine. Yet Merlin's assurance that he will take the child away and that the child will be well cared for negates this possibility. In fact, the final line of Merlin's condition hints that something greater might be in the future of the child. While the phrase "for it shal be your worship and the childis availle" could be interpreted as an assurance on Merlin's part that Uther will not have to live with the shame or suffer the consequences of having fathered a bastard out of wedlock by his antagonist's wife, and that the child will not suffer from the stigma of being illegitimate, the phrase could be just as readily read as Merlin hinting at the future greatness of this child and thus the prestige the child will bring to the Pendragon line. This is one of the earliest instances where the idea of "worship" is brought up in the *Morte*, and it introduces an important theme that would have resonated with Malory's audience. Raluca Radulescu points out that

[i]n Malory's *Morte Darthur* "worship" acquires an overwhelming importance, and the importance given to the preservation of "worship" as a knight's contractual duty to his lords and his fellow knights, along with the maintenance of his own and his family reputation, would have appealed to fifteenth-century gentry readers. (20)

Observing that Merlin's statement shows how "illicit desire will eventually lead to [Uther's] 'honor' or 'worship,'" Cherewatuk concludes that "Merlin's logic is based on the patriarchal assumptions that the son's honor accrues to the father's name" (112). Indeed, this patriarchal re-writing of adultery is evident in the terms of the deal between Merlin and Uther. The love and pleasure which Igraine experiences in the *Suite*—the potential

threat that feminine desire poses to the account of Arthur's conception—is proleptically effaced by how the word "desyre" becomes the currency of male exchange in Merlin's condition: "be sworn ... to fulfille my desyre, ye shal have your desyre." In being linked to Merlin's designs for the future, Uther's desire for Igraine is given a dynastic character that is not present in the *Suite*.

The male compact between Merlin and Uther that manages to recuperate Uther's adulterous desire, transforming it into the basis of political succession, is also evident in the way their shared knowledge gains prominence on Uther's death-bed. Cherewatuk takes the view that Uther's reticence in recognizing his son during his lifetime—Uther only affirms Arthur's patrimony on his death-bed, and Arthur is not present at the scene—is an indication of how "Uther's unbridled desire leads to doubt about Arthur's right to rule" (112). Yet a comparison of the death-bed scene in Malory to the parallel scene in his source shows that Malory narrates the event with a stronger sense of how Uther's recognition of the child will prepare for Arthur's assumption of political authority. In the *Suite de Merlin*, Uther is thought to be dead because he is unable to respond to any of those attending to him. However, Merlin rouses the king into uttering one final sentence by giving him the unexpected news that his son will one day reign:

They all asked him [Merlin], "How do you think you'll get him to speak?" And he answered, "You will see." Merlin then turned around to the head of the king's bed and whispered quietly in his ear, "You have come to a very beautiful end, if your conscience is as your looks say it is. And I tell you that your son will be head of your kingdom after you through the power of Jesus Christ, and he will perfect the

Round Table you have founded." When the king heard this, he pulled toward him and said, "For God's sake, bid him pray to Jesus Christ for me." (Pickens 211)

Despite having witnessed a miracle of sorts, those who are amazed that the king has spoken have no idea of what exactly is exchanged between Merlin and Uther: "not even one of them could hear what the king had said except Merlin" (Pickens 211).<sup>156</sup> The *Suite* thus enforces the special bond between Uther and Merlin that is built on privileged knowledge but does not extend this knowledge into the public sphere. Uther shares, for one last moment, in the knowledge of the future, when he is provoked to his last words on hearing Merlin's prophetic assurance. However, he does not ratify Arthur's succession to the throne, and there is no proclamation made that recognizes Arthur as his heir.

In the *Morte*, on the other hand, a clearer effort is made to transform the secret knowledge about Uther's son into political discourse. While Uther is similarly "specheles" in the *Morte*, the scene plays out quite differently:

So on the morne alle the barons with Merlyn came tofore the kyng. Thenne Merlyn *said aloud* unto kyng Uther, "Syre, shall your sone Arthur be kyng after your dayes of this realme with all the appertenaunce?" Thenne Uther Pendragon tordned hym and *said in herynge of them alle*, "I gyve hym Gods blissyng and myne, and byd hym pray for my soule, and righteously and worshipfully that he

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<sup>156</sup> Et il li demandent: "Merlins, comment le cuides tu faire parler?" Lors se torna Merlins de l'autre part devier de chief le roi et li consilla moult bas en l'oreille: "Rois, tu as faire moult bonne fin, se la conscience est tele comme la samblance. Et je te di que tes fius Artus sera chiés de ton regne apriès toi par la viertu de Jesucrist. Et sera acomplissables de la table reonde que tu as fondee." Et quant li rois oi ces miervelles que Merlins dist, si se traist vierst lui et li dist: "Merlins, priiés li pour Dieu que il prit a Jhesucrist por moi." ... Et los se leva Merlins et tout li autre qui grant merveille orent eue de chou que li rois a parlé, ne il n'en i ot onques uns qui peust savior que ja avoit dit a Merlin." (131)

clayme the croune upon forfeiture of my blessing," and therewith he yelde up the ghost" (11.39–12.8, emphasis mine).

In contrast to Merlin's whisperings and Uther's indistinct cry in the *Suite*, Malory's account ensures that Uther's acknowledgement of Arthur as his son and his desire that Arthur succeed him are announced and heard clearly. Thomas L. Wright observes that "[i]n the question addressed to Uther it is manifest that Merlin assumes a special task—that of bringing about the reign of Arthur" (23). Even though she argues that the proclamation is ineffectual in resolving the tension that develops over who should succeed Uther, Radulescu concedes that "Merlin facilitates the opportunity for Uther to proclaim Arthur as rightful ruler in the hearing of all those present, the barons of his royal council" (115). Further, the structure of the exchange, in which Merlin asks Uther to ratify Arthur as his heir transforms the prophetic utterance of the *Suite* into a moment where Uther exercises his political authority. The phrase "this realme with all the appertenance" also strengthens the legal overtones of this scene, for Merlin appropriates language commonly found in wills, legal documents and parliamentary records.<sup>157</sup> As such, Malory's narrative re-interprets Arthur's conception and inheritance in public and ultimately political terms. Now, the disguise that was adopted in conceiving Arthur is exchanged for the public avowing of Arthur as Uther's heir.

The way that the *Morte* contains and transforms adulterous desire by taking away the secrecy that characterizes it as a disruptive alternative to marriage, family, and lineage, is perhaps most powerfully illustrated in Uther's conversation with Igraine after their marriage, when it becomes apparent that she is pregnant. I have already indicated

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<sup>157</sup> See *MED* s.v. *appurtenance* n. 1.

how the narrative places Igraine in a state of confusion immediately after the night with Uther, and that her lack of knowledge about that encounter contrasts with the masculine knowledge that Merlin and Uther possess and manipulate for public and political purposes. Yet interestingly, in Malory's most significant departure from the French source, Igraine does not remain in this state of confusion. The events of the night are eventually explained to her and she receives knowledge of the identity of her child's father: "Thenne the quene made grete joye whan she knewe who was the fader of her child" (10.31–2). Dorsey Armstrong sees Igraine's grateful acquiescence at learning about the bed-trick as casting her in the "model of proper feminine behavior ... quickly and silently adapting to the needs and wants of the men who fight over and exchange her" (48). While this is correct, it does not detract from the fact that the revelation allows Igraine to share in the masculine plot, effectively constituting a hetero-normative family unit out of a previously male homo-social compact. The scene of conception that is bereft of feminine pleasure and the state of anxiety and sorrow that Igraine is placed in after she learns of her husband's death are replaced with the fulfillment of knowledge after she learns the truth surrounding her child's conception.

Morris briefly notes that Malory's change "destroys the delicate and sinister web" of deception found in the *Suite* but that "Malory's narrative hereabouts is so brisk that the loss is not noticeable" (88). Yet this shift in the narrative should not be dismissed so easily, even if it is a brief scene. The extent of Malory's innovation and its ramifications on Arthur's status within the family unit is worth close examination not only because it is consistent with the *Morte's* attempt to legitimize adulterous desire but also because the narrative now legitimizes Igraine as a maternal figure after previously excluding the

account of her emotions and desire. In her pregnant state, Igraine now becomes a valued maternal figure whose knowledge of her child's origins contributes to Arthur's own legitimacy while it simultaneously overwrites her characterization as the object of Uther's adulterous desire. Although Igraine cannot be guilty of adultery per se because she sleeps with Uther under the illusion that he is her husband, the stain of her unwitting desire would mar the attempts to legitimize Arthur. Thus, even if knowledge of the bed-trick is primarily part of a male compact to shape Uther's dynasty, the narrative offers Igraine this knowledge so it can integrate her into a vision of stable familial origins for Arthur, and in so doing, create a stronger case for Arthur's legitimacy.

In the *Suite*, when her pregnancy becomes apparent, Igraine is shamed into telling Uther what happened on the night of Gorlois's death. Uther asks Igraine who the child's father is, explaining that it can be neither him nor the duke:

When the lady heard the question, she felt ashamed and began to weep. With tears in her eyes she said: "My lord, I cannot tell you a lie when you already know so much, and I shall not try, but, in God's name, take pity on me! If you assure me that you will not leave me, I shall tell you something extraordinary but true." He assured her that he would never leave her, whatever she might say. Delighted with his reassurance, she went on: "My lord, I shall tell you an extraordinary story." (Rosenberg 344)<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Et quant la dam ot chou, si dist em plourant: "Sire, de chou que vous savés ne vous puis jou faire menchoingne a croire. Ne autre chose ne vous dirai je mie, mais pout Dieu aiiés mierchi de moi; car je vous dirai merveilles et voir, se vous m'asseurés que vous ne me lairés mie." Et il l'en assure que ja por chose que elle die ne le laira. Quant la roine oi so signour qui l'asseura, si en fu moult lie et li dist: "Sire, je vous conterai merveilles." (120)

Igraine only agrees to reveal the circumstances that led to her pregnancy if she is assured that Uther will not leave her, a signal that Igraine's fear is of the social stigma she suffers from mothering what appears to be an illegitimate child. After she recounts the incident, Uther explains that she must conceal the secret of her child's conception and that he has made arrangements for the child to be disposed of:

My dear love, take care to keep your condition a secret from as many people as you can, because you would be disgraced if it were known. I hope you understand that, when the child is born, we cannot reasonably acknowledge it as ours, and we shall not keep it for ourselves. I am asking you, then, to give it, as soon as it has been born, to a certain person that I shall point out to you, and in that way, we shall never hear anything further about it. (Rosenberg 344)<sup>159</sup>

In the *Suite*, the mystery surrounding Arthur's conception is not clarified for Igraine at this point. Instead, there is a clear refusal to acknowledge the child's parentage, a disavowal of legitimacy that is even starker on Uther's part because he possesses the knowledge to make the child legitimate but denies this possibility explicitly.

Malory's version re-writes this scene with the express intent of moving toward legitimizing Arthur, by having Uther reveal the bed-trick to Igraine. Ralph Norris suggests that Malory's decision follows a probable minor source, John Hardyng's *Chronicle*, where "Uther clearly tells her the truth about his and Merlin's machinations"

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<sup>159</sup> Biele amie, gardés que nus hom ne nulle feme ne le sache a cui vous le puissiés celer, car vous en seriés honnnie, se on le savoit. Et je voel bien que vous sachiés que cis enfes qui de vous naistra n'est pas ne miens ne vostres raisonnablement, ne jou ne nous ne l'arons a nostre oes, ains vos pri que vous le doingniés si tost comme il nasitera a chelui que je vous com manderai, si que je mais n'orrons nouveies de lui. (121)

(19).<sup>160</sup> However, the brief couplet that the *Chronicle* allocates to the revelation—"But then betwene them two he [Uther] did discure, / The priuete in all, as it was wrought" (119)—merely provided Malory with a narrative opening through which he explored the complicated relationship between truth and knowledge. The exchange that frames Igraine's confession of the night's events illustrates the shift in focus:

[H]e asked hir *by the feith* she ought to hym whos was the child within her body. Thenne was she sore abashed to yeve ansuer. "Desmaye you not," said the kyng, "but telle me *the trouthe*, and I shall love you the better, *by the feythe of my body!*" "Syre," said she, "I shalle telle you *the trouthe*." ... "That is *trouthe*," said the kyng, "as you say, for it was I myself that cam in the lykenesse." (10.14–29, emphasis mine)

Instead of being assured that Uther will not abandon her, as is the case in the *Suite's* sequence, Igraine explains the circumstances of her pregnancy when Uther invokes a wide range of semantic possibilities associated with the word "trouthe." When Uther first broaches his request, expecting an answer "*by the feith* she ought to hym," he invokes a contractual sense of the obligation owed him that results from their marriage bond. Igraine's willingness to explain her pregnancy to him would be a demonstration of a

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<sup>160</sup> Like Hardyng, Malory seems to be following an English tradition of casting Uther in a more sympathetic light. Layamon's *Brut* also has Uther telling Igraine about the bed-trick as well, a detail that is not present in his source, Wace's *Roman de Brut* (CF. lines 8781–822). Layamon's Igraine, however, does not believe the revelation:

He sende to þan castle his selest þeines  
and grætte Ygærne, wifuene aþelest,  
and sende hire taken wæt heo i bedde speken ...  
Yet wende Ygærne þat hit soð weoren  
þat þe dæde eorl isoht hafede his dugeðe,  
and al heo ilæfde þat hit læs weore  
þat þe king Vðer æuere weoren icumen her. (9591–9)

wife's loyalty to her husband and lord, an act that could effectively cancel the marks of infidelity borne by her body. Thus, when Uther affirms Igraine's narrative—"That is trouthe"—he is not only confirming her account; in addition, he is commending her for her honesty in not hiding the matter from him.

The word "trouthe" also takes on another meaning in the passage. When Uther and Igraine both mention "the trouthe," they use a sense of the word that had only become common usage in Middle English quite recently: the idea of "trouthe" as referring to an accurate account or independently verifiable fact. Richard Firth Green demonstrates that while this sense of "trouthe" emerges at the end of the fourteenth century, "[b]y the mid-fifteenth century the establishment of a distinct intellectual sense of *truth* is well attested" (26).<sup>161</sup> Thus, while the word remains bound up with contractual and ethical meanings, especially because Uther places Igraine's confession within the terms of the marriage contract, Malory also uses this occasion to reinforce Arthur's mysterious conception as a fact whose occurrence can be verified and explained. In doing this, Arthur's mysterious conception, which becomes verifiable, or at least takes the appearance of factuality that is accounted for when Uther explains the bed-trick to Igraine, is no longer a secret, but finds a place within an epistemological framework that is governed by fidelity and obligation.

