

FEELING WOMEN:
AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN'S VIEWPOINTS
IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH BRETON LAY

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1994

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The chapter here entitled, 'The Demon Mother: A Reading of Sir Gowther', appeared in an earlier form under the title, 'Animal Magic: Moral Regeneration in Sir Gowther', in The Yearbook of English Studies 22 (1992).

I wish to record my gratitude to the following people for their support and encouragement over the years.

To Professor Felicity Riddy, for her encouragement, input and patience, all of which have been considerable; to Dr. Carol Meale, who first suggested I might attempt this; to Ms. Karen Hodder and Professor Nicole Ward-Jouve, for their advice and support. To Dr. Jim Binns, for his erudition and his faith in me; to Dr. Glen Newey, for introducing me to the work of Cavell and Wittgenstein; to Mr. Ken Stokes, for his patience and encouragement; to Mr. Ken Clayden, for teaching me so much about communication. To my parents, Thomas and Kathleen Robson, for all their help, and to my husband, Darryl Jones, for everything.

ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to explore the Middle English Breton lays using Freudian and feminist psychoanalytic theory; this achieves the effect of teasing out alternative narratives. It examines the perspectives generated by reading the lays as tales in which the woman is the protagonist, not simply the 'heroine'. The thesis seeks to suggest that these stories encode narratives of female bodily experience, which criticism has effaced.

Chapter 1 explores the genus, lay, and examines the critical reception of the Middle English lays in this century. It seeks to demonstrate how the lay has been 'feminized' and infantilized by criticism, and proceeds to offer a feminist and psychoanalytic framework within which the lays may be read, and which allows for a different evaluation of the 'feminine'.

Chapter 2 examines the lay Sir Degarre, showing how the adolescent girl overcomes anxieties about sexual maturity: it contains an analysis of rape and incest fantasies; the resentment generated by the commodification of the female body, and the ploys which women use in order to avoid male authority. The chapter attempts to uncover the precarious nature of gendered identity by examining the way in which the narrative oscillates throughout between a male and a female psyche.

Chapter 3 examines three lays, Emare, Lay le Freine and The Erl of Toulous, and seeks to show how women's adoption of masochistic strategies enables them to attain sexual and social security. With Emare I endeavour to show how the girl can have illicit desires and yet remain the 'heroine'. In the section on Lay le Freine, the mechanism of 'splitting' the woman into the 'good' and the 'bad' is analysed, revealing how 'bad' women are thus forced into the margins. With the analysis of The Erl of Toulous, I attempt to demonstrate how the woman externalizes her guilt over her illicit desires, and by so doing, answers self-doubt and criticism.

Chapter 4 examines the 'barren marriage', where the husband's homosociality is threatened by his wife's

departure. I also discuss the spaces which transgressive desire occupies in the poem, and show how the desiring woman is demonized.

Chapter 5 In this chapter the position of the unwilling mother is explored. I seek to show how motherhood is reconstructed as positive, following the mother's self-punishment for being an erotic, rather than a maternal woman: I examine how the 'feminized' hero is made a scapegoat for proscribed female sexuality, and how it is allowed re-entry to the social order after penance.

Chapter 6 I first discuss the problems of dealing with an Arthurian narrative, when it is an 'uncourtly' tale. I proceed to demonstrate how the erotic and sexual rivalry in the tale is constructed as 'straight' competition, which masks the homosexual attraction which exists in the poem. I show how the older woman is discredited on the entrance of the younger one, and argue that the tale is a vehicle for male sexual fantasy.

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

I

This thesis sets out to explore the Middle English Breton lays using Freudian psychoanalytic techniques. It is my contention that the lays contain 'hidden narratives': these narratives have not received any positive critical evaluation. Where the 'intrusive' narratives have been commented on, they have been viewed as, at best, the work of the 'irrational', and at worst, the result of authorial ineptitude. I argue that these hidden narratives deal with women's experiences of their bodies, and confront women's own feelings of anxiety over biological womanhood. The use of Freudian psychoanalytic approaches provides a method of teasing out these alternative narratives.

I take as my starting point the reception of these tales, and will argue that they are not, as many critics have assumed, 'preliterate' but sophisticated narratives in their own right, which are deserving of academic analysis.

(1)

There are eight Middle English Breton lays: Sir Degarre, Lay Le Freine, Emare, The Erl of Toulous, Sir Orfeo, Sir Gowther, Sir Launfal, and The Franklin's Tale. (2) I shall not be examining Chaucer's Franklin's Tale - the only one of his works which is defined as a lay and included in literary historians' classifications as such - because the reception of a work by Chaucer is necessarily different from the

reception of anonymous tales, and an important aspect of this thesis is in dealing with critical responses to the works. I shall be commenting on the question of author and authority later in this section.

With the exception of Sir Degarre all of the tales actually name themselves as lays within the narrative; (3) Sir Degarre is grouped with the lays because it is set in Brittany (1.7), as well as according with definitions of the lay such as that given by M.J. Donovan: '.... fairy elements, length and its straightforwardness as story'. (4)

Lay Le Freine and Sir Orfeo date from the beginning of the fourteenth century; Sir Degarre from before 1325; Sir Launfal from the later fourteenth century; Sir Gowther, The Erl of Toulous, and Emare from around 1400. (5) Sir Degarre exists in nine manuscripts; Lay Le Freine in one; Emare in one; The Erl of Toulous in four; Sir Orfeo in three; Sir Gowther in two and Sir Launfal in one. (6) The lays, then, form a cohesive group, insofar as their 'authors' all put their works into the tradition of short-story telling which derived from the lais of Marie de France. (7) Historically, too, they would seem to belong together: the form is not recognized in English before the fourteenth century, nor does it survive it. Only one of the lays, Sir Launfal, has a named author, Thomas Chestre, and he is only named within the narrative (1.1039). It is generally assumed that he is a

minstrel re-working a well-known folk-tale. (8) Gisela Guddat-Figge comments:

It is difficult to decide whether minstrels may have been the authors of more popular romances which need not be of learned origin. Not surprisingly, the manuscripts offer no help on this point. After all, the difference between the fixed text of the romance and the shape of the poem in oral recitation cannot be ignored. It has been clear that in any strongly traditional literature depending to a great extent on oral recitation the singer, reciter or minstrel can and will adapt his performance to his audience by means of a richly developed repertoire of formulas. . . . Thus in a limited sense minstrels certainly are the "authors" of Middle English romances. (9)

I shall therefore treat this work, too, as an anonymous tale.

The common characteristic of these tales is that they are short: The Erl of Toulous, with 1224 lines, is the longest; the shortest - complete - tale is Sir Orfeo, with 580 lines. (10) T.C. Rumble comments:

They [the lays] were, above all, popular tales, designed to appeal to an audience less than learned, and one which had little time or taste for such forms as the longer, often intricately psychological courtly romances, and the overtly didactic and moralistic saints' lives. But more important, except that they were composed originally to be heard, rather than read, the lays strove for many of the same effects as the modern short story. (11)

Walter Allen comments that oral tales, such as The Thousand and One Nights, or Boccaccio's Decameron, are the

antecedents of the modern short story. He makes a distinction between written (usually longer) and oral (usually shorter) fiction and the place of their reception:

And the oral tale is still very much with us, often in as primitive a form as it can ever have been. **The oral tale is still very much at home everywhere. Indeed home is the operative word here,** for the oral tale may be heard as a matter of course in every family circle, in every pub, wherever people come together in the ordinary traffic of life. (12) (my emphasis)

This already raises questions both of elitism and of gender.

With regard to the elitist charge, Harriet Hudson remarks:

High literature is characterized by complex expression, reliance on the permanence of the written record, individual creativity, innovative outlook, self-conscious design and selection of materials. On the other hand, popular literature may be said to be characterized by direct expression, pragmatic outlook, conventional design, the use of received materials and non-exclusiveness. (13)

She argues that what is important for 'high' literature is a 'name': '.... without a fixed text it is difficult for an author to establish an individual voice, and elite audiences value this'. (14) If short/oral fiction is more appropriate for the home, then it follows that it is seen to be more appropriate for women, for the distinction between public and private, male and female space is a commonplace of social organization. (15) To what extent this generalization

is 'true' is a moot point: whilst women might be represented as listening to romances in the privacy of their own family circle (16), certainly Langland's market-places and pubs were full of women selling their wares (17), and no doubt listening to the minstrels who must have gathered an audience on such occasions. Again we return to the question of elitism, for the distinction to be made in this public/private debate is not one of gender but of class.

It should be noted that romances, too, have been marginalized as a 'popular' form, and partly because of their orality. Hudson writes:

If the Middle English romances are not, primarily, oral literature, in some ways they behave like oral literature. They exist in variants, as oral tales do, thus there is no fixed text and no single correct version. Reliance on a fixed text, whether in writing or in perfect memorizations of oral literature, seems characteristic of elite, official cultures. (18)

Hudson's distinction between 'high' and 'popular' genres, and between written and oral literatures, becomes for other critics a distinction between sophisticated and unsophisticated narratives. The equation of 'popular' with 'unsophisticated' is a commonplace, and not just of criticism, though it is most certainly in operation here. Writing on Sir Launfal, A.J. Bliss opined:

A work intended to satisfy the wish-fulfilment of an audience of so little sensibility and sophistication has no room for any subtlety.

The prime requirements are a sense of familiarity and a lack of precision so that the peasant listener immediately feels at home and is able to make the identification of himself with the hero. (19)

Andrew Taylor's recent article on the question of minstrel narration and the Middle English romances raises questions over such simplistic distinctions as those made between public and private, oral and written literature: it thus poses problems for those who would make judgements regarding the 'sophistication' of a narrative. Firstly, he argues that minstrelsy cannot be regarded as a marginalized tradition, scorned by literate audiences: secondly, he suggests that romances form a type of 'transitional literature', which was written for readers - not composed by minstrels. (20) What Taylor's article really does is to explode the myth that romances are simple tales for simple people: whether the tales were read or heard, their popularity is not (necessarily) an indication of simplicity.

If lays and romances are both popular genres, how can they be distinguished? Is there any difference between them other than that of length? Kathryn Hume observes that 'Romances have a very distinctive tendency to idealize Most romances display heroes as patterns of ennobling virtues'; (21) she also argues that this is not true of folk-tales generally, which allow for the use of cleverness and subterfuge. However, I don't think that Hume's thesis is tenable, either with the lays or the romances; after all,

Sir Gowther is sometimes regarded as a saint's life (ennobling virtues) and Sir Orfeo as an allegory of Christ's harrowing of hell (idealizing). The eponymous hero of The Erl of Toulous is as heroic and knightly and as patiently in love with the lady for whom he waits and fights honourably as ever Chaucer's Troilus or Malory's courtly Lancelot were. Again, courtly romances, such as Malory's Tale of Gareth of Orkney or Chretien's Yvain (which are similar) both use cleverness and subterfuge as a means of winning. (22) It seems, therefore, that there is little point in attempting to distinguish between the lays and the romances: like novels and short stories, the primary difference between them is one of length. Where the cut-off point occurs has been decided by the fact that some short romances call themselves (or place themselves into the category of the) lays. They therefore form a natural group for study.

The history of the lays' critical reception is a somewhat mixed one. In the early part of this century they were received with approbation, which by the 1950s had turned to something approaching contempt, though latterly there have been some attempts at re-evaluating them. Henry Kozicki's article on Sir Degarre contains a useful history of the tale's reception which is, broadly, reflected in the attitude to the whole group, with the single exception of Sir Orfeo. (23) Why this should be so I shall attend to later. J. E. Wells's comments - published in 1923 - reveal not so much a critical evaluation as a distinctly personal

one, and the kind of language which he employs is very interestingly sexist. I give here a sample of his comments on the lays:

[Le Freine] The poem is written simply and tenderly It exhibits a fineness of conception and a delicateness of taste and touch [Sir Orfeo] The little story is one of the most attractive pieces in Middle English charmingly graceful and fanciful [Emare] The poem is full of sentiment and sensibility [The Erl of Toulous] The points are stressed in the speech of the lady, who, though she is beautiful and virtuous, is somewhat too didactic. (24)

'Simply', 'tenderly', 'fineness of conception', 'delicateness of taste and touch', 'little', 'attractive pieces', 'charmingly graceful and fanciful', 'full of sentiment and sensibility'; the list of adjectives which Wells employs could easily be taken (out of context) as a description of a 'feminine' woman. What his description also does is to 'infantilize' the tales; they aren't serious works of literature (by serious writers, who are men?), but 'fripperies' which help to pass the time pleasantly (like women?). They are certainly designated by Wells in Howard Bloch's 'preliterary' category. It is notable that the only pejorative comment which he makes is on the 'too didactic' lady of The Erl of Toulous; ladies are obviously very charming when they are beautiful, virtuous, small, delicate, etcetera - but only as long as they keep their mouths shut.

In a work also published in 1923, J.D. Bruce, writing on Marie de France's Guigemar, made the following comment:

.... one must read the original to catch the charm of its naivete which effaces completely the boundaries between fairyland and actual life, of the simple, direct story of passion, which, neither hasting nor lingering, goes straight to the mark. If one were asked to name the books which represent best the romantic charm of the Middle Ages, the wisest answer, perhaps, would be the lais of Marie de France and Gottfried of Strasbourg's Tristan. (25)

Of Marie de France he goes on to note: 'Of this admirable poetess, whose naive grace cast its spell over Goethe in his old age, we know little more than her name, her nationality and her works.' (26) It seems to me that there is an implicit understanding of all the works as being particularly 'female'; perhaps because the genus 'lay' is descended from the work of a woman author; or perhaps because their popularity/unsophistication meant that they would be construed not just as 'women's tales' but as 'feminine'. Of course, along with the word 'feminine' go all sorts of associations to do with 'irrationality', 'charm', 'graceful', 'naive', etcetera - the words which Wells uses to describe the lays. Women - and 'women's tales' - are thus trivialized. (27) The lays are devalued as works which are anonymous, lower-class and derivative; they are valued as works which are charming, lovely, graceful, etcetera. The whole equation reads like a misogynist representation of women: critical response constructs the texts as 'female' -

for better or worse.

By the 1950s the evaluation of the lays as works of literary merit has changed: they are less often viewed as 'charming', and more often categorized as 'inept', though the language employed still betrays a distinctly patronizing tone, and is still based on obviously sexist premises. In an article published in 1953, G.V. Smithers follows earlier critics in his commendation of the lays. He observed:

Even compositions in miniature, such as Sir Degarre and Desire, already exhibit the irrationality which is the most potent ingredient in the charm of Arthurian romance and that enchanting irrationality is commonly due not to some miracle of poetic insight, but to the prosaic and mechanical accident that the material has been taken out of its original setting. (28)

Once again, we are presented with stories which are slight and charming. Thus, illogical femininity (irrational, enchanting, charm) is a turn-on, and therefore the tales are acceptable, but this result is only arrived at because of a mistake, not because of masculine genius ('a miracle of poetic insight'). The title of C.H. Slover's 1931 article, 'Sir Degarre: A Study in A Medieval Hack Writer's Methods', displays contempt for author and tale. (29) The editors of Medieval English Romances (1980), made the following reductive remark: 'Sir Degarre is only - or, at any rate, primarily - "a story" [which] demonstrates how enjoyable a mere story, if well told, can be.' (30) I shall

give further examples of these types of comments in the chapters on the individual lays.

It is necessary to relate such differences in style of criticism to the framework within which they were written. The rise of English as an academic discipline which has generated its own theories and language is, essentially, a phenomenon of this century, and the highly specialized language which criticism now employs is radically different from the very generalized vocabulary which scholars such as Wells and Bruce were accustomed to use. It would be impossible, now, to evaluate a text by attending to its 'charm', 'attractiveness', or 'gracefulness'; similarly, the mid-century Leavisite search for moral truth would be dismissed by (most) contemporary criticism. There has not yet been, though, a coherent re-vision of readings of the Middle English lays, and there is still a tendency to see them as inferior. In an essay published in 1988, Derek Pearsall commented thus on Sir Degarre: '.... the whole thing is a not at all contemptible example of what the professional romancer could knock together when pressed.'

(31) John Finlayson makes another gendered response when he writes (1984-85): 'We may perceive an essential aspect of the lay, namely, that it is closer to the fairy-tale or folk-tale than the full-fledged romance in its total disregard for motivated, sequentially significant action.'

(32) The search for 'motivated, sequentially significant action' is a search for male action, for women are

characterized as moved by the irrational, and certainly as inconsequential and insignificant; they do not do anything which is termed as 'significant', for their business is to be small and charming. Again, terms such as 'hack writer', 'mechanical', and 'knock together', are masculine gendered expressions: it is men who are 'hack-writers', who can be relied on to 'make' something when it is wanted. (33)

What would appear to be happening is that when critics like the tale/s - chiefly in the very early part of this century - they respond to them as though they were 'feminine', betraying the figure of the critic as the 'gentleman scholar', the 'man of letters'. Where 'feminine' equals 'delightful pet' the 'charm' is 'potent' (cf. Smithers) and scholars (i.e., sophisticated men) like the lays. However, where analysis rests less on the personal and more on the scholarly method, the tales are dismissed as those which an inept (cf. Smithers) man might make when required to construct (cf. Pearsall) a tale which is essentially journalese (cf. Slover) and lacking in action (cf. Finlayson).

Critics are looking for what they expect to get - and what they expect to get are men's tales. Finlayson makes this point in his comment: 'In fact, considered coldly [rationally], shortness and adventure or ordeal would seem to be the only things that can really be isolated as universal characteristics.' (34) Finlayson's focus on 'adventure and ordeal' contrasts sharply with the comments

of critics such as Wells: at no point does Wells comment in a manner which may be construed as 'masculine'. It is difficult to believe that the tales which Finlayson sees as having only 'shortness, adventure and ordeal' in common, are the same as those which Wells perceives as 'delicate, attractive, fanciful and full of sensibility'. It is thus clear that it is possible to read the lays in radically different ways.

What is also interesting is how little work has been done on the lays: in J.E. Wells' 1923 Manual of Writings in Middle English the critical bibliography is contained within two pages (pp. 783-84); by 1967 the bibliography in the revised Manual runs to only five pages (pp. 292-97). (35) Romances fare better than lays do. (36) The exception to this critical rule is Sir Orfeo, which has received both more attention and more approval than any of the other Middle English lays. I shall give a series of critical opinions in the section on Sir Orfeo.

Sir Orfeo, though, belongs to a very long tradition of tales going back to Ovid and it has the status of a myth; critics therefore have a means of understanding and categorizing it, even of writing a whole book on the tradition. (37) It is perceived as being both accessible and worthy of critical attention because it fits into a privileged, male position. As Diane Purkiss notes:

A myth is not a single entity, but a diversity of stories told differently in different times and

places. Myths are often caught up in contemporaneity, just as they were for their inventors. As part of their history, myths have been part of literary and academic self-definitions. Classical myths are, in Alicia Ostriker's phrase, "handed down"; they belong to high culture, and are largely transmitted by educational and cultural authorities. Consequently, classical myth is not merely authoritative and high in itself; it also confers prestige on texts which display their author's knowledge of it. Classical myth became a way for literary communities to constitute themselves and exclude others. (38)

The Middle English Breton lays, apart from Sir Orfeo, certainly belong to an 'excluded' tradition. Part of the reason for this is that they are difficult to categorize, other than as lays; they are full of oddities and inexplicabilities if one is reading them as belonging to a tradition of (even ill-made) male-authored/male-centred texts. My own difficulties in understanding the lays arose out of a desire to read them as neatly self-contained stories which could be understood as rational creations: in fact, as stories which were written within the confines of a set of expectations which amount to 'rules'. I wanted to fit them into a (male-designed) schema. The manifest irritation which Smithers betrays, calling the author 'the person responsible for this version' (39) is precisely because the tale does not fit his expectations. It is also a significantly un-gendered comment, which is very unusual: critics almost invariably use 'he' unless it is known that the author is a woman; why then does Smithers not write 'the man responsible'? There is an implicit meaning here that he

doesn't want to (be seen to) be critical of a male author/ity - so he uses the neutral form; or perhaps he is (again implicitly) suggesting that a man would not make such a bad job of writing a version of a tale? Of course it is also possible that Smithers distances himself from the 'person responsible', not as a gendered response, but as a means of distancing himself from the 'lower class' lay and its author.

The idea of 'fit' - that is, of the critic approaching the text with a pre-conceived set of expectations - is worth exploring further. Annette Barnes writes: 'Whether the universal principles are psychological, religious, sociological or political, it often happens that in individual cases the shoe fits only if the foot is literally cut to the requisite size'. (40) But these 'universal principles', which are the principles on which criticism rests, are gendered male, as Genevieve Lloyd has shown. In western culture, logic, reason, hypothesis, rationality are all masculine. Lloyd notes: 'Rational knowledge has been constructed as a transcending, transformation or control of natural forces; and the feminine has been associated with what rational knowledge transcends, dominates, or simply leaves behind'. (41) She goes on to argue, persuasively, that this binary vision in which femaleness is associated with 'the unlimited, irregular and disorderly', as against the male principles associated with determinate form, has structured virtually all western philosophical thought until

the latter half of this century. I would argue that it also structures critical responses to the lays; what earlier critics saw as feminine charm, more recent ones see as (feminine) disorder.

And the lays are 'disorderly'; writing on the romance, rather than specifically the lay (which is often and in this case certainly assumed into the category 'romance') (42), Gerald Bordman comments:

This piecemeal introduction of motifs from without - the temptation is to term it literary prefabrication - may partially explain three features scholars generally suggest distinguish the romance - poor characterization, happy endings, the use of the familiar. But the patently artificial and arbitrary romance destroyed the sense of inevitability which so often demanded an epic hero's noble death. The capriciousness with which any motif might be brought into service permitted the romance to satisfy the audience's desire for a pleasant conclusion. (43)

Bordman's comment highlights the difference between 'motivated, sequentially significant action' ('the inevitability [of] the epic hero's noble death'), and the 'capriciousness' of the woman's plot.

Of course, along with their being read as 'feminine' goes an often explicit belief in the lays' artistic inferiority. Again and again one is reminded that the lays are, simply, not very good. Constance Bullock Davies remarks: 'What we have to try not to do is to invest the Breton Lay with an intellectual and literary significance it

did not originally possess. In conception it was fundamentally primitive'. (44) Here we have 'naive' being rewritten as 'primitive'. Nor are 'intellectual' and 'literary' gender-neutral terms. (45) As women have not been allowed to participate in 'intellectual' life, so also works which are perceived as feminine (however subliminally), are also denied merit. Davies' 'primitive' means 'pre-civilized', which goes with 'childlike', and 'suitable for subjugation'. One is led to the conclusion that there is something about the narratives which strikes critics as 'feminine', whether that is in the approving sense of attractive, charming and slight, or the disapproving sense of being disorderly, irrational and capricious.

Freud commented: 'When we cannot understand something, we always fall back on abuse. An excellent way of making a task lighter'. (46) What I intend to do, then, is to get rid of the Procrustean bed and the emasculating knife (both male tools of domination and intervention) and attempt to find a way of reading which poses a different kind of evaluation of the 'feminine'.

II

If one takes the tales without wishing to cut out some parts, and imagines that they are actually skilfully

crafted, then it is possible to see something else emerging. I want to argue that these tales are 'feminine' in a way which is quite different from the 'feminine' of earlier critics.

What is so remarkable about these narratives is that they do confront problematics of biological womanhood. The stories deal with particular female experiences, those connected with women's 'rites of passage' and the parturitional aspects of being a woman. I know of no piece of criticism which has looked at the tales from the point of view of the women in them and attempted to make sense of them in that light. I shall be reading the lays against previous criticism, from my position as a woman reader. It seems to me that the women are not marginal in the tales which I have so far examined, but that they have been marginalized by male assumptions. In Morag Schiach's words: 'The argument, then, is that narrative can only proceed by the construction of a particular concept of "woman", which is then forced into the margins, and used to reflect and to validate male heroism'. (47) It is because women have been marginalized by male criticism that the tales so resist any easy categorization. The female narratives are not so much implicit as repressed.

As I have noted, the tales are anonymous, but they derive, as a type, from the works of a female author, Marie de France. Insofar as Lay Le Freine derives directly from her lai, it can be seen as female-authored. I want to

suggest that the Middle English lays may very well have been female-authored. (48) My thesis is that the tales do contain narratives of female experience, and that this is what they have in common with each other. Nikki Stiller observes: 'The great difficulty presented by the predominantly male authorship of medieval works is, I believe, not so much misogyny as a distortion through ignorance'. (49) However the lays, unlike most other medieval narratives, are not ignorant of and do not avoid the menstruating, maternal body: Sir Degarre, Sir Gowther, Le Freine and Emare all contain maternal narratives - which are problematic; Sir Orfeo and Sir Launfal do not shirk the physical body either. The Erl of Toulous is the only lay which does not encompass a narrative wherein the female body is neither maternal nor mutilated: what it does portray is a (married) woman displaying her body to attract a lover. It is not a question of women readers or members of an audience making their own meanings out of these tales, (50) but of the tales being misappropriated by later critics.

These repressed stories have their own logic and plausibility; they can be subjected to sustained analysis and reveal coherent structures where the discovery of wish, dream or fear, does lead to explanation. (51) Freud argued for there being another kind of thinking, between the (historically) male 'rational' and the (historically) female 'irrational'. In The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, he demonstrated the presence of submerged or 'repressed'

meanings by examining the incongruences between what people indicated they had intended to say, write, or do and what they actually did say, write or do. Freud noted: 'Where an error makes its appearance a repression lies behind it - or, more correctly, an insincerity, a distortion, which is ultimately rooted in repressed material'. (52) In the same way the 'hidden' content of these lays, when examined using psychoanalytic approaches, reveals anxieties and frustrations of the kind which Freud was accustomed to find in his patients.

The material is not hidden in these tales in any 'rational' kind of way; I do not intend to suggest that the authors of these tales deliberately concealed these hidden narratives in tales which can also be read as stories of adventure or ordeal. Rather, these repressed tales may have been as hidden to their authors as they were and are to their audience. These hidden meanings are, I believe, what have provoked critics to respond to the tales as 'irrational', and to assume that they are inept attempts to construct logical and plausible narratives. The fact that Smithers wants to get rid of one of the recognition tokens and one of the fights in Sir Degarre seems to imply that he felt the tale to be 'unmanageable' and 'disorderly'; possibly his manifest irritation is a subliminal admission that there is more to this story than meets the eye; one is not, after all, irritated by nothing, and here he is irritated by the tale's not conforming to expectation, to

what he thinks he knows these tales ought to be like.

The presence of a hidden narrative is what might be classed as a Freudian slip; that is, it is indicated by some act, activity or token which one would not normally expect to find in such stories. Jane Gallop's instructive comment that it is in the impurities of narrative that both Freudian and feminist critiques find methods whereby alternative readings can be found, is precisely the means of understanding the 'irrational' in the lays. (53) Reading them requires a sympathy with the unexpected and 'the unfit', rather than irritation - and sometimes simply embarrassment. I give as an example Sir Degarre, where the princess announces her intention of leaving the retinue in order to answer a call of nature (1.51-2); this is quite an extraordinary announcement in the context of what is otherwise a courtly narrative. However the princess does not reveal exactly what that 'call of nature' is; thus attention is drawn to the fact of her having a bodily nature (and being aware of it herself), which then forces the reader to ask what, precisely, that nature might be. Stanley Cavell notes: 'Whatever in me I have to conceal I may betray exactly by the way in which I conceal it'; he goes on to remark: 'The concealment of what there is to express is an exacting art, like camouflage. You might call it a language; the language of the body'. (54) It is worth pointing out, though, that - not surprisingly, perhaps - the question as to what precisely it is that the princess stops to do is one

that other critics do not raise; their narratives proceed: 'the princess leaves the retinue and is lost in the forest'. (55) This elision is telling; what it tells us is that the biological body is ignored.

Similarly, in Sir Gowther, attention is drawn to the specifically female body in a way which is unparalleled, to my knowledge, in any other romance; the infant Gowther bites off his mother's nipple when she is trying to suckle him. In Sir Orfeo, Herodis is described as lacerating her body in a way that is conventional enough as a sign of mourning, although there is no 'rational' occasion for her to be exhibiting such signs of grief. There are indications in these tales that the repressed narratives have to do with female bodily experiences, with the need to come to terms with one's - female - body, both as a biological body and as a social construct.

What I intend to explore in the Middle English lays are the anxieties which women have about their bodies, which are revealed in what I have termed the hidden narratives. I shall concentrate on the fantasy element, which, I suggest, makes them 'women's tales'. I would argue that these are not 'symbolic stories' representing conscious desires or fears, but that the fantasy element, which is usually submerged in what is perceived to be a straightforward narrative, is a means of working through various anxieties, connected especially with women's 'rites of passage': with puberty and maidenhood; the loss of virginity; the experience of sexual

intercourse; (56) childbirth and childlessness; the mother's response to her children; and the menopause. Each of these marks a distinct phase in many women's lives and each is something which is - potentially - painful, both literally and psychically. Although they are not all universal characteristics, shared by all women, they are, nevertheless, exclusively female; they are also important in the portrayal of women in the lays. I would note, though, that much of the anxiety surrounding them is attributable to cultural factors, not simply physical fears of pain. (57) Psychoanalysts recognize that female fears of sexual experience are not necessarily biologically determined, but are created by the ideologies which control sexual behaviour. (58)

In medieval times, the dominant discourse on sexuality was man-made and served male interests, and many girls must have felt anxiety about sexual experience. Such anxieties were, in part, fed by the ideologies surrounding virginity. Not only was virginity represented as the highest ideal, for men and women alike, but apologists for virginity frequently used arguments about the disadvantages of married life: virginity was a social, as well as a spiritual ideal. The author of Holy Meidenhad stresses the iniquities of marriage:

Heo schal his wil muchel hire unwil (drehen,
ne luuie ha him neauer swa wel), with muche
weane ofte; alle his fulitch (es)chipes ant
his unhende go(m)enes, ne been ha neauer swa

with filth bifunden, nomeliche i bedde ha schal
wull ha, nulle ha, tholien ham alle. (59)

Nevertheless, the anxiety about, say, childbirth, rests on the fact that it was, and still is today, usually a very bloody and painful process. (60) Similarly anxiety about the menopause belongs both to personal psychology and cultural valuation; whether older women are valued in a society or not, it marks the end of one's reproductive life and is an indication of ageing. The portrayal of Guinevere in the lay Sir Launfal as a sexually voracious, lying and scheming hussy who loses the competition to the (younger) lady Triamour, might suggest how menopausal women were viewed. The indicator of the end of reproductive life in this tale is the curse, which Guinevere imposes on herself, of having her eyes put out if she is not the fairest woman living (1.809-100). Blinding is commonly a substitution for castration and Triamour does, in fact, blind Guinevere by blowing into her eyes (1.1007-08), thus indicating that Guinevere's sexual life is ended. (61) It is significant that, generally speaking, powerful women tend to be widows or older women, like the Wife of Bath; (62) of course, the archetypal older woman is the step-mother or witch. (63)

Female attitudes towards the changes in their lives as a consequence of biology are probably much the same as people's attitudes to change more generally; on the one hand, change is liberating and exciting - menopause brings

with it the end of the possibility of pregnancy, which may well be a relief to many women; but change is also frightening and biological change is an inevitability over which one has no control. A reading of the lays would seem to suggest that this is as true of the Middle Ages as it is now. Thus the girl having her first period becomes aware of her womanhood, with the excitement of being 'grown-up' and, potentially, the concomitant terror of the components of being 'grown-up': the princess in Sir Gowther takes refuge in dumbness; the princess in Sir Degarre in auto-eroticism.

There is another, very important, matter to be considered here that relates to the question of autonomy; this is especially loaded when it comes to the area of female sexual activity. Because patriarchy does not want women to be sexually autonomous - for fear of subverting the structure of hierarchical society - then such women have been cast in the negative, the Clytemnestras and Phaedras, and women have been made to feel guilty about wanting such experience. The romances, though, sometimes depict women as sexual agents who choose men. Flora Alexander writes:

In reality in post-conquest England an upper class woman's choice of a sexual partner "was subordinated to questions of land, money, and rank", and it is not surprising that the idea of a woman as an object of exchange between men is reflected in the literature of the thirteenth century. But it is notable that repeatedly the literary texts accommodate some degree of dissatisfaction with the treatment of women as chattels. (64)

There are overt instances of this: in Sir Launfal, where the sexualizing of men is explicitly performed by women; in Sir Gawain and The Green Knight, where the lady is portrayed as a sexual predator; the Wife of Bath is probably most famous for her designs on men; even younger heroines, like Rimenhild in King Horn are portrayed as knowing who they want and not hiding it. Malory's Guinevere is one of the most powerful and best-known women in medieval literature, and what is well-known about her is that she has a long-standing adulterous affair. She is represented by Malory as speaking openly her desire for Lancelot:

And anon the quene was ther redy to mete hym.
And than they made their complayntes to othir
of many dyverce thingis, and than sir Lancelot
wysshed that he myght have comyn in to her.
"Wyte you well," seyde the quene, "I wolde
as fayne as ye that ye myght com in to me."
"Wolde ye so, madame," seyde sir Lancelot,
"wyth youre harte that I were with you?"
"Ye, truly," seyde the quene. (65)

Guinevere is, of course, not the only desiring woman; there are many women in medieval English romance, from Ysolde onwards who are unambiguously sexually active.

There are also narratives, though, where the women are covertly sexually active, and it is with these that I am principally concerned. This covertness is revealed if one uncovers the fantasy elements which are contained in some of the lays. In Sir Degarre, the princess's self-revelation of her bodily nature is followed almost immediately by her

rape; in Sir Gowther, the mother's prayer for a child is followed by her encounter with the lustful man whom she meets after she has left the castle. It is important to note that in these covert encounters, responsibility for sexual activity is refused. Toril Moi notes: '.... as in all rape fantasies, the delight and jouissance spring from the fact that the woman is blameless: she didn't want it so cannot be guilty of any illicit desires'. (66) Responsibility is refused for the act, but it is the desire which creates the fantasy; the same is true of masturbation fantasies, which show that the girl is declaring herself a sexual creature, though in a repressed fashion. Rosalind Coward comments:

The guilt women often feel about active sexuality is evidenced by the guilt which women seem frequently to feel about masturbation, a guilt apparently not shared by men. The pleasure is felt as somehow stolen, not quite right. This is probably because the activity is directly reminiscent of childhood sexuality - the organs and sensations are not necessarily those of the heterosexual act of penetration. It is therefore an activity which unavoidably reminds women of a sexuality outside the "approved" act, and a sexuality for which only they are responsible. (67)

Women's sexual feelings, and the fantasies which express them, do form an important part of these narratives.

There are also indications in the texts that women are afraid of the physical experience of sex; female sexual processes can be, literally, more painful than male sexual processes, as Karen Horney has noted. (68) Experiences such

as menstruation and defloration can provide a type of 'injury' of the wounding, bleeding order; I shall comment further on this in the section on Sir Gowther. However these experiences can also be positive, rather than occasions for fear and this is where, I would say, the body needs 're-writing'. In fact the lays do 'write the body', which male critics have attempted to erase; and the female body needs re-writing because, as Clara Thompson has noted, it has been undervalued. She goes on to remark: 'I think we can concede that the acceptance of one's body and all its functions is a basic need in the establishment of self-respect and self-esteem'. (69) This is something that has been denied to women by social constructs. Caroline Bynum notes:

It thus seems possible to suggest, as the vast majority of historians have done, that women understood themselves to be symbols of the flesh, saw fasting and other forms of asceticism as weapons for ridding that flesh, and therefore adopted extreme starvation and other forms of mutilation in an effort to rise to the level of spirit and to become, metaphorically speaking, male. (70)

The lays, though, present a different historical perspective, for the women in them are portrayed as bodily women. The medieval construction of the female body as a locus of fear, shame and guilt is a masculine one - though as Bynum has suggested, this was adopted by many women. However, as the princess in Sir Degarre evidences, women in the lays don't necessarily feel that way about it.

There is another problem to be confronted here, and that is the problem over the language available to represent women and bodily experience. Dale Spender comments:

Because women have not been involved in the production of the legitimated language, they have been unable to give weight to their own symbolic meanings, they have been unable to pass on a tradition of women's meanings of the world. Both sexes have the capacity to generate meanings but women have not been in a position to have their meanings taken up and incorporated in those of the society. (71)

Writers, Spender implies, whether male or female, do not have a tradition of representations of women's meanings on which to draw. It has been observed that sexist language possesses words only for constructing women's experience as negative. (72) It is generally thought that women cannot represent themselves as positively identified, speaking subjects; however the lays show that women could be written in that way. Julia Kristeva's theory of 'positionality' makes it possible to see how this might be effected. (73) However, if texts do find a means of giving expression to women's experiences, then those experiences are ignored by critics, unless they form a significant enough intrusion into the male heroic text to warrant condemnation. I shall give examples of this in the sections on the individual works.

