Thinking through Time in the Middle English Romances

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Doctor of Philosophy

University of York

English and Related Literature

March 2014

Abstract

This thesis investigates how the Middle English romances use time as a framework for the shaping of individual identity. It uses linguistic and narrative analysis, with a consideration of context, to illuminate the romances' portrayal of human experience in time, arguing that the romances are attuned to the shaping forces of agency, remembrance, and narrative structure. In this way, these texts stand as examples of reflective thought and identity formation. Via the exemplarity produced through ethical reading, romances equip their gentry and mercantile readership to reflect on their own identities with the romances as models. As its sources, this thesis uses a selection of Middle English romances focusing on the individual lifetime and preserved in manuscripts for household readership. The introduction will position the work within current scholarly interest in temporality, define views on romance audience, and propose a model of ethical reading, or 'romance exemplarity', which will shape an understanding of how medieval readers would have applied romance to themselves. Chapter One considers the 'pastness' of romance, and argues that the nostalgic effects of romance are crafted to foster a sense of continuity between the past and present, thereby overcoming resistance to change and channelling readers' desire towards an exemplary model. Chapter Two examines how the romances use temporal models to structure personal remembrances of failure and rupture, and argues that the romances adopt temporalities from religious discourse to interrogate the intersections between spiritual and secular life. Chapter Three examines the use of the future tense in romance, whereby characters negotiate personal desire and social authority, fantasising a world in which social hierarchies merge with and support the desires of the protagonist. Chapter Four uses narrative theory to explore how romances articulate the relationship between human temporality and divine intervention, locating ethical puzzles which inscribe a narrative attempt to think through individual life confronting the omnitemporal power of God. Finally, the conclusion draws together the findings of the study to argue that temporal readings of romance are a neglected but necessary component in assessing the genre, and can contribute answers to ongoing debates in romance criticism, particularly where atemporal models of interpretation have traditionally prevailed. Temporality in romance vitally shapes the genre's relation to other medieval discourses, its preoccupations, and its relationship with its audience.

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Acknowledgements

First of all, I must give my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Nicola McDonald, who championed this project from the beginning. She gave much valuable insight with great patience. I never had to complain of a supervisor who was inaccessible or aloof, because she never begrudged me her time. In addition, I am grateful to Helen Fulton for her input and encouragement along the way, and Elizabeth Tyler for her role on my upgrade panel.

For both friendship and help, I owe much thanks to my fellow PhD students at the University of York. I have fond memories of our shared attic workspace. Amongst these friends, my thanks go to Katherine Bilous Handel and Hollie Morgan for their help with Old French; Deborah Thorpe for her advice about legal documents and medieval households; and Victoria Flood for her direction on the topic of political prophecy. Beyond such practical help, these and others gave me daily support. To Hollie Morgan in particular I must extend my gratitude for her companionship as we began our PhDs at the same time and together wrestled with complex texts and the other challenges of postgraduate work.

Beyond that, I have enjoyed the enduring support of many friends I knew before my time at York, and though I cannot name them all here, I am flattered and thankful that they have continued to share their company and conversation with me, often despite great distances.

Aside from my supervisor, a few other academics have generously lent their time and advice to me as a junior colleague. I am grateful to Michael Johnston for allowing me to see, before its publication, the typescript for his upcoming book, as well as an article for an upcoming volume of *Studies in Bibliography*. I am also thankful to Ad Putter for time spent discussing our favourite romances and his reading suggestions early in my project. My thanks go to Heather O'Donoghue for her support both during my MPhil and, later, during my PhD; I spent several happy and productive summers house-sitting for her, and her continued interest in my work has been a great encouragement. Finally, I am grateful to the attendees at the Oxford Medieval Graduate Seminar in October 2011, where I presented a portion of Chapter Four and received valuable feedback and encouragement.

I must also thank the wonderful staff at the University of York, both in the English Department and the Centre for Medieval Studies, as well as the J.B. Morrell and King's Manor libraries. Equally, I extend my thanks to the staff at the British Library and the Bodleian Library, where I completed significant portions of my research.

On a more personal note, I must acknowledge a great debt to my mother, Susan Barton Neal, with whom my education began and who carried it through my school years. She and my father, until his death, always championed my education as well as my aspirations. In particular, their supervision of my education meant that I had greater freedom than most of my peers to pursue my own interests, and was encouraged to develop the research and writing skills that have served me well for years since. Not all twelve-year-olds have the luxury of parents who avidly encourage and facilitate what, for me, were many happy afternoons on the floor between the stacks of the local libraries, combing through whole piles of books.

Much love and gratitude go, finally, to my husband Michael. He supported me in my research from the time we first met, even when it meant having to look things up on Wikipedia to understand what I was talking about. Since then, he has supplied steady friendship and unconditional love, washed many dishes when I needed time to work, and provided for me in all kinds of ways. Our marriage has been occasion indeed for the happiest ending this world and its narratives can afford, an earthly 'joy and blysse'. But lest that should fill our final vision, may we always remember the better bliss to come with Him in whom all things are possible, including, surprisingly, this thesis.

Author's Declaration

I certify that to the best of my knowledge, all of the work contained in this thesis is my own, except where sources are cited. No portion of this thesis has been published prior or submitted for any other examination.

Introduction

> Mony aunterez here-biforne
> Haf fallen suche er þis.
> Now þat bere þe croun of þorne,
> He bryng vus to his blysse! AMEN.[1]

These are the closing lines of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. I first encountered them in translation in an undergraduate British literature textbook, sitting in an empty teaching room to do my reading between classes. Even in translation, they impressed me immensely, but I scarcely knew why, though I mulled over the passage through the years. I did not know, at the time, that it was 'convention' to end a romance with a prayer, or to address the audience directly. But knowing that does not, and should not, diminish the quality of these lines that impressed me then: their brief evocation of vast spaces of time.

These lines are provocative in many ways, but especially, I am now able to say, temporally. They hint at many other adventures, specifically ones which take place 'er þis'. Why is that? Why not 'at the same time' or 'after'? Immediately, the next lines whisk our attention into the future, with a benediction, specifically for the future of 'vus', no longer the story of Gawain or the 'mony aunterez' (many adventures) besides his. The invocation of 'us' in the closing is a convention of the genre, some say a relic or fantasy of oral performance,[2] but while this accounts for the origin of the enigmatic 'vus' it does not fully elucidate its purpose: why does the audience need to be overtly addressed?[3] And does this address, so consciously done, impact the narrative in any way? Why should the narrator be concerned for the specifically future fate of the audience? Moreover, there is the question of how this prayer for the future impacts our reading of the narrative which precedes it: if the ending of a story is so important,[4] what do we make of this ending in relation to the whole story?

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[1] J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, eds., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 2nd ed., rev. Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 2525-30.

[2] Carol Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), 22-23; John M. Ganim, *Style and Consciousness in Middle English Narrative* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 71, 149.

[3] Roger Dalrymple considers the closing invocation and its function in *Language and Piety in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 29-32. One function he identifies is that of creating a community between readers, speaker and characters.

[4] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 93-94; Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction,* with a new epilogue (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966, 1967, 2000).

I invoke *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* because it is a well-known romance which raises some of the temporal questions pertaining to many other romances. These are particularly issues of the temporal situating of the story in relation to the audience. Why does the narrator make specific efforts to state when the story occurs? Why does the narrator pray for the audience's future? But these are not the only temporal questions which the romance raises.

The puzzles of these lines of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in fact echo throughout the poem. As is well known, the whole romance is 'bracketed' by the history from Troy to Arthurian Britain in a mirrored chronology, beginning with a whirlwind history going forward to Arthur's time (1-36), then reversing at the end to speed even more quickly backwards through that same history and land again at Troy (2522-25).[5] There are also at least two cases of distance in time producing differing interpretations. The first is in the early mention of Arthur's court, which in the narrator's recollective account is portrayed as the epitome of chivalric innocence (37-59); however, the whole narrative of the romance, in which the court's foremost hero Gawain proves a failure, complicates this retrospective report of the Arthurian court.[6] Similarly, at the end, Gawain groans in retelling his story, while the court laughs (2502, 2514). This provides the reader with two possible responses to Gawain's adventures, the one shaped by Gawain's remembering of a lived experience, the other a response not to experience but to its narration. These issues of retrospect, reinterpretation and narration are also temporal.

More extensive study of these temporal techniques is needed, because they recur across the romance genre. The positioning of the narrator and audience in relation to the emphatically *past* time of the romance is common, and discussed in Chapter One. Instances of recollection and retelling of the past occur in many romances, including *Sir Cleges, Ywain and Gawain,* and *Le Bone Florence of Rome,* often at pivotal moments. As the final chapter will make clear, the romance genre, characteristically taciturn when it comes to explaining motivations or meanings, makes potent use of the temporal features of

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[5] See, e.g., Laila Gross, 'Time in the Towneley Cycle, *King Horn, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*' (PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 1967), 116-17.

[6] This has been debated. See, e.g., Christopher Dean, *Arthur of England: English Attitudes to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 77-8; Laura Ashe, '*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Limits of Chivalry', in *Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, ed. Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjević, and Judith Weiss (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), esp. 167; cf. Jonathan Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy: Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain-Poet* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 116.

narrative structure to allow inferences to fill these gaps. These vital and recurring temporal features in the romances have received little study.

Furthermore, certain features commonly considered characteristic of the romance genre suggest that romance offers fruitful ground for temporal analysis. One such feature is the happy ending, cited by many critics as a feature of the genre, and considered by Kevin Whetter especially to be the *sine qua non* of romance.[7] Whatever the content of the story, he argues, it is incapable of being a romance if it does not end happily. Temporality is not one of Whetter's concerns, but his argument is intriguing from a temporal perspective. It might be rephrased thus: whatever happens as the narrative unfolds, the make-or-break requirement is that a certain event (the happy outcome) must occur at a certain time. Thus, with this definition of romance, there is a temporal requirement at the outset. The happy ending of a romance will condition the whole 'argument' which it can make, and the whole function it can assume in society.[8]

Another temporal generic feature of romance is what Geraldine Barnes calls its 'chronological' 'enclosure'.[9] Middle English romance tends to encompass the whole lifetime of one individual; it is 'biographically complete'.[10] This, Barnes notes, is different from Chrétien's romances, where the focus is on the heroes' chivalric careers, an observation borne out by the ending of *Ywain and Gawain*:[11] there, where the Middle English version carefully describes the ultimate fates and deaths of all its central characters, the French simply concludes with the present satisfaction of Yvain and his lady and gives no hint of their futures. In this way, the Middle English romances in particular tend to assume an individualistic focus, deriving their whole structure from the temporal framework of the individual life.[12] The argument and function of romance is thus conditioned by a certain type of temporal structure. As with the happy ending, this suggests

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[7] Kevin Whetter, *Understanding Genre and Medieval Romance* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008), 50, 99. On the happy ending, see Derek Brewer, 'Escape from the Mimetic Fallacy', in *Studies in Medieval English Romances: Some New Approaches*, ed. Derek Brewer (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988), 8; Derek Brewer, 'The Nature of Romance', *Poetica* 9 (1978), 27; Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London: Methuen & Co., 1970, 1977), 10, 29; Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 10; Wanchen Tai, 'Is There An End?' (PhD Thesis, University of York, 2008), 198, 202.

[8] Cf. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot,* 93-4.

[9] Geraldine Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 18.

[10] Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy*, 18.

[11] Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy*, 18.

[12] Cf. Jane Bliss, *Naming and Namelessness in Medieval Romance*, Studies in Medieval Romance 7 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 20.

that investigating these temporal aspects of romance structure will yield a greater understanding of the romances themselves.

Time in Literary Studies, Medieval Studies, and Romance

The importance of studying time in literature has become increasingly clear in the last few decades. In part, this is because it is now clear that mid-twentieth-century structuralist and formalist models of interpretation tend to 'suppress time' in favour of spatially perceived structures, and growing scholarly interest in time is partly a reaction to this former focus on atemporal meaning.[13] The intellectual foundation for the study of temporality in narrative is Paul Ricoeur's three-volume work, *Time and Narrative*, published in French in the 1960s and translated into English in the 1980s.[14] Ricoeur's theory, dually derived from Augustine and Aristotle (a pleasing beginning for medievalists), demonstrates that all narrative is temporal because all human experience is temporal; moreover, that narrative is a way of giving shape and meaning to specifically temporal experience.[15] Ricoeur's philosophical bent leaves much room for more technical analysis of narratives, a gap which critics like Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal, Frank Kermode, and Peter Brooks have filled by developing terminologies for discussing how time operates in narrative.[16] What these studies and terminologies reveal is that time in narrative is never simple, but is a complex construction even in the simplest of texts. Because the time of the story itself (the events 'as they really happened') and the time of the narrative (the sequence and timing in which events are narrated) always exist in relation to each other, the constructed time of narrative moves in a varying sequence of tensions with the time of

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[13] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology,* trans. John and Doreen Weightman (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 16; David Wood, *The Deconstruction of Time*, with a new preface by the author, SPEP Studies in Historical Philosophy (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001), xxxv, 349-51; Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time,* The Frontiers of Theory (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1; Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 10.

[14] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[15] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:xi; the discussion of Augustine and Aristotle takes place in vol. 1, Chs. 1 and 2.

[16] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), esp. Chs. 1-4; Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. Christine Van Boheemen, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*; Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*.

the story: backwards and forwards, faster and slower, and on different levels of remove.[17] This relationship between story and narrative makes it clear that even choosing the sequencing or pace of events in a narrative is an act of interpretation, capable of eliciting important interpretive inferences from the audience, for example about causation.[18] Other studies of the cultural relevance of time suggest that the temporality chosen for a narrative will always have resonances outside itself with social, gendered, or religious constructions of time, to name a few: that certain types of time may be considered 'medieval', 'Christian', 'postmodern', or 'feminine'.[19] Together, theorists of narrative span the spectrum from philosophical meditations to cultural considerations of temporality to specific narrative workings, but in total their findings suggest that almost any narrative presents a sophisticated and meaningful manipulation of time.

In exploring the cultural resonances of temporality, some scholars have developed concepts of specifically medieval types of temporality.[20] Seminal in this is Jacques Le Goff's *Time, Work and Culture in French Life and Thought*. Le Goff propounds the idea that the Middle Ages was a time of changing perceptions of time itself, that the invention of the clock and the use of clock time to track labour created a new and different sense of time, distinct from the more flexible monastic time which changed with the seasons and was rooted in the rhythms of sacred observance.[21] With the invention of the clock, time became not only independently measurable apart from daylight, but also became linked with labour and hence a commodity.[22] In other words, certain uses of time are proposed to

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[17] E.g. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 33-35, and Chs. 1-4; Bal, *Narratology*, Ch. 2.

[18] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), 45-6. This will be considered in further detail in Chapter Four.

[19] Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1982); Anne Higgins, 'Medieval Notions of the Structure of Time', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 19, no. 2 (1989); A. J. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, trans. G. L. Campbell (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 110-11; Heather Dyke, ed., *Time and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003); Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Postmodern Experience*, trans. Neville Plaice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Paul Strohm, 'Time and the Social Implications of Narrative Form', Ch. 5 in *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Pres, 1994); Rita Felski, 'Telling Time in Feminist Theory', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 21, no. 1 (2002); Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs* 7, no. 1 (1981), 13-35.

[20] A good account of critical ideas of medieval temporality is given by Roseanna Cross, *Time Past Well Remembered: The Handling of Time in Some Middle English and Old French Texts* (Saarsbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller Aktiengesellschaft & Co. KG, 2009), 1-4.

[21] Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture*, 29-52; see also Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, 104-6.

[22] See also Linne Mooney, 'The Cock and the Clock: Telling Time in Chaucer's Day', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 15 (1993).

be not only culturally specific to the Middle Ages, but become the locus for a narrative of social development, indeed locating the Middle Ages as the beginning of an industrial, capitalist, practice of time.[23] At the same time, other scholars have explored cultural views of time in other specifically medieval domains: medieval historiography, exegesis, hagiography, and personal devotion.[24] These studies not only explore the cultural domains which both inform and are shaped by medieval literature, but propose that the study of temporality is one angle for new and more nuanced insight into the medieval period. This also means that any study of time in medieval narrative will have implications for how we view medieval culture and 'the medieval period', indeed how we view 'the modern period' as differentiated, or continuing on, from it.[25] Le Goff's study illustrates this perfectly, articulating an analysis of medieval time which evolves into a narrative of the origins of modern industry.

In criticism of medieval narrative, an accumulation of studies through the last few decades paints a picture of how medieval narratives which are not overtly 'about time' may make crucial use of time. John Ganim's *Style and Consciousness in Middle English Narrative* examines the portrayal of both time and space in a series of Middle English texts, including a few romances. His work demonstrates not only the nuance of Middle English treatments of time, but argues that medieval narrative stands as a complement to philosophical debate, a proposition that sees the romances as intellectual texts which not only evince the prevailing cultural issues of their time, but participate in these debates.[26] Ganim's work assesses anonymous romances on equal footing with Chaucerian works and

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[23] Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture,* xii-xiii.

[24] Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore, 1999); Spiegel, 'Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative', *History and Theory* 22 (1983); Marjorie E. Reeves, 'History and Prophecy in Medieval Thought', *Medievalia et Humanistica,* n.s. 5 (1974); R. W. Southern, 'Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 3: History as Prophecy', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 5th ser. 22 (1972), 159-80; Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 87-99; Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

[25] Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture,* xi. Cf. Chris Humphrey, introduction to *Time in the Medieval World,* ed. Chris Humphrey and Mark Ormrod (Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2001), 1-2; Ute Berns and Andrew James Johnston, 'Medievalism: A Very Short Introduction', *European Journal of English Studies* 15, no. 2 (July 2011), 98-99; Richard Utz, 'Coming to Terms with Medievalism', *European Journal of English Studies* 15, no. 2 (July 2011), 104; David Aers, 'A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the "History of the Subject"', in *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* (New York, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992); cf. Nicholas Watson, 'Desire for the Past', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 21 (1999), 92-97.

[26] Ganim, *Style and Consciousness,* 152-52.

makes the important point that these narratives all deserve attention as intellectually and culturally important works. Another important contribution has been in the realm of memory studies, which are directly linked to analysing the use of the past. In *The Book of Memory*, Mary Carruthers gives a detailed reconstruction of medieval memory techniques, and explicates the close alliance between narrative, individual memory and judgment, and ethics. In other words, though both time and narrative are arguably peripheral to her focus, she establishes a model for how time is implicated in decision-making, how a reader relates to the 'past' of a narrative already read, and how the reader enacts the connection between the 'past' of a narrative and the 'present' of an ethical situation. She offers a few nuanced and scintillating readings of medieval narratives, and her theories have a much wider potential for application than critics of medieval narrative have generally appreciated.[27]

The importance of narratives, including romance, in medieval instances of collective memory has been more widely explored than the type of individual memory studied by Carruthers.[28] Such studies, through their frequent theoretical affiliations with areas of study including fantasy, postcolonialism, and nationalism, link memory and time more generally with the shaping of identity. For example, Geraldine Heng, Robert Rouse, and Patricia Clare Ingham explore how romance treatments of the past in some form contribute to recovery from trauma and the shaping of present-day English identity.[29] Other medieval genres, like genealogy, history writing, and prophecy, are given similar consideration by Lee Patterson, Gabrielle Spiegel, and Lesley Coote.[30] In many of these studies, there is a focus on remembering the past as a vehicle for the shaping of identity, via the shaping of ethical behaviour (Carruthers), the use of the past to legitimise present authority (Spiegel), or using romances to work through past communal trauma (Heng). All

[27] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Carruthers's work is preceded by that of Francis Yates, which covers a longer period but in less detail: *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966).

[28] See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser, The Heritage of Sociology (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[29] Robert Allen Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance,* Studies in Medieval Romance 8 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2005); Geraldine Heng, *Empires of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Helen Young, *Constructing 'England' in the Fourteenth Century: A Postcolonial Interpretation of Middle English Romance* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

[30] Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: the Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Spiegel, *The Past as Text*; Lesley A. Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (York: York Medieval Press, 2000).

these works portray memory as directed towards a defining, legitimising, or restoring of a present-day identity, a proposition which will receive further exploration here. The closely-related field of nostalgia, traditionally the preserve of eighteenth-century and more recent periods of study,[31] has also received some attention in relation to medieval drama and to *Piers Plowman*, of which the latter compellingly proposes that nostalgia towards a past society in fact fuels a radical impulse towards future change. Rydzeski's study of *Piers Plowman* signals the often deceptive orientation of nostalgia appearing conservative but in fact being substantially radical, which this study will also explore.[32] Finally, two volumes of essays published in 2000, that year of temporal anxiety, take the millennium as a point for reflecting on the temporal concerns of the Middle Ages: *Medieval Concepts of the Past* and *Medieval Futures: Attitudes to the Future in the Middle Ages*.[33] These studies suggest that meditating on the temporalities of the Middle Ages may shed light on present-day concerns.

All the studies listed above make it clear that time, broadly conceived, can form a fruitful topic for study in medieval narrative, but many gaps remain in the field.[34] For one thing, many of the studies above tend to focus on communitarian conceptions of identity: political identity, English identity, the identity of social classes in relation to one another. However, in the romances particularly, a great number of texts focus structurally on individuals, and thus it seems incumbent to consider how the link between time and identity functions in such a setting, where even the titles of romances force attention onto the structure of a single central hero. In the romance genre, too, the desires are often acutely domestic rather than overtly political: family, wife, children, good living. If

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[31] For example, Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Dames reads the operation of nostalgia in the Victorian novel. Nostalgia is treated as a central topic in certain types of eighteenth-century verse: see Laurence Lerner, *The Uses of Nostalgia: Studies in Pastoral Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972); Aaron Santesso, *A Careful Longing: The Poetics and Problems of Nostalgia* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006).

[32] John C. Coldewey, 'The Way Things (Never) Were: Spiritual Nostalgia in Medieval English Plays', *European Medieval Drama* 2 (1998); Justine Rydzeski, *Radical Nostalgia in the Age of Piers Plowman*, Studies in the Humanities 48 (New York: P. Lang, 1999). Note that Rydzeski's definition of 'radical' refers to the concept of social reform through return, and thus differs from a more modern connotation of radicalism as a rejection of the past (12-13).

[33] Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried, and Patrick J. Geary, eds, *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); J. A. Burrow and Ian P. Wei, eds., *Medieval Futures: Attitudes to the Future in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2000).

[34] Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, Medieval Cultures 35 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1-3.

memory and the future are linked to the shaping of identity, how does this identity-shaping function in a romance about a single knight with a supposed audience of the knightly class?

Additionally, there are few focused considerations of time in relation to romance. More especially, though theoreticians like Ricoeur, Genette, Brooks and others have formulated compelling terminologies for temporal analysis of narrative, as well as considerations of how these narrative structures link to worldview and argument, with a few exceptions these approaches have not received wide attention in the study of Middle English narrative.[35] As the introductory remarks on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* suggested, many of the puzzles of romance are linked to temporality, and therefore it is important to submit these texts to serious narrative analysis as one way of unpicking their most debated moments. A few studies do provide good examples of this methodology at work. In book length, the first is Ganim's *Style and Consciousness,* which includes *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and other romance-like works such as *Troilus and Criseyde*. A recent book (based on a thesis) by Roseanna Cross, *Time Past Well Remembered*, deals with the use of time in several Middle English and Old French texts, particularly the issue of narrative order and how medieval texts relate narrative time to the time of the external world.[36] A 1967 thesis by Laila Gross analyses how time passes in *King Horn, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Troilus and Criseyde*, but to my knowledge none of this material has appeared in print.[37] A thesis by Wanchen Tai, titled 'Is There An End?', examines several anonymous Middle English romances to reassess their treatment of desire and satisfaction, a topic closely involved with the temporality of narrative structure and how the future is handled.[38] Mary Carruthers analyses the use of tense in Chaucer and its relation to memorative practices, resolving certain problematic points in Chaucer's narration, while Karen Smyth performs a similar analysis on 'time referents' in the work of Lydgate.[39] Finally, Ad Putter takes the

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[35] Evelyn Birge Vitz carries out such a study on French literature: *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology: Subjects and Objects of Desire* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1989). Roseanna Cross performs some temporal narrative analysis on a few Middle English texts in *Time Past Well Remembered*.

[36] Cross, *Time Past Well Remembered*.

[37] Gross, 'Time in the Towneley Cycle, *King Horn, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*'.

[38] Wanchen Tai, 'Is There an End?'.

[39] Mary Carruthers, 'Meditations on the "Historical Present" and "Collective Memory" in Chaucer and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', in Humphrey and Ormrod, *Time in the Medieval World,* 137-155; Karen

exact approach described above of using temporal and narrative analysis as ways of resolving persistent 'problems' in certain romances.[40] All of these works link a close analysis of how time is used with a consideration of the ideological and cultural implications, hence representing the basic goals of my own work. However, there is a need for studies which go beyond the canonical romances and Chaucerian works to the wide field of equally compelling anonymous Middle English romances.[41]

This thesis aims to accomplish two goals in relation to this existing scholarship. The first is to link the kind of detailed reading of narrative, such as that performed by Ganim, Putter, Smyth and Carruthers, with a consideration of how those features of language and style reflect larger cultural and philosophical concerns. Theorists have demonstrated the philosophical and cultural implications of how narratives handle time, from issues of structure, to the resonances and cultural meanings of temporal frameworks, down to small details of tense and order. Smaller-scale studies like those of Putter, Smyth and Carruthers suggest that there is much productive reading still to be done about the connection between the romances' details of syntax and structure and the ideological conclusions these choices promote. I hope to provide at least some such readings by considering the cultural and ideological implications of time in romance, while anchoring those readings in the detail of tense and narrative structure.

Secondly, this thesis will explore the potential for multiple temporalities to coexist within a single work. As scholars have now moved away from a view of a 'monolithic' or 'singular' Middle Ages, so too it is important to recognise that analysing time in Middle English texts is not simply a matter of identifying 'medieval time' or a 'medieval way of conceiving temporal experience'.[42] Rather, within a single narrative many temporal modes

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Smyth, 'The Significance of Time Referents in Lydgate's Work', in *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse,* ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riaño (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003).

[40] Ad Putter, 'In Search of Lost Time: Missing Days in *Sir Cleges* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', in Humphrey and Ormrod, *Time in the Medieval World*, 119-136; Putter, 'Story Line and Story Shape in *Sir Percyvell of Gales* and Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*', in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

[41] There is an equal need for the anonymous romances to be considered on their own terms instead of in comparison with—especially—*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chaucer's works. One great shortcoming of Gross's thesis is its hierarchisation of texts: from *King Horn* as formulaic, to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as 'infus[ing]' romance formulae with 'life' and making them into 'assets', to *Troilus and Criseyde* as the romance of the three which is 'fullest with and in time' ('Time in the Towneley Cycle, *King Horn, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', 142, 236). The only anonymous romance in her study thus becomes simply a comparison point for directing praise at Chaucer's poem.

[42] Aers, 'A Whisper in the Ear'.

and structures coexist and interact, and the movements between these elements is as responsible for final effect as the identity of each element itself. Indeed, the frictions between elements may be the cause of interpretive problems, while properly understanding them may equally be the solution. Therefore, it is one goal of this thesis to examine particularly the intersections and shifts between tense, mode, narrative structures, and different cultural models of time.