Malory's choice of words in creating the semantic web spun out of the varied meanings associated with "trouthe" is particularly striking when the corresponding

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<sup>161</sup> Green's study, *Crisis of Truth*, examines how "trouthe" was a "keyword" in late medieval England. See especially chapter one for how its meanings changed over time.

passage in the Middle English prose *Merlin*, a text that was probably written a decade earlier than Malory's, is considered:

And as the kyng on a nyght lay with her, he asked with whom she was so grete, and þat she myght not be so grete with hym.... Thus the kyng oposed Ygerne, and she hadde grete drede, and seide wepinge, "Sir, of this that ye sey I may make to yow no lesyng, ne of other thinges shall I not lyen; ffor oure lordes love, haue mercy on me, and I shall telle yow a merveile that is very *soth*, yef ye will me assure, yef it plese yow, that ye shull not me forsaken." (86, emphasis mine)

In being a more direct translation of the French, the passage in the Middle English *Merlin* has Igraine speak of the night of Arthur's conception after her fears are assuaged and not as a demonstration of her fidelity. Malory's use of "the trouthe," which links the events surrounding Arthur's conception to the language of marriage and fidelity, appears quite intentional, given how the more conservative and semantically stable word for veracity—"soth"—is used by the writer of the Middle English *Merlin* to refer to the "merveile."

Instead of the disavowal of the child that occurs in the *Suite*, admitting the bed-trick into the realm of factual reality instead of allowing it to persist as an "extraordinary" event ("merveilles"), allows Uther to declare to Igraine, "desmay you not, for I am fader to the child" (10.29–30). Malory's innovation in this scene also complicates Terence McCarthy's observation that "Malory takes the narrative material of French romance and ... make[s] it fit in with the English tradition of the chronicles ... [by] rejecting as far as possible what is merely personal and private" ("Old Worlds" 19). In order to create the sense of veracity that would be in line with chronicle tradition, Malory turns to the "personal and private" in this instance, using the exchange between Uther and Igraine to

"make" Arthur's conception a fact. In this way, the *Morte* capitalizes on moments that make Arthur's paternity ambiguous and his legitimacy questionable in the Old French narrative in order to make clear statements about Arthur's acceptance as Uther's heir. Arthur's identity is further stabilized by Igraine's sharing in this knowledge despite the murky and adulterous circumstances surrounding his conception. While this by no means settles the issue of Arthur's legitimacy to inherit the crown, as is evident in the baronial and kingly challenges to his right to rule at the beginning of his reign, it does reflect a cultural anxiety about the legitimacy of England's rulers in the fifteenth century, which could have been a symptom of the repeated challenges to the authority of the incumbent monarchs during the Wars of the Roses.

The vexed relationship between adultery and illegitimacy would have been on the minds of Malory's contemporaries. One of the most powerful Lancastrian noble families, the Beauforts, had an ancestry whose origins in an extra-marital relationship was continually invoked over the course of the fifteenth century. The Beauforts were descendents of John of Gaunt's children by his mistress Katherine Swynford. After John of Gaunt took Katherine as his third wife in 1396, their children were legitimized by Richard II and an act of Parliament in the following year (Saul, *Richard II* 246). Even so, their status as a legitimate branch of the Lancastrian family was circumscribed when Gaunt's son, Henry IV, came to the throne. In an effort to strengthen his own claim to the throne in 1407, he confirmed the legitimacy of his half-siblings and their descendants but "declared that this did not cover the succession to the crown" (Lander 37). This exclusion was important, as without it, the Beauforts could have challenged more directly Richard of York's position as Protector of England during Henry VI's illness and his

eventual claim to the throne. As Charles Ross points out, before Henry VI produced an heir, Edmund Beaufort, the duke of Somerset and grandson of John of Gaunt, "might have been regarded as Henry VI's heir presumptive" (3) except for Henry IV's exclusion, and even with the exclusion clause, Richard of York began to fear in the 1450s, that "Somerset might be officially recognized as heir presumptive to the throne" (12). Supporting this view, Chris Given-Wilson and Alice Curteis observe that "as the ranks of the Lancastrian royal family gradually thinned out over the [fifteenth century], the claim of the Beaufort branch to represent it was a factor in English politics that could never quite be forgotten" (151).

More generally, accusations of bastardy were consistently hurled at leading Lancastrian and Yorkist figures during the Wars of the Roses, with hopes of discrediting their claims to the throne. For instance, Henry VI's son, Edward, was accused by the earl of Warwick of being illegitimate and unable to inherit the throne. Rebelling against his brother Edward IV, George, the duke of Clarence, spread the rumor that his older brother was really "the son of an archer from Calais named Blaybourne," and that he (George) was the true Yorkist heir to the throne (Given-Wilson and Curteis 156). The last Yorkist monarch, Richard III, had a "fondness for bastardizing his rivals" (Given-Wilson and Curteis 159). He made an elaborate accusation about the illegitimacy of Edward IV's sons based on the claim that Edward had already been contracted in marriage to another woman when he married Elizabeth Woodville, making the marriage void and the princes bastards (Given-Wilson and Curteis 158). Faced with the challenge of Henry Tudor, Richard went back into the annals of history, contesting Henry's right to rule because he

had Beaufort blood in him (Given-Wilson and Curteis 159).<sup>162</sup> Even though these slurs on both monarchs and contenders to the throne were usually ineffective in wresting power from them, they indicate how concerns about legitimacy had entered into the political discourse of late-medieval England in a very explicit way. In this climate of incrimination, Malory's interest in dramatizing the efforts taken to eliminate the taint of adultery on Arthur's birth, which could compromise his right to wield power even if official legitimization were present, is hardly surprising.

The transformation of Uther's transgressive act into a moment that can be reconciled with and interpreted by the auspices of the legitimate family also indicates how individuals become subjects that simultaneously institute as well as become governed by the social expectations and norms. Jacques Lacan's graph of desire, with the concept of the *point de capiton* in particular, is helpful in illustrating the effects of this transformation on Uther and the social structure. The *point de capiton*, or quilting point, refers to the moment when the individual is "sewn" into the symbolic order, an act which produces a subject who is subjected to the laws of the symbolic while also affirming and fixing the chain of signifiers that make up the symbolic order. While Lacan leaves the interpretation of the symbolic order at its most general, referring to it as the "locus of the Other, the Other as witness, the witness who is Other than any of the partners," the Other that enables Speech which guarantees Truth (Lacan 684), Slavoj Žižek extends the notion of the symbolic order to encompass more ideological terms, showing how a master signifier, such as "Communism" could act as quilting point to hold other concepts such as

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<sup>162</sup> In his propaganda, Richard III conveniently left out the fact that he too had Beaufort blood in him. His mother, Cicely, wife to Richard of York, was herself the daughter of Joan Beaufort, the youngest child of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford's union.

"democracy," "freedom," "state," or "justice" in a particular place of meaning within the symbolic order (102).

Critics of Arthurian literature have found value in the concept of the quilting point in explaining the ideological function of various figures or moments in Arthurian narrative. Laurie Finke and Martin Shichtman, in their reading of the *Bruts* of Wace and Layamon, posit that the "imaginative construction [of rape] in the writing of history [serves] as a symptom or trope that functions as a 'quilting point,' binding together the floating elements that make up ideological space and thereby creating and sustaining a particular ideological formation" (57). By showing that scenes of rape in these texts coalesce concerns about military prowess, social status, and political hegemony, they argue that

[t]he Mont St. Michel giant's rape of Elein ... serves as a nodal point (*point de capiton*) that "quilts" together the network of ideological relations these histories were designed to reproduce, while itself producing a certain ideological and structural function (Žižek calls this "surplus-enjoyment") that exceeds the rape's ideological and structural function. (68)

Jeffrey Cohen, writing about how the monstrous body in pieces is indelibly linked to the fiction of the bodily integrity of the subject who enacts or gazes upon destruction, comments on Arthur's defeat and decapitation of the same giant, arguing that the gaze of the spectators of the gruesome sight finally rests upon

Arthur, in the realization that the monster's powers have been incorporated and re-coded by the king, [... and] the heroic name of Arthur in Geoffrey of Monmouth's text becomes a *point de capiton*, a "quilting point" where the contradictions that

inevitably undergird any subject, any ideology, are temporarily allayed by finding embodiment in a "rigid" signifier. (67–9)

Taking a different tack, Armstrong also uses the quilting point as an analytical framework that advances the view that "in Malory ... the figure of Guenevere—absent from all earlier accounts—suddenly appears to bind together the threads that trail off from either end of the Roman War" (13).<sup>163</sup>

Instead of reading a single character or moment in the narrative as the quilting point, I contend that the successive rhetorical acts that I have been analyzing, acts that reveal the circumstances surrounding Arthur's conception as well as his position as Uther's legitimate heir, have the effect of a quilting point. These acts of revelation transform Uther's encounter with Igraine into an event that can be recognized and acknowledged by the ideology of the nuclear family, and the event can be brought to knowledge and stabilized by the regime of truth that is perceived to lie in the symbolic order, within the jurisdiction of the Other. "Adultery" as a possible signification of the encounter cannot be erased, but it can be held in a less threatening place within the chain of signification.

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<sup>163</sup> For these critics, the incident or character itself becomes the quilting point for either the narrative or series of ideological concerns. Instead of referring to Uther's adulterous encounter, as the quilting point, I argue that the quilting point emerges and is reinforced each time that the adulterous encounter meets with the symbolic order, the notion of family in this case, through repeated discursive representations. This application of the quilting point is informed by the fact that in Lacan (and Žižek's reading of Lacan) the symbolic order is not held in place by a pre-existent transcendent signifier; instead, it comes into view as individuals come into subjectivity through the discursive structures that define them. The symbolic order, the Other, exists in a dialectical relationship with the process of subjectivization even as it is the condition of this process.

Lacan's Second Graph of Desire can be found on page 684 of *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink. The graph is also available in Slavoj Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, on page 103.

Figure 5.1. Lacan's Second Graph of Desire

Figure 5.1 shows the second stage of Lacan's graph of desire, where the individual is fully subject to the reign of the symbolic.<sup>164</sup> The subject is represented by  $\$$ . The bar across S represents the fact that the subject is already alienated from its biological existence by becoming a subject "determined by language" (Fink 115).<sup>165</sup> I(O) represents the ego-ideal, "the Other's ideal that the subject internalizes" (Fink 116). Thus, it is only by "going through" the symbolic order, represented by the vector S(O)–O, that the subject is able to sustain a sense of its own ontological integrity: "the ego requires a relation to the Other in order to be 'complete'" (Fink 117). The vector  $\$$ –I(O) represents how Uther's transgressive act is quilted into the symbolic order, to produce Uther as husband and father of a legitimate heir. In my reading, the vector S(O)–O refers to the

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<sup>164</sup> Following Žižek, I represent terms associated with the Other with an English "O," instead of Lacan's French "A."

<sup>165</sup> The first graph in Lacan's series establishes this alienation effect.

field of concepts associated with the family (for instance, "companionship," "fidelity," "procreation," "adultery") that are held to a particular meaning once Uther's act is brought under the auspices of the legitimate, idealized family: the Other of the symbolic, represented by "O" on the graph. The contradictions and obstacles that adultery and bastardy may present to Uther's and Arthur's rule can be smoothed out when they take their place in the chain of signification that is quilted in place by the ideology of the idealized family.

The vector  $\$-I(O)$  that produces the subject passes through the vector right at the top of the graph, through  $O-S(O)$ . Of this movement, Lacan writes: "there is no demand that does not in some respect pass through the defiles of the signifier [where] needs have been diversified and geared down by language to such an extent that their import appears to be of quite a different order whether we are dealing with the subject or politics" (687). Bruce Fink clarifies that this is how the individual's "need," addressed to the Other, becomes "demand" in the process of subjectivization, where need is interpreted, given meaning, and transformed by the Other (118). Thus, Uther's bed-trick, a spurious and selfish expression of need, has to be re-narrated in terms that will fit adultery into the social order, through the rhetorical acts that submit the incident to the symbolic order. Uther's sexual urges, given meaning by the symbolic order after the fact, correspond to the movement from need to desire, and become the basis for lineage and succession. In this schematization, the subject is completely subjugated to the symbolic order and the symbolic order of the family is able to completely fulfill the subject: need and demand correspond perfectly. This, as I show in the sections that follow, is not always the case in the *Morte*.

Another point about the symbolic order illustrated by the graph is how the quilting point holds the related signifiers in place retroactively. Fink explains that, for Lacan, the signifier–signified relationship does not progress through an "additive" unfolding of meaning; instead, "[t]here are moments ... at which a certain meaning precipitates out, or crystalizes, so to speak, either by anticipation or retroaction" (113). Similarly, the transgressive elements of Uther's adulterous encounter with Igraine are not transformed by a process of recuperation from within the relationship. For example, the text does not present Uther's violation as masking an idealized love that is gradually revealed as Uther and Igraine live together in companionate bliss. Instead, declarative moments where knowledge is exposed and held up as equivalent to the truth—such as Merlin's foretelling of Arthur's destiny, Uther's revelation of the bed-trick to Igraine, and the deathbed revelation—are used to quilt elements of the symbolic order in place.

Yet, this raises a question about the efficacy of such moments in suturing the symbolic order in place. For if meaning is retroactively attained, how does the quilting point itself gain its status as a master signifier of sorts? Žižek argues that the quilting point attains its status not because it is the "point of supreme density of Meaning [that is] excepted from the differential interplay of elements." Instead

it is the element which represents the agency of the signifier within the field of the signified. In itself it is nothing but a "pure difference": its role is purely structural, its nature is purely performative—its signification coincides with its own act of enunciation; in short it is a "signifier without the signified." (99)

While I would not go so far as to claim that the acts of revelation that have been analysed are moments of "pure difference" that are "purely structural" in the quilting of the family,

for they are also narrative moments that advance the plot, these moments of revelation that install Arthur within the symbolic order of the family also possess a performative quality about them that draws attention to their own status as "acts of enunciation."

For instance, where Merlin foretells Arthur's conception before Uther goes to Igraine in disguise, he does so on the condition that Uther will swear to do as he tells him: "'So ye (Uther) wil be sworn unto me (Merlin), as ye be a true kyng enoynted' ... Thenne the kyng was sworne upon the four Evangelistes" (8.37–40). Merlin's speaking, which predicts Arthur's place within his lineage and succession, is conditioned upon a speech act on Uther's part that performs the work of binding Uther to a contract with Merlin. Later on, at Uther's death-bed, Merlin's performative speaking not only elicits an affirmation of Arthur's succession on Uther's part, but is more literally a demonstrative act: Merlin's words result in the "miracle" of reviving Uther to utter his final words. Further, in the scene where Uther confronts Igraine about the origins of her pregnancy, the emphasis on Igraine confessing "the truth" that Uther already has knowledge of also highlights the enunciative quality of the moment. In this moment, Uther exercises the power of knowledge, where the bodily pleasures of the sexual encounter are transformed into the pleasure derived from hearing another confess what one already knows to be true. Igraine's speaking and Uther's subsequent revelation not only transform the circumstances of Arthur's conception into verifiable fact, they also draw attention to themselves as a series of speech acts where speaking itself is the central point of the episode. In being points in the narrative where the conscious performance of speech is foregrounded, these moments come close to demonstrating Žižek's observation that the

quilting point derives its power from the way its "signification coincides with its own act of enunciation."