Not only are women's experiences coded as negative, when they are encoded at all (the straightforward narrative in

Sir Degarre is a reminder of the perils of childbirth), but the female body is also erased when it becomes 'an embarrassment' (chiefly in its menstruating, childbearing condition). Critics consistently 'recognize' the intrusion of the female body by ignoring it - sometimes with palpable distaste (as with Donovan on Sir Gowther). It follows, then, that a romance motif such as the blood-stained sheet is always interpreted as signifying male presence: either the woman is represented as a virgin penetrated by a man; or because the man has been wounded and bled on the sheets, as is assumed to be the case when Mellyagaunte opens Guinevere's bed-curtains, and sees the blood-speckled sheets. (74) However, as every woman who has ever menstruated knows, there is no need to have had a man in the bed in order to have blood-stained sheets. Guinevere, though, as a male-constructed romantic icon, can't then be represented as a bleeding woman. This 'overlooking' is in large part a response to Christian notions about the horrible 'fleshliness' of the body. Gordon Leff has suggested that dualistic heresies, such as the Waldensian and Cathar heresies, permeated Christian belief: these dualistic doctrines denied Christ's passion and his - or any other - bodily resurrection; they also denied Mary's motherhood. (75) Thus, the denial of the (potentially) maternal body is the denial of being made flesh. Julia Kristeva has also remarked that Christianity only allows women to enter the symbolic community as long as they remain

virgin. (76) Of course, it is in the cause of the preservation of their virginity that many female saints (who are allowed entry to the symbolic community) are martyred.

(77) Kristeva goes on to comment:

.... patrilinear descent with transmission of the name of the father centralizes eroticism, giving it the single goal of procreation. It is thus caught in the grip of an abstract symbolic authority which refused to recognize the growth of the child in the mother's body. (78)

Patriarchy attempts to transcend and deny its bodily origins; women are thus represented as vessels wherein the male seed is nurtured. Effectively, women become loci of production. I shall comment on the commodification of the woman's body, and most particularly the commodification of the uterus, in the section on Sir Degarre.

Flesh, whether male or female, was represented in medieval theology as an obstacle to the attainment of a life of grace and union with God; the mortal coil has to be shuffled off. Gordon Leff explains the goals of mystical transcendence well:

Man, in entering the ground of the soul, entered into an eternal stillness, devoid of time, place, or movement. To do so he had first to cast off those attributes of the world, which meant complete detachment not only from all physical wants but his very awareness as a finite being; if man were to see God, **he must no longer see or feel as a creature.** (my emphasis) (79)

This is, again, a denial of the flesh and the body. Leff goes on to note the superiority accorded to the intellect because of its affinity to God (deiformitas); this deiformity was, in effect, another denial of the corporeal. (80) In his commentary Leff uses the masculine form; in 1967, when the book was published, virtually no academic, either male or female, would have used the unthinkable woman/she/her, or the vulgar generic 'they'; there are other reasons, too, why he does so, and this is a concern which Genevieve Lloyd has argued. She comments:

The obstacles to female cultivation of Reason spring to a large extent from the fact that our ideals of Reason have historically incorporated an exclusion of the feminine, and that femininity itself has been partly constituted through such processes of exclusion. (81)

Women mortify their flesh to become, as Caroline Bynum observes, 'metaphorically speaking, male'; they can never become godlike because God is male and purely metaphysical; men by effort can achieve deiformitas, while women can achieve maleness. The necessity that one be 'male' in order to get closer to God clearly demeans the female experience by assuming that the male provides the model for all spiritual aspirations, as well as by equating the male with God. It is also a male version of events; Bynum has suggested other reasons for women's mortification of their

flesh. (82) It is true that St. Augustine argued that men and women were equally valued:

We must likewise repudiate those who deny that the Lord Jesus Christ had Mary for His mother, since His temporal plan ennobled each sex, both male and female. By possessing a male nature and being born of a woman He further showed by this plan that God has concern not only for the sex He represented but also for the one through which He took upon Himself our nature. (83)

Nevertheless - apart from the fact that Augustine's views on the equality of the sexes were not widely held - even here, woman is allowed entry to the symbolic order only in terms of her relationship to man. (84) The bottom line is that men can be divine, transcending the body altogether; women can become men - and get rid of the childbearing body. It is notable that that is almost precisely what happens in high courtly romances: the lady of 'fin' amor' is not a mother. (85) Similarly, the body is transcended in criticism and belittled insofar as 'women's speech' (for example talk about [taboo] biological experiences such as menstruation) is assumed to be either embarrassing or 'trivial'.

Women's speech is belittled in other ways as well: it is not a source of authority or truth. This is not simply a matter of women being ignorant of the truth: it is also, in part, a masculine response to the idea of women knowing or speaking truth. As Kristeva has noted, classical and biblical models are male-centred: 'God generally speaks only

to men'. (86) Although men are allowed to take up authoritative positions, which ensure that their utterances are believed, the same is not true of women. The classical example is provided by Cassandra, who had the gift of prophecy but the curse of being disbelieved by those to whom she spoke. Significantly, Cassandra's male twin, Helenus, also has the gift of prophecy, but he is not represented as having the same doom. It is apparently 'natural' that he will be listened to and taken seriously, because he is a man, whilst Cassandra will not. The other symbolized female truth-speakers are the sybils. Sybils do not speak their own truths, but are simply the means whereby gods express themselves, and, as such, are the archetypal female vessel, the 'embodiment' which the gods enter in order to be able to speak to people. (87) The Virgin Mary occupies the same kind of tradition: she too is symbolized as a vessel for a male God. It seems, therefore, that women can only be symbolized as speaking truth when they speak for men. (88)

Not only is women's speech problematic, but their relationships with one another have not been symbolized in the ways that men's have. Although fathers and sons are a constant theme in classical and medieval literature, the relationship between mothers and daughters is far less frequently represented. Margaret Whitford, writing about Irigaray, has commented on this lack of a female symbolic, whereby mothers and daughters do not figure mythically or culturally. (89) What female relationships there are, are

frequently cast in the negative: classical examples are provided by Hera, Athene and Aphrodite; biblical by Rachel and Leah, or Martha and Mary. (90)

It is in the highly problematic area of mother-child relationships that the lack of a female symbolic is evident. Women's love of their children is not uncommonly represented as being in direct contradiction of 'the greater good', as the example from Amis and Amiloun which I shall be commenting on shortly demonstrates. Malory is clearly not interested in portraying women's feelings, otherwise his rather bald comment that the lords and barons were displeased when their children were murdered by Arthur, might have indicated far stronger emotions. (91) Genevieve Lloyd has commented on the conflict of mothers' relationships with their children - in this instance where sons are required to go to war - as the conflict between the state and the individual. (92) It is also a conflict for the girl or woman in a paternalist household who becomes a mother without male sanction. The mother in Lay le Freine prefers to expose the child, rather than be condemned as an adulteress; the princess in Sir Degarre is terrified at what her father will say if she reveals her pregnancy to him. In classical mythology Clytemnestra's attempt to save Iphigeneia is portrayed as the beginning of the downward path which ends with her being an adulterous murderess. The crux of the problem, though, is that it is as a lover and wife, or mother, that women's relationships are most

positively symbolized. Patriarchal ideology has it both ways: when it suits men to see mothers' relationships with their children as good, then they are glorified: the Pieta, the Madonna and Child are staples of western European art galleries. However when maternal feelings are viewed as dangerously subversive, then mothers - like Clytemnestra - are castigated, when they are represented at all. Nikki Stiller observes:

Even when women begin to take active roles in the literature these roles are romantic, not maternal. Even in the courtly literature, written in good part for women and controlled by them to some extent, the relation of the woman to the man is important, and not that of a woman to her children. The occasional maternal role played by a mother is that of mother to a male child, to a son. (93)

There are an extraordinary number of 'absent' mothers in Middle English romances. Jenny Fellows observes: '.... in general, the mothers of romance heroines are conspicuous by their absence'. (94) This is partly, I would suggest, because a mother is not a sexy creature; women are split into wives and mothers, and then mistresses. I shall comment further on this in the section on Lay le Freine. The father's relationship with the daughter then becomes the focus of attention, so the mother has to be denied in order to make this acceptable. Not only are mothers frequently absent but mother figures, as compared with father figures, also tend to be under-represented. The portrayal of mothers

who are 'good' women also draws on masculine ideas and male points of view. In Amis and Amiloun, Amis's wife is presented as a compassionate and deserving woman; this is perhaps not unconnected with the fact that when her husband has slain their children in order to cure his friend's leprosy, she comforts him, although she is sorrowful, saying that perhaps God will send them more children. (95) She accepts that male friendship is a greater bond than parenthood. What she is also accepting is the man's right to dispose of their children as he sees fit; in fact, that masculine values are paramount.

Maternal preoccupations do figure, though, quite notably, in the lays, in Lay Le Freine, in Emare, and most obviously in Sir Gowther, where breast feeding is an issue, as well as the whole notion of maternal nurture. It is also true that the relationship with male children is not unproblematic. Sir Gowther is an egregious example - to (male) critics, at least - but the motif is there in Sir Degarre, too. Here the female narratives subvert the traditional male narratives.

III

It is here that I wish to present the case for using a critical approach which draws on Freudian psychoanalysis. I shall also be drawing on modern feminist criticism, as it is in these critical works that models for deconstructing and

reconstructing the female body are offered. I shall begin by justifying the use of Freudian theory.

What Freud succeeded in doing was to revolutionize society's ways of thinking, especially about women. Rachel Bowlby comments:

From the point of view of anti-psychoanalytic feminism, the person of Freud as a Victorian patriarch is usually taken as the ground for assuming an inescapably anti-feminist stance built into the texts and the practice of psychoanalysis ever since. From the other side, that of pro-psychoanalytic feminism, Freud's early researches into hysteria mark the starting point of what was to be an undoing of every bourgeois or patriarchal assumption as to the biological naturalness of heterosexual attraction or the masculinity and femininity predicated of men and women. (96)

Long before Braidotti's comments on the (feminist) deconstruction of established forms of knowledge, Freud remarked: 'I fail to see why the wisdom which is the precipitate of men's common experience of life should be refused inclusion among the acquisitions of science'. (97) He also made such radical remarks as the following:

The tendency on the part of civilization to restrict sexual life is no less clear than its other tendency to expand the cultural unit. As regards the sexually mature individual, the choice of an object is restricted to the opposite sex, and most extra-genital satisfactions are forbidden as perversions. The requirement, demonstrated in these prohibitions, that there shall be a single kind of sexual life for everyone, disregards the dissimilarities, whether innate or acquired, in the sexual constitution of human beings; it cuts

off a fair number of them from sexual enjoyment, and so becomes the source of serious injustice. (98)

Certainly he uses the male, rather than a gender neutral term, but the first statement undercuts both the authoritative or received nature of wisdom, and the notion that science is a purely factual, theoretical affair where things are always demonstrably the same.

Freud listened to and learnt from women whom most people would simply have condemned as hysterical. The O.E.D. defines hysteria thus:

A functional disturbance of the nervous system characterized by anaesthesia, hyperaesthesia, convulsions etc. and usually attended with emotional disturbances or perversions of the moral and intellectual faculties. Women being more liable than men to this disorder, it was originally thought to be due to a disturbance of the uterus. Unhealthy emotion or excitement.

The time-honoured method of dealing with an hysterical person is to give them a good slap; it is certainly not to take them seriously. There is in Freud's work an insistent and consistent refusal to condemn people and a commitment to attempting to understand them, however 'hysterical'. That Freud's understanding was coloured by historical and cultural perspectives goes without saying, leading to the necessity for a re-evaluation of his theories. Nevertheless, there is, in his work, a serious attempt to listen - by looking as well as listening - to what people, men and

women, have to say for themselves.

What Freud also did was to create a vocabulary, and this vocabulary, validated as it was by medical and scientific practice, made a linguistic space - which was not defined by moral codes - for people's interiors: masturbation - not 'onanism', or 'self-abuse' - became a legitimate method of dealing with 'repression'; (99) homosexual desire was no longer presented as an 'unnatural' vice, felt only by perverts. (100) Certainly one has to recognize that medical and scientific vocabulary is a discourse of mastery, and remember Luce Irigaray's warning that the relative physical positions which analyst and analysand occupied (one seated, hidden, the other lying, open to view), emphasize male power and female powerlessness, especially in a sexual sense. (101) Juliet Mitchell, though, has made the following important point: 'Psychoanalysis must be one of the very few scientific professions that, from its inception, exercised no discrimination against women'. (102) Essentially, as Rachel Bowlby notes, feminist critiques of Freud rest on the fact that his theories, arising from the analyses which he conducted, were prejudiced by his own views. Christiane Olivier writes:

In psychoanalysis we find a conception of woman that has been dreamed up by a man; a woman such as man might wish her to be, but one perhaps unrelated to what "woman" really is. From Freud onwards there occurs a distortion of feminine sexuality which women are challenging as totally unrelated to them. (103)

I am unaware that there existed, before Freud, an undistorted view of feminine sexuality.

There is an awareness, in psychoanalysis, both that sexuality is not necessarily gender-determined and that there were problems, for men, in attempting to analyse women's sexual experience. Otto Rank remarked that psychoanalysts' lack of understanding of women's sexual lives provided a distorted picture. (104) Whether they have owned to it or not, psychoanalysts have, too often, presented a distorted view of female sexuality, and it is this distortion which modern feminism addresses.

As Helene Cixous has argued, the female body has been appropriated by men. (105) As I commented earlier, women are represented as loci of production in addition to their role as desirable objects; they are very seldom represented as speaking, powerful, gazing subjects. Just as the transcendence ideal dispenses with the body, so too, as Toril Moi has remarked, does classical intellectuality. (106) The body has been delineated as that which is female, as opposed to the mind, which is male: this dichotomy of head and body has led to a denigration of 'bodily knowledge', and it is this notion of the body as being a site of knowledge which feminist critics have attempted to establish. (107)

If we now return to medieval 'distortions', certainly the medieval conception of women as the very embodiment of evil is a commonplace. (108) The motif of the Devil using

the form of a beautiful woman in order to tempt men is also a feature of medieval story. (109) Women, too, are shown as recognizing that their beauty is a source of evil; the guilt that such situations engender then devolves upon them. In Le Bone Florence of Rome, on refusing an old, ugly and evil suitor who has threatened to wage war if she will not marry him, Florence laments:

"Allas" seyde that maydyn clere,
"Whedur all the yonde folk and there
Schoulde dye for my sake,
And Y but a sympull woman". (110)

However what happens in the lays is that the hidden narratives - which critics have consistently misread - privilege bodily experience and bodily knowledge: they also show the women as controlling agents of their own sexual activity, and sometimes the sexual activity of men, too. The women look, speak, act, and are - however embarrassing for critics - female bodies. Here, in these marginalized tales, one can detect narratives of women's feelings about being women.

CHAPTER 2

GROWING UP STRAIGHT: THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED
IDENTITY IN SIR DEGARRE

I

Sir Degarre exists in more manuscript copies than any of the other Middle English Breton lays. (1) Its critical reception, along with that of the rest of the lays, which I outlined in the introduction, has been largely dismissive. In his 1931 article C.H. Slover commented:

Its literary quality is not high; in fact, the author is so inept in putting together his materials that he has left unconsciously a number of direct clues to his sources and methods. (2)

Slover's use of the word 'unconsciously' is interesting; it suggests that there is something subliminal at work in the construction of this tale, and it is this 'subliminal narrative' in which I am interested. There do seem to have been problems for critics in dealing with Sir Degarre. When they are positive, critics still see it as merely 'charming'. Henry Kozicki, though, after his useful survey of the tale's reception in this century goes on to remark:

It is apparent that in this approach literary value is related to the question of whether the lay is genuine or, pejoratively, imitation, on the implicit assumption that a genre crystallizes in its proper form, because nature loves fixed order. Those works that fit the traditional form are good; conversely, mutations with new characteristics, or even correct characteristics artificially rather than spontaneously arrived at are false and are decried. This line of thought is not a profitable one for arriving at literary appraisals. (3)

'Order', 'fit', 'form', are all key words in the history of criticism of the lays, and as I have previously argued, the model derives from that of male rational discourse. What I intend to do, then, is to offer a reading of Sir Degarre which takes into account the 'un-fit' narrative.

One of the ploys which women have used down the ages to escape confinement is that of cross-dressing: from Thecla to Christina of Markyate, Joan of Arc, Shakespeare's Rosalind or Woolf's Orlando, the assumption of male clothing is a strategy which has allowed women some measure of freedom. (4) With characters like Joan of Arc and Orlando, though, the assumption of male dress is only the outward sign of an identification with a 'masculine' position. Along with Joan's male attire goes an assumption of male authority and autonomy which enabled her to head that most male of worlds, the army. The assumption of a biologically 'opposite' position is taboo: as Marina Warner has suggested, the breaking of this taboo is at the root of Joan's persecution. (5) Women who assume a 'masculine' appearance are still vilified, as are men who are considered 'effeminate'. (6) The crux of the matter is that 'we' (whichever 'we' that is, male or female), have to be able to be recognized as such; otherwise, how can 'we' tell 'us' from 'them'? What is brought into question here is not simply how things look, but a concern over the uncertainty of sexual identity and orientation.

Freud's observations on the tenuousness of sexual identification broke an important mental mould. He

commented: 'Generally speaking, every human being oscillates all through his life between heterosexual and homosexual feelings, and any frustration in the one direction is apt to drive him over into the other'. (7) What I want to consider in Sir Degarre is the precariousness of gendered identity. My thesis is that the princess is shown as assuming both male and female roles. Women who fantasize in adolescence about being a boy - because of the perceived liberation which it entails - are probably far commoner than those who actually assume a 'masculine' role. Where the assumption of feminine identity is problematic, the desire to enter a masculine position is probably even greater. In Sir Degarre there is a such a problem for the adolescent princess: her mother is dead, having died in that most female of experiences, childbirth.

Sir Degarre, then, rather than being 'only - or, at any rate primarily - "a good story"', which 'demonstrates how enjoyable a mere story, if well told can be' (8), embodies a tale of female sexual fantasy and of the fears and eventual acceptance of biological womanhood. This is the 'submerged narrative' of the tale. Overtly, the tale can be read as a patriarchal fantasy of property and heritage; the widowed king, needing to get a male heir to keep and protect his kingdom, 'uses' his daughter, in order to continue the family line. It is notable that these events are similar to those which occur in the myth of the birth of Theseus. His mother, Aethra, makes an offering of her virginity to the goddess, and in doing so provides Aegeus with the son whom

he so badly needs to ensure the inheritance of his kingdom. (9) In this myth her father, Pittheus, is instrumental in bringing Aegeus to Aethra, just as Degarre's grandfather is, in allowing his daughter to be lost in the woods. It is also notable that the talismans in these tales are in one case identical and in the other functionally the same. In the Theseus myth the talismans are sword and sandals, and in Sir Degarre sword and gloves. Here, as with other lays, the story apparently tells an obvious 'hero myth': a young man, of unknown parentage, is fostered in an other-worldly setting (in the sense that he has a religious/spiritual upbringing); he makes his journey back into the world, 'proves' his rightful heritage and is subsequently recognised by his parents. Finlayson comments:

In essence, therefore, Sir Degarre is a romance of adventure which conforms to the loss of status-restoration pattern. Through his adventures, the hero establishes his prowess and identity and the work ends on an appropriate restoration of harmony. Apart from being short and having the marvellous element of a fairy-birth episode (whose potentials are completely underdeveloped and subsequently ignored) Sir Degarre is in no way substantially different from any other roman d'aventure. (10)

Finlayson clearly sees the fairy-birth episode as somewhat spurious, for he goes on to remark: 'In fact, in Sir Degarre the fairy-knight might as easily have been a mortal rapist for all the difference his fairy origins make to the nature and quality of the action and poem'. (11) What this piece of criticism indicates is a typical desire to rewrite the

stories 'properly', that is, according to rational models. Thus, the fairy knight becomes superfluous, because he serves no explicitly rational purpose. This relates to a general problem that critics who see in Sir Degarre nothing but a 'good story' have with the narrative: it does not, in fact, from their point of view, turn out to be very well told. Even Kozicki ends his defence rather lamely, noting: 'What the author of Sir Degarre has put together is not unappealing. Certainly it is imaginatively done and deserves better comprehension than analysis of standard forms and sources permit'. (12) W.C. Stokoe, whom Kozicki describes as the tale's 'strongest champion' (13) focuses his attention entirely on 'action' and 'aventure', the classic male heroic, arguing that the author is not as 'inept' as G.V. Smithers claimed when he described it as: 'an inept modification of a basic story-pattern'. (14) Stokoe's remarks about the talisman of the sword are revealing, however. He says: '[it] is an appropriate gift for a fairy knight's son and since the principals in this story fight fully armed, is a safer recognition token than the commonly used ring'. (15) What does Stokoe mean by 'safer', here? It looks as if he is concerned to maintain the 'maleness' of the narrative. The 'commonly used ring' is a female token, which, as we shall see the gloves do, symbolizes the vagina. A sword is 'safer' here, then, because a ring would have provided Degarre with two female identifiers, the ring and the gloves. Men - and masculinity - in this tale are defined by aggressive power and weaponry, a matter I shall be

commenting on later, and to have a hero who locates himself by the talismans of ring and gloves would be to have a hero who locates himself in the place of the mother. A condition far from 'safe', if the male heroic is to be at all tenable. How tenable it is is part of the matter which I shall be discussing.

There have, though, been some pieces of criticism which have indicated dissatisfaction with the reductionist readings of Sir Degarre which the 'good story' school typify. Bruce Rosenberg remarks:

Sir Degarre is a story whose interest lies in the search by a young man for his father and mother, from whom he has been separated since early childhood. Certainly critics have seen little else of interest in the narrative: for despite the claim that the story "is not without power" whose suspense is "deftly handled", and that "dramatic tension plays an important part", no critic has really been interested enough to discuss that "power" or that "tension" at any length. As with nearly all of the Middle English romances, or Breton Lays, Sir Degarre is treated as a quaint historical piece containing "a composite of motives found elsewhere in medieval romance". (16)

Whilst I would agree with Rosenberg's attempt to read the tale on its own terms, so to speak, I would not agree with him as to where the interest lies. For him, Degarre is unproblematically the centre of the tale's concerns, and it is governed by his perspective. From my point of view, the tale is, in part, about the princess's fears of womanhood and her rejection of patriarchal ideology, as well as about Degarre's precariously identified masculinity. In fact the

narrative could be said to be generally about the precariousness of gendered identity, although its meanings are not monolithic, especially in relation to the problematic area of adolescent sexuality. I shall comment further on this in relation to the princess's experience in the wood.

A different, and more fruitful, critical approach is taken by Cheryl Colopy, who writes:

While a literal reading of the story yields a poem that is rude, sudden, muddled - full of bizarre events that seem to defy explanation - a psychological one shows the poem's events to be connected thematically and symbolically. The muddle becomes a pattern when we identify the language which the poem speaks: the visual, symbolic language of the unconscious which is shared by dream and fairy tale. (17)

Colopy's comment is an extremely interesting one; the distinction which she makes between the literal and the symbolic is the distinction between the rational/conscious/male and the irrational/unconscious/female narratives. The 'muddle [which] becomes a pattern' is already deconstructive, but the way in which Colopy reconstructs the text is still to fix it as masculine: 'Like his father before him, Degarre is a giant killer, as are all sons in fantasy'. (18) I hope to demonstrate that the text can be read as reconstructing itself as a 'feminine' one.

II.

Having examined the critical reception of the tale, I now wish to offer a quotation from Freud which I feel is significant in that it unites several issues which are to be my concern in reading the narrative.

At the same time as these plainly incestuous fantasies are overcome and repudiated, one of the most significant, but also one of the most painful psychical achievements of the pubertal period is completed: detachment from parental authority, a process that alone makes possible the opposition, which is so important for the progress of civilization, between the new generation and the old. At every stage in the course of development through which all human beings ought by rights to pass, a certain number are held back; so there are some who have never got over their parents' authority and have withdrawn their affection from them either very incompletely or not at all. (19)

I intend first to discuss the tale as a fantasy which deals with some of the anxieties of puberty. As Freud has suggested, some of these anxieties are bound up with incest fantasies: I shall proceed to examine the incest motifs which occur in the tale. I shall also be discussing the tale's notions of gendered identity, which is revealed as a precarious construct.

The narrative begins by telling us about the princess: in fact, Degarre himself does not enter the story until as late as line 303. By contrast, we learn quite a lot about the princess within the first thirty-four lines: she is her

father's only heir (1.17-8); she is beautiful and gracious (1.19-20); she is her father's pride and joy (1.21); her mother died in giving birth to her (1.22-3); she is of marriageable age (1.24); she is wanted by her suitors for her position rather than her personal attributes (1.27-8); the king has no intention of giving her up to a man weaker than himself (1.29-34). This is already a significant amount of information: more, in fact, than we are ever given about any of the other characters, with the single exception of Degarre himself. There is a correlation between the amount of information we are given about individuals and their significance in the story. In the lays the technique of 'foregrounding' is used, with minor characters existing only as functionaries who move the plot forwards. (20)

'Significant' characters are those about whom we are told significantly more. The princess, then, is significant: and her age is of primary significance here. It should be noted that the concern about her age is an anxiety emphasized by her social status. For an heiress, sexual activity is strictly prescribed.

The next thing which we find out is that the king conducts a ceremony each year to commemorate the death of his wife (1.35-6). Now this act of piety towards his wife is at the same time an act of insensitivity - at best - and brutality - at worst - to his daughter. Such commemorative ceremonies were common, but it has to be remembered that this commemoration marks not only the mother's death but the princess's birthday. The equation of birth day with death

day creates an anxiety about being a child-bearing machine, which is essentially what an heiress is. This is a narrative of both guilt and resentment. Although the child is innocent of the mother's death (if there is guilt to be had, it might be the father's for having got the mother pregnant in the first place), nevertheless, the responsibility is placed upon the child. We know very early on: 'Of hire [the princess] was dede the quene his wif; / In travailing here lif sche les.' (1.22-3) What the narrative is actually saying here is that it is all the princess's fault that her father has no wife and that she has no mother. In this tale this can be interpreted as indicating the princess's own feelings of guilt at being the one who survives.

The tale can be read as a fantasy, specifically a female fantasy, which is generated by the fact that the princess is a girl of marriageable age, and that sooner or later she is going to have to be married, experience sexual intercourse and, in all probability, childbirth. Freud comments:

Marriage brings fresh sexual traumas. It is surprising that the wedding night does not have pathogenic effects more frequently, since unfortunately what it involves is so often not an erotic seduction but a violation. (21)

There is no reason to suppose that this was markedly different in medieval England, and however understanding parents may have been in marrying their daughters to men with whom they had some chance of happiness, this does not detract from the fact that sexual intercourse and childbirth

were a potential source of fear or anxiety. (22) It seems unlikely that girls had any formal sex education since there are no manuals in existence: certainly, until very recently sex education has always been an informal matter, and what girls might have known from hearing older women's conversation, or that of their brothers, sisters and friends can only be a matter of conjecture. Even were girls aware of what intercourse was and what childbirth entailed, there is still a whole world of difference between knowing what it might be like and being exposed to the experience oneself. As I noted in the introduction, medieval moralists were explicit on the disadvantages of married life. However, the princess knows that for her celibacy is not an option because she is an heiress and must provide heirs.

Of course, the ideology behind the production of heirs is patriarchal: it has to do with property and land and the transference of wealth; it is also legal and contractual and belongs to the world of male law. The princess, here, is a commodity, and she is marketed for everything which her status entails. As a biological woman she is a factory or site for the production of babies: her body is a commodity which her father can dispose of for his own purposes. (This is an issue on which which Luce Irigaray has commented).

(23) That she is a young and beautiful woman may be part of the problem which relates to her own feelings about her own body. The narrative raises the problem that she requires satisfactions other than those which are imposed upon her, and the fantasy it embodies is a way of experiencing and

therefore to some extent overcoming, the anxieties and resentments which are created by the ideological requirement that she become a mother.

The princess's fantasy begins when she leaves the retinue on the way to the abbey where her mother's commemoration ceremony is to be held. This in itself is important: she asserts her power by attempting to deny reverence to her mother. The most remarkable things about her departure from the retinue, however, are, first, the manner of her announcement and, second, the content of it. Her 'disappearance', as it were, from the retinue is a very public one, which is quite extraordinary given that she has called the chamberlain over and stated that she is leaving the retinue in order to answer a call of nature:

Here chaumberleyne she clepede hire to,
And other dammaiseles to,
And seide that hii moste alight
To don here nedes and hire right. 1.49-52

Now this is, to my knowledge, an unparalleled announcement in courtly, romantic literature; mention of bodily functions belongs, much more properly, to genres such as fabliaux, and such mention certainly does not belong on any ceremonial occasion. (24) Mary Douglas notes: 'A natural way of investing a social occasion with dignity is to hide organic processes'. (25) The princess makes entirely public and open what is usually - and certainly in this genre - completely effaced. I would point out, moreover, that she

tells her chamberlain, not her father by whose side she is riding.

The editors note that in this case the chamberlain is, unusually, a woman: (26) the only evidence they cite - and it is not decisive - is the implication in line 50 where the princess calls the chamberlain 'And other damaiseles two' (1.50), one particular woman and two others. But if the chamberlain is a woman, why does she not go with the princess? The narrative is explicit that she is accompanied by two maidens (1.53-4), presumably the two whom she has called over with the chamberlain. Possibly, the editors assume that the chamberlain is a woman as no gently-reared maiden would be so immodest as to call a man to tell him that she needed to answer a call of nature. This fits with the embarrassment which I have argued critics have displayed in their commentaries on the lays. If the chamberlain is a man, as the editors indicate one would expect, why has she told him, instead of her father?

Here, the princess is voicing her possession of a bodily nature and the fact of her impending isolation from the public view; it can be read as an indirect message to her father to tell him of her availability. As I have mentioned, the content of the message is an extraordinary one in this context, yet the princess displays no shame on announcing her needs. This is either because - like a child - she feels no shame, or because the occasion is not one for shame. As Cavell has noted, the body is 'the first object of shame', and shame is 'the specific discomfort produced by

the sense of being looked at, the avoidance of the sight of others is the reflex it produces'. (27) The princess draws attention to herself, but not merely to herself: what she is really drawing attention to is her body. This, I would say, is a response to the fact that she has, hitherto, not been regarded as a woman but as an heiress, as a commodity. It is notable that this exhibitionism on her part is matched in the second part of the narrative by its opposite, scopophilia, in the Castle of Maidens.

Judith Kestenberg comments that for the pre-pubertal girl, 'Being noticed and receiving attention assumes tremendous importance, as self-observation is projected upon men in a renewed effort to ward off curiosity about one's own body'. (28) This, though, is also an ideologically-based interpretation. Curiosity about one's body as a child is not consciously directed: the child plays with herself without any intention of masturbating. (29) Once puberty is arrived at, the girl is conscious of womanhood; menstruation marks her arrival as an adult sexual creature. To say, then, that girls 'ward off curiosity about [their] own body', is to say that girls make an effort not to see or touch their consciously female bodies; that again, female bodies are only to be the focus of the male gaze, or commodities which men buy, sell, and exchange in the furtherance of patriarchal ideology. However there is a possible reading of this tale which escapes from the woman-as-victim, woman-as-vessel trap.

When the princess leaves the retinue, we are not told

what it is that she actually stops to do; the natural assumption to make, given the rhetoric, is that it was either to urinate or to defecate. My thesis is that she stops because of the onset of her first menstrual period. The behaviour which she displays in the forest is in keeping with that described by psychoanalysts on the girl's arrival at puberty. (30) She is separated not only from the retinue, but also from the maidens who accompany her. It is notable that when lost in the forest it is the princess's women who fall asleep under the chestnut tree (1.71-3) while she wanders off picking flowers and listening to the bird-song (1.75-6). In medieval tales the woman who is to be raped, seduced or spirited away commonly falls asleep under the chestnut tree, as happens in Sir Gowther and Sir Orfeo. In these two lays, however, the setting is not a forest but an orchard, a space which is natural (and fruit-producing), and at the same time bounded: it is nature circumscribed and ordered by knowledge. Here in the lays it represents consciousness, by contrast with the forest which is wild and unbounded. The forest is the unconscious of the tale and there is a whole clutch of signifiers in and about the princess's visit to it which symbolize the potential possibilities and confusions of adolescent sexuality: this provides further indications that the princess has entered biological womanhood. Like a forest, which is wide and multifarious, meaning here is not fixed; there are indications of auto-eroticism (the glamorous stranger as a masturbation fantasy); reproductive capacity (the illicit

pregnancy); and conscious desire (masturbation and incest fantasy). I shall comment further on the significance of garden and forest as transitional and transgressive female sexual space in the section on Sir Gowther and Sir Orfeo.

My argument is that this pubertal fantasy is, as Freud suggests, a means of coming to terms with entry into adulthood. For the princess, puberty is a particularly anxious experience, because of her mother's death and her own status as an heiress. What the fantasy also does, in effect, is to buy time, the time needed for her to come to terms with the those aspects of living in a woman's body of which she is afraid. In a society where women were marriageable at the age of twelve, according to canon law, time was something that they had little of, and loss of virginity and childbirth following so soon after puberty, women who were brought up to marry could have had little opportunity for assimilating each experience, either separately or completely. Although it was not common for girls to be married as young as was legally permitted, nevertheless the experiences of menstruation, loss of virginity and childbirth are all, potentially, major sources of anxiety and occur in a relatively short space of time. Experiences that are only partly consciously assimilated may then, depending on the individual, leave a residue of unconscious impressions from which anxieties spring. Freud notes:

The existence of ideas of this kind that are inadmissible to consciousness is pathological. In

normal people all ideas that can become current at all enter consciousness as well if they are sufficiently intense. In our patients we find a large complex of ideas that are admissible to consciousness existing side by side with a smaller complex of ideas that are not Their psychical ideational activity is divided into a conscious and an unconscious part, and their ideas are divided into some that are admissible and some that are inadmissible to consciousness.

He further notes:

The most numerous and important of the ideas that are fended off and converted have a sexual content. They are at the bottom of a great deal of the hysteria of puberty. Girls who are approaching maturity - and it is they who are chiefly concerned - behave very differently towards the sexual ideas and feelings which crowd in on them. (31)

There is good reason for a girl situated as the princess is to be afraid of biological womanhood.

III

If we now return to the opening lines of the poem, there is another implication in the juxtaposing of the mother's death with the daughter's birth. This relates to the princess's feelings of guilt about her mother and the effect that this has on her relationship with her father. Part of the fantasy element, which is generated from the heroine's perspective, is an attempt to compensate her father for his lack of a wife and a male heir by providing for those needs

herself. This is not unlike a fantasy which Freud has identified:

.... every eldest daughter of a numerous family builds up in her unconscious the phantasy of becoming her father's second wife by the death of her mother. If the mother is ill or dies, the eldest daughter takes her place as a matter of course in relation to her younger brothers and sisters, and may even take over some part of the functions of the wife in respect to the father. The unconscious wish fills in the other part. (32)

Freud's version of the fantasy is not quite the same as the one in the poem, in which there are no other children, and in which this in itself creates pressures on the princess. In Sir Degarre the father is left with neither a wife nor a male heir; the princess feels not only guilt at being the survivor, but guilt at being a female survivor: she isn't an 'heir' in her own right, but a means of the production of heirs. The narrative, as I have already pointed out, commodifies her body (most particularly her uterus), a fact which is made quite plain in the suitors' desire to marry her for land, riches, money and status. The 'guilt', then, can also be read as resentment at being first commodified, and second at the requirement of patriarchal ideology that she should take the place of the mother. I argue that the narrative can be read as a fantasy of escape from the ideologies of lineage and legitimacy.

It is important to note the ambivalence of the devices in the text: the princess both resists taking on the mother's role and seeks it in fantasy. There is, in Sir

Degarre, the fantasy of lying with the father which is not an overtly incestuous threat on his behalf, as is explicitly the case with Emare. Although the narrative states that he loves her as his life and he is reluctant to have her married off, there is never any indication that she is a desirable object to him. The very fact of his holding a ceremony for his dead wife implies that he still thinks of her as his wife - his daughter is only his daughter: however, this may also signify the transference of the wife/daughter role. This isn't true of the daughter, though; she subverts patriarchal ideology by her sexual autonomy.

When the princess is lost in the wood it is, as I have noted, remarkable that the women fall into a magical sleep whilst the princess does not: this indicates that the princess is controlling the 'magic' in this tale. And the 'magic' is all to do with bodies - they are in the woods because of her body, and before they leave again her body is changed from that of a 'virgin' - that is here, a child - into that of a sexually-active woman; the difference is between the body of a pre-pubescent and a pubescent girl. The forest functions as the transitional space between (ignorant) childhood and (conscious) womanhood. As a sexually-aware woman, the girl then becomes conscious of desire. Commenting on the pubertal girl, Kestenbergr writes:

In her fantasies, the girl dreams of meeting glamorous strangers, but such a meeting with the idealized father-figure never materializes. Waves of intense penis-envy alternate now with masochistic fantasies. Masturbation, if it occurs, is accompanied by rape

fantasies in which the guilt is clearly placed upon the attacking male. (33)

The princess does 'meet' the 'glamorous stranger', a young and handsome (idealized), but well-made and accomplished knight (like her father) (1.91-7). He tells her that he has loved her for many years and, in effect, that he has been awaiting this opportunity (1.105-7). This is what the princess fantasizes that her father would say and do. Colopy's analysis of this scene is at one with what I perceive to be happening here. She writes:

The forest setting and the many ambiguous features of the fairy knight can encourage us to see the rape as a fantasy of wish-fulfillment: the daughter "dreams" that her own father appears in the forest and rapes her, a projection of her own intense feelings for him. Some stylistic details would even support this - similar adjectives, not used elsewhere in the poem, describe both the king and the fairy knight. (34)

The rape is a brutal one, with the princess crying and attempting to flee but being seized and ravished anyway (1.109-13). This is in keeping with Kestenberg's and Colopy's analyses, and with the ambivalence towards heterosexual experience which the tale displays. It is further typical that the maiden, in accordance with the tradition of wish-fulfillment, has her 'lover' announce that she will bear a son (1.116-17). The bearing of a son is also a response to the feelings of guilt associated with being a female survivor. The princess has therefore achieved her

fantasy of being a wife to her father and providing him with the heir he wants.