Selection of Texts

I have selected texts for this study from the romances that are most obviously concerned with issues related to time, including memory, visions of the future, and the temporal features of narrative structure. In some cases, the romances which fall into this category are obvious: I am not the first to discuss the elaborate use of memory and time in *Ywain and Gawain* and its source *Yvain*.[43] In fact, I include this romance in two different chapters because it potently addresses two distinct aspects of time, both the 'pastness' of romance and autobiographical memory within romance. In other texts, time may not appear to be a central 'theme', but often has a vital function in how the romance is structured or as the medium for framing its main concerns.[44] One goal of this study is to demonstrate that, with adequate methods for reading these temporal features of structure and language, time emerges as a functional and central—if initially submerged—feature of many romances.

Structure has also formed an important criterion for selecting romances. This study focuses on those romances which structure themselves around a single individual's lifetime, because the central concern is with how the romances use time to shape individual identity. Romances examined here which evince this focus most fully, encompassing both the hero's birth and death, are *Sir Tryamour, Sir Perceval of Galles, Amis and Amiloun,* and *Le Bone Florence of Rome.* Some other romances do not begin with the hero's birth but rather *in medias res*, starting at his adulthood, but do explicitly refer to the hero's 'ending' or

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[43] Jon Whitman, 'Thinking Backward and Forward: Narrative Order and the beginnings of Romance', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 4, no. 2 (June 2006): 131-50.

[44] Whether all narratives are 'about time' in some way has been debated. Ricoeur argues that not all narratives are about time, because time is not *at stake* in all of them (*Time and Narrative,* 2:101). Currie, however, argues that in the case of novels at least, some appear not to be 'about time' only because their temporalities are so culturally accepted that they register as invisible. He argues that all novels are 'about time' in some sense (*About Time*, 4). I would say that this means that time is potentially 'at stake' even where it does not form a direct subject of the narrative.

death: these are *Ywain and Gawain, Robert of Cisyle, Sir Cleges, Sir Eglamour of Artois,* and *Sir Isumbras*. By this criterion of the individual lifetime one type of romance in particular is excluded, namely the romances where Arthur is a central figure, for example the alliterative *Morte Arthure, The Avowyng of Arthur* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure.* The reason for this is that the Arthurian romances, when dealing with identity, are freighted with more political and often communitarian concerns which differentiate them from the romances which treat of an individual's lifetime. The Arthurian romances can, in fact, also benefit from a temporal reading, but in the interest of space I have reserved my attention for the other romances which are more individually focused.[45] I prioritise these because it is the individual lifetime of these heroes (and one heroine) which makes these romances most readily translatable as exemplary models for an audience similarly concerned with the trajectory of *their* own lives. These are also the romances which most clearly articulate individual identity centred in the middling social milieu I shall discuss below, and which present central figures who align well with the information we have about romance readership.

Additionally, my selection of romances has purposefully transgressed one traditional divide, that of sacred versus secular. This is because one goal of this study is to expose these different romances equally to certain types of ethical reading, rather than prejudging their concerns based upon sources or traditional classifications. Some of the romances examined here have been generally considered religious or exemplary, for example *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, Le Bone Florence of Rome,* and *Sir Isumbras*, all of which have very clear hagiographical or moralising affiliations. Others, like *Sir Tryamour, Sir Perceval of Galles, Ywain and Gawain, Sir Cleges* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois* are generally more secular in frame of reference, and are not usually considered didactic. Choosing romances from both sides of a divide sometimes perceived in romance enables the argument that both the so-called didactic romances and those considered texts for pleasure employ similar uses of time and are attuned to the same issues. Specifically, they all foster exemplary reading, not in a narrowly defined 'didactic' sense but in the sense that all of these romances can be read as models for identity and behaviour. This is equally true of both the traditionally didactic romances, like *Robert of Cisyle*, and the

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[45] For similar reasons, I have also excluded the alliterative romances, for example the alliterative *Morte Arthure.* As Pearsall notes, the alliterative romances are distinct from the others not only in verse-form but in frame of reference and in general in their patronage: Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, Vol. 1 of *The Routledge History of English Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 156-7.

seemingly different and more secular (but not at all irreligious) *Sir Cleges*. For this reason, the uniting criterion of romance selection is the structure of the individual lifetime, rather than the nature of the text's source or its surface-level 'religious' or 'secular' concerns; how the text negotiates these dual concerns through individual lives is of more immediate relevance both to this study and to the lives of romance audiences.

Because one method of this study is to read across several romances for comparisons, these romances are selected to have overlapping manuscript contexts in some cases. Most, in the versions I use, are preserved in manuscripts dating from the late fourteenth century to the mid-fifteenth century, and congregate in a few major romance manuscripts: Cambridge, University Library, Ff. 2.38; Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91 (the Lincoln Thornton manuscript), and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 61; this implies that many of these romances, which I will read alongside one another, were in fact read together by their medieval readers.[46] These manuscripts will be discussed below.

During the course of this study, I shall allude to other romances than those which form my central concern. As I hope to show, certain temporal features are so recurrent as to be closely allied to the romance genre itself, for example the use of nostalgia I discuss in Chapter One. Other features and concerns may not be generically associated with romance, but clearly pertain to some members of the genre and suggest certain pervasive concerns of the period and audience, for example the use of the future tense I discuss in Chapter Three. Finally, I hope to provide methods of reading time in the romances which can be fruitfully carried over to other texts. Even though reading different romances through this same lens may produce different results, I hope to show that these methods of temporal reading are useful frameworks for uncovering some of the romances' core concerns.

Romance Readers and Contexts

These core concerns of romance pertain especially to the audience of a 'middling social milieu'. This is the audience which is now[47] generally agreed upon by romance

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[46] Cambridge, University Library, Ff. 2.38 contains versions of *Robert of Cisyle, Sir Eglamour of Artois, Le Bone Florence of Rome,* and *Sir Tryamour*. Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91 (the Lincoln Thornton MS) contains versions of *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and *Sir Perceval of Galles*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 61 contains *Sir Isumbras* and *Sir Cleges*. Additionally, London, British Library, Egerton MS 2862 contains a nearly-complete version of *Amis and Amiloun* and a fragment of *Sir Eglamour*.

[47] Scholarship of previous decades has sometimes emphasised a lower-class audience than more recent scholarship, and the 'minstrel theory' of composition was also associated with similar views. For examples, see: Derek Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965), 91-92,

scholars, and would include gentry and prosperous members of the mercantile class, as well as members of the lower nobility.[48] Evidence for this comes in part from the romance manuscripts, most of which are plain and suggest an audience of those who could afford books but not the lavishly illuminated volumes owned by aristocracy.[49] The chivalric values and noble central characters of romance also suggest an audience of those who consider themselves 'gentil', both in the sense of the county gentry but also including those in urban settings who represented an urban gentility.[50] These readers were interested in the upward mobility portrayed in the romances; they were also literate, reasonably well read people with the means and leisure time to own books and read them.[51] In particular, this audience represents a readership of those interested in actively defining their social and

102, 114; also Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, 146; but cf. 'The Pleasure of Popular Romance: A Prefatory Essay', in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 9-18; Gisela Guddat-Figge, 'The Audience of the Romances', in *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances* (1 München: W. Fink, 1976), 44; John Halverson, '*Havelok the Dane* and Society', *The Chaucer Review* 6, no. 1 (1971), 150; Donald Sands, *Middle English Verse Romances* (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1966), 7; Andrew Taylor, 'The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript', *Speculum* 66, no. 1 (Jan. 1991), esp. 59-60; Hudson, 'The Middle English Popular Romances', 77; Mehl, *The Middle English Romances,* 7-9, 12-13.

[48] For example: Carol M. Meale, '"Gode men / Wiues maydnes and alle men": Romance and Its Audiences', in *Readings in Medieval English Romance* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 220-1; Harriet Hudson, 'Middle English Popular Romances: The Manuscript Evidence', *Manuscripta* 28 (1984); Noel James Menuge, *Medieval English Wardship in Romance and Law* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 14-15; Raluca L. Radulescu, *The Gentry Context for Malory's* Morte Darthur (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003); Helaine Newstead, 'Romances: General', in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500. Vol. I: Romances*, ed. J. Burke Severs (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967), 11; Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), 1. I am grateful to Michael Johnston for allowing me to see the typescript of this book. Page numbers refer to the typescript.

[49] Meale, '"Gode men / Wiues maydnes and alle men"', 213-14. Meale notes that, for noble ownership of Middle English romances, Bodley 264 and Harley 326 provide the best manuscript evidence (214-15). Only four romance manuscripts have systematic illustration: these are London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero A.X; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley MS 264; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 876; and London, British Library, Harley MS 326. None of these manuscripts, it should be noted, contain the romances which form the central study here. The one other illustrated romance manuscript is the Auchinleck MS, though most of its illustrations have been cut out.

[50] Hudson, 'Middle English Popular Romances', 76-78; Hudson, 'Toward a Theory of Popular Literature: The Case of the Middle English Romances', *Journal of Popular Culture* 23, no. 3 (Winter 1989), 46; Hudson, 'Construction of Class, Family, and Gender in Some Middle English Popular Romances', in *Class and Gender in Early English Literature*, ed. Britton J. Harwood and Gillian R. Overing (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 77-78; Stephen Knight, 'The Social Function of the Middle English Romances', in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and* History, ed. David Aers (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), 101-2; Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, 43; Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 20, 150.

[51] Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 6, 12-13.

familial identities,[52] who, evidence suggests, read romances in a context of community and debate.

By gentry, which is not a medieval term,[53] I refer to the group of landowning families below the baronage but who nonetheless assumed roles in, and therefore acquired power through, local administration.[54] They seem generally to evince at least a basic degree of literacy, including amongst women.[55] They also represent a numerous and powerful social group; Catherine Carpenter's study of Warwickshire estimates that in later medieval England 60-75 percent of the land was owned by non-noble landowners, in other words the group referred to here as gentry, meaning that, although they did not hold the highest social status, as a group they practically managed most of the land in the country.[56] This group would include the Paston and Stonor families, both of whom rose through legal and administrative careers, as well as Robert Thornton, a tax collector in the North Riding

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[52] Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 1, 56, 106, 227. Johnston argues repeatedly that the gentry romances are a vehicle for the identity formation of an emergent class of middling landowners.

[53] Nigel Saul discusses this terminology and proposes alternative terms in *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 6-7.

[54] For some definitions of the gentry and their general attributes, see: K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 1973), 6, 268-78; Susan M. Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century*, Derbyshire Record Society, Vol. 8 (Chesterfield, Derbyshire Record Society, 1983), 1; Malcolm Mercer, *The Medieval Gentry: Power, Leadership and Choice During the Wars of the Roses* (London: Continuum, 2010), 11, 66; Christine Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401-1499* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 35-36, 42; Elizabeth Noble, *The World of the Stonors: A Gentry Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 18-19; Peter Coss, *The Origins of the English Gentry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11; Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London 1300-1500* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 239-42.

[55] The Paston boys were variously educated at Cambridge, Oxford and Eton, and the Paston women have enough administrative confidence to suggest a competent degree of education: see H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and Their England: Studies in an Age of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 103-110. We know that at least one male child of the Stonor family was sent away to school (Noble, *The World of the Stonors*, 43-4). Robert Thornton, well-known gentry book-owner (see below, 28-29), must have been literate: see George Keiser, 'Lincoln Cathedral Library MS. 91: Life and Milieu of the Scribe', *Studies in Bibliography* 32 (1979), 164. The Ashmole 61 collection is signed by the scribe and owner, Rate, indicating his competence both in reading and writing. On literacy, see also Thrupp, *The Merchant Class*, 161-62; M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993; first published in 1979 by Edward Arnold Ltd.; page references are to the 1993 version), 246-47, 252; Clanchy, 'Looking Back from the Invention of Printing', in *Literacy in Historical Perspective,* ed. Daniel P. Resnick (Washington: Library of Congress, 1983), 14; Carol M. Meale, ' '…all the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch': Laywomen And Their Books in Late Medieval England', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 1996), 133-4; Julia Boffey, 'Women Authors and Women's Literacy in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century England', in Meale, *Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500,* 159-82.

[56] Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 36; see also Saul, *Knights and Esquires*, 5; Christopher Dyer, 'Warwickshire Farming 1349-c. 1520', *Dugdale Society Occasional Papers*, No. 27 (Oxford: Dugdale Society, 1981), 3; Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry, 27.*

of Yorkshire and the owner and compiler of two important romance manuscripts.[57] This understanding of the gentry might also include Chaucer's Franklin, a 'householdere, and that a greet', a lover of Epicurean pleasures, who presides over his home's ever-laden table like a petty 'lord and sire'.[58]

The evidence of inventories and manuscripts for how these gentry families read romance suggests that it often took place in reading networks in which reading was often communal and books were shared. For example, a book inventory[59] for John Paston II survives from the 1470s, and, although damaged, lists a few titles which suggestively correspond to known romances. For example, the list includes a '[…] Warwyk', perhaps a version of *Guy of Warwick*, a work titled 'Kyng Richard Cure delyon', which is perhaps a romance like the *Richard Coeur de Lion* which survives, and a text called 'the Greene Knyght' which could be the text of the same title which survives in the seventeenth-century Percy Folio, or alternatively a version of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or some other, lost, romance with similar subject matter.[60] Item 16 on Lester's transcription seems to correspond with Paston's 'Grete Boke', for which a bill also survives.[61] This inventory evinces the borrowing and lending of books, for example the volume containing the 'Warwyk' and 'Richard' texts which John 'had off myn ostesse at þe George', a 'Troylus' text which passed through the hands of two other men before Paston, two books seemingly on loan to others, and one that was a gift from 'Percyvall Robsart'.[62] In a letter to John II, Thomas Danverse promises to send him Ovid's *De Arte Amandi*, further evidence of book-sharing among the Pastons and their friends; the Paston letters also include requests for books to be sent to the owners while away from home, again

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[57] H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England,* Chs. 1-2; Noble, *The World of the Stonors*, 36; Michael Johnston, 'A New Document Relating to the Life of Robert Thornton', *The Library* 8, no. 3 (2007), 308; see also Keiser, 'Lincoln Cathedral Library MS. 91'.

[58] *General Prologue* in *The Riverside Chaucer,* ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 339, 336, 341-356.

[59] G. A. Lester prints the inventory: 'The Books of a Fifteenth-Century English Gentleman, Sir John Paston', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 88 (1987), 202. The inventory can also be found in Norman Davis, ed., *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, 1976)*,* 1: 516-18.

[60] Lester, 'The Books', 202, 203-4. On the Percy Folio *The Grene Knight*, see: Douglas Gray, 'A Note on the Percy Folio *Grene Knight*', in *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004); Severs, *Handbook*, no. 26 (pp. 57-58); *The Greene Knight* and its introduction in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Gawain Romances and Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

[61] Curt F. Bühler, 'Sir John Paston's *Grete Boke*, a Fifteenth-Century "Best-Seller", *Modern Language Notes* 56 (1941), 345-6.

[62] Lester, 'The Books', 216-17; see the inventory on 202, items 1, 2, 5, 6, 8.

broadening the context and possible audience for their readership.[63] This suggests that these texts' circulation was wider than their household of ownership. Moreover, the evidence of Paston's inventory accords with C. E. Moreton's argument that families like the Pastons had meaningful interaction with others of various social positions, making it unsurprising that Paston might share a book with his 'ostesse at þe George'.[64] Another social reading network is suggested by the fifteenth-century Findern Manuscript (Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.1.6), which is known to have belonged to a Derbyshire gentry family.[65] The manuscript contains thirty different hands; there are also a number of names written after texts and in the margins, perhaps evidence of occasions when texts were enjoyed by a group together.[66] Though this is not a major romance manuscript (it contains only a single romance, *Sir Degrevant*), it provides evidence of what appears to be communal compilation and reading amongst the gentry.

Evidence suggests that, in addition to county gentry, the romances were of interest to urban merchant families as well, the 'burgeis' households of cities like London,[67] York, and Leicester.[68] Both *King Horn* and *Guy of Warwick* have been identified as romances likely aimed at a mercantile audience, and Nicole Nolan Sidhu argues for how a context of the guilds forms a productive reading environment for the moral problems of *The Clerk's*

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[63] Davis, *PL,* 2: 379-80 (No. 745); the letter is from January 1467. Nicola McDonald discusses this letter in 'Gender', in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, ed. Marion Turner (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2013), 69; Lester, 'The Books', 211-12.

[64] C. E. Moreton, 'A Social Gulf? The Upper and Lesser Gentry of Later Medieval England', *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991); see also Deborah Youngs, 'Cultural Networks', in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, ed. Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove, Manchester Medieval Studies (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), esp. 129-31.

[65] Richard Beadle and A. E. B. Owen, eds., *The Findern Manuscript: Cambridge University Library MS. Ff.1.6* (London: The Scolar Press, 1977), vii-viii; Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue,* No. 11 (pp. 90-94); Michael Johnston, '*Sir Degrevant* and the "Findern Anthology" (Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.1.6)', *Studies in Bibliography* 59 (forthcoming), 3, 19; Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry,* 150-52.

[66] Beadle and Owen, *Findern Manuscript,* xi-xii; Meale, '"Gode men / Wiues maydnes and alle men"', 222; Michael Johnston, '*Sir Degrevant* and the "Findern Anthology"', 4. Many of these hands contribute only single poems to the manuscript which are known in that copy only and may be original compositions (Beadle and Owen, *Findern Manuscript*, xii).

[67] Ralph Hanna argues that until Chaucer, London should be considered a province co-equal with other urban centres in literary output: *London Literature, 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2-3; Hanna, 'Reconsidering the Auchnleck Manuscript', in *New Directions in later Medieval Manuscript Studies*, ed. Derek Pearsall (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), 9.

[68] Meale, '"Gode men / Wiues maydnes and alle men"', 217-20; Maryanne Kowaleski and P. J. P. Goldberg, eds. *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See especially the essays by Felicity Riddy, '"Burgeis" Domesticity in Late-Medieval England'; P. J. P. Goldberg, 'The Fashioning of Bourgeois Domesticity in Later Medieval England from a Material Culture Perspective'; and Jane Grenville, 'Urban and Rural Houses and Households in the Late Middle Ages'.

Tale.[69] These urban families share the gentry interest in upward mobility, as reflected in Chaucer's descriptions of the urban craftsmen in the *Canterbury Tales*. The social climbing of the burgess's wives intimates the negative light in which urban upward mobility has been viewed, both by medieval clerical discourse and occasionally by modern scholars.[70] At the same time, the burgesses clearly take themselves seriously as a respectable group of amicable peers, 'a greet fraternitee' whose natural environment is the guildhall, with fine clothes and accessories and clear positions in line for roles in urban administration.[71] These various characterisations of the urban merchants suggest them as an audience likely to identify with the romances' concerns with family, social identity, and individual advancement.

There are three manuscripts which have immediate relevance to this study, one of which belongs to a gentry owner, Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 91, and two of which are linked to Leicestershire and are likely to have been owned by urban families: Cambridge, University Library, Ff.2.38 and Ashmole 61.[72] Aside from providing more concrete evidence of readership by linking physical texts with their medieval owners or at least regions, these manuscripts are important for presenting the literary contexts in which the romances were read. Typically, this is a context of other romances and an assortment of religious texts or moral narratives.

Two romances in this study are taken from Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 91, or the Lincoln Thornton: *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, and *Sir Perceval of Galles*, the latter of which appears here in its only surviving English version.[73] The manuscript's owner, Robert Thornton, is known to have compiled and owned this and one other romance manuscript (London, British Library, MS Additional 31042). The Lincoln Thornton is a collection which preserves romances amongst many other texts, including many liturgical texts in

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[69] Rosamund Allen, 'The Date and Provenance of *King Horn*: Some Interim Reassessments', in *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy, Ronald Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1988), 121-25; Robert Rouse, 'Walking (between) the Lines: Romance as Itinerary/Map', in Purdie and Cichon, *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, 144-7; Nicole Nolan Sidhu, 'Weeping for the Virtuous Wife: Laymen, Affective Piety and Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale"', in Kowaleski and Goldberg, *Medieval Domesticity*.

[70] *General Prologue* in Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 374-8; Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', 91-2; Riddy, '"Burgeis" Domesticity', 19-20.

[71] Riddy, '"Burgeis" Domesticity', 19-20; *General Prologue* in Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 364, 366-72.

[72] Michael Johnston, 'Two Leicestershire Romance Codices: Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.2.38 and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61', *Journal of the Early Book Society* 15 (2012), 85-100. Johnston argues that these manuscripts are linked to each other through dialect and paper source.

[73] Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue,* No. 27 (pp. 135-42).

Latin, and its likely scribe and owner is an example of the 'middling gentry'.[74] Thornton had close contact with local magnates and a role in administration as a tax collector, as well as possibly participating in some local litigation, and suspected of involvement in some kind of political unrest against the Crown.[75] He therefore represents the particular position of gentry readers of romance, having a degree of local authority but also being subject to other authorities above him, and therefore in a position to negotiate a number of roles and relationships. He also had access to social networks which provided him with sources for his texts, again reinforcing the impression of gentry audiences as part of a community of interacting readers.[76]

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 61 represents the manuscript of a more urban audience.[77] This manuscript provides two romances studied here, *Sir Isumbras* and *Sir Cleges*. The manuscript contains many scribal signatures by 'Rate', and on the basis of this, the Leicestershire dialect, and the fish and flower decoration, Lynne Blanchfield proposes that the manuscript's owner was connected with the Corpus Christi Guild in Leicester.[78] The book, quite likely, would have belonged to an urban 'burgeis' household, and its contents reflect a variety of reading materials with both a spiritual and pragmatic appeal: saintly legends, advice poems, devotional poems, and exemplary stories in addition to romances. A similar manuscript is CUL Ff.2.38, which also contains a selection of devotional works, catechetical works, exemplary stories and, at the end, a selection of romances.[79] Among its romances are four which are studied here:[80] *Sir Eglamour of Artois,*

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[74] Keiser, 'Lincoln Cathedral Library MS. 91', 177, 160-64; Michael Johnston, 'A New Document', 305-7.

[75] Michael Johnston, 'A New Document', 307, 308-9, 312; Keiser, 'Lincoln Cathedral Library MS. 91', 162-3.

[76] Keiser, 'Lincoln Cathedral Library MS. 91', 165-76.

[77] Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue*, No. 70 (pp. 249-52).

[78] Blanchfield, 'An Idiosyncratic Scribe', 5-6, 146-61, 159-60; George Shuffelton, introduction to *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Middle English Popular Verse*, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), 4-5.

[79] Frances McSparran, 'Literary and Historical Significance of the Manuscript' in the introduction to *Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38*, ed. Frances McSparran and and P. R. Robinson (London: Scolar Press, 1979), vii-xii; Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue*, No. 12 (pp. 94-9).

[80] *Sir Tryamour* and *Le Bone Florence of Rome* are studied here in their CUL Ff.2.38 versions. *Sir Eglamour of Artois* is studied in its Lincoln Thornton version, as noted above. *Robert of Cisyle* will be studied in the edition by Edward E. Foster, which uses the Vernon Manuscript as a base text: *Amis and Amiloun,* TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, 2nd ed. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997, 2007).

Sir Tryamour, Le Bone Florence of Rome, and *Robert of Cisyle*.[81] It is an undecorated book, and the variety of material, all in English, suggests that the book was for both enjoyment and education in a lay bourgeois household of the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.[82] Although this book groups romances at the end, suggesting that its compilers recognised romance as generically distinct from the other material, as with Ashmole 61 the book's varied contents are a reminder of the readers' wide interests and reading capabilities. In fact, all three manuscripts noted here—the Thornton, Ashmole and CUL manuscripts—suggest an audience with generic awareness and the ability to read different kinds of texts, an audience 'literate' in the more expansive sense. Moreover, the presence of multiple genres in these manuscripts, not always differentiated into sections, requires an active response in determining how a given text is to be read. It may even suggest, as I shall explore below, that our own tendency to ascribe vastly different modes of reading to 'spiritual' versus 'secular' texts may force a differentiation which the manuscripts do not.

These manuscripts also return us to the readers themselves, the range of material suggesting that these books met a variety of needs and were used by a whole household and possibly wider social network of readers. In the household, very likely they would have been read by, or heard by, many different ages and by both sexes. As we know from studies of the medieval bourgeois household, it also would have included non-kin members of equal rank or of peasant background, those who lived with the family as servants or apprentices.[83] The same would be true of a gentry household, as the history of the Paston family shows: a household would include wards (like Stephen Scrope, the ward of the Pastons' friend Sir John Fastolf), household retainers like Richard Calle (who had enough interaction with the family to fall in love with Margery), or children sent from other families to be educated, as was common practice and as happened to John Paston III, who was placed in the household of the Duke of Norfolk.[84]

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[81] Although the generic identity of *Robert of Cisyle* as a romance (rather than a saint's legend or exemplum) is subject to debate, in this manuscript it appears along with the other romances with nothing to suggest that it is out of place among them.

[82] McSparran and Robinson, *CUL MS Ff.2.38,* vii, xvi-xvii; Felicity Riddy, 'Temporary Virginity and the Everyday Body: *Le Bone Florence of Rome* and Bourgeois Self-Making', in McDonald, *Pulp Fictions*, 200-1.

[83] Riddy, '"Burgeis" Domesticity in Late-Medieval England', 14-36; Grenville, 'Urban and Rural Houses and Households in the Late Middle Ages'; P. J. P. Goldberg, 'The Fashioning of Bourgeois Domesticity in Later Medieval England', 136.

[84] H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and Their England*, 75, 42-46, 83; Susan M. Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, 51-53.

The reading scenario in which these audiences encountered the romances might have been private reading, but in fact there is more evidence for social reading scenarios, such as the Findern manuscript mentioned above. Such a social situation is also described in 'The Lament for Sir John Berkeley', a poem which Turville-Petre found written on the back of a document from 1395. Berkeley is described as a 'householder' (39) who enjoyed fine entertainments (much like Chaucer's Franklin), including:

> '[…] Daliance of damisels to drive away þo day,
> To rede him oright romance were redi on array.' (43-44)[85]

Here, it seems that the gentry householder enjoys hearing romances read aloud to him by ladies.[86]

This setup provides the forum for what Helen Cooper argues was the usual mode of reception for the romances, 'engaged reception'.[87] Cooper proposes that the meaning of the romances to their medieval readers would have been construed in the context of discussion and debate, a format which was important to medieval academic culture as well as in chivalric culture.[88] I have argued elsewhere that the English texts translated by John Trevisa suggest that at least one fourteenth-century noble reader desired equipping to participate in academic debates.[89] However, there is also a debate culture centring around love in the *demandes d'amour* tradition, which has Continental popularity but for which one manuscript in English survives, titled 'Demaundes off Love' and dated 1487 in the manuscript.[90] The text provides questions and answers, some theoretical about the nature of worship, largesse and courtesy, and some hypothetical about preposterous love triangles

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[85] The poem is printed in Thorlac Turville-Petre, 'The Lament for Sir John Berkeley', *Speculum* 57, no. 2 (1982), 336-38.

[86] John Ivor Carlson suggests that this is the context for which Thornton copied his texts, based on changes made to sources which facilitate spoken delivery: 'Scribal Intentions in Medieval Romance: A Case Study of Robert Thornton', *Studies in Bibliography* 58 (2007-2008), esp. 65.

[87] Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, 13.

[88] Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, 13.

[89] Jennifer Barton, 'Instruction and Information in the Works of John Trevisa', *Marginalia* 9 (2009), http://www.marginalia.co.uk/journal/09education/barton.php.