Finally, the graph of desire offers an insight into how Malory's interventions in the received narrative locate these early moments of the narrative firmly in the public sphere of the legitimate and idealized family. The lower portion of the graph, the circuit running through  $i(o)$  and  $m$  without passing through  $O-S(O)$ , represents the "imaginary process," where the fiction of a whole ego can appear prior to being subject to the symbolic order (Lacan 685). This path maps the "mirror stage," where the ego,  $m$ , crystallizes in response to the specular image,  $i(o)$ , before it. However, this fiction of wholeness cannot persist or be completed without the support of the symbolic order, and to remain caught in the imaginary would lead to the disintegration associated with psychosis (Fink 117–8). Shrouded in magic and secrecy, Uther's adulterous encounter could have been left in this state, unconnected to the symbolic order of the family. The bed-trick, which relies on supernatural elements, Merlin's magic, and entails Uther taking on a temporary disguise, an image that eventually dissolves, can be said to exist in the order of the imaginary. Left in its state of secrecy, the bed-trick would remain a socially unsupportable fantasy that would have to be suppressed or denied, which is exactly how Uther handles the matter in the *Suite* by refusing Igraine knowledge of the truth. Without the sustaining structure of the symbolic, the bed-trick cannot become the basis of familial identity or lineage.

Given how illegitimacy was a prime concern for the aristocracy during and shortly after the *Morte's* composition, the decision to cast the adulterous encounter between Uther and Igraine in terms that shift Arthur's conception towards legitimization

rather than secrecy indicates an attempt to re-invent at least that portion of Arthurian legend to alleviate the anxieties surrounding inheritance and legitimacy. However, despite Malory's creation of a factual circumstance validating Arthur's link to Uther, the subsequent challenges to Arthur's reign show how the attempts to cement the truth by exploiting the stability of marriage, family, and kinship fail to remove the cloud of uncertainty that hangs over Arthur's origins. Even if adultery and its consequences can be re-shaped by legal, ethical, and sacramental rhetoric, the challenge to Arthur's right to rule early in his career as king demonstrates how his origins in adultery compromise his authority. Even though it can be quilted into the symbolic order of the family, adultery carries complications that threaten this order from within. This is clearly illustrated when Merlin first tries to defend Arthur's legitimacy in public. He gives the assembled barons the "cause" by which Arthur is to be king: "I shall telle yow the cause, for he is kynge Uther Pendragone sone borne in wedlok, goten on Igrayne, the dukes wyf of Tyntigail" (17.39–18.2). In what Patricia Ingham calls "a particularly maladroit choice of words" that "reasserts the problem of Arthur's legitimacy at the very moment of its putative solution" (202), Merlin's words highlight the dangers that lie behind the facts of Arthur's conception. Even if truthfulness has been advanced to mitigate the trespass, guilt, and illegitimacy caused by adultery, Merlin's inability to finesse the circumstances of Arthur's birth occurs precisely because he insists on a factually accurate account. Merlin does go on with his legalistic formula aimed at justifying Arthur's legitimacy, but as has been noted earlier, this does not necessarily convince. As Ingham notes, Merlin's rhetoric eventually shifts away from the past, and "remed[ies] the problem of Arthur's heritage

with the promise of a unified English hegemony," asserting that Arthur will rule over all of England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland (202).

If the rhetorical instability surrounding Arthur's origins is an effect of adultery, Arthur's difficulties are compounded by the fragile political alliances that are built around Uther's marriage to Igraine. Again, the threat comes from within the symbolic structure of the family. This is encapsulated in the challenge mounted by King Lot that eventually expands into the alliance of the eleven northern kings who war against Arthur's overlordship. This resistance first appears to be an extension of the objection that the English barons have to being "overgovernyd with a boye of no hyghe blood borne" (15.24–5). Yet unlike the barons, who recognize Arthur as king after "alle the comyns cryed at ones" (16.10–11) that they will have Arthur for king, Lot's resistance remains resolute, even after Merlin presents the legal proof of Arthur's legitimacy: "Some of the kynges had merveyll of Merlyns wordes and demed well that it shold be as he said, and som of hem lough hym to scorne as kyng Lot, and mo other called hym a wytche" (18.11–14). Merlin's proofs are meaningless to Lot. However, this rejection is not a random symbol of opposition to Arthur's rule. Instead, a context for Lot's opposition to Arthur's overlordship can be traced, if not fully fleshed out, from the political order that emerges after Uther marries Igraine. The legitimacy of Arthur's rule is thus troubled not only from a rhetorical standpoint, but also because there are political investments that remain tangled up with the marriage alliances Uther institutes.

When Uther takes Igraine for his wife, the effects of the adultery turned into marriage have political ramifications. Malory follows his French source in narrating that when Uther marries the recently widowed Igraine, he has to make provisions for Igraine's

daughters by Gorlois. These come in the form of marriages for Igraine's daughters, where Uther presumably ensures that they do not end up as dowerless spinsters. Following the fact that Uther and Igraine "were maryed in a mornynge with grete myrthe and joye" come the attendant marriages of Igraine's daughters:

And kynge Lott of Lowthean and of Orkenay thenne wedded Margawse that was Gaweyns moder, and kynge Nentres of the land of Garlot wedded Elayne: al this was done at the request of kynge Uther. And the thyrd syster, Morgan le Fey, was put to scole in a nonnery, and ther she lerned so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye. And after she was wedded to kynge Uryens of the lond of Gore that was syre Ewayns le Blaunche Maynys fader. (10.4–12)

Malory's compressed account of the marriage arrangements obscures the fact that Lot's willingness to marry Igraine's daughter is central in sealing the marriage between Uther and Igraine in the *Suite*.<sup>166</sup> Malory alludes to this when he writes "al this was done at the request of kynge Uther," but the motives behind the marriages are left unexplained. If this moment is compared with the corresponding material from the *Suite*, it becomes clear that other marriages that result from Uther's union to Igraine have a concessionary aspect. Uther's provision for Igraine's family and alliances from her prior marriage acts as the material guarantee that anchors the expected transfer of loyalty to him. At the same time, the marriage alliances that Uther requests also have the potential to benefit his political position. Robert Kelly interprets these marriages as "part of a border policy on Uther's

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<sup>166</sup> In the *Suite*, negotiations between Uther's deputy, Ulfyn, and Igraine's party determine how Uther can make amends for the death of Gorlois. Uther's marriage to Igraine as well as advantageous marriages for Igraine's family and friends are part of the deal. See "The Story of Merlin," pp. 206-8, for the account.

part—binding potentially rebellious border-kings to the royal family by marriage—obviously a failed policy, as its only result was that the rebel kings were given a stronghold in Cornwall" (83). This reading is reasonable as the *Morte* does not offer any details about the loyalties of the kings Lot, Nentres, or Uriens, and they might well have been antagonistic to Uther. However, in the *Suite*, Lot already is Uther's loyal feudal subject, and readily agrees to the marriage arrangements as an opportunity to demonstrate his fealty. When informed about the proposed marriage alliance, he tells Uther, "Sir, you will never ask me to do anything for the sake of your love and peace that I would not do very gladly" (Pickens 207). By marrying Igraine's children to men whose loyalties he can depend on, Uther manages the potential threat of insurrection from within the royal family.<sup>167</sup>

Yet why does Malory omit the details of how these marriage alliances come about in his efforts to summarize the action of his French source? One possibility is that the marriage arrangements are of interest to Malory's forward-looking narrative only because they present an opportunity to introduce Arthur's half-sisters as an ominous prelude to the troubles that Arthur will experience with Morgause and Morgan le Fay. At the same time, the *Morte's* silence about Lot's loyalty to Uther also reflects the difficulty in

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<sup>167</sup> Dorsey Armstrong comes to a similar conclusion about the role of the "wedding proliferation" in the *Morte*, though she does not refer to the *Suite*. She writes

The occurrence of these other marriages at the same time as Uther and Igrayne's sanctions the king's actions. At the same time, King Lot and King Nentres derive for their own unions important significance in that they are connected in a special way with the power and status of King Uther. Each of these marriages affirms and increases the significance of the other, and a double benefit is derived: for the community which is strengthened through acts of solidarity, and for each of the individuals of this community, who derived for themselves some measure of extra power and influence through their participation in this socially important ritual. (48)

reconciling the contradiction between having Arthur legitimized via the repeated assertion of being Uther's son and the need to have him prove himself against rebellious subjects. The northern kings' refusal to acknowledge Arthur in the *Suite* is more understandable as Uther actively disowns Arthur, an act that Merlin tries to reverse. Indeed, within the narrative logic of the *Suite*, Lot's fight against Arthur could well be taken as an extension of his loyalty to Uther; there, Merlin seems to be acting against Uther's wishes. In the *Suite*, an irony is present in the identity of the rebellious kings because they are the very ones who are part of political marriage alliances that Uther makes to appease Igraine's kin and supporters.

But having emphasized Arthur's lineage from Uther at several points in the narrative, and having alluded to at least some public knowledge of this fact, it makes narrative sense that the *Morte* dispenses with the characterization of Lot as Uther's loyal subject in order to magnify the opposition Arthur faces even though he appears to be a legitimate ruler. Having downplayed Lot's connection with Uther, Malory is able to magnify Lot's role as the leader of the rebellion as he pours scorn on Merlin's proof of Arthur's legitimacy and encourages the other kings to oppose Arthur: "Be we wel avysed to be aferd of a dreme-reder?" (18.36). However, even if his loyalty to Uther no longer features in the narrative, the familial connection between Arthur and Lot continues to cast a shadow over his rebellion. By dismissing Merlin's claims of Arthur's legitimacy, Lot also rejects the possibility of affiliation through marriage with Arthur, a connection that would make his subsequent rebellion against a legitimate sovereign doubly treacherous and an underlying possibility that Malory's audience would certainly have connected to the Wars of the Roses. The tension between the loyalty expected of familial alliances and

the will to power is compounded by the fact that two of the other rebel kings, Nentres and Uriens, are also related to Arthur through marriage to his half-sisters. The reader remains aware that the rebellion is also a family feud, even if those involved do not acknowledge the fact, created by the unwieldy sets of alliances that are forged when Uther marries Igraine. One implication of the marriage affiliations that lurk beneath the surface of the narrative is that, without Arthur's claim to the throne, Lot's family would have a strong claim to Uther's throne, given his marriage to Uther's oldest step-daughter. Even if Lot himself would not be able to lay hold of the crown, Gawain certainly would have a strong claim. Thus, while the text never makes Lot's rebellion about claiming Uther's crown for himself or his family, this possibility exists because of the complications that arise when Uther weds a widow with children in his haste to make his adulterous desire socially acceptable.

From a perspective that a large proportion of Malory's bourgeois-gentry readership would identify with, Lot's rebellion can be seen as a tussle over how Uther's estates would be distributed after his death, a matter that would depend on whether or not Igraine has children by Uther. With a marriage, a woman would receive a dower, or jointure, from her husband. On her husband's death, the widow in England would still keep possession of this dower, and could even bring it into a new marriage (Hanawalt, "Option" 144). A widow's children (and their spouses) from a previous marriage would stand to benefit indirectly as her wealth could certainly be shared with them while she were alive. The contestation over dower rights for widows in late medieval England has been shown by Sue Walker to have shaped the experience of widowhood in significant ways, where "[l]itigation about real property and appurtenant rights required that women,

especially widows, be an active part of that pervasive legal culture" (82). While Igraine does not feature at all in the disputes after Uther's death, Lot's rebellion could be read as reflecting the complications that a second marriage could bring to the issue of a widow's dower rights. With Uther's death, Igraine can expect to continue to have a large portion of his wealth at her disposal. And this is where Arthur's presence, if he is recognized as a legitimate child of Uther's, creates problems because it affects the size of the dower due to Igraine. English common law gave widows "one-third of the husband's estate for their life use, if the marriage produced children" but "[i]f the couple had no children, then the widow was entitled to one-half" (Hanawalt, "Option" 144). These concerns involving dower and inheritance would have resonated with the *Morte's* bourgeois-gentry readership as their social position and economic well-being could have been affected by these distinctions in the amount of dower due a widow.

With regard to how second marriages affected both the Lancastrian and Yorkist parties in the fifteenth century, high profile re-marriages complicated the socio-political status quo, though not quite in the same way as in the *Morte*. In particular, the existence of Henry VI's Tudor half-brothers meant that he had the opportunity to extend the Lancastrian power base. In the late 1420s, Henry V's widow, Katherine of Valois began an affair with the Welshman, Owen Tudor, whom she eventually married. Both children of this second marriage were treated well by their royal half-brother, Henry VI, and were created the Earls of Pembroke and Richmond in November 1452 (Weir, *Lancaster* 169). This move was significant, at least symbolically, for these earldoms had previously belonged to the dukes of Bedford and Gloucester, Henry VI's uncles. Henry VI, without siblings of his own, elevated his half-brothers as a counter-weight to Richard of York's

growing power. The Tudors, who were especially popular in Wales, where York also had territorial interests, ensured that those lands "became firmly Lancastrian" (Weir, *Lancaster* 170). Katherine's second marriage also had a great impact on the fortunes of the English monarchy, as her grandchild, Henry Tudor, eventually became Henry VII after he defeated the last Yorkist king, Richard III.

Another high-profile second marriage was the Yorkist king Edward IV's marriage to a widow, Elizabeth Woodville in 1464, a marriage which has been judged a "remarkable misalliance ... [whose] consequences were a matter of high political concern, and ultimately contributed largely to the downfall of the Yorkist dynasty" (Ross 87). While many of the problems caused by Edward's marriage to Elizabeth involved the lost opportunity to advance England's interests with a continental marriage alliance as well as the estrangement that the Woodvilles created between Edward and his most powerful supporter, Richard Neville, the earl of Warwick, some measure of this marriage's unpopularity can be attributed to the fact that Elizabeth brought with her two sons from a previous marriage. Charles Ross lists them as part of the "formidable liabilities" that Elizabeth brought to the Crown because they would have to be provided for (90). Elizabeth worked hard to secure wealthy heiresses for these sons from her first marriage, Thomas and Richard Grey, and her "repeated interference with the laws of inheritance for the benefit of the royal family gave several English magnates a vested interest in the downfall of the children of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville" (Ross 337).

Thus, even as the *Morte* transforms the adulterous desires of the bed-trick into a marriage that establishes the foundation of Arthur's rule, this marriage is somewhat compromised because it has its origins in secrecy and prior alliances. Even though

Arthur manages to fend off the challenges to his throne through the force of arms, thus successfully maintaining the symbolic order of the family that Uther and Merlin establish, further acts of revelation that involve him, Igraine, Morgause, and Morgan le Fay, expose more fully how fragile this symbolic order really is.