This is revealed in a characteristically displaced fashion; she admits her desire by attributing the knowledge of the child's paternity to others, saying: 'Men wolde sai bi sti and strete / That mi fader the king hit wan;' (1.168-9). This is a point which Colopy also emphasizes. (35) She further affirms her own innocence of sexual matters by saying: 'And I ne was nevere aqueint with man' (1.170); what in fact this reveals, however, is the extent - and accuracy - of her sexual knowledge. Freud commented that adolescents may very well 'possess sexual knowledge far oftener than is supposed or than they themselves believe'. (36) The princess obviously knows that most crucial piece of sexual information; not only where babies come from, but how they get there, for she tells the maidservant that she has never 'known' a man immediately after she has revealed her pregnancy.

The motif of father-daughter incest is sometimes revealed as a patriarchal device to ensure an 'untainted' bloodline. (37) This is the patrilineal version of the tale. Another way of reading it would be to understand the princess as acting autonomously, which she clearly does: rejecting the role of the mother who is sacrificed in childbirth by patriarchal necessity, and subverting the ideology by having a child illegitimately. The narrative rejects the commodification of the princess's body: this point is emphasized later in the story when Degarre

betrothes himself to the autonomous lady in the castle of maidens, having previously turned down acceptance into the patrilineal structure as the earl's surrogate son (1.385-408). Nor is the princess married off to any of the suitors who want her as 'goods', but in the end to the fantasy/fairy knight whom she has created.

IV

I shall turn now to the construction of gendered identity in the tale. As I have suggested, this is a precarious construct which is first adumbrated through the use of the talismans, the sword and the gloves.

After the rape and the prediction, the fairy-knight gives the princess the first talisman, the sword, which he instructs shall be given to the son whom she is to bear (1.118-33). The second talisman, the gloves, he sends to her later. It is this talisman which I intend to discuss first. It is not clear precisely when the princess receives them: the first time the gloves are mentioned is when she places them with Degarre as he is about to be exposed (1.194-99). The gloves are crucial in understanding this narrative, and what they signify is a complex of meanings about female sexual activity. Colopy's comment that 'like Cinderella's slipper [they] appear to be a female symbol', (38) is one with which I agree. Firstly, then, the gloves signify the

uterus, and what we are told about them is that they will fit only the princess herself:

That nolde on no manne honde,
Ne on child no on womman she nolde,
But on hire selve wel she wolde. l.196-98.

They act as identifiers of the mother. However they also operate as a symbol for the hand. Here it is necessary to return briefly to the incest motif, for in symbolizing the hand, the gloves also indicate a connection with the masturbation fantasy which I argued for earlier.

In an article examining persecuted heroine tales, Elizabeth Archibald noted that two of the common motifs were an incestuous proposition, usually from a father, and mutilation, usually of the hands. In a footnote she further mentions: 'Otto Rank suggests that in a much earlier form of the tradition the daughter was in love with her father, and was punished for her masturbatory desires by mutilation of her hands'. (39) I would argue that this tale belongs to that earlier tradition: certainly the rape scene accords with the description of rape fantasies given by Kestenberg. Bruce Rosenberg also notes:

We have seen that Custance does not suffer mutilation, and neither does Degarre's mother, but then in the latter case the elements of this savage detail have distinct echoes. A glove is given as a token. . . . That the savagery of the peasant tale should be sublimated in this way seems plausible, and all the more plausible because of the metonymous closeness of gloves to hands. (40)

In giving away the gloves as uterus the princess is rejecting the commodification of her body: the womb is the locus of commodification for it is the site of production and clearly no suitor would want her if she were unable to produce. The uterus is therefore rejected not on psychological, but on ideological grounds.

The other talisman, the sword, she is to give to the child when he is grown so that the father can recognize his son (1.119-31). However the sword is not perfect; the point of it is missing, broken off in a battle with a giant (1.123-7). Now this is curious; fairy knights do not usually leave their offspring pointless swords. The real question to be addressed here is why does the princess choose as talismans a pointless sword and a pair of gloves? And then why does she keep the sword (instruct herself to keep it) until the child is of age, and give away the gloves? What - in psychological terms - she is doing is keeping the emblem of castrated (headless) masculinity and rejecting the emblem of what she fears and resents, embodied here in the representation of the uterus, the gloves. (41)

Julia Kristeva's essay, 'On Chinese Women', contains an analysis of the fears and desires of the pubertal girl which is almost startling in its applicability to the situation which obtains in Sir Degarre. She writes:

The girl obtains a real or imaginary penis for herself; the imaginary acquisition of the male organ seems here to be less important than the access she gains to the symbolic mastery which is necessary to censor the pre-Oedipal stage and wipe out all trace of dependence on the mother's

body. Obliteration of the pre-Oedipal stage, identification with the father, and then: "I'm looking, as a man would, for a woman"; or else, "I submit myself, as if I were a man who thought he was a woman, to a woman who thinks she is a man". (42)

Kristeva argues that the girl who identifies herself with her father represses the vagina and any partner other than her father: thus the male partner will be 'feminized' and the female partner 'masculinized'. Her argument that this may lead to female homosexuality provides another interpretation for the princess's actions.

Whether she can be identified as homosexual or not, the princess rejects the experience of heterosexual activity and accepts the male talisman for herself. Swords and spears are consistently identified in the narrative as symbols of phallic virility (1.537, 569, 573-4, 711-4, 1033-4), and the princess's retention of this one could suggest that part of her neurosis is penis envy. Juliet Mitchell's comments on penis envy seem particularly apposite here:

The girl's initial high estimation of her body is shattered by her sense of mutilation (castration) when, at a time when a child is jealous of all possessions, she finds she has no penis; this notion of a wound is confirmed by menstruation and defloration (hence female hostility to the latter act). (43)

Reading the princess's behaviour in this way provides one explanation for her continued possession of the sword.

Nevertheless, there are other possible readings as well.

That the sword is without its head may be interpreted as being an indicator of the princess's resistance to the idea of heterosexual intercourse. Her anxiety causes her to wish men to be castrated so that she has nothing to fear from them. However, the talisman of the pointless sword may represent not penis envy but penis hatred; hostility to defloration is connected to the fact that sex is already circumscribed for her by her role as an heiress; thus, even her fantasy is one of rape, she cannot associate intercourse with anything other than death (childbirth), or rape and incest, hence her anxiety. The narrative does not have to be read, though, in such a negative way. If we follow Kristeva's argument, then the princess gains control of the situation (though at some cost), which she then manipulates, successfully avoiding commodification of her body. The princess only gets the gloves back on the threshold of marriage to a man whom she has dreamed up.

The fantasy of the birth of her son is a method of confronting her anxieties about childbirth and it is significant that the princess is loath to give the child away (1.181-9); it is at this point that the acceptance of motherhood both as a source of power and as a revenge on the male begin to emerge, for illegitimate children belong unequivocally to the mother. Karen Horney's observations on motherhood as an empowering experience are apposite here:

But from the biological point of view, woman has, in motherhood, or in the capacity for motherhood, a quite indisputable and by no means negligible physiological superiority.

This is most clearly reflected in the unconscious of the male psyche in the boy's intense envy of motherhood. We are familiar with this envy as such, but it has hardly received due consideration as a dynamic factor. When one begins, as I did, to analyze men only after a fairly long experience of analyzing women, one receives a most surprising impression of the intensity of this envy of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood, as well as of the breasts and of the act of suckling. (44)

The princess's injunction that her son should love no woman except her whom the gloves will fit - in full knowledge that they will fit only herself - relates to the rewriting of motherhood with which the tale is now engaged. Whilst the princess remains in her pubertal phase, never, metaphorically speaking, leaving the wood, in sending the gloves off with her 'son' she knows that at some point she will be given them back and that at that point, she will (as she does) put them on and acknowledge her possession of a uterus. Even then, though, gendered identity remains precarious: it oscillates throughout the narrative, making this a particularly difficult tale to analyze.

V

I have already suggested that Sir Degarre is the story of both the mother and the son: I shall argue that his story provides a means of continuing her story. Degarre is, I argue, a 'masculinized' version of the princess herself, a

point which Kristeva's analysis can be seen to confirm. The princess possesses 'his' sword; he possesses 'her' gloves: it is in the narrative of Degarre that the precariousness of gendered identity is realized.

I shall begin by making some brief comments on Degarre's name. No other character in the tale has a name; they are all referred to either by role (father, daughter etc.), or by title (king, duke etc.); the tale's attitude to names is strictly functional. But Degarre's name ('de egare', 'of the outcast') is not so much a name as a marker for the absence of the princess; it encapsulates the princess's status:

Degarre nowt elles ne is
But thing that not never whar hit is
Other thing that is neg forlorn al-so: 1.255 -57

Throughout the narrative Degarre mimes the princess's condition: she remains metaphorically speaking, 'in the wood', the place of adolescent confusion over sexuality, and this obtains until her 'outcast' (son) returns.

There are three areas of this second part of the narrative on which I intend to focus. The first is Degarre's fight with his 'grand-father' and the consequent marriage to his 'mother', where the exchange of talismans takes place. This, I argue, signifies the overthrow of the incest fantasies. I shall then comment on the narrative of the visit to the Castle of Maidens: in this section, women are represented as powerful and controlling agents of their own sexual activity. Finally, I shall comment on the

confrontation with the 'father' and the restoration of the male talisman.

I shall begin by commenting briefly on Degarre's journey to find 'his mother'. The only adventure which he has on the way is a battle against a dragon, which, as Jung has pointed out, is an embodiment of the evil aspects of motherhood - something that devours (45) and this is stressed in this description, for the dragon has '.... wide throte and teth grete' (1.349). Although the narrative has begun to recognize motherhood as an empowering experience, the perils of childbirth are not overcome until this point. The narrative states that the dragon comes towards Degarre, 'Blowinde and zenient al-so / Als he him wolde swolewe tho' (1.371-72). The dragon as a swallower and devourer of women is attested to in the legend of St. Margaret, who is the patron saint of women in childbirth; just as she manages to burst out of the belly of the dragon, so Degarre manages to kill it. (46) Here childbirth does not kill but is vanquished, and this vanquishing is a necessary stage in the acceptance of the possession of a womb.

In this adventure, Degarre's rescue of another, the Earl, from the dragon offers him the opportunity of being accepted into a patrilineal system. The earl's gratitude and proffers of money and land (1.385-92) are typical, but interestingly, Degarre's response is neither to accept or to refuse but rather to make his acceptance conditional. The earl has offered him 'al that he hade' (1.390), but only material goods are specified; Degarre makes his acceptance

of the rewards conditional on there being a woman whom the gloves will fit. Now that the threat of childbirth has been overcome, so Degarre starts seeking to give back the womb and potential for carnal knowledge to his mother. Although he knows that the gloves will fit only his mother (1.311-16), he asks for all women, including young maidens, to be brought forward (1.394-402). Clearly, as his mother is still being passed off as a young maiden he would need to try the unlikeliest woman in order to find her; but the knowledge that his mother is to be found in a woman who is, apparently, young and a maiden belongs exclusively to the princess and her serving-maid. Degarre's conditions again demonstrate that he is her 'split', her 'outcast', and the fact that he makes his acceptance conditional in the way in which he does, demonstrates that the incidentals of the quest are not incidentals, but the means of overcoming fears.

It is at this point that the battle with the grandfather takes place. Although, supposedly, twenty years have gone by, in another sense time has stood still, for the king is still fighting suitors for his daughter's hand.

The king a gret counseil made
For nedes that he to don hade.
Whan the parlement was plener,
He lette crie far and ner,
If ani man were of armes so bold
That with the king justi wold,
If he might for ani thing
Him out of his sadel bringe,
He sscholde have in mariage
His dowter and his heritage.

That is kingdom god and fair-
For he hath non other hair. 1.435-46

She is still being presented by her father as a commodity. By contrast with the knights of the first section of the narrative, Degarre stresses when he meets the king that what he wants is his daughter (1.479); he does not mention the heritage at all. Here, at last, the princess is allowing herself to be recognised (is recognizing herself) as a marriageable woman. Her autonomy is established (through her male outcast) and she is no longer constructed as a commodity but as a woman who is desirable - and who feels desire.

The fight between Degarre and the king is emphasized as being one between impotent old age and virile youth, as well as between experience and innocence. The narrative stresses that Degarre knows nothing about jousting (1.514, 524), whilst the king is much practised (1.516), as well as being better equipped (1.515). What the joust demonstrates, though, is that youth is superior to age, if not in the matter of skill then in the matter of staying power; the king laments, 'Me ne fil nevere swich a cas / That man that ich migte hit / After mi strok migte sitte' (1.526-28). The king's petulance is also evident in his command, 'Do bring me a schaft that wil nowt breke!' (1.564). As I have previously noted, spears in the narrative are emphatically masculine and phallic and the king's resentment at not being able to defeat Degarre is resentment at his age and failing

virility, completed by the fact that Degarre finally unhorses him (1.581-82). Although the king is first described as being 'sor aschamed' (1.584), he very quickly recovers his composure and speaks courteously to Degarre, calling him 'hende son' (1.598). It is worth pointing out that the wording which he uses to Degarre echoes the idea of marriage and family ties, for he says, 'Ac be thou wers, be thou bet, / Covenaut ich wille the hold' (1.604-05).

There is a narrative excursus on the evils of people marrying those about whom nothing is known (1.617-30) which is the patrilineal construction of the narrative as warning against any kind of random or illicit sexual relations; we already know that in fantasy the princess has had both. Now that she is no longer being viewed as a commodity, then sexual activity is perceived as desirable. It is notable that at this point Degarre completely forgets about the gloves and the injunction which they carry; previously his first thought had been to see if he could find his mother, but here it is not until he is about to go to bed with her that he remembers the gloves (1.637-44). Degarre obviously 'knows' that his bride is his mother and his forgetting to ask her to try the gloves reveals her absence of fear over the possession of a uterus. (47) It is the king who resolves the situation by asking Degarre what ails him (1.654-56): here, as with the conversation in the wood where the princess tells the chamberlain of her bodily needs, the conversation is displaced. Degarre gives the king the explanation about the gloves in the presence of the princess

(1.657-62); what is happening subliminally is that the princess is explaining to her father that she is not a commodity but a woman who has been chosen for herself, and who has also herself chosen whom she will have. It is notable that she puts the gloves on (1.670) before touching her 'son' again, demonstrating her acceptance of womanhood. The uterus and the hand are returned to the princess. This is also the first time that the princess and her father acknowledge their familial relationship to each other, calling each other 'father' and 'daughter' (1.684-85); there is no longer any ambiguity over who they are for each other.

When the princess tells her father the tale of Degarre's birth what in fact she is revealing is who she is; she tells him 'al that sothe' (1.693), all the things about her which he has not known: that she has had a sexual life - is a sexual creature - and that he has been ignorant of her as a woman. He has always assumed her to be a 'maiden' (1.686), but a maiden does not simply mean a virgin, it also indicates one not much past childhood. Her father has treated her as a child, and as a commodity, which is what, in patriarchal ideology a female child is. (48) He has also ensured that suitors find it well-nigh impossible to win her. This conflict over the commodification of the female body is a conflict between patriarchal ideology and the daughter's love for her father. Nikki Stiller writes:

Young women needed their fathers for much more than childhood sustenance. They did not have recourse to armed rebellion if such provision was not forthcoming. The tendency to identify

with the powerful father must have been strong, or perhaps one should say the predisposition to identify with him, because an overt masculine and active identification would have been considered disastrous for the female child or young woman, a putative wife and mother. (49)

Stiller's observation that 'an overt masculine and active identification' would be disastrous suggests good reasons why a covert ploy might be used. In fact the princess has produced an identification with her father which allows her to escape the torments that self-identification would bring, and to take on an active, autonomous self. (50) Degarre is the son/husband whom she creates to act for her.

It is at this point that the sword is given to Degarre (1.711-12): the first thing which he does is to question his mother about his father (1.701-04), and she swears that she can tell him 'no thing' (1.706), save what he took from her and what he gave in return: 'But tho that he fram me raught, / His owen swerd he me bitaught' (1.707-08). There is no mention of his noticing that the tip is missing, he merely comments on the fact that it is a weapon which could only have belonged to a man (1.716) and that he will not rest until he has found his father (1.718-19). This manly weapon, however, has been in the princess's possession all this time and is still in the hands of her 'split'. Gendered identity has still not calcified into traditional roles.

Before examining the tale of the Castle of Maidens, I shall make a few observations on the parallelism of the forest through which Degarre now travels and that of the

forest in which the princess was initially lost. In the first forest we are only told that there are birds singing (1.76), but the princess mentions her fear of wild animals (1.87). It is explicitly stated that in this second forest there are no domestic animals (1.736) but many wild ones as well as birds singing (1.737-38). Here, now, the princess, in the form of her surrogate, is more adult, the anxieties about what there may be in the forest have become things really capable of inspiring fear and thus able to be confronted. This is in keeping with the emergence from neurosis where what is half known and a great source of anxiety becomes a conscious - and therefore potentially resolvable - fear. The narrative also states that Degarre was 'bigeten' in the forest for some time (1.733) which has, of course, been precisely the princess's psychological condition.

The castle which appears at this point has some of the qualities of the 'enchanted castle', first in that it would appear that it is in the wood (1.735-41); like the castle of the Sleeping Beauty it is surrounded by thick forests, it is the only building there and it is beautiful (1.743-46). In similar fashion it is populated, but although the inhabitants of the castle are not fast asleep they are completely silent (1.775-82, 800-01). What is most important to note here is that with the single exception of the dwarf, all the inhabitants are women. The motif of the Castle of Maidens is a common one in medieval literature and it is a commonplace that the maidens are waiting for a knight to

come and liberate them. (51) The dwarf is very much a man cut down to size; it is explicitly stated that his hands and feet are as large as those of the biggest man in the land (1.793-94) and although he performs the actions of a servant, laying the table for supper, his clothing is fitting for a gentleman (1.795-98). It is also notable that Degarre takes one look at him and laughs, before addressing him civilly (1.799-800). It seems to me odd that this gentlemanly, beautifully dressed and groomed man is both a servant and a dwarf. What he represents, I would say, is the princess's vision of a 'manageable man'; he is at once a gentleman and a man and at the same time someone literally and metaphorically to be looked down upon, as such posing no sexual threat to the women who are in control here.

Degarre, having greeted the dwarf and received no response, then greets the ladies and their silence makes him both angry and defensive: he says, 'Ich have hem gret and hi nowt me / But thai be domb, bi and bi / Thai schul speke first ar I' (1.816-18). In fact the maiden does speak to him before he speaks again to her, but this is only after he has spent the night in an enchanted sleep in her bed. What the silence does is to put the women in a position of power - Degarre is forced to await their pleasure, so to speak, a reversal of normal gender roles. Smithers comments:

The silence in which Degarre is received and entertained is wholly unexplained. It happens to be an important feature of that version, since it is paralleled both in Desire by the dwarf's initial silence when serving the hero. (52)

The silence of people, especially of women, is a powerful method of refusing to conform to social necessities or realities. The refusal to communicate can isolate, not the one who is refusing, but the ones who want to communicate and are denied the opportunity of doing so. In this way, the silence of the princess in Sir Gowther is a method of evading the impending reality of marriage and experience of sexual intercourse; it would appear from the narrative that she will not be married until she can speak, nor can she make and consent to vows until she can do so. In Sir Degarre the women, literally, create the tone of the place.

Degarre's enchanted sleep (1.844-67) provides the lady with the opportunity for examining him; this suggests that women need to find out what men's bodies are like so that their fears can be assuaged. As I have already noted, this need to look is the parallel of the princess's desire to be looked at. Kernberg has noted:

.... the hysterical woman who despises men or is afraid of men because of their sexual interest is completely unaware of her own sexual impulses and therefore does not "empathise" fearfully with the "enemy". (53)

When the lady has seen Degarre sleeping and seen what a sleeping man is like, she is no longer afraid and then she can speak to him; in other words she accepts herself as a being who wants to establish sexual relations with men.

It is important to compare the situation of the lady of

this castle with that of the princess, for the former is, of course, an image of the latter, but here in a maturer phase. By contrast with the princess, the lady is surrounded by women in her own domain, but there is the parallel situation of her being desired by a stranger (1.889-93); she too is her father's only heir and there is no mention of the existence of a mother (1.881-84). The lady explains to Degarre that there are no men because they have all been killed in attempting to protect her from the amorous knight (1.899-912), however she does not explain her father's absence. She uses the past tense when she mentions him (1.881), but from then on he is not spoken of and we never find out what has become of him. I would suggest that the father can be identified with the amorous knight, as the king is with the fairy-knight, but in keeping with the princess's gradual acceptance of sexual maturity this knight is recognized as being one whom the princess cannot love (1.894-95): incest fantasies have now been entirely overthrown, the princess now knows that she has to separate herself from her father.

The lady offers Degarre land first and her body only second if he can defeat the amorous knight (1.921-24). Significantly, there is no mention of him coveting the land (1.925-27). This is in direct contrast with the attitudes of the men who fought for the princess, for without exception they were all interested in her possessions, not one of them in her. The commodification of the body has finally been repudiated.

The final section of the narrative deals with the confrontation between Degarre and the fairy-knight. This quest for the father is the princess's final necessary recognition of who she has been and what she has done; she has fantasized and projected her fantasies and anxieties on to her father and he needs to be faced before she can be freed from him. It is significant that this time her son and surrogate is fighting with new armour, which bears the device of three women's heads (1.1029-34); by contrast the father/fairy-knight's shield shows three boars' heads (1.1005-08). Here, maidens meet animals and reconciliation is achieved, for of course once Degarre and his father recognize each other they stop the fight (1.1057-70). It is the talisman of the pointless sword that effects the recognition and it is at this point that the piece is replaced (1.1069-71). The princess has finally overcome her fear of men so they no longer need be castrated. What is crucial to note is that the princess has been in control of events throughout the tale: she has been the agent of sexual activity, denied in the first part of the narrative, accepted in the Castle of Maidens.

The 'fortuitous' ending of the tale makes a neater ending than one would expect pure chance to make. (54) Degarre and his father having recognized each other, the former immediately says that they should go and comfort his mother who is in mourning (1.1081-84). The princess's tears and mourning are those of one who has been lost in the forest of adolescent sexuality. The princess finally takes

the place of the mother and again communicates through her body. Kristeva remarks: 'what milk and tears have in common: they are the metaphors of non-speech, of a "semiotics" that linguistic communication does not account for, They re-establish what is non-verbal'. (55) In short, the tears re-establish the body, not as a site of production but as a locus of desire: this desire is problematized because of ideological requirements. As in Sir Gowther, though, the problematics of motherhood are resolved through identification with a 'masculine' hero. Motherhood is not the problem; the problem lies in patriarchy's insistence on motherhood within (and for) prescribed relations. Where the girl (or woman, in Sir Gowther), can 'feel free' to select a sexual partner outside the legitimating structures, then sexual experience can be represented positively.

CHAPTER 3

PROJECTIONS OF DESIRE: THE MASOCHISTIC WOMAN IN
EMARE, LAY LE FREINE AND THE ERL OF TOULOUS

In this chapter I intend to explore the narratives Emare, Lay Le Freine and The Erl of Toulous. Each of these tales tells a story of desires: of incestuous desire in Emare and of adulterous desire in the other two. They are all narratives of calumniated wives: the eponymous heroine of Emare is calumniated by her mother-in-law; in Lay le Freine the narrative is of self-calumny, and The Erl of Toulous embraces both types, for the lady is accused by the rejected suitors and then by herself in her reiterated confessions of the gift of the ring. My argument is that in these tales the calumny both masks and betrays the strategy of feminine masochism which each of the heroines adopts as a method of coping with patriarchal restrictions on female desire.

Although masochism is the strategy adopted by each of the heroines, I shall be examining the different ways in which it operates: I shall do this by relating different aspects of its organization to particular tales. I argue that Emare demonstrates the most typical form of feminine masochism (as defined by Karen Horney), whereas The Erl of Toulous is a narrative of guilt which is itself a repressive complex, especially in relation to female sexual activity. In Lay le Freine the strategy which is adopted is for one of the girls to assume a masochistic position, whilst the other

remains 'the good girl'. I shall also be commenting on this splitting as a trope which is a commonplace in representations of women.

As is the case with the other Middle English lays, there has not been a great deal of critical attention paid to them. This is most observable in the - lack of - criticism available on The Erl of Toulous: in the last twenty five years there have been only two articles written on this lay, one of which is not evaluative but a dating study of the manuscript. (1)

Critical work on Emare and Lay le Freine has tended to focus on their similarities to 'patient Grisilda' stories. For example, Shirley Marchalonis writes:

In the two romances with female heroes, Emare and Lay Le Freine, the women, like the chivalric heroes are tested, but for a different set of qualities. Women do not have to prove their worth as fighters or their loyalty to the class. Feminine virtue is passive: women, it seems, must endure rather than act. (2)

Dieter Mehl's laudatory portraits of the suffering Emare, as well as the heroine of The Erl of Toulous, are as much a political statement on what good women should be as a piece of criticism. Commenting on Emare he writes:

The whole poem is a glorification of the heroine, who, wherever she goes, awakens love and admiration. Not only her deeds and her practical skills, but especially her perfect beauty are outward expressions of her goodness. Even the wicked old queen has to admit that she never saw such a beautiful woman, but it is a sign of her vicious

character that she cannot recognize this beauty for what it is, but thinks it must be the mark of a devil. (3)

There is, of course, nothing wrong in that: as Toril Moi has remarked, feminist criticism is avowedly political. (4) The difference between explicitly and implicitly political criticism is that the latter seems to work against women's interests. Mehl's comments, which have no avowed political connections, nevertheless work on the assumption that the 'heroines' (all 'heroines'?) are 'good'. His approval of the lady of The Erl of Toulous makes this clear: 'Her spirited rejection of the two knights who want to tempt her into adultery clearly shows how abhorrent the thought of any extra-marital relationship appears to her'. (5) Marchalonis, commenting on Lay le Freine also makes plain 'the good girl' model:

Her decoration of the marriage bed with her own cherished mantle is an act of love and generosity that is almost stunning. Her act of devotion apparently cancels out her sin; she is rewarded with an identity, the husband she loves, and the stability and safety of marriage. (6)

The tales, then, are read as narratives of passive virtue triumphant. What such readings indicate, however, is approval of feminine masochism: whilst Marchalonis's reading seems to recognize - albeit implicitly - that masochism is a ploy which allows Le Freine access to sexual and social

security, Mehl appears simply to be admiring the masochistic woman.

Although the strategic adoption of masochism might be understandable, from my point of view as a woman reader I find it difficult simply to like stories where the heroine - such as the saintly Grisilda - is passive to the point of stasis. I have always thought of Emare as an extremely irritating tale; her prissy goodness - so commended by Mehl - and the fact that her sufferings 'entitle' her to get her man has always seemed to me to be an execrable pattern for a girl. The construction of 'the heroine' does not appear to allow for a woman to be (what critics encode as) 'sinful'. What I have wanted is for women to do something wrong and still to be the 'heroine'.

Though it is not possible to recreate these long-suffering heroines, it is possible to re-read them; I take as my model in this attempt Judith Fetterly's position of the 'resisting reader'. (7) I shall begin, then, by examining Emare and I hope to show that her adoption of the masochistic strategy is an effective means of opposing patriarchal legitimacy.

EMARE

Writing on feminine masochism Karen Horney notes:

The influence that these ideologies exert on women is materially strengthened by the fact that women

presenting the specified traits are more frequently chosen by men. This implies that women's erotic possibilities depend on their conformity to the image of that which constitutes their 'true nature'. (8)

Emare has been read as a passive heroine par excellence. She is subjected to an incestuous proposal from her father, is cast out, then the subject of malicious slander by her mother-in-law, followed by another exile. She suffers patiently and has her man restored to her at the end because she has endured so humbly. Or so goes the received version of the tale. Like the eponymous heroine of the similarly calumniated Bone Florence of Rome, Emare is said to approach sanctity through her humility and forgiveness. (9) Her magic robe is the outward sign of her inward grace, as is her beauty. (10)

However I would argue that Emare can be read not as the passive plaything of the tale (and of men), but as its prime mover: events are shaped to her desired end, and that is shaped by her desires, which are projected on to the other characters in the story. Structurally - and psychologically, too - she is the dominating force; whenever she appears in the narrative, so does bewitching desire. She is the bearer of the magic talisman, the cloak, which is effectively a kind of love-charm: it is the cloak which bewitches, more than her beauty. It has been suggested that in earlier versions of the tale, Emare, and not her father, was given the cloth, from which the robe is made, as a love-charm by a

supernatural agent. (11) The bearer of a love charm is not necessarily a romantic innocent. The archetypal bearer of the bewitching garment is Aphrodite, whose magic girdle makes her irresistible. (12) Aphrodite is, above all, an inspirer of sexual passion - but then so too is Emare, a fact which is not given the emphasis which it deserves.

I shall begin, then, by examining that part of the narrative which deals with the incestuous proposition. I argue that the repressed narrative here reveals the daughter's desire for her father. What is emphasized in this tale is others' desire for Emare, whilst she remains blameless. Rosalind Coward's observations on women's displacement of sexual desire seem particularly apposite here. She writes:

Thus as a girl child assumes a position in the adult world, a strong feeling of guilt is attached to infantile sexuality, however unconscious the experience may be. Sexuality has usually to be someone else's responsibility, not an activity desired by the female body and acted on and secured by the female person. Instead female sexuality becomes centred on attracting, on making another person assume responsibility for women's desire. (13)

Here, rather than the beautiful woman being blamed, blame attaches to the father and the mother-in-law: the fact that it is the parents (for here the mother-in-law functions as a rival mother figure) who are 'guilty' would seem to indicate that the tale does indeed include a narrative of the child's guilty sexual feelings. The absence of the (natural) mother

- a trope which I have commented on in the chapter on Sir Degarre - and the eventual elimination of the rival mother suggest a narrative which is as implicitly anti-feminist as it is explicitly. As a feminine strategy masochism serves to secure the one woman by denying that security to the other. I shall comment further on this in the section on Lay le Freine.

The incestuous proposition which opens the action of the tale occurs after Emare is given the magic talisman, the robe. The description of the cloth occupies eighty lines (1.88-168), which is a substantial portion of the narrative; it is a far more detailed account than any other person, place or thing merits. As I have already remarked, the robe functions as a love-charm: it both represents explicitly sexual love and inspires it. What is also important to note is that the cloth is made by one woman and then given to another; and the one who made it, made it as a love token.

In the fowrthe korner was oon,
Of Babylone the sowdan sonne,
The amerayles dowghtyr hym by.
For hys sake the cloth was wrowght;
She loved hym in hert and thought,
As testymonyeth thys storye. 1.157-62

What is notable in Emare is that the cloth, fashioned by the sultan's daughter, is effectively a message from one woman (more precisely, a daughter) to another. If women don't talk to each other about their experience of desire -

and they certainly don't in the context of courtly romances - then they can use the work of their hands, employ their arts and crafts, to indicate very clearly that sexual love is something that they do desire; and the pairs of lovers depicted on the cloth are lovers who are forbidden to love each other. (14) The narrative, then, is one of forbidden love and, more specifically, love forbidden to daughters. The daughter's desire for her father, I shall argue, is displaced onto the father's desire for his daughter via the magical agency of the robe, itself covered with portraits of forbidden love.

The forbidden love with which we are presented here is that of Syr Artyus for his daughter, though this incestuous proposition is not, according to my reading, as straightforward as it appears to be. Elizabeth Archibald, in the context of the Constance stories, notes that in earlier versions the daughter was in love with her father and was punished for her masturbatory fantasies by mutilation of the hands. (15) I have previously argued that Sir Degarre belongs to this tradition. My thesis is that Emare, too, echoes this type of incestuous desire and that her desire for the 'forbidden' love is displayed by her adoption of the love-charm, the magic robe. It is notable that from the point when she receives it (1.241-46) she is always represented as wearing it until the final reconciliation with her father (1.1009-1020). It is only at this point, when she has made what Peter Brooks describes as a 'correct

erotic object choice', that she can leave aside the robe/her projecting of desire onto others and receive him as her father and not an object of desire. (16)

The idea that daughters fantasize about being seduced by glamorous strangers (who are, in fantasy, their fathers) is a commonplace of psychoanalytic investigation. (17) It has also been argued that women are supposed to harbour incestuous desires towards their fathers:

Women are encouraged to commit incest as a way of life. As opposed to marrying our fathers we marry men like our fathers men who are older than us, have more money than us, more power than us, are taller than us, are stronger than us our fathers. (18)

And, as Maldwyn Mills has pointed out, the similarity between the narrative treatments of Emare's father and husband is remarkable:

.... when we compare the author's treatment of the actions of the heroine's father and of her husband. We might have expected a very sharp differentiation here: the father is one of the monsters of the story - an ageing lecher, who treats Emare quite ruthlessly when she will have nothing to do with him; the husband, on the other hand, is its Prince Charming. But by applying very similar motifs to each, the author makes them seem curiously alike. (19)

They are alike in the position which they occupy seen from the vantage point of the controlling view, that is, from Emare's point of view: they are men whom she desires.

The narration of the father's incestuous desire for Emare only seems curious if we do not accept that hers is the controlling consciousness. Her father first sends for her after he has been given the cloth which has already dazzled him:

The cloth was dysplayed sone;
The emperour lokede therupone,
And myght hyt not se;
For glysteryng of the ryche ston
Redy syght had he non,
And sayde, "How myght thys be?"
The emperour sayde on hygh,
"Sertes thys ys a fayry,
Or ellys a vanyte!" 1.97-105

Sir Artyus's comment, 'Sertes, thys ys a fayry, / Or ellys a vanyte' is later inverted by the mother-in-law: on first beholding Emare wearing the robe she remarks: 'Sone, thys ys a fende, / In thys wordy wede' (1.446-47). Both the 'parents' recognize that the robe is magical - a recognition which is not given to anyone else in the tale. For the mother, illicit love is an evil, whereas for the father the possibility of it is enchanting. It should be noted, though, that it is only after the father has expressed his enchantment that the pictures of the forbidden lovers are described.

And when he wolde wende
He toke his leve at the hende
And wente forth on hys way.
Now remeveth thys nobyll kyng:
The emperour aftur hys dowghtur hadde longyng,
To speke wyth that may.

Messengeres forth he sent
Aftyr that mayde fayr and gent, 1.184-91

The narrative is explicit that the cloth has already inspired the father with a desire to see his daughter, and the sight of her is then reported as inspiring incestuous desires:

Byfore her owene fadur sete,
The fayrest wommon on lyfe;
That all hys hert and all hys thowghth
Her to love was y-brought:
He byhelde her ofte sythe,
So he was anamored hys thowghtur tyll,
Wyth her he thowghth to worche hys wyll,
And wedde her to hys wyfe. 1.221-28

However, as Thelma Fenster has pointed out, the recognition of incestuous desire - usually displayed as the father's desire - is often mutual. Writing on La Manekine she observes:

Otto Rank's warning that the inclination towards incest must not be seen as one-sided is more than apt. when Joie blushes at her father's entry into her chamber, therefore, there is a sense in which she does "know" his intentions, even though at the level of the persecution story she continues to appear faultless. At that level the reader is allowed to concentrate on the innocence of the blush and to ignore that it can also signify desire. (20)

First he has the robe to bewitch him, then he sees his daughter. I shall comment further on the notion of magic's

ability to deceive the senses of the beholders in the chapter on Sir Gowther. For the moment suffice it to say that, obviously, one who is 'dazzled' cannot see clearly, and what one tends to see when so situated is a type of mirage; either what one wants to see, or what someone else suggests one might see. Again, it is the activity of looking/seeing which is indicative of the magic at work, for her father is described as staring at her (1.225); his inability to look elsewhere is a common feature of lover's rhetoric: 'can't take my eyes off you'. His actions here are those of a lover, not a father. His counsellors, who have not been so bewitched because they are not the objects of Emare's desire, are, though, obedient to his will that the marriage should be sanctioned:

And called hys counseyle nere.
He bad they shulde sone go and come
And gete leve of the pope of Rome,
To wedde that mayden clere.
Messengeres forth they wente,
They durste not breke hys commandemant. 1.231-36

The father's desire that this incestuous relationship be sanctified suggests a similarity between this tale and those where the proposition is sanctified by the mother's dying wish that the husband should only remarry someone as beautiful as she is. (21) The Grimm brothers' Allerleirauh (Of Many Different Kinds of Fur) is such a tale. What might also be signified here is the daughter's desire to take the

mother's place. The motif is emphasized in this tale with the mother-in-law's elimination through permanent exile. Emare forgives her father and he returns to the fold.