[90] W. L. Braekman, ed., *The 'Demaundes off Love'*, Scripta 7: Mediaeval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Brussels, Omirel: 1982), 7, 11-13; Nicola McDonald, 'Games Medieval Women Play', in The Legend of Good Women: *Context and Reception*, ed. Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 190-93; for a study of a similar topic, see McDonald, 'Fragments of (*Have Your) Desire*: Brome Women at Play', in Kowaleski and Goldberg, *Medieval Domesticity*.

and other lovers' situations.[91] The text's editor proposes that, although answers are given to the questions in the text, evidence suggests that the questions could have been used in a game in which participants, like the speakers in the text, were required to rationalise their own answers to questions which clearly have no obvious 'right' answer.[92] Indeed, Cooper suggests that Chaucer's Knight in fact invites his hearers to just such a debate about whether Arcite or Palamoun has the better fate: 'Yow loveres axe I now this questioun: / Who hath the worse, Arcite or Palamoun?'[93] This is precisely the type of question the 'Demandes off Love' presents.[94] Though it might seem an idle question to consider, in fact choosing to 'side' with one knight or the other approaches the larger issue of justice in the poem. Moreover, as Nicola McDonald suggests, such games could have formed the context for forming marriage relationships as well as for players (women particularly in her study) to use the 'empty forms' of the games' text to voice their own amorous and sexual desires.[95] Nor are the 'Demaundes' alone in this function, for other game texts, like *Ragemon le Bon,* suggest a similar role in fostering participatory chamber entertainment.[96] This illuminates the way in which the 'hypothetical' debates given in texts like the 'Demaundes', instigated by Chaucer's Knight, and clearly possible in the reception of the romances, easily transition from talking *about* a topic to voicing one's own identity. In other words, the debate culture of 'engaged reception' provides a context in which romances can be seen as the vehicles for multiple, situational, and personally articulated responses, and function as a medium for readers to shape individual and social identities.

This thesis will assume that any romance was potentially read aloud to an audience who would have been prepared to debate such questions 'to drive away þo day' as Sir John Berkeley did. This of course means that the perspectives on each romance might have differed, just as indeed the question of Chaucer's Knight already assumes and fosters such difference. It also means that the romances, through social reading and conversation, could

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[91] Braekman, *'Demaundes off Love'*, 15; for different types of question, see, for example, sections 2.33-35, 2.20, 2.28.

[92] Braekman, *'Demaundes off Love'*, 14-15.

[93] *The Knight's Tale* in Benson, *The Canterbury Tales,* 1347-8.

[94] One scenario in the 'Demandes' is particularly reminiscent of *The Knight's Tale*, namely one in which the questioner asks which is better: to see a lady often but be unsure of her love, or to be sure of her love but see her rarely because one is 'in a toure' (Braekman, *'Demaundes off Love',* 1.9).

[95] McDonald, 'Games Medieval Women Play', 185-87, 196-97.

[96] Other examples of game texts, especially those in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 86 and London, British Library, Harley 2253, are discussed by Peter Coss in *The Foundations of Gentry Life: The Multons of Frampton and their World, 1270-1370* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 230-256.

readily be rendered available for a negotiated and 'contemporary' practical application—of whatever sort—to the lives of their medieval hearers and readers. This particular potential for applicability will form the final part of this introduction.

Romance Exemplarity

It is necessary, in making any assessment of the cultural work which the romances perform, to have a functioning model for how readers would have understood the translation from text to practical, individual experience. That is, how did the readers of medieval romance assess the relationship of their own personal lives, and their own society, to the romances they read? In romance studies, the answer to this question has usually centred around the dichotomy of pleasure and instruction, the 'teach and delight' mandate which has its root in Classical thought and which medieval theorists absorbed and debated.[97] Many modern scholars thus approach the issue of romance 'application' through either pleasure or edification. Those who argue that the cultural work of romance is achieved through pleasure tend to focus on romance as fantasy, as wish-fulfilment, as a commodity, or take psychological approaches. On the other side of the debate, scholars who argue that a romance's cultural work is achieved through moral edification tend to focus on reading patterns of saintly life, character growth, or exemplary and didactic rhetoric. These didactic readings of romance, at first glance, are the best way of making sense of those romances which either overtly declare an exemplary purpose, or suggest it by their hagiographic sources or moral rhetoric.[98] However, as I will discuss below, the concept of romance didacticism is a problematic one, not because the romances do not teach (indeed, they do so in many and profound ways), but because the criticism

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[97] For a discussion of the medieval debates on this topic and their sources, see Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), Ch. 1.

[98] *Sir Tryamour* explicitly claims to be an 'ensaumpull' (10). Both *Le Bone Florence of Rome* (2176-81) and *Robert of Cisyle* include an overt moralisation (438-40). *Sir Cleges*, *Sir Isumbras* and *Robert of Cisyle* all use the language of 'pride' in the downfall of their heroes. In addition, most descriptions of romance heroes use superlative language and hence imply a moral evaluation. See *Sir Tryamour* in Harriet Hudson, ed., *Four Middle English Romances: Sir Isumbras, Octavian, Sir Eglamour of Artois, Sir Tryamour,* TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, 2nd ed. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006); Carol Falvo Heffernan, ed., *Le Bone Florence of Rome,* Old and Middle English Texts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979); *Robert of Cisyle* in Foster, *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle and Sir Amadace*; *Octavian* in Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances,*16-21; *King Horn* in Sands, *Middle English Verse Romances,* 19-20; MacEdward Leach, ed., *Amis and Amiloun*, E.E.T.S. o.s. 203 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937, 1960), 2506-8; Edith Rickert, ed., *The Romance of Emaré: Re-edited from the MS., with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary,* E.E.T.S. o.s. 99 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908, 1958), 37-42; Frances E. Richardson, ed., *Sir Eglamour of Artois,* E.E.T.S. o.s. 256 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965)*,* 7-12.

surrounding romance didacticism has tended to polarise it from romance pleasure, or to understand didactic narrative in ways that are too simplistic to enable a nuanced critical reception. After a summary of some of the scholarly discussions of didacticism, I shall argue that we need to replace the discourse of didacticism in romance criticism with the discourse of exemplarity, or ethical reading.

The first problem with the critical discussions of romance as didactic, as noted above, is the tendency to dissociate didacticism from pleasure. This is most evident in the criticism from the 1950s to the 1980s. In general, critics from this period tend to debate the primary goals of romance in terms of pleasure and didacticism. These goals are often seen to be at odds with one another, as evinced by the various debates which centre around determining which of these purposes—to delight or instruct—predominates in a given romance or group of romances, or even the genre as a whole. Early in the twentieth century, Laura Hibbard Loomis (1924) divides the romances into three groups, the third of which is 'Romances of Trial and Faith', a division which assumes and enforces the view that a romance can be identified by a single uppermost mode, for example edification.[99] Dorothy Everett, in 1955, concludes that in the romance genre pleasure always predominates as a goal over didacticism, and Donald Sands in 1966 agrees.[100] Just over a decade later, Derek Pearsall (1968) confronts the debate without making such a sweeping categorisation of the genre, but his discussion not only assumes the same dichotomy of pleasure versus teaching, but pairs it with the implicit assumption that a didactic romance can never be as interesting or literary as one which is directed towards other purposes. Thus, he describes the morally puzzling romance *Amis and Amiloun* as one 'never burdened by its didactic theme', in one fell swoop classing the romance as didactic—which is hard to deny, given its saintly models and religious imagery—but 'salvaging' it for serious literary study by assuring us that this didacticism isn't as detrimental to the story as it might be.[101] Pearsall's article is fascinating for its thick texture of unspoken assumptions, one of which is that the popular, including the pleasurable and the didactic, is at odds with the literary and sophisticated. This assumption means that admitting any didactic element in a romance immediately

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[99] Laura A. Hibbard Loomis, *Mediæval Romance in England: A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclic Metrical Romances,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1926-1959; first published 1924), vii; see also Maldwyn Mills, ed., *Six Middle English Romances* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1973), vii.

[100] Dorothy Everett, *Essays on Middle English Literature,* ed. Patricia Kean (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955, 1959), 15; Sands, *Middle English Verse Romances*, 1.

[101] Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', 109.

disqualifies it from any capacity for nuanced meaning. In a recent essay, Pearsall moderates many of his earlier opinions to offer a more congenial view of romance, but does so, interestingly, not by establishing new terms for judgment but by emphasising the other side of the dichotomy, 'the pleasure of popular romance'.[102] In other words, mid-twentieth-century scholars carry on a debate over the teach-or-delight dichotomy, while considering it largely a dichotomy, and assuming that in a given romance one goal will usually predominate over the other, or even at the expense of the other. This approach, it seems to me, not only forestalls the question of whether pleasure and teaching might be co-operative (as indeed medieval rhetoricians considered them to be),[103] but does so by avoiding one obvious feature of the romances, that they often claim to teach while simultaneously being shaped to feed a number of pleasures.

In later romance criticism, critics often continue to focus on pleasure and teaching as being different or opposing goals. Thirty years after Dorothy Everett's claim that the romances privilege pleasure, Edmund Reiss (1985) says the opposite, that the romances may be entertaining but are basically didactic, and W. R. J. Barron (1987) echoes this position by stating that the characters of romance exist 'in the service of [the romance's] didactic purpose'.[104] However, though this sense of dichotomy persists, later critics are more comfortable with discussing the didactic purposes of romance without viewing these as reasons to exempt the romances from serious study. For example, Matthew Woodcock (2006) discusses Isumbras and Guy as romance heroes whose saint-like lives illustrate the need to integrate both secular heroes' lives and the didactic message of saints' lives.[105] Andrea Hopkins provides a book-length study of the penitential romances in a clear indication that unashamedly didactic romances are nonetheless worthy of extended study (1990).[106]

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[102] Pearsall, 'The Pleasure of Popular Romance', 9-18.

[103] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 60, 257; see also the discussion of the use of pleasure in teaching by Richard de Bury in his *Philobiblon*, in *The Love of Books: The* Phlobiblion *of Richard De Bury,* trans. E.C. Thomas (London: The De La More Press, 1902), 83-87, also repr. in Robert P. Miller, ed., *Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 74-76.

[104] Reiss, 'Romance', in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England,* ed. Thomas J. Heffernan, Tennessee Studies in Literature 28 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 115; W. R. J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance,* Longman Literature in English Series (London: Longman, 1987), 5.

[105] Matthew Woodcock, 'Crossovers and the Afterlife', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography,* ed. Sarah Salih (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 149.

[106] *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

These scholars' efforts accept that 'the didactic' in romance is worthy of serious investigation, but this brings us to the second problem I mentioned above, namely the inherent limitation of the concept of 'didacticism'. This is presumably because of its repeated use in certain ways over years of criticism. For one thing, taking a didactic approach tends to convert narratives into universal injunctions, reading a one-to-one correspondence of an 'example' to the moral mandate, in the form of a universal: one should perform penance, one should pray to God for help, one should not be proud.[107] The overt moralisations of romance narrators themselves often foster just such universalising interpretations; as Mitchell observes, though in his opinion 'medieval examples do *not* solicit static generalities', nonetheless '*they constantly seem to*' (emphases mine).[108] For another thing, 'didacticism' or an exemplary narrative still seems to require apology by critics on behalf of the medieval writers and readers who thought that this was an acceptable literary mode.[109] Finally, the 'didactic' functions of medieval texts can also become entangled with ideas of coercion, so that didacticism in narrative is seen as a force for manipulating a passive reader or preserving hegemonic power.[110] Stephen Knight, though not directly discussing the didactic aspect of the romances, summarises this view well when he sees the 'social function' of many of them as being to '[validate] the practices of the feudally powerful, and [persuade] the non-powerful of the authenticity of the whole imaginary'.[111]

In summary, the critical discussions of romance's social relevance, moralisation, or exemplarity are often hampered by the assumptions and terms of the discourse of didacticism. Even describing romances as 'moral' or 'instructional' or 'edifying'—other

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[107] Andrea Hopkins's analyses can tend in this direction, for example her consideration of Sir Gowther as a penitent (*The Sinful Knights,* 170, 173-74). See also Dieter Mehl's interpretation of *Sir Isumbras* (*The Middle English Romances*, 129).

[108] J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (Cambridge: D. S. Brwer, 2004)*,* 1. For examples from the romances, see n. 98, above.

[109] Mehl's comment on *Emaré,* which he deems to be organised around a moral rather than for entertainment, is a good example: he urges his readers not to judge the romance just because it is meant for contemplation and devotion (*Middle English Romances*, 138-9). See also J. A. Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland and the* Gawain *Poet* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 83; Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', 109.

[110] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative,* 1; Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry*, 83; Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 20 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 29.

[111] 'The Social Function of the Middle English Romances', 103.

terms which might suggest themselves—can have a similar effect to classifying them as 'didactic'.

I propose that, in lieu of the discourse of didacticism in relation to romance, the discourse of exemplarity or 'ethical reading' provides a better model for understanding how these texts might have practical relation to the lives of their readers, and for how medieval readers themselves would have understood that relation. Recent studies by Scanlon and Mitchell, as well as Carruthers' study of the role of memory in ethics, have made it clear that overtly exemplary medieval texts (such as *Handlyng Synne*) are not the only ones which may invite 'exemplary' readings.[112] Many 'secular' narratives, like the romances, are available to be read ethically, and Mitchell applies his theory of ethical reading to *The Clerk's Tale*, which is a romance.[113] These scholars all urge that a text's potential to pose an example for behaviour is best understood not as a static property of the text, but as a result of a certain ethical reading process; John Dagenais argues that this ethical reading is in fact the predominant mode of reading in the Middle Ages.[114] These new studies of medieval ethical reading, or the discourse of exemplarity (as opposed to the discourse of didacticism), provide the most fruitful means for appreciating the romances' varied applications to the lives of their readers.[115]

J. Allan Mitchell approaches the topic of exemplarity in medieval texts by explaining that reading narratives 'ethically' is a process involving a reader's moral judgment engaging with the examples given in a narrative. This method of reading is what medieval exegetes would call the tropological response, or reading with a view to recognising what action to take; in other words, reading a text for its pertinence to the world of action.[116] In the Middle Ages, the main approach to ethical reading was derived from the moral casuistry of Aristotelian ethics, which took a case-based approach to ethics. This approach is distinct from 'categorical ethics', and seeks to build guides for action out

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[112] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative*; Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*; Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, esp. Ch. 5.

[113] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative*, Ch. 7.

[114] *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the* Libro de Buen Amor (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), xvii.

[115] For another endorsement of the plurality of ethical responses to romance, see Melissa Furrow, *Expectations of Romance: The Reception of a Genre in Medieval England*, Studies in Medieval Romance (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2009), e.g. 175-76.

[116] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative*, 14.

of an array of specific cases.[117] The movement of logic in casuistic ethics is 'upward' in this sense, from specific cases to more general principles, but also continually allows for a return back down into the specific case as a point of comparison or as a point for enacting a moral principle.[118] In other words, as Mitchell says, 'Reading for the moral describes the *narrative* (as opposed to strictly *normative*) ethics exemplarity promotes […].'[119] Ethical reading continually locates moral relevance in the specific narrative case. Thus, medieval exemplary narratives of any sort—including romances—should be seen not as avenues leading to sterile and categorical 'morals',[120] but as individual cases which can be fruitfully compared to others or drawn upon for guidance according to a particular situation.

The reader is an active agent in this process, not only as the one whose conscience judges the cases presented in the narrative, but as the one who effects the translation of the exemplum into the world of action.[121] John Dagenais has argued that medieval readers in general did not read texts as self-enclosed, but rather as a world of human action 'co-extensive with their own'.[122] In other words, any narrative was available to be exemplary to a reader prepared to see it as one; ethical reading is not confined to texts which proclaim themselves to be exemplary, or which seem 'didactic' to critics. Mary Carruthers' study on medieval memory makes it clear why this is: a well-trained memory would be supplied with examples from books and was the foundation of prudence, which evaluates remembered examples and makes decisions about what action to take in present situations.[123] Both Aquinas and his source, Cicero, see prudence as a faculty which judges between good and bad and guides action.[124] Prudence is developed through the accumulation of examples in the memory, and operates by judging a present situation in

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[117] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative,* 5.

[118] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative,* 24, 27; William Lyon Benoit, 'Aristotle's Example: The Rhetorical Induction', *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980), 188; see also Richard B. Miller, *Casuistry and Modern Ethics: A Poetics of Practical Reasoning* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 21.

[119] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative,* 4.

[120] Cf. Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries,* trans. F. Hopman (London: Penguin Books, 2001; first published 1924 by Edward Arnold), 223.

[121] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative,* 17, 76.

[122] Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading,* xvii, 8, 217-18.

[123] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* esp. Chs. 1 and 5.

[124] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* 65-7, 69.

light of these examples.[125] This is why, Carruthers observes, moral decisions in medieval texts are often accompanied by 'fragments' from memory, exempla which form the basis for the decision: as examples, she cites Chaucer's Dorigen in *The Franklin's Tale* and Abelard's Heloise.[126] Although an example might be linked to a specific occasion via the expression of a maxim, such as 'a sinner should perform penance', the real *function* of this categorical maxim is simply to allow examples to be usefully grouped by topic and thus useful for an occasion.[127] For Dorigen, a host of 'ensamples' serve to reassure her that 'many a noble wyf er this / And many a mayde' have killed themselves rather than 'with hir body doon trespas'.[128] In memorial terms, the moral norm (e.g. the example of female chastity) functions simply as a useful category under which to group similar cases, and a given example might fall under multiple categories.[129] The logical movement is not from moral norm to specific case, but between specific cases, from Dorigen's situation to the situations of the women she remembers, mediated by the statement of a norm. This means that the categorical norm, of which common examples from romance might be headed by concepts as 'penance', 'humility', 'pride', and 'doughtiness', does not delimit a reading of a particular example, but simply represents one possible subject classification under which to group given narratives in memory. Ethical reading does not require us to say that *Sir Isumbras* only teaches that knights should not be proud and should perform penance. Rather, *Isumbras* provides examples of pride and penance, among other things; a certain ethical reading might translate these into injunctions, 'do not be proud', but this is by no means the only ethical reading available, as I hope to show in Chapter Four. And, in the context of the 'engaged reception' I described above for the romances, *Sir Isumbras* might seem relevant in many different ways at once to a group of medieval readers of differing sexes, ages, household and social roles, and particular circumstances.

The implications of ethical reading for Middle English romance are that, regardless of whether the romances announce themselves to be exemplary (though some do), it is legitimate to read them through this particular ethical lens. That is, to consider the ways in which a romance might have relevance to its medieval audience, one approach is to 'read

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[125] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* 66-7.

[126] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* 179-81.

[127] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* 181.

[128] *The Franklin's Tale* in Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1419, 1364-66; her rehearsal of examples is 1367-1456.

[129] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* 181.

for the moral'.[130] As I have emphasised, this is not the reductive reading of a romance as didactic in a single way or the classification of certain romances (but not others) as having a particular goal of teaching. Rather, it is an appreciation of the many ethical categories to which a romance might belong, and the copious morals it can offer according to situation and audience. As Mitchell argues in his analysis of *The Clerk's Tale*, it is quite possible for a romance to be read ethically and to be 'polyvalent' in meaning.[131] The discourse of exemplarity has several particular benefits for medieval romance criticism. First, it avoids the teach/delight dichotomy and allows critical assessments to move beyond classifying romances on this scale and focus, among other things, on how pleasure and practical purpose might be co-operative in a genre that so clearly aims at both. Second, the discourse of exemplarity relies on a theory of ethical reading practices, which shift the focus from the text as a static and enshrined object and towards a fuller appreciation of the text in its dynamic relationship with the reader and its translation into the world of practical experience.

I would like to conclude this discussion of romance exemplarity with two examples, from romance, of readers who read for the moral. The first example is from Gower's *Confessio Amantis* where Amans explains how reading the romance *Ydoine and Amadas* consoles him in his misery:

> […] Min Ere with a good pittance
> Is fedd of redinge of romance
> Of Ydoine and of Amadas,
> That whilom weren in mi cas,
> And eke of othre many a score,
> That loveden longe er I was bore.
> For whan I of here loves rede,
> Min Ere with the tale I fede;
> And with the lust of here histoire
> Somtime I drawe into memoire
> Hou sorwe mai noght evere laste;
> And so comth hope in ate laste,
> When I non other fode knowe. (Book 6, 877-89)[132]

Notice how Amans uses the language of the 'case' or particular situation, describing Ydoine and Amadas as those who 'whilom weren in mi cas', thereby linking their case

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[130] Cf. Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative*, 4.

[131] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative*, Ch. 7.

[132] G. C. Macaulay, ed., *The English Works of John Gower*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900-1901), vol. 2.

with his. By the activity of memory, Amans extracts from the romance what can only be described as 'the moral': 'Hou sorwe mai noght evere laste' (887). This is done with the explicit purpose of supplying himself with some practical help, 'hope' for his own situation. It is a 'moral' which does not only supply a course of action (patience in the face of suffering) but also the understanding and attitude which permit this action. It is not, in this sense, a moral which coerces an unintelligent reader into blind response; it is a moral derived (in speech, 'engaged reception') by the reader himself, leading to action via a new understanding. Thus, Amans in this short passage engages in exactly the kind of ethical reading of romance that I have described.[133]

Interestingly, the romance which Amans finds so useful receives another ethical 'reading' in another romance, *Emaré*. In that romance, 'Ydoyne and Amadas' are portrayed as one of the four sets of lovers on the elaborate cloak worn by the heroine (122). I agree with Elizabeth Scala that the embroidery should be seen as a 'text' analogous to a manuscript miscellany, and the characters' encounter with it thus represents a kind of reading.[134] The cloak has some connection to the next event, which is that Emaré's father develops an incestuous lust for her, though interpretations of this episode differ widely.[135] However, I think the image-embroidered cloak provides the visual cue for the emperor's memories of the romance stories it portrays, and that his desire for his daughter reflects an

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[133] For a similar reading of this passage in *Confessio Amantis*, see Furrow, *Expectations of Romance*, 158-60.

[134] 'The Texture of Emaré', *Philological Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2006), 226-32.

[135] Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury quote various interpretations in the introduction to their edition of the text in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 149-50. See also: Nicholas Perkins, 'Ekphrasis and Narrative in *Emaré* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*', in Purdie and Cichon, *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, 59; *Emaré* in Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, eds., *Middle English Metrical Romances*, vol. 1 (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1964), note to line 168 (p. 428); Mortimer J. Donovan, 'Middle English *Emaré* and the Cloth Worthily Wrought', in *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, ed. Larry D. Benson, Harvard English Studies 5 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), 339-41; Marijane Osborn, *Romancing the Goddess: Three Middle English Romances about Women* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 205 and the footnotes to the poem on 258-9, notes to lines 79-187; Margaret Robson, 'Cloaking Desire: Re-Reading *Emaré*', in *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), 67; Mills, *Six Middle English Romances,* 197-8, note to lines 83-168; Mehl, *Middle English Romances,* 139; Amanda Hopkins, 'Veiling the Text: The True Role of the Cloth in *Emaré*', in *Medieval Insular Romance*, ed. Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 81-82; Ross G. Arthur, 'Emaré's Cloak and Audience Response', in *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature,* ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989); Anne Savage, 'Clothing Paternal Incest in *The Clerk's Tale, Émaré* and the *Life of St Dympna*', in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy,* ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts 3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000).

ethical application of 'reading' the romances as exempla.[136] The emperor models himself upon the romance heroes, defined (in his reading as well as in the cloak's images themselves) by their amorous desires for the heroines. Obviously, this 'reading' of the romance is substantially different from the one Amans gives, which underscores the point that the romance *Amadas and Ydoine,* now known only in an Anglo-Norman version (if this is the one referred to), is not limited to a single moral. Without even knowing precisely which romance is referred to, it is clear that Amans and Artyus derive two vastly different interpretations from it; Amans takes it as a comfort and consolation, in a sense as an encouragement to remain submissive in his situation, Artyus as the opposite, a prompt not towards inertia but towards (un)ethical action.

It might be objected that there is no proof that these 'readers' are reading the same romance, as it is possible that two romances existed under that title with different plots. However, even allowing for this, I would reiterate that Amans and Artyus both 'read' the romances in question not only in vastly different kinds of ways, as described above, but also in ways that do not correspond to the kinds of moralisations that a didactic analysis might suggest. They do not conclude that they should be generous or avoid pride, or undertake penance, nor that they should attempt a reconciliation of the chivalric and the religious life—all 'moralisations' which may readily be found in romance criticism.[137] Rather, they see romance 'cases' as parallel to their own in unique ways according to their specific needs and desires. They also take from the romances both a form of 'pleasure' (consolation or erotic stimulation) and equally a form of exemplary 'teaching' towards an attitude or action (patience or sexual pursuit).

The importance of an ethical reading model to this study is that the romances' temporal negotiations feed and work alongside exemplary reading. The romances use both temporality and exemplarity to forge a relationship with their readers. Ethical reading,

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[136] The description of the cloak echoes the kinds of 'memory images' of medieval academic texts, which are used to fix all kinds of information in the memory (e.g. Carruthrs, *The Book of Memory*, 221-22, 230-42, 248-49).

[137] For a discussion of pride and 'God's works' in *Sir Isumbras,* see Ann Dobyns, 'Exemplars of Chivalry: Rhetoric and Ethics in Middle English Romance', in *Romance and Rhetoric: Essays in Honour of Dhira B. Mahoney*, ed. Georgiana Donavin and Anita Obermeier, Disputatio 19 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 27-29. Also see Andrea Hopkins' account of the same romance, including a consideration of Isumbras' generosity as in fact a vice (*The Sinful Knights,* 132-3). For a reading of several romances as examples of penance undertaken, Hopkins' whole book is relevant; for a discussion of the working out of love/marriage and chivalric values in *Ywain and Gawain*, see John Finlayson, '*Ywain and Gawain* and the Meaning of Adventure', *Anglia* 87 (1969).

moreover, itself embodies a certain view of time, namely a 'presentist' approach which sees the past as a source of visionary solutions to present issues and models for personal identities.[138] Moreover, temporality shares exemplarity's concern with identity, for scholarship on memory and desire (past and future) indicates how temporal orientations shape identity.[139] Thus, exemplarity and temporality work together to address and shape the audience. The interrogation and thinking required to complete an ethical reading are mirrored in the texts themselves as they 'think through' the complexities of existence in time, equipping their gentry and bourgeois medieval readers to confront the transformations effected by time in their own lives.

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[138] For the term 'presenist', see Utz, 'Coming to Terms', 104; for a view of this in medieval reading practice, see Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading,* xvii.

[139] One of the early connections between identity and time is Augustine's meditation in Book 11 of the *Confessions,* where the discussion of the nature of time is interspersed with personal meditations on the implications of time for individual existence and relationship to God. The use of memory in the formation of identity is foundationally discussed by Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*; see also Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), Ch. 2 and Ch. 5; Susan A. Crane, 'Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory', *American Historical Review*, 102, no. 5 (1997). In medieval studies, examples of studies of memory and identity include: Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* Ch. 2, esp. 61, and 181; Carruthers, 'Meditations on the "Historical Present"', 137-155; Sarah Foot, 'Remembering, Forgetting and Inventing: Attitudes to the Past in England at the End of the First Viking Age', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 6th ser., Vol. 9 (1999), 185-200; Heng, *Empires of Magic*; Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, esp. 3-4; Vitz, *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology,* 3, 214. Vitz argues that desire is the primary means of medieval characterisation and even provides a good basis for classifying texts based on the relation between desire and its satisfaction.