### **III. The Fantasy of Family: Adultery and Identity**

The nature of revelation traced in the previous section emphasized how such revelation plays a crucial role in establishing the family as a public institution that is ultimately directed at legitimizing Arthur's reign. Even though Lot's opposition shows the paradoxes of such a process, the attempts to contain Uther's adulterous encounter within the boundaries of the family are by and large successful. This section begins with an analysis of another moment of revelation that now deals with the adulterous encounter from a distance. The scene I examine has Igraine revealing the events of his conception to Arthur such that his origins are confirmed. However, the context and consequences of this revelation make it more difficult to manage than the earlier revelations. This act of revelation is not as well contained because it originates in Merlin's judgment on Arthur for having slept with his half-sister, Morgause, and initiates Arthur's problematic relationship with his siblings, Morgause and Morgan le Fay.

The narrative context of judgment in which Arthur's origins are revealed to him is important because it demonstrates how the experience of revelation causes knowledge to swerve away from its intended purpose. After committing incest with Morgause unknowingly, Arthur is confronted by Merlin, who first appears as a child, then as an old man, revealing to Arthur that "kyngge Uther was thy fadir and begate the on Igrayne"

(43.29–30) and foretelling how Arthur's acts of adultery–incest will have damaging consequences on the kingdom that he has struggled so hard to hold together:

[Y]e have done a thyng late that God ys displesed with you, for ye have leyene by youre syster and on hir ye have gotyn a childe that shalle destroy you and all the knyghtes of youre realme. (44.16–19)

Critics have noted that this moment of prophetic confrontation by Merlin recalls the biblical episode where the prophet Nathan conveys God's judgment on David after he has committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged for Uriah's death (Wilson-Okamura 28–9; Guerin 22–3). Rhetorically, Merlin's pronouncement is quite unlike his other prophetic utterances prior to and after this moment. Instead of merely telling of what will come to pass, Merlin invokes God's displeasure with Arthur. In the biblical instance, Nathan's message brings instant repentance and contrition in David, and in this sense, the revelation achieves its goal. However, this does not happen in Arthur's case, a difference caused largely because Merlin judges Arthur with knowledge that Arthur does not already possess: Merlin's words do not have the effect of causing Arthur to repent of his wrongdoing. While it is true that there is no evidence that Merlin intends for Arthur to repent, Merlin's revelation leads Arthur to desire more knowledge about himself, a desire that deflects the force of Merlin's judgment. Arthur becomes intrigued about his own past, and declares that Igraine be sent, for only "if she sey so hirselff, than woll I beleve hit" (45.2–3).

The actual scene where Igraine reveals to Arthur the circumstances of his conception also attracts other reactions that distract from the fact that Merlin's revelation was made in judgment. The scene begins with an outburst on the part of Ulphuns,

Uther's knight who knows about the bed-trick, where he accuses Igraine as being "the falsyst lady of the worlde, and the most traytours to the kynges person" (45.10–11). His accusation is based on the assertion that had Igraine publicly acknowledged Arthur as her son during the rebellion of the kings and barons, Arthur's reign would be secure. But Ulphuns's accusation does not make sense for several reasons. First, Igraine knows that the child conceived on the night of the bed-trick is Uther's, but she does not have knowledge of what has become of that child, for the child was taken away from her. Second, Ulphuns, along with Merlin and Arthur's foster father, Ector, already know that Arthur is Uther's child: the burden of convincing the kings and barons rests more squarely on their shoulders than on Igraine's. Indeed, when Igraine defends herself, arguing that Merlin should bear the most blame for the situation, Ulphuns weakly agrees: "Ye [Merlin] ar than more to blame than the queene" (46.4). Ulphuns's accusation, however, is interestingly worded because it inverts the language of honesty and fidelity, the language of "trouthe" with which Uther frames the earlier confession and revelation. Kenneth Hodges observes that Ulphuns's accusation, and Igraine's response, transform the queen from a passive object to one that actively influences the political situation: "Her faithfulness is still at issue, but now it is her faithfulness to her country, not her husband, and her story (at least in theory) has the power to decide who should be king. The challenge forces her to shift from prize to participation in royal politics" (44). While Hodges is right to observe that Ulphuns makes this a political moment, it should be remembered that this scene does not unfold with the primary goal of affirming or proving Arthur's right to rule. It is true that Arthur receives confirmation about his birth origins from Igraine at a crucial point of his reign: Within the narrative, the alliance of kings led

by Lot has beaten a retreat, and Arthur's allies from the continent, Bans and Bors, have returned to their own kingdoms. However, by this point, Arthur's rule enjoys a measure of stability; in fact, that he can have an affair with the wife of his erstwhile enemy indicates this. Already proven in battle, his hold on authority is much firmer even if he now faces a new threat in the person of King Royns. Thus, Ulphuns's accusation, which reads Igraine's arrival at Court as reviving the issue of Arthur's legitimacy, not only is irrelevant in that Arthur has already established himself through the force of arms, but also distracts from the purpose of Merlin's revelation, which is to judge Arthur's adultery–incest and not Igraine's lack of disclosure.

Yet Ulphuns's accusation indicates how the moment of revelation throws the narrative off the course intended by Merlin, a deviation that begins when Arthur shows more interest in finding out about his origins than in affirming that his origins confirm his guilt. Through Ulphuns's interjection, the whole question of incest is pushed aside, and Merlin, the original judge, himself is judged for not arranging for Igraine to bear witness to Arthur's birth earlier. In fact, when it is finally established that Arthur is indeed Uther and Igraine's child, the scene transforms yet again, and the picture of mother–child affection swerves the narrative even farther away from its initial aim of proving that Arthur has indeed committed incest: "And therewith kyng Arthure toke his modir, quene Igrayne, in hys armys and kyssed her, and eythir wepte uppon other. Than the kynge lete make a feste that lasted eyght dayes" (46.12–15). Thus, when the revelation of his origins enters the field of social knowledge, the threatening fact of his incest, the very fact that motivates Merlin to reveal to Arthur his origins, disappears from view. In its place, the much more reassuring picture of a reunion is held up as the conclusion of this

particular episode. A fantasy portrait of the idealized family emerges to cover all manner of ills.

The culmination of the scene in an affective outpouring is important, especially since this is one of the few moments at which Arthur himself displays emotion in a public setting.<sup>168</sup> Even though the scene of physical embraces and tears clearly uses conventionalized gestures to emphasize the importance of blood relations, the display of affect overshadows the negative implications of this revelation of kinship: the fact that Arthur has committed incest with his half-sister. Malory's version of events displays characteristic economy of narrative in that he dispenses with an elaborate sequence of evidence and proof that Merlin concocts in the *Suite du Merlin*. In the *Suite*, Arthur is already convinced about this parentage and his meeting with Igraine merely stages this knowledge more publicly, for Merlin orchestrates the revelation by showing how the partial recollections of the parties must logically point to Arthur's position as Uther's legitimate heir.<sup>169</sup> In contrast, there is more at stake in the scene of re-union in the *Morte*. Arthur genuinely wants proof of his parentage, and Merlin's and Ector's simple affirmations that Igraine is indeed Arthur's mother, as well as Igraine's recollections, convince Arthur of his parentage. In this way, the mother-child bond takes center stage

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<sup>168</sup> Other moments when Arthur shows this depth of emotion all involve family members. When Arthur is re-united with Gareth, a scene I discuss below, he shows this depth of emotion. Another memorable instance occurs when Gawain lies dying after they invade England to quell Mordred's rebellion: "When kyng Arthur knew that he [Gawain] was layde so low he wente unto hym and so fownde hym. And there the kyng made grete sorow oute of mesure, and toke sir Gawayne in hys armys, and thryse he there sowned" (1230.6–9)

<sup>169</sup> This sequence is recounted in the *Post-Vulgate Merlin Continuation*, pp. 172–5. There, Arthur is privy to the staging of this knowledge and it is Igraine who is the unknowing subject to whom this knowledge of Arthur's parentage is revealed.

in Malory's version, and the emotion that this reunion produces establishes the primacy of Arthur's newfound familial relations.

Even as the scene establishes the primacy of the parent–child bond, there is a paradoxical reticence to present Arthur's family as a natural, self-evident entity. One element that is noticeably absent from this scene of recognition is any evidence that Igraine is biologically linked to Arthur. The physical resemblance (or its lack) between parents and their children is an important marker of kinship in the *Morte*. For instance, unlike his brothers, Torre does not resemble the cowherd Ayres, the man whom he thinks is his father—"all [Torre's brothers] were shapyn muche lyke the poore man [Ayres], but Torre was nat lyke hym nother in shappe ne in countenaunce" (100.17–19)—and this sets the stage for the revelation that he is really Pellinore's son. Galahad's resemblance to Lancelot—"[S]om seyde he [Galahad] resembled much unto sir Launcelot" (862.1)—forces Guinevere to concede grudgingly that "sir Launcelot begate hym on kynge Pelles doughter" (862.2). Unlike Torre and Galahad, Arthur no longer has a living father to whom he can be compared physically, though this would by no means prevent a resemblance to Uther from being noticed. Cory Rushton observes that, in the *Morte*, familial links are also indicated by "an unconscious recognition of kinship," as is the case between Gawain and Gareth, and Lancelot and Galahad, where "Malory emphasizes the unconscious call of blood to blood" (141). Yet Arthur's identity is neither constituted on the basis of physical resemblance nor through this intuitive sense of blood relation but through his mother's memory and Merlin's testimony. As the narrative attempts to give Arthur some grounding in a "natural" blood tie with his mother, it simultaneously shows

how that bond is largely dependent on the reconstruction of past events, filtered through speech and testimony, and not a fact that is immediately evident.

A broader consequence of Arthur's reunion with his mother is that it introduces the family as a domestic entity that eventually undermines Arthur's chivalric fellowship. Unlike Torre or Galahad, whose recognition as the sons of highborn knights predicts their masculine prowess and knightly success, Arthur's discovery of his family does not have this straightforward effect. McCracken has observed an ambivalent effect of the maternal connection in Grail romance that is applicable to the Igraine's revelation to Arthur:

Even though mothers generally disappear in the Grail stories, they do make an appearance. Their actions are largely limited to conception and birth, but their obvious importance to the engendering of heroic sons puts mothers in the ambivalent position of being necessary and superfluous, desirable and disposable, pure and treacherous. ("Mothers" 37)

While Igraine's revelation grounds Arthur in family, it also institutes familial relations that do eventually become "treacherous." Arthur's discovery of family links him to Morgause and Morgan le Fay, whose presence as half-sisters pose challenges to Arthur's authority. Arthur's relationships with his half-sisters exemplify a tension between the family that he wants to affirm as providing him a core identity and the pressures that the family brings to bear on his authority.

The most dramatic instance of Arthur's problematic relationship with his sisters is the fact that he commits incest with Morgause. Most critical discussion of Arthur's

relationship with his sister centers on this sensational fact;<sup>170</sup> yet interestingly, the knowledge of incest does not provoke an immediate reaction from Arthur. His reaction to the knowledge that he has committed incest is relatively subdued and oddly overshadowed by the joy of being re-united with his mother. Yet the incest, and Merlin's prophecy that the child of the union will bring the kingdom to doom does provoke retaliation from Arthur, if not contrition and repentance. The knowledge that he has committed incest causes Arthur to take the law into his own hands in the single moment in the *Morte* where Arthur's ruthlessness can only be described as tyrannical. Having learned from Merlin that the child of their incestuous union will be born "on May-day," Arthur proceeds to order that all children born in that month, including Mordred, be gathered up and sent to their deaths on a ship (55.21–28). Mordred, as the product of incest, cannot be fit into the structure of Arthur's joyful reunion with his family, and Arthur's own discovery of family is commemorated ironically by the sacrifice of many other children.

As important as the knowledge of incest and its consequences are in determining the relationship between Arthur and Morgause, there are other moments in the *Morte* where the tensions in the sibling relationship comment more subtly on the pressures

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<sup>170</sup> Extrapolating from Merlin's warnings about the consequences of incest, Thomas Rumble shows how "the incident of Arthur's incestuous begetting of Mordred ... set[s] in motion a chain of events which, almost totally unconnected in his French sources, provide a dominant and carefully planned underplot for the entire *Le Morte Darthur*" (167). Wilson-Okamura argues that the incest is not the key issue because it is the product of ignorance. Arthur's graver sin is that of adultery (19) and Beverly Kennedy mitigates Arthur's sins by arguing that in rebelling against Arthur, Lot loses the right to feudal reciprocity, making Morgause fair game ("Adultery" 71). Armstrong contends that Morgause's encounter with Arthur is dangerous to the order of Arthurian society not because of the incestuous connection but because "she agrees to commit the sin of adultery" and it is "her active role in the exchange of her body that threatens the patriarchal social order of Arthur's kingdom" (52).

Arthur faces in balancing his sense of obligation to his kin and his position of power. Even though these moments do not involve the revelation of adultery, they are also structured by the experience of coming into knowledge, where secret identities and affairs are revealed. One of the most interesting of these instances occurs in the "Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney," in which Morgause uses her position as sibling to the king to insinuate that Arthur does not have proper control over his own court. Gareth, having arrived incognito at Arthur's court, has been given a lowly position as a kitchen-boy by Arthur's steward, Kay. After a year's service, he leaves court on a quest that Arthur grants him, with his true identity as the king's nephew still unknown by the knights of the Round Table, including his older brothers. During his quest, Morgause comes to Arthur's court in a manner that emphasizes her royal status—"there com in the quene of Orkenay with ladyes and knyghtes a grete numbir" (338.36–339.1)—and demands that Arthur account for Gareth's whereabouts as well as the way he has been treated, thus revealing Gareth's true identity:

Where have ye done my yonge son, sir Gareth? For he was here amongyst you a twelve-monthe, and ye made a kychyn knave of hym, the whyche is shame to you all. Alas! Where have ye done nowne dere son that was my joy and blysse?  
(339.6–10)

Morgause's complaint is interesting because she does not come as a victim or with a plea for help, the usual modes of address that women proffer at Arthur's court. Instead, she is on the offensive, accusing Arthur's court of shameful behavior. This is emphasized again a few moments later when Morgause explicitly uses the kin relationship between them to intensify the wrongdoing on Arthur's part: "'A, brothir!' seyde the quene, 'ye dud yourself

grete shame whan ye amongyst you kepte my son in the kychyn and fedde hym lyke an hogge" (339.16–18). In drawing upon her sibling connection to Arthur, Morgause indicates that the gravity of Arthur's misjudgment stems from his inability to recognize Gareth's innate nobility as well as the fact that he is related to Arthur by blood. It is true that it may be reasonable for Morgause, with Lot's death, to be looking out for the social standing of her children, yet this moment is constructed such that Morgause uses her position as Arthur's sister to receive public hearing of her maternal concern for her "dere son," her "joy and blysse." In this moment of revelation, made possible because she possesses knowledge that Arthur's court does not, Morgause manages to comment on the policies and politics of a masculine circle where her criticism would otherwise carry little weight.