The incestuous proposition operates in several ways at once: firstly it displays - and displaces - the daughter's desire for her father; a desire which he recognizes and reciprocates. Secondly, what it does is to draw the boundaries between licit and illicit desire: it is this distinction on which I intend to focus now.

As Freud has remarked, incest is the most deep-seated and ancient taboo: he further remarks: 'the basis of taboo is a prohibited action, for performing which a strong inclination exists in the unconscious'. (22) However, incest is not prohibited by natural law (physically, it is perfectly possible), but by man-made law: having been made by men it follows that it can be revoked by man, especially fathers, who are typically controlling figures. The ultimate earthly controlling father in medieval Christendom is the Holy Father, the Pope, and it is to him that Sir Artyus appeals for permission to recreate the law. All of the responsibility for sexual desire and sexual activity is placed with the fathers: the repression of active female sexuality is so deep-seated that no aspect of it is permitted to escape the mechanisms of patriarchally-constructed society. Emare's illicit desire for her father when recognized and returned by him, can be legitimated.

However, neither the tale nor its heroine is concerned with male legitimacy: what we are presented with in the end is female authorization.

There is a constant pull in Emare between what is desirable and what is licit: the dichotomy between the desirable and the licit is even controlled topographically. The father sends to Rome for legitimacy, and at the end of the tale he and Emare's husband make their penitential journeys to Rome. Neither her father nor her husband does meet or receive penance from the Pope after their arrival in Rome because she is the one who awaits them there and who dispenses the law at this point (1.835-40, 949-66). As I have pointed out, exactly the same motif occurs in Le Bone Florence of Rome. There is something else, though, to be said about this dialectic and that is that the men appeal to masculine law to sanction desire: the Pope grants the father's request that he should be allowed to marry his daughter. When he has the authority to marry Emare and tells her of this, then she refuses him. In the narrative she makes her appeal to divine law (1.251-64); but it is the law of God, divine law, as mediated through his representative, that has been granted. Her desires lie outside such legitimating structures: when she is given the place of the mother then she no longer desires him. This might perhaps say something about the view which is being presented of desire itself, that in fact desire, from the perspective of a woman who accepts male law, is illicit. I have already

argued in the Introduction for the separation of the roles of mistress, wife and mother, where sexual desire is clearly the prerogative of the mistress, the illicit woman. The desiring girl, then, cannot take the place of the mother, as this would serve only to efface her sexual nature. What Emare has to do, then, is once more to become illicit.

Rather than assent to male law, Emare becomes an outcast, though again the narrative constructs her as blameless, for it is on her father's orders that she is put to sea:

The emperour was ryght wrothe
And swore many a gret othe,
That deed shulde she be.
He lette make a nobull boot,
And deed her theryn, God wote,
In the robe of nobull ble. 1.265-70

The masochistic woman is represented both as punishing herself for her illicit desires, and as making herself an even more desirable partner because of her obedience to the ultimate male authority, God, unmediated by earthly men. Her position, in this context, is disobedience masked as obedience: all of the legitimating structures operate on behalf of the father - he is the king and has authority for this marriage from the Pope. Emare's refusal to comply with male law is a refusal which is - eventually - construed almost as saintly.

I have already commented on the motif of the woman

refusing male control by appealing to divine law: the price to be paid for this refusal is the adoption of masochistic practices, whether that is the extreme form displayed in the lives of the female saints, or a passive form, such as that adopted by the patient Grisilda. In the first type the female body is mutilated, whereas in the second it is more often effaced. Until the very end of the tale Emare is displayed wrapped in the dazzling robe: we seldom 'see' her, what we do see is a mobile expression of illicit desire.

Illicit desire has to be accommodated in some way by patriarchal society. My argument is that it is accommodated by reference to divine law. It is therefore of crucial importance that we examine the occasions where women's disobedience is finally accepted as a type of higher obedience. As I have noted, the lives of female saints provide radical examples of this higher obedience. I would tentatively suggest that such women have to be made 'saints' because they are persistent refusers of male dictate: such powerful women cannot be allowed to be shown (or read) as subverting male authority for the simple reason that authority cannot be represented as fragmented. Either authority is absolute (has absolute power behind it), or it can be evaded, or even actively challenged. Thus, women's denial of earthly male authority can only be allowed on the basis that some male sanctions it. (23)

What is extraordinary in Emare is that in the end her activities, her desires, are not sanctioned by male law,

divine or otherwise: as I have noted, she becomes the dispenser of order. Emare, then, has succeeded in attaining her desires. Her departure from her father leads her to another man who is (constructed) like her father - and like him, bewitched by her - but unlike her father in that he is not taboo. Her seduction of him mirrors the desired seduction of her father:

The kyng loked her upon,
So fayr a lady he sygh nevir non:
Hys herts she hadde yn wolde.
He was so anamored of that syghth,
Of the mete non he myghth,
But faste gan her beholde. 1.397-402

The objection to the match again comes from a mother, who is, necessarily, presented as evil as she poses a threat to the achievement of the girl's desires. From a feminist point of view, possibly the most disquieting aspect of the adoption of masochistic practices is the way in which such strategies alienate those women who do not adopt them themselves. I shall be commenting further on this in the section on Lay le Freine. Here, suffice it to say that Emare's victory over the men means that she becomes the centre of the (formerly) male world. It also means that, because she has managed to do this, she is read as a saintly woman. As a ploy which ensures control, the seduction of man using bewitching techniques, coupled with ultimate obedience, is a success. Emare is centralized as a heroine

because she appears to conform to masculine notions of feminine behaviour.

Resisting the idea the Emare is an archetypal 'good girl' is difficult: she is a heroine, she suffers and forgives - she must be saintly. But she also ends up as a controlling agent of her own - and others' - sexual destiny.

LAY LE FREINE

The first problem to be confronted with Lay le Freine is that the Middle English version is incomplete: as I mentioned in the Introduction, the tale has been completed from the lai of Marie de France. The Middle English version ends where the wedding party for Le Codre is about to begin (1.340). However this narrative is faithful to Marie's tale: the slight differences which occur are omissions from the early part of the tale, and are thus not important in the reconstruction of the ending. (24) It therefore seems reasonable to accept the ending which we have as an integral part of the story.

There has not been a great deal of critical attention paid to this tale, and what little there is belongs most definitely to the 'assenting reader' tradition. John Beston opines that the poet (whom he invariably refers to as 'he'), has a mind which is 'not metaphorical or even particularly poetical'. He further observes:

The Le Freine poet has a moralistic sort of mind that differentiates him from Marie de France as well as from the Sir Orfeo poet; he is religiously and even clerically directed where they are not. The author of the English Le Freine, however, shows a concern with God as omniscient, and as hearing "sinful man bedes" (the mother's and the midwife's). He is also concerned with a life lived in accordance with the dictates of "holy chirche". (25)

It is difficult to see how Beston can argue that the author has 'a moralistic sort of mind that differentiates him from Marie de France' when the ending is a direct translation of her tale, and the rest a faithful rendition. What his comment seems to underline is the rigidity which critics so often display in writing on the lays. More serious, though, from a woman's point of view, is his focus on God, the church and sinfulness - on the maleness of the narrative. He entirely ignores the fact that most of the poem is concerned with women and motherhood; a point which Nikki Stiller has not omitted. She writes:

We are, at long last, in the ladies' chamber, and beside the childbed. Very clearly depicted, in spare, symbolic terms, is the relationship of women to childbirth, and to the birth of female children in particular within patriarchal society. (26)

To ignore the fact that the poem is really concerned with women and motherhood seems to me to be misreading it entirely. Apart from the fact that there are hardly any men in it (the husband, the neighbour, the porter and Guroun),

this story, for a change, really does belong to a woman, and it is even named after one. I have argued previously that naming can be misleading; the central character, the one in whom the reader is interested, who provides the focus, need not necessarily be the one from whom the tale takes its title. This is also the case here; the informing agent is not Le Freine but her mother. She is the one whom the story is 'about'.

The feminine narrative in this tale - Beston's foci notwithstanding - is not repressed. However, the mother is represented as having illicit desires which she both speaks and denies; this is effected by her displacing those desires. Susan Wittig has pointed out that Le Freine's mother takes the place of the adulteress:

She subsumes both the roles of accuser (she says that her neighbour's wife is an adulteress) and victim (she fears that she will be considered unfaithful, convicted by her own charge) and she takes on characteristics of both roles, the guilty and the innocent. She punishes herself for her own crime. (27)

Like Emare, the mother adopts a masochistic position. The consequences of adopting this strategy is that the figure of the 'good girl' (the innocent accused) is entirely split from that of the 'bad girl' (the adulterous woman). This is a split which can be found in classical mythology where sisters are readily recognizable as 'good' or 'bad'.

In Lay le Freine, the mother produces twin girls after she has slandered her neighbour:

Ich have wonder, thou messanger,
Who was thi lordes conseilor,
To teche him aboute to send
And telle schame in ich an ende,
That his wiif hath to childer y-bore.
Wele may ich man wite therfore
That tvay men hir han hadde in bour; 1.65-71

This belief is a commonplace one, as Margaret Schlauch has pointed out. (28) However as Mehl's comments on the lady of The Erl of Toulous indicate, a virtuous wife never entertains the possibility of adultery. (29) It is the evil sister who thinks thus, and who must therefore be disowned and distanced. But here in Le Freine the mother is the evil Other as well as the virtuous wife; there is no narrative indication that the mother did commit adultery, we never see her in an orchard, nor are we given any other reason to suppose that she was faithless: the suggestion of adultery in the text comes only from her. Although the mother isn't actually described as evil the narrative is certainly far from flattering:

Than was the levedi of the hous
A proude dame and an enveious,
Hokerfulliche misseging,
Squeymous and eke scorning.
To ich woman sche hadde envie. 1.59-63

She is also distinctly unpopular with the other women in the castle and something of a bane to her husband, too.

The knight himself was sore agramed,
And rebouked his levedy
To speke any woman vilainy.
And ich woman therof might here
Curssed hir alle y-fere. 1.74-8

What her real 'sin' is, is to say what ought to be unspeakable, possibly even unthinkable by a woman, namely that a man's children might not be of his begetting. Even more unthinkable is the idea that she is thinking of adultery herself - which really means, 'is thinking of committing it'. The mother is - at first - represented as the evil double, because she speaks the unspeakable, and is therefore vilified by the women of the castle.

When the mother is delivered of twin girls (1.86-87) the options which present themselves to her are equally unappealing:

"Allas", sche seid, "that I was born!
Withouten ende icham forlorn.
Or ich mot siggen sikerly

That tvay men han y-ly me by;
Or ich mot sigge in al mi liif
That I bileigh mi neighbour's wiif;
Or ich mot -that God it schilde!-
Help to sle min owen child.
On of this thre thinges ich mot nede
Sigge other don in dede. 1.95-104

She at first resolves to kill the child and then do penance (1.113-14) but the midwife refuses her command (1.115-20). This is curious, for she chooses to be a murderess rather than (be assumed to be) an adulteress or a slanderer. She wishes to murder that part of herself which evidences her nonconformity to the patriarchal system; patriarchy operates on power and consensus: this means that women have to assent to men's ideas about how they should behave and when women don't assent, then they are marginalized, isolated, ostracized or exiled.

The mother here is presented with an alternative by her companion, who reminds her of the time-honoured practice of exposing unwanted or troublesome children (121-34). As is also the time-honoured tradition the child is exposed with talismans, here a mantle and a ring (1.137-44); the narrative states that this is done so that whoever finds the child will know that it comes from a noble family (1.143-44). John Finlayson comments:

Le Freine shares with Sir Degarre the motif of the lost noble child who is brought up by a hermit or in a convent and carries identifying material which is later used to reunite it with its real parents. (30)

But neither Degarre nor Le Freine is really lost; they are given away and for the same reason, because the mother has had (or will be thought to have had) illicit sex.

Infanticide, or the appearance of it in exposure, is a choice preferable to the social stigma (and that is in the best case) of having had unlawful intercourse. (31) Women are constantly represented as doing anything to avoid being condemned to live outside the law. The mother in Le Freine is no different.

Le Freine is placed in the hollow of an ash tree, which, in folk-lore is the tree of re-birth. (32) Le Freine is thus reborn, away from her 'mother' and having nothing to do with her; the shadow has been got rid of. What is also interesting here is that although Le Freine is found by a man (1.185-201), the maiden has placed her near a convent (1.158-64); it is to a community of women she is given and by whom she is reared.

The porter who finds Le Freine is very much a functionary, as men tend to be in this tale (1.185-88). Here, they perform the menial tasks: it is the women who rule and dominate and it is therefore to the Abbess that the porter takes the child after his daughter has warmed and fed her (1.200-208). The Abbess here functions as a surrogate mother in her undertaking to rear the child:

"Go", hie seid, "on heighing,
An feche it hider I pray the,
It is welcum to God and to me.
Ichil it help as I can
And sigge it is mi kinswoman.

It is also remarkable that the children are given twin-names, Le Freine and Le Codre; it is only the mother and the maiden who exposed Le Freine who are in a position to know that there are twin daughters. Thus when the abbess/mother names one Le Freine because of where she is found, the other/mother gives her legitimate daughter her twin-name, Le Codre. The daughters, then function as projections of the mother, and they are split into the 'good' and 'bad'. I shall be commenting on this division shortly.

Le Freine is told by the abbess of her orphaned condition as soon as she asks:

The abbesse hir in conseyl toke,
To tellen hir hie nought forsoke,
Hou hie was founden in al thing,
And tok hir the cloth and the ring,
And bad hir kepe it in that stede: 1.245-49

What, in effect, she tells her is that she does not belong to the man-made order of kinship systems; Le Freine has asked about 'hir kin, on or other, / Fader or moder, soster or brother' (1.243-44). She is told that she has none, that she is outside that structure of legitimacy and legitimating forces. It is appropriate, then, that when Guroun comes on the scene - because of the reports which he has heard of her (1.257-58) - he wishes to make her his lover (1.271-72). As I have mentioned there is never any prospect of her entering into marriage with him, she is always seen as 'a bit on the side', and that is because she belongs on the outside of the

patriarchal structure. This equation of outside and female sexual pleasure is one which I have also commented on in the chapter on Sir Orfeo and Sir Gowther. Le Freine's ready accession to Guroun's proposal that she should leave the convent to become his mistress (1.290-98) may be read as a result of the fact that she does not live either by, or within, the usual set of rules and authority. She 'proves' her illegitimacy by entering, willingly, an illicit sexual world. It should be noted that the decision to go with Guroun is her own; he doesn't rape her or abduct her, both common features of romances which denote, as I have argued, the girl's refusal to accept responsibility for her own sexual desires. Clearly, Le Freine is here the split (and shadow) of her mother who was herself unable openly to admit to having (a desire for) illicit sex. Le Freine is living her mother's life for her, or rather, the mother is inventing a less constricted life for her double, her daughter.

These 'double' daughters, such as Helen and Clytemnestra, and Ariadne and Phaedra, are mythologized so that one of them turns out to be a shad(ow)y figure. So dissociated, so polarized, has the figure of the evil woman become from the figure of the virtuous woman, that it becomes difficult to realize that they were ever related, except dialectically. I had entirely 'forgotten', and was surprised to find myself suddenly 'remembering' a fact which I knew very well, namely, that Helen and Clytemnestra were

sisters three times over; twin-sisters possibly, sisters certainly and sisters by marriage having married the brothers Agamemnon and Menelaus. (33) By comparison with her twin, Helen, Clytemnestra is represented as being evil and lecherous; she is vilified as an adulteress and a murderess, and is certainly not a candidate for the Isles of The Blessed, which is where Helen ends up. The same is true of Ariadne and Phaedra; Ariadne, who was Theseus' lover before he married her sister, was left by him and entailed no threat, whilst Phaedra's reported infatuation with his son, Hippolytos, would overtly dislocate the patriarchal order. Phaedra has thus entered the symbolic order as a depraved woman whereas Ariadne is left unscathed.

This splitting of pairs of sisters into 'good' and 'bad' (the rhetoric which is employed is as simplistic as the concept), at least posits a relationship between the two women: a relationship which patriarchy continues to attempt to deny. (Nicole Ward Jouve is particularly instructive on this point). (34) In keeping with this division of 'good' and 'bad' women, in Lay le Freine the 'good' sister, Le Codre, is - effectively - a nobody. We know absolutely nothing about her other than the fact of her existence: she is constructed as a commodity, chosen for Guroun because she is an heiress:

His knightes com and to him speke,
And Holy Chirche commandeth eke,
Sum lordes doughter for to take,
And his leman al forsake;

And seid him were wel more feir
In wedlok to geten him an air
Than lede his liif with swiche on
Of was kin he knewe non.
And seid, "Hir bisides is a knight
That hath a doughter fair and bright
That schal bere his hiritage;
Taketh hir in mariage!" 1.311-22.

Le Codre is subsequently married to another lord when she is denied her first husband (1.404-06). What is remarkable here is that it is her sister's (masochistic) strategy which decides Le Codre's fate. For a woman's desires to be allowed to interfere with the construction of patriarchy is highly unusual. Elizabeth Wilson observes: 'No one worries about the needs of women who might have "cravings" and desires The cravings of men constitute the overt, socially recognized problem'. (35)

In reality, it is not just women's desire but sexual desire which is not allowed to interfere with the construction of patriarchy: St. Augustine was forced to reject his beloved mistress after a suitable marriage had been contracted for him. (36) The crucial difference lies in the fact that men are allowed to continue sexual relationships after marriage, whereas women cannot do so without incurring serious difficulties.

Le Codre's almost total anonymity denotes another aspect of the 'good' and 'bad' distinction, and that is that the 'good' woman remains private - because privately kept by men. By contrast the 'bad' woman is a public figure. At the

one extreme of this dichotomy we have the prostitute who walks the streets, her body open to all-comers; at the other extreme, in Christendom, we have the nun, incarcerated in the convent, her body hidden from view by the enveloping habit. (37) Le Codre, then, exists as the cipher against which the 'bad' woman is defined. The remarkable thing about this tale is that Le Freine is not construed as a 'bad' woman, and this is because of her adoption of a masochistic strategy. She ought to be an outcast, she is young, beautiful, gracious - and sexy: in Marie de France's version the argument which Guroun employs to make her quit the convent is that the abbess will be displeased if she becomes pregnant whilst under her roof. (38) The Middle English version does not mention this, but clearly they are lovers and live as a married couple (l.309-10). Beston does seem to have recognized Le Freine as somewhat less than deserving, for he reserves his sympathy for the 'good' Le Codre, remarking: 'The English version makes the sister a shadowy figure, probably advisedly in view of the unkind way she is treated at the end of the story'. (39)

From the point at which Le Freine goes to live in Guroun's castle, she is presented as a loved and popular figure; unlike the position which her mother occupies in her home:

So long sche was in his castel
That al his meyne loved hir wel.

To riche and pouer sche gan hir dresse,
That al hir loved, more and lesse. 1.305-08

However there is a rub, and that is that although she is a perfect woman, beautiful and gracious to all, she isn't legitimate and men are offended by this:

His knightes com and to him speke,
And Holy Chirche comandeth eke,
Sum lordes doughter for to take,
And his leman al forsake:
And seid him were wel more feir
In wedlok to geten him an air
Than lede his liif with swiche on
Of was kin he knewe non. 1.311-18

The emphasis is again on knowing where a wife fits into the social order: which really means, where does her blood come from? With what blood will he be mingling his? This is an insistent - and it sometimes seems pervasive - theme in the Middle English romances. It is also remarkably similar to the rationale which Walter uses in Chaucer's Clerk's Tale. (40) A man's desire to have children, most particularly sons - though a daughter will do as a makeshift link - is a desire to have a part of his flesh and blood who will bear his name and inherit his land and goods; it is, perhaps, the only tangible evidence of immortality, the same name, the same flesh and blood occupying the same space for hundreds of years, both backwards and forwards. On a more pragmatic level, and it is this which really concerns me here, it is also a method of ensuring that power - and the privileges,

comfort and wealth which go with it - remain in the same hands. Always men's hands. If women move out of the patriarchal system of values then there can be no legitimate children; or at least men could not be sure that the children whom their wives bore would be theirs, which amounts to the same thing in practice. And in order to continue the same system of values, men must marry women who belong to it and abide by its rules, which Le Freine clearly doesn't. I should point out that this is the ideology which underlies the production of heirs; in practice social structure and relations are far more fluid.

Guroun agrees then, though reluctantly, to marry the heiress whom his courtiers have chosen for him (1.319-24). It is at this point that the narrative informs us that the chosen bride is Le Freine's twin (1.329-32) and that no one knows of this save God alone (1.333-34). The mother's shadow is still so distanced from her (after all, she has been having an illicit relationship), that she is not yet allowed to be recognized or recognizable.

Under these circumstances Le Freine becomes even more of a patient Grisilda figure: 'No word of pride ne grame sche spoke' (1.354). She even lays her mantle on the bed in order to please her lord (1.360-68). As in Emare, it is through weaving, embroidery and sewing that women send messages to each other when speech is impossible. Just as Procne weaves a message into her sister's bridal robe to tell her that her marriage is proscribed, so it happens here: the mother of

the twins recognizes the cloth and reveals all (1.369-94).
There are two very important things to note here; the first
is that the mother confesses all to her husband:

Sche swoned and was wel neigh ded,
And lay sikeand on that bed.
Her husband was fet tho,
And sche told him al her wo. 1.387-90

She swoons on to the marriage bed which is covered by the
cloth before beginning her confession; it is precisely the
marriage bed which was the start of all the problems. The
mother's desire was for what the poem encodes as illicit
sex, adultery; the fact that she gave away the cloth and
ring which were love-tokens given her by her husband (1.397-
98) along with her child indicates her rejection of sexual
love within marriage. Le Freine, then, functions as the part
of her which rejects the constraints of law and (wishes to)
live outside its male boundaries. Now the mother has come
back inside, so to speak; she confesses to her husband -
which means that she accepts that illicitness is a sin.
'Sin' is a term which critics use freely in commenting on
this tale without indicating what the 'sin' is; presumably
on the basis that everybody knows and accepts that for women
to have sex outside marriage is not simply unlawful but
sinful to boot.

The cloth which is Le Freine's identifier tells not of
forbidden love but of lawful love; it is the parents'

marriage token, along with the obvious marriage token of the ring. By putting the mantle on the marriage bed Le Freine indicates acceptance of legal sex, in addition to warning her sister against having sex with this man. Patriarchal rules again become the order of the day; the wife admits that she has been 'wrong', that is, that she has objected to the masculine confines by which her life is ordered, and desire comes back inside the institution which has been created for its satisfaction (for men, anyway). Everybody is re-united and they all settle down as happily married couples each knowing precisely who they are and what are their relations to each other.

This is what typically happens, with very rare exceptions, at the end of a romance; there is always a re-establishment of order, which means a re-imposition of the status quo. From a feminist perspective the satisfying thing about these tales is seeing that (some of) the women do do illicit things, have illicit desires. There is, though, a problem for criticism and that is to see the women who are at the centre of the stories as equally sexy as those who exist on the margins. A 'heroine' such as Emare or Le Freine is always seen as a 'good girl', presumably on the basis that only a moral degenerate could write a tale which had a lustful woman as a heroine. It is possible, I would say, to be at the centre, to be legitimate and to want sexual experience; what is necessary is that this should be recognized. Like Sir Gowther, Lay Le Freine is more positive

about women's sexual desires than is common; just as Sir Gowther reveals and resolves female sexual anxieties and frustrations so does Le Freine, for through the agency of the child, the mother is restored to a married life which includes her admission to her husband of her sexual nature.

THE ERL OF TOULOUS

As I have already remarked, The Erl of Toulous has received virtually no attention: this may be related to the fact that critics seem to have had even more difficulty in categorizing it than they have had with the other lays. Its editors note:

Though sometimes grouped with the Breton Lays, to which it professes to be related, it has little in common with them, and its true source is probably historical. The writer had a strong moral sense and was probably a cleric. (42)

Dieter Mehl remarks: 'The poem in its present form cannot really be counted among the lays unless any short narrative is to be termed lay'. He goes on to observe:

Goodness, that is in this poem justice and chastity, prevails against all treason and intrigue without any spectacular exploits and superlative heroism. There is, in this respect, a clear resemblance to such poems as Emare and Le Bone Florence of Rome, but in The Erl of Toulous, the story, though in many ways exemplary, is not told as an exemplum or as an illustration of any particular virtue. Love is the main subject of the tale, though in a

much higher sense than most of the shorter romances, and this links it with the other poems of that type rather than with the homiletic romances. (43)

Again, critics are looking for a male heroic, and although the eponymous Erl is a 'gentil knight' par excellence, the narrative is only incidentally concerned with his heroic exploits. As Mehl points out, it is really 'a love story'. I would disagree with him, though, in his contention that it is love' in a much higher sense': Mehl does not make explicit precisely what he means by this, but in the context of his other comments on the tale it appears that he believes the lady to be 'above' love based on sexual attraction. (44) This is to ignore the obvious physical attraction on which the whole relationship between the Erl and Beulybon is predicated. It also ignores the fact that she is clearly unhappily married, and that the calumniated wife motif is elaborated beyond expectation insofar as the lady, in her reiterated confessions of the gift of the ring, calumniates herself. What is also remarkable is that the Erl is the only man in the narrative who does not immediately accept that Beulybon is innocent.

Beulybon is the unequivocal centre of the narrative: what is more, she is the only woman in the entire tale. She is the romantic icon: nothing and no one detracts from her role as the beautiful, adored centre of a male court. Freud comments that this type of story can be readily recognized

as a day-dream. (45) I want to argue that The Erl of Toulous embodies the fantasy of an unhappily married woman who projects her sexual desires on to men: however, the lady's recognition of desire is accompanied by guilt, because such desire is illicit. The adoption of a masochistic strategy, then, is a means both of punishing guilt and allowing for social (and sexual) reintegration. Sir Gowther, Sir Orfeo and Lay le Freine also display unhappily married woman: as I have argued, the assumption of masochistic strategies enable the ladies in Sir Gowther and Lay le Freine to end up happily married. I shall argue here that marital disharmony is the source of the fantasy and that it also allows the lady to fulfil her wishes of replacing her husband.

From the very beginning of the narrative, the Erl is the focus of marital tension. The first presentation of Beulybon and her husband, Dyoclysyen, is their argument over his treatment of the Erl:

To the Emperour sche can say:
"My dere lorde, y yow pray
Delyury the Erle his ryght".
"Dame", he seyde, "let that bee;
That day schaly thou neuyr see,
Yf y may ryde on ryght". 1.46-51

Her comments to him after he has lost to the Erl are similarly redolent of disharmony, for in effect she says 'I told you so' (1.151-56). Unsurprisingly, Dyoclysyen is irritated by this (1.158-59). Whilst Beulybon is construed

(especially by critics), as a paragon of virtue, she is certainly not constructed as a perfectly submissive wife.

Maureen Fries comments:

Besides chastity the other important virtue for wives in popular romance is obedience, and the prime exemplar is that patient Grisilda renowned throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. (46)

Perhaps it is Beulybon's outspoken criticism of her husband which led J.E. Wells to label her 'too didactic'. (47)

In reading the tale as a narrative of illicit desire it is important to stress that the Erl always poses a threat of disruption, whether that is as a conventional enemy, or as a potential lover to a married woman. It could be argued that the conventional masculine heroic - the war and knightly exploits - are a cover for the fantasy of the jealous rivalry of the two men for the woman. Edwin Greenlaw observes: 'That the author desires to have the earl considered as the hero is manifested not only by the defence in the combat, but by the evident interests which the lady feels for him from the first'. (48) Greenlaw is the only one of the - admittedly very few - commentators on the poem who does recognize Beulybon's interest in the Erl. Robert Reilly's reading of her agrees with Mehl's approbation.

Reilly remarks:

Twice she puts off her would-be seducers with scathing denunciations. 'Certainly there is no possibility that she would accept the Earl as a

lover. She shows herself in the chapel as much for the benefit of Sir Trylabas, who must keep his bargain, as out of pity for the Earl, who has come so far to see her beauty. It is a bit incongruous that she even gives him the ring. Yet her doing so ultimately provides further evidence of her wifely fidelity when it becomes clear that this small act troubles her conscience so much that she must confess it, not only to the abbot, but to the Earl disguised as a monk. (49)

What seems to me remarkable is the evident desire of both Reilly and Mehl to excuse Beulybon's conduct: their insistence on her purity, fidelity, on her being 'above' 'ordinary' love verges on the manic. One asks oneself: what are they trying to prove? Alternatively, one could ask: who are they trying to deceive? These two questions need to be asked of the construction of the lady in this tale. I intend, then, to focus on the pledges which the lady gives to the Erl, and hope to show that these gifts demonstrate both sexual interest in him and a pledge that their relationship will be consummated.

When the Erl is brought to see Beulybon, she is the one who is insistent that Trylabas's pledge be honoured (1.280-85). Reilly's comment that she agrees to this proposition 'out of pity for the Earl' is not evidenced in the text: she consents after Trylabas has told her that the Erl is in love with her:

He hath forgeuyn me my raunsom,
Be God full of myght -
And all ys for the loue of the!

The sothe ys, he longyth yow to see,
Madam, onys yn syght! 1.266-70.

Her rebuke of Trylabas - who has quite rightly pointed out that the Erl is an enemy and should be killed (1.278) - overtly concerns itself not with the Erl, but with the consequences for Trylabas (eternal damnation), should he break his pledge. As is typical in this tale, concern for other people's 'honour' masks the lady's desire to have her own way. Certainly, when she displays herself to the Erl in the chapel, her demeanour goes beyond what Mehl has called 'common politeness'. 'Twyes sche turnyd hur abowte / For the Erle schulde hur see' (1.349-51). The narrative also states that she showed her face, 'For loue of that knyght' (1.337-39). The sentence might be ambiguous; it is possible that it refers to Trylabas, for whose soul she manifests such concern, but it seems unlikely. The focus in this scene is on Beulybon, and more particularly on her beautiful appearance (1.340-60), and the Erl's response to it. It is after this sighting that the Erl expresses the wish that she were unmarried and that he could be her lover (1.367-72). My argument is that she promises this to him, for his expressions are a mask for hers.

When the Erl approaches the lady, disguised as a hermit, she gives him two things: a ring and some money. Reilly has remarked that the giving of the ring is 'a small act', but the giving and receiving of rings is one of the most crucial

signs of sexual exchange. The Erl interprets the gift as a sign of her feeling for him, for he remarks: 'Yf euyr y gete grace of the Quene / That any loue betwene us bene, / Thys may be oure tokenyng' (1.406-08). And of course, this is what happens at the end of the tale. The ring, then (which she takes from her own finger, 1.392-93), is a pledge of her love for him.

The money which she also gives to the Erl has received no comment whatsoever. The assumption seems to be that one would expect a beggar to be given money, and how much she gives is of no significance. Beulybon gives him forty florins (1.389), a sum which she expressly asks to be brought to her for this purpose. The narrative precision about the amount given - and the largeness of the sum - struck me as curious: the number forty, though, is a symbolic one, and what it signifies is a period of trial, followed by reward. The Israelites spend forty years in the desert before arriving at 'the promised land'; Noah's Flood lasts for forty days and forty nights; and Christ spends forty days in the desert. The forty day period of Lent mimics the forty days which Christ spent in the desert.(50) The money, then, is a message that there will be a period of exile, but Beulybon and the Erl will, eventually be united. The Erl, then returns to his own country (1.409-11), and the lady is left to start punishing herself in earnest for her desires.

It is only at this point that her husband becomes

'suspicious' of her, for at this point he sets two men to guard her (1.481-86). This can be seen as indicating the lady's guilt at her behaviour: the masochistic woman incarcerates herself, she acts, as Susan Wittig points out commenting on Lay le Freine, as perpetrator and victim. The doubling is further emphasized in this narrative in the figures of the two guards who proposition her. The fantasy is split into desire (the Erl), and guilt (the guards). Edwin Greenlaw's penetrating remark that the knights carry out the 'more odious work' of false accusation which ought to be the Erl's task in the tale, implicitly suggests that this splitting does occur. (51) True to form, the rejected suitors calumniate Beulybon, but this accusation reflects her 'guilt'. What has to happen in order for the lady to be 'absolved' is that the world - which means the world of men - has to recognize her 'innocence', and it is 'proof' of this that the next part of the narrative constructs.

The accusation of adultery which the knights make after they have produced 'evidence', in the body of the young man hidden in her bedroom, is challenged by an old knight (a type of wise man), who convinces his audience of her innocence (1.883-902). From this point on, the only one who is uncertain of Beulybon's fidelity is the Erl of Toulous himself. When he hears that she is to be burnt at the stake he travels to the realm, but he is constantly represented as checking up on the possibility of her unfaithfulness (1.920, 944, 1015, 1021-32, 1048-50). In the same way, the lady is

represented as 'confessing' to having given a ring to the Erl on two occasions: she confesses to her uncle, the abbot, and to the Erl, who is disguised as a monk. The confessions underline the internal nature of guilt: however they also externalize the fantasy and at the same time procure (male) 'forgiveness' for it. It is this which permits the fantasy/the desire, and which allows Beulybon to marry the Erl. After she is 'proved' innocent (she is only innocent because everyone thinks that she is), the husband is despatched without ceremony. The narrative merely remarks that he survived for only three years after these events (1.1207): what is curious here is that Beulybon and the Erl are married immediately he is made emperor by the mandate of the people (1.1208-213): the lady appears constantly as a pawn, nothing which she does or which happens to her is achieved through her own agency - with the single exception of the gifts of the ring and money. I would argue that these talismans say it all: once they have been given the lady has only to wait for the Erl to return, which of course he does once her guilt (her desire) has been legitimated through patriarchal recognition.

Chapter 4

THE TIES THAT BIND: SEX AND MARRIAGE IN

SIR ORFEO

I

A lack of external events and appropriate internal responses can constitute a trauma no less than the "dramatic" assaults against the ego. More than that, the anticipation of more and more eventlessness may similarly constitute a danger of severe proportions to one's well-being.

A woman whose psychosexual needs should find satisfaction in her marriage and her family life is often threatened with the danger of being left unsatisfied, because her marriage relation has come to a premature end and because of the uneventfulness of her emotional life. Where a marriage is childless, the wife has lost one of the things which might be of most help to her in tolerating the resignation that her own marriage demands from her. (1)

These opening quotations, from Seidenberg and Freud, offer a way of understanding Sir Orfeo. What is so extraordinary about this tale is that it contains the motif of the mutilated female body (as does Sir Gowther): this motif is uncommon outside saints' lives (and pornography), and is generally a type of punishment for sexual transgression; this is a trope that still exists in the practices of the modern sex-murderer. (2) It is necessary, then, to examine the narrative to see what the mutilation motif can lead us to infer about Herodis.

Sir Orfeo contains the tale of a woman whose marriage is childless. I shall argue that it also deals with a marriage barren of sexual passion. My thesis is that this tale

encompasses the fantasy of a 'demon lover', who is a substitute for the inadequate husband. I would further suggest that in Sir Orfeo we are given a portrait of a husband who, even if potent and fertile, appears to prefer the company of men. Orfeo's interests lie in his music and his kingdom and his ties are to society and his fellows. Herodis is a figure who prevents him from being (seen for) what he is.

What I intend to do, then, is to examine the tale from the viewpoint of the woman in it and thus suggest a way in which women might read a narrative which is, typically, viewed as a story both by and about men. (3)

II

Of all the Breton Lays Sir Orfeo is the one which has excited the most critical attention: I have already argued in the introduction that this is because of its status as myth. It has also been met with the most enthusiastic response. Peter Lucas writes:

One of the reasons why Orfeo has been found so attractive is probably that it is so very reassuring. Indeed it would hardly be exaggerating to call it a psychological tonic. (4)

However some critics have seen it as something other than 'a tonic' or 'a story of married lovers'. (5) The most interesting comment (which is also a mixture of the 'feminine' and the 'primitive' that I discussed in the Introduction), is made by Dorena Allen, who observes:

The often praised lightness and charm of Sir Orfeo are deceptive: the distinctive flavour of the poem comes not from them, but from a unique and haunting combination of fourteenth century graces and immemorial fears. The world of the poem, for all its outward elegance, is still the primitive world of popular belief, a world in which men are forever surrounded and threatened by cruel and capricious beings. (6)

Not only are people so situated, but they are also subject to nightmare and fantasy. Freud remarked:

We need not be surprised to find that, whereas the neuroses of our unpsychological modern days take on a hypochondriacal aspect and appear disguised as organic illnesses, the neuroses of those early times emerge in demonological trappings. (7)

As Ernest Jones has pointed out, nightmare may be a disguise for fantasy. He writes:

Thus a repressed wish for a particular sexual experience may be represented in a dream by imagery which, though associatively connected with them in the unconscious, is very dissimilar in appearance to the ideas of that experience; or, on the other hand, the ideas may appear in the dream, but accompanied by such a strong emotion of dread that any notion of their

representing a wish is completely concealed from consciousness. (8)

My thesis is that Herodis' dream in the orchard is a rape or seduction fantasy, although it is one in which the sexual component is strongly disguised. The notion of the rape fantasy is one that has been examined by Freud, Kestenberg and Coward to name but a few: I have already made reference to their work in the section on Sir Degarre.