Chapter 1: The Nostalgic Past of Romance

The Middle English romances consistently take place in the past, not only by implication but often by direct insistence that the story happened long ago. This is frequently done by some reference to the characters as the audience's 'elders' or ancestors:[1]

> And giff þam ioye þat will here
> Of *eldirs þat byfore vs were,*
> *Þat lyued in grete honoure.* (*Sir Eglamour of Artois*, 4-6)[2]

> In the bukes of Rome als it es tolde
> How byfelle amange *oure eldyrs olde* […]. (*Octavian*, 10-11)[3]

> Lystyns, lordyngys, and ye schall here
> Of *ansytoures that befor us were*,
> Bothe herdy and wyght,
> In tyme of Uter and Pendragon […]. (*Sir Cleges*, Ashmole 61 version, 1-4)[4]

> Ther folke sitis in fere
> Shullde men herken and here
> Off *gode that before hem were*
> That levede on arthede. (*Sir Degrevant*, 5-8)[5]

A few romances heighten and develop this sense of pastness by an explicit meditation on how times have gone bad since then:

> […] This greves [thickets] wexen al gray
> That in her time were grene.
> […] The gode ben al oway
> That our elders have bene. (*Sir Tristrem*, 1:14-15, 18-19)[6]

> Þai [Arthur's knights] tald of more trewth þam bitwene
> Þan now omang men here es sene,
> For trowth and luf es al bylaft;
> Men uses now anoþer craft. (*Ywain and Gawain*, 33-36)[7]

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[1] Italics in the following quotes are all mine.

[2] This is the Lincoln Thornton text from Richardson, *Sir Eglamour of Artois*.

[3] In Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances*.

[4] In Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*.

[5] In *Sentimental and Humorous Romances*, ed. Erik Kooper, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005).

[6] In *Lancelot of the Laik and Sir Tristrem,* ed. Alan Lupack, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994).

[7] Albert B. Friedman and Norman T. Harrington, eds., *Ywain and Gawain*, E.E.T.S. 254 (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

Other romances shape the pastness of their subject matter by focusing on its source and transmission, essentially claiming that the narrators had to do a bit of archival work or oral history gathering to dig out the present story:

> We redeth oft and findeth ywrite -
> And this clerkes wele it wite -
> Layes that ben in harping
> Ben yfounde of ferli thing. […]
> In Breteyne bi hold time
> This layes were wrought, so seith this rime. […]
> Now of this aventours that weren yfalle
> Y can tel sum ac nought alle. (*Lay Le Freine*, 1-4, 13-14, 19-20)[8]
>
> Mo ferlyes on þis folde han fallen here oft
> Þen in any oþer þat I wot, syn þat ilk tyme. […]
> Forþi an aunter in erde I attle to schawe […].
> If ȝe wyl listen þis laye bot on little quile,
> I schal telle hit as-tit, as I in toun herde […]. (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 23-24, 27, 30-1)[9]

When Chaucer puts romances in the mouths of his characters, he also reiterates this convention of siting the story in the past. The Knight's tale is sourced from 'olde stories' and takes place 'whilom'.[10] The Clerk's tale is about a 'markys' who 'whilom lord was of that lond' of Saluces.[11] The Wife of Bath's tale takes place 'In th'olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour' which were 'manye hundred yeres ago'.[12]

Often meshed with these insistences upon the pastness of the story is a suggestion that this past has exemplary value. This is the case in the explicit meditations of decline in *Sir Tristrem* and *Ywain and Gawain*. It is an openly stated feature of *Sir Tryamour*, where the narrator claims that his listeners will receive a 'gode ensaumpull' (10).[13] Chaucer's Clerk tells his tale with an overt moral interpretation (1142-47), as does the narrator of *Le Bone Florence of Rome* (2176-84).[14] Many other romances imply the exemplarity of their

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[8] In Laskaya and Salisbury, *The Middle English Breton Lays*.

[9] Tolkien and Gordon, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

[10] *The Knight's Tale,* in Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer,* 859.

[11] *The Clerk's Tale*, in Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer,* 64.

[12] *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, in Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer,* 857, 863.

[13] In Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances*.

[14] Heffernan, *Le Bone Florence of Rome*; Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative,* Ch. 7, esp. 117, 122, 129. Mitchell argues convincingly that the Clerk's tale is 'about' exemplarity, and that the conflicting interpretations offered by the other characters illustrate Chaucer's point about the polyvalence of possible moral interpretations. I have approached this issue in the Introduction, and will do so again in Chapter Four.

subject matter by describing the heroes of the past in terms of superlative and total approval: the 'herdy and wyght' elders in *Sir Cleges* (3), or the 'gode' in *Sir Degrevant*, where the use of the word 'good' as a noun identifies characters of the past solely by their moral excellence (see quotations above). Examples of heartily approved romance heroes abound even beyond the quotes given above. The narrator of the Ashmole 61 *Lybeaus Desconus* declares for his hero that 'A beter knight, ne more profetabull, […] / Herd I never of rede' (10-12).[15] In *Emaré,* it is said of Artyus that 'so gret a lord was none' (30). In *Le Bone Florence of Rome,* Troy is the birthplace of knights 'hardy and kene', than whom none better 'in all thys worlde was neuyr ʒyt' (4-5). In this sense each romance takes a structurally solipsistic approach to its own hero, setting him (and sometimes her) up as the preeminent example of moral or chivalric excellence. The use of past examples for moral purposes is given direct explication in the context of a history, Mannyng's *Chronicle*, where Mannyng writes that part of the 'wisdom' of having a written record is in order to know 'þe dedis of kynges' in a specifically moralising context: the important thing to know is 'whilk were foles & whilk were wyse', among other moral qualities.[16] Mannyng accepts that the past can have moral usefulness and that this exemplary quality is intrinsic to the writing of a chronicle.

These two conjoined features of romance, an emphasis on the past and an emphasis that the past is exemplary, have led to scholarly debate. No doubt this is partly because the suggestion that the past can be made morally useful is problematic to a positivist historical perspective, and also because of the feeling of some twentieth-century critics that the moral intentions of medieval narrative mar or debase it.[17] In general, a modern approach to the past would claim that the goals of 'narrating the past' and 'providing moral examples' are inimical to one another. At very least, it is not always clear from the romances why pastness and exemplarity should so often go together, and sometimes in the same sentence.

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[15] *Lybeaus Desconus,* in Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61.* Other examples of heartily approved central characters include: *Amis and Amiloun,* 5-6, 31-6; *Emaré,* 37-42; *Octavian,* 13-24; *Sir Orfeo,* in Sands, *Middle English Verse Romances,* 1-8; *Sir Cleges,* in Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61,* 7-12; *Sir Perceval of Galles*, in *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain,* ed. Mary Flowers Braswell, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 3-4. Chaucer's *Sir Thopas* is similarly exemplary (in Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer,* 715-17), though his physical description, read humorously, signals that this romance feature is perhaps reproduced satirically (in Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer,* 724-31).

[16] Robert Mannyng, *The Chronicle*, ed. Idelle Sullens, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 153 (Binghamton, New York: Binghamton University, 1996), 1.16, 1.17, 1.18-20.

[17] Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry*, 82; Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', 109. Pearsall praises *Amis and Amiloun* for being 'never burdened by its didactic theme'.

Alternatively, like some critics, we may conclude that the exemplary claims of the Middle English romances flow automatically from their past setting, that they are symptoms of the 'medieval view of the past' characterised by what Patterson calls 'deference'.[18] C. S. Lewis describes medieval writers and readers as 'exhilarated' by the 'backward […] glance' towards a 'packed and gorgeous past' which is the same as the present only better.[19] This interpretation suggests that the medieval romances try to be exemplary simply because they assume that the past is better, that exemplarity is a natural consequence of the medieval view of the past.

However, such a view of the romances' approach to the pastness of their own setting oversimplifies several important features of their approach. For one thing, the concept of deference to the past, as Larry Scanlon demonstrates, easily passes over the agency which is required in textual production; the narrators of Middle English texts do not 'defer' to the past so much as they use it and shape it to particular ends, remaining active agents, while their audiences equally play a crucial part as agents in the success or failure of a particular narrative of the past.[20] For another thing, simply labelling the romances' use of the past as 'deferential' and 'exemplary' does not in fact explain the operations which achieve this particular perspective or the reason for it. Finally, this whole discussion may seem at odds with some of the notable features of the romances themselves, for instance that so much of their content is clearly not suitable (or presumably intended) for emulation, even in cases where the narrator claims that it is exemplary; moreover, as many studies have emphasised, the romances often shape the 'past' to the purposes of fantasy, pleasure, and desire, exuberant aspects of the genre which are hard to reconcile with a serious interpretation in terms of a deferential and exemplary use of the past.[21]

In this chapter, I would like to suggest that the way through these contradictions is through a more refined understanding of the 'pastness' and the 'exemplarity' of the romances, and of how these elements in fact work together. The first step is to redefine the

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[18] Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*, 198. A similar view is voiced by Gurevich, that medieval ethics sought to repeat the past in the present, effacing the division between them (*Categories of Medieval Culture*, 98-99).

[19] Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; originally published 1964), 185.

[20] Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power,* 37-8.

[21] E.g. Geraldine Heng, *Empires of Magic*, sees romance as a fantasy; Caroline Eckhardt sees *Sir Perceval* as humorous: ''Arthurian Comedy: The Simpleton-Hero in "Sir Perceval of Galles"', *The Chaucer Review* 8 (1974); Vitz sees desire as the primary animating force of medieval characterization (*Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology,* 3).

romances' 'deference' to the past as a form of nostalgia, and then to see how they shape this nostalgia as a conduit for their exemplary aims. In *Sir Tryamour*, nostalgia is meticulously created to foster a desire for the exemplary aspects of the fictional past, while in *Ywain and Gawain*, a similar nostalgia is invoked but then examined, provoking a different kind of identification with the past not as superior, but as consolingly similar to the present.

Sir Tryamour and the Creation of Nostalgia

In *Sir Tryamour*, the narrator coordinates his exemplary goals with a carefully cultivated nostalgia. Unlike some romances, where the narrator seems to promise more for his narrative than he delivers, the narrator of *Sir Tryamour* makes modest claims for his story's exemplary value, allowing the narrative itself to expand beyond what is promised in its presentation of a blessed and excellent knight. The narrator then orchestrates a closing to the romance which causes Tryamour to recede gradually from the audience's vision in such a way as to create the effect of time's passage and evoke nostalgia for the narrative which has been 'experienced' but subsequently lost. The structure of *Sir Tryamour* ultimately strengthens its exemplary goals by manipulating the audience's relationship to the past into one of nostalgia.[22]

The first indication of the pastness of the story is structural, and lies in the explicit references the narrator makes both to himself and his audience. He refers to himself in the first person singular, 'Y' (5, 9, 17, 888), and his audience in the second person plural, 'ye' and 'yow' (4, 9, 11, 1689). The presence of a visible narrator is a common feature of the romances in general, and one easily classed as null in significance or, at least by some scholars, interpreted as the textual relic of an oral performance.[23] However, instead of dismissing the self-announced narrator, or assigning his references to himself[24] a purely

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[22] My model for the idea of manipulating an audience's relationship to the past, in order to bring it to a nostalgic relationship, is taken from Nicholas Dames's discussion of the Victorian novel, *Amnesiac Selves*, 18.

[23] For comment on this, see Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre in Middle English Romance*, 23; Ganim, *Style and Consciousness,* 71, 149. Andrew Taylor demonstrates the lack of evidence for the so-called 'minstrel' manuscripts being intimately tied to an oral tradition in 'The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript'.

[24] I will consistently use the masculine pronoun to refer to the narrator. Technically, of course, the gender of the narrator is not specified, nor would a female narrator be historically impossible; in a household reading context, in fact, a female member might easily have read the romance to an audience an thus inhabited the role of the speaking subject. However, as my arguments pertain to temporality and not directly to the

mimetic significance, it is important to recognise the narrator's role in establishing

temporal relationships between two times: the narrated time, which is the time of the story

itself as represented in narrative,[25] and the time of narrating, which is the 'present' of the

audience and narrator.[26] As Mieke Bal observes, in any narrative the relationship between

these two times, the narrated time and the time of narrating, can only be determined if the

narrator actually appears:

> In other words, this problem of the temporal relationship [between time of narrating and the story] cannot be separated from the problem of the status of the narrator. […] The narrator must tell his own story or someone else's 'in the first person'; otherwise, the time of the narrating remains vague, indefinite, and above all uninteresting.[27]

In other words, a first-person narrator has a privileged function, which no other voice can

supply, in determining the temporal distance between when a story is supposed to have

happened and when it is told. Thus, even the blandest romance narrator is at least

responsible for articulating the chronological distance[28] between his audience and the

romance story.[29]

Another indication that the story takes place in the past is the narrator's summary

treatment of his subject matter. In the introduction, he implies the distance in time by

giving a brief summary of events before the narration proper begins: he introduces the king

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narrator's gender, and because the most realized 'fictions' of romance narrators seem to assume a minstrel character who would be male, for simplicity I will use the masculine pronoun.

[25] I use the term *narrative* to represent what in Russian formalism is called the *sjuzet,* in other words the rendition of events into a plot. See note 26, below, for references. In this choice of English language terminology, I follow Genette (*Narrative Discourse,* 27); similarly, Paul Cobley, *Narrative* (London: Routledge, 2006), 5-6.

[26] The term *story*, as I use it here and throughout, corresponds with the term *fabula*, which originates with the Russian formalists and refers to the events themselves, comprising the 'fable', as distinct from their narrative rendition in a plot (which is referred to as the *sjuzet*). On this subject, and for examples of these concepts in criticism, see: Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History—Doctrine,* 3rd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965, 1955, 1981), 240; Boris Tomashevsky, 'Thematics', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays,* trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, Regents Critics Series (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 66-7; Victor Shklovsky, 'Sterne's *Tristram Shandy:* Stylistic Commentary', in Lemon and Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism,* 57; Cobley, *Narrative,* 15; Brooks, *Reading for the Plot,* 12-13, 17-18; Roland Barthes, *S/Z,* trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975); Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale,* trans. Laurence Scott, 2nd ed., rev. and ed. Louis A. Wagner (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1968), 113.

[27] Mieke Bal, 'The Narrating and the Focalizing: A Theory of Agents in Narrative', trans. Jane E. Lewin, *Style* 17, no. 2 (1983), 242.

[28] I use the term 'chronological distance' literally, to refer to the distance of normal human time claimed to have elapsed between the events of the romance and the 'present day' of the narrator and audience.

[29] On this role of the narrator, see also Gross, 'Time in the Towneley Cycle, *King Horn, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', 81, 118, 181.

of Arragon and his queen and notes that the queen 'was' falsely accused by a steward who did her shame (13-24). By summarising the general plot in this way, all in the past tense, the narrator obliquely signals that the entire story has already taken place before the present time, the time of narrating.[30] He assumes what Ricoeur would call a position of 'depth' towards the subject matter, summarising it in a way which is only possible at a chronological remove from the events.[31] The distance of the story from the present is also suggested by his encouragement that the story won't take long to tell, and requires his audience only to 'pause a little while': 'Yf ye wyll a stounde blynne, / Of a story Y wyll begynne' (4-5). Insisting on the brevity of the story reduces its immediacy, again reinforcing the sense of chronological distance from the audience's present time.[32]

The attitude of the narrator towards the past is one of nostalgia. Nostalgia is a form of bittersweet pleasure in the past, and depends upon the dual predication of both alienation and continuity of identity.[33] Nostalgic discourses construct what Fred Davis describes as a 'dialogue' which passes back and forth from past to present, emphasising the past as better than the present and thus highlighting their dissonance or alienation.[34] *Sir Tristrem* succinctly deploys this dialogue of comparison: 'The gode ben al oway / That our elders have bene' (18-19), but such back-and-forth dialogue can be found structuring the meditation in *Ywain and Gawain* and the reflection on the many 'ferlyes' (marvels) of the Arthurian world in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This construction of alienation from a superior past forms the chief aspect of most definitions of nostalgia, certainly of personal

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[30] Genette, *Narrative Discourse,* 33-35, 215; Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 2:5, 77; Bal, *Narratology*, 102. Note that Bal uses the term 'fabula' to refer to what I call *story*, and 'story' to refer to what I call the *narrative.*

[31] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 1: 30, 84-5

[32] This consciousness of the time the story will take to tell is even more striking in light of Genette's observation that nearly all novels consider the duration of the time of narrating to have no relevance (Genette, *Narrative Discourse,* 222). Some reference to the shortness of the time of narration is made in *Emaré, Lay Le Friene, Sir Perceval of Galles, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir Launfal,* and *Ywain and Gawain.* This is not to say that these narratives' claims to brevity are accurate or intended to be so, but rather that their very consciousness of the time of narration, and claim to an 'opinion' about that time, is unusual for narrative in general.

[33] The function of nostalgia in fostering continuity of identity is discussed by Davis*, Yearning for Yesterday*, 32-46, 49, 103-4; he discusses nostalgia's creation of alienation (13-16); Felicity Riddy emphasizes its creation of alienation between past and present; see 'The Uses of the Past in "Sir Orfeo"', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 6 (1976), 10.

[34] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 15-16.

nostalgia toward one's own past.[35] However, this recognition of nostalgic discourse's basic structure leaves out the important method whereby it functions in literary contexts: nostalgic discourse is able to create longing in the audience because it also, by whatever means, posits that the loss is somehow their own. The past may be fictional—as indeed it is here—but the crucial point is not the past's ontological reality but its ability to be identified with the audience.[36] A nostalgic dialogue which recognised a 'better' past belonging to a distant country, involving characters totally unconnected to its audience, experiences foreign to them, and 'other' in every aspect, would potentially not create nostalgia but posit total alienation and dissonance. For nostalgia to be realised in the audience as a feeling of loss and desire requires the nostalgic dialogue to propose, somehow, that the lost past has a place in the audience's own past and thus in their own identity. The author of *Sir Tristrem* insinuates this identity of the audience with the past by a simple pronoun: '*our* elders' (19, emphasis mine). The romances and histories which attempt to place their material in English geographic locations do so not solely to make a claim for historicity (though this may be one goal) but primarily to make the claim that the 'past' which the story represents rightfully belongs to the past of its audience, and should be incorporated into their own sense of identity in some way.[37] This mechanism of nostalgia—the claim that there is some link of identity between the audience and the past described—is closely tied to what Davis considers the ultimate function of nostalgia, which is to establish the continuity of an identity in the face of apparent change, as I shall discuss in more detail below.[38]

It is nostalgia's concern with identity which makes it such an apt ally for exemplary discourse, which is similarly concerned with identity. Nostalgia functions by claiming a link of identity between the audience and the past, and the goal of nostalgic discourse is to

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[35] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 13-16; Lerner, *The Uses of Nostalgia*, 54; Santesso, *A Careful Longing,* 16. Lerner's word is 'deprivation', while Santesso describes the object of nostalgic desire as a past that is 'unattainable', because idealised.

[36] Davis discusses how fictional Disney stories and figures become part of a nostalgic experience for visitors at Disney World and Disneyland (*Yearning for Yesterday*, 121-2). How a 'fictional' past can be incorporated into the audience's personal past will be discussed in further detail below.

[37] An extreme example of the attempt to link romance events with English locations can be found in the Auchinleck version of *Sir Orfeo*, where 'Traciens' (Thrace in Eastern Europe) is said to be merely an old name for Winchester (23-6). The patent implausibility of this suggests that historical convincingness is not its primary aim, but rather it fancifully proposes to draw the events of the romance into the past of its English readers. On this, see also Rhiannon Purdie, *Anglicising Romance: Tail-Rhyme and Genre in Medieval English Literature*, Studies in Medieval Romance 9 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 98-99.

[38] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 34-5, 44-5.

stabilise the identity of its present-day audience by an appeal to the past. This means that nostalgia is essentially concerned with the activity of identity-shaping that is at the centre of exemplary discourse. Larry Scanlon's discussion of the exemplum makes this most clear: an exemplum, he says, is 'the narrative enactment of cultural authority', in other words it is a story which narrates an example which its audience is being enjoined to incorporate into their own moral identities; they are to copy what is good or conversely avoid an example which is bad.[39] The effectiveness of the exemplum, measured in the audience's emulation of it, requires audience identification much as nostalgia does; the audience must 'enter' the subject position of the example's good characters and thus shape their own selves in accordance with that model.[40] Moreover, an appeal to authority is inherent in the exemplary mode, implicit in the notion that an audience 'ought to' or 'should' adopt a certain behaviour in response to the exemplum; to have credibility it must claim to have authority over the audience's moral identity.[41] As Scanlon outlines it, the operation of exemplary authority importantly resembles the operation of nostalgia. Exemplary authority operates via a triangulation involving a speaking subject, an audience, and the past:

> For it [authority] involves *not just deference to the past but a claim of identification with it* and a *representation* of that identity made by one part of the present to another. […] Authority, then, is an enabling past reproduced in the present.[42]

Scanlon's description of the authority which animates exemplary discourse is similar to what might be called the 'authority' which animates nostalgic discourse as described above: exempla rely upon creating an audience identification with the past, a past which of course the exemplum construes in a specific way and for the specific purpose of exercising a 'constraint' in the present. Here is where the logical alliance of exemplarity and nostalgia emerges. If the goal of a narrative is exemplary, its effectiveness can be better ensured by strengthening the force of identification necessary for its operation. Nostalgic discourse is suited to this task because it also posits identification, but deals in the powerful currency of desire: nostalgic longing for the past is a desire whose object is the same 'past' that the exemplum holds up as a model. The moral example, situated in the past, can be allied with

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[39] Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority and Power*, 33-4.

[40] Scanlon, *Narrative, Authorty and Power,* 34-5. This view, as Scanlon acknowledges, relies on the theory of subjectivity: see Emile Benveniste's foundational essay, 'Subjectivity in Language', in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, Miami Linguistics Series 8 (Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971).

[41] Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority and Power,* 30, 33-4.

[42] Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority and Power,* 38; emphasis mine.

the past of nostalgia and thus merge with the object of desire. In other words, theoretically, by working together nostalgia and exemplary discourse can create in their audience a desire to transform themselves to become better, 'more like things used to be'.

In *Sir Tryamour,* the narrator's introduction also introduces the openly stated exemplary purpose of his work:

> A gode ensaumpull ye may lere,
> Yf ye wyll thys story here
>   And herkyn to my stevyn. (10-12)

This exemplary goal is corroborated, if not indicated, by the request for the audience's attention for 'a stounde'. Measuring the story's length solely in terms of the time the audience must pause to hear it is a subtle indication of priority: the retelling of the past is motivated by present concerns and temporally contained within present experience. The motivation for telling the story of Sir Tryamour is not, in Ricoeur's words, because the past 'need[s] and merit[s] being narrated', but because of some need perceived in the present.[43] Even this exemplary stance towards the story, which judges the story's usefulness and shapes presentation with reference primarily to its audience rather than to a sense of historical justice or completeness, also embeds the chronological distance from the subject matter, which is necessary for the assumption of the present-oriented basis of judgment.

Having established both the pastness and the exemplary status of his story, the narrator proceeds to tell the story itself. This narrative accomplishes two main purposes: first, it provides the fulfilment of the promise of an exemplary narrative; second, by shifting out of narratorial introduction into a chronological plot, the narrative gives the effect of shifting into a mode of narrative more like 'experience' itself. This is what enables the audience to feel nostalgia for the story once it has been told.

First of all, the story establishes the basis for an exemplary status for its hero. That the romance does so should not be taken as necessarily given; many romances either undercut their heroes' exemplary status or develop it via a progression that involves failure on the hero's part. For example, the eponymous hero of *Sir Gowther* is the child of an incubus and commits atrocities before repenting. Many of the Arthurian romances cast their heroes in a light that is at least ambiguous with regard to their true adherence to the principles the text espouses, for example the oath-breaking hero of *Ywain and Gawain*, or,

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[43] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:75; Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xiv. Coleman notes that medieval writers often presented the past in response to a present need.

more famously, Gawain's failure in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In *Sir Tryamour*, however, the insistence upon Tryamour's greatness does receive narrative corroboration. Tryamour begins performing knightly feats before he is even of age (690). When he meets with two other knights who challenge him, the narrator says, 'In that tyme ther was not soche thre' (1420). This distinction of being the best of their time, applied to all three knights here, is quickly narrowed when Tryamour defeats both (1423-24), establishing himself as the single best knight of his time. Though Tryamour spends most of the romance in exile, searching for his identity, this is a result of his father's misguided suspicions and bad counsel, rather than having any penitential overtones as does the exile of the hero in *Sir Isumbras*.

This narrative of Tryamour's life, in addition to supporting the claim that Tryamour is a hero to emulate, presents events as a chronological narrative having a higher degree of what Plato would call *mimesis* than the introductory summary. As already described above, the narrator's introduction approached the story from a chronological remove and referred to it only summarily: it was a 'story', an 'ensaumpull' (5, 10), and received a brief synopsis only of the story involving Tryamour's parents (7-8, 13-24). To use Plato's term, this would be called *diegesis,* and is a presentation of events from a distance which has freedom to subordinate them to the needs of the audience.[44] The shift into the main plot of the romance represents a departure from *diegesis* and a shift into *mimesis*, or greater correspondence to reality in the narrative's structure.[45] This is represented by a greater degree of what Ricoeur calls 'extension', or the quality of a plot which moves chronologically in time instead of being summarised.[46] Another feature of this type of narrative is that the narrator tends to recede from immediate notice and to make fewer comments on the action,[47] and thus to allow the events of the narrative itself to assume more responsibility for conveying meaning. In its extended aspect, its chronological structure, and it relative absence of narratorial comment, the body of the romance, in contrast with the introduction and conclusion, appears more mimetic and thus shares some

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[44] Genette, *Narrative Discourse,* 162-64.

[45] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 162-64.

[46] Ricoeur, 1: 30, 84-5. For the use of spatial terms to discuss time, see Chapter Four, below, 140, n. 3.

[47] Bal would call these comments 'argumentative' comments, i.e. non-narrative intrusions like interpretations or observations (*Narratology*, 33).

of the features of real experience.[48] By reading this portion of *Sir Tryamour,* the audience 'experiences' his life via narrative. The importance of this experiential aspect of the narrative is that experience is a prerequisite for nostalgia, for as Davis puts it, nostalgia is for a 'personally experienced past'.[49] In telling the narrative of Tryamour's life, the narrator thus supplies the audience with the effect, if not the actuality, of experience, preparing them to engage in remembering that experience once it has past.