Arthur is affected by her speech and he responds in kind. He reciprocates Morgause's terms of sibling address repeatedly when he attempts to excuse himself and the court for not recognizing Gareth:

"Fayre sister," seyde kynge Arthur, "ye shal ryght well wete that I knew hym nat, nother no more dud sir Gawayne nothir his bretherne.... Also, sistir, mesemyth ye myght have done me to wete of his comynge, and than, if I had nat done well to him, ye myght have blamed me." (339.19–25)

Even though Morgause accepts Arthur's explanations, again framing her acquiescence in terms of respecting their bonds of kinship—"Brother," seyde the quene, 'all that ye sey we believe hit'" (340.14)—she pursues her criticism of Arthur's court more indirectly by turning upon Kay as she reminds the court of Kay's demeaning treatment of Gareth:

"But I mervayle," seyde she, "that sir Kay dud mok and scorne hym and gaff hym to name Bewmaynes; yet sir Kay," seyde the quene, "named hym more ryghteuously than he wende for I dare sey he is a fayre an handid man and well disposed, and he be on lyve, as ony lyvyng." (340.17–21)

Morgause's re-direction of her displeasure towards Kay contains more than a sarcastic jibe at the king's steward. Having had to respect her brother's explanation because he panders to her by using that familial relation and also because he is king, she seeks an easier target. By drawing attention to the unintentional appropriateness of Kay's insult, Morgause seizes upon Kay's inability to recognize noble character or blood. Beneath the apparent light-heartedness of Morgause's sarcasm is the fact that Kay himself is also "related" to Arthur, as they grew up in the same household and has his position as steward by virtue of the fact that he is Arthur's foster brother. Morgause may be implying that Kay's less than honorable behavior betrays his less than noble origins. Unlike Arthur, Gareth, and herself, he does not descend from royal blood, and thus should not have the same level of influence within Arthur's court as she does. Morgause not only undermines Arthur's authority by questioning his steward's actions but implies that Arthur's faux pas has occurred because he entrusts the organization of his court to one who lies outside the elite circle of their own noble lineage. By insisting on the affront to her son, she makes public display of her status as Arthur's blood relation. Interestingly, unlike Arthur, Kay is given no opportunity to offer a reply for his actions, a silence that marks his social inferiority. Instead, it is up to Arthur to put an end to Morgause's accusations, which he does in a terse request: "Sistir," seyde Arthure, "lat

this langage now be styllle, and by the grace of God he [Gareth] shall be founde and he be within this seven realmys" (340.22–3).

As this episode develops, Arthur becomes an eager avuncular figure, who goes to great lengths to seek out Gareth and give him the social recognition Morgause demands. Arthur organizes a tournament whose primary objective is to lure Gareth to return to court and to give Gareth a stage on which he can display his martial prowess. After Gareth is victorious and has shed his disguise, Arthur comes to him and displays the same kind of intense emotion that characterized his own reunion with Igraine:

So whan the kynge cam there, he saw sir Gawayne and sir Gareth.... Than the kynge avoyded his horse, and whan he cam nye to sir Gareth he wold a spokyn and myght nat, and therewyth he sanke downe in a swoghe for gladness.... Wete you well the kynge made grete joy! And many a peteuous complaynte he made to sir Gareth, and ever he wepte as he had bene a chylde. (358.11–20)

Again, while the conventional outpouring of emotion governing family reunions is used here, the extent to which Arthur is stripped of his masculine authority is quite startling. There is an inappropriate excess in Arthur's reaction that hints at the more complicated relationship between Arthur and the Orkneys. Even as Arthur's extravagant display of emotion involves the "grete joy" of according a blood relation the honor due his nature, there also seems to be an element of guilt and a desire for absolution that exceeds Gareth's ill-treatment. I suggest that this moment, for all its joy, also alludes to Arthur's "unnatural" relationship with Morgause and Mordred, and how the incestuous relationship as well as his parentage of Mordred remains suspended, an unresolved fact

that haunts Arthur's dealings with the Orkneys, given Mordred's survival of the May-day killings.

As critics have observed, one of the most obvious omissions in the *Morte* involves the fact that Mordred's return to Arthur's court is never narrated, despite Malory's promise to tell of it: "Mordred was cast up, and a good man founde hym, and fostird hym tylle he was fourtene yere of age, and than brought hym to the courte, as hit rehersith aftirward and towarde the ende of the Morte Arthure" (55.30–3). P.J.C Field argues that not too much should be made of the omission, and that the omitted reunion between Arthur and Mordred could be explained by Malory's increased knowledge of his French sources, where Mordred is already present as an adult, or simply that Malory forgot that such a promise had been made in the "Tale of King Arthur" (101). Rushton makes more of the omission, arguing that it cannot be staged because it would run counter to the values embodied by Arthurian society: "Certainly, if the reader did see Arthur meeting his unexpected son Mordred, Malory could not use his standard phrase for a father and son reunion; if Arthur was seen to be 'well pleased' with his son Mordred, it would seriously undermine the reader's confidence in Arthur's instincts" (142).

Hence, it is possible to read Arthur's reunion with Gareth as containing displaced emotions relating to his "unnatural" ties with Morgause and Mordred. In particular, the "peteous complaynte[s]" that he makes and the fact that he "wepte as he had bene a chylde" depict Arthur in a state of contrition that far outweighs the mistreatment of Gareth. The description of Arthur's weeping like a child is particularly arresting, as the simile occurs in only one other place in the *Morte*, at the conclusion of the episode where Launcelot successfully heals Sir Urry: "Than kynge Arthur and all the kynges and

knyghtes kneled downe and gave thankynges and lovynges unto God and unto Hy Blyssed Modir. And ever sir Launcelote wepte, as he had bene a chylde that had bene beatyn!" (1152.33–6). Apart from having partial analogues, both the "Tale of Sir Gareth" and "The Healing of Sir Urry" are episodes in the *Morte* that are regarded as Malory's original contributions to Arthuriana (Norris 136), and Malory's use of the weeping child to figure Arthur and Launcelot suggests a similarity in these moments. In Launcelot's case, his ability to heal Urry at the end of a tale that most fully develops his adulterous relationship with Guinevere suggests that this is a moment where he feels properly chastised by God, who enables him to perform the miracle even though Launcelot is well aware that his conduct has been less than perfect.<sup>171</sup> Similarly, Arthur's weeping could be a measure of his own chastisement that is mixed with gratitude. Despite having performed an unnatural act with his sister, he still has access to family in this reunion with Gareth. In this context, Arthur's emotional outburst can be regarded as a process by which he works through the impossibility of his relations with Morgause and Mordred, which must remain unacknowledged within the structures of the family. In this tearful reunion, Arthur's need for acknowledged family strains at the boundaries of his publicly accepted filiation as brother and uncle to the members of the Orkney clan. This scene, coupled with his eagerness to promote Gareth's interests, figures him as a parent to Gareth, vicariously positioning him to act out the impossibility of family with Morgause or Mordred.

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<sup>171</sup> Earl R. Anderson provides a useful summary of the various critical interpretations to unravel the meaning behind Launcelot's tears in his reading of this episode. A good number of these interpret Launcelot's tears as indicating feelings of contrition, unworthiness, and overwhelming gratitude at being able to perform the miracle (46).

A second instance that involves Morgause illustrates how acts of revelation accentuate the tensions between factions in Arthur's court and how Arthur's sense of kinship affects his authority. Morgause is involved in an affair with Lamorak, a son of Pellinore, and thus a hated rival of the Orkney brothers. In plotting to kill Lamorak, the Orkney brothers use their mother to lure him to his death: "Thenne by the meane of sir Gawayn and his bretheren they sente for her moder there besydes, fast by a castel besyde Camelot, alle was to that entente to slee sir Lamorak" (611.34–7). In the heat of the moment, confronted with the physical reality that his mother is sleeping with the enemy, Gaheris fails to execute the planned slaying of Lamorak, kills Morgause— "[H]e gate his modir by the heyre and strake of her hede" (612.10–1)—and allows Lamorak to escape. Morgause's death at the hands of her own son causes the rivalry between the Orkneys and the sons of Pellinore to spread throughout the Round Table, as Gaheris is banished from Arthur's court, and other knights, such as Launcelot and Tristram begin to take Lamorak's side in the matter. Later in the narrative, while pledging that he will protect Lamorak from the Orkneys, Arthur's vexed relationship with his kin comes to the fore. On one hand, the fact that the Orkneys are related to Arthur by blood causes Lamorak to desist from hunting them down: "[I]f hit were nat at the reverence of youre hyghnes, I sholde be revenged uppon sir Gawayne and his bretherne" (664.7–9). However, Arthur himself has been unable to keep his nephews in check and his eagerness to claim the Orkneys as his kin, illustrated by reunion with Gareth discussed above, does not translate into an ability to mitigate their lust for revenge.

Despite this, Arthur remains a naïve believer in the stabilizing effect of family bonds, and he thinks that the best way to have dealt with Lamorak and Morgause's affair

would have been to turn it into a marriage alliance: "Hit had bene mucche fayrer and bettir that ye hadde wedded her, for ye ar a kynges sonne as well as they" (664.4–5). It is fitting that Arthur's proposed marriage solution is fantasized only after Morgause is dead, for enacting it would have been no solution to the antagonism. Critics have observed how the relationship between Lamorak and Morgause is an insult to the Orkney clan. Beverly Kennedy argues that Gawain's anger with the affair stems from the dishonor that it brings his family, from the fact that her liaison with Lamorak is a sign that Gawain "lacks sufficient power either to protect or control her" ("Adultery" 66). Other critics see the Orkneys' anger at the affair between Lamorak and Morgause as inflected by the desire to protect their inheritance, for marriage between Morgause and Lamorak would affect their inheritance adversely (Cherewatuk 106–7; Kim 49). In this light, Arthur's proposed marriage alliance would be untenable, and would aggravate rather than resolve the tension. Thus, when Arthur proposes the marriage to Lamorak as a missed opportunity, Arthur appears sorely out of touch with the realities of the inter-familial feud, even blinded by his ideals about the recuperative effects of the family.

The revelation that Arthur has half-sisters through Igraine also introduces the most problematic sibling relationship in the *Morte*, the one between Arthur and Morgan le Fay. This sibling relationship becomes threatening when Arthur places too much trust in family, and entrusts Morgan with Excalibur. Arthur's decision to entrust the weapon to Morgan is somewhat surprising as it comes as a response to Merlin's warning, who tells him, "Loke ye kepe well the scawberd of Excaleber, for ye shall lose no bloode whyle ye have the scawberde uppon you" (78.25–6). Yet instead of keeping the weapon himself, "for grete trust Arthure betoke the scawberde unto Morgan le Fay, hys sister" (78.28–9),

completely oblivious to the fact that Morgan "wolde have had Arthure hir brother slayne" (78.31). Armstrong argues that Arthur's decision to trust Morgan with the sword is not as thoughtless as it first appears. She argues that the various characters "ignore or manipulate the rules of the Pentecostal Oath when attempting to fulfill a perceived obligation to his or her kin." As such, Arthur is not necessarily naive in assuming that "as his sister and wife of one of his strongest allies Morgan would be the safest choice as a guardian for Excalibur and its scabbard" (61). Even so, giving the weapon to his sister for safekeeping seems redundant if Arthur's primary concern is its safety. Instead, one could read Arthur's decision as an attempt to strengthen his kinship ties: he leaves Excalibur with Morgan in order to affirm his trust in her because they are related by blood. This reading is consistent with Arthur's eagerness to form familial links with his half-siblings and also explains why Arthur acts in contradiction to Merlin's warning.

Arthur's misplaced assumptions about the positive ties of kinship are demonstrated when Morgan's motives for making a counterfeit Excalibur and planning Arthur's death at the hands of her lover, Accolon, are revealed. Morgan's hatred for Arthur originates ironically from the fact that he is related to her by blood. Accolon explains that "kyng Arthur ys the man in the worlde that she hatyth moste, because he is moste of worship and of prouesse of ony of hir bloode" (145.33–5). Instead of affirming the family in the manner that Arthur tries to do, Morgan's view of her kinship with Arthur takes on a perverse competitiveness. While it is not clear why Morgan experiences this hateful envy, it is possible that she considers Arthur's pre-eminence as detracting from her own power. In this sense, her hatred of her most illustrious male relation is an affront

to patriarchal order, for a sibling relationship with the king would otherwise be valued for all the benefits that the relation would entail.

Morgan's hatred for Arthur is twinned with adulterous desire, for despite being married to Uriens, she is also Accolon's lover. Thinking that Accolon has managed to kill Arthur, Morgan enacts her own plan to kill her husband, Uriens, presumably so that she can wield power with Accolon as she assumes they now have possession of Excalibur. Even though Morgan's plan to behead her husband is foiled by her son, Uwain, who catches her in the act, Morgan demonstrates how acting on her desire and taking direct action to destroy male figures of authority disrupts the notion of the family unit as a stable institution of patriarchal control. Unlike Arthur, who goes out of his way to establish himself as a member of the family, Morgan rejects these ties of kinship and marriage.

Despite the way that Morgan's acts are an affront to the patriarchal family, Arthur responds with a stubborn insistence that the family must ultimately bear responsibility for her actions. In a subsequent episode, Arthur narrowly escapes death when Morgan sends a lady bearing him an enchanted mantle as a gift. Arthur's own vanity, as well as his continued belief in the integrity of his own family, nearly causes his death:

And the damesell seyde, "Your sister sendyth you this mantell and desyryth that ye sholde take this gyfte of hir, and what thyng she hath offended she wol amende hit at your owne plesure." Whan the kynge behelde this mantell hit pleased hym much. (157.16–20)

It takes one positioned outside the family, the Lady of the Lake, to warn Arthur not to put the mantle on. Even though he may be playing the part of gracious king and sibling,

Arthur's inability to discern Morgan's true motives is quite startling, considering that this episode immediately follows his discovery of Morgan's treachery with Excalibur, where he vows that he will be "sore avenged uppon hir, that all Crystendom shall speke of hit" (146.21–2). The fact that Arthur forgets this vow so quickly does suggest that he is angered more by Morgan's sibling betrayal than by the danger posed to his life, hence his eagerness to accept the mantle as Morgan's peace offering.

When it has become apparent that he cannot control, or even fathom his sister's plans and desires, Arthur turns upon the men of Morgan's immediate family, her husband Uriens and son Uwain, even though Morgan has repeatedly acted independently of them. In an illogical, frustrated outburst, Arthur accuses Uriens of being a conspirator with Morgan, absolves him, and then turns his suspicions on Uwain:

Than was the kynge wondirly wroth more than he was toforehande, and seyde unto kynge Uryence, "My sistir, your wyff, is allway aboute to betray me, and welle I wote other ye or my nevewe, your son, is accounsyle with hir to have me destroyed. But as for you," seyde the kynge unto kynge Uryence, "I deme nat gretly that ye be of counseyle, for Accolon confessed to me his owne mowthe that she wolde have destroyed you as well as me; therefore y holde you excused. But as for your son sir Uwayne, I holde hym suspect. Therefore I charge you, putt hym oute of my courte." (158.2–13)

By accusing the men of Morgan's family of conspiring with Morgan, Arthur demonstrates how he cannot believe that a woman who is related to him by blood could act independently to plot his death. In this sense, despite the the patriarchal unit's utter failure to contain Morgan, Arthur's assignation of blame continues to re-inscribe male

authority at the very site where it has failed. The urgency of Arthur's ineffectual (and inaccurate) assignation of blame to the male figures betrays an anxiety about female desire and initiative dismantling the structures of the family. Ironically, even though his accusation is shaped by a demand for male responsibility for Morgan's actions, both Arthur and Uriens are figured as victims of Morgan's plots, and Arthur's only recourse is to send a member of the next generation, Uwain, into exile. The fact that Arthur turns upon Uwain is interesting as it betrays an anxiety about the relationship that mothers might have with their sons that might short-circuit the logic of patriarchal succession and paternal influence. Arthur, who should be the paragon of male authority, pathetically tries to reinstate his authority by banishing an innocent knight. The threat posed by Morgan's hate and adulterous desire leads to a moment where the male fellowship comes under stress, a strain more acutely felt in the fact that Gawain leaves Arthur's court as well in a show of solidarity with his cousin. Consequently, the loss of control over the family unit results in the breaking up of other social institutions as well.