Orfeo's casting of himself out from society and subsequent return with Herodis is a method of making heterosexuality compulsory in this tale. It should be noted that it is an affirmation which not all versions of the Orpheus legend accord him. (9) There are two strands in this tale which I shall be examining: these two strands are Herodis's story and Orfeo's story. I shall begin by examining the narrative of Herodis's experience.

III

It is suggested, covertly if not overtly, by a number of critics that Herodis' experience in the orchard is a sexual one. M.J. Donovan notes that Herodis' name associates her with Herodias, the provocative woman, and 'the wild ride', which is usually led by Satan. (10) John Friedman argues that the temporal precision of Herodis' abduction is grounds for suggesting that the fairy king was a version of the

lustful 'noon day demon'; he further observes: 'That the fairies were lustful and hunted women around trees was already established by Chaucer's day'. (11) P.R. Orton comments on her 'carelessness in falling asleep in such dangerous circumstances'. (12) The implicit suggestion in this remark is that Herodis 'asked for it'. It is something of a literary convention that to fall asleep under a tree is to invite a demon-lover; even to be out maying or in an orchard is sufficient for there to be an expectation of a sexual encounter. Malory's Guinevere is not exempt from the fate of an attempted rape, though by a mortal man, in the same circumstances. (13) Ultimately, of course, the tradition derives from Eve and her encounter with the serpent in Eden. I would suggest that Herodis is in no different plight from that of other women asleep - or out - among the trees; what I would take issue with is the degree of consciousness (or carelessness) with which this is portrayed as happening. E.C. Ronquist opines:

The doubling of fear into the second pathos of self-incrimination made it seem as if Herodis were allowing herself to be carried off, even carrying off herself. (my emphasis) (14)

I would begin, therefore, with an examination of the narrative at the point where Herodis wakes from her dream of the fairy-king. This is where her story begins: the events in the orchard are told from her point of view. When she

wakes, she wakes to a nightmare world; the dream itself has not been frightening, rather, it was a pleasant excursion:

Tho com her king al-so blive
With a hundred knightes and mo
And dammisels an hundred al-so,
Al on snowe white stedes;
As white as milke were her wedes.
I no seighe never yete bifer
So fair creatures y-core.
The king had a croun on hed;
It nas of silver no of gold red,
Ac it was of a precious ston
As brighte as the sonne it schon.
And as son as he to me cam,
Wold ich, nold ich he me nam
And made me with him ride
Opon a palfray by his side
And brought me to his palays
Wele atird in ich ways,
And schewed me castels and tours
Rivers, forestes, frith with flours
And his riche stedes ichon,
And seththen me brought oyain hom
Into our owen orchard. 1.142-63 (15)

The dream itself cannot be described as a nightmare and indeed the fairy-kingdom 'looks like Paradise' (16); Herodis does recount that she has told the fairy-knights, 'I durst not, no I ne wold' (1.140) come to see the fairy-king, but she makes no such statement about the arrival of the king himself; of him she says: 'Wold ich, nold ich, he me nam' (1.154). This indicates her refusal to take responsibility for what has happened; she becomes, in his presence, someone who simply cannot help herself. The same is true of the conversation which she tells of having had with the fairy-king when he returns her to the orchard. He tells her that

she should in no wise attempt to hinder him from taking her away, and that in any case:

Whar thou be, thou werst y-fet
And to-tore thine limes al
That nothing help the no schal. 1.170-72

It could, of course, be argued that this codicil to the dream experience is what causes her to wake up screaming, but I would suggest, rather, that this is another attempt to refuse responsibility for the fantasy; as such, it is in keeping with the quotation which I gave earlier from Ernest Jones. It is also in keeping with descriptions of female rape fantasies. Rosalind Coward writes:

The hero's power is not only reminiscent of the father's perfection before the fall, so to speak; the power also works to absolve the woman from any responsibility for the sexual engagement. (17)

Now there is a problem insofar as the fairy-king is not reported as molesting Herodis; this has led some critics to argue that there is no sexual motive in her narrative: James Knapp, rather quaintly, remarks that she cannot have been carried off for love as the Fairy King already has a wife. (18) However, it should be remembered that she is recounting the events of the dream to her husband. The narrative does not tell us what happened; Herodis's account of events forms that part of the narrative. In Sir Gowther the only way in

which the audience knows that Gowther's mother has had sexual relations with a fiend is because the story says so; it certainly isn't what she tells her husband,

Apart from the literary conventions of women being portrayed as having either desired or undesired sexual encounters when out amongst the trees, the action which Herodis takes on waking can also be offered as evidence that she has had a sexual encounter. As I have noted she wakes to a nightmare world:

Ac as sone as sche gan awake
Sche criid and lothli bere gan make;
Sche froted hir handen and hir fet,
And cracched hir visage - it bled wete;
Hir riche robe hie al to-rett
And was reveyd out of hir witt. 1.77-82

Her behaviour displays the classic signs of mourning, the wailing and laceration of the body as well as the tearing of the clothes. Ernest Jones has suggested that such behaviour is apotropaic in nature; the mourners, being afraid of the return of the dead person to wreak destruction on the living, attempt to ward this off by doing harm to themselves. (19) It could be said that Herodis mutilates herself as an apotropaic measure against the fairy-king, but there are other reasons why she might do so. Self-mutilation can also be a feature of mental disturbance and the actions which are described here certainly bear close resemblance to Margery Kempe's experience of post-natal depression. (20) But if Herodis is mourning, what, precisely, is she mourning

for? And if it is a nervous breakdown, what has caused it? What Herodis' mutilation unquestionably demonstrates is someone in pain; more specifically and literally here, some body in pain. The pain which she inflicts on her body turns it, metaphorically speaking, inside out, showing white where it should be red and red where it should be white:

Thi bodi, that was so white y-core,
With thine nailes is al to-tore.
Allas thi rode, that was so red,
Is al wan as thou were ded,
And al-so thine fingres smale
Beth al blodi and al pale. l.105-10

In thus displaying her insides to Orfeo she makes her body speak for her. Christiane Olivier comments: 'Women, it will be said, talk with their bodies; or don't talk because of their bodies'. (21) As there is never any indication in the text that Orfeo and Herodis do have sexual intercourse, or that they ever touch each other, I want to argue that the way in which Herodis makes her body speak for her is an indication of her unsatisfied desire.

In the classical myth of Orpheus and Eurydice it is far easier to argue that desire is unsatisfied for there, they are just married when Eurydice is bitten by the snake and dies (22); in this Lay they have clearly been married for some time (l.120-24). What we do know in this version is that Orfeo is never reported as touching her, save on the occasion when he leads her from the underworld: it should also be remembered that his skill as a musician lies in his

hands, those crucial instruments of knowledge through touch. It is also instructive that on their return from the underworld Orfeo immediately designates the steward his heir (1.572): there is never any question of there being any heirs of his body. I take this to be an indication that there will not be any heirs; the only certainty of fruitlessness is by not planting any seeds. Herodis, then, turns her insides out, bleeding, for Orfeo to see, as an indication of her sexually barren life. Her body 'speaks' its message of isolation and untouchedness. Elaine Scarry writes: '.... to be intensely embodied is the equivalent of being unrepresented and is almost always the condition of those without power'. (23) She also observes that 'the body [is] the locus of pain, the voice, the locus of power'. (24) Herodis is given very little voice in the narrative, but, as I have observed, she uses her body.

The scene in which Herodis, raving, is confronted by Orfeo is extraordinary in a number of ways: firstly Orfeo goes to visit his wife accompanied by ten of his knights (1.99); at no point does he attempt to comfort her by touch, caress or embrace and in fact he begins by looking at her and he then speaks, describing the mutilations which she has inflicted on her body. What this reads like, to me, is not a description of a loving husband visiting his beloved wife, but of a torturer visiting his victim. This, I would say, is the first indication of hostility we are given between the couple.

Orfeo goes to visit Herodis accompanied by his knights, thus, presumably, armed men; he is not reported as taking household servants (stewards, chamberlains or maidservants), as one might expect. It seems to me remarkable that a man would go to visit his sick wife so accompanied. It should further be noted that Herodis is, here, a prisoner, for she has been bound in her bed (1.93-4). Orfeo begins the interview by looking at her, and looking can be an act of overt hostility; in this scene, where he and his companions are looking at the exposed body of Herodis I would argue that this is certainly the case. What he then does is to describe the wounds on her body, again, an act of brutality. There are, of course, divergent opinions as to what is happening here. Peter Lucas notes:

The emphasis on, and even idealization of, the mutual love between Orfeo and Herodis is indeed one of the most striking features of Sir Orfeo Thus, Herodis' distracted mutilation of her body, because it arises from her dreaming about her abduction from Orfeo, implies her love for him. (25)

I am not convinced of this, given the scene with which the audience is presented, one in which Orfeo also comments on the way in which Herodis looks at him: 'Allas, thy lovesum eyghen to / Loketh so man does on his fo' (1.111-12). The narration of Herodis' wounds is not, I would say, an expression of sympathy; a sympathetic response would be to acknowledge the other's pain (the time-honoured rhetoric of

sympathy for one in pain is to say 'I know' or 'there', gory details do not form part of it). (26) A catalogue of wounds belongs to the realm of medicine or law, not to any portrayal of human sympathy; especially where the one human concerned is bound and the other is accompanied by armed men and is keeping his distance. On the experience of torture Scarry writes:

The dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside gives rise to a fourth aspect of the felt experience of physical pain, an almost obscene conflation of private and public. It brings with it all the solitude of absolute privacy with none of its safety, all the self-exposure of the utterly public with none of its possibility for camaraderie or shared experience. (27)

Herodis is both isolated - the only woman, the only prisoner in the group of powerful men - and exposed - bound and torn, unable to run or to cover herself.

There is another issue to be addressed here as Herodis tortures herself. This self-exposure may be read as a continuation of the rape fantasy: certainly it is not dissimilar to the account of the real life threat of rape given by Christina of Markyate. (28) Orfeo and his men, unlike Christina's husband and his friends, do not want to see this exhibition of the female body: it is for them that this conflation of the public (the masculine world of the court) and the private (the insides of the woman's body) is obscene. It should be remembered, however, that it is given to Orfeo, rather than to the narrator, to 'speak the

wounds': perhaps this is an implicit comment that it is he who be-speaks them.

I would compare this with the scene in Dracula where Holmwood and his companions visit the ailing Lucy. What is happening in this scene, as in Sir Orfeo, is that the men are guarding themselves against what is, in essence, a sexual attack on them. Lucy Westenra asks, in voluptuous tones, that Holmwood should kiss her; Van Helsing prevents this, telling him that he may only kiss her on the forehead, a chaste and asexual demonstration. (29) It should also be noted that Holmwood's companions are both brothers-in and men-at arms; it is mentioned that they have often been on hunting trips together and they become, literally, blood-brothers, through their donations to Lucy (p.61). Herodis' look of enmity bears comparison with the look of rage which Lucy directs at Holmwood when he will not kiss her as she wants to be kissed (p.161). There are also similarities in the description of Lucy's body to that of Herodis.

There, on the bed, seemingly in a swoon, lay poor Lucy, more horribly white and wan looking than ever. Even the lips were white and the gums seemed to have shrunken back from the teeth as we sometimes see in a corpse after a long illness. (p.127)

Although it is not described here, we know that Lucy, too, has a torn and bloodied body. What has happened to each of these women is that their experience with the demon-lover has sexualized them; they have each dreamed-up a masterful,

brutal lover who cannot be escaped. Demon-lovers are not afraid of women's sexuality (of having sex as an act of pleasure), whereas Orfeo and Holmwood both are. Lucy is 'punished' for the sexual desires which she expresses: 'Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her and save all this trouble?' (p.59) She is punished by being first 'demonized' and then by having a stake through her heart and her head cut off. Freud comments on the motif of beheading as an act of castration and Peter Allen writes about the exaltation of the 'silent woman' who is 'often portrayed as a woman who has been decapitated'. (30) Herodis, too, is 'demonized' by being subsequently located in the underworld. Female desire is seen as being 'an illness', or a demonic possession which must be combated in whatever way is available. It is significant, though, that in western cultures the only successful weapons against voracious women are the explicitly Christian talismans of cross and host; Orfeo's army is singularly ineffective in preventing Herodis from returning to the fairy-world:

Ac yete amidde hem ful right
The quen was o-way y-tvight,
With fairi forth y-nome. l.191-93

The classical tale of Orpheus and Eurydice differs, really, only in two significant ways, but these are crucial to this reading of the tale. The first difference is that Eurydice is bitten by a snake in an overtly sexual encounter

in the woods and dies immediately; there is thus no confrontation between her and Orpheus about the incident. Secondly, Orpheus goes to Hades to bring back Eurydice, a task in which he does not succeed; she has been taken there because she is dead, whereas Herodis is not dead and does come back, although Orfeo does not set out to seek her. (31) These scenes, the confrontation incident and the depiction of the underworld 'place' the tale in 'the primitive world of popular belief'. (32) J.E. Wells observed: '.... if one did not know the old story, one could scarce suppose the tale other than a fairy tale'. (33) Whilst there is no 'rational' explanation, the removal from this world to another, secret, magical world is a potent metaphor for sexual pleasure. Herodis has entered an enchanted world which is a fictionalized fairyland of beautiful countryside dotted with castles and rivers (l.156-57, 349-76); it is never dark there and, most importantly, time stands still. It has to be said that the desire that time should stand still so that the moment can endure forever is a commonplace of lover's rhetoric: this is exactly what Herodis gets.

The situation which obtains in this lay is the obverse of that which occurs in Sir Gowther. After her encounter with the demon-lover, Gowther's mother crosses herself (an antidote to sexual desire) and flees back to the castle whence she later removes herself to a secure tower. She has been frightened by her experience of sex 'on the outside' (of sexual pleasure) and her attitude towards it causes her

to 'demonize' her son: she exists in continual flight from sexual autonomy, from liberation; even her sexual experience is one that enables her to stay inside the tower, for without a child she would have been cast out by her husband. By contrast Herodis is a woman who has enjoyed her liberation (though in keeping with repressed fantasies it is constructed as compulsion), and then moved from the confinement, literal and metaphorical, of her husband's castle, chamber, and bindings. There is no point of contact between the worlds of Orfeo and Herodis; certainly not at this stage where he cannot even see his wife disappearing into her magical world (l.181-94).

IV

I want to turn, now, to the demarcation of sexual activity which can be found in this lay. I shall argue that the demonization of female desire is attached to particular loci. What is of crucial importance in this lay (and in Sir Gowther) is the notion of boundaries, of insides and outsides. In each of these lays the women meet the demon/fairy in an orchard, and an orchard is a type of transitional space between inside and outside, house and forest. An orchard is half human-made, in that it is bounded, and half natural, in that it is full of trees; as I noted earlier, orchards are the traditional space for seductions, perhaps because they are places which are, quite

literally, fruitful. It should be remembered that the tree under which Herodis falls asleep is - like the orchard - half natural and half artefact, for it is a grafted tree. (1.70). But from an orchard one can either come back, as Gowther's mother does, or, go on to a different, unbounded world, as Herodis does.

One of the aspects of this presentation of the underworld is that its vista is limitless; true, it has castles and towers and walls, and the buildings are described substantially (1.355-68), but it is, nevertheless, flat and endless seeming: 'Smothe and plain and al grene, / Hille no dale nas ther non y-sene' (1.353-54). This landscape is an innocent-looking one; it is like a human one except that it has no 'edge' to it at all, either of mountain or of sea. Yi-fu Tuan remarks:

Generally speaking, every human made boundary on the earth's surface - garden hedge, city wall or radar 'fence' - is an attempt to keep inimical forces at bay.

Boundaries are everywhere because threats are ubiquitous. (34)

The underworld does, however, despite the limitless and homely vista when there, have the most marked boundary of all, namely the three-mile tunnel of rock which must be passed through (1.347-51). The underworld corresponds to the tombs and mausoleums of the gothic novel and these are symbolic of transgressive spaces: they are locations where women sate their appetites, more specifically their sexual

appetites. As such they are both psychic spaces and physical spaces symbolic of both desire and the place where desire is satisfied, the female sexual organs. The tunnel which Orfeo has to pass through in order to reach Herodis is another symbolic passage, this time a symbol of the vagina which he has to enter to free her from the 'spell', her frustrated body. In the same way that Orfeo was forced to see the 'inside' of Herodis's body when she had mutilated herself, he is now forced, symbolically, to enter it, in order to 'rescue' his old life. As in Sir Gowther, Gowther is used to work through anxieties and frustrations for his mother and the princess, so in Sir Orfeo the story also oscillates between male and female psyches.

Herodis's entrapment in the underworld parallels her containment in Orfeo's castle; the 'freedom' which she sought with the demon-lover is, as it is with Lucy Westenra, another kind of imprisonment. When her husband has come to her he is old and worn and pathetic. He does at this point, resolve to go and get her; but is this the mission of mercy and love which it is generally read as being? He follows her so that he can re-enter his old life: she, in coming back, is again 'absented' in any significant way from the text, as M.J. Donovan has observed. (35) She is also 'un-sexualized', for as soon as they return the steward is made heir and she is silenced.

The underworld, on this occasion of Orfeo's visit is presented as the frightening folk-realm, not the paradisaal

world, and this is by the inclusion of the 'taken' whom Orfeo is described as seeing: '.... folk that were thider y-brought / And thought dede and nare nought' (1.389-90).

These are typical vampire myth figures:

Sum stode with-outen hade
And sum non armes nade,
And sum thurth the body hadde wounde,
And sum lay wode y-bounde,
And sum armed on hors sete,
And sum a-strangled as thai ete
And sum were in water a-dreynt
And sum with fire al for-schrent.
Wives ther lay on child-bedde,
Sum ded and sum a-wedde; 1.391-400

The 'cruel and capricious beings' (cf. Allen), are here represented by those whom Paul Barber terms 'revenants'. In his book Vampires, Burial and Death, Barber has noted that the typical revenant dies unexpectedly, as do many of those in the underworld. (36) However Orfeo also sees many 'sleepers':

And wonder fele ther lay bi-sides
Riht as thai slepe her under-tides.
Ech was thus in this world y-nome,
With fairi thider y-come. 1.401-04

The underworld, then, is this transgressive place where those who gave themselves to or were taken by demons are brought and where they are placed side by side with those who are also potential trouble-bringers. The 'sleepers' would appear to be the women with whom Orfeo first sees Herodis (1.304-06) and they are associatively connected with

these other victims/trouble-bringers. Female desire can again be seen to be constructed as disruptive, for, as Barber points out, these revenants are dangerous; they will come and revenge themselves on the living by symbolically eating them (sucking their blood), the women being feared especially for the voracity of their appetites.

V

After Herodis' disappearance from the orchard Orfeo laments her absence sadly (1.195-99). However he does not decide to attempt to seek her out and bring her home; he decides, rather, to give up his kingship and go and live the life of a hermit (1.227-28). What he does resolve, though, is never to look at another woman again (1.211). Loyalty to his wife is the most immediately apparent explanation for this decision, for he says:

For now ichave mi quen y-lore,
The fairest levedi that ever was bore,
Never eft I nil no woman se. 1.209-11

As critics have pointed out, Orfeo's loss is a double one:

The combination of his own decision to go into exile and the inability of his followers to solace or advise him pushes Orfeo, literally and figuratively, into life at its lowest level of existence, a life which approximated death. In the wilderness he has neither love nor companionship The material life of the classical Orpheus was not changed by the death of Eurydice, but in Sir Orfeo Herodis' abduction

signals the complete reversal of Orfeo's fortune as king. (37)

This is not, strictly speaking, true as there is a reversal in the classical myth, though of a different order. Ovid wrote:

Throughout this time Orpheus had shrunk from loving any woman, either because of his unhappy experience, or because he had pledged himself not to do so. In spite of this there were many who were fired with a desire to marry the poet, many were indignant to find themselves repulsed. However Orpheus preferred to centre his affections on boys of tender years, and to enjoy the brief spring and early flowering of their youth: he was the first to introduce this custom among the people of Thrace. (38)

Whilst it might be allowable to grant such a custom existed among the ancient Greeks, it seems to me unlikely that homosexuality could be in any way promoted in medieval England: sodomy was regarded as a sin against nature, and thus heretics and witches were commonly accused of it. (39)

Orfeo cannot be allowed to live, wifeless, in a society of men. Eve Sedgwick comments:

"Obligatory heterosexuality" is built into male dominated kinship systems homophobia is a necessary consequence of such patriarchal institutions as heterosexual marriage. (40)

Orfeo's court is clearly constructed as a male dominated one: the only women who appear in it are Herodis and her attendants, the women exist as mere functionaries. One would

expect to find the court governed by men - as it is - but one might also reasonably expect to find a female rival (as in Emare or Sir Launfal), or a female confidante (as in Sir Degarre or Lay le Freine), or other women who reflect the role of the 'heroine' (as in Sir Gowther). The Erl of Toulous is the only other lay where the woman is as isolated in a male world as Herodis appears to be. I argue that Orfeo is constructed as homosocial: he spends his leisure time with men, harping (1.33-40); he attends his sick wife accompanied by his men (1.99-100); he makes his parting speech to his lords and steward, vowing never to look at another woman (1.201-11); the focus of the return of the couple is directed almost exclusively at Orfeo (1.575-95).

Without a wife Orfeo could be construed as being homosexual, rather than simply homosocial; paradoxically, he thus needs a wife in order to 'approve' the time spent with men. As I have argued, Orfeo is never voluntarily seen to touch his wife or to allow for the possibility of an heir; in my view this is because his antecedent, Orpheus, was depicted as homosexual. Whilst homosocial desire is allowable in the tale, homosexual clearly is not and Orfeo thus has to leave the society of men; the society of women he gives up willingly.

It is a commonplace of medieval romance that the hero spends some time isolated in a wilderness or forest, and this exile typically functions as a type of moral space before the regeneration and re-integration of the hero can

take place. Penelope Doob has made a careful study of these conventions and what they signify; her view of Sir Orfeo, though, is that it is emphatically a Christian poem. She writes: 'I am convinced that the poem can be fully understood only when one grasps the traditions that seem to have influenced its conception: the commentaries, the Christian uses of the Orpheus legend, and especially the convention of the Holy Wild Man'. She goes on to note: 'The Holy Wild Man and the meaning of his life of exile in the wilderness are nowhere in medieval literature more important than in Sir Orfeo,' (41) However, even when critics do not take an unrelentingly Christian stance, Orfeo still occupies the position of the 'hero'. L.J. Owen argues that Orfeo follows this tradition:

Sir Orfeo presents a familiar pattern of heroic adventure in which the hero undergoes an initiatory period of suffering and endurance, often in a wilderness or wasteland, before he is able to undertake significant heroic action. [Orfeo retires to the forest] as a commemorative act in honour of the lost Herodis, in honour of love. No word in the poem suggests that he hoped to find her, or even intended to look for her. (42)

One asks oneself: why not? It is, after all, the done thing, in literature as in life, to make some search for a lost loved one; but Orfeo does not make that search for her and when he does follow the ladies who lead him to her, it is, as Felicity Riddy points out, in search of his own past. (43) The fact that he has to have her in order to have his

past life back is further evidence of the 'validating' of heterosexuality which occurs in the poem.

VI

Orfeo lives in the wilderness for ten years and what the narrative emphasizes are the physical hardships which he has to endure:

Now on hard hethe he liith,
With leves and gresse he him writh. 1.239-44
He that had y-had plente
Of mete and drink, of ich deynte,
Now may he al-day digge and wrote
Er he find his fil of rote. 1.253-56.

His only pleasure is that of harping and whilst he is playing, even the wild animals are tamed (1.270-74). What is displayed here is Orfeo's capacity as an enchanter; he, too, can weave 'spells'. However it is a different type of 'playing' which reminds him of his erstwhile nobility. Orfeo often sees the fairy-king and his entourage riding in the forest (1.281-302); sometimes they are hunting (1.283-86); sometimes portrayed as an army ready for battle (1.289-96); sometimes dancing and making music (1.297-302). It is this 'pursuit of his own past' which leads him to Herodis and, as in Sir Gowther, the turning point of the action is marked by tears:

Yern hi bi-held hir, and sche him eke,
Ac noither to other a word no speke.
For messais that sche on him seighe
That had ben so riche and so heighe
The teres fel out of hir eighe. l.323-27

Tears are a means of communication, too, and what they communicate is emotion, here, explicitly, pity. It should be noted that there is only one occasion in the whole of the text when Herodis speaks and that is the scene when she tells Orfeo of her encounter with the fairy-king. We see Orfeo through her eyes on two occasions: the first is when she looks at him as an enemy when she is in pain; the second, here, when she sees him suffering and weeps for him. It is another paradox that her absence from the scene makes her far more of a presence than her actual presence does; once she is back from the underworld, although we know that she is there, occupying a throne and a place next to Orfeo, she no longer figures in the story. Perhaps the pity is for Orfeo, but it could also be for her own unlived life, as is the case with Gowther's mother.

However, as I noted earlier, Orfeo, too, is an enchanter and just as the animals are lulled in the forest so Herodis, I would suggest, remains in her trance and is led by Orfeo from the underworld. Now this is a contentious point, but the narrative gives no indication in any way that Herodis is awakened. The fairy-king gives Orfeo leave to take his wife because of the bond of honour between men: Herodis is exchanged as a result of the male pledge (l.449-70). The

narrative is explicit that the fairy-king is reluctant to give the beautiful Herodis to the ugly Orfeo:

"Nay", quath the king, "that nought nere,
A sori couple of you it were!
For thou art lene, rowe, and blac,
And sche is lovesun with-uten lac. 1.457-60.

However, even the fairy-king is constructed as accepting that the ties of male society cannot be undone.

In the classical myth Eurydice follows Orpheus, they do not touch. Orfeo only needs to lead Herodis if she cannot see the way for herself. As I have mentioned, she does not speak, or act, again; she is still controlled by male power, but now it is Orfeo's power. It should be remembered, though, that demon-lovers do give up their women once they have made them theirs; once Dracula has got Lucy where he wants her he moves on to Mina. Orfeo simply reminds the king that women should not be allowed to dispel the bonds of (masculine) society.

The return is described as joyous and the ending is the 'happily ever after' of romance and fairy-tale (1.590-95). In terms of Orfeo's return to society certainly it is a happy ending; the steward is loyal and everybody is delighted to have Orfeo back (1.575-88). Homosocial rules are again the order of the day; Orfeo is 'proved' heterosexual by virtue of having a wife, which then gives him latitude for belonging to and enjoying the society of

men, as I have already outlined. Frequently in Middle English romance, the wife is represented as that which has to be escaped. While the husband is 'liberated' by marriage, the wife, by contrast, is imprisoned in the home, castle or tower; this is the point from which the hero journeys and which is also the locus from which boundaries begin. Without this centre boundaries cease really to exist, or become so fluid that the hero does not really know where he is. Thus, when Herodias is gone, Orfeo's central position ceases to hold and he goes to the wilderness. Tuan remarks:

Cultivated fields are the familiar and humanized world. By contrast, the forest surrounding it seems alien, a place of possibly dangerous strangers. (Note that the words "forest" and "foreigner" share the meaning of foranus, "situated on the outside"). The forest is a maze through which wayfarers venture at risk. Wayfarers can literally lose their way, but lostness always carries the sense of moral disorientation and of disorderly conduct. (44)

Not only is the forest dangerous and alien but in it, one becomes one of the dispossessed, the powerless; this is in part because in the 'foreign-ness' of the forest what is lost is the power of speech, or at least of speech that is in any way meaningful:

.... the voice becomes a final source of self-extension; so long as one is speaking, the self extends out beyond the boundaries of the body, occupies a space much larger than the body. (45)

But really, I would say that in order to be speaking in any meaningful way, one needs to be (or have the hope of being) heard. This is Orfeo's strength, that he can endure the foreignness of the forest because he can extend himself out beyond his miserable bodily existence with his music; by virtue of it he can again belong to society, albeit at that point only that of animals.

The oppositions in this poem come from all sorts of sources: the contrast of the classical and the folk-tale; of the two courts; of the 'before' and 'after' relations of Orfeo and Herodis; but nowhere are they so strong, I would argue, as in the opposition set up between Herodis the shrieking fury and Herodis the completely silent woman; between her 'presence' in the narrative whilst she is in the underworld and her 'absence' when she returns. Herodis's life is barren in the metaphorical as well as the literal sense of the word: she herself displays her empty body; the text constructs her life - from her husband's physical avoidance of her to the subjects' lack of interest on her return - as one empty of event or significance. A tale of marital fidelity it might be, though for other reasons than those usually offered; but a tale of married lovers it isn't.

Chapter 5

THE DEMON MOTHER: A READING OF SIR GOWTHER

I

By contrast with the popular Sir Orfeo, Sir Gowther has excited very little critical attention; nor has it been read as anything other than a type of 'secular hagiography', though E.M. Bradstock does have some demurrals to make on this point. (1) The focus has been on Gowther as the named hero of the tale and whilst I would not wish to suggest that this naming is radically misleading, it has in fact meant that other characters have not had their stories explored; it is this imbalance in perception which I intend to address. (2) I would argue that this narrative could be said to be as much (if not more) the story of Gowther's mother than of Gowther himself.

I have already argued that in romances the tendency is for the female body to be effaced, either by the tale itself, or by critical responses to it: I also suggest that the female body is most often represented in fabliaux as a dirty joke. (3) What is extraordinary in Sir Gowther is that the maternal body is unequivocally present, and in a way which cannot be a matter for joking. It is notable, though, that just as critics 'ignore' the physical body in Sir Degarre, it is ignored here in this tale. I can find no critical comment on the incident where the infant Gowther bites off his mother's nipple.

Sir Gowther begins in the confines of society and in the confines of the romance genre with a superlatively beautiful

lady, a noble duke and a happy wedding feast with a tournament (1.37-45). The whole thing has gone sour within the first fifty lines when, after ten childless years, the husband informs his wife that she is clearly barren and that he is wasting his time on her so they must part. M.J.

Donovan comments:

It has long been felt, that Sir Gowther lacks the courtliness of a Breton lay. Although it opens promisingly as the Duke of Austria marries and amid great splendour holds a tournament, it soon loses the reader in the business of Gowther's nursery. (4)

Clearly, Donovan is disappointed that the story is not going to follow the pattern which he has had cut out for it. What seems to me to be particularly revealing is that it is when the story becomes involved in 'women's business' that critics would have the story mutilated to suit their preconceptions. This is certainly the case with readings of Sir Gowther: the mother is only ever viewed as a means of getting Gowther there. I would say, though, that an examination of her story casts a completely different light on the tale.

My thesis is that, as in Sir Degarre, where the child is a means of continuing the princess's story, so in Sir Gowther he is a 'feminized' hero: Gowther is an embodiment of his mother's 'sin', and it is he who undertakes her punishment and reintegration. The problems which the narratives confronts are over the construction of desire as

demonic: this demonizing of desire generates the need to atone by mortification of the flesh; this is first instanced when Gowther bites off his mother's nipple. Julia Kristeva remarks that 'women can atone for their carnal jouissance with their martyrdom'. (5) In fact, mutilation of the breasts is a staple of the tortures inflicted on female martyrs, and what this symbolizes is the unsexing of the female body. (6) Punishment is then projected onto Gowther, whose penitential journey entails prohibitions on normal eating and on speech. What the tale does is to rewrite desire, to re-humanize desire, giving a voice to that which has been constructed as unspeakable, has been, like Gowther himself, silenced.

I shall begin, then, by commenting on Gowther's begetting, and show how this marital infidelity generates the notion of desire as illicit. There is, however, a further problem to be confronted here, and that is that the venture into the world of illicit sexual activity is undertaken because the lady is threatened with exclusion from her place within the court; this threat is what generates the infidelity. The lady goes to the orchard seeking a means of becoming a mother so that she may stay inside the courtly world. It is not simply desire which is constructed as illicit, but **women**, when they do not perform the roles which patriarchy expects of them. An 'outsider' can equally be a woman who goes outside the confines in order to satisfy her sexual needs, or one who is thrown out

because she does not satisfy male dictate. In any case, I would argue, women's seeking of motherhood is another method of effacing female desire: the notion that women are sexually dissatisfied with their husbands is not one that patriarchy often constructs in genres other than the comic.

II

Early on in the narrative the husband informs his wife that they are to part because of her barrenness:

To is lade sone con he seyn,
'Y tro thou be sum bareyn,
Hit is gud that we twyn;
Y do bot wast my tyme on the, 1.52-5

It is at this point that the tale removes itself from the courtly, both literally and metaphorically, for the lady, having prayed to God and the Virgin for the grace of conception, is next found in the orchard. It is important to note that when the lady prays, the narrative is explicit about her need to bear a child: '.... grace to have a chyld, / **On what maner sche ne roghth** (1.62-3, my emphasis). It is directly after this prayer that she is reported as being found in the orchard. As I have argued in the chapter on Sir Orfeo, women and orchards have a long-established sexual connection and this also obtains here. Out in the orchard, then, the lady is besought of love by her husband's double and she there and then grants him her body (1.64-9); this is

Friedman's 'noon day demon' who 'takes the shape of a man to tempt, or to assault a woman'. (7) Now the narrative is not explicit, in fact it is positively cagey, as to whether or not the lady was aware that the man was not her husband; I would say that it implies that she was aware, although Andrea Hopkins suggests otherwise: '.... the duchess thinks that she is with her husband, and therefore commits no (intentional) sin'. Bradstock also notes: 'The author diminishes the Duchess's sinfulness while preserving a reason for Gowther's sinful beginnings. The Duchess is irresponsible rather than deliberately evil'. (8) We know that her husband had declared his intention of wasting no more time on her; we know that she is desperate for a child by any means and we know that she is outside the boundary of the court.

There is, too, the implicit suggestion that the Duke has no regard for her as a woman with a sexual identity and needs of her own; on her return from the orchard and the encounter with the double, she tells him that she has had a message from an angel to the effect that they will beget a child that night and his response is: 'Dame, we schal fonde' (1.87). This could be a pious way of indicating that he lives in hope; but it may also be a comment on his masculine capabilities; perhaps the lady has had to go outside the court because her husband is not only infertile but impotent. The fact that she accepts the double in the orchard without question or bargain may indicate that this

is the situation being portrayed here.

The notion that her husband should acknowledge that she is a creature with a sexual identity of her own is, of course, a modern one, but only, I would suggest, from a masculine point of view. There are numerous examples of female sexual fantasies which bear out female recognition of female desire: notable examples are provided by Christina of Markyate, who struggled long and hard to overcome her desire for a man, and by Margery Kempe, who explicitly reveals her delight, as a young woman, in her husband's body. (9) What is notable, though, is that these are 'real-life' examples; as I have remarked, the literary expression of female desire tends to belong to fabliaux.

The lady is not constructed as having the space within the court to satisfy either her sexual or maternal needs. I should say, though, that the preoccupations of this tale seem to me to be the lady's wish to fit into patriarchal society by bearing an heir; the focus is on the need to be a mother, which is a consequence of her wish to remain inside the patriarchal structure, itself a consequence of her fear of being outside. Her 'desire' to have a child is not a bodily one but an ideological one. However it should be remembered that it is only after the man in the orchard has had intercourse with her that he reveals himself as a fiend and a child-begetter (1.70-3). What seems to me to be implicit here is the woman's need to see a man who is at the same time her husband and an adequate (and fertile) sexual

partner. The fiend does not need to transform himself, for her need transforms him in her eyes; she later reiterates that the man was: 'As lyke my lorde as he myght be' (1.229). I suggest that she clings to this description because she has no wish to see the reality of the situation. (10)

Mary Douglas makes an interesting observation, specifically on tribal practices in Africa, but which seems relevant to what is happening here: 'In each case, a concern about wrong sexual partners came through to the animal classification in the form of concern about uncontrolled, boundary crossing animals'. (11) To the reader puzzling over whether or not the lady knows if the man in the orchard is her husband, jokes about 'So you think you really know your husband?' may occur; but actually, it is not very much of a joke. In societies where monogamy is the ideal, if not the hard and fast rule, fears about getting (or having got) the wrong sexual partner must be common. But what I would stress is that such fears are female fears; a man can put his wife away, get another one, or, more simply, have a 'bit on the side'; this is not the case for women. The boundary around the sexual activity of the married woman can only be crossed at peril. However, as Luce Irigaray has remarked, the patriarchal requirement of female monogamy has in no way interfered with male polygamy. (12) This is a matter which Freud has also commented on, and his suggested solution is precisely the one which the lady takes. (13)

Although I have argued that these fears are female

fears, there is a source of male fear about having got the 'wrong' sexual partner: this fear is created firstly by the possibility of barrenness; the solution to this anxiety is simple, as is seen in Sir Gowther. The second fear is related to the possibility of the wife's unfaithfulness: how can a man know if the children whom his wife bears are actually his? (This is an issue which I have commented on in the section on Lay le Freine). Briefly, then, in Sir Gowther, I argue that the fear over sexual partners is the lady's, as she is the one under threat. The lady has to cross the boundaries of the court in order to find a man to whom she is not just a site of production; the husband's desire is explicitly stated as being the desire to have an heir (1.56-7). As I have remarked, the lady is constructed as seeking motherhood, too, but she agrees to intercourse without condition. Here again, as in Sir Orfeo, female desire is portrayed as being illicit; women have to go outside the confines of society in order to satisfy it; and it is demonic, in that it is satisfied by demons.