That experience, however, is not the final purpose of the romance. At the end, the narrator arranges a closing which shifts the audience's relation to the narrative experience. In effect, he allows the audience to watch as the story is consigned to the past and partially forgotten. This is partly achieved by Tryamour's elision from his family's main line of inheritance, showing the way in which genealogical memory relegates him to its margins. Tryamour is his parents' only heir, indeed his conception is a result of their anxious attempts in the face of an heirless kingdom. The importance of his role as heir is central in the romance's structure, which traces his restoration to his identity as his father's son, something he himself has been seeking (1040-41, 1592-96). However, by the time the romance is over, Tryamour has married the heiress of Hungary, and so by marriage inherits the kingdom of Hungary before he is able to inherit the kingdom belonging to his own birthright, Aragon. When Tryamour's father dies, Tryamour appoints the younger of his two sons to rule over Aragon, passing his inheritance directly to his heir (1708-13). Though the whole romance is overtly preoccupied with Tryamour's journey out of exile and restoration to his rightful inheritance, he never takes direct possession of his family's land, and nothing about his chivalric superiority alters the effect of this genealogical elision. The genealogical forms of preservation of his culture fail to acknowledge or preserve his superiority; genealogy 'forgets' these aspects of Tryamour's character. The other way in which the narrator achieves a shift in the audience's relationship to Tryamour's life is by altering the temporal structure of the narrative. The narrator becomes visible, and once again the audience is explicitly included in the reference to 'us' (1717), reinstating the sense of pastness and distance with which the romance began. The narrator also allows his

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[48] This is not to say that the plot of a romance is actually more representational than the narrator's introduction, i.e. it is not to say that the plot is 'unmediated experience' while the introduction is mediated via narrative. Technically speaking, all of a romance text is narrative, and all of it is equally the utterance of its speaking subject, the narrator. My point is that the narrator has, at his disposal, various means of structuring his material, and can be overtly present in the first person to varying degrees, and changes in these strategies will create the *sense* of changes of the relation of the audience to the story.

[49] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 8, 47.

telling of events to morph into a perspective which, as at the beginning, contains Tryamour's story within the experience and interests of the audience. The narrator says,

> Here endyth Syr Tryamowre,
> That was doghty in every stowre,
>> And evyr wanne the gree [prize], as the boke seys. (1714-16)

Here the narrator gives an indication of how the story's 'ensaumpull' is to be read: Tryamour's life demonstrates that he is 'doghty' (1715). That is, Tryamour's story is once again held distant in time from the audience, interpretable, and contained in the form of a book which represents a certain form of remembering. Tryamour's story recedes even further by the end of the romance, where the audience's concerns fill the final vision as the narrator prays for their welfare:

> God bring us to that blys
> That evyr schall laste wythowt mys.
>> Amen, amen, for charytee! (1717-19)

As in the beginning, which began with a prayer for 'us', the narrator and narratees together (1-3), here the very end of the romance returns to the former dynamic of narrator and narratees separated in time from the story matter, encountering it in a literary text. Tryamour has vanished altogether, indeed the past itself has vanished from the final vision, which is solely for the future of narrator and narratees.

The whole effect of this progress through Tryamour's narrated life, his genealogical elision, and eventually the consignment of his life to the matter of a 'boke' and its vanishing altogether in the face of other concerns, is to draw the audience through an experience of superlative greatness and then through a gradual experience of loss. The resulting awareness of a passage of time which has produced the loss of something good is the necessary condition for what Davis calls 'simple' nostalgia: this is the basic nostalgia which depends upon 'a positively toned evocation of a lived past' which contrasts with the present.[50] For the most part, Davis assumes that nostalgia is for a past which is remembered by an individual, for a period of childhood or youth, or at least a period which is immediately connected to individual experience via family photographs and the memories of grandparents.[51] He hints, however, at the way in which nostalgia can be experienced for 'media creations', and argues that the experience of Disney World and

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[50] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 17-18.

[51] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 8, 40-1, 47, 61-2, 121.

Disneyland offers a contemporary example of such nostalgia.[52] *Sir Tryamour* is a similar 'media creation' which propagates a collective nostalgia for its readers, with enough debris of real history to connect itself to tangible experience: the real country of Aragon and the familiar material culture of martial life corroborate the otherwise fictional and romanticised vision of knightly greatness, just as Davis argues the fictional objects of nostalgia created by Disney are 'corroborated' by the memories of grandparents, songs and photographs.[53] The readers of *Sir Tryamour* are akin to the visitors of Disney World in being the (willing) victims of a staged loss which produces nostalgia.

This nostalgic operation in *Sir Tryamour* serves the romance's exemplary function through its alliance with identity. Nostalgia, Davis says, 'marshal[s] our psychological resources for continuity', incorporating a past identity into present experience by 'cultivating appreciative stances' towards it.[54] Nostalgia responds to the threat of discontinuity in experience,[55] in other words to the realisation or the threat of a loss of past identity. It has already been argued that this 'loss' in *Sir Tryamour* is a fictional one, but this makes little difference to the overall nostalgic argument: the romance posits that a superlative chivalric identity, in particular, was once realised but has been lost by the passage of time and the changes it effects. The function of the nostalgic experience which this loss creates is subtly to implant the impression of identity with that past. The loss, which is overtly created, implies its logical precedent, which is the flattering suggestion that the lost chivalric identity did somehow once belong to the audience's own experience. The knighthood that Tryamour represents thus becomes the object of an intimate form of desire for a past identity. Creating this desire for a form of lost identity is how nostalgia specifically supports an exemplary function.

Exemplarity, too, it will be remembered, is concerned with identity. As a discourse, it seeks to persuade the practitioner to assume a new identity. If Tryamour's biography is read as an exemplum of knightliness, the goal of the romance is to persuade the audience to emulate this feature of Tryamour's identity and thus make it their own. However, the inherent risk of any exemplary project is that it enorses change and thus poses a threat of discontinuity to an audience who must alter their identity to comply. By allying itself with

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[52] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 119-22.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 34-36, 44-45.

[55] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 34-36.

nostalgia, the exemplary project of this romance can overcome the threat of discontinuity by constructing a fictional experience which posits that the identity to be assumed is already part of the audience's own past. Fostering the virtues of knightliness represents not a break in identity, but the reclaiming of an identity lost and now desired. In other words, nostalgia neutralises the threat which an exemplary goal necessarily poses, doing so by transposing a proposed future identity to the past.

Ywain and Gawain and Reflexive Nostalgia

Ywain and Gawain is a translation, but with extensive omissions and substantive changes, of Chrétien's *Yvain*. In this romance, the nostalgic experience itself is put to scrutiny through a process of what Davis calls reflexive nostalgia;[56] this is a nostalgia which turns back on itself to interrogate its validity.[57] The narrator of *Ywain and Gawain* indulges in slavish nostalgia towards an imagined better age, meanwhile contradicting his own nostalgia by telling a story that fails to exhibit the virtue of truth that he attributes to it. Though the Middle English adaptor of Chrétien's longer *Yvain* takes the nostalgic sentiment from his source, he augments his own role as narrator, and he alters the object of the romance's nostalgia from love (*amors*), in the French version,[58] to the virtue of truth.[59] The adaptor's changes evince a conscious shaping of the romance as a text which creates nostalgia for its audience but proceeds to examine that nostalgic image of the past and undermine its claims, all within the constraints of a narrative form which still ends by bracketing the past with a frame of nostalgic desire and approval.

As part of his strategy for creating nostalgia, the English adaptor of the romance appends an introduction which explicitly introduces the narrator and audience in a way which Chrétien's version does not. As in *Sir Tryamour*, the effect is to allow the difference between the time of the story and the time of narrating to emerge, creating the effect of

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[56] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 21.

[57] Svetlana Boym outlines a similar type of nostalgia which she calls reflective nostalgia; see *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xviii, Ch. 5; 'Nostalgia and Its Discontents', *The Hedgehog Review* 9, no. 2 (2007), www.iasc-culture.org/ENews/2007_10/9.2CBoym.pdf, 13, 15-16.

[58] The theme of love is indicated by repeated references to 'amors' in the prologue. See the French: David F. Hult, ed., *Le Chevalier au Lion ou Le Roman d'Yvain*, Lettres Gothiques (Librairie Générale Française, 1994), lines 13, 20, 24.

[59] J. A. Burrow makes this point also: 'The Fourteenth-Century Arthur', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, 69-83 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 75.

'pastness' more strongly. Chrétien begins by plunging immediately into the narrative:
'Artus, li boens rois de Bretaingne' ('Arthur, the good king of Britain', 1). The English
adaptor, in contrast, prefaces a six-line introduction appealing to God on behalf of the
hearers, introducing the subject of the romance, and requesting his hearers to listen 'a lytel
stownde' (1-6). This adaptation brings the work into alignment with English conventions
for traditional romance introductions,[60] but more importantly creates the conditions for a
sense of pastness as already seen in *Sir Tryamour*: the audience is addressed by a speaking
narrator and the time of narrating (the present) is invoked as 'a lytel stownde' (*Ywain and
Gawain*, 6).

The narrator of this romance clearly views the past as superior to the present, and
engages in a comparison of the two in a form similar to the 'mental dialogue' which Davis
identifies as the means for construing nostalgia.[61] It is this process of comparison which
produces the strong sense of 'alienation' between past and present.[62] The Middle English
author focuses this comparison not on the status of love, as in Chrétien's version, but on
the Arthurian court's tale-telling and adherence to a principle of *treuthe*. He describes their
storytelling practices:

> Fast þai carped and curtaysly
> Of dedes of armes and of veneri
> And of gude knightes þat lyfed þen,
> And how men might þam kyndeli ken
> By doghtines of þaire gude ded […]. (25-29)

> Þai tald of more trewth tham bitwene
> Þan now omang men here is sene,
> For trowth and luf es al bylaft;
> Men uses now anoþer craft.
> With worde men makes it trew and stabil,
> Bot in þaire faith es noght bot fabil.
> With þe mowth men makes it hale,
> Bot trew trowth es nane in þe tale. (33-40)[63]

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[60] See Ricoeur's definition of tradition (*Time and Narrative* 2:14-15)—probably a definition much more useful than the designation of a romance as 'formulaic', at least in connotation; to call something formulaic implies a mindless reiteration, whereas designating it traditional implies that its very repetition is a symptom that it is perceived to have meaning, and is productive of meaning.

[61] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 15-16.

[62] Riddy, 'The Uses of the Past in *Sir Orfeo*', 10.

[63] As far as I am aware, no one has commented on the affinities between this passage and one in Robert Mannyng's *Chronicle*, but the recurrence of important words suggests a connection:

In this passage, adverbs referring to time ('þen' and 'now', lines 27, 34, 36) and the comparative 'þan' (34) stage a direct contrast between past and present. In the past, the stories told in Arthur's court were not fictional but about actual 'gude knightes þat lyfed þen'. This ideal image of the chivalric past is then compared to 'now', the present day, which is marked by comparatively less 'trewth',[64] the virtue encompassing fidelity, integrity, and moral uprightness.[65]

After this introduction, the narrator transitions into the main plot of the story in the same way as does the narrator of *Sir Tryamour*, and with the same effect. He makes this transition clear, assuming the 'directing function' of a narrator to dispose a text's transitions: 'Þarfore hereof now wil I blyn, / Of þe Kyng Arthure I wil bygin […]' (41-42).[66] Instead of looking back, from a distance, upon the matter of his story the narrator now purports to narrate it in closer detail and in sequence. As with *Sir Tryamour*, the effect is to heighten the narrative's mimetic features, purportedly giving a more 'accurate' rendition of events, and decreasing the apparent sense of pastness of the story so that the events themselves become responsible for conveying meaning.

From this close perspective, many events in the romance seem to undercut what the narrator has claimed about the *treuthe* of the Arthurian past. The adventures of the central character, Ywain, turn on his failure to be true. He marries a woman named Alundyne during the course of his adventures, and then leaves her to embark on further adventures, vowing to return in a year's time (1493-1560). However, he forgets his vow entirely until the year has already past (1570-82), and when he breaks this vow the accusation levelled at him by Alundyne's messenger is focused precisely on his untruth: she accuses him of being 'A fals and lither losenjoure' (a false and treacherous deceiver,

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> […] of Arthure is said many selcouth
> In diuers landes, north & south,
> þat man haldes now for fable,
> be þei neuer so trew no stable. (1:10395-8)

Mannyng, in this case, is translating Wace, but I think the closeness of wording suggests that the ideas of fable, truth, and stability in words are closely allied to the Arthurian tradition. See also Richard J. Moll, *Before Malory: Reading Arthur in Later Medieval England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 24-25; cf. Ad Putter, *An Introduction to the Gawain Poet* (London: Longman, 1996), 44. Putter discusses 'truth' in relation to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

[64] *MED,* s.v. 'treuth', 1-5.

[65] In Chrétien's version, the focus is on the truth of lovers; he describes modern lovers who, though they assert their love, lie because they have no understanding and thus transform their love into a 'fable'. The Middle English author transfers the concept of 'fable' into his poem, but applies it to the concept of *treuthe*.

[66] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 255.

1602).[67] He has failed to exhibit the very virtue which the narrator had declared to be ubiquitous in Ywain's time.[68] This fault of untruth, in other romances, is the behaviour of unredeemable characters. It is the primary mark of Erl Godrich's villainy in *Havelok the Dane*: 'Of his oth ne was him nouth. / He let his oth al overga' (313-14); likewise, Godard is guilty of the same treachery of being untrue to his word: 'he havede ful wo wrowht, / […] For al hise manie grete othes' (2453, 2459).[69] The ascribing of this fault of 'untruth' to one of the title characters in the romance, and the placement of Ywain's oathbreaking near the centre of the romance, implies what Alan Lupack observes, that 'even knights of the Round Table have to learn that being true is no simple matter.'[70] However, that truth in Arthur's time was a simple matter was precisely what the narrator's nostalgic perspective had striven to show. Thus, the unfolding of the narrative stands in tension with the narrator's characterisation of his Arthurian subject matter, and Ywain's exemplary qualities are called into question because of his failure to live up to the *treuthe* which was said to be universal in his time.

By establishing a position of nostalgia towards a past which, upon closer narration, then fails to stand up to the greatness ascribed to it, the narrator allows the audience to engage in reflexive nostalgia. This is what Davis also calls 'second order' nostalgia, which questions the nostalgic presentation of the past by asking, 'Was it really that way?'[71] Reflexive nostalgia, by this interrogation, 'corrects' and 'deflates' nostalgia's claims.[72] In this romance, the introduction manifests 'first order' or 'simple' nostalgia, which is the basic nostalgia which proposes that the past was better than the present; the narrator focused his nostalgia on the predominance of *treuthe* in the past.[73] His narrative, however, undercuts this claim in a way that prompts the audience not simply to feel nostalgic but rather to rethink the validity of that nostalgic response.

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[67] See *MED,* s.v. *lither(e* and *lōsenǧer.*

[68] The passage in which Ywain's broken vow is exposed is one of the occasions where the emphasis on love in Chrétien's text has been clearly redirected by the Middle English adaptor towards an interest in false promises. This is not an instance of mere disinterest in courtliness, but rather a change in keeping with the thematic focus of the whole work, which, as I have already argued, is a change clear and deft from the beginning. See also Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, 162.

[69] In Sands, *Middle English Verse Romances*.

[70] Alan Lupack, *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 2005)*,* 99.

[71] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 21; Boym, *Future of Nostalgia,* xviii.

[72] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 21; Boym, *Future of Nostalgia,* xviii, Ch. 5.

[73] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 17-18; Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xviii, Ch. 4.

This operation of reflexive nostalgia is confined to the audience, however. The narrator never evinces an overt change in perspective from his simple nostalgia. When he returns, at the end of the romance, to his role as commentator and summariser of the action, he recasts the story as one of unqualified goodness. The main narrative ends and the conclusion begins at line 4009, where a blue initial in the manuscript, for which space was left when the main text was written in black ink, suggests that the scribe, too, saw this as a transition point.[74] Ywain and Alundyne have just been reconciled, but in circumstances which do credit to Alundyne's honour rather than Ywain's, for she is tricked into a promise which she insists upon keeping (3923-4008); the chief *treuthe* in the story is exhibited by her more than anyone else. Instead of attempting to address the ambiguous moral import of this conclusion, the narrator concludes the story with a standard summary of a happy ending:

> Now has Sir Ywain ending made
> Of al þe sorows þat he hade.
> Ful lely lufed he ever hys whyfe
> And sho him als hyr owin life;
> Þat lasted to þaire lives ende. (4009-13)

Similar happiness is granted to Lunet and the lion (4025-6). The summary nature of these passages signal that the narration has once again assumed the character of diegesis, reinstating the sense of pastness by summarising events which include the deaths of the chief characters, emphasising that all the events narrated ended long ago. Ywain's and Alundyne's love lasts 'to þaire lives ende' (4013) and likewise Lunet and the lion enjoy happiness 'until þat ded haves dreven þam down' (4026).[75] The narrator then increases this distance by appending a formulaic ending not present in Chrétien, beginning, 'Of þam na mare have I herd tell' (4027) and making supplication for Christ to grant 'us', both him and his audience, a place in heaven (4029-32).[76] Thus, by the end, the narrator has resumed the distance with which he began the romance, and has taken care to invoke again his own identity as narrator ('na mare have I herd tell') and the presence of his audience in the inclusive 'us'. Prior positions in relation to the story have been resumed, and from these

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[74] London, British Library, Cotton Galba E.ix, fol. 25r. The capital's location is also recorded in Friedman and Harrington's edition, 106, note to line 4009.

[75] Friedman and Harrington note that line 4026 is an addition to the source (*Ywain and Gawain,* 132, note to lines 4026).

[76] This addition is noted by Friedman and Harrington, *Ywain and Gawain,* 132, note to lines 4029-32.

positions the narrator pronounces his happy ending, treating the romance as if, like *Sir Tryamour*, it were as exemplary in content as it promised to be.

Ywain and Gawain's nostalgia differs from the nostalgia of *Sir Tryamour* by prompting reflection on the nostalgia itself. Instead of creating a bond of identity between the audience and the fictional past in order to reinforce the past's exemplary influence, the reflexive nostalgia in *Ywain and Gawain* exposes the mechanisms of the exemplary use of the past. It does so, in effect, by pulling apart the seams of those mechanisms: it shows the narrator's attempts at creating nostalgia but relates a story whose failures inhibit a fully nostalgic response by the audience. It becomes clear, from this treatment, that the nostalgia propagated by the narrator has its roots in narrative attitude and technique, rather than in the inherent qualities of the past itself. In this way, though its nostalgia receives radically different treatment from that in *Sir Tryamour*, *Ywain and Gawain* similarly uses nostalgia to posit a continuity of identity: instead of imagining a past as a recoverable part of the audience's identity, *Ywain and Gawain* suggests that the discontinuity of past and present envisaged by nostalgia is in fact a ruse. The lack of *treuthe* in the present time links it clearly to the past, which suffers from the same fault.[77]

Conclusion: Consolations of Continuity

If, as I have argued, the romances' primary stance towards the pastness of their subject matter is nostalgic, one potential conclusion to draw is that they are essentially conservative. Because of its emphasis on the superiority of the past, nostalgia suggests itself as a conservative impulse, resisting change as it fixes its gaze not forward but backward.[78] When combined with an exemplary impulse which explicitly seeks transformation of its audience, the conserving force of nostalgia seems particularly strong, even potentially coercive. It suggests the oppressive form of authority that Scanlon

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[77] As a side note, it should be evident by now that any generalisations about the inferiority or simplicity of the Middle English version of this poem in comparison with Chrétien's version should be silenced. Friedman and Harrington, as an example of such views, note the English adaptor's habit, throughout the poem, of cutting out 'courtly' material in the form of introspection or rhetorical elaboration; this is part of a project of suiting the English version to an audience 'not adjusted' to Chrétien's version of courtliness: see Friedman and Harrington, *Ywain and Gawain,* xvii-xxii; see also Lupack, *Guide,* 99; and Keith Busby, 'Chrétien de Troyes English'd', *Neophilologus* 71 (1987), 601. Barron similarly contrasts Chrétien's romance with the Middle English one, relegating the English to a more simplistic set of readers and goals (Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, 161). Barron's analysis misses the allowance that the English romance makes for just such 'ambivalence' as the French version exhibits, and for similar reasons.

[78] See Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 109.

identifies: 'a repressive past accepted compliantly by an unquestioning present'.[79] This view of nostalgia in the romances easily results in a didactic reading of these texts along the lines described in the Introduction: as texts which defer to the 'repressive past' as a tool for teaching moral lessons.

However, Fred Davis's discussion of nostalgia and identity provides an alternative reading of nostalgia's function. He observes that collective nostalgia is often 'overindulged' in response to the threat of identity discontinuity, in other words in response to the threat of major social change.[80] However, the effect of this is not to repress change in the public sphere, but rather to equip societies to withstand public change by fostering an inward musing 'over a shared past', providing a mechanism to preserve the continuity of a society's identity even when that identity seems threatened by change.[81] Read in this light, the nostalgia of the romances can be seen not as a retrograde conservatism, but rather a means of equipping their readers to withstand societal upheaval. Maurice Halbwachs puts this a slightly different way, positing that the ability to remember the past frees the rememberer from the feeling that present society is only a 'constraint'; the past provides an outlet which permits the individual to feel enthusiasm, instead of resentment, towards society.[82] Both Davis and Halbwachs articulate different ways in which the past performs a vital enabling function for those who remember. In a similar way, the romances' nostalgia, in its various forms, provide ways of thinking about the past which enable it to furnish consolation for the present.

In *Sir Tryamour*, this takes the form of a functional nostalgia that empowers an exemplary goal, in effect encouraging readers to see a good, chivalric past as a lost but reclaimable part of their own identity. Within the text itself, this acts as a salve to ease the threat of change proposed by the suggestion of an exemplary goal; change is recast as the reclaiming of part of one's own cultural identity. It is worth remembering that, however the chivalric example of Tryamour is portrayed as being from the (actual) past, it is actually a fiction. For the author to hold up a chivalric example as a model for his audience's identities cannot represent a literally conservative move because he does not take his cue from the past at all; the example is technically radical in being distinct from any actual past

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[79] Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, 37-8.

[80] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 34-5, 103-4.

[81] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 103-10.

[82] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 51.

model. Its appearance of conservatism is the consoling result of the nostalgic fiction; this fiction makes innocuous what is an essentially radical goal.

In *Ywain and Gawain*, consolation is provided in a different way, but via the same principle of continuity of identity. Nostalgia is not itself the source of consolation, but rather provides the perspective which is laid open to question by the narrative, and the resulting interrogation furnishes evidence of a different kind of continuity. The narrative shows that the 'good old days', in one essential quality at least, are indistinguishable from the present. This reassures the audience that the proposed loss of *treuthe* in the present day is not a loss at all. The absence of *treuthe* afflicts the past as well, and the appearance of rupture is only a narrative effect which obscures an essential continuity between past and present. The past, in this romance, provides no obvious solution to present deficiencies, but does suggest that the absence of *treuthe* need not be mourned as a loss but understood as a perennial shortcoming of the knightly class.

This type of consolation, through realising the shortcomings of the past, is also at work in *Sir Tryamour*. Meshed with the narrative of Tryamour as the ideal knight is the narrative of his parents, which is a calumniated queen story in which Tryamour's mother is falsely accused of adultery. In fact, at the beginning of the romance, when the narrator promises an 'ensaumpull', the foregoing summary has not been of Tryamour's life but of his parents':

> Of a kyng and of a quene,
> What bale and blys was them betwene,
> Y schall yow telle full evyn. (7-9)

It thus seems, at the outset of the romance, that Tryamour's example is not the central one, but rather any application is to be taken from his parents. As this chapter has shown, the emphasis of the romance eventually shifts to focus on Tryamour, and the treatment of the knight is clearly meant to hold him as an example; the final shifts in focus at the end are also directed at the eponymous hero, and create the romance's nostalgia for him and for the values and the 'past' he represents. However, as I argued in the Introduction, an ethical reading of this romance is free to take 'ensaumpull' elsewhere, and might readily attend, as does the narrator initially, to Tryamour's parents. Their story of deception, betrayal, misunderstanding and injustice can act as a counterbalance to the view of the past which Tryamour's excellence promotes. This might alter the emphasis of the romance's nostalgia to one more like that in *Ywain and Gawain,* a nostalgia which consoles not by proposing that the superlative past can be reclaimed, but one which more grimly assures its readers

that even the superlative past was not exempt from broken fidelities and misreading of signs.

As the quotations at the beginning of this chapter illustrated, the sense of pastness and suggestion of moral usefulness in the romances is a wide-ranging feature, and many other romances evince the same kinds of nostalgic operations. They often, as in the examples here, configure their nostalgia with a degree of ambiguity about what part of the past is exemplary, and in what way. For example, the emperor Artyus in *Emaré* is described boldly as 'the best manne / In the worlde that lyvede thanne' (37-8), but he proceeds to attempt incest against his daughter. He is apparently an exemplary figure, but not ultimately as a positive model. Similarly, the nostalgia for the past which animates the opening and closing of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, with its vivid evocation of chronological distance as it sweeps through centuries of history in a few lines, seems disjointed from its subject matter, which Gawain himself understands to be a story of failure. A similar disjunction emerges in a romance like *Sir Degrevant,* where hearers are urged to hear of the 'gode' (good men) who lived before them, but the narrative turns out to revolve around local disputes of practical kind which were likely familiar to the audience:[83] a neighbouring Earl is jealous of Degrevant's wealth and so spoils his land (96-224). It is possible to read Degrevant himself as an example of justice, generosity, and zeal for the faith (he is on a crusade while his lands are ravaged), and in that sense to employ the romance's nostalgia in the same way as proposed in the first reading of *Sir Tryamour*: a longing to emulate a praiseworthy knight. Equally, though, the romance may 'console' in another way, by offering an image of the past as plagued by the same local but vicious quarrels as the present-day of late medieval England.[84] In all these examples, fodder is provided for readers to examine their own relation to the past, to emulate favoured heroes and thus revive the past in the face of apparent loss, or to realise that the plights of their present-day situations have reassuring precedent, which abates the shock of present threat: 'times haven't changed'. This is certainly the kind of consolation which Gower's Amans

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[83] Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, 144; Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 72-3, 148-9; Kooper, introduction to *Sir Degrevant* in *Sentimental and Humorous Romances*, 57; Maureen Jurkowski, 'The "Findern Manuscript" and the History of the Fynderne Family in the Fifteenth Century', in *Texts and Their Contexts: Papers from the Early Book Society*, ed. John Scattergood and Julia Boffey (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 208-9.

[84] For example, the Paston family were involved in disputes over their claim to various lands (H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and Their England*, 5-7, 10-17), and over the building of a wall which a neighbour then knocked over, setting off some local drama; see Davis, *PL*, 1: 34-5 (No. 22).

seeks from romance, where he finds those who were 'in mi cas' even 'longe er I was bore' (880, 882).

Whatever the specific examples to be taken from romance, this reading of the link between the pastness of romance and romance exemplarity provides a way of understanding one specific way that the romances fit into the 'teach and delight' mandate. Many scholars accept that, in some way, 'sentence and […] solaas', as Chaucer's Host puts it, formed the expected framework for most medieval fiction; moreover, this framework provided the justification for forms of pleasure that might otherwise seem morally suspect.[85] The romances do clearly encompass many forms of pleasure, including often predictable and gratifying structures,[86] violent extravagance, sexual gratification, slapstick humour,[87] and sophisticated reversals of real and fantastical.[88] It is easy to see how these pleasures might be deemed morally suspect and therefore need to be legitimised by a moral purpose. However, to these pleasures should be added the pleasure of nostalgic longing, and this particular pleasure casts light on how 'sentence and solaas' may be integrated. The framing of many romances as set in the past and as having exemplary value represents a particular appropriation of the marriage of 'solaas' and 'sentence', with the solace taking the form of nostalgic pleasure and the sentence taking the form of exemplarity. In this way, 'sentence and solaas' is not a moralising construct forced onto a literature of enjoyment simply to avoid censure, but can in fact be employed in ways which permit the pleasure and the teaching to be inextricably and fruitfully linked. This is clearly seen in the use of nostalgia as an effective form of pleasure which opens the romances to be willingly received by the audience for the exemplary shaping of identity.