In this section, by examining the importance of knowledge about one's family in the construction of Arthur's identity, I have shown that this knowledge of family has ambivalent effects. Even if Arthur is eager to consolidate his kinship ties, the knowledge of family is tainted by desires that cannot be as easily subsumed under the law of the family as was the case with Uther's adulterous encounter. In particular, Arthur's own adulterous affair with Morgause, Morgause's desire for Lamorak, and Morgan's adultery are revealed in ways that undermine the stability of the family, rather than become stabilized by the family.

Lacan's third graph of desire, which is a complication of graph two, illustrates how the family is a symbolic order that now cannot fully contain the consequences of knowledge that arise from Arthur's past and his newfound family ties. In contrast to the moments of revelation involving Merlin and Uther that serve their political goals, the subject who now emerges with knowledge about the family does not have his needs fully met by the family. Each of the instances involving revelation of family or adultery show how this knowledge extends beyond the stabilizing boundaries of the family. When Igraine's connection to Arthur is revealed, Merlin's intended judgmental use of kinship ties is interrupted by the joy of reunion, and yet the trauma of incest also hovers over the re-discovery of family. At the same time, while Arthur is now rooted in a broader kinship structure, this also causes ambivalent links with his half-sisters to be forged. The effects of this tension, of wanting to fully acknowledge family while being haunted by the threats that appear with the establishment of family, appear irreconcilable. For instance, Arthur's uncle–nephew reunion with Gareth also becomes the occasion where his displaced feelings about his own "unnatural" relationship with Morgause and Mordred emerge. Further, in trying to capitalize on his blood-relationship with Morgan, Arthur ends up dramatizing the weakness of kinship bonds in containing desire and envy. In each of these cases, Arthur's feelings about family end up showing that the encounter with the symbolic order opens up a gap between the subject's demand and what the family can fulfill. This gap, which Lacan views as the production of desire, is illustrated in Figure 5.2.

The gap that emerges at the top of the graph indicates how need can never be fully satisfied by the Other. What the subject wants is not fully consonant with what the Other

can provide and this institutes "the realm of desire (d on the graph) that comes into play, desire that introduces a gap or space between the subject and the Other" (Fink 120).

Lacan's Third Graph of Desire can be found on page 690 of *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink. The graph is also available in Slavoj Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, on page 111.

#### Figure 5.2 Lacan's Third Graph of Desire

Even though the emergence of the desiring subject suggests the inadequacy of the symbolic order in containing desire, desire is not understood as emerging autonomously. Instead, desire itself is product of the perceived failure of the symbolic order's ability to attend to the subject's needs, from the fact that the Other does not contain all the answers: "the Other's question—that comes back to the subject from the place from which he expects an oracular reply—which takes some such form as 'Che vuoi?,' 'What do you want?,' is the question that best leads the subject to the path of his own desire" (Lacan 690). This is true in Arthur's experience with the family, as his attempts to affirm his family as a totalizing and secure structure are crucial in revealing the excesses—Arthur's

response to incest and Mordred; Morgan and Morgause's feminine desire—that cannot be contained by the family in the same way that Uther's adulterous designs were. Despite the emergence of the gap between what the individual wants and what the family can fulfill, we have seen how Arthur continues to place his trust in the family as a unit of trust, stability, and accountability. This fantasy—represented on the graph by the matheme  $(\mathcal{S} \diamond o)$ —is an attempt to fill in the gap and restore authority to the structures of the family. In fantasy, the subject,  $\mathcal{S}$ , continues to trust that the Other contains a special quality, the Lacanian *objet petit a*, that has thus far eluded the subject's grasp. The subject believes that this quality, once possessed, will fill in the space created by the dissonance between the subject and the Other. Hence, even though these moments of revelation expose the inadequacies of the family, Arthur falls back upon the fantasy of the family as the unit that stabilizes identity and social interaction.

The dissonance created by his experience of the family and his persistence in upholding the integrity of the family mean that Arthur, despite his best efforts, can never quite become the confident patriarch of the family unit, for, to use Žižek's turn of phrase, he "cannot come to terms with this interpellation" (114). The fantasy that Arthur tries to nurture about the validity of the family unit as an institution of integrity and stability comes under assault when he has to deal with Guinevere's adulterous relationship with Launcelot.

#### **IV. "Shamefull Noyse": Accusation and Adultery**

In the final book of the *Morte*, the most dramatic, and perhaps most consequential revelation of adultery takes place when Guinevere and Lancelot are accused of and

caught in adultery by Agravaine and Mordred. This event, which leads to the dissolution of the Round Table and unleashes violence amongst the fellowship of men, is key in establishing how the knowledge of adultery is a transgressive force against the family. Unlike the acts of revelation involving Uther and Merlin, the discovery of adultery cannot here be controlled and takes on a life of its own. No amount of re-narration can domesticate this moment; indeed, it is narration itself that makes the revelation of Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery so threatening. Further, this episode unfolds in a manner that forces Arthur to abandon the consolations that he finds in the fantasy of the family.

In part, the fantasy of the family has to be abandoned by Arthur because of the long-standing nature of the relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot. Prior to the final book, the passages that describe the interactions between Guinevere and Lancelot in the *Morte*, coupled with Guinevere's apparent jealousy that Lancelot has fathered Galahad, and the gossip that surrounds their relationship seem to imply an on-going consummated adulterous relationship. R.M. Lumiansky represents this view when he argues that the effect of the passages relating the relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot in the "Tale of Tristram" indicate "the commencement of adultery and its development to a degree that awareness of it has spread widely" (208). Thus, when Malory describes that the two spend the night together after Lancelot breaks into Guinevere's cell when the queen is held captive by Meleagant in "The Knight of the Cart" episode—"sir Launcelot wente to bedde with the quene and toke no force of hys hurte honde, but toke hys plesaunce and hys lykyng untyll hit was the dawnyng of the day"

(1131.28–31)—the incident seems to be merely the most graphically described incident in a long-running affair where Lancelot cuckolds the king.

However, other critics have noticed that Malory is much more reticent than the French sources in affirming that Lancelot and Guinevere do indeed engage in illicit sex. For example, following the above quoted account of Lancelot spending the night with Guinevere, the apparently clear-cut insinuation of sexual activity is made ambiguous by the phrase—"for wyte you well he slept nat, but wacched" (1131.31–2). This sentence, addressed to the audience, seems calculated to admonish the reader's assumptions that the night is filled with love-making because it re-establishes Lancelot as a loyal sentinel, even though he "toke hys plesaunce and hys lykyng." Thus, critics have rallied around such moments to question easy assumptions about what actually takes place between Lancelot and Guinevere. For instance, commenting on this sequence, Robert Sturges observes that this "seems a straightforward enough description of adultery until we reach the final clause," suggesting the possibility that "Lancelot's 'pleasaunce' and 'lykyng' [are] perhaps to be found simply in guarding his lady,... foreclos[ing] the possibility of any definitive answer" (59). Even though Kennedy concedes that in this passage, adultery does actually occur, she argues that this is its the sole instance in the *Morte*. Referring to the long "Book of Tristram," she observes that "Malory has carefully and consistently omitted all evidence of any actual adultery between Lancelot and Guinevere" and that Morgan le Fay's allegations of adultery do not indicate the couple's guilt but the contrary ("Adultery" 73). In another article, Kennedy explicates Malory's description of Guinevere as a "trew lover" by maintaining that after the "one possible instance of treasonable adultery" in "The Knight of the Cart," every other subsequent meeting

between the two has chaste intentions. Even when they are caught in the queen's room by Agravaine's posse, Kennedy argues that Guinevere's comparison of "her willingness to die to that of a Christian martyr suggests that she has, indeed, repented her earlier sin and does not now fear death, knowing that she is innocent" ("Trew Lover" 25–27). More generally, the ambiguities surrounding what actually happens in their relationship and how it should be interpreted have prompted Elizabeth Scala to write

Malory's depiction of their relationship is infamous for the way in which it defies his own attempts at an explanation. Malory goes to great lengths to rationalize the events that make his hero cuckold his king and his heroine commit adultery. Oaths, trials, and ordeals continually "prove" the lovers' innocence in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. More importantly, Malory attempts to keep the relationship outside of physical terms. (387)

The critical response that Malory's depiction of the affair illustrates how the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere, regardless of whether it can be or should be verified as an adulterous affair, differs from the earlier moments of adultery as an object of knowledge. In Uther's bed-trick, the event is easily verifiable and its effects are controlled by Uther and Merlin. In that instance, acts of revelation control the consequences of adultery quite fully, managing to subsume adultery within an ideal of family that emphasizes lineage and continuity. Even in the revelation of the affair to Arthur by Igraine, the veracity of the event is not contested. This is also true when Arthur's adulterous–incestuous episode with Morgause is handled or Morgan le Fay's adultery with Accolon is revealed. The incidents of revelation involving Igraine and Arthur's half-sisters might carry dire consequences, but there is little question about what

actually happens. However, with Lancelot and Guinevere, the relationship seems to defy the certainty of knowing what goes on between them that might enable the labeling of the affair as an adulterous one. This, however, does not prevent their relationship from being at the center of an act of revelation that has fatal consequences. Yet it does mean that the narrative shifts away from depicting revelation as an act that offers knowledge that can be equated to truth and becomes concerned with how an act of revelation itself constructs the very event that it proposes to reveal. Not only does the revelation of Lancelot and Guinevere's affair illustrate the problems of perception and knowing, it also suggests that rumors of adultery are more potent in discrediting the family than actual acts of adultery.

If a keyword that governs acts of revelation in the earlier episodes (for example, where Uther asks Igraine to explain how she becomes pregnant) is "trouthe," its counterpart in this late episode is "noyse." "Noyse" becomes an important word that is used to describe the rumors and suspicions that surround Guinevere and Lancelot's relationship, and is also the defining descriptor in the revelation of their affair. "Noyse" is first connected to the affair in this episode when Arthur walks into a council in which Agravaine has made his intentions to tell Arthur about the suspected affair clear. In response to his intentions, Gawain and the rest of the Orkneys, with the exception of Mordred, try to dissuade Agravaine and finally pronounce that they will have nothing to do with the matter. It is at this moment that Arthur comes within earshot of their argument and demands to know "what noyse they made" (1163.1). Arthur's use of the word "noyse" here refers to speech or sound at its most general level.<sup>172</sup> Perhaps Arthur's

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<sup>172</sup> The *MED* offers three major meanings for "noise." The first refers to the physical quality of the noise as "a sound," the second definition involves "a disturbance" or

concern about his knights' speech arises because the loud voices suggest that they are in the middle of an argument, but it also unintentionally introduces the use of "noyse" as a signifier for the affair in this book. Even so, the very fact that the affair is primarily an auditory phenomenon—it is translated into sound and gets debated about out loud—is crucial in its construction as an event that can finally be revealed. Before Arthur walks into the room and Agravaine tries to convince the rest of his brothers of the rightness of his crusade against Guinevere and Lancelot, Agravaine speaks of the relationship as a public embarrassment that is even more shameful because words have not been used to recognize it for what it is. Agravaine says

I mervayle that we all be nat ashamed bothe to se and to know sir Launcelot lyeth day and nyghtly by the quene. And all we know well that hit ys so, and hit ys shamefully suffird of us all that we shulde suffir so noble a kynge as kynge Arthur ys to be shamed. (1161.19–23)

In Agravaine's speech, he thrusts his suspicions of the affair out into the open, with his construction already assuming not only the guilt of Guinevere and Lancelot but that all the other knights feel the same way about it as he does—"hit ys shamefully suffird of us all." Thus, Agravaine's resolve to speak to Arthur about the matter also assumes the burden of a common voice, where he intends to speak on behalf of the knights about what is already seen and known. Of course, there is no unified consensus on whether Agravaine should speak to the king, as Gawain's violent protestations make clear. However, in order to pursue his personal obsession with persecuting Guinevere and Lancelot, Agravaine constructs knowledge about their relationship as a given that merely

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"quarrel," and the third defines noise as "rumor, scandal, accusation." See *MED* s.v. *noise* (n) 1., 2., and 3.

has to be spoken about and brought to the king's attention. Putting words to what everyone already sees and knows is Agravaine's way of completing an event that will surely lead to the downfall of the queen and Arthur's best knight.

Yet when Arthur enters and demands to know "what noyse they made," a more complex and contested apprehension of the affair between Guinevere and Lancelot is also invoked. Perhaps, Arthur's "noyse" refers to more specific meanings: slander, gossip, or rumor. This is certainly possible as Agravaine and his brothers are speaking out of the king's earshot, and Arthur's court is consistently characterized by "noyse" as rumors and speculation swirl about Lancelot and Guinevere. The first use of "noyse" to refer to a rumor that relates to Lancelot in the *Morte* occurs at the end of "The Book of Sir Tristan," in the episode where he sleeps with Elaine of Corbenic and sires Galahad. Even though this "noyse" is not used to characterize Guinevere and Lancelot's relationship, it certainly affects them:

And so the noyse sprang in kynge Arthurs courte that sir Lancelot had gotten a chylde uppon Elayne, the daughter of kynge Pelles, wherefore quene Gwenyver was wrothe, and she gaff many rebukes to sir Launcelot and called hym false knyght. And then sir Launcelot tolde the quene all, and how he was made to lye by her, "in lykenes of you, my lady the quene"; and so the quene hylde sir Launcelot exkused. (802.15–19)

The power of "noyse" as rumor is clear, as it manages to drive a wedge between Guinevere and Lancelot, even forcing Lancelot himself to explain the truth of the matter. Lancelot's own fear of rumor and the scandal that it can lead to is shown after he returns from the Grail quest. At the beginning of "The Book of Lancelot and Guinevere,"

Lancelot slides away from the contrition he experiences on the Grail quest, and begins to "forgate the promyse and the perfeccion that he made in the queste" (1045.9–10). His meetings with the queen begin to be spoken about in the court—they "had many such prevy draughtis togydir that many in the courte spake of hit"<sup>173</sup>—and especially by Agravaine, who "was ever opynne-mowthed" (1045.21). Lancelot, aware of the dangers that these rumors pose, tries to quell the rumors: "sir Launcelot applyed hym dayly to do for the plesure of Oure Lorde Jesu Cryst, and ever as mych as he myght he withdrew hym fro the company of queene Gwenyvere for to eschew the sclawndir and noyse" (1045.25–8). In doing so, he incurs the queen's wrath, which ultimately propels him to go into exile, once again demonstrating how "noyse" as rumor produces an effect on its victims. Even when Lancelot tries to prevent "noyse," it exerts a disruptive force.