Hawthorne's Hester Prynne belongs to this type too, for her sexual life, as opposed to her married life, forces her to live outside the confines of society; both literally, in that she lives on the edge of town, and metaphorically, in the aura created by the scarlet letter. (14)

The accusation of barrenness levelled at the lady has resulted in her acting illicitly, and we know that she is ambivalent about what she has done. Rather than her being

demonized - for she has crossed herself and fled back to her confine - the child is demonized as a product of sexual desire.

Sche blessed hur and fro hym ran;
Into hur chambur fast ho wan,
That was so bygly byld; 1.76-8

This is the safety of a world that both protects and confines her; it also condemns her to live in a prison of man's making but her acceptance. She assents to Christian notions that sex outside marriage is sinful; here, as in Dracula, it is the explicitly Christian talisman which is used to deny desire.

The flight from the sin outside to the safety inside is paralleled later in the narrative when, after the death of her husband, she flees from the court now ruled by her demon child, to a secure tower (1.154-57). The duke's physical incapacities are one side of what appears to be moral inadequacy, for, unable to control this demon child, he gives in to him and then dies of sorrow (1.145-51). This, too, can be seen as sexual inadequacy in that he is as unable to stand up to his son in the manly world of swords and blows, for the narrative states of Gowther: 'Ther was none in that lande / that dynt of hym durst byde' (1.149-50). It is notable that the man who does confront Gowther with his evil nature is shown to be the appropriate sexual partner for the lady, for Gowther marries this old earl to

his mother when the process of regeneration is complete (1.680-84). It is also remarkable that the old earl marries a woman whom he knows to have been unfaithful to her first husband; it is he who first publicly suggests that this might have been the case. What might be inferred from this is that the earl's estimate of the duke was not flattering in manly terms; that he was, perhaps, the kind of man to whom a woman, might, forgivably, be unfaithful. The fact that infidelity is constructed as forgivable would again suggest that this narrative is postulating a female point of view.

From the lady's point of view the story, thus, ends successfully, for, from having a husband who can, at best, be described as characterless (and who does not figure significantly in the story), she ends up with a husband of certain and fearless character, who also becomes duke of that country (1.680-84). She is restored to the state and status which she holds at the beginning of the tale, but with a different - and better - husband. What has happened is that Gowther, her child, the child of her body and her 'sin', works through her alienations and frustrations for her; he is the embodiment of her anxieties and the means whereby her needs and desires are fulfilled. As Diana Childress points out, the position of enduring 'humiliation, deprivation and suffering' which Gowther adopts is characteristic of female protagonists (15); he is a 'feminized' hero.

When his mother confesses to Gowther his true paternal origins they weep together (1.231); it is noteworthy, though, that he first weeps when she lies to him about his paternity:

Ho onswarde hym that tyde:
'My lord', scho seyde, 'that dyed last'.
'Y hope' he seyde, 'thou lyus full fast'.
Tho teyrus he lett don glyde. 1.222-25

He cries for her lies, and the lie she has had to live. Gowther's regeneration is also the beginning of his mother's integration into society, for up until this point she has been in flight from the truth, which has resulted in her incarcerating herself in a secure tower, away from her sin and her son. Towers are normally reserved for maidens waiting to be liberated by handsome princes and, as such, are emblematic of cooped-up sexuality. (16)

As I have already remarked, tears mark the turning point in Gowther's life and in that of his mother and this is also significant; tears are produced, usually involuntarily, for the purpose of washing the eyes or expressing emotion. As I noted in the chapter on Sir Degarre, Julia Kristeva has suggested that tears are a form of communication which is non-verbal; already, speech is proscribed for Gowther, but what this non-speech does is to re-establish the female body as a site which has previously been silenced. There is a recognition of their natures, both animal and social: his mother admits to having had a sexual, as opposed simply to a

married life; and he discovers a cause for his evil and anti-social nature; this is his 'orphaned' condition, following his mother's disownment of her son/sin and his 'father's' absence.

III

Gowther's exclusion from society is a consequence of his illegitimacy and it is manifested through the prohibitions on speech and on normal eating. (17) It is notable that Gowther, begotten outside the confines of society by a demon, on a mother who allows herself to be deceived, explicitly rejects, in his infancy, any kind of feminine nurture. In his first year he kills nine wet-nurses by sucking their lives (1.110). Although he is not actually described as sucking their blood, the implication is that he does so, especially given that medieval physiological theory held that milk was the mother's own blood, transformed for the purpose of nurturing infants. (18) When his own mother tries to give him suck he bites off her nipple (1.125-27).

Gowther's rejection of both the female (as nurturer) and the courtly results in his living like a brute beast: he treats the breast as flesh and blood, and of course it is animals, not humans, who eat flesh raw and drink the blood. (19) This dehumanizing is paralleled by his mother's acceptance of the feminine role in the court, which has her living like a caged animal. Illicit women, then, and their

offspring, are represented as being more akin to animals than they are to humans.

What is of primary importance in distinguishing the animal from the human, is the ability to speak, which obviously natural (as opposed to supernatural) animals cannot do. The way in which people who had little or no speech were treated in our own society until very recently suggests that this has remained a crucial determinant. In Sir Gowther the courtiers of the castle, finding that he remains dumb, call him Hob the Fool and treat him as scarcely human; there are numerous examples in medieval literature of the 'dumb wild man of the woods' being treated in exactly the same way. Penelope Doob has examined the phenomenon of 'the wild man' at length and she records the following attributes:

Essentially human in form, the wild man is set apart from his civilized counterpart by any combination of the following characteristics: discoloured skin, usually black; long body hair, covering all but his hands and feet; a great beard; dress of foliage or skins; some physical deformity, such as bestial facial features; unusually great or small size; the inability to speak or even reason; rough, even churlish behaviour; supernatural power over wild animals; a diet of roots, berries or raw flesh; a solitary habitation - often a cave - in the desert or forest far from men. (20)

It has to be remembered, though, that Gowther isn't really a wild man; certainly he journeys through the woods, but the only ways in which he conforms to Doob's pattern is through

the prohibition on speech and normal eating, both of which he assumes as a penance. Gowther only becomes recognizably a wild man when he is living in the castle; his penance is to be made a social outcast within the confines of the court. I have already suggested that this is the role which his mother is represented as occupying: Gowther externalizes her predicament. The 'feminine' hero is constructed as a voiceless animal.

It seems entirely appropriate that Gowther's mother's extra-marital activity results in a child who does not recognize the boundaries and distinctions which are normally made in society and who does not interpret gestures in ways in which they are usually understood: as I have remarked, the offer of the breast is not interpreted as an offer of food and comfort, but as something alien, to be inappropriately drained or bitten. In fact it is interpreted as an offer of flesh, rather than milk: the 'fleshliness' of the female body is thus punished. Women are continually, for Gowther, objects to be punished or to take revenge on:

Meydyns maryage wolde he spyll
And take wyffus ageyn hor wyll,
And sley hor husbondus too. l.193-95.

This, too, may be seen as an externalization of the mother's guilt over the begetting of her child.

I have previously argued that the silence of women can be empowering: here, in Sir Gowther, silence is both a means

of rejecting adult sexuality (the dumb princes), and an imposition on the woman (the mother). Gowther takes on the position of the silent in order to un-do their speechlessness. The tale then constructs this un-doing as heroic. Mary Douglas makes an interesting observation, again specifically on African tribal practices, but which bears relation to what is happening here:

In these beliefs there is a double play on inarticulateness. First there is a venture into the disordered regions of the mind. Second, there is the venture beyond the confines of society. The man who comes back from these inaccessible regions brings with him a power not available to those who have stayed in the control of themselves and of society. (21)

This is certainly true in the case of the regenerate Gowther.

In attempting to understand the tale it is also necessary to distinguish the different types of recognition which occur in it: there is the recognition of man as a moral and social creature, and there is the recognition of man as a creature, needing creature comforts. These different types of recognition tend to be embodied in different kinds of people: the latter is, here appropriately, the preserve of women (the dumb princess) and animals (the dog who brings him bread). There are in fact eleven 'mothers' in the tale; the nine wet-nurses whom he kills; his own mother; and the princess in her nurturing

role. The mothers, though, are all presented as 'feeders' for the men, with the exception of Gowther's mother who fails to be a nurturing figure. Women are seen to exist to make heroism possible, here by feeding the hero. Recognition of man as moral and social being is performed by men, and, more specifically, by father figures. It is notable that Gowther has five fathers of one kind or another in the tale; his actual father, the fiend; his presumed father, the duke; the old earl who confronts him with his evil nature and who subsequently becomes his step-father; the Pope, his spiritual father; and his father-in-law. When the old Earl confronts Gowther with his evil nature he is also assuming that the mother has had intercourse with a fiend:

We howpe thou come never of Cryston stryn,
But art sum fendys son, we weyn,
That werkus hus this woo;
Thou dose never gud, bot ey tho ylle:
We hope thou be full syb tho deyll' 1.205-09

He is clearly a man not afraid of female sexual desire for, as I noted earlier, he subsequently marries Gowther's mother. This marriage is instigated by Gowther; again, he can be seen to be remedying his mother's condition and providing for her bodily needs. It is only when this monstrous child confronts his mother with the question of his paternity and is told that, in truth, he is half fiend that the other half of him can begin to be recognized; this 'other half' though, is the female inheritance of

frustration and anxiety; these anxieties are then embodied in Gowther who becomes a 'feminized' hero.

IV

From this point on in the narrative Gowther's regeneration is speedy and moves, essentially, through three stages of recognition, the first of those being performed by the Pope, who imposes his penance on him:

Wherser thou travellys be northe or soth,
Thou eyt no meyt bot that thou revus of howndus mothe,
Cum thy body within;
Ne no word speke for evyll ne gud,
Or thou reyde tokyn have fro God
That forgyfyn is thi sin. 1.292-97

This penance focuses the double concern of the narrative, which is with nourishing (and lack of nourishment) and with speech (and lack of speech). Both of these activities are marked as female in the text, where the mothers cannot feed him and the princess cannot speak to him. The women are also isolated, both of them being located in the traditional tower and they, as well as Gowther, are released and re-integrated into society.

Gowther's first stop on the penitential journey is marked by the fact that during his three days there he is brought a white loaf by a greyhound (1.305-09); in Rome all he had been able to get was a snatched bone, but now that his journey of repentance has begun, so has his integration

into shared life. As with Orfeo, shared life begins with animals. When on the fourth day the greyhound does not come, Gowther takes the hint and journeys on; this, too, is significant, insofar as Gowther is now allowing himself to be directed by others, the Pope and the dog, whereas formerly he would never have done so. It should be noted that journeys dictated by animals are a common feature of hagiography, as is the motif of animals providing them with food. (22)

When Gowther arrives at the castle where the remainder of the action takes place, he sits down outside; his immediate assumption is that he will not be allowed in. However he finds that there are no porters or ushers there and that entry is not barred him (1.319-27). It is here that he is first recognized as human; indeed it is at this point that we get the first real physical description of him; previously he has only been described as big, but here he is said to be superlatively handsome (1.337). He has always been portrayed as such a moral monster that he was not seen to be handsome; this would fit with his being demonized because when his mother looked at him she saw not a normal infant but an embodiment of her sin. Now that he is becoming regenerate, a sort of Dorian Gray in reverse, he is allowed some measure of social acceptance; more importantly he is allowed to think of himself as, in some measure, socially acceptable; he can at least come in.

Syr Gowther up and in con gwon;
At the dor uscheare fond he non,
Ne porter at tho yatte,
Bot gwosse prystely thoro tho pres,
Unto the hye bord he chesse,
Therunder he made is seytt.
Tho styward come with yarde in honde;
To geyt hym thethyn fast con he fonde
And throly hym con threyt
To beyt hym bot he wende away; 1.325-34

Whilst the steward wants to beat him and drive him away, the emperor, a noble man, recognizes Gowther as potentially noble himself, suggesting that perhaps Gowther's odd behaviour is a form of penance. This is part of a principle which is strongly at work in this tale, namely, that it takes one to know one. The one who is found really to know Gowther is the emperor's dumb daughter.

Again, motifs are slightly displaced; she is not a princess under an enchantment of having been turned into an animal or fast asleep; but there is the suggestion, again implicit, that her dumbness arises from some kind of enchantment, for her father prays that she might be allowed to speak 'again' (1.391-92). She, too, belongs outside the confines of normal human intercourse, and part of the story deals with her regeneration and integration into society. This dumb princess is the only one in the court to recognize that this creature, who lives like a dog, is the one who, each day, goes out to do battle against the Saracen hordes who are besieging the castle in order to obtain the princess for their sultan. It is notable that although battle is

undertaken against heathens, it is not undertaken for reasons of belief (for cultural or religious reasons), but rather for animal reasons, the man's desire for the women - though Bradstock is not of this opinion, seeing the battles as resolutely Christian. (23) Similarly, it is part of Gowther's regeneration that he is miraculously granted armour on each of the three days he prays for it; its significance is social, rather than religious.

It is important to recognize that the dumb princess is the first woman whom Gowther allows to nurture him. Recognizing the man in the animal, she washes out the mouths of a couple of greyhounds, puts bread in one and meat in the other and sends them off to Gowther (1.442-46). Reciprocally, of course, it is through Gowther that her speechlessness is undone. Typically, in this tale, it happens in a way which is at once oblique, in terms of the motif, and at the same time entirely natural. The princess, when she sees Gowther wounded through the shoulder by a spear, utters her first sound, a moan or cry (1.630) and promptly swoons and falls out of her tower. On the one hand, crying out and fainting at the sight of blood is not exactly an unusual response, and it has to be said that there is nothing like a bump on the head for reordering the senses. What has happened is that the princess has recognized him as a physical animal (she feeds him and cries when he bleeds), who is also a man, just as the Pope has recognized him as a moral and social animal and the emperor as a noble animal.

This incident also shows the princess her fears of having a sexual partner, of losing her virginity. Initially, sex can be a wounding, bleeding experience for a woman: as I remarked in the Introduction, medieval moralists were unequivocal in their construction of women's sexual life as a painful one. In Chretien de Troyes Erec and Enide Enide is represented as enduring all, on their wedding night, 'regardless of pain'. (24) Seeing Gowther wounded, and by a spear is, in this tale, a typically displaced motif; he works through her fears for her, just as he undertakes a penitential journey for his mother's 'sin'.

It is notable that when Gowther has been wounded and the princess is lying in a dead faint, he takes himself off and more or less licks his wounds; there is no one there to tend them for him and the narrative states that he missed the princess (l.640-42). It is this last, mutual recognition between Gowther and the princess, where, as I have remarked, she sees that knights are also creatures who need feeding and bleed, not only unknown moral and social animals who are prepared to wreak social havoc in order to obtain her, that brings her down to earth. Gowther sees that women are not only alien or enemies to be harmed, but people who feed and tend men; that mothers are acceptable and desirable. Thus, the narrative reconstructs motherhood as positive.

Just as the mother has the talisman of the cross with which to 'protect' herself, so Gowther has his talisman, too. What he has is a falchion, which he has made for himself and which no other man can carry (1.136-39); I would argue that this is the symbol of his alienation from society and an emblem of his fears. The alienation comes from being made to feel (or be) illicit and the anxiety is a consequence of this 'outlawing'. However Shirley Marchalonis regards the weapon as emphasizing the courtly nature of the tale: 'Gowther's retention of his sword indicates that his redemption will be accomplished through the chivalric ideal'. (25) The Pope asks him to lay down this falchion at the same time as he gives Gowther his penance, but he refuses, on the grounds that he has few friends (1.29). Although at this point Gowther has been recognized as human by others, what is necessary is that he recognize himself as human. His adoption of this talisman bears out O'Keefe's comment:

Since magic arises to defend the self against the pressures of too much community, too much religion, too much moral consensus, since magic is forever defensive and evasive and so condemned to live with anxiety, magic is therefore always assuming postures of anti-social estrangement. (26)

Karl Miller's analysis of the double makes a very useful commentary on Gowther's behaviour here. Miller writes:

The imagination of the double has been explained as an effort to deal with the existence of evil - an effort which leads to the assignment of destructive urges to another self, which may choose the subject as the spectre of his own disobedience. This interprets the fact that while the double may enable the orphan to attack his enemies, the double may also behave like an enemy, striking from outside - like an oppressor, a possessor, a tempter or devil, a tyrant or parent. Where the double reeks of aggression, revenge and deceit, those are aimed at the orphan: and yet they are the orphan. We are in a world of polymorphous hostility, from which he suffers and in which he is implicated. We are brought to feel that he is engaged in the impossible task of trying to escape from himself, or to separate himself from someone whom he can't help resembling or repeating. (27)

Gowther is his own protector and his own enemy; he carries with him his own burden, which he has made and which he alone can put down. He is the hero who has to overcome himself: the mother has to overcome her guilt.

The princess, too, has her journey into the 'other' regions; by contrast with Gowther's imposed penitential journey of moral and social regeneration, hers is a personal and private state of unconsciousness. However, she comes back from this state with a message that Gowther is now forgiven and can rejoin society; significantly, the narrative does not suggest that this is miraculous, it

merely states that this happens by the grace of God (1.651-60). The types of journey and recognition which each undergoes represent what the other needs to learn in order to achieve integrity. He occupies the position of an animal who needs to become human; she occupies the position of the confined and silent woman; they help heal each other.

Now that Gowther is regenerate he, of course, marries the princess and his life is exemplary. After his death miracles are worked at his tomb because, the narrative states, he was faithful to and suffered for God. For the princess, recognition of her feelings of tenderness for the animal, man, is an acceptance of sexual maturity, that she cannot stay cooped-up, speechless in her tower for ever. For Gowther, recognition of who he has been necessitates a period of appearing to be what he has by nature been, before the outer and inner man can achieve conformity. Caroline Bynum states:

And grace brings about not only the conformity of the individual to God, but also the conformity of outer and inner man. That is what a saint is; one in whom extraordinary life (without) reflects extraordinary virtue and grace (within). (28)

Having been outside the control of himself and of society in one direction, the fiendish, he is then, because he was powerful enough to overcome his fiendishness, able to be outside the control of himself and of natural laws in the

other direction; which is what happens in his miracle working, he is being controlled by God. As J.A. Burrow has noted: 'Transcendence, in this mortal life, is a property of the few, mainly, in medieval writings, of saints and heroes'. (30)

On one level, what Sir Gowther does is to combine different types of motif and recognition, almost different genres, the romance and the folk-tale, to show that overcoming the self is heroic and that heroism of that kind can be saintly. But saints are only defined as such after their deaths; what is being transcended here in this mortal life is fear or anxiety. And these fears and anxieties are created by patriarchal ideology's attempt to circumscribe female sexuality. These fears are represented as disordered regions of the mind which result in some kinds of inarticulateness.

Inarticulateness is perhaps the most fitting way of defining alienation; the individual feels so foreign that there is no mode of communication through speech, only gesture (the threat of the falchion, the offer of food) will suffice: and gesture, body language, is a means of communicating which women do have available to them. As Mary Douglas has noted, the one who is able to return from inaccessible regions brings with them power and that power is the strength to be the kind of animal the individual wants to be, morally, physically, socially and culturally. Geza Roheim notes: 'That we find the magical attitude or

behaviour in every neurosis. Indeed, it is an important part of every neurosis - and, even if we scratch only the surface, of every personality'; and, further: 'Magic in general is the counterphobic attitude, the transition from passivity to action'. (30)

It is notable that each of these characters is, in some way, active: Diana Childress has pointed out that Gowther is not a typical energetic, aggressive masculine figure. I would point out that the competing discourses here are complex. There is the conflict between romance (or saint's life) and folk-tale, where the tale's dynamic is not predicated on outside agency but on individual agency. The male folk or fairy tale hero can spend his time sitting around embodied as a frog, waiting for the princess to come and kiss the enchantment away. Similarly, princesses of fairy-tale wait for the kiss to wake them up. However, here, Gowther must journey and suffer; and the princess has to descend, literally and painfully, to earth. Gowther's mother is shown terrified and imprisoned, weeping and admitting that she was not satisfied by her husband, and was afraid of mothering. Both of these women are provided with a sexual partner who is desirable in terms of status and capable of recognizing their needs and fears. In the end they all live 'happily ever after', but not because there is a magic wand waved by a beneficent fairy, or a miracle worked by God. O'Keefe remarks:

Magic fights to defend the individual ego against the social group from which it is born but which is capable of disintegrating it by the least pressure. The stolen fire, as the Prometheus legend tells us, is used to defend man, individual man - against the gods, the logos, the nomos, the superego, the society - to defend man's spontaniety against his socialization. (31)

The mother's self-punishment (the child who bites her, her own confinement of herself in the tower), represents an acceptance of patriarchal ideology: but the demonization of the child does confront one of the problems which face women who are required to become mothers. In the end, the tale both constructs the classic patriarchal family, while at the same time giving space for the woman's problematic role within that family.

Chapter 6

THE RIVALS: A CONSIDERATION OF SIR LAUNFAL

I

'The oral and written traditions are indeed concurrent; they run beside each other, echoing back and forth, but they do not sing harmonious polyphony'. (1) Andrew Taylor's illuminating comment on the relationship of the minstrel and literary traditions in Middle English romances strikes me as a perfect description of Sir Launfal. Critics have generally agreed that Chestre's tale is a minstrel version of Marie de France's Lanval and the Middle English Sir Landevale. (2) There are, though, further complications to be taken into consideration, as W.C. Stokoe suggests that Marie de France was herself reworking a folk-tale, and A.J. Bliss concludes that Lanval, and its analogues, is of genuinely Celtic origin. (3) The tale, then, moves from the folk-tale through the courtly, and then back to minstrel tradition. In the context of my thesis, understanding Chestre's tale is further complicated by the fact that it is the only one of the Middle English Breton lays which is Arthurian, although without the courtliness which one expects in later Arthurian narrative. This accretion of tales results in a poem which I can find no models for interpreting as a coherent whole. Again, Taylor's comments on the workings of minstrel tales are revealing. He writes:

....what he [Chretien] is accusing them [conteurs] of is picking the story apart, breaking it into pieces. And this is exactly what performers must have been obliged to do as they anticipated and

played upon their audience's response, selecting fragments which would meet the needs of the moment. Taken together, the two terms **coronpre** and **depecier** summarize the essence of **jonglerie**, both its servile dependance upon the paying audience and the complex relationship of any single performance to some putative whole. These two terms, although drawn from the writings of a twelfth-century French poet, provide a possible model for the puzzling interaction between the Middle English romances and the concurrent oral tradition. (4)

In attempting to understand the tale, then, I shall be breaking it into pieces, and hope to show what Chestre does - and what effects this achieves - with his material. I shall begin by highlighting the differences between Lanval and Landevale and Chestre's Launfal, and in doing so shall show the different versions of the 'feminine' which the poem encodes.

It is only in Launfal that the eponymous hero leaves the court because he has been excluded from the gift-giving by Guinevere (l.67-72). In neither of the other versions does Guinevere appear until after Launfal's return from exile. In Lanval he is represented as leaving the court because Arthur does not give him gifts (p.73); in Landevale he leaves the court because he has given away all his wealth (l.21-32). Thus the first important difference is that Guinevere is made responsible for Launfal's exclusion: Arthur gives him gifts - and company - when he says he must go (l.80-4). The meeting with the fairy mistress is comparable in each of these tales: Chestre adds the incident of the gift from the mayor's daughter which enables Launfal to ride off and meet

Triamour, but otherwise the narratives proceed similarly. Chestre also adds the tournaments, in Karlyoun and in Lombardy (l.433-92, 505-612), which Bliss accounts for by suggesting the appropriateness of such scenes to the tail-rhyme convention. (5) These battles serve to lengthen the poem - and display Launfal as a 'conquering hero' - a pose which he does not assume in either of the other versions. In fact, he is not only a conquering hero, but an exceedingly bloodthirsty one, who kills all of the other lords (l.610).

Launfal's return to court and Guinevere's proposition to him remain much the same in each tale (Lanval, p.76; Landevale, l.211-18; Launfal, l.675-810). In Lanval he is explicitly accused of homosexuality, an accusation which remains implicit in the other two. It should be noted that it is only in Marie de France's tale that Guinevere is not represented as a well-known lecher, as she is in the other two; in all versions she is judged to be less beautiful than Triamour. However, it is only in Launfal that she curses herself and receives her punishment at Triamour's hands. All of the narratives end with Launfal riding off with Triamour.

What happens, then, in Chestre's version, is that there is a rewriting of Guinevere, which goes beyond the unflattering portrait, and which represents her as being not only discredited as a beauty, but punished, too. This begs questions about precisely what it is that she is being punished for: in part, it is clearly for her lechery; blinding is a common substitute for castration, as Freud has

observed. (6) What also happens in this tale is that Launfal's manliness is emphasized through his battles. It is my thesis that underlying this shift in treatment is a deeply antifeminist bias: the beautiful woman who gives to and pleases men is shown victorious over the voracious, threatening woman who excludes men. There is something else, though, to be said about this, and that is that the tale constructs the rivalry as being between the women; yet the initial rivalry is clearly between Guinevere and Launfal for a place at Arthur's court. The explicit accusation of homosexuality is omitted, but the woman who makes accusations of lack of manliness is punished in Chestre's tale. I have already mentioned that Guinevere is punished for her lechery, and this lechery is constructed as threatening male relations. What Chestre is at pains to emphasize is the masculinity of the tale: thus, at the end, Launfal has to ride off with Triamour, otherwise he would be left at Arthur's side without Guinevere as a guarantor of his heterosexuality.

II

I propose now to give a selection of critical comments on Sir Launfal, which show how it has been - as is the case with most of the lays - both gendered and devalued. Bliss's very thorough introduction to his edition concludes:

To the reader who comes to it straight from Lanval, with its carefully contrived atmosphere of faery, its psychological subtlety, and its sophisticated charm, Launfal may seem crude and even repulsive. Yet the reader who is prepared to judge Launfal on its merits will find that in a sense it is easier to appreciate than Lanval. In Lanval the story is told in terms of a set of arbitrary conventions which have long been obsolete and are remote from modern feelings; but in Launfal the motive force lies in the urges which, however much they may be suppressed, are most fundamental in human nature. It is a tribute to Chestre's success in his attempt that the modern reader who is not ashamed to surrender his sophistication for a little can still identify himself with Launfal and vicariously enjoy the charms of inexhaustible wealth, invulnerability in battle, and the love of the most beautiful lady in the world. (7)

Bliss's more than implicit suggestion that this is a slightly grown-up-version of a 'Boy's Own' tale which 'we' can settle down to for the evening with a mug of cocoa (or a bottle of claret) and forget that during the day 'we' are highly sophisticated readers who wouldn't give this (public) shelf room if it hadn't been written in Middle English is not an untypical trope in scholarly criticism on the Middle English lays. The author's 'im-properness' forces 'the modern reader' to have to forget 'his' sophistication, which from the comments made seems to come as something of a relief: Bliss makes Sir Launfal sound like a story to masturbate to, with the fantasy of the almost-naked beauty ready to give 'him' money, power and sex. What Bliss and other critics do is, in effect, to 'apologize' for its incivilities (whilst at the same time enjoying them) and, more importantly, to appropriate it as a strictly

heterosexual tale designed to please men; Bliss's 'human nature' turns out to be male, and educated male at that. Whilst I would agree that, in the end, the tale is constructed as heterosexual and a vehicle for male fantasy, I would argue that its construction as such is not unproblematic.

Peter Lucas made what I can only call a bizarre statement when he wrote: 'Launfal was written for a less sophisticated audience where the theme of the relationship between a man and a woman would probably have been more popular'. (8) Lucas makes no suggestion as to what a more sophisticated audience would prefer: perhaps he is assuming that sophisticates prefer epic and tragedy, which tend to belong to elite (male?) readerships? Certainly Northrop Frye classifies epic and tragedy as 'high mimetic' (9): what is also notable is that such fiction is heroic; again, critical comment seeks to denigrate the lays by gendering them and by relegating them to a 'lower' class. S.T. Knight also observed:

We might perhaps reflect that the oral background of Sir Launfal suggests that Chestre is a minstrel rather than a courtly poet; this would explain the crudity of some of the poetry and also the bluntness of some of the incidents. (10)

We might think that; on the other hand, we might think that if all critics can do is to patronize author, tale and audience alike, they might find something that better suits

their sophisticated tastes. B.K. Martin, though, does attempt to offer critical understanding of the poem, by trying to read it on its own terms as a folktale; more importantly, Martin does recognize that meaning is not monolithic and that 'we' aren't all offended or excited by the same things. Martin writes:

In particular, reference to the conventions of the folktale as a literary genre may lead us towards the recognition of the fact that there were more ways than two of treating a tale of wonder like Sir Launfal. (11)

As I have noted, there are further problems to be confronted with the reception of this tale, and these problems relate to the fact that this is an Arthurian narrative. Critics are notably disturbed by the fact that the tale, and particularly its known characters, Arthur and Guinevere, are not as 'civilized' as later Arthurian narrative portrays them as being. Typically, critics have argued that this is a minstrel version, where one expects unpleasantness, because, after all, such tales are produced neither by nor for 'pleasant' (that is, courtly) people. Marie de France is exculpated, because, it is argued, her material is originally folk-tale, but her treatment of it is courtly. (12) What is even more interesting than this general trope is the fact that the desire to protect Arthur's 'good name' is more of an issue than the protection

of Guinevere's reputation. Lesley Johnson and Elizabeth Williams remark:

This unflattering depiction of Guinevere is unusual but not entirely unprecedented, since her unfaithfulness is a very old feature of the Arthurian legend: Chestre here treats with particular ruthlessness an aspect of Guinevere which is usually cloaked in romantic sympathy. Her punitive blinding, however, which has no place in the accepted Arthurian narrative, perhaps points to a folk-origin for the story, based on the "Potiphar's Wife" motif in which the queen was not Guinevere at all. (13)

Whilst it is allowable (just), to accept that the adulterous Guinevere has her antecedents in a promiscuous woman, it appears that critics are less willing to believe such ill of Arthur. Bliss has noted: 'The most striking departure of Sir Launfal from tradition is the lack of dignity with which Arthur is represented. The unflattering portrait of Guinevere, on the other hand, is not an innovation but a return to the earlier periods of Arthurian romance'. (14) A page later, Bliss mentions, in a footnote, that an earlier tradition recorded that Arthur had had three wives: (15) in fact, according to that tradition, Arthur had three wives and three mistresses; nor was he the courtly hero whom one expects him to be. (16)

Having said that, one expects people to be protective of Arthur, because of his mythical status as 'a sleeping hero': (17) such protectionism, though, lends itself to an attempt to categorize this tale as a folk-tale which has misnamed

its characters. Whilst I would not wish to suggest that there are no folk-tale motifs here, neither would I argue that the inclusion of them is an offence against the courtly, especially the courtly position occupied by Arthur. As Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones observe: 'Behind the royal features in Geoffrey and Malory may be discerned the ruder lineaments of the folk-hero'. (18) Whether or not Arthur is more or less barbarous, or Guinevere more or less promiscuous, than later Arthurian narrative generally allows is not my underlying concern in attempting to analyze this tale. What I am concerned with is to understand the construction of gender relations presented here.

Traditional readings have focused on the tale as wish-fulfilment; this is of value only insofar as it is of use to male readers, and consequently ignores whatever aspects of the tale do not conform to the dominant ideology. In Chapter 2 I discussed Sir Degarre's preoccupation with 'growing up straight', with the precariousness of gendered identity. This is also an issue here. The tale both begins and ends with a society constructed as 'homosocial' (see Chapter 4 for an analysis of 'homosociality'; I shall also be commenting further on this during the course of this chapter); consequently women are situated within the tale as disruptive of this order. Women in Sir Launfal are divisive. By introducing heterosexual sexuality into the tale, they instigate the separation of Launfal from his fellows, thus occasioning him to adopt a 'feminine' position away from the

court. The tale circumvents the dangers of the 'feminizing' of men by presenting women as competitors with each other: the consequences of this are that while Triamour is constructed as a benevolent fairy-mistress - a vehicle for male fantasy - Guinevere is punished as a type of witch. The tale, therefore, I shall be arguing, is a deeply anti-feminist text.

III

I shall begin by discussing the tale's homosocial order. Freud comments: '.... directly sexual impulses are unfavourable to the formation of groups. In the great artificial groups, the Church and the army, there is no room for woman as a sexual object. The love relation between men and women remains outside these organizations'. (19) It has to be said that, typically, the courtly world is constructed as being one where men and women can meet each other, and where courtship does take place, unlike the male-male relationships which exist in epic loci, the camp and the field of battle. Yet here, in Sir Launfal, the court appears to be a homosocial idyll:

Doughty Artoure som while
Sojournede in Kardevyle,
With joy and greet solas,
And knightes that were profitable
With Artour of the Round Table-
Nevere noon bettere ther nas! 1.7-12

In Lanval, although the narrative states that Arthur gives wives and land to everyone except Lanval, the occasion for the court to be gathered at Carlisle is because Arthur is at war against the Scots and Picts (p.73). In Landevale, whilst it is not explicitly stated that they are at war, again the company is described as being composed of men (1.5-13). The emphasis in the early part of these tales is on the court as a male world: after Launfal's return (in all versions), the court is depicted as male and female, but not before Launfal's exclusion. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the court, at this point, is closer to the male (epic) loci - and thus to Freud's quotation - than it is to the romantic court. It is to this male idyll that Launfal belongs:

With Artoure ther was a bachelere,
And hadde y-be wel many a yere,
Launfal for sothe he hight.
He gaf giftis largeliche,
Gold and silvere and clothes riche,
To squier and to knight.
For his largesse and his bounte

The kinges stuard made was he
Ten yere I you plight. 1.25-33

It is Arthur's marriage to Guinevere (which occurs only in Chestre's version), which introduces women to this world.

The tale is structured around the exclusion of Launfal from this idyll through female sexual agency. Guinevere arrives at the court and disrupts the old order; not only

does she bring sex into it, but she arrogates Launfal's place, and she does this by dispensing gifts. The giving and receiving of gifts in this tale (a motif which also obtains in Lanval and Sir Landevale) is a crucial signifier of sexual and social belonging. Marcel Mauss comments:

Total prestation not only carries with it the obligation to repay gifts received, but it implies two others equally important: the obligation to give presents and the obligation to receive them. To refuse to give, or to fail to invite, is - like refusing to accept - the equivalent of a declaration of war; it is a refusal of friendship and intercourse.
(20)

As we have seen, Launfal has an important place in this world, and this is indicated through his gift-giving capacity. We are told that Guinevere singles out Launfal from the company of knights, and how she does so seems to me to be particularly noteworthy:

The Quene yaf giftes for the nones,
Gold and selvere and precious stonis
Here curtasie to kithe.
Everich knight she yaf broche other ring,
But Sir Launfal she yaf no thing-
That grevede him many a sithe. l.67-72

Guinevere singles out Launfal by neglecting him. What the giving of a gift does, as Mauss has shown, is to emphasize social cohesiveness and the failure to give a gift is, certainly in folk-tales, a punishable offence: the thirteenth fairy who doesn't receive an invitation to

Sleeping Beauty's christening turns her (lack of) present into a curse.

It is significant that Launfal fails to receive a gift at the wedding feast, because the custom of gift-giving at weddings is a mark of two things: firstly it marks sexual success (the finding of a sexual partner), and secondly it approves social (which here means patriarchal) systems and hierarchy: new kinship patterns are instituted and old relations re-defined. Mauss writes:

For it is groups, and not individuals, which carry on exchange, make contracts, and are bound by obligations; the persons represented in the contracts are moral persons - clans, tribes and families; the groups, or the chiefs, as intermediaries for the groups, confront and oppose each other. (21)

My argument is that the opposing factions in this tale are the heterosexual world, represented by Guinevere, and the homosocial, represented by Launfal.

Clearly, if there isn't a place laid for him at this new-ordered table, then Launfal is out of place, something which he recognizes and effects, telling Arthur that he must return home for his father's burial (1.73-8). Guinevere displaces Launfal within the court, and it is notable that Arthur consequently more or less pays him to go away (1.81-4). Launfal is not invited to return to the court until reports are heard of his success in battle and his generosity, when he is again given the job of steward:

Sir Launfal shud be stward of halle
For to agie his gestes alle,
For couthe of largesse. 1.622-24

What happens in the meantime, though, is crucial in re-establishing Launfal as one who is again worthy to occupy this position.

IV

When Launfal leaves the court on the pretext of attending his father's funeral, he tells the Mayor where he seeks lodgings that he is estranged from Arthur:

But, Sir Meyr, without lesing,
I am departid from the King,
And that rewithe me sore.