The romances handle nostalgia in different ways but towards a common goal of providing models for establishing continuity of identity. Whether in the face of present discontent or the threat of change, the romances demonstrate how different nostalgic modes for thinking about the past can negotiate a relationship to it which consoles in the face of the present and future.

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[85] *General Prologue*, in Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer,* 798; Olson, *Literature as Recreation,* Ch. 1. See also the discussion of the use of pleasure in teaching by Richard de Bury in his *Philobiblon*, in Thomas, *The Love of Books*, 83-87, also repr. in Robert P. Miller, *Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds*, 74-76.

[86] E.g. the happy ending, patterns of threes, exile and return patterns, lost and recovered identities.

[87] Eckhardt, 'Arthurian Comedy'.

[88] Heng, *Empires of Magic*, 43.

Chapter 2: The Autobiographical Past in Romance

Romances consider the past not only in their setting, but in the form of the autobiographical memory of their characters.[1] One of the more well-known examples is at the end of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, when Gawain recapitulates his adventures for the audience of Arthur's court: 'Þe chaunce of þe chapel, þe chere of þe knyȝt' and all that follows (2496; 2494-2512). He structures his personal narrative according to two available medieval modes of narrative which deal with the past: the exemplum and confession. As in confession, Gawain clearly names his wrong deeds: 'couardise and couetyse' (2508); he also structures his narrative to lead to a moral, speaking no longer about himself in the first person but in the third person, universally: 'For mon may hyden his harme, bot vnhap ne may hit, / For þer hit onez is tachched twynne wil hit neuer' (For a man may hide his injury, but may not remove it, / for wherever it is once fastened, it will never part; 2511-12).

There are several unexpected aspects to this personal narrative. First of all, it takes from confession its focus on shaping the past in terms of wrongdoing, paired with the appropriate contrition in the form of 'gref' and 'schame' (2502, 2504), and uses the language of the seven deadly sins in the mention of 'couetyse'. However, this alliance with a religious discourse is deflected by the introduction of 'couardise', which belongs in a martial or chivalric framework of virtue. Gawain also shapes his personal experience to an exemplary purpose by appending a 'moral' about the inability of anyone to hide the visible consequences of, in this case, 'vntrawþe' (2509). Gawain seems to be warning his hearers that past failure permanently shapes present identity, a perspective suited to moral injunction but slightly out of step with a confessional focus on sin as absolvable. Finally, this exemplary shaping of the narrative is itself pushed aside when the court receives it without apparent seriousness, for they 'laȝen loude' (2514), and instead of taking Gawain's case as a negative example to be avoided, in fact treat him as a positive example and emulate him by wearing similar baldrics (2515-18).[2] They take his personal narrative as 'exemplary', but in precisely the opposite way Gawain seems to intend, a phenomenon which appears in another romance, *Ywain and Gawain*, as we shall see. Thus, for all the ways in which Gawain's personal narrative of his past seems to take its structures from

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[1] For definitions of autobiographical memory, see John A. Robinson, 'Autobiographical Memory: A Historical Prologue', in *Autobiographical Memory*, ed. David C. Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 19; William F. Brewer, 'What is Autobiographical Memory?', in Rubin, *Autobiographical Memory*, 26-7.

[2] On the court's response to Gawain, see Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry*, 87.

moral discourses, a full appropriation of these discourses and the appropriate responses to them is constantly deflected.

These aspects of Gawain's narrative and its reception which seem slightly misaligned with one another are indicative of several features of the way Middle English romances handle the relationship of individuals to their own pasts: in other words, how they handle autobiographical memory and narration. Gawain employs pre-existing models for how he structures his narration, namely the model of confession and that of the exemplum, both of which are moral discourses concerned with identity. However, these models are not slavishly copied but are recombined, placed in a non-religious setting (the court), and received in ways different from what the discourses intend. In other words, Gawain remembers his past via the available identity-shaping discourses, but these discourses are taken from their original environment and become subject to interrogation. Gawain becomes an example of how these models can be used to give structure and meaning to a personal past, but Arthur's court forms a context which questions these models' validity or relevance.

As this chapter will show, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is not the only romance to deploy these moral discourses of identity to shape personal pasts. The same activity is evident in *Sir Cleges, Ywain and Gawain,* and *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, with differing degrees of acceptance of and resistance to the various moral and religious models adopted. Throughout, it will be clear that memory is by no means a purely reiterative activity. As recent studies of medieval memory have moved away from memory as passive and rote, they have moved towards an understanding of how memory of the past is active, constructed, and purposeful.[3] Mary Carruthers has shown how even the techniques of medieval memory which may seem most mechanical are in fact part of a framework in which recollection is meant to be 'occasional', suited to a present need.[4] This may be for composition of a written work or sermon, or for an ethical situation in which a guide for behaviour is needed, but in either case it is understood that memory is to be shaped to suit a situation.[5] As I have shown in Chapter One, this active use of the past is evident in the activities of romance narrators as they craft a nostalgic relationship of present to past.

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[3] Lucie Doležalová and Tamás Visi, 'Revisiting Memory in the Middle Ages (Introduction)', in *The Making of Memory in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lucie Doležalová (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 4; see also Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, xiv.

[4] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 26-7, 74, 87, 180-1.

[5] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, Ch. 6 (on composition), and 178-88 (on ethical occasions).

Similarly, it is evident in the romances where characters stand as narrators of their own pasts at a particular moment. These narrations all serve not only a present function in each romance and for the identity of the rememberer, but simultaneously also reflect on the temporal models which shape their recollections.

As the psychologist John Robinson discusses, the frameworks for autobiographical memory are supplied by the social and institutional structures which regulate action: structures of work, worship, and leisure, among other such 'domains of action'.[6] For the medieval romances, these temporal structures are often taken from religious, devotional and moral literature, as I have indicated. The prolific religiously motivated literature of the late medieval period, including devotional poems, catechetical texts, books of hours, manuals of penance, and exemplary works, often shares manuscripts with the romances, and, despite its variety of genre, is generally directed toward the end of identity shaping in the form of understanding and refashioning the self.[7] This self-fashioning is the goal of inward reflection and knowing oneself, as the speaker in an Ashmole 61 text, 'The Sinner's Lament', encourages his readers to do: 'God gyve thee grace thiselve to know' (96).[8] This kind of injunction to 'know thyself' in devotional literature is often accompanied by an emphasis that self-knowledge requires understanding how temporality shapes identity. A good example of this occurs in *The Prick of Conscience*, a popular text which also appears in the same manuscript as *Ywain and Gawain* (London, British Library, Cotton Galba MS E.ix). In this text, self-knowledge is enjoined in explicitly temporal terms:

> For he þat knawes wele, and can se
> What him-self *was*, and *es*, and *sal be*,
> A wiser man may he be talde […]. (Emphasis mine.)[9]

Here, to know oneself is synonymous with knowing one's identity in the three temporal modes of past, present and future. This kind of model for self-knowledge positions

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[6] John A. Robinson, 'Temporal Reference Systems and Autobiographical Memory', in Rubin, *Autobiographical Memory*, 159.

[7] Major romance collections which also contain devotional and religious works include London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A.ii; Cotton Galba E.ix; Add. 31042 (the London Thornton MS); Cambridge, University Library, Ff.2.38; Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91 (the Lincoln Thornton MS); Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 61.

[8] *The Sinner's Lament*, in Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, 349-51.

[9] Richard Morris, ed., *The Pricke of Conscience (Stimulus Conscientiæ)* (Berlin: A. Asher & Co. 1863), 211-13. This edition is based on Cotton Galba E.ix.

memory, particularly autobiographical memory, as a fundamental part of forming individual identity.

The context for most late medieval devotional practice is, of course, the aftermath of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which spawned an increasing amount of pastoral and devotional literature in England.[10] This included preaching material, instructional works in English like *Handlyng Synne* and *The Prick of Conscience*, manuals for confession, many devotional poems, and the Books of Hours which governed private religious observance.[11] This plentiful literature, particularly in English, means that readers of Middle English romance would very likely be familiar with the models of time inherent in religious discourse, perhaps through teaching informed by such texts, but in many cases also through their own reading and often from texts in the same manuscripts as the romances.[12] As Susan Crane argues, this context of increased pastoral care and lay spiritual education richly informs the romances' use of motifs and plot structures, as evinced in the many romances which derive from originally hagiographical sources, such as *Amis and Amiloun* and *Sir Isumbras*, which are discussed in Chapter Four.[13] In the same way, the dialogue of characters within romance is similarly informed by the varieties of self-knowledge available from the religious texts circulating at the time.

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[10] Leonard E. Boyle, 'The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology', in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England,* ed. Thomas J. Heffernan, Tennessee Studies in Literature 28 (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985); Peter Biller, 'Confession in the Middle Ages: Introduction', in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages,* ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (York: York Medieval Press, 1998); Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 6-7; Jerry Root, *'Space to Speke': The Confessional Subject in Medieval Literature,* American University Studies, series 2, vol. 225 (New York: Peter Lang, 1997)*,* 1; Susan Crane, '*Guy of Warwick* and the Question of Exemplary Romance', *Genre* 17, no. 4 (1984), 352-53; an English translation of the text of the 1215 Council can be found in Harry Rothwell, ed., *English Historical Documents, 1189-1327*, Vol. 3, *English Historical Documents* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1975), 136.21 (pp. 654-55).

[11] Boyle, 'The Fourth Lateran Council', 31, 37; Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner: Characterization and Confession in the Literature of the English Middle Ages* (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1983), Ch. 2; Michael Haren, 'Confession, Social Ethics and Social Discipline in the *Memoriale presbiterorum*', in Biller and Minnis, *Handling Sin,* 109, 112-13; Biller, 'Confession in the Middle Ages: Introduction', 10; Guy Trudel, 'The Middle English *Book of Penance*', *Medium Ævum* 74, no. 1 (2005); Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, 4-6; Mary Beth Long, 'Corpora and Manuscripts, Authors and Audiences', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography,* ed. Sarah Salih (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 51.

[12] Trudel notes that the *Book of Penance*, though addressed at times to the penitent, addresses itself frequently to the confessor as a teacher of the material, a reminder that penitents who did not read confessional texts themselves could still have encountered their contents through the teaching of someone who had ('The Middle English *Book of Penance*', 22-6).

[13] Crane, '*Guy of Warwick*', 352-56.

However, the values of the religious movement post-1215 also potentially conflict with the temporal concerns of romance, with their focus on the happy ending in terms of marriage, land and progeny, rather than surrender of the individual will to God and martyrdom.[14] Gawain's speech quoted above, though clearly confessional in many regards, is not received as such, and this signals that the romance is doing more with this discourse than merely holding it up as a model. In this romance as well as in the others discussed below, the challenge which vernacular religious discourse poses to secular values is often taken up in a spirit of interrogation.[15] In their varied use of moral and devotional models for shaping the past, romances transfer these contemplative models to a new context based on external action and dialogue; they are, in this sense, dramas of reflective thought. Not only this, however, but they make this transfer into to a context which may in fact generate resistance to the religious models or at least to the perspectives they imply. In their treatment of personal autobiographical narrative particularly, the romances explore the practical consequences of individuals in secular life understanding their past and present in the ways in which moral and religious discourse enjoins upon them. Results of this transfer from a religious to a secular setting range from nuanced acceptance and self-transformation as in *Sir Cleges*, to the tacit irrelevance of moral discourse compared to chivalric action in *Ywain and Gawain,* and finally to the more brutal obliteration of religious self-definition in *Le Bone Florence of Rome*. In conclusion, I shall return to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to consider how these other romances shed light on its handling of devotional and exemplary self-definition.

Nostalgic and Liturgical Time in *Sir Cleges*

In *Sir Cleges*, a knight and his wife achieve the redemption of their fallen fortunes by transforming their understanding of the past. Cleges initially approaches his past life in a nostalgic mode, seeing disjunction between his past and present and remaining unable to see any hope for the future. In contrast, his wife, Clarys, sees their family life as part of a

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[14] Crane, '*Guy of Warwick*', 363; see also Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner*, 40-1. A good example of the difference between hagiographical ends and those of romance can be found in the comparison of the Eustace legend to *Sir Isumbras*, where the saint's legend ends with martyrdom and the romance with restoration to worldly position: see Laurel Braswell, '"Sir Isumbras" and the Legend of Saint Eustace', *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965), 128-151, esp. 130-32; see also Rhiannon Purdie, ''Generic Identity and the Origins of *Sir Isumbras*', in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. Phillipa Hardman (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 120.

[15] Crane, '*Guy of Warwick*', 370.

liturgical continuity which creates meaningful wholeness and hope. Once Cleges transforms his own understanding into alignment with that of his wife, he attains literal restoration of their fortunes. The romance thus shows two characters posing different models of time for the interpretation of their personal lives, and privileges the liturgical, devotional model by transferring its typological pattern of hope into a literal narrative of restoration.

Sir Cleges has no known source and exists in two versions, which are thought to derive from a common source rather than from each other.[16] One version, in Edinburgh, University Library, MS Advocates 19.1.11, is missing its final stanzas.[17] Therefore the version used here is the one in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 61.[18] Not only is it more complete, but its differences in wording often pertain of the portrayal of nostalgia and the past, making it a text much more oriented towards working through the past than the Advocates version.

The trajectory of Cleges's past is outlined at the very beginning of the romance: he is a wealthy knight who gives generously to his tenants and holds lavish Christmas feasts (13-63), but over the years expends all his fortune (64-9). Finally, one Christmas, he sits contemplating in the garden and is forced to face the results of his spending:

> Wo bethought hym that tyde:
> What myrth he was wonte to hold,[19]
> And he had hys maners solde,
>   Tenandrys and landys wyde.
> Mekyll sorow made he ther;
> He wrong hys hondys and wepyd sore,
>   For fallyd was hys pride. (87-93)

Cleges recalls his past 'myrth' and pairs it with his present predicament, now that he has 'hys maners solde', and in this passage his thinking exemplifies the nostalgic dialogue that

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[16] The two versions are found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 61, and National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, MS 19.1.11 (the Advocates manuscript); derivation of the two versions is discussed by Laskaya and Salisbury, introduction to *Sir Cleges* in *The Middle English Breton Lays,* 367.

[17] The Advocates version of the text is printed in French and Hale, *Middle English Metrical Romances*, 2:877-95.

[18] *Sir Cleges* in Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61.*

[19] In the Advocates version, this line reads, 'And on his myrthys þat he schuld hold' (*Sir Cleges* in French and Hale, *Middle English Metrical Romances,* 2: 91); the difference in wording is important, for in the Advocates version Cleges considers his feast-hosting as an obligation, indicated by the modal 'should', whereas in the Ashmole version he thinks of it as his past habit, as indicated by the word 'wonte'. The nostalgia of the moment in the Advocates version is thus much lessened; Cleges's sorrow is over the loss of his wealth and his inability to fulfil his obligation, rather than stemming from a reflection on his past habit.

Davis explains, and which was discussed in Chapter One.[20] Through this dialogue, Cleges articulates an understanding of his past and present as irrevocably severed, characterised by the alienation that is such a crucial component of the nostalgic mode.[21] Rita Felski posits that this particular temporal structuring of experience—what is called nostalgia here—has an 'in-built' emotional response, as Cleges exhibits.[22] He also remembers the past idealistically, remembering his happy past but neglecting the very fault which led him to the present unhappy situation, namely his own spending.[23] Cleges focuses on the past happiness of his Christmas feasts but ignores that they are also the direct cause of his present poverty, engaging int the kind of forgetfulness that is symptomatic of some nostalgias.[24] As a result of his idealistic and disjunctive view of his own past, Cleges views his present as irreconcilably inferior, and he entirely lacks a vision for the future. Cleges's inaction is symptomatic of nostalgia, for if the present is worse than the past, implicitly the future can only be worse still.[25] Cleges's perspective also isolates him, for it allows his construction of past and present no participation in any scheme of time outside that of personal experience. His isolation is physically envisaged in the narrative: he is portrayed as alone in the garden, and he hears the sound of minstrels playing nearby but does not join them, remaining instead on his own, 'Sygheng full pytewysly' (105). Finally, Cleges's nostalgic model of conceiving the past not only affects his understanding of events but his understanding of his own identity: he mourns because 'fallyd was hys pride'. He sees the loss of material wealth as the direct cause of the loss of an aspect of his own identity.

Cleges's wife Clarys arrives, however, to fit his temporal experience into a different model which sees past and present as unified in a liturgical calendar. Instead of comparing the present to a superior past, she focuses on the liturgical identity of the present day, and urges him to cease his sorrow 'Agene this holy dey'[26] of Christmas Eve,

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[20] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 15-16.

[21] Riddy, 'The Uses of the Past in *Sir Orfeo*', 10; Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 13-16; Lerner, *The Uses of Nostalgia*, 54; Santesso, *A Careful Longing*, 16.

[22] The emotional response to the idea of time as regression—what is here termed nostalgia—is 'in-built', according to Felski ('Telling Time in Feminist Theory', 21-2).

[23] Santesso, *A Careful Longing*, 16; see also Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 37-39.

[24] Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 14-15. Boym describes how, when nostalgia is employed in the creation of national identities, the past for which it longs is often purposefully rewritten.

[25] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 109.

[26] Ad Putter glosses this phrase as 'as the holy day approaches', which differs in slight detail from my translation but does not substantially affect the force of the passage as a whole ('In Search of Lost Time', 125). See note 26, below, for my gloss of the word 'agene'.

when to be 'mery and glad' is more appropriate (129-30).[27] Clarys identifies the present day by its part in a liturgical *cursus*, to use Anne Higgins's term: the liturgical 'rhythm in events' which constituted the liturgical year.[28]

This cyclical structure unifies many historically disparate linear narratives into a single structure: the life of Christ, the lives of saints, and the world's movement from creation towards judgment are all linear narratives which become meshed together in the liturgical cycle.[29] The yearly repetition of the sequence of Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ascension maps the life of Christ onto the individual believer's symbolic birth, spiritual death at Lent, and redemption at Easter. Incorporated into this cycle are the lives of the saints each remembered on their assigned days, whose lives thus participate in the pattern of the liturgical year in a way that mirrors and signifies their spiritual participation in the great movement of redemption. In the romance, viewing 'this […] dey' as the recurrence of a liturgical event relates it to the past by connecting it with a foregoing chain of similar, rather than contrasting, events. Moreover, it bestows on the day a meaning derived from the story of salvation which the liturgy enacts: Christmas Eve, in this narrative, is the day which anticipates the arrival of the Saviour. It is not a time inferior to the past, but rather looks forward to the apex of the salvation story, the epitome of hopeful futures. Moreover, Clarys's model of time allows Cleges's past to share in the trajectory of the entire Christian community over time and space.

Not only does the liturgical model of time attach all these linear narratives to its *cursus*, by definition it also invites individual believers to map their own lives onto this structure both by participation in liturgical practice and by private devotional observance. Clarys's integration of personal life and identity with a liturgical model of time is thus precisely the activity which medieval devotional practice encouraged. The popularity of Books of Hours produced in small formats for private use attests to the ready availability of the liturgical model of time: these books provide sequences of readings for different

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[27] The preposition 'agen(e)s' can mean 'on', as it is glossed in Shuffelton's edition of the text, but also 'in preparation for' a time or occasion, or immediately before a certain time, a definition which seems more in keeping with Clarys's emphasis: see *MED,* s.v. 'agen(e)s', 8 (a) and (b). Many carols bear witness to the propriety of mirth at Christmas: see, for example, the refrains of several carols: 'Now be we glad and not to sad', and 'Be we mery now in this fest', both fifteenth-century examples: Richard Leighton Greene, ed. *The Early English Carols*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977; First published 1935), No. 38 (p. 21), Nos. 81-82 (p. 43).

[28] Higgins, 'Medieval Notions of the Structure of Time', 230, 232-33.

[29] Higgins, 'Medieval Notions of the Structure of Time', 229-30, 233-34; Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England*, The British Library Studies in Medieval Culture (London: The British Library, 2003), 57.

times of year, a 'Kalendar' of feasts and saints' days, and often include illustration schemes which integrate these elements with narratives of the lives of Christ, Mary and the saints.[30] As Kathryn Smith discusses, these books are structured by the liturgical year and its feast days as well as the large span of salvation history from the Old Testament through to Judgement Day and the end of the world; integrated into these schemes, often according to the personal interests and taste of the books' owners, were programmes of illustration which meshed the lives of Christ, the Virgin, or the saints with the readings for certain seasons.[31] Simply using a Book of Hours for personal devotions would signal the individual's symbolic participation in all these intermeshed schemes of Christian time. However, the manuscripts themselves also show that their owners integrated their lives into these schemes by personalising the physical books. Donor portraits are an example of such personalisation, as is the illustration in the Neville of Hornby Hours (c. 1340) which takes a standard cosmological picture of the spheres and makes the central 'terra' sphere a picture resembling the family's estates.[32] Not only this, but owners sometimes added birth and death records to blank pages of the books, or even onto the Kalendar, thus integrating the events of their own lives and families into the liturgical sequence.[33] Duffy describes a Book of Hours where the owner has written 'my moder departyd to god' on the day of her death in the October/November Kalendar page.[34] The way devoted laypeople integrated liturgical models of time with the events of their own lives, using Books of Hours, is echoed narratively in the way Clarys reimagines hers and her husband's personal history according to a liturgical structure.

The particular contrast between the temporal perspectives of Cleges and Clarys is evident once again when Cleges discovers the blooming cherry tree during the night. Cleges sees the growth as unseasonable:

> 'I have not se this tyme of yere
> That treys any fruyt schuld bere,
> Als ferre as I have sought.' (199-201)

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[30] Duffy, *Marking the Hours,* 4-6; Duffy gives a general history of Books of Hours in Ch. 1; see his comments on personalised uses of the Kalendar on pp. 43-6; on the Kalendar and its structuring of time, see Kathryn Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion*, 57; for different illustration schemes, see all of Ch. 2.

[31] Kathryn Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion*, 57.

[32] Kathryn Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion,* 57, 120-22, Fig. 57; the Neville of Hornby Hours is London, British Library, Egerton MS 2781.

[33] Kathryn Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion*, 57; Duffy, *Marking the Hours,* 43-5.

[34] The manuscript is Cambridge, University Library, Ee.1.14; see Duffy, *Marking the Hours,* 46-7, Fig. 35.

Cleges approaches this marvel with the same habit of thinking that produced his nostalgia. He holds the past and present in apposition and views the present as an aberration: the budding of the cherry tree this winter is against the precedent of every previous year. Cleges' idea of the past, in which he has never seen a cherry tree bud at this time, is also constructed by an appeal to personal experience: '*I have not se* […]' (199, emphasis mine). Much as he views the meaning of 'today' in terms of its relation to the trajectory of his own life, rather than in its liturgical identity, so he also views the cherry tree's blossoming as out of season in his own experience. Appeal might be made to nature's cycle, but Cleges attempts no such argument. His construction of present and past as alienated from one another causes him to read the cherry tree as a bad omen for the future: he tells Clarys that he is 'aferd it is a tokenyng […] / That more grevans is ny' (209-11). Earlier, he was too absorbed with grief over the present to envision the future; here, he is able to expect a future, but one shaped by his sense of the alienation of past and present, predictive of disaster.

As before, Clarys offers a different perspective which appeals not to personal experience of the past but to a liturgical precedent for understanding the present as meaningfully connected. She sees the cherry tree not as a bad omen but as a 'tokenyng / Of more godnes that is comyng' (212-13). This is because she reads the cherry tree in its significance in the liturgical *cursus*. As Ad Putter argues, the idea of 'fruition' was associated with the birth of Christ.[35] Ambrose, for example, writes in a hymn, 'Verbum Dei factum caro / Fructusque ventris floruit': 'The word of God has been made flesh, and the fruit of the womb has flourished'.[36] There is also evidence of cherries associated specifically with the birth of Christ. In the Second Shepherd's Play in the Towneley Cycle, shepherds bring a bunch of cherries to the newborn Christ.[37] While the fruitful cherry tree is out of place according to Cleges's personal experience of the natural world, in terms of symbolic association in a liturgical calendar, the cherry tree's blossoming is, like the mirth

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[35] Putter, 'In Search of Lost Time', 130-1; Alexander Tille, *Yule and Christmas: Their Place in the Germanic Year* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Press, 1899), 173-5; Clement A. Miles, *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition, Christian and Pagan* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912; repr. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1976), 268-69.

[36] *Veni, redemptor genitum*, in *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi,* ed. Guido Maria Dreves, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Fues's Verlag, 1888), p. 36, no. 21, ll. 7-8. See also in Putter, 'In Search of Lost Time', 131. Putter suggests that the author of the romance knows these associations, and aligns the Christmas setting of the romance with the blossoming precisely because they are associated with one another (129-31).

[37] 'Second Shepherds Play', in *The Towneley Plays,* ed. Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, vol. 1, E.E.T.S. s.s. 13 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1035-36 (p. 156).

appropriate to Christmas, quite 'in season'. This difference of interpretation is reflected in the difference between Cleges's and Clarys's reactions to the miracle: Cleges fears this out-of-season fruition is a bad omen, a divergence from natural order, while Clarys thinks that it foretells 'more godnes that is comyng', seeing it as a beneficent divine intervention proper to the happy season (213).[38]

The romance thus portrays Cleges and Clarys as individual rememberers with two vastly different ways of construing the relation of past experience to present situation. Cleges's position isolates him and his experience; for him, remembering is an individualistic activity undertaken in solitude, and his insistence on the irreconcilable difference between his past identity and his present fosters a view of experience as broken, disjointed, and lacking any hopeful continuance. Clarys's view, in contrast, brings past experience into communion with the present and with larger systems of meaning and development. Her view is put forth in dialogue, breaking into the physical isolation of Cleges's reverie, and she situates her husband's individual past as part of a trajectory which is able to reach into the future towards redemption, both in its own right and in its symbolic association with the pattern of salvation onto which it is mapped in the liturgical *cursus*. It is Clarys's view that wins out, for she is right in her prediction about the cherries, and her advice governs the subsequent narrative.

In the second part of the romance, Cleges takes Clarys's advice and presents King Uther with the cherries as a gift. This gesture literalises the typological hope which Clarys assigned to the cherries: instead of merely signifying hope, the cherries now become an instrumental means of hope as they initiate Cleges's attempt to reingratiate himself with Uther. When Cleges presents the cherries to the king he adopts Clarys's interpretation of what they signify:

> 'Jhesu, our savyoure,
> Sente you this fruyt with grete honour,
>   Thys dey onne erth growyng.' (365-67)

Cleges describes the cherries as having been sent by Christ, himself the fruit that was sent also on 'thys dey', understanding them as a gift rather than a bad omen. Uther, too, subscribes to this optimistic view, and describes the cherries as a 'feyre newyng', a fair

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[38] It is possible that the couple's two different views of time are specifically gendered. Rita Felski notes that the idea of 'time as repetition', or a cycle, is linked to women in many cultures, in part because of women's biological cycles ('Telling Time in Feminist Theory', 25-6), and Julia Kristeva remarks upon the same ('Women's Time', 16-17), and contrasts this feminine cyclical time with masculine, linear time (17-18).

novelty (370), thus noting their unusualness for the time of year but seeing this as a positive quality. This is because the novelty of the cherries, instead of occasioning a sense of disjunction, is understood as aligning them in conjunction with the salvation story: Cleges and Uther now both see the cherries according to a liturgical model of time. Not only do the cherries become a literal means of restoration for Cleges, but the narrator obliquely indicates that they become a literal means of redemption in another way. The narrator says that Uther gave the cherries as a present to 'a lady gente' who is not named but, the narrator says, later becomes Uther's queen (374-79); in other words, Uther sends the cherries as a gift to his eventual wife, Igraine, whom we know from other Arthurian stories to be the mother of Arthur. This allusion to future events subtly suggests that the cherries play an incipient role in a courtship that later leads to the birth of Arthur. Just as the cherries, typologically seen, signal the anticipation of the advent of Christ, in this brief allusion they figure in the events leading to the literal advent of another saviour, Arthur. The typological interpretation is echoed and realised even beyond the scope of Cleges's and Clarys's own lives. This suggests that Clarys's liturgical understanding of the cherries perceives something 'real' about their significance which Cleges's more naturalistic understanding failed to recognise.