Finally, in the longest depiction of Guinevere and Lancelot's relationship in relation to "noyse," both of them use the word to characterize how they have been troubled by it. This episode occurs after Guinevere is abducted by Meleagant. Lancelot has arrived to rescue Guinevere and is on the verge of breaking down the door to Meleagant's stronghold. Out of fear of the reprisals that Lancelot will carry out, Meleagant begs for Guinevere's mercy: "Madame, I wolde no more ... but that ye wolde take all in youre own hondys, and that ye woll rule my lorde sir Launcelot" (1128.10–12). Guinevere accedes, agreeing to prevent the violence and sealing her assent with a pithy aphorism: "Ye sey well ... and bettir ys pees than evermore warre, and the lesse noyse the more ys my worshyp" (1128.16–17). Guinevere's use of "noyse" in opposition to her

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<sup>173</sup> While "prevy draughtis" seems to be an oblique reference to sexual encounters, Kennedy convincingly argues that this refers to the queen and her knight taking private walks in full view of the court ("Adultery" 75–6).

honor—"worshyp"— is somewhat ambiguous in this context. Up to this point in the episode, Meleagant has not accused her of adultery, and "noyse" could refer to the disruptive nature of his abduction. However, in the ensuing conversation with Lancelot, "noyse" takes on its more specific association with slander. Lancelot is curious to know why Guinevere has managed to come to terms with Meleagant, expressing some disappointment that he does not have a chance to fight his foe and suggesting that Guinevere is letting Meleagant off too easily. Guinevere responds that she spared Meleagant the violence not because of "favoure nor love that I had unto hym, but of wysdom to lay adoune every shamefull noyse" (1129.9–11). This explanation gains Lancelot's assent, and he echoes her sentiment, saying, "Madam ... ye undirstonde full well I was never wyllynge nor glad of shamefull sclaudir nor noyse" (1129.12–13). "Noyse" as rumor affects the couple's choices and decisions and the promise that one will stop talking about the affair is strong enough to avert violence. At the same time, this episode shows how Guinevere and Lancelot, while troubled by the "noyse," are confident about their ability to quell it when their adversaries are silenced.

Thus, when the term "noyse" re-emerges as Arthur enters the picture, his general description of the sounds generated by the discussion recalls the fact that the relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot has already generated a lot of gossip and discussion prior to the king's direct involvement in the matter. Agravaine, of course, expects that Arthur's involvement will bring about a material change in the state of affairs. By forcing the king to attend to the rumors, Agravaine expects that Arthur, as king and husband, will be compelled to take action against Guinevere and Lancelot, translating "noyse" into actions of consequence. However, after Agravaine speaks openly of the affair to Arthur

and accuses Lancelot of treason, Arthur's takes up the term "noyse" again, and offers a response that paradoxically appears to suggest a course of action while betraying his own reluctance to act:

"Gyff hit be so," seyde the kyng, "wyte you well, he ys non othir [a traitor]. But I wolde be lothe to begyn such a thyng but I mught have prevys of hit, for sir Launcelot ys an hardy knyght, and all ye know that he ys the beste knyght amonge us all, and but if he be takyn with the dede he woll fyght with hym that bryngith up the noyse, and I know no knyght that ys able to macch hym. Therefore, and hit be sothe as ye say, I wolde that he were takyn with the dede. (1163.12–9)

Arthur's response takes up a more specific meaning of "noyse"—"noyse" as accusation—in his suggestion that Lancelot will challenge it with arms, but he remains unclear about whether he believes the accusation. A fundamental denial governs Arthur's response. Instead of giving any credence to Agravaine's accusation, he immediately poses it as a hypothetical—"Gyff hit be so"—and characterizes it as "noyse," a phenomenon he opposes to "the dede." Arthur's response thus makes "noyse" an insubstantial thing, setting up a clear hierarchy between the unreliability of rumor and accusation and the hard fact of being "takyn with the dede," a condition that he mentions twice in his response. Agravaine's hope that the king will act if he is embarrassed by the rumors is denied as Arthur hardens the distinction between "noyse" and "dede."

While Arthur's response could also be read as containing the suggestion that Agravaine should carry out a plan to catch Lancelot in the act of adultery, this reading is contained by the authorial remarks immediately following Arthur's response:

For, as the Freynshe booke seyth, the kynge was full lothe that such a noyse shulde be uppon sir Launcelot and his quene; for the kynge had a demyng of hit, but he wold nat here thereoff, for sir Launcelot had done so much for hym and the quene so many tymes that wyte you well the kynge loved hym passyngly well.  
(1163.20–5)

Predictably, there is no corresponding statement in *La Mort Roi Artu*. Instead, in the French book, Arthur turns "pensive and sad and disturbed" on hearing the news but quickly encourages Agravaine to act: "If you ever loved me, do whatever you must to catch them in the act; and if I don't take revenge as one should with a traitor, I'll never wish to wear the crown" (Lacy 119). Similarly, after hearing Agravaine's accusation in the *Stanzaic Morte Arthure*, Arthur readily assumes Lancelot's guilt:

Alas, full grete dole it were  
In him [Lancelot] sholde any tresoun be!  
But sithe it is so, withouten fail,  
Sir Agravain, so God thee rede,  
What were now thy best counsel,  
For to take him with the deed? (1742–7)

In contrast to his sources, Malory directs the reader's response by examining the contradiction between the king's love for Lancelot and the fact that he eventually makes war against his favorite knight, something that the other accounts do not dwell upon. To do this, Malory shows that Arthur's answer is not so much a desire for Lancelot to be caught in certainty of adultery but that the king poses "the dede" as a condition that is near impossible to fulfill. Being "full lothe" of the "noyse" and loving Lancelot

"passyngly well," Arthur insists on the insubstantial nature of the accusation, and uses the opposition between rumor and the deed as a tactic to silence Lancelot's accusers. Even if his queen and knight are conducting an adulterous affair, Arthur seems to hope that they will be discreet enough not to be caught in the act of adultery; and, perhaps, he hopes that Agravaine will not be so reckless as to try to trap Lancelot.

Arthur's aversion to the "noyse" could be dealt with in another way. He could find incontrovertible evidence against Lancelot and the queen for himself and act upon that. However, as critics have argued, Arthur has good reasons beyond his love and gratitude for Lancelot not to act, even though this compromises the ideal of the family that he has been eager to shore up previously. For instance, Angela Gibson argues that throughout the *Morte*, the exposure of adulterous affairs, even if motivated by virtuous intentions, is made problematic because "the decision to put intimate life on display is destructive" (71). As such, Arthur's decision not to acknowledge the affair is grounded in the belief that certain kinds of knowledge should never be made public. McCracken, commenting on the French *Lancelot* and *Mort Artu*, observes that the figure of the adulterous queen operates to stabilize competing factions at court. Her adulterous relationship with the king's favorite knight is a cause of complaint for other courtly factions because they want to eject Lancelot (or Tristan) from a position of honor in order to occupy it themselves (*Adultery* 93). This certainly makes sense in Agravaine's complaint against Lancelot. Lancelot not only occupies a position of favor that should belong to the Orkneys by virtue of their blood-ties to Arthur, but Lancelot had also sided with Lamorak previously, an archrival whom the Orkneys have murdered. Thus, in order to maintain the political status quo, and perhaps prevent another dynastic contestation for

power like the Orkney–Pellinore feud, Arthur accepts Lancelot's relationship with the queen so that Lancelot can remain in his position of preeminence. In doing so, however, Arthur detracts from the integrity of the family as the stabilizing component of his court and society and falls back on the fellowship created by the Round Table as a stabilizing institution.

Despite Arthur's attempts not to confront the matter of the queen's relationship with Lancelot, Agravaine contrives a plot to catch Lancelot and Guinevere in "the dede." While a certain measure of Agravaine's success results from the literal fact that Lancelot pays a visit to Guinevere's chambers at night and is found there by Agravaine and his knights, this by itself does not constitute an obvious fact that provides proof of the deed. On the contrary, Agravaine's act of revelation constructs Lancelot and Guinevere's guilt through his exploitation of "noyse." This is significant because Agravaine's noisy revelation contrasts with Malory's own silence about what happens behind the closed doors of the queen's chamber. After Lancelot comes to the queen, Malory writes, "And whether they were abed other at other maner of disportis, me lyste nat thereof make no mencion, for love that tyme was nat as love ys nowadays" (1165.11–13). Malory himself withdraws from the position of an omniscient narrator, sealing the actuality of the event within the chamber. By not writing about the couple's activities, and actively suggesting that any speculation on the reader's part is doomed to inaccuracy because these events occur in an irretrievable past, Malory proffers a principled silence that withdraws from and censures the speculation and gossip that is associated with "noyse." Malory's silence stands in direct contrast with Agravaine's noisiness. Instead of creeping up to the queen's chamber, in a manner that would actually enable them to catch Lancelot

and Guinevere in the deed, Agravaine and the knights come "with grete cryyng and scaryng voice[s]," shouting that Lancelot is a traitor "wyth a lowde voyce, that all the courte myght hyre hit" (1165.16–19). "Noyse" as rumor or accusation can be quelled or defended against. But here, it exceeds those functions and becomes wedded to the deed itself as Agravaine uses his mode of revelation to create the very act that he aims to reveal.

E. Kay Harris, writing about how this scene functions within the context of laws relating to treason, argues that Agravaine's noisiness is akin to the "hue and cry" that could be raised in order to "mak[e] present for a specified time, the criminal act beyond its actual occurrence" (194). Of course, what actually occurs in this case is irrelevant and the deed is already assumed in the knights' loud cries. Thus, uncovering the deed as a verifiable fact is beside the point and "Agravaine has made sure that the noise against Lancelot exists and that it signifies treason" (Harris 198). Agravaine's construction of the event through accusation differs from the earlier scenes of revelation discussed in this chapter. In part, this has to do with the implications of the queen's adultery on Arthur's symbolic power as the head of family and state. From another perspective, Agravaine's revelation poses Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere an epistemological challenge that is more difficult to overcome than the problems that ensued from earlier acts of revelation. Previous acts of revelation, even when they involved the revelation of adulterous affairs or created subsequent problems for Arthur in his relations with his family, were still grounded in factually verifiable events. In this case, however, the revelation itself takes on a life of its own through the "noyse" of adultery, making it more difficult to contain within the discourse that structures the ideals of family. Rhetoric, formerly used to

contain elements that threatened the integrity of the family unit, now shapes the transgressive act and propels it into the public view.

The way "noyse" makes the revelation of Guinevere and Lancelot's adultery an uncontrollable force comes into sharper focus when it is contrasted with an earlier accusation that comes against the couple in "The Knight of the Cart" episode. On the morning after Lancelot forces his way into the queen's cell and spends the night with her, the blood from his wounds alerts Meleagant to some impropriety on the queen's part:

And therewithall he [Meleagant] opened the curtayn for to beholde her [Guinevere]. And than was he ware where she lay, and all the hede-sheete, pylow, over-shyte was all bebled of the blood of sir Launcelot and of hys hurte honde. When sir Mellyagaunt aspyed that blood, than he demed in her that she was false to the kynge and that som of the wounded knyghtes had lyene by her all that nyght. (1132.8–14)

Meleagant's discovery of the blood becomes the basis of his accusation. Even though he is at least as intrusive as Agravaine in entering the queen's chamber, Meleagant's accusation depends on the fact of the bloodstained sheets, and he is more careful in drawing conclusions about the queen's infidelity. He is certain that one of the queen's wounded knights has slept with her, even though he is unable to pinpoint whom. Even though he is well aware that Lancelot has a special relationship with the queen, Meleagant does not accuse Lancelot, because Lancelot had no access to the queen and his role in the liaison cannot be deduced from the bloodstained sheets. Even though he behaves treacherously by trapping Lancelot such that Lancelot cannot fight on behalf of the queen's honor, Meleagant still goes through the motions of bringing the case before

the king, a move that Agravaine explicitly refrains from doing as he and his gang of knights try to charge into the room to kill Lancelot. When Lancelot does manage subsequently to escape from his imprisonment and kill Meleagant, the outcome of the trial by combat invalidates Meleagant's accusations. Even though the bloodstains on the queen's bed sheets have not been satisfactorily explained, they become irrelevant as evidence of the queen's infidelity, and the episode ends with the observation that "the kynge and the quene made more of sir Launcelot, and more was he cheryssed than ever he was aforehande" (1140.11–13). Thus, Meleagant's accusation, even though it is based on more material evidence of wrongdoing, is less dangerous than Agravaine's accusations, because the latter's "noyse" is not submitted to the legal procedures that govern knightly conduct.

The threat represented by the "noyse" of Agravaine's aggressive attempts to simultaneously create and uncover Guinevere and Lancelot's trespass is evident in Lancelot's response. Lancelot is more threatened by the loudness of his accusers and the public nature of the accusations than by their ability to do him physical harm or the fact that they might bring him to justice. As Agravaine and Mordred continue with their loud cries, he tells Guinevere, "thys shamfull cry and noyse I may nat suffir, for better were deth at onys than thus to endure thys payne" (1166.8–10). Clearly, Lancelot is troubled about how the loud accusations will mar his reputation even further and harm it beyond repair. Addressing his accusers from behind the chamber door, he first asks them to be silent and tries to offer himself up if they agree—"Now, fayre lordys ... leve youre noyse and youre russhynge, and I shall sette opyn thys dore, and than may ye do with me what hit lykith you" (1167.11–12). This, however, results in the killing of Colgreavance, as

the knights try to rush into the room when Lancelot holds the door ajar. Perceiving that he has the upper hand, having slain a knight and appropriated his armor, Lancelot attempts to bargain with Agravaine again, this time insisting that they depart in silence:

[G]o ye all frome thys chambir dore and make you no suche cryyng and such maner of sclaudir as ye do. For I promyse you be my knyghthode, and ye woll departe and make no more noyse, I shall as to-morne appyere afore you all and before the kyng, and than lat hit be sene whych of you all, other ellis ye all, that woll deprave me of treson. And there shall I answeere you, as a knyghte shulde, that hyder I cam to the quene for no maner of male engyne, and that woll I preve and make hit good uppon you wyth my hondys. (1168.1–10)

Like Arthur, who interposes the opposition between "noyse" and "the dede," Lancelot offers an alternative to the "noyse" of accusation. Confident in both the trust of his king and in his prowess at arms, Lancelot knows that his actions as well as his relationship with the king can negate the accusation of adultery and treason, as they have on previous occasions. Lancelot's challenge for his accusers to repeat their accusations before the court is also interesting because he knows that, in that context, his accusers would have to answer for what is spoken, unlike in the present circumstances, which allow "noyse" to run out of control without definite consequences to the speakers.