Nether thare no man, benethe ne above,
For the King Artours love
Onoure me never more. 1.100-05

Launfal has apparently left because he did not receive a gift from a woman, so why does he now say that he is estranged from her husband and make no mention of his exclusion by Guinevere? What is at issue, I would suggest, is rivalry between Guinevere and Launfal for Arthur. Guinevere's hostility, which means that Launfal has to leave the court, is not represented by him as loss of her, but loss of Arthur: her exclusion of him is thus an exclusion of her rival. Eve Sedgwick has noted that homosocial orders are

characterized by an explicit hostility towards open homosexuality: I have noted this tendency in the chapter on Sir Orfeo. What the tale does, therefore, is to introduce Triamour, who eliminates Guinevere in a 'straight' sexual competition. (22)

Rene Girard has written of the commonness in literature of 'triangular desire' (23), and I would argue that that is what is happening here. The trope of the 'eternal triangle' commonly operates between two people of the same sex vying for the attention of a member of the other: this supposes, on Girard's model, an erotic attraction between the two rivals. In this case, then, it could be suggested that it is Launfal and Guinevere who desire each other. Eve Sedgwick comments on Girard thus:

What is most interesting for our purposes in his study is its insistence that, in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of "rivalry" and "love", differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent. Girard finds many examples in which the choice of the beloved is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival. Girard seems to see the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle as being even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than any thing in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved. (24)

Girard's model requires modification here, as do all models when applied to this tale. What is at issue, then, is not an

erotic relationship between Launfal and Guinevere, but an intense emotional rivalry which has Arthur as its object, and which is indeed portrayed in the tale as being a stronger relationship than that of either Launfal or Guinevere to Arthur himself. Thus the relation - and the rivalry - between Guinevere and Launfal has as its focus not Triamour but Arthur.

Roger Loomis has commented: '.... It becomes obvious that the basic element in the story of Launfal is simply the jealous rivalry of Guinevere and Morgain so prominent in the Lancelot romances'. (25) In this tale it is Guinevere who is far more like Morgain than the fay Triamour is. Geraldine Heng has noted that the figures of Morgan and Guinevere may have been conflated: (26) it seems to me likely that this is the case here. Writing on Morgan, Margaret Jennings remarked:

Morgain's beauty lingers in the romances, though it is usually a guileful enticement to lust Her beauty degenerated in proportion to the demise of her goodness until in Sir Gawain and The Green Knight she is described as immensely ugly. Probably the most promiscuous lady - mortal or immortal - in all Arthurian romance. (27)

Although in Sir Launfal Guinevere is not immensely ugly, she isn't as beautiful as Triamour and she certainly fits the other criteria which Jennings has delineated.

By rewriting Guinevere as a type of Morgan, she becomes further vilified, and the effect which this vilification

achieves is to privilege the relationship between Arthur and Launfal. Rivalry, then, which is constructed in the tale as between women, is in fact, as I have suggested, a cover for a deeper rivalry - that between homosocial and heterosexual desire.

IV

I wish now to continue this argument by focusing on women in the tale, as both disruptive and enabling agents. It is women who initiate and authorize male sexual experience. Whilst Launfal is explicitly shunned by men because of his lack of status and inability to join in any kind of social life (l.187-89), women both patronize him and allow him to return to a socially cohesive court. Launfal is even unable to attend church because of his poverty:

Today to church I wolde have gon,
But me fautede hosin and shon,

Clenly brech and sherte.
And fore defaute of clothinge,
Ne might I in the peple thringe.
No wonder though me smerte! l.199-204

It is at this point that he receives his first gift from a woman, the Mayor's daughter, who gives him the necessary trappings for his horse so that he can leave the society of men altogether (l.205-19). What Launfal does is to ride more or less straight into a society of women. On this journey

Launfal occupies a position which is explicitly 'feminine'. Writing on Marie de France's Lanval, Howard Bloch comments:

The lady has all that Lanval lacks. Where he is an exile at court, she leaves her own country to find him. Where he is neglected by Arthur, she prefers him to all knights. Where Lanval is impoverished, she is so rich. As the antithesis of Lanval's situation, and indeed, in what could be read almost as a parody of the damsel in distress rescued by the valiant knight, the fairy lady promises eternal fidelity (in contrast to Arthur's neglect) and - more importantly - as much wealth as his heart desires. (28)

The situation remains the same in Sir Launfal, except that it is Guinevere who has neglected him rather than Arthur. As I have noted, this shift in the sex of the neglector thus locates responsibility for disruption with women. The 'damsel in distress' whom Launfal now 'becomes' is further emphasized by the fact that he falls asleep underneath a tree and then meets the fairy women (l.220-28). I have already commented in the chapter on Sir Orfeo and Sir Gowther, that the practice of falling asleep underneath trees at noontide is explicitly to invite a 'demon lover'. So Launfal, from this position, is taken to meet his fairy mistress (l.254-79), who immediately, in the manner of fairy lovers, beseeches him of love:

She seide, "Launfal, my lemman swete,
Al my joye for the I lete,
Sweting paramour.
Ther nis no man in Cristente

That I love so moche as the,
King neither emperoure!" 1.301-06

Like the demon lover in Sir Gowther, she asks him for love and he grants it, before it is revealed that along with that love (which is explicitly, in Sir Gowther, a one-off sexual encounter), goes a granting of other wishes, here for wealth (1.315-24). Triamour's significance, then, is twofold; she both establishes Launfal's reputation as a 'man' by becoming his lover (the story makes it clear that in order to be such, one has to have a mistress 1.689-90) and enables him to dispense patronage; but at the same time the tale undercuts ideas of the masculine by the fact that Launfal occupies a position typically marked as 'feminine'. The tale emphasizes Triamour's beauty and her sexual availability and desirability; she is clearly presented as a vehicle for male fantasy:

Therinne lay that lady gent
That aftere Sir launfal hadde y-sent
That lefsom lemede bright.

For hete her clothes down she dede
Almost to her gerdilstede;
Than lay she uncovert.
She was as whit as lillie in May
Or snow that sneweth in winteris day-
He seigh nevere non so pert. 1.286-94

She is ready and waiting for him, in the manner of fairy or demon lovers 'as if by magic'. And just as demon lovers sexualize women, so she sexualizes Launfal.

Once Launfal has been sexualized by Triamour he is also able to take his place in social, homosocial and courtly life again. First he re-establishes himself as a force in society by dispensing patronage:

Launfal helde rich festes.
Fifty feede povere gestes,
that in mischef were.
Fifty boughte stronge stedes;
Fifty yaf riche wedes
To knightes and squiere.
Fifty rewarded religions;

Fifty deliverede povere prisouns
And made hem quit and shere;
Fifty clodede gestours.
To many men he dede honours
In countreys far and nere. 1.421-32

He then enters tournaments and proves his manliness.

Catherine Lafarge's comments on Malory are relevant here:

'For Malory, as for Caxton, to be unhorsed is to be unknighthed; to be unknighthed is to be unmanned'. (29)

Launfal has already been thrown from his horse when it stumbled in the mud, now, by contrast, he is manly and a victor; Triamour has given him everything a knight could need, wealth, a horse and the gift of invulnerability (1.325-33). Sir Launfal glorifies 'the masculine' and male notions of honour and sportsmanship, but at the same time it undercuts them by making the enabling power female. This forms part of the problematics of the heterosexual fantasy provided by the text.

As I have mentioned, Launfal is only allowed to return

to the court once his generosity and potency have become public knowledge:

The tiding com to Artoure the King
Anon without lesing
Of Sir Launfal's noblesse.
Anon he let to him sende
That Launfal shuld to him wende
At Seint Jonnis Masse. 1.613-18

Here, gift-giving is characterized as aristocratic, rather than an act which marks social coherence, and it is noteworthy that Launfal returns to a court which is depicted as being rather different from the masculine world which he had left:

Ther he fond merthe and moch honour,
Ladies that wer well bright in boure,
Of knightes greet companie. 1.628-30

This society is composed of men and women, which appears not to have been the case with the court which Launfal had left. This is the romantic locus rather than the epic: the court is now established as a place where heterosexual love belongs. The embodiment of the heterosexual lover, though, is Guinevere, who, as I have already mentioned, is vilified in the text:

But Sir Launfal likede her nought,
Ne other knightes taht were hende;
For the lady bar los of swich word

That she hadde lemannis under her lord
So fele there nas noon ende. 1.44-8

The extraordinary thing is that we are told this even before Arthur and Guinevere are married (1.49-50). Guinevere, then, is clearly not being presented as a young and inexperienced maiden, but rather as an older, sexually mature and experienced woman; she is not a lovely girl who has only one lover, but a grown woman who has had many. She is a sexual devourer, and is punished for being so.

I have already suggested that rather than Triamour being a type of Morgain, Guinevere assumes that role here; this is further stressed by the fact that Triamour, unlike the promiscuous Guinevere, promises fidelity to Launfal, explicitly in Marie de France, implicitly in Sir Launfal (1.304-05). Guinevere is made into a type of witch - thus Launfal is further privileged in his rejection of her. (In Landevale he cites his oath to the king as the first reason why he will not accept her advances, 1.219-22). What this rewriting of Guinevere also does is to allow space for the further operation of male fantasy: the witch is commonly held to be a figure which embodies the sexual rivalry of women. (30) Men's stake in this rivalry (the desire to be loved by young and beautiful women, which Bliss's comments clearly display), will mean that the young woman has to displace the older one. This is precisely what happens in Sir Launfal. Here, sex is brought out into the open, both

literally and metaphorically, when Guinevere propositions
Launfal:

The Quene gan Launfal to counsel take

And seide in this manere:
"Certainliche, Sire Knight,
I have the lovid with all my might
More than this seven yere.

But that thou lovie me,
Certes I die for love of the,
Launfal my lemman dere". 1.674-81

This is certainly not the emotion which he had aroused in her before and it has to be said that, in effect, nothing has changed except that he has become the lover of a young and beautiful woman. Of course, neither she nor anyone else is to know this; Triamour explicitly forbade that he should boast of her as one of the conditions of accepting her love (1.361-66); in fact, it is Guinevere who forces him to break this vow through her accusations: 'Thou lovist no woman ne no woman the' (1.689). (In Marie de France this accusation is explicitly one of homosexuality. p.76) Certainly here Launfal takes it as a slur on his virility and it is because of this imputation that he boasts of his mistress: in fact Guinevere invites him to reveal his secret life and love by offering him another secret love. Her voracity is seen to be her own undoing. The competition is between what each of these women can give him; Guinevere has the power to have him in/excluded from the court; Triamour enables him to act

autonomously. When, after his boast, all that she has provided him with disappears, his autonomy is again removed and he becomes reliant on the knights of the court who act as surety for him when Guinevere charges him with treachery (1.709-20). The homosocial world is re-established, once it has been legitimated as homosocial and not homosexual. However the real accusation is that Launfal has challenged Guinevere's beauty; far more weight is given to the 'beauty contest' aspect than to the charge of attempted seduction:

Than seide King Artoure,
"File atainte traitoure,
Why madest thou swich yelping?

That thy lemanes lothlokest maide
Was fairer than my wif thou seide.
That was a foul lesinge!
And thou besoftest here before than
That she shold be thy leman-
That was misproud likinge! 1.760-68

It is not for the lie which Guinevere curses herself, but for the possibility of no longer being the fairest: 'Yif he bringeth a fairer thing, / Put out my eyn gray!' (1.809-10).

Effectively, what happens here, is that the older (more powerful, and therefore also), less desirable woman is eliminated from the court. Triamour is 'displayed' (1.979-81) and she is judged the fairest and accordingly praised, whilst Guinevere is found lacking. Arthur himself says to Triamour: 'Ech man may y-se that is sothe:/ Brightere that ye be' (1.1004-005). Triamour promptly blows into

Guinevere's eyes and blinds her, thus fulfilling the curse which she had placed on herself. B.K. Martin has suggested that this is part of a superstition about the powers of breath, but it seems to me that there is more to it than that in this case. (31) Blinding is not only a punishment for having seen what one shouldn't, as it is with Tiresias ; it can also be a punishment for sexual transgression as it is with Oedipus and Samson. I have already noted that Freud has commented that blinding is a substitute for castration. There are folk and fairy stories which deal with the battle between older and younger women. From a masculine point of view (or a feminine point of view which accepts male values), this competition between the pleasing beauty and the demanding woman is played out in the notion of looks and looking. It is the men who judge the beauty contest and it is their valuation which Guinevere accepts. She is no longer the fairest and she therefore 'invites' her 'successor' to displace her in the eyes of the court.

However, the reason why an older woman has to abandon her claims to sexual satisfaction is because male fantasy is focused on the younger woman, who is perceived to be more beautiful: old women are typically presented as ugly, as types of the witch (whereas old men are wise), who ought to step outside the area of sexual competition. Sir Launfal is a deeply antifeminist tale. Although the women do act as sexualizing agents they only do so in order to empower men; the tale leaves us with a blind and completely discredited

Guinevere and of course Triamour disappears back to the fairy world, along with Launfal, who cannot be allowed to remain in Arthur's court (1.1000-1026). What male fantasy would have him remain alone in an earthly court when at his disposal is endless intercourse with a beautiful woman who promises him fidelity and whatever else his heart desires? What seems to me to be being postulated here is an incredibly bleak view of gender/sexual relations, for as soon as women/sex(uality) enter the court there is a dislocation (someone who hasn't 'achieved' heterosexuality has to go). What it does is to bear out Gayle Rubin's observation: 'the oppression of homosexuals [and the possibility of homosexuality] is a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women'. (32)

NOTES

Chapter 1 - Notes

1 Howard Bloch's interesting analysis of the assumptions which underlie much criticism of medieval texts is particularly apposite here. He observes: 'If the Middle Ages are conceived as the lost paradise of a simpler era, its literature comes to constitute the trace memories of childhood, the naive and spontaneous creation of a happier time. Like a child it is incapable of reflection, of intentionality, and thus of the deviousness of subsequent epochs: The medieval text is preliterate - a poetry without mystery, allegory or style, in short, without literary elaboration or manner'. Howard Bloch, 'New Philology and Old French', Speculum, 65 (1990), pp.38-58, 43.

2 Texts used are the following: 'Sir Degarre', in Medieval English Romances, Part Two, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt and N. Jacobs (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980). 'Emare' and 'Sir Gowther', in Six Middle English Romances, ed. M. Mills (London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1973). 'Sir Orfeo', in 'Sir Orfeo' and 'Sir Launfal', eds. L. Johnson and E. Williams (Leeds: University of Leeds, School of English, 1984). 'Sir Launfal', and 'Lay Le Freine', in Middle English Verse Romances, ed. D.B. Sands (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1986). 'The Erl of Toulous', in Middle English Metrical Romances, eds. W.H. French and C.B. Hale (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., first pub. 1930, this edition, 1964). Although most literary historians are in agreement about the lays, Derek Brewer remarks: 'There are about eight so-called Breton lays; Le Freine and Sir Degarre (if included) are both in the Auchinleck Ms. Another, Emare, is a story containing incidents similar to those in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale of Constance, and in other romances. Other lays are Sir Eglamour, Sir Torrent, Octavian and Sir Triamour'. Derek Brewer, English Gothic Literature (London & Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1983), p.81. Brewer makes no further remark as to why - or why not - he includes these and leaves out the others. R.M. Wilson is also somewhat vague on the matter. He writes: 'Eight Breton lays, written at various dates, survive in English, and there is some evidence that there may have been others'. The Lost Literature of Medieval England (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1952), p.126. As he makes no further comment I shall assume that he is referring to the same lays as are generally listed.

3 Emare 1.1030; Sir Gowther 1.747; Sir Orfeo 1.757; Launfal 1.4; Lay Le Freine 1.22; Erl of Toulous 1.1220.

4 M.J. Donovan, in A Manual of Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500, ed. J. Burke Severs, (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967). p.141.

5 ibid.: Le Freine and Sir Orfeo pp.135-36; Sir Degarre p.140; Sir Gowther p.141; Erl of Toulous p.142; Emare p.136; Sir Launfal p.138.

6 All data and page references in this footnote are to Gisela Guddat-Figge Catalogue of Mss. Containing Middle English Romances (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1976). Lay le Freine exists in one Ms: Advocates 19.2.1. [Auchinleck], pp.121-26. Sir Orfeo exists in three Mss: Ms. Advocates 19.2.1. [Auchinleck], pp.121-26; Ms. Bodl. 6922 [Ashmole 61], pp.249-52; Ms. Harley 3810, pp.204. Sir Degarre exists in nine Mss: Ms. Bodl 14528 [Rawlinson F34], pp.267-68; Ms. Bodl. 21835 [Douce 261], pp.265-66; Camb. Univ. Ff.ii.38., pp.94-99; Ms. Egerton 2862, pp.182-84; ms. Additional 27879 [Percy Folio], pp.151-59; Ms. Advocates 19.2.1. loc.cit; de Worde, circa 1502-34; Copland, Bm C.21.c.66, circa 1548-68; John King [Selden D45(3)], circa 1560. Sir Launfal exists in Ms. Cotton Caligula A.ii., pp.169-72. Sir Gowther exists in two Mss. Ms. Royal 17.B.xliii, pp.211-13; Ms. Advocates 19.3.1.[Auchinleck], pp.127-30. The Erl of Toulous exists in four Mss. Ms. Bodl. 6922, loc.cit.; Ms. Bodl. 6926 [Ashmole 45], pp.247-49; Camb. Univ. Ff.ii.38, loc.cit; Lincoln Cathedral 91 [Thornton], pp.135-42. Emare exists in one Ms. Ms. Cotton Caligula A.ii, loc.cit.

7 I shall continue to preserve the distinction between the French and English lays in spelling English as 'lay' and French works as 'lai'.

8 S.T. Knight, 'The Oral Transmission of Sir Launfal', Medium Aevum, 38 (1969), pp.164-70, 169.

9 Guddat-Figge, op.cit., p.33.

10 The unfinished Lay Le Freine has only 408 lines; it is completed from the lai of Marie de France.

11 T.C. Rumble, The Breton Lays in Middle English (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), p.vii.

12 Walter Allen, The Short Story in English (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p.4.

13 Harriet Hudson, 'Toward a Theory of Popular Literature: The Case of the Middle English Romances', JPC, 23:3 (winter, 1989), pp.31-50, 41.

14 Hudson, ibid., p.39.

15 See, for example, the following quote from Jane Gallop, Thinking Through the Body (New York: Columbia U.P. 1988):
'The mind-body split makes the mother into an inhuman monster by dividing the human realm of culture, history and politics from the realm of love and the body where mother

carries, bears, and tends her children. Accomplice to the mind-body split, in capitalist patriarchy, is the division between public and private'. p.2.

16 Chaucer, Works, ed. F.N. Robinson (Oxford: O.U.P. 1957, second edition), Troilus and Criseyde, Book II, 1.81-4.

17 William Langland, The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Complete Edition of the B-Text, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt (London, Melbourne & Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1978), Passus V, 1.299-340.

18 Hudson, op.cit., p.39

19 A.J. Bliss, ed., Sir Launfal (London & Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1960), p.44.

20 Andrew Taylor, 'Fragmentation, Corruption, and Minstrel Narration: The Question of The Middle English Romances', in The Yearbook of English Studies, 22 (1992), pp.38-62. See especially the following comments: '.... minstrelsy and popular oral narrative co-existed with more bookish and sophisticated literary amusements both in time and in social level'. p.53. '.... there is no reason to suppose that fifteenth and fourteenth century minstrelsy was confined to the margins of society. The evidence of oral recitation cannot therefore be explained away by locating it back in some hypothetical golden age of the baronial hall nor by consigning it to a social or cultural substratum'. p.54.

21 Kathryn Hume, 'The Formal Nature of Middle English Romance', PQ, 53 (1974), 158-80, p.170.

22 See 'Yvain', in Chretien de Troyes, Arthurian Romances, trans. W.W. Comfort, introduction and notes by D.D.R. Owen (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, first pub. 1914, this edition 1975), pp.193, 214. See also 'The Tale of Gareth of Orkney', in Thomas Malory, Works, ed. E. Vinaver (Oxford: O.U.P. 1971, second edition), pp.213 (1.29), 214 (1.6).

23 Henry Kozicki, 'Critical Methods in The Literary Evaluation of Sir Degarre', MLQ, 29 (1968), pp.3-14.

24 J.E. Wells, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500 (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1923). Le Freine, p.127; Sir Orfeo, p.129; Emare, p.130; Erl of Toulous, p.138.

25 J.D. Bruce, The Evolution of the Arthurian Romance (Gottingen: Dandenhoed & Ruprecht; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1923). p.55.

26 Bruce, *ibid.*, p.56.

27 For a discussion on the trivializing of women and their speech, see Deborah Cameron, Feminism and Linguistic Theory (Basingstoke & London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1985), p.126.

28 G.V. Smithers, 'Story Patterns in Some Breton Lays', Medium Aevum, 21 (1953), pp.61-92. p.88.

29 W.C. Stokoe, 'The Double Problem of Sir Degarre', PMLA, 70 (1955), pp.518-34. C.H. Slover, 'Studies in a Medieval Hack Writer's Methods', Texas Studies in English, 11 (1931) pp.6-23.

30 Schmidt and Jacobs, op.cit., p.11.

31 Derek Pearsall 'The Development of Middle English Romance', in Studies in Medieval English Romances, ed. Derek Brewer (Cambridge: D.S Brewer, 1988), p.23.

32 John Finlayson, 'The Form of the Middle English Lay', The Chaucer Review, 19 (1984-85), 352-67, p.363.

33 For a discussion on the use of non-sexist language as a discourse of masculinity, see Deborah Cameron, op.cit., p.69. 'A hack writer', has to be a man, otherwise it would say, 'a female hack writer'.

Please note that throughout this thesis I shall use generic they/them rather than she/he, him/her to stand for the singular and the plural form, letting the content of the sentence demonstrate whether it is to be understood as singular or plural. My reason for doing so is provided by Cameron, op.cit., p. 68, who notes the following practices: 'Since at least 1553, when one Thomas Wilson asserted the precedence of masculine nouns and pronouns, grammarians have been attempting to eliminate the tendency still present in ordinary speech to use they as a singular for generic and unspecified referents. And while generic they has never been eradicated from speech, it has been stigmatized as non-standard, incorrect and unacceptable in writing'.

34 Finlayson, op. cit., p.354.

35 I examined, as a random sample, the bibliographies for the decades from 1920-1990. In 1920-21 The Year's Work in English Studies lists no works on the lays: in 1930, the year in which French and Hale published their edition Middle English Metrical Romances, the Chaucer bibliography runs to eighteen pages - and there is nothing on the lays: in 1940 Chaucer has twenty-two pages and there are no entries for the lays: in 1950, seventeen pages on Chaucer and no mention of the lays: in 1960, the year Bliss's edition of Sir Launfal was published, Chaucer has ten pages and there is no entry for the lays: in 1970 (MLA bibliography), there were ninety-eight entries for Chaucer, with three articles being

specifically on The Franklin's Tale; two articles on Sir Launfal and one on Sir Orfeo: in 1980 (MLA) there were one hundred and twenty-seven citations for Chaucer, one specifically on The Franklin's Tale; two articles on Sir Orfeo and one citation from a book of essays for Sir Gowther: in 1990 (MLA) there were ninety-six entries for Chaucer, two on The Franklin's Tale, and one entry for Sir Degarre.

36 Using the same bibliographies and the same years, the citations for King Horn are as follows: in 1930, one citation; in 1940, one; in 1970, one, with no entry for any of the other years looked at. In Wells's edition of The Manual of Writings in Middle English, op.cit., the bibliography for King Horn covers only one page, pp.262-63; in Burke Severs's edition it extends from pp.206-209.

37 John Warden, ed., Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth (Toronto: Toronto U.P. 1982).

38 Diane Purkiss, 'Women's Rewriting of Myth', in The Feminist Companion to Mythology, ed. Carolyn Larrington (London: Pandora Press, 1992), p. 441.

39 Smithers, op.cit., p.80.

40 Annette Barnes, 'Female Criticism: A Prologue', in The Authority of Experience, eds. A. Diamond and L.R. Edwards, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), p.6.

41 Genevieve Lloyd, The Man of Reason (London: Methuen & Co, 1984), pp.2, 3.

42 In fact, W.H. French classed King Horn as a (courtly) lay and not 'a romance manque'. I can find no other critic who classifies it as such, though lays are commonly classified as/assumed into the genre of romance. The fact that French indicates that a lay is 'a failed romance' again evidences the negative way in which they have so often been viewed. The Year's Work in English Studies (Oxford & London: O.U.P. & Humphrey Milford, 1940), p.74.

43 Gerald Bordman, 'Folklore and the Medieval Romance', in Folklore in Action: Essays in Honour of MacEdward Leach (Philadelphia: Publications of The American Folklore Society, vol.xiv, 1962), p.41.

44 Constance Bullock Davies, 'The Form of the Breton Lay', Medium Aevum, 42 (1973), 18-31, p.30.

45 Deborah Cameron, Feminism and Linguistic Theory op.cit., pp.110-11.

46 Freud, 'Little Hans' and 'The Rat Man', S.E. vol. X, p.27.

47 Morag Schiach, 'Their "symbolic" exists, it holds power -we, the sowers of disorder know it only too well', in Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, ed. Teresa Brennan (London: Routledge, 1989), p.157.

48 Guddat-Figge, op.cit. 'It is perhaps not surprising that romances, which primarily aimed at entertaining and edifying the reader, are rarely found copied together with scholarly or scientific Latin texts'. p.22. 'Well over half of the ninety-nine Mss. are written entirely in English. A group of sixteen Ms. with a few Latin titles and explicits will probably have to be added since the Latin tags at best prove some knowledge of Latin on behalf of the scribe, but hardly of the reader. Judging from the rather simple texts, the readers would seem to have been members of the less well-educated middle classes, many of them probably women, although female names appear in only a few Mss'. p.43.

49 Nikki Stiller, Eve's Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature (Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1980), p.7.

50 Carol Meale remarks: 'as in the example of Christina of Markyate and her reading of the legend of St. Cecilia, it was possible for women to extract meaning relevant to their own lives and experiences from male-authored texts, as well as from those which they wrote themselves'. Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 17 (Cambridge: C.U.P. 1993), p.2.

51 Stanley Cavell, Must We Mean What We Say? (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1976), p.235: '.... intending to do something is internally related to wanting something to happen, and discovering an intention is a way of discovering an explanation'.

52 Freud, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, S.E. vol.VI, p.218. See also p.143: 'If a survey is made of cases of mislaying, it in fact becomes hard to believe that anything is ever mislaid except as a result of an unconscious intention'. On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement, S.E. vol.XIV, p.147: '.... the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance from the conscious'.

53 Jane Gallop, op.cit., p.31.

54 Stanley Cavell, The Claim of Reason (Oxford: O.U.P., 1979), p.459.

55 C.H. Slover, op.cit., p.5.

56 The distinction which is being made here is between the first experience of sexual intercourse, and then the continuation of it in marriage; the difference is evidenced in Sir Gowther in the fear of the princess and the frustration of Gowther's mother.

57 The overcoming of pain is a cultural construct, as, for example in the initiation rite, but the biological body's response is to avoid pain; the natural response to pain is to flinch, or, in extreme cases, to lose consciousness.

58 Judd Marmor, 'Changing Patterns of Femininity', in Psychoanalysis and Women, ed. Jean Miller (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p.234.

59 Hali Meidenhad, ed. Bella Millett, EETS OS 284, (Oxford: O.U.P., 1982), p.16, l.2-6. Of course this treatise was written for recluses, and not the readers of lays or romances; however, along with the popular saints' lives, it does provide evidence of cultural attitudes towards virginity. In Caxton's translation of Jacobus de Voragine's The Golden Legend, ed. F.S. Ellis (London: J.M. Dent, 1900, 7 vols.), we can find the same message as that given to the recluses, which deserves to be quoted at length: 'And the woman that is married is subject to man, and is beaten with staves and fists in such wise as they be delivered of their children ere their time, deformed and lame, and when in her youth she might unnethe suffer teachings and admonestements of her mother, which was but soft and amiable, she should now by the contrary suffer of her husband great shames, reproofs and villanies. And she among all other things answered: "I know well that my father was jealous over my mother, and much sorrow suffered my mother, and my husband shall be such an one hereafter". Thereto, they answered: "When they be new wedded they seem much debonair, but after, when they feel themselves married, they reign much cruelly, and sometimes they make their maidens mistresses greater than their wives, and thus all holiness may be lost, but by penance may it be recovered, and virginity may not come again to his perfection, [sic] now well that the culpe of sin may well be defaced, but the virginity may not be had again". vol.3, p.179.

60 Whilst modern medicine can render childbirth painless for a minority of women, a midwife of many years experience whom I have consulted has suggested that most women's experience of childbirth is not without pain.

61 Freud, Totem and Taboo, S.E. vol.XIII, p.130, footnote 1.

62 Margery Kempe was forty when she began her life of celibacy and pilgrimage. Julian of Norwich had her first visions at the age of thirty. The Book of Margery Kempe, ed.

B.A. Windeatt (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p.11. A Revelation of Love, ed. M. Glasscoe, (Exeter: Exeter University Press, first pub. 1976, this edition, 1986), p.vii.

63 William Monter, 'Women in The Age of Reformations', in Becoming Visible: Women in European History, ed. Bridenthal et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), p.217.

64 Flora Alexander, 'Women as Lovers in Early English Romance', in Women and Literature in Britain, ed. Carol Meale, op.cit., p.27.

65 Malory, Works, op.cit., p.657.

66 Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Routledge, 1988), p.118.

67 Rosalind Coward, Women's Desire: Female Sexuality Today (London: Paladin Books, 1984), pp.194-95.

68 Karen Horney, 'The Flight From Womanhood', in Psychoanalysis and Women, ed. Miller, op.cit., p.16.

69 Clara Thompson, 'Some Effects of the Derogatory Attitude Towards Female Sexuality', in Miller, *ibid.*, p.65.

70 Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.217.

71 Dale Spender, Man Made Language (London: Pandora Press, first pub. 1980, this edition 1990), p.52.

72 Cameron, op.cit., p.5.

73 For an explanation of this theory see Toril Moi's editorial comment, in The Kristeva Reader (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p.13.

74 Malory, op.cit. p.658. The same motif occurs in Chretien de Troyes' version of the story, 'Lancelot', in Arthurian Romances, op.cit. p.330. See also Marie de France's 'Yonec', in The Lais of Marie de France, eds. G.S. Burgess and K. Busby (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), p.90.

75 Gordon Leff, Heresy in the Later Middle Ages (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 2 vols. On the Cathar heresy, p.451; on the Waldensian heresy, p.466.

76 Julia Kristeva, The Kristeva Reader, ed. Toril Moi, op.cit., pp.145-46.

77 see Caxton's translation of The Golden Legend, op.cit.: vol.2, 'The Life of St. Lucy', pp.130-36; 'The Life of St.

Anastasia', pp.149-51; 'The Life of St. Agnes', pp.245-50. vol.3, 'The Life of St. Agatha', pp.32-7; 'The Life of St. Juliana', pp.45-9. vol.4, 'the Life of St.Christine', pp.93-7. vol. 5, 'The Life of St. Eufemia', pp.143-47. vol.6, 'The Life of St. Barbara', pp.198-204. vol.7, 'The Life of St.Katherine', pp.1-23; 'The Life of St. Dorothy', pp.42-5.

78 Kristeva, op.cit., p.142.

79 Leff, op.cit., p.287.

80 ibid. p.278.

81 Genevieve Lloyd, op.cit., p.x.

82 See Caroline Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, op.cit. Writing on Lidwina of Schiedam, Bynum comments: 'Lidwina, who was required to carry food to her brothers at school, slipped into church on the way home to say a prayer to the virgin. The incident shows how girlish piety could provide a respite from household tasks, in this case, as in so many cases - the task of feeding men. We also learn that Lidwina was upset to discover that she was pretty, that she threatened to pay for a deformity when plans were broached for her marriage (here her mother defended her), and that, after an illness at age fifteen, she grew weak and did not want to get up from her sickbed'. p.125. See also, p.20 and p.167 for similar examples of female piety being used as a method of avoiding marriage or servitude to men.

83 St. Augustine, Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects, ed. R.J. Deferrari (New York: Fathers of The Church Inc, 1955), pp.325-26.

84 For example, Augustine comments: 'But I do not see how a man can have freedom to marry another if he leaves an adulteress, since a woman does not have freedom to marry another if she leaves an adulterer'. ibid. p.18.

85 The split between the sexy mistress and the boring wife is given verbal expression in Chretien de Troyes, 'Cliges': 'His mistress he has made his wife, but he still calls her his mistress and his sweetheart, and she can complain of no loss of affection, for he loves her still as his mistress, and she loves him, too, as a lady ought to love her lover'. Arthurian Romances, op. cit., p.178. The crucial distinction, though, is between the mother and the childless woman. Guinevere is of course childless - and remains a romantic heroine throughout her life. Criseyde, too, is childless, as is Isolde. 'Bad' mothers, like Morgause of Orkney, are allowed to remain sexual, but those such as Elaine of Corbenic are not. See Luce Irigaray's comments on this issue in The Irigaray Reader, ed. M. Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); for example, she writes: 'Clytemnestra

certainly does not obey the image of the virgin-mother that has been held up to us for centuries. She is still a passionate lover'. p.36. See also p.51. T.H. White's portrayal of Elaine strikes me as true to expectation of a 'good' mother. See The Once and Future King, (Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1962, first pub. Collins, 1958), p.485. Other mothers, like Gareth of Orkney's wife Lyonesse, simply remain away from court. Clearly court(ly) is no place for (biological) women and children

86 Kristeva, op.cit., p.140.

87 For Cassandra see Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), vol.2, p.263. For the sybils see New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology (London: Hamlyn, 1968), p.113. Kirshner and Wemple note that the sybils form one of the most potent female images in western religious tradition. Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honour of John H. Mundy, eds. J. Kirshner and S. Wemple, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p.35.

88 Clearly the case of visionary women is different; I shall not be dealing with this issue as they are real women and I am concerned with representations of women.

89 Margaret Whitford, 'Re-reading Irigaray', in Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, op.cit., p.108.

90 For Rachel and Leah see Genesis 29: 1-24. For Martha and Mary see Luke 10: 38-42. For Aphrodite, Hera and Athene see Graves, op.cit., vol. 2, pp.270-72.

91 Malory, op.cit., p.37.

92 Lloyd, op.cit., p.77.

93 Nikki Stiller, 'Eve's Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Middle English Literature', in The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature, eds. C.M. Davidson and E.M. Broner (New York: Ungar Publishing Co, 1980). p.23.

94 Jenny Fellows, 'Mothers in Middle English Romance', in Meale, op.cit., p.54. The following all have a very obviously absent mother: Emare, Sir Degarre, Le Bone Florence of Rome, Sir Gowther, Torrent of Portyngale, The Man of Law's Tale, The Physician's Tale, The Knight's Tale, The Clerk's Tale.

95 Amis and Amiloun, ed. MacEdward Leach, EETS OS 203 (Oxford: O.U.P., 1937), p.96.

96 Rachel Bowlby, 'Still crazy after all these years', in Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, op.cit., p.45.

- 97 Rosi Braidotti, 'The politics of ontological difference', in Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, op.cit. Freud, The Psychopathology of Every Day Life, S.E. vol.VI, p,159.
- 98 Freud, The Future of an Illusion, S.E. vol.XXI, p.104.
- 99 Freud The Interpretation of Dreams, S.E. vol.V, p.371.
- 100 Freud, The Case of Schreber, S.E. vol.XII, p.46.
- 101 Luce Irigaray, 'The gesture in psychoanalysis', in Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, op.cit., p.129.
- 102 Juliet Mitchell, Feminism and Psychoanalysis (London: Allen Lane, 1974), p.322.
- 103 Christiane Olivier, Jocasta's Children: The Imprint of the Mother, trans. George Craig (London: Routledge, 1989), p.11.
- 104 Otto Rank, The Trauma of Birth (New York: Harper & Row, 1973; first pub. London: RKP, 1929), pp.36-37.
- 105 Morag Schiach commenting on Helene Cixous, op.cit., pp.159-60.
- 106 Toril Moi, 'Patriarchal thought and the drive for knowledge', in Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, op.cit., p.189. See also p.195. For medieval notions see H.R. Lemay, 'Anthonius Guainerius and Medieval Gynecology', in Kirshner and Wemple, op.cit., p.335. 'Guainerius' treatise shares with other medieval writings the assumption that the character of a woman is determined by the state of her uterus'. See also E. McLaughlin, in Religion and Sexism, ed. R. Ruether (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), p.217. '.... in his discussion of the bisexual nature of mankind, male and female, Thomas Aquinas follows Aristotle in his view that the male is ordered to the more noble activity, intellectual knowledge, whereas the female, though possessing a rational soul, was created solely with respect to her sexuality, her body, as an aid for the preservation of the species'.
- 107 Braidotti, op.cit., pp.94-5. See also Jane Gallop, op.cit., p.3.
- 108 Pauline Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers: Family Politics in the Early Middle Ages', in Studies in Church History: Medieval Women ed. D. Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp.99-100. See also Caroline Bynum, op.cit. p.29: 'They [male biographers] were also far more likely to attribute sexual or bodily temptation to female nature than to male (men's sexual yearnings could always be blamed on the

presence of women as temptresses) and to see women struggling unsuccessfully to overcome the flesh'.

109 The Golden Legend, op.cit., vol.2, pp.106-08, 'The Life of St. Andrew'; vol.3, p.82, 'The Life of St. Benet'; p.189, 'The Life of St. Dunstan'; vol.4, p.117, 'The Life of St. Christopher'; p.233, 'The Life of St. Hippolitos'; vol.5, p.13-4, 'The Life of St. Bernard'; p.39, 'The Life of St. Bartholomew'; vol.7, p.154, 'The Life of St. Thomas Aquinas'.