Cleges's memory of his own past is redeployed at the end of the romance, but instead of emphasising alienation, Cleges uses the narrative of his past life to affirm the continuity of his identity from past to present, ultimately leading to his restoration. Uther, not recognising Cleges, wants to know who he is. The harper confirms that the 'pore man' who has now appeared in court is the knight who was 'som tyme' called Cleges (480, 482-83). The harper recalls Cleges's past:

> 'I may thinke when that he was
> Full of fortone and of grace,
>> A man of hye stature.' (485-87)

Uther remembers Cleges fondly but believes him to be dead (488-90). Asked to verify his identity, Cleges himself recalls his former place in Uther's retinue and recounts his subsequent trials:

> 'I was your awne knight […]'

> 'Tyll God allmyght hath vyset me;
>> Thus poverté hath me dyght' (523, 528-29).

Cleges narrates the change in fortune which produced his earlier nostalgia and alienation from the past. However, here his narration is within a different context and produces a different result. He is no longer an isolated rememberer, but narrates his past life to a public audience. He attributes his change in fortune to God. The clear purpose of his narration is not to emphasise the break between his past and present, but to confirm that he is indeed the same man he used to be: he affirms the continuity of his identity, despite apparent change. Uther, now recognising him, gives him a knight's reward. This use of the past focuses not on alienation, creating nostalgia, but rather on continuity, promoting restoration.

This romance suggests that the desire for continuity which nostalgia evinces can be satisfied by understanding time as a liturgical *cursus*. As I discussed in Chapter One, nostalgia rests both on a sense of alienation and a desire for continuity, and as Davis argues, nostalgic remembrance is usually a form of recreating a sense of continuity in response to the threat of discontinuity.[39] Cleges's nostalgic outburst in the garden is an expression of desire not for the past per se, but for continuity in his own identity, sustenance of his own 'pride'. However, the nostalgia to which Cleges resorts is impotent to supply him with the continuity he desires. He can see his experience only in terms of disjunction, and this understanding provides no way out of his isolation and inaction. Restoration of continuity relies on the liturgical model of time which Clarys provides. Her liturgical interpretation of the past provides 'resources for continuity' that Cleges's nostalgia in fact does not.[40]

This model of time supplies a typological continuity which ultimately bears the fruit of a literal restoration. The typological continuity between past and present, winter and cherry blossoms, becomes real continuity when fortunes are literally restored, and symbolically 'blessed' cherries become literal means for attaining blessing. Similarly, Cleges's own view of his experience and identity, once altered in alignment with his wife's, leads directly to the restoration of his public identity in Uther's court. In this sense, the ending of the romance literally 'realises' the view which is symbolically present in the liturgical model of time: this is the view that individuals participate in a pattern of continuity, a pattern which is typologically discernible even when not literally apparent, and one which culminates in redemption for the faithful, both annually (at Easter) and ultimately (at the Last Judgment). In this literal 'realisation', the romance also vindicates

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[39] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 34-5, 49, 104.

[40] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 34-5.

the characters who view their lives according to a liturgical model because it becomes the means for achieving redemption. The romance thus uses the outwardly focused happy-ending structure of romance narrative to vindicate a devotional, liturgical understanding of personal identity in time.

However, the context for this vindication of a religious definition of identity remains the secular context of romance. Liturgical time is recommended not absolutely, nor for its spiritual advantages, but because it achieves what nostalgia could not. It permits Cleges to be restored to the desired position of a romance hero, to attain the final 'joy and mery chere' and timely death after prosperous life that shapes the structure and the values of romance (561, 554-65). On the one hand, although the romance vindicates the liturgical conception of identity, arguably it misses the spiritual point in its focus on material restoration. On the other hand, this misappropriation is a curious way of taking liturgical identity utterly seriously, attributing to it a practical potency beyond its spiritual compass, a potency in the realm of a gentry 'man of mekyll myght' who is 'full of plenté' (12, 24).

Exemplary and Confessional Pasts in *Ywain and Gawain*

Ywain and Gawain appeared in Chapter One in the study of nostalgia, but the romance is worth another look for its treatment of autobiographical memory. Personal remembrance figures in the romance's preoccupation with knightly identity, particularly as it is threatened by particular failures and stands in need of redemption. Two knights, Colgrevance and Ywain, employ two models for remembering and reshaping past failure: that of an exemplary narrative and that of confession, both of which have particular ways of fashioning the past in a way which promises to redeem it. These two models, both from different moral discourses, are juxtaposed with Ywain's action-oriented and secular approach to redeeming past failure by personal exertion and cunning. Although Ywain pays lip service to a confessional mode and uses its language to describe his actions, in fact he seeks to redeem his identity not by accepting the spiritual transformation which confession offers, but by other means somewhat morally questionable. The romance thus recognises the identity-shaping function of both exemplary and confessional discourse, while picturing this function disjoined from the practice of the central hero, for whom these discourses are a source of language but not of efficacy.

The context for Ywain's adventures is set by the experience of his cousin, Colgrevance, who recognises that his personal failures compromise his reputation and

seeks to redeem it by narrating his experience as an exemplum. Near the beginning of the romance, Colgrevance, under pressure from the other knights, reluctantly agrees to tell a story about an adventure he had six years before. The story culminates in failure, a 'chivalric defeat', hence his reluctance to tell it.[41] Colgrevance makes it clear that the failure he narrates represents his own personal experience (152), not attempting to falsify or disavow it, but at the beginning of his narrative he sets the stage by assuming the role of a moralising narrator. He pontificates on the importance of remembering what is heard, using language which evokes the importance of memory in receiving and applying useful examples:

> Bot word fares als dose þe wind,
> Bot if men it in hert bynd;
> And, wordes wo so trewly tase,[42]   *And, whoever truly receives words,*
> By þe eres into þe hert it gase,
> And in þe hert þare es þe horde
> And knawing of ilk mans worde. (143-48)

Mary Carruthers has pointed out that the image of a treasure-chest is often used as a metaphor for the memory, with the information stored in memory likened to the treasure.[43] This remembered 'treasure', in medieval ethical theory, becomes the basis for decision-making.[44] In other words, Colgrevance reminds his hearers that his story has a usefulness for them, if they are willing to attend to it. Colgrevance also prepares the way for the exemplary value of his story by stating that it should be taken as neither trivial nor fictional: 'Trofels [trifles] sal I ȝow nane tell, / Ne lesinges forto ger [make] ȝow lagh' (150-51). His story is important enough to be remembered by the hearers and kept for reflection, legitimate material for the collection of 'commonplaces' that supplies medieval memory with valuable exempla.[45] Finally, Colgrevance suggests his exemplary thrust by

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[41] David E. Faris, 'The Art of Adventure in the Middle English Romance: *Ywain and Gawain, Eger and Grime*', *Studia Neophilologica* 53 (1981), 94.

[42] Mary Flowers Braswell, the editor of the TEAMS edition of *Ywain and Gawain*, glosses 'tase' as 'takes' (*MED*, s.v. 'taken'). The Middle English verb encompasses meanings such as to receive, to hear, to notice, and to understand (*MED,* s.v. 'taken', 15a, 22, 25).

[43] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* 33, 42, 44, 246.

[44] The relation of memory to ethical decision-making has been discussed by Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* 65-7, 69. This is why, Carruthers argues, moral decisions in medieval texts are often accompanied by 'fragments' from memory, exempla which form the basis for a decision: as examples, she cites Chaucer's Dorigen and Abelard's Heloise (179-81). Mitchell also discusses medieval ethical theories as based on the use of narrative cases as the basis for evaluating a situation ethically (*Ethics and Exemplary Narrative*, 4-5, 24; see also Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power,* 4).

[45] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* 178-9.

emphasising the value of the narrative he tells, rather than his personal experience itself. His comment on memory focuses repeatedly on remembering the 'word', a term repeated three times in the quote above (143, 145, 148).

Colgrevance then shapes his experience into an example about the folly of seeking knightly adventures. When he first set out, his goal was to seek 'aventurs in þat land, / My body to asai and fande' (315-16),[46] apparently the knightly goal of proving his physical prowess. He was directed to a magical stone and fought with a knight who defeated him and took his horse and armour, but ends his adventure without meeting his foe again. In retrospect he dismisses the whole enterprise as folly: 'On þis wise þat tyme I wroght; / I fand þe folies þat I soght' (455-6).[47] Seen in hindsight, not only is the story dismissed but the goal itself deemed foolish: the follies he attained were not accidents but follies '*þat I soght*' (emphasis mine). Though Colgrevance acknowledges that his original *intended* goal was to prove his prowess, he also acknowledges that the process of the adventure itself not only produced folly, but altered his understanding of his original goal. By this closing comment, Colgrevance transforms the mere telling of events into what Frank Kermode calls a 'concord fiction', one which, by the application of a certain beginning and ending, bestows meaning on the events between.[48] Colgrevance chooses to conclude his story of failure with an interpretation which both gives meaning to that failure by naming it as 'folly' and which, simultaneously, makes that failure productive of a larger, communicable point about the folly of seeking adventures for their own sake.

By electing to shape his past failures into an exemplary narrative, Colgrevance takes advantage of a form that would be familiar to any medieval reader of romance. The manuscript of *Ywain and Gawain* (Cotton Galba E.ix) also contains a some exemplary narratives in the form of a version of *The Seven Sages*, a series of exemplary stories fitted into a frame context.[49] Exemplary narratives may vary greatly in length and subject matter,

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[46] *MED,* s.v. 'finden', 10.

[47] In the *MED*, the word *folie* has exclusively pejorative connotations. The less pejorative use, as in 'the *Ziegfield Follies*', is specifically a later usage (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'folly', 1.b).

[48] Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 190, 193.

[49] The text from Cotton Galba is edited by Killis Campbell, *The Seven Sages of Rome* (Boston, London: Ginn & Company, 1907). Other editions of different versions of the text include Jill Whitelock, ed., *The Seven Sages of Rome (Midland Version): Edited from Cambridge, University Library, MS Dd.1.17*, E.E.T.S. 324 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Henry William Weber, ed., *Metrical Romances of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: Published from Ancient Manuscripts. With an Introduction, Notes, and Glossary* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable & Co. and London: Constable, Hunter, Park and Hunter, 1810) (this is the Auchinleck MS text).

from short examples for use in sermons to stories that form part of larger works like *Handlyng Synne*, *Confessio Amantis* or the *Canterbury Tales*. Many stories that lie on the edge of the romance or hagiographical genre could be said to be exemplary, for example some of the texts in Ashmole 61, such as *Saint Eustace* and its romance redaction *Sir Isumbras,* as well as more obviously moral texts like *The Knight Who Forgave His Father's Slayer* and *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire*.[50] What exempla have in common is a particular approach to temporality. They take subject matter which lies in the past, which has ended and therefore can be made into a completed narrative, and cast it as a single whole which can be interpreted and made to guide future action. The appeal to an example from the past as a guide for action is, in Scanlon's terminology, a process of triangulated authority which traverses past and present. It is the 'claim of identification' with the past and 'representation of that identity made by one part of the present to another'.[51] In other words, a story told in an exemplary mode—as an authoritative model for behaviour—always proposes that an individual shape his or her identity in accordance with the past, and sees the present moment as one of potential transformation. Exemplary narratives shape the past into a model for present identity; this is true even for narratives which, like Colgrevance's, provide a negative example which acts as a warning. An exemplum which uses the past as a warning to its audience redeems that past by casting it as a means to good for its hearers, and, as Robinson proposes, even the autobiographical past can be used for this purpose.[52]

The 'redemptive' value of the exemplary mode is not only in its usefulness to others, but for how it shapes the identity of the narrator as one who claims authority and exercises power in controlling how the past is presented. With subtle irony, by telling his own story of shame and failure in the form of an exemplum in which his past self is the bad example, Colgrevance positions his present self as the authoritative narrator and the voice of moral compass in relation to the tale. As Larry Scanlon explains, the telling of an exemplum often accompanies a claim of authority by the teller, because it is the storyteller who has the power to 'wield' the moral control the narrative pronounces.[53] Not only is this power inherent in the narratorial role, but by branding his earlier actions as foolish and

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[50] See Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, nos. 1, 5, 18, 35b.

[51] Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, 38.

[52] Robinson, 'Autobiographical Memory: A Historical Prologue', 19.

[53] Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, 34, 38.

shaping them into a tale of warning, Colgrevance subtly claims that he is now wise in his ability to recognise foolishness and competent to instruct others. Moreover, by assuming this position of wisdom and authority, he implicitly distances his present, authoritative identity from his past identity of foolishness. Colgrevance uses his role as an exemplary narrator to salvage a reputable identity that his past would otherwise threaten.

It is at this point that Ywain moves to the centre of the romance's attention, and he begins by immediately misunderstanding the exemplary point of Colgrevance's 'word', in effect nullifying a crucial aspect of the exemplum's redemptive power. Instead of comprehending Colgrevance's warning about the folly of knightly adventures, Ywain uses the story as the impetus for his own action-oriented approach to redemption. His misunderstanding is evident in his response to Colgrevance's use of the word 'folies'. He says, 'Þou ert a fole at þou ne had are / Tald me of þis ferly fare' ('You are a fool that you never told me of this strange event before', 461-62). If he had known about this 'chivalric defeat' before, he would have avenged Colgrevance, his cousin, on the knight who defeated him. In other words, he sees Colgrevance's foolishness to lie in not enlisting help earlier, rather than in seeking adventures in the first place. Ywain's hearing of the tale thus does nothing to qualify his faith in, or provoke reflection upon, the value of knightly adventure. Moreover, his keenness to take action shows his inattention to the six-year lapse in time since Colgrevance's adventure (153), refusing to see it as finished, despite the passage of time and despite the emphasis on pastness and conclusion which the exemplary retelling required.[54] Consequently, he takes Colgrevance's tale as the basis for finishing the task by obtaining vengeance on the Red Knight (463-65).[55]

Ywain's actions prove that, in a sense, his form of 'redeeming the past' is achievable. True to his goal, he finds and kills the Red Knight who defeated Colgrevance. This exploit provides the starting-place for Ywain's own adventures, which begin now that he has rectified Colgrevance's failure. He marries Alundyne, the widow of the Red Knight (869-1266), but after Gawain criticises him for laziness he asks his wife for permission to set out on his own adventures, agreeing to return in a year (1449-1560). At this point, a whole year passes during which Ywain undertakes his own feats of prowess, but the year's

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[54] The time given is seven years in the French version, but no critics to date have suggested any reason for this discrepancy.

[55] As Whitman says of the French version, Yvain projects Calogrenant's past into his own future ('Thinking Backward and Forward', 138).

worth of events are telescoped, occupying only twenty-two lines of text (1561-82).[56] This minimises the importance of these adventures and thrusts the emphasis onto what happens next, indeed makes apparent what has been the most important 'event' of that year: Ywain forgets his vow and fails to return to his wife on time. Thus, despite Ywain's success, his new adventures are in fact the context for his own failure, fulfilling Colgrevance's original warning about the folly of seeking adventures. Ywain, struck with a madness that seems like contrition as a result of his broken promise, proceeds in the next part of the romance by trying to redeem his own failures.

He does so in a model that appears confessional. The language used about Ywain's subsequent adventures casts them as a form of atonement, a way of dealing with past failure not by shaping it towards a good ending but by balancing it with appropriate penance. Lunet, when she reminds Ywain of his broken commitment, tells him that he will 'ful dere haby' (very dearly pay for) his wrong (1610). Ywain echoes these words himself when he is reconciled to Alundyne, saying that he has 'dere boght' (dearly paid for) his misdeed (3996). He speaks of past failure and subsequent action in the language of debt and repayment, echoing the language used in penitential texts.[57] When he is finally reconciled with Alundyne, he labels his oath-breaking 'foly' in a verbal confession to his wife, echoing Colgrevance's use of the term but using a word that also carries into confessional language. Ywain says,

> 'Grete foly I did, þe soth to say,
> When þat I past my terme-day […].' (3997-98)

A fourteenth-century poem of general confession uses this term to refer to sin: 'And of al my folye / Mercy, lord, mercy ich crye'; this poem uses 'folly' as a term clearly referring to sinfulness.[58] Ywain's naming of personal 'folly' and view that actions atone for sin represent a confessional construction of the past.

The purpose of confessional discourse is to effect redemption through a refashioning of the past. Confession conceives self-knowledge as the remembrance of

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[56] This is a question of 'duration' in Genette's terminology, i.e. the relationship between the pace of the story and the narrative (*Narrative Discourse*, Ch. 2, esp. 94-95). See also Bal, *Narratology*, 100.

[57] E.g. 'An Evening Prayer', 1-4, and 'Maidstone's Seven Penitential Psalms', 1-8, in Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61,* 1-4; Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner*, 61-2, 70.

[58] Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), No. 87, 17-18 (p. 109); for notes on the text see 271-2; see also Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner,* 61-2.

one's past actions, within a framework which ignores the good and sees only the bad. In *Handlyng Synne*, readers are told to think about their sins systematically and thoroughly:

> Euery man shulde haue *a-fore þoȝt*
> How and whan hys synne was wroȝt,
> And *beþenke hym weyl* on euery dede […]. (10819-10821; emphasis mine).[59]

Confessors were encouraged to prompt penitents by listing the sins, thus providing a framework to which the penitent could fit his statements.[60] Because everything remembered is systematically accounted for according to the system of the Seven Deadly Sins, confession produces an account of one's past self through the lens of shortcoming. A Middle English text surviving in six manuscripts, called the *Book of Penance,* provides just such a framework for confession, and the Seven Deadly Sins portion of this text appears in Cotton Galba E.ix with *Ywain and Gawain*.[61] The confessional account of personal failure is produced, however, with the goal of expiation and redemption, the 'reconstruction of personality'.[62] This identity transformation has long been recognised as one chief operation of confession. The role of confession in self-definition was first suggested by Foucault, and is closely tied to Benveniste's discussion of subjectivity, in which he explains how a speaker's identity as a person emerges only through discourse itself.[63] It is confession's role to provide a form of discourse which penitents inhabit by speaking their sins.[64] Katherine Little argues that the importance of confession for defining individual identity was recognised in the Middle Ages, too, hence the Wycliffite attempts to redirect identity-forming language away from confession and towards scriptural models.[65] Mary Flowers Braswell, and more recently, Jerry Root, both suggest that medieval writers were aware enough of confession as a discourse of self-definition that they use it as a framework for

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[59] Idelle Sullens, ed., *Robert Mannyng of Brunne: Handlyng Synne,* Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies (Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1983).

[60] Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner*, Ch. 2, esp. 52.

[61] Trudel, 'The Middle English *Book of Penance*', 11-12; the text of several versions of the *Book of Penance*, including the portion found in Cotton Galba E.ix, is printed in Richard Morris's edition, *Cursor Mundi (The Cursor o the world): A Northumbrian Poem of the XIVth Century In Four Versions.* E.E.T.S. o.s. 57 and 59, part 5 (London: 1878), 27548-28065 (pp. 1527-51).

[62] John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal* libri poenitentiales *and Selections from Related Documents,* 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938, 1979), 45.

[63] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 1:61; Benveniste, 'Subjectivity in Language', 224, 226-7; Root, '*Space to Speke',* 61, 79.

[64] That is, confession provides an 'empty form': see Benveniste, 'Subjectivity in Language', 227.

[65] Little, *Confession and Resistance*, 1.

the presentation of literary characters.[66] Ywain's use of a confessional mode of 'apology' to Alundyne, and the description of his adventures using the terms of penance, suggest that he is assuming confessional self-definition as a way of redeeming his otherwise irreparable failure.

If 'redemption' is figured as a reconciliation between Ywain and Alundyne, then in one sense the romance appears to vindicate Ywain's confessional self-shaping when Alundyne accepts him back after his confessional speech to her. However, the actual mechanisms whereby Ywain wins back her favour have nothing to do with contrition or forgiveness, except perversely. Ywain has assumed a new identity as 'the Knight with the Lion', and wishing to return to his wife's good graces, concocts a plan whereby Lunet proposes to Alundyne that she accept friendship with 'the Knyght with the Liown', not specifying that it is Ywain (3913-20). *Pace* Finlayson, this situation, that she is 'driven by fear and tricked by Lunet', is difficult to dismiss and makes it likewise difficult to read the scene as a straightforward acceptance of Ywain and his redeemed identity.[67] That is, her acceptance of Ywain's 'new identity' is not knowingly done, and this skews any attempt to read it as analogous to confessional absolution. Ywain's 'confession' also includes what seems to be an excuse for his actions, when he claims that 'wha so had so bityd, / Þai sold have done right als I dyd' (3999-4000). The sentence is somewhat ambiguous, but seems to mean, 'Whoever had experienced the same, they should have done just what I did'.[68] This sentence is not present in the French.[69] Whether this is an excuse for his passing his 'terme-day' (3998) on the grounds that 'anybody could have made the same mistake', or a statement that everyone in his position should 'buy' their sins (3996), is not clear, but based on the structure of the lines preceding and following, it seems to mean the former: 'anybody would have done the same'. Such an excuse, if that is what it is, certainly has no part of confessional practice. Though Ywain pays repeated lip service to confession and penance in his approach to repairing his mistakes, the ultimate happy ending is achieved by practical and slightly dubious ingenuity.

Though Ywain's word 'folye' the romance comes full circle. It is a direct echo of Colgrevance's exemplary moralisation of his own story, denounced as folly in the retelling.

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[66] Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner*, Ch. 3; Root, '*Space to Speke*', 10-11, 61, 79.

[67] Finlayson, '*Ywain and Gawain* and the Meaning of Adventure', 333.

[68] *MED,* s.v. 'tīden', 4.

[69] Hult, *Le Chevalier au Lion ou Le Roman d'Yvain*, 6770-88.

This is the word which Ywain initially misunderstood; presumably if he had understood it, he would have heeded the caution against seeking foolish adventures and not initiated his own set of failures. As it is, by the end of his own adventures, Ywain reaches the same conclusion about them that Colgrevance reached about his, and similarly distances himself from his deeds both by labelling them as folly and by vowing never to repeat them: 'I sal never thorgh Goddes grace / At mi might do more trispase […]' (4001-2). In other words, he attempts to redeem his present self by disavowing his former deeds as a youthful folly, now discarded and never to be repeated.

While the romance vividly portrays the deployment of two morality-oriented modes of self-redemption through memory, the use of exemplary narrative and the use of confession, it also portrays its protagonist missing the point of both modes. Ywain does not listen to cautionary tales and he does not rely on contrition and expiation to effect a spiritual 'happy ending', though he is capable of deploying the language associated with both these modes. Ywain's response to and use of moral and religious discourse resembles the baronial response to the Church's increased pastoral oversight that Susan Crane envisages in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council. The church's ideals of surrendering personal will, in the way that the saints of hagiography do, conflicted with the personal ambitions and this-worldly concerns of land and family that characterised feudal society. Crane sees the romances as a 'poetic ground' for secular society's exploration of how religious ideals interact with temporal goals, often producing narratives which deploy religious language and motifs but resist the essential values these elements imply.[70] Ywain himself embodies this view of the relationship between moral discourse and romance, easily adopting the language of confession and receiving Colgrevance's exemplary story, but failing in the transfer of penitential and exemplary values into his own ethical behaviour. He relies, rather, on action to shape the progress of his identity and reputation.

Confession and Justice in *Le Bone Florence of Rome*

In *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, confessional remembering is again employed as a means of identity redemption, figured in the physical healing of the romance's four villains after their confession. It also redeems the eponymous heroine's reputation by clearing her of false allegations. However, in this generically complicated romance, vacillating between

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[70] Crane, '*Guy of Warwick*', 352-53, 355-56, 368-70.

romance and hagiography, confession is wrested from its religious context and becomes the means for a very different type of identity-shaping in the realm of secular justice. The ambivalence towards certain moral models of identity which are seen in *Ywain and Gawain* becomes a more violent resistance in *Le Bone Florence of Rome*. Unlike *Sir Cleges,* this romance questions the possibility of transferring religious models of identity into the secular realm.

The context for the romance's two opposing views of confession is its generic duality, clearly visible in the dual identity of the heroine. Florence, after much fighting over her, marries a man called Emere, only to be separated from him before consummating the marriage and told that he is dead. She then endures a series of betrayals and abuses, but all the while retains her virginity; she thus stands as both a calumniated queen figure familiar in romance but simultaneously as a virgin saint who has pledged 'marriage' to Christ and eventually finds safety in a nunnery (1099-1101, 1876-1914).[71] The early emphasis of the romance on battles and the vying of men for Florence's hand establishes the story as a romance and drives it towards the expected romance ending of marriage. However, towards the midpoint the romance shifts towards hagiography when Florence, believing her husband to be dead and having never consummated her marriage with him, makes a vow to 'weddyd bee' to Christ (1099). Although chastity is a common virtue in romance heroines, it is usually in the form of faithfulness to a human lover even in his absence, for example Josian in *Bevis of Hampton,* who murders a would-be husband on their wedding night because of her faithfulness to Bevis, or the princess in *The Squyr of Lowe Degre,* whose extreme 'chastity' in the form of devotion to a dead lover becomes a central irony.[72] Unlike these heroines whose chastity is fidelity to their lovers, Florence's vow to Christ is made without reference to Emere, and unlike the French version of the romance, she does not think of her husband when taking the veil.[73] Thus, although her

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[71] Romances containing the calumniated queen motif include *Octavian, The Erle of Toulous, Emaré,* and *Cheuelere Assigne,* as well as *The Clerk's Tale.* The motif is analysed by Margaret Schlauch in *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens* (New York: New York University Press, 1927, 1973).

[72] *Bevis of Hampton* in *Four Romances of England,* ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake and Eve Salisbury, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), 3219-3224; *The Squyr of Lowe Degre* in Sands, *Middle English Verse Romances*, 669-706, 924-70; Helen Cooper, introduction to *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England,* ed. Rosalind Field, Phillipa Hardman and Michelle Sweeney, Christianity and Culture: Issues in Teaching and Research 3 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer), 2010), xix.