In offering an alternative to his accusers, Lancelot tries to invoke their sense of honor as knights, swearing "be my knyghthode" and saying he will act "as a knyghte shulde," thus insinuating that Agravaine's accusation and slander run counter to the principles that should govern knightly behavior. Lancelot's attempts to defer immediate confrontation with the knights are consonant with these attempts to invoke a chivalric

code. Further, Lancelot discerns that acting in the present would probably give credence to the accusations, no matter what the outcome of the fight might be. Given the private nature of this encounter, taking action would give substance to the accusations and create an event that would be open to further interpretation. Thus, Lancelot tries to contain both his and his accusers' actions with the chivalric code that they are sworn to. However, the aggression with which the accusers proclaim Lancelot's treason is matched by their recklessness and Lancelot is forced to fight them, resulting in all the knights save Mordred being slain. This results in the queen being condemned to the stake, more violence when Lancelot rescues her, and open war between Arthur and the knights who support Lancelot. Lancelot's violence in the queen's chamber, away from the public eye and outside the procedures that govern armed conflict, results in the destruction of the kingdom.

Rumor and slander that centered on painting the queen as an adulteress were used during the Wars of the Roses, most notably by Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick, as part of Yorkist propaganda aimed at discrediting the Lancastrian rulers. In the middle of the 1450s, as Henry VI's queen, Margaret of Anjou, became more actively involved in seeking to oust the Yorkist faction from a role in government, rumors originating from the Yorkists began to circulate concerning the queen's sexual infidelities. One aspect of these rumors was the charge that Margaret had conceived the Prince of Wales out of wedlock, or that he was a changeling, and could not be Henry VI's legitimate heir. This charge was also coupled with the accusation that the queen had been an adulteress, with Warwick claiming that royal power now "lay in the hands of [Henry's] wife and those who defile the king's chamber" (Maurer 176–8). Helen Maurer argues that the

accusations were aimed not only to discredit the heir to the throne but also to undermine confidence in Lancastrian rule by targeting the queen:

As politics polarized between a Yorkist faction and a more amorphous group of Lancastrian loyalists with Margaret as their shadow leader, and as the stakes in the conflict escalated, the rumor was co-opted by the Yorkists to serve a particular political agenda. Along the way, the approach shifted away from questioning Margaret's ability to questioning her morality.... These allusions to infidelity and sexual promiscuity constitute charges that were particularly and uniquely damaging to a woman's reputation. Their understood effect would have been to discredit her in all other areas as well, through a process of association. Moreover, by insinuating that disorder existed within the royal family, they bolstered perceptions of disorder within the wider realm. (47)

The rumors of infidelity circulating about Margaret of Anjou gained impetus from the fact that she was viewed as over-stepping the boundaries of traditional queenship by becoming the leader of the Lancastrian faction. Guinevere, of course, does not take such an active role in the political conflicts of the *Morte*. However, her person enables Lancelot to retain his prominence at court, and the way that Lancelot's rivals use the queen's adultery to erode support for a faction entrenched in power parallels the political use of similar rumors in the Wars of the Roses.

The major consequence of the attempt to catch Guinevere and Lancelot in the act of adultery is Arthur's decision that the queen must die. With the May-day slayings, this is only the second time in the *Morte* that Arthur legislates death in a manner that forecloses the possibility that innocence can be upheld by either legal arguments or trials

by combat. The passage that explains Guinevere's death sentence focuses on how her crime not only involves illicit sexual desire but also harms the king's person:

So than there was made grete ordynaunce in thys ire, and the quene muste nedis be jouged to the deth. And the law was such in thos dayes that whatsomever they, of what astate or degre, if they were founden gylty of treson there shuld be none other remedy but deth, and othir the menour other the takyng with the dede shulde be causer of their hasty jougement. (1174.19–25)

It is for treason that the queen will burn, not adultery itself. Adultery becomes the graver sin because it is no longer a trespass against the king as a private individual but has become an offence against the institution of the crown of which Arthur is a representative. The language of this passage affirms this. It is not Arthur who condemns that queen, but "the law" that is impersonally and impartially applied regardless of the social rank of the crime's perpetrator. Further, the reason for Guinevere's summary execution without other recourse to a trial to prove her innocence is justified by legalese: "othir the menour other the takyng with the dede shulde be causer of their hasty jougement." Yet this turn to specific points of the law problematizes the "hasty jougement" for the reader. To begin with, Lancelot and Guinevere are not exactly taken "with the dede." Even though Lancelot's presence in Guinevere's room at night would have been compromising enough for an accusation of adultery, Malory's ambiguity in describing the encounter and his emphasis on the noisy accusations make the claim that they are caught in the act difficult to substantiate. The other condition for execution without trial, being caught with "the menour" is also interesting. The *MED* defines "menour" as "stolen goods," and references this passage as an example of its use. In

attempting to show how "menour" is relevant to this passage, the *MED* speculates that it might refer to the armor that Lancelot takes from Sir Colgreavance after killing him.<sup>174</sup> While this is plausible, taking another knight's armor would hardly amount to treason; besides, it is Guinevere, not Lancelot, who is being charged with treason here. Perhaps the notion of stolen goods would make more sense if Lancelot is thought of as being caught with the king's property, with "menour" referring to Guinevere herself. Indeed, given how Arthur considers that Lancelot has been the foundation of his chivalric fellowship, the reverse would also be true: Guinevere's involvement with Lancelot effectively robs the king of his best knight, and becomes treasonous by causing division and strife within the Round Table.

The idea that Guinevere's relationship with Lancelot is treasonous not because of adultery but for its effects on Arthur's fellowship is seen in the lines that follow the statement of the law. These lines represent an interpretation of the law, justifying the queen's death more specifically: "And ryght so was hit ordayned for quene Gwenyver: bycause sir Mordred was ascaped sore wounded, and the dethe of thirtene knyghtes of the Round Table, thes previs and experyences caused kynge Arthure to commaunde the quene to the fyre and there to be brente" (1174.25–9). The attention shifts to the destructive effect that the attempt to apprehend Guinevere and Lancelot has had on Arthur's fellowship. Whether or not Guinevere is actually guilty of adultery is irrelevant here. Rather, her guilt lies in being caught at the center of a situation where unregulated violence has been unleashed on the king's own fellowship. In this sense, the "noyse" around the event, the commotion and disruption that eclipses the ambivalence of whether

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<sup>174</sup> See *MED* s.v. *meinoure* (n).

adultery has been committed, dooms the queen. In a sense, the insubstantial nature of the accusations allows attention to be drawn away from the affair itself, and leads Arthur to focus on the material effects—the corpses of his dead knights and the wounds on his son—of the episode. That the death sentence on Guinevere centers on the division she brings to the court is also borne out by Arthur's initial reaction when the wounded Mordred reports the bungled attempts to capture Lancelot. After listening to Mordred's account, Arthur's response is fixated on Lancelot's deeds and the disaster that Lancelot's loss spells for the Round Table:

"Jesu mercy!" seyde the kyng, "he ys a mervalyous knyght of proues. And alas ... me sore repentith that ever sir Launcelot sholde be ayenste me, for now I am sure that the noble felyshyp of the Round Table ys brokyn for ever, for wyth hym woll many a noble knyght holde. And now hit ys fallen so ... that I may nat with my worschyp but my quene muste suffir dethe." (1174.12–18).

Even though Arthur decides that he must act against Guinevere to restore his honor, his emphasis on Lancelot's departure and the antagonism that it will cause suggests that the insult to the king's honor is not tied to the queen's adultery but to how it breaks up the fellowship.

Gawain's levelheaded response to the matter further emphasizes how adultery has become a side issue in Arthur's death decree even as it unleashes violent effects. Gawain seizes upon the fact that the revelation consists of accusations and rumors instead of an actual deed and tries to return the supposed adultery to the realm of speculation:

"My lorde Arthure, I wolde counceyle you nat to be over hasty, but that ye wolde put hit in respite, thys jougemente of my lady the quene, for many causis. One ys

thys, thoughe hyt were so that sir Launcelot were founde in the quenyes chambir,  
yet hit myght be so that he came thydir for none evyll." (1174.31–1175.2)

Constructing an alternative explanation from the known facts, Gawain argues that the queen might have summoned Lancelot "for goodness and for none evyll, to rewarde hym for his good dedys," and that Lancelot goes in the cover of night precisely to avoid "slaundir" (1175.7–8 and 12). By proposing a different reading of the event, Gawain offers a reason for Arthur to doubt the definitive course of action that he has initiated. Yet recuperating Guinevere and Lancelot from the accusations of adultery has no effect on Arthur. Instead, Arthur focuses in on the deaths that have resulted, and enumerates how Gawain's kin have been killed by Lancelot: "[Y]e have not cause to love hym ... he slew youre brothir sir Aggravayne, a full good knyght, and almoste he had slayne youre othir brother, sir Mordred.... And also remembir you, sir Gawayne, he slew two sunnes of youres, sir Florens and sir Lovell" (1175.28–32). Arthur is more concerned about the way his knights have been killed, and the queen's death is a vicarious way of avenging these deaths. Sarah Kay, commenting on the link between killing and adultery in *La Mort Roi Artu*, makes a relevant observation:

Lancelot and the queen are never required legally to defend themselves as adulterers, only as killers. The killings, it seems, function as a displacement of the crime of adultery, and also as a narrative metaphor for it.... In identifying the lovers as killers, then, the text both integrates their adultery to the *Mort's* cataclysmic canvas, and represents it as (literally) lethal. (35, 40)

Arthur's decision to deal with the revelation of the adulterous relationship by having Guinevere burnt at the stake is a reaction to elements that surround the accusation,

to elements of the relationship that exceed the charge of adultery itself. Earlier in the *Morte*, when Arthur is confronted with revelations about the adultery and incest within his own family, he manages to fall back upon the integrity of the family unit as a fantasy that answers for its own inadequacies. However, the epistemological complications surrounding this particular episode of adultery that lead to the death sentence demonstrate how the fantasy of the family as an ideological construct that guarantees individual and social identity can no longer be sustained.

The breakdown of fantasy and its effects on the structure of desire are schematized in Lacan's final graph of desire. Distinguishing this graph from the previous one is the way the inadequacy in the Other does not lead to a move downward toward fantasy,  $(\$ \diamond o)$ , but leads upward to the position at the upper left hand point of the graph,  $S(\emptyset)$  in Figure 5.3.

Lacan's Completed Graph of Desire can be found on page 692 of *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink. The graph is also available in Slavoj Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, on page 121.

Figure 5.3 Lacan's Completed Graph of Desire

Lacan explains that the matheme  $S(\emptyset)$  is the "signifier of a lack in the Other, a lack inherent as the Other's very function as the treasure trove of signifiers" (693). This is the position that Arthur moves into with his response to the accusations concerning the queen's adultery. The idea of the family unit as a space of fidelity and responsibility no longer provides the comforting illusion that can dismiss the accusations of adultery, as adultery occupies a space beyond knowledge, where proving what actually happened becomes irrelevant to Arthur's actions. Adultery cannot be approached directly as a component of knowledge that can be defined or structured by the symbolic order represented by the family. With this signification of lack, this position of the graph also indicates that "there is no Other of the Other, no guarantee (or guarantor such as God) of what the Other says—whether the familial, juridical, religious, or analytic Other, [where n]o statement has any other guarantee than its very enunciation" (Fink 122). This can thus also be taken as the point where the enunciative power of "noyse" in the act of revelation, by creating the object of its discovery takes precedence over whether adultery as verifiable deed actually occurs. Finally, this is also the point that emphasizes the logical disconnect of Arthur's judgment. Arthur's death sentence is pronounced as a rhetorical absolute that is meant to answer the accusations of adultery but does not do so in a logically coherent manner as Arthur seeks the queen's death to avenge his knights' death.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> From another perspective that would relate adultery to courtly love, the circuit of desire running from O through  $(\S \diamond o)$  to  $S(\emptyset)$  indicates how adultery can be transformed into courtly love, where the Lady is elevated to the sublime object as part of the cultural activity generated by the attempts to symbolize the lack in the Other. That courtly love operates in a zone beyond fantasy is clear from Lacan's observation that courtly love depends on "techniques of holding back, of suspension, of *amor interruptus*" and that it

In a sense, this marks a point where Arthur's desires—both concerning the family and as they are governed by the family—break down, where the conflicts inherent within his idea of the family become apparent. For while Arthur's decision to sentence the queen to death appears to destroy the nuclear family and emphasizes his failure to govern his wife's desires, it also paradoxically affirms patriarchal family values, for the death sentence can be seen as an ultimate act of familial discipline.<sup>176</sup> Further, Arthur is acting on behalf of family because he is avenging the deaths of his nephew and his nephew's children, a point that Arthur himself makes when he tries to convince Gawain of the rightness of his course of action. In this sense, the death sentence on Guinevere represents an extreme attempt to clarify the ambiguities inherent in an ideology of the family that struggles to reconcile the competing demands of love and fidelity, procreation and chastity, and protection and discipline.

Finally, the graph also indicates the consequences of Arthur's refusal to fall back upon the family as a fantasy of security and stability. The matheme at the upper-right hand corner of the graph,  $(\$ \diamond D)$ , is Lacan's representation of the drive, which is "what becomes of demand when the subject vanishes from it" (692). Žižek argues that the drive is what becomes of desire after fantasy is traversed and that this is "ultimately the death drive [as] 'beyond fantasy' there is no yearning or some kindred sublime phenomenon"

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"persists in opposition to the purposes of the pleasure principle ... [as] the pleasure of experiencing unpleasure" (*Ethics* 152).

<sup>176</sup> Canonists discouraged medieval husbands from taking out personal vengeance on adulterous wives or lovers; however, husbands whose wives were found in adultery were responsible for turning them in for judgment. Not submitting one's adulterous wife to the law was regarded as abetting the sin (Brundage, *Law* 209 and 248).

(124).<sup>177</sup> In condemning Guinevere to death, Arthur allows the forces of vengeance and destruction to be unleashed on a massive scale. The uncontrolled violence that issues from this act is marked by the loss of restraint, by compulsive acts of vengeance and rebellion that destroy the principles upon which Arthur's fellowship and kingdom are founded. In this sense, the dissolution of Arthur's fantasy about the family signals a final phase of the *Morte*: it unleashes a societal death drive that the restraints of culture are unable to keep in check.

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<sup>177</sup> Fink's interpretation of the movement from jouissance to castration offers a different interpretation as he places the emphasis on "an enjoyment of drive satisfaction after or despite prohibition and loss" (127). While Žižek's identification of the drive with the death-drive makes more sense given the *Morte's* ending, Fink's reading of the operation of drive would work well in an analysis of courtly love, where the repetitious acts of suffering in the name of love strip desire of pleasure or the possibility of fulfillment within fantasy and indicate the compulsive nature of enjoyment that lies beyond pleasure.

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