Thomas Malory, Works, op.cit., pp.548-50, 570-71.

Chaucer, Man of Law's Tale, in Works, op.cit., p.66, l.365-71.

110 Le Bone Florence Of Rome, ed. C.F. Heffernan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967).

Chapter 2 - Notes

1 See A Manual of Writings in Middle English, ed. J. Burke Severs (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967), pp.292-97. All line references are to the text found in Medieval English Romances eds. A.V.C. Schmidt and N. Jacobs, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), 2 vols, vol 2.

2 C.H. Slover, 'Sir Degarre: A Study in a Medieval Hack Writer's Methods', Texas Studies in English, 11 (1931), 5-23, p.5.

3 Henry Kozicki, 'Critical Methods in The Literary Evaluation of Sir Degarre', MLQ, 29 (1968), 3-14, p.6.

4 For Thecla see R. Ruether, 'Mothers of The Church: Ascetic Women in The Late Patristic Age', in Women of Spirit, eds. R. Ruether and E. McLaughlin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979): 'Thecla, in the apocryphal Acts, is one who sacrifices all, her home and her fiancée, in order to follow Paul. She cuts her hair, travels as a man and stops at no threat from family or state to pursue her vocation'. p.74. Christina of Markyate's assumption of male dress is a single occurrence which enables her to escape from her family home, rather than a long-term strategy for liberation. The Life of Christina of Markyate, ed. C.H. Talbot, (Oxford: O.U.P. 1959), p.91.

5 Joan of Arc's attire became a focus in her trial for heresy. It is clear that her opponents' main objection was to her assumption of a male role. 'Joan's dress formed the subject of no less than five charges, so although we know nothing of Joan's appearance, we have detailed information about her clothes. The charge declared: "The said Jeanne put

off and entirely abandoned women's clothes, with her hair cropped short and round in the fashion of young men" The accusation breaks down in three parts: the unwomanliness and immodesty of her costume; the luxury of her state; the carrying of arms. Her transvestism offended; it was a potent strategy for change symbolized by her donning the garments of men'. Marina Warner, Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), pp.149-50.

6 See, for example, the following recent commentary from The Star in 1986: 'Wooftahs, pooftahs, nancy boys, queers, lezzies - the perverts whose mortal sin is to so abuse the delightful word "gay" as to render it unfit for human consumption the strident, shrieking, hairy-nippled harridans whose claim to be feminists is a revolting contradiction in terms'. Quoted in Richard Davenport-Hines, Sex, Death and Punishment (Glasgow: Collins Sons & Co, 1990, this edition, 1991), p.337.

7 Freud, The Case of Schreber, S.E. vol.XII, p.46.

8 Introduction to 'Sir Degarre', in Medieval English Romances op.cit. p.11. Other critics are equally dismissive; see, for example, Derek Pearsall: 'the whole thing is a not at all contemptible example of what the professional romancer could knock together when pressed'. 'The Development of Middle English Romance' in Studies in Medieval English Romances: Some New Approaches, ed. D. Brewer (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988), p.23.

9 Robert Graves, Greek Myths, op.cit., vol.1, pp.323-25.

10 John Finlayson, 'The Form of the Middle English Breton Lay', The Chaucer Review, 19 (1984-5), pp.352-67.

11 ibid., p.359.

12 Kozicki, op.cit., p.14.

13 ibid., p.5.

14 G.V. Smithers, 'Story Patterns in Some Breton Lais', Medium Aevum, 22 (1953), 61-92, pp.79, 88.

15 W.C. Stokoe, 'The Double Problem of Sir Degarre', PMLA, 70 (1955), 518-34. p.532.

16 Bruce Rosenberg, 'The Three Tales of Sir Degarre', NM, 76 (1975), 39-51, p.39.

17 Cheryl Colopy, 'Sir Degarre: A Fairy Tale Oedipus', Studies in Short Fiction, 17 (1982), 31-39, p.32.

- 18 *ibid.*, p.37
- 19 Freud, A Case of Hysteria, S.E. vol.VII, p.227.
- 20 Such 'minor' characters are, for example, the messenger in Emare; the pope in Sir Gowther; the mayor's daughter in Sir Launfal.
- 21 Freud, Studies on Hysteria, S.E. vol.II, p.246.
- 22 Nikki Stiller, Eve's Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature (Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1980), p.32.
- 23 Luce Irigaray, 'When The Goods Get Together', in New French Feminisms, eds. E. Marks and I. de Courtivron, (Amherst: University of Massachussetts Press, 1980), p.107.
- 24 See Chaucer's The Merchant's Tale, for example, where May tells Januarie she must go to the privy: that this is an excuse for her to read Damian's note does not detract from the fact that calls of nature are admissible in the narrative. Works, ed. F.N. Robinson (Oxford: O.U.P. 1957, second edition), 1.1950-51.
- 25 Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p.12.
- 26 Schmidt and Jacobs, *op.cit.*, p.241.
- 27 Stanley Cavell, Must We Mean What We Say? (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1976), p.278.
- 28 Judith Kestenber, Children and Parents: Psychoanalytic Studies in Development (New York: J. Aronson, 1975), pp.22-23.
- 29 When adults masturbate, it is with the explicit intention of gaining sexual satisfaction: children play with themselves, but without intent.
- 30 See Judd Marmor, 'Changing Patterns of Femininity', in Psychoanalysis and Women, ed. Jean Miller (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p.234.
- 31 Freud, Studies on Hysteria, S.E. vol.II, pp.225, 245.
- 32 Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, S.E. vol.XVIII, p.219.
- 33 Kestenber, *op.cit.*, p.23.
- 34 Colopy, *op.cit.*, p.33

35 Colopy, *ibid.*, p.33.

36 Freud, Studies on Hysteria, S.E. vol.II, p.134.

37 See, for example, Chaucer's Clerk's Tale: 'For she is fairer, as they deemen alle, / Than is Grisilde, and moore tendre of age, / And fairer fruyt bitwene hem sholde falle, / And moore plesant, for hire heigh lynage'. l.988-91.

38 Colopy, *op.cit.*, p.31.

39 Elizabeth Archibald, 'The Flight From Incest: Two Late Classical Precursors of the Constance Theme', The Chaucer Review, 20 (1985-6), pp.259-72. In her article on La Manekine, Thelma Fenster has also noted the motif of the daughter who punishes herself for her desires. 'Beaumanoir's La Manekine: Kin D(R)ead: Incest, Doubling and Death', American Imago, 39 (1982), 41-58, p.50. Freud has also noted the tendency in hysterics to psychogenic paralysis, particularly in organs which have dual functions of which one is overtly sexual. Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, S.E. vol.XI, p.212-17. He writes: '.... when, for instance, a hand which has tried to carry out an act of sexual aggression and has become paralyzed hysterically, is unable, after that act has been inhibited, to do anything else - as though it were obstinately insisting on carrying out a repressed innervation'. There are two instances of mutilation of the hands, one actual and one symbolic, in The Golden Legend, ed. F.S. Ellis (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1900), 7 vols., vol.4, 'The Life of St. Leo the Pope', p. 10: vol.7, 'The Life of St. Arsenius', pp.78-81.

40 Rosenberg, *op.cit.*, p.45

41 On the theory that decapitation equals castration, see Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, S.E. vol.XVIII, p.273.

42 Julia Kristeva, The Kristeva Reader, ed. Toril Moi, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p.149.

43 Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (London: Allen Lane, 1974), p.123.

44 Karen Horney, 'The Flight From Womanhood', in Psychoanalysis and Women, ed. Jean Miller, *op.cit.*, p.10.

45 C.G. Jung, Aspects of The Feminine (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1982), pp.109-10.

46 See the legend of St. Margaret, who slew the dragon which had swallowed her by bursting out of its belly. It is also significant that she became the patron saint of women in childbirth. The Oxford Dictionary of Saints, ed. D.H. Farmer (Oxford: O.U.P. 1987). Seinte Marherete, ed. F.M.

Mack, EETS 193 (Oxford: 1934). See also Colopy, p.34, for a discussion on the dragon as a female archetype.

47 Freud, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, S.E. vol. VI, pp.144-45.

48 See Elaine Showalter, commenting on Hardy's Mayor of Casterbridge, in 'Towards A Feminist Poetics', in Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader, ed. Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986): 'What Howe, like other male critics of Hardy, conveniently overlooks about the novel is that Henchard sells not only his wife but his child, a child who can only be female. Patriarchal societies do not readily sell their sons, but their daughters are all for sale sooner or later.'. p.189.

49 Stiller, op.cit., p.16.

50 For women who are tormented because of their assumption of authority, see The Golden Legend, op.cit., vol.3, pp.45-49, 'The Life of St. Juliana': vol.4, pp.93-97, 'The Life of St. Christine'; vol. 6, pp.198-204, 'The Life of St. Barbara'; See also Osbern Bokenham, Legends of Hooly Wummon, ed. M.S. Serjeanston, EETS OS 206 (Oxford: O.U.P. 1971), p.11, l.390-96; p.59, l.2131-142.

51 Malory, Works, op.cit., 'The Tale of Gareth of Orkney'. Chretien de Troyes, 'Yvain', in Arthurian Romances (London: J.M.Dent, 1975).

52 Smithers, op.cit., p.82.

53 Otto Kernberg, Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism (New York: J. Aronson, 1975), p.31.

54 Nicholas Jacobs, 'The Lost Conclusion of The Auchinleck Sir Degarre', N&Q, 37 (1990), pp.154-58. Jacobs writes: 'The inference is ineluctable that the conclusion of Sir Degarre, elaborate descriptions or no, ran to no more lines than could be accommodated in one column of forty-four lines and perhaps a little more. it remains clear that the original conclusion of this attractive, if slight and at times muddled romance must be regarded as lost beyond recovery'. p.158.

55 Julia Kristeva, op.cit., p.173.

56 ibid., p.174.

Chapter 3 - Notes

1 Friedrich Hulsmann, 'The Watermarks of Four Late Medieval Manuscripts Containing The Erl Of Toulous', N&Q, 1985, March 32, [230] (1), 11-12. Robert Reilly, 'The Erl of Toulous: A Structure of Honour', Medieval Studies, 37 (1975), 515-22.

2 Shirley Marchalonis, 'Above Rubies: Popular Views of Medieval Women', JPC, 14 (1980-81), 87-93, p.90

3 Dieter Mehl, Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries (London: RKP, 1969), p.136.

4 Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics (London: Routledge, 1988), p.xiv.

5 Mehl, op.cit., p.88

6 Marchalonis, op.cit., p.92

7 Judith Fetterly, The Resisting Reader (Bloomington and London: Indiana U.P., 1978). See for example, the following quotation, pp.xx-xxii: 'The question of who profits, and how, are crucial because the attempt to answer them leads directly to an understanding of the function of literary sexual politics. As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values one of whose central principles is misogyny. Clearly, then, the first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting, rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us'.

8 Karen Horney, 'The Problem of Feminine Masochism', in Psychoanalysis and Women, ed. Jean Miller (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973) p.36

9 Le Bone Florence of Rome, ed. C.F. Heffernan, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967). Heffernan comments: 'For both Florence and Emare, beauty, symbolic of moral perfection, is also the basic cause of suffering'. p.33. Florence is accused of adultery by her brother (p.95), who then beats her; the description of her sufferings is comparable to those inflicted on female saints; see p.102, l.1512-518. She is later accused of murder by a rejected suitor (p.106). As in Emare the men then arrive at the convent where Florence is domiciled, confess, and are forgiven by her, (p.117-120).

- 10 R.G. Arthur, 'Emare's Cloak And Audience Response', in Sign, Sentence, Discourse, eds. J. Wasserman and L. Roney (New York: Syracuse U.P. 1989), p.84
- 11 Middle English Metrical Romances, eds. W.H. French and C.B. Hale (New York: Russell & Russell Inc. First pub. 1930, this edition 1964), vol.1, p.428, note 168.
- 12 Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, op.cit., vol.1, pp.67-71
- 13 Rosalind Coward, Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today (London: Paladin Books, 1984), p.194.
- 14 The motif of women communicating through the use of sewn, woven or embroidered cloth is an interesting one which has not previously been emphasized. There is great stress laid on Emare's skill with her hands, 'Of her handys, she was slye', (l.67, 382, 730), but the association of women's handicrafts with sexual messages has been ignored. The archetypal practitioner of weaving is the 'good' wife Penelope, who uses it as a means of delaying a sexual relationship. By contrast, Clytemnestra, the 'bad' wife, who has already taken a lover, weaves a garment for Agamemnon's homecoming which becomes his shroud. Procne's message to Philomela is woven. Le Freine's message to her sister is the cloth in which she was exposed. Where women's ability to communicate through speech is denied - as is literally the case with Procne - then this is a means which lends itself to them because sewing is (usually) seen as a feminine preserve. Caroline Bynum comments on the fact that cooking was perceived to be so much a woman's business that it was not merely arcane but threatening. See Holy Feast and Holy Fast (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.190. The same is not true of sewing - partly because it is not as obviously life-threatening as poisoned food is: the assumption, which Mehl makes, that sewing is an innocent and laudable pastime is not necessarily always borne out. The rhetoric of enchantment - spells are either 'cooked' (the witches' brew), or 'woven' (the magic garment) - indicates that such activities are a 'feminine' preserve. And a dangerous feminine preserve at that. The motif of the woman sewing remains, even in much later, realistic, fiction, a 'telling' one. In Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South, the scene where Mrs. Thornton unpicks her own initials from her best linen as a prelude to sewing in those of her - expected - daughter-in-law (and rival), is an extraordinarily concise way of indicating her recognition of her displacement. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p.269.
- 15 Elizabeth Archibald, 'The Flight From Incest: Two Late Classical Precursors of the Constance Theme', Chaucer Review, 20 (1985-86), pp.259-72.

- 16 Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot (Oxford: O.U.P. 1984), p.104.
- 17 J. Kestenberg, Children and Parents: Psychoanalytic Studies in Development (New York: J. Aronson, 1975), p.149
- 18 J. Herman and L. Hirschman, 'Father-Daughter Incest', Signs, 2 (Summer 1977), 735-56, p.740.
- 19 Maldwyn Mills, Six Middle English Romances (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1973), p.xiv.
- 20 Thelma Fenster, 'Beaumanoir's "La Manekine": Kin D(r)ead: Incest, Doubling and Death', American Imago, 39 (1982), 41-58, pp.46-47.
- 21 Maldwyn Mills, op.cit., p.197, notes 52-54.
- 22 Freud, Totem and Taboo, S.E. vol.XIII, pp.31-32.
- 23 In fact in the Saints' Lives male authority is represented as continuous. Typically what happens is that men either carry out each others orders, or take over from each other where appropriate. In Osbern Bokenham's 'Life of St. Christine', there are four judges involved in torturing her; when one dies, the next takes over (she is tortured continuously for fourteen years). See Legends of Hooly Wummon, ed. M.S. Serjeanston, EETS OS 206 (Oxford: O.U.P., 1971), pp.58-84. In The Golden Legend St. Lucy is given to the judge for persecution by her betrothed, and the men of the town gather to rape her on the judges' orders: vol.2, pp.133-34. Similarly Agnes is given to the provost by her father because she refuses to marry a pagan: vol.2, p.247. St. Christine is represented as being given to a judge after the death of her father: vol.4, p.96. See also the 'Life of St. Barbara', vol.6, p.202, given to a judge because she refuses to worship her father's idols. The rhetoric employed by Virginia's father in The Physician's Tale suggests that the figure of the father and the judge are interchangeable here, too. The father says: 'Take thou thy deeth, for this is my sentance', l.224; Virginia asks him - not the persecuting judge - for mercy, which he denies, condemning her to death himself. Chaucer, Works, ed. F.N. Robinson (Oxford: O.U.P. 1957, second edition).
- 24 The Lais of Marie de France, eds. G.S. Burgess and K. Busby (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986). The only omissions which the Middle English version makes are the following: pp.61-62; 'For this reason he hated the worthy woman, and was highly mistrustful of her, keeping her in close custody without her having deserved it'. p.64: 'When he was sure of her love, he spoke to her one day: "Fair one you have now made me your love. Come away with me for good! I assure you that should your aunt notice she would be most

aggrieved and extremely angry if you became pregnant in her house.' p.65: '.... her mother, [Le Codre's] who accompanied her, was afraid of the girl whom he loved so much, lest she try to cause ill-will between her daughter and her husband. She planned to cast her out of her own house and advise her son-in-law to marry her to a worthy man, for in this way she could be rid of her'.

25 John B. Beston, 'The Case Against Common Authorship of Lay le Freine and Sir Orfeo', Medium Aevum, 45 (1976), 153-63, p.154.

26 Nikki Stiller, Eve's Orphan's: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature (Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1980), p.54.

27 Susan Wittig, Stylistic and Narrative Structures in The Middle English Romances (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1978), p.129.

28 Margaret Schlauch, Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens (New York: New York University Press, 1927), p.83.

29 Mehl, op.cit., p.88.

30 John Finlayson, 'The Form of The Middle English Lay', The Chaucer Review, 19 (1984-85), 352-67, p.359.

31 It is worth noting that this motif survives very late. In George Eliot's Adam Bede Hetty Sorel is accused of - and about to be hanged for - infanticide, when in fact what she has done is to expose the (illegitimate) child. (London and Glasgow: Collins Classics, this edition undated), pp.513, 534.

32 Robert Graves, The White Goddess (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), p.168. Gilbert White, Natural History Of Selborne (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1891), pp.221-24.

33 Graves, Greek Myths, vol.2, pp.51-54.

34 Nicole Ward Jouve, The Streetcleaner (London & New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), pp.174-79.

35 Quoted in Ward Jouve, *ibid.*, pp.178-79.

36 St. Augustine, Confessions (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), p.131.

37 The idea of the nun as a 'pure' woman, aloof from the world is not borne out, either in Chaucer's portrait of the Prioress, (General Prologue, l.118-162) or in visitation records of the period. One such report records: 'Rumour has brought to their hearing that certain things forbidden,

hateful and guilty and contrary to and at variance with holy religion and regular discipline are daily done by the Prioress, nuns and others, serving men and agents of the same place'. On inspection, it was agreed that the Prioress be allowed to resign. Visitations of Religious Houses in The Diocese of Lincoln, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson, (Lincoln Record Society: vol.7, 1914), pp.81-2. Sexual dalliance clearly occurred in convents: see also Giles Constable, 'The Nun of Watton: Studies in The Early History of The Gilbertine Order', in Studies in Church History: Medieval Women, ed. D. Baker, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978). Nevertheless, the concept of the nun as a denier of female sexuality and the female body still exists.

38 The Lais of Marie de France, op.cit., p.64.

39 Beston, op.cit., p.157.

40 Chaucer, The Clerk's Tale in Works, op.cit, l.985-91.

41 Graves, Greek Myths, vol.1, pp.165-66.

42 French and Hale, op.cit., p.383.

43 Dieter Mehl, Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries (London: RKP, 1969), pp.86, 92.

44 *ibid.*, p.88.

45 Freud, 'Jensen's "Gradiwa"' and Other Works, S.E. vol.IX, p.150.

46 Maureen Fries, 'Feminae Populi: Popular Images of Women in Medieval Literature', JPC, 14 (1980-81), 79-86, p.82.

47 A Manual of Writings in Middle English, ed. J.E. Wells, (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1923), p.138.

48 Edwin Greenlaw, 'The Vows of Baldwin', PMLA, 21 (1906), 575-636, p.633.

49 Robert Reilly, 'The Erl of Toulous: A Structure of Honour', Medieval Studies, 37 (1975), 515-23, p.521.

50 For Noah's Flood, see Genesis 7: 11-17. For the Israelites exile in the desert, see Exodus 16: 35. For Christ's trial in the desert, see Mark 1: 9-13.

51 Greenlaw, op.cit., pp.632-33.

Chapter 4 - Notes

1 Robert Seidenberg, 'The Trauma of Eventlessness', Psychoanalysis and Women, ed. J. Miller (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.356. Freud, Totem and Taboo, S.E.vol. XIII, p.15

2 Symbolic mutilations occur in Sir Degarre and Sir Launfal, although actual representations of mutilated women are, as I have remarked, rare, with the notable exceptional categories which I have cited. In Marie de France's lai, 'Bisclaveret', the faithless wife is mutilated and then tortured. See, The Lais of Marie de France, eds. G.S. Burgess and K. Busby, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), p.71. See also 'Cliges', in Chretien de Troyes, Arthurian Romances (London: Everyman, 1975), pp.168-69. Here, as in Dracula, the doctors are represented as carrying out the punishment on the girl. Men are sometimes shown as being punished for sexual sins, for example Gareth, in Malory's 'Tale of Gareth of Orkney', in Works, ed. E. Vinaver (Oxford: O.U.P., first pub. 1954, this edition, 1971), p.206. In later, more realistic fiction, the mutilated female body is transmuted into the disfigured body: thus, Henryson's faithless Cresseid is punished by being afflicted with leprosy. See Robert Henryson, Poems, ed. C. Elliott, (Oxford: O.U.P. 1963, this edition, 1974); '.... scho was sa deformit / With bylis blak ouirspreid in hir visage, / And hir fair colour faidit and alterait', l.394-96; see l. 344-96. For modern examples of men mutilating transgressive women, see Nicole Ward Jouve, The Streetcleaner (London & New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), pp.7-8.

3 See, for example J.B. Beston, 'The Case Against Common Authorship of Lay Le Freine and Sir Orfeo', Medium Aevum, 45 (1976), 153-63, p.155,157.

L.J. Owen, 'The Recognition Scene in Sir Orfeo', Medium Aevum, 40 (1971), 249-53, p.250.

J. Finlayson, 'The Form of the Middle English Lay', The Chaucer Review, 19 (1984-85), 352-67, p.365.

4 P.J. Lucas, 'An Interpretation of Sir Orfeo', Leeds Studies in English, 6 (1972), 1-9, p.8.

5 K.R.R. Gros Louis, 'The Significance of Sir Orfeo's Self-Exile', Review of English Studies, 18 (1967), 245-52, p.249.

6 Dorena Allen, 'The Dead and the Taken', Medium Aevum, 33 (1964), 102-11, p.110.

7 Freud, 'The Ego and the Id' and Other Works, S.E. vol.XIX, p.72.

8 Ernest Jones, On the Nightmare (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), p.43.

- 9 Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, vol.1, pp.111-13.
- 10 M.J. Donovan, 'Herodis in the Auchinleck Sir Orfeo', Medium Aevum, 27 (1958), 162-65, p.164.
- 11 J.B. Friedman, 'Eurydice, Herodis and the Noon-Day Demon', Speculum, 41 (1966), 22-29, pp.25-26, 28.
- 12 P.R. Orton, 'Some Problems in Sir Orfeo', Notes and Queries 27 (1980), 196-99, p.198.
- 13 Malory, Works, pp.650-51.
- 14 E.C. Ronquist, 'The Powers of Poetry in Sir Orfeo', Philological Quarterly, 64 (1985), 99-117, p.104.
- 15 'Sir Orfeo' and 'Sir Launfal', eds. L. Johnson and E. Williams, (Leeds School of English, 1984).
- 16 S. Lerer, 'Artifice and Artistry in Sir Orfeo', Speculum, 60 (1985), 92-109, p.102.
- 17 Rosalind Coward, Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today (London: Paladin Books, 1984), p.194.
- 18 James A. Knapp, 'The Meaning of Sir Orfeo', MLQ, 29 (1968), 263-73, p.267.
- 19 Jones, op.cit. p.113.
- 20 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. B.A. Windeatt (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985). See p.42: '.... she bit her own hand so violently that the mark could be seen for the rest of her life. And also she pitilessly tore the skin on her body near her heart with her nails, for she had no other implement, and she would have done something worse, except that she was tied up and forcibly restrained both day and night so that she could not do as she wanted'.
- 21 Christiane Olivier, Jocasta's Children: The Imprint of the Mother (London: Routledge, 1989), p.118.
- 22 Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), p.225.
- 23 Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain (Oxford: O.U.P. 1985), p.207.
- 24 *ibid.*, p.51.
- 25 Lucas, op.cit., pp.4-5.
- 26 Stanley Cavell, Must We Mean What We Say? (Cambridge: C.U.P. 1976), p.263.

27 Scarry, op.cit., p.53.

28 The Life of Christina of Markyate, ed. C.H. Talbot (Oxford: O.U.P., 1959), p.53. 'She saw herself already dragged out in their midst, all surrounding her, looking upon her, threatening her, given up to the sport of her destroyers'.

29 Bram Stoker, Dracula, ed. A.N. Wilson (Oxford: O.U.P. 1983), pp.160-61.

30 Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, S.E. vol. XVIII, p.273.

Peter L. Allen, 'The Ambiguity of Silence: Gender Writing and Le Roman de Silence', Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language In Medieval Thought And Literature, eds. J.N. Wasserman and L. Roney (New York: Syracuse U.P. 1989).

31 Graves, Greek Myths, vol.1, pp.112-13; Ovid, op.cit., pp.225-27.

32 Dorena Allen, op.cit., p.110.

33 J.E. Wells, A Manual of Writings in Middle English (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts & Sciences, 1923), p.129.

34 Yi-fu Tuan, Landscapes of Fear (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p.6.

35 M.J. Donovan, in A Manual of The Writings in Middle English, revised edition, ed. J. Burke Severs, (1967). He writes: 'As story it is told with a deliberate simplicity and a care marred, if at all, in one way only; Orfeo's return and recognition draws attention from Herodis's rescue and homecoming, which should be the climax of the poem'. p.136.

36 Paul Barber, Vampires, Burial, and Death (New Haven, Yale U.P. 1988), p.13.

37 Gros Louis, op.cit., pp.247-48; F. Riddy, 'The Uses of the Past in Sir Orfeo', YES, 6 (1976), 5-15, p.7.

38 Ovid, op.cit., p.227.

39 V.L. Bullough, 'The Sin Against Nature and Homosexuality', in Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church, eds. V.L. Bullough and J.A. Brundage (New York: Prometheus Books, 1982), 55-89, p.70.

40 Eve K. Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature And Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia U.P. 1985), p.3.

41 Penelope Doob, Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature (New Haven & London: Yale U.P., 1974), pp.164-65.

42 L.J. Owen, op.cit., pp.250-51. For examples of the motif of 'the hero in the wilderness' see Malory Works, op.cit., pp.487-90, 495-500, 303-308.

43 Felicity Riddy, 'The Uses of The Past in Sir Orfeo', The Yearbook of English Studies 6 (1976), 5-15, p.13.

44 Tuan, op.cit., p.81.

45 Scarry, op.cit., p.33.

Chapter 5 - Notes

1 Maldwyn Mills, ed., Six Middle English Romances (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1973), Introduction, pp.xviii-xix. Diana Childress, 'Between Romance and Legend: Secular Hagiography in Middle English Literature', Philological Quarterly, 57 (1978), pp.311-22. E.M. Bradstock, 'Sir Gowther: Secular Hagiography or Hagiographical Romance or Neither?', AUMLA, 59 (1983), 26-47, p.41.

2 See especially the following comment: 'In particular what do girls and women make of hero stories dealing with apparently exclusively male experience, and vice versa? Do they, instead, treat the fantasy freely, creating their own stories from elements in the original?' Anne Wilson, Magical Thought in Creative Writing (Stroud: The Thimble Press, 1983), p.143.

3 Benkov writes: 'According to didactic treatises, coarse language is considered generally unfit both for a girl's mouth and ears - the subject of sex, and particularly the mechanics of the act being particularly taboo. Such delicacy of vocabulary and subject matter in the language of courtly ladies was, however, fair game for ridicule in the fabliaux, with their traditional deflation of courtly values and customs'. E.J. Benkov, 'Language and Women: From Silence to Speech', in Sign, Sentence, Discourse, op.cit., p.247. The female body is formally relegated to the subject of 'joke', insofar as it is only represented in genres such as fabliaux, where it becomes, quite literally, the locus of the dirty joke. See, for example, Chaucer's Miller's Tale, l.3722- 743.

4 M.J. Donovan, The Breton Lay: A Guide to Varieties (Notre Dame: Univ. Notre Dame Press, 1969), p.228.

5 Julia Kristeva, op.cit., p.146.

6 According to The Golden Legend, op.cit., the following saints have their breasts removed as part of their torture: St. Agatha, vol.3, p.35; St. Christine, vol.4, p.97; St. Barbara, vol.6, p.203; in the Life of St. Katharine, the wife of the emperor who comes to her defence has her breasts removed, vol.7, p.23. As is the case with mutilation of the female body, in later more realistic fiction the transgressive woman develops organic illnesses of the breast. See for example, Maria Edgeworth, Belinda (London & New York: Pandora, 1986); Lady Delacour's putrified breast is the consequence of her acting in unwomanly fashion by taking part in a comic duel; pp.23-24, 47.

7 J.B. Friedman, op.cit., p.27.

8 Andrea Hopkins, The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romances (Oxford: O.U.P. 1990), p.161. Bradstock, op.cit., p.34.

9 The Book Of Margery Kempe, ed. S.B. Meech, EETS 212 (Oxford: 1940), p.181. The Life Of Christina Of Markyate, ed. C.H.Talbot (Oxford: O.U.P. 1959), pp.115-17.

10 'Witchcraft like most forms of magic, was a substitute for impotence, a remedy for anxiety and despair.' Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.623.

11 Mary Douglas, Implicit Meanings (London: RKP, 1975), p.208.

12 Luce Irigaray, The Irigaray Reader, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p.130.

13 Freud, 'Jensen's "Gradiwa"' and Other Works, S.E. vol.IX, pp.195-96.

14 Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1906), pp.99-104, 297.

15 Childress, op.cit., pp.317-18.

16 See 'Yonec', p.86, and 'Guigemar', p.52, in The Lais of Marie de France, eds. G.S. Burgess and K. Busby (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986). See also Malory, Works, op.cit., p.478. The archetype is provided by The Sleeping Beauty.

17 Gowther's behaviour as infant and adolescent bears comparison with modern descriptions of autism, and I would suggest that the story of a 'demon-child' is an interesting way of exploring this form of psychosis. It then also makes sense to read the story as that of his mother, as the type of autism of which I suggest Gowther is an example has much

to do with the psychic history of his mother. J.K. Wing writes: 'The psychogenic theory suggests that there is a prior disorder of personality in the mother, who is unable to develop a warm relationship during the early weeks of life with an otherwise normal infant, thus causing what is regarded as the basic disability - the "autism" - from which the rest of the syndrome develops'. Early Childhood Autism, ed. J.K. Wing (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1966), p.32. Autistic children are, commonly, unable to interpret gestures; they frequently have little or no speech and display behavioural abnormalities; for example they display a tendency to reverse normal order - the confusion of left and right, back and front. Mary Douglas points out that reversal is a characteristic of the demon. See Natural Symbols (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p.138. It should be noted that autism is far commoner in male than in female children. See Wing, p.12, on mixed dominance; p.13, on self-mutilation; p.28, on gender dominance. My own experience of working with autistic adolescents and young adults has provided me with direct evidence of some of the kinds of behaviour which Gowther displays: coming up to give a kiss and at the last second transforming it into a bite. The level of fear which autistic people display is also notable. Karl Miller's comments on the double are also revealing in thinking about the demon-child as autistic; see this chapter, p.180. It should be remembered that autism, too, can be overcome; it is not congenital but a rare form of infant psychosis.

18 Caroline W. Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.65.

19 See Chretien de Troyes, 'Yvain', in Arthurian Romances, op.cit., p.225, where the lion drinks the warm blood of the slain deer, while Yvain cooks his meat.

20 Penelope Doob, Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature, op.cit., p.134.

21 Mary Douglas, Purity And Danger (London: RKP, 1953), p.95.

22 William Caxton, Golden Legend, op.cit., vol.5, pp.1-9, 203-204. This is a motif which Doob has also commented on: op.cit., p.148.

23 Bradstock, op.cit., p.38.

24 Chretien de Troyes, Arthurian Romances, op.cit., p.28.

25 Shirley Marchalonis, 'Sir Gowther: The Process of a Romance', The Chaucer Review, 6 (1971), p.19.

- 26 Daniel O'Keefe, Stolen Lightning: A Social Theory of Magic (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982), p.506.
- 27 Karl Miller, Doubles (Oxford: O.U.P. 1985), pp.46-7.
- 28 Bynum, op.cit., p.102.
- 29 J.A. Burrow, The Ages of Man (Oxford: O.U.P. 1986), p.102.
- 30 Geza Roheim, Magic and Schizophrenia (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), p.102.
- 31 O'Keefe, op.cit., p.277.

Chapter 6 - Notes

1 Andrew Taylor, 'Fragmentation, Corruption, and Minstrel Narration: The Question of The Middle English Romances', The Yearbook of English Studies, 22 (1992), 38-62. p.59. See also the following comment: 'Even the greatest Arthurian stories, French no less than English present strings of adventures which, though sometimes systematically "interlaced", are often only loosely connected with each other or with the main theme. **This discursive incoherence is apparently inherited from the older Celtic narratives from which so much of the Arthurian legend derives**'. From the Introduction to Sir Gawain and The Green Knight, eds. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, revised N. Davis (Oxford: O.U.P. 1967, first edition, 1925), p.xiv.

2 S.T. Knight, 'The Oral Transmission of Sir Launfal', Medium Aevum, 38 (1969), pp.164-70. B.K. Martin, 'Sir Launfal and The Folktale' Medium Aevum, 35 (1966), pp.199-210. Sir Launfal, ed. A.J. Bliss (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1960). All line references are to the edition found in Middle English Verse Romances, ed. D.B. Sands (Exeter: Exeter U.P., 1986). Line references to 'Landevalle' are from the text which is found in Bliss's edition of Sir Launfal. References to Marie de France are from The Lais of Marie de France, eds. G.S. Burgess and K. Busby (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986).

3 W.C. Stokoe, 'The Sources of Sir Launfal: Lanval and Graelent', PMLA, 63 (1948), 392-404, p.403. See also A.J. Bliss, 'The Hero's Name in the Middle English Versions of Lanval', Medium Aevum, 27, (1965), 80-85, p.81. For Bliss's comments on the Celtic origin of Lanval see his edition of Sir Launfal, p.19.

4 Taylor, op.cit., p.59.

- 5 Bliss, Sir Launfal, op.cit., p.30.
- 6 Freud, Totem and Taboo, S.E. vol.XIII, p.130.
- 7 Bliss, Sir Launfal, op.cit., p.46.
- 8 P.J. Lucas, 'Towards an Interpretation of Sir Launfal' Medium Aevum, 39 (1970), 291-300, p.295.
- 9 Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New Jersey: Princeton U.P. 1957, this edition 1971), p.34.
- 10 S.T. Knight, op.cit., p.169.
- 11 B.K. Martin, op.cit., p.210.
- 12 Stokoe, 'The Sources of Sir Launfal, op.cit., p.403.
- 13 Lesley Johnson and Elizabeth Williams, eds., 'Sir Orfeo' and 'Sir Launfal' (Leeds: Leeds School of English, 1984), p.v.
- 14 Bliss, Sir Launfal, op.cit., p.37.
- 15 *ibid.* p.38.
- 16 For earlier versions of Arthur and his wives and mistresses, see Iolo Morganwg, The Triads of Britain (London: Wildwood House, 1977) See also Rachel Bromwich, Trioedd Ynys Prydein (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), p.341-49. Bromwich gives credence to the notion of the conflation of Guinevere and the fay by providing the etymology of her name, Gwenhwyfar, as 'white phantom'. The notion of Arthur's three wives, or loves, remains in this tale, embodied in Triamour, whose name means precisely that; thus she also embodies the idea of rivalry. This is a good example of the onomastic process, which Jones and Jones mention as an important component of the development of oral narratives, and which often turns on an imperfect understanding of the sources. See Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, eds, The Mabinogion (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1949, this edition 1974) p.xviii. Further evidence both of the confusion as to sources and gender here is suggested by the existence of the romance entitled Sir Triamour.
- 17 Keith Thomas, Religion and The Decline of Magic (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), pp.496-501.
- 18 Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, op.cit. p.xxv.
- 19 Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, S.E. vol.XVIII, p.140-41.

- 20 Marcel Mauss, The Gift (London: Cohen & West, 1966), p.10.
- 21 *ibid.*, p.3.
- 22 Eve K. Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia U.P. 1985), p.1.
- 23 Rene Girard, Deceit, Desire and The Novel (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins U.P. 1960), see Chapter I.
- 24 Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, p.21.
- 25 R.S.Loomis, 'Morgan La Fee and the Celtic Goddesses' Speculum, 20 (1945), 183-203, p.191.
- 26 Geraldine Heng, 'Feminine Knots and The Other Sir Gawain and The Green Knight', PMLA, 106 (May 1991), 500-14, p.510, footnote 7.
- 27 Margaret Jennings, 'Heavens Defend Me From That Welsh Fairy', in Court And Poet, ed. G.Burgess (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1981), 197-205, p.200.
- 28 Howard Bloch, 'New Philology and Old French' Speculum, 65 (1990), 38-58, pp.49-50.
- 29 Catherine LaFarge, 'Repetition and Malory's Mort Darthur', in New Feminist Discourses, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992), 263-79, p.265.
- 30 Ernest Jones, On The Nightmare (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), p.190.
- 31 Martin, *op.cit.*, p.201.
- 32 Quoted in Sedgwick, *op.cit.*, p.3.

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