[73] Muriel Cadilhac-Rouchon, 'Revealing Otherness: Comparative Examination of French and English Medieval Hagiographical Romance' (PhD Diss., Cambridge University, 2009), 207.

virginity is not ultimately her final state, it represents her entrance into an intermediate role of the saintly heroine of a hagiography.[74]

Initially, it is this context of hagiography which shapes the salvific understanding of confession. Florence's four abusers, all afflicted with diseases, come to her nunnery for healing, in which she is known to have special power. However, she requires that they first confess their sins publicly:

> Sche seyde, 'Ye that wyll be hale,
> And holly broght owt of yowre bale
> > Of that ye are ynne,
> Ye muste schryue yow openlye,
> And that wyth a full lowde crye,
> > To all þat be here boþe more and mynne.' (2032-7)

As in many romances, this 'shriving' is anachronistic to post-1215 practice, occurring 'openlye' and thus resembling the public penance of earlier periods.[75] Additionally, of course, Florence is not a priest. However, the requirement of the supplicants 'shriving' themselves in preparation for curing represents a literal appropriation of a common metaphor of spiritual salvation: Origen refers to bishops as the 'physicans of souls', and this language of healing is reiterated in the Fourth Lateran Council, deriving ultimately from the continual emphasis in the Gospels on Christ as both a physical and spiritual healer.[76] Though Florence deals in bodily healing, her language and the association of confession with healing mean that symbolically her understanding of the purpose of confession is allied to its sacramental purpose: salvation for the individual.[77]

This spiritual redemption, couched as physical healing, is echoed by another kind of redemption, the public redemption of Florence's character. As each of the four villains confesses his part in Florence's various abuses and abductions, they assemble a communal

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[74] Florence's vow to Christ is a statement of intention, rather than a permanent vow of chastity, as indicated by her use of the word 'will'; see Chapter 3 for further discussion of this verb. On Florence's 'temporary virginity', see also Riddy, 'Temporary Virginity', 203-5.

[75] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights*, 32.

[76] Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5, 53, 81-83; see Ch. 1 for an account of Jesus as a healer, and Ch. 3 for an account of healing (both physical and metaphorically) in medieval Christianity; McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance,* 44-6; for the text of the 1215 Council, see Rothwell, *English Historical Documents, 1189-1327*, 136.21 (pp. 654-55).

[77] Lee Ramsey reads the end of this romance as if Florence is complicit and intentional in the punishment of the villains which occurs later (2119-21). However, at this point in the romance, Florence does know that these men are her abusers (2014-15), but also does heal them after their confession (2110-15), implying that the link she proposes between confession and redemption is seriously intended. See Lee C. Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1983), 181.

narrative in which her own innocence is conversely vindicated. She has been accused of
sexual relations with Sir Egravayne (1301-1305), and has also taken the blame for
murdering the daughter of a lord named Terry, though the reader knows that the murder
was carried out by one of the villains, Machary (1630-71). During the confession, therefore,
not only do the four villains admit their own culpability, they also publicly exonerate
Florence for these supposed sins. Miles, Machary, and the mariner all confirm that, despite
their attempts, Florence has refused their sexual advances (2051-55, 2072-96, 2099-2103).
Miles most pointedly confirms her virginity: 'clene fro me sche paste' (2055). Machary
also confesses that he himself is the murderer of Terry's daughter. The portion of the
narrative contributed by Terry, the father of the murdered girl, confirms the purpose of
exonerating Florence, for Terry is not among the 'iiii fekyll' (2182) and has nothing to
confess, but adds his part in the story to form the context for refuting the false allegation
against Florence.[78]

This confession, and the whole narrative it weaves as each character retells his part
in the romance, accomplish the public justice which the plot has thus far been unable to
achieve. In this way, the model of confessional remembering provides a framework for
shaping the past so that true agency, and therefore blame and innocence, become known to
all. Like sacramental confession, this is within the context of salvation, where the narrative
which establishes justice simultaneously becomes the means of grace. Here, grace takes the
shape of physical healing, which Florence performs as promised (2110-15).

However, the next stanza seems to obviate this reading of the confession scene by
transferring the confessional model into an entirely different realm, that of secular justice.
Florence's husband, Emere, is also present seeking healing, but his wound is not implied to
be the result of sin, but is an 'euyll in hys hevedd' due to an unhealed arrow wound
sustained in battle (1933, 1936-47). Emere's wound is 'secular', visible evidence of his
martial role. Once Emere is healed, in the very next line he assumes the role of judge and
declares to the four evildoers, ' "Y fynde yow iiii in fere"' (2117); this literally means 'I
find you all [to be] associates', and thus seems to mean 'I find you all complicit [in
guilt]'.[79] He then has them all burned (2119-21). He sees their confession in terms of
secular justice; they have all admitted to their individual crimes and Emere metes out
punishment. Emere's gesture represents a reassertion of secular justice after the

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[78] The 'four false' are Miles, Clarebalde, Machary and the mariner.

[79] *MED,* s.v. 'fẽre' (n.(2)), esp. 2.

hagiographical interlude of Florence's life, and a concomitant transformation in how confession is understood. Whereas to Florence the confessional narrative identified the 'iiii fekyll' as penitents seeking absolution, in Emere's understanding it identifies them as criminals confessing their guilt.

This dramatic shift, from the values and the confessional understanding of hagiography to that of romance, explains Florence's enigmatic 'woo' at the punishment of the men who have all abused and asaulted her. No explanation is given in the romance, only the narration, 'Then was the lady woo' (2121), a line of which not all critics have taken account.[80] Why should she grieve at their punishment? This reading of the dual understanding of confession provides a way of accounting for her grief; it is in response to the perversion of the salvific understanding of confession. The transition of confession from producing grace to producing punishment coincides with Florence's own transition out of her saintly virginity and back into a married state, rejoining the romance trajectory after her hagiographical interlude.

In this junction of hagiography and romance, and woeful transition out of spiritual significance and into a world of secular justice, this romance mitigates against a transfer of confessional redemption from the spiritual to the practical world. The promise of salvation which confession holds, as figured in Florence's healing of the villains, is abruptly snuffed out by Emere's secular and justice-oriented approach, and Florence's salvific understanding is not permitted to leave the bounds of the spiritual, saintly mode which she inhabits. In this way the romance suggests a conclusion which is opposite of that which I have drawn for *Sir Cleges.* That romance appropriated religious and moral models of understanding the past into a secular context, enabling the hero to redeem and refashion his present identity on the models offered by spiritual practice. In contrast, *Le Bone Florence of Rome* causes the religious model of salvific confession to clash with a secular understanding of justice. It brutally proposes that an attempt to redeem one's past using the hope held out by a confessional model will not pertain outside the abbey or church.

In light of this, the romance's closing moral injunction assumes a second reading beyond the obvious moral warning common in exemplary literature. The moral at the end reads:

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[80] Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances*, 181. Ramsey sees the ending of the story as Florence's vindication and assertion of dominance.

> Forþy schulde men and women als,
> Them bethynke or þey be false,
>> Hyt makyth so fowle an ende.
> Be hyt neuyr so slylye caste,
> Ʒyt hyt schamyþ þe maystyr at þe laste,
>> In what londe þat euyr þey lende. (2176-81)

At one level, this represents the kind of moralising summary which prompts 'didactic' readings of romance. It is reductive, universalising, and ignores much of the actual content of the narrative: 'Don't be wicked like these crafty villains; you'll come to a bad end.' However, while echoing the tone of exemplary discourse, this moral injunction in fact drives home the implication of the romance's violent juxtaposition of a spiritual versus a secular understanding of confession: that wrong deeds will put their instigators to shame 'at þe laste', leading to a 'fowle ende' even in the face of the redemption promised by confessional discourse. The romance's ending, and its moral, can be read as a critique of any attempt to transfer the promises of religious literature into practical life. It demonstrates the irrelevance of religious identity-shaping in the practical realm, where past actions follow their masters to the end and a criminal, declaring his guilt, can only momentarily become a penitent before secular justice identifies his 'confession' as one whose end is punishment, not absolution.

Conclusion

In some regards, the use of personal memory in these romances plays a role analogous to the role of nostalgia in romance pastness. Temporal models for personal memory permit characters like Cleges and Colgrevance to achieve continuity in their identities by choosing how to understand themselves in relation to their pasts. Cleges's nostalgic longing evinces a desire for continuity, but this desire is better satisfied by seeing himself as part of a liturgical *cursus*. This view of time posits an underlying continuity to events, and placing himself within this structure propels Cleges to declare himself to Uther and implement a literal continuity as his position and wealth are restored. In another way, Colgrevance uses the temporal structure of the exemplum to bridge the break in his knightly identity caused by his failed adventure. By fitting his experience into a moralising structure, Colgrevance reshapes his past into a source of authority for himself, thus distancing himself from his own past folly by assuming the position of a wiser knight. In Ywain's case, his betrayal of faith to Alundyne represents a rupture not only in his knightly

credibility but in his relationship to his wife, which a penitential and confessional model allows him to repair in a publicly acceptable way. In this sense, then, many of the available devotional models of time are shown to supply 'resources for continuity' in much the same way that nostalgia does.[81]

In one aspect, then, the romances' handling of the past and personal identity is often profoundly religious, not in its surface accuracy so much as in its temporal structure and overall modality. This is yet another instance of the way in which, as other scholars have argued, medieval culture and thought cannot be fully appreciated without taking Christianity seriously.[82] In particular, the debt to confessional discourse that Jerry Root and Mary Braswell have found in other medieval fictional texts emerges here yet again, and is responsible for the way in which the autobiographical past in romance is so often viewed as one of failure; such is the case in *Ywain and Gawain, Le Bone Florence of Rome,* and in the portion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* quoted at the beginning of this chapter and to which I shall return below.[83] Even where confession does not form the primary mode of constructing autobiographical narrative, as in *Sir Cleges*, redemption still comes in the form of shaping the past in accordance with other devotional models.

However, as should be clear by now, these devotional models are not slavishly copied into romance. They are taken out of their specific religious context, for example the case of Ywain's penance and confession, which do not occur in the context of sacramental confession or penance dictated by a priest but rather inform the basic language and structures of action.[84] In this case as in the others, the romance takes the underlying temporal concerns of devotional literature and raises them in a new context. Similarly, in *Sir Cleges,* liturgical time and its propositions about individual identity become a vehicle for negotiation with a feudal superior. In *Ywain and Gawain,* confessional self-conception is applied to knightly achievement and marital relationship. In *Le Bone Florence of Rome,* against the heroine's will, confessional identity-shaping becomes the means for earthly

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[81] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 34-5.

[82] Aers, 'A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists', 195-6; Vitz, *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology,* 213; Ad Putter, 'The Narrative Logic of *Emaré*', in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance,* ed. Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (Harlow: Pearson, 2000), 178-79.

[83] Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner*, Ch. 3; Root, *'Space to Speke'*, 10-11, 61, 79, Ch. 3.

[84] The lack of overtness of this confessional understanding is presumably responsible for Trudel's comment that in relation to Cotton Galba's *Seven Deadly Sins* text and its version of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the 'rest of the contents' of the manuscript—including *Ywain and Gawain*—'do not fit into any larger penitential scheme' ('The Middle English *Book of Penance*', 15-16). On the contrary, the romance evinces an interest in penance in a different way from the religious texts.

justice in a move which is faithful to the confessional purpose in its eye towards justice, yet fundamentally denies its salvific aim. The romances imagine what would happen if the modes of shaping the self which devotional literature proposes maintained in a secular environment; in this sense they stand as 'complements' to the philosophical, theological and moral movements of their time.[85] One notable trend here is that in all these cases, when the language and identity-shaping of religious discourse is transferred to a new context, they are directed to the achievement of far more temporal goals, namely personal success, marital harmony, and the establishment of imperial justice. This is true even when devotional temporality is viewed absent of irony and with approbation (though never directly commanded), as in *Sir Cleges.* This particular romance well illustrates Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's suggestion that both romance and hagiography should be considered co-equal 'forms of exemplary biography'.[86] In other words, rather than being purely an entertaining and secular derivative of hagiography,[87] romances which assume a religious understanding of identity stand alongside hagiography as both genres respond to religious discourse within a framework of different goals. The differing emphases and values of saintly versus romance narrative derive not from an opposition of religious and secular, but from their different frameworks of values and goals, within which religious self-definition receives vastly different treatment.

One distinct purpose of the way these romances appropriate devotional and moral temporalities of self is to interrogate them, particularly their efficacy in the face of secular goals. In *Ywain and Gawain*, exemplary narrative is both morally useful and not; while Colgrevance succeeds at least partially in rescuing his own reputation by the deployment of an exemplary framework for his past, this narrative is misunderstood by Ywain and thus fails to serve its purported moral function. Ywain deploys a religious model for rescuing his identity in his elaborate 'confession' to Alundyne, but in fact it is his secular identity as 'The Knight with the Lion' and the consequent deception of Alundyne which actually effects their reconciliation. The process by which he has purportedly 'dere boght' his 'misdeed' is a nod to penance while the legwork of identity reparation is done by secular means. This romance suggests a reading like the one Susan Crane proposes for several

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[85] Ganim, *Style and Consciousness,* 152.

[86] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, '"Bet…to…rede on holy seyntes lyves…": Romance and Hagiography Again', in Meale, *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, 85.

[87] Wogan-Browne, '"Bet…to…rede"', 84-5.

'exemplary' romances (*Guy of Warwick, Sir Isumbras, Amis and Amiloun,* and *Athelston*):
she argues that the romances which deal with moral issues often do so from a position of
resistance, adopting doctrines and conduct from religious literature but using these to
further 'their ultimately secular endeavor'.[88] In *Ywain and Gawain*, the moral purpose of
exemplary narrative and the redemptive purpose of confession are not ridiculed so much as
rendered simply irrelevant to knightly pursuit: both Colgrevance and Ywain are concerned
with their identities, seeking to redeem themselves from failure and ill repute, but in
seeking this redemption they have no qualms about co-opting moral and religious models
of self with little regard for maintaining their integrity. Ywain in particular repeatedly
evinces that he sees his identity as shaped primarily by action, and sees even his past
failures as redeemed by action. In *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, this irrelevance of
confessional self-shaping in the face of secular concerns is more stark, as the redemptive
purpose of confession is shown to be utterly at odds with the mandates of secular
punishment, while the identities shaped by confessional discourse are directed to achieving
temporal justice. The four criminals, though temporarily they become penitents and are
'redeemed' through healing, find that this sanctified state has pertinence only while they
remain under the saintly authority of Florence; it does not transfer to the realm of secular
authority that Emere wields, where they remain criminals. All these ways in which
romance deals with religious discourses, abundantly but freely, and interrogatively, suggest
some reasons why moralists traditionally denigrate the genre.[89]

The foregoing argument should cast some light on the final scene in *Sir Gawain
and the Green Knight*. There, Gawain freely employs both confessional and exemplary
discourse to construe the relationship of his past and present self, much as Colgrevance
does in his own exemplary tale. Gawain, in this sense, understands his life in the 'correct'
way according to both these discourses: he names his past sin, feels 'gref' for it, and takes
his past actions as a negative example which should be morally useful to others. However,
in the context of Arthur's court, the proper response to these models is blatantly ignored.
The romance itself does not necessarily reject these moral models of identity, but envisions

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[88] Crane, '*Guy of Warwick*', 356; see also Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986)*,* 12, 219, 223. In *Insular Romance*, Crane notes that this advocacy of secular interests is the likely reason for preachers' condemnations of romance (220).

[89] On such views of romance, see McDonald, 'A Polemical Introduction' in McDonald, *Pulp Fictions,* 3-7, 16-17; Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *The Popularity of Middle English Romance* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975), 11-14; Furrow, *Expectations of Romance*, 222.

a courtly audience which laughs at them—whether with purposeful derision or with simple failure to understand it is impossible to tell. From the court's mimicking of Gawain's baldric, ignoring its indication of a *negative* example in Gawain's narrative, it seems that they represent a culture intent upon seeing a knight's deeds in no other way than as accumulating to his 'renoun' (2519), and which therefore sees Gawain's past in this way regardless of the other structures he uses to articulate it. In one way, the romance thus suggests the irrelevance of religious self-fashioning and a moral understanding of the past to secular and courtly life: the language of 'gref', 'schame', 'blame' and 'couetyse' has no possible conjunction with the language of 'renoun', because the former construes the past as negative, while the latter construes it as an untarnished lineage. In fact, the courtiers' stubborn culture of renown resembles a romance narrator's determined nostalgia towards the past. In another way, however, the romance also encodes a quiet critique of the courtiers who exhibit this limitation in understanding, who foolishly model themselves on a negative example, and in whose culture such negative examples are preserved in 'þe best boke of romaunce' (2521). The laughing response to Gawain's narrative suggests that Arthur's court in this romance, much as in *Ywain and Gawain*, is a context in which bad examples, far from being consigned to the past, are doomed to be repeated.

As Kevin Whetter observes, it is impossible to make a sweeping statement about a general romance response to religion, because the romances are pluralistic and hence represent a full range of treatments of how religious injunction impinges on other concerns.[90] Some consistencies are observable, however. In all the romances covered here, the terms whereby moral and devotional discourse articulates a personal past are fruitfully employed as structures for autobiographical memory. Because of romance's generally secular concerns with individual achievement, within the timeline of individual life, the conclusions offered by moral and religious discourse are always maintained within a context of individual and temporal values. The possibilities of religious self-shaping are viewed with differing degrees of approbation, never with an unqualified acceptance but also not with a wholesale rejection. Rather, romances like *Ywain and Gawain*, *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* maintain a reserve about whether

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[90] K. S. Whetter, 'Subverting, Containing and Upholding Christianity', in Field, Hardman and Sweeney, *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England,* 103-4, 118; cf. Joanne A. Charbonneau on *Sir Gowther* in 'From Devil to Saint: Transformations in *Sir Gowther*', in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. Phillipa Hardman (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 26-28. Charbonneau describes *Sir Gowther* as a romance which embodies such pluralism in a single text.

religious identity is fully compatible with secular pursuit. They envision a clear picture that many of the 'heroes' of chivalric success or the members of courtly circles do reject the implications of moral discourse. Yet they refuse fully to side with these characters, maintaining a persistent hesitation about the wisdom of their rejection: neither Ywain nor Arthur's court appear fully wise. To their audience, these romances illustrate the way in which devotional and moral self-defining discourses can be integrated into secular life, and starkly face the shortcomings of such discourses in the face of personal achievement. However, they leave it open for their readers to determine whether these shortcomings justify a rejection of those discourses or whether, with a vividly imagined appropriation as in *Sir Cleges*, they may yet prove practically useful frameworks for autobiographical identity shaping.

Chapter 3: Agency and Authority in Shaping the Future

In *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, Eglamour's squire provides some conventional wisdom about seeking individual advancement. Eglamour's vision for his future is to marry the woman he loves, who is of a higher social status, but his more conservative squire advises,

> 'Takis it not to ill: I vndirstande
> ȝe are a knyghte of lyttill lande
>   And mekill wolde hafe mare;
> If I wende and say her sa,   [If I go and tell her so]
> In a skorne scho will it ta
>   And lightly late me passe.
> Mayster, þe man þat hewes ouir hey
> The chyppis fallis in his eye:
>   Thus fallis it now and ay was.' (64-72)[1]

The squire explains that Eglamour's lack of landed wealth and title prevents him from marrying the daughter of his lord, the Earl of Artois: the discrepancy in social class, measured in land, is a barrier to Eglamour's desires. However, beneath the squire's statement is a basic assumption about how the future is determined. The squire argues that Eglamour's agency over the future is limited by the constraints which the past imposes: the constraints of his own landlessness (presumably because his family had no land to inherit), and implicitly the constraint of social position which separates him from the Earl's daughter and is implied in the metaphor of 'hewing over-high' to describe seeking marriage to her. This proverb is used variously elsewhere in Middle English, generally to describe a form of pride that fails to acknowledge one's proper place in the world, such as the man beset by 'surquiderie' in *Confessio Amantis*, the rebel William Wallace in Mannyng's *Chronicle*, and, in *Mum and the Sothsegger,* it describes the self-destructive activities of oppositional labourers who distract the nobility from protecting the kingdom.[2]

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[1] Richardson, *Sir Eglamour of Artois*. The version examined in this chapter will be the Lincoln text as edited by Richardson, unless otherwise specified.

[2] For occurrences of this proverb, see Bartlett Jere Whiting and Helen Westcott Whiting, eds., *Proverbs, Sentences and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1968), C235. For examples, see: Macaulay, *The English Works of John Gower*, vol. 2, Book 1,1917-8; Mannyng, *Chronicle,* 2:8068; James M. Dean, ed., 'Mum and the Sothsegger', in *Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Sothsegger* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 1473-4. Another image linking social climbing with a 'too high' pursuit is Higden's comparison of the English with Daedalus, the mythological craftsman who made wings for himself, but whose son fell to his death by trying to fly too close to the sun and discovering that it melted the wax holding the wings together: Churchill Babington, ed., *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis*, Rolls Series 41, 9 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1865-86), 2:170-2 (Trevisa's English translation and explanatory comment on 171-3).

The proverb tends to link political and social restiveness with the sin of pride, and propose that overreaching has its own natural backlash. This state of things, says the squire, is rooted in tradition: 'Thus fallis it now *and ay was*' (72, emphasis mine).

Eglamour, conversely, has asked the squire for help because he holds a different view of how the future is determined. He intends to make arrangements for the satisfaction of his desires, his own vision of the future, which is for marriage to Christabelle and for more land, as the squire observes (65-6). Eglamour's assumption is that the future is subject to the 'authority'—the command—of his own agency. The squire's speech, contrasted with Eglamour's own assumptions about his unlimited agency, positions the romance to pit these two views of the future against each other: the future as delimited and partially determined by the authority structures of the past, or the future as open and determined by the workings of individual agency.

Three romances are examined here: *Sir Perceval of Galles, Sir Eglamour of Artois,* and *Robert of Cisyle.* All three use discussions about the future to stage a debate between these two basic views: that the future is determined by past precedent, or determined by agency. This perspective is often subtly expressed by a nuanced deployment of modal auxiliaries in constructing the future tense. Already, this use of the future tense is intimated in the squire's use of 'will' to describe his own opinion about the future, that Christabelle 'in a skorne […] will it ta' (68). This chapter will demonstrate that his choice of 'will' rather than 'shall' in describing the future is consonant with the romances' consistently careful use of auxiliaries to form the future tense, which in Middle English uniquely conveys relationships of authority and subordination, and reveals personal desire and will. In other words, the use of the future tense forms a natural locus for negotiations of desire and conflicts of authority, and the romances capitalise on this feature of the language to convey their characters' temporal perspectives through dialogue.

Moreover, these romances link these perspectives on the future to social class. The titled aristocracy, including Prinsamour, Arthur, and Robert, are marked by a conservative confidence that their social position rests on past precedent and grants them authority over their own futures, as well as those of their subjects. The aristocratic vision is ideologically linked to Old Testament models of flourishing and blessed patrilineage, and represents stability and order, the assurance of continuity which the squire voices, a system which is

'now and ay was'.[3] In contrast, the upwardly mobile characters belong to the gentry class: Eglamour is 'of gentill blode' (159), despite his lack of land, and Perceval, though unbeknownst to himself, is the son of a knight and nephew of the king. The central attribute of these characters' 'gentriness' is portrayed as a vigorous upward mobility, a quality of the English people as Hidgen characterises them in the *Polychronicon,* which Trevisa translates:

> […] what byfalleþ and semeþ oþer men, þey wolleþ gladlyche take to hem self; þerfore hit is þat a ȝeman arraieþ hym as a squyer, a squyer as a knyȝt, a kniȝt as a duke and a duke as a kyng.[4]

> [Whatever appertains and is fitting to other men, they will gladly take to themselves: therefore it is that a yeoman arrays himself as a squire, a squire as a knight, a knight as a duke and a duke as a king.]

These English social climbers all aspire to 'array themselves' like the class immediately above them. In a similar way, the gentry heroes Perceval and Eglamour are characterised by their reliance on personal action to shape their futures, including their status in society. In so doing, both represent fictional versions of 'careerism', the term used especially by Michael Bennett to describe the practice of individual pursuit of advancement, whether by trade or industry, through the Church, in law and government, by military service, or— Eglamour's final means—by marriage.[5] One medieval family which owed its social position to careerisim is the Pastons, first in the legal career and marriage of William Paston and then through John's advantageous marriage to Margaret.[6] The Plumpton family is a similar case.[7] Other examples can be found, for example the de Merington family,

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[3] Joel T. Rosenthal, *Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England,* Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 23; Philippa C. Maddern, 'Social Mobility', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500,* ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 115.

[4] Babington, *Polychronicon,* 2:169-71 (facing Latin version on 168-70).

[5] Michael J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of* Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Maddern, 'Social Mobility', 114, 122; Coss, *Origins of the English Gentry*, 165. William Paston's career is recounted in H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and Their England*, 2; see also Davis, *PL,* 1: lii-liii.

[6] For the career of William Paston I, see Davis, *PL,* 1: lii-liii, and for his marriage, xlii-xliii; also Colin Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: The First Phase* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 2; for John I, see 1: xliii-xlxlvi, liv-lv; also see the account of the family in H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and Their England*, Ch. 1. John I's impending marriage is mentioned in letter in which William's wife Agnes gives an approving account of the 'gentilwoman', Margaret, and her meeting with John (Davis, *PL,* 1: 26, no. 13).

[7] Keith Dockray, introduction to *The Plumpton Correspondence: Written in the Reigns of Edward IV, Richard III, Henry VII, and Henry VIII,* ed. Thomas Stapleton, with a new introduction by Keith Dockray (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1990; first published London: J. B. Nichols, 1839); Joan Kirby,

successful fourteenth-century merchants in Coventry who acquired land outside the city and through the next two generations shifted from an urban merchant family to the status of county gentry; other examples of attempted but less successful careerism can also be found.[8] As Trevisa puts it, such people are like a many-eyed character Argus, 'ful of yȝen', because likewise they are always looking around 'in euery side where wynnyng [gain, benefit] may arise'.[9] Many romances represent an imaginative formulation of this 'gentry fantasy' of social triumph through personal ambition.[10]

The romances discussed in this chapter use negotiations over the future to stage conflicts of social class, and, to use Michael Johnston's word, 'inflect' the world of the romance to allow the gentry representative to triumph—hence their role as 'gentry fantasies'.[11] This plays out differently in *Robert of Cisyle*, where the hero is a member of the aristocracy and exemplifies the conservative vision of the future which these romances ascribe to the aristocracy. Though this romance does not focus on a gentry hero, it approaches a similar issue, but from the other direction; here, too, the aristocratic confidence is dismantled, not from below by the gentry but from above by God. This romance delivers a different kind of warning and gratifies a different (but complementary) fantasy of aristocratic overthrow, but one negotiated in the same kind of language prevalent in the other romances: the future tense. All these romances thus, in different ways, allow a form of agency to penetrate the aristocratic construction of the future. At the same time, these romances complicate their own apparent vindication of the gentry and personal agency. The heroes' reward is typical of romance, taking the form of land, marriage and heirs, and is received as the granting of personal desire. However, it takes the form of patrilineal satisfaction, implementing the same structures and sources of authority which have just been overthrown. These romances enable their gentry and mercantile readers to enjoy their fantasies of aspiration, proposing that individual identity can be

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The Plumpton Letters and Papers, Camden Fifth Series, vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-18, esp. 2, 4.

[8] Coss, *Origins of the English Gentry*, 190; Maddern, 'Social Mobility', 118-121.

[9] Babington, *Polychronicon*, 2:171.

[10] Michael Johnston, 'A New Document', 311.

[11] Michael Johnston, 'A New Document', 311; Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 20.

achieved, despite social constraints, while never entirely rejecting the social structures themselves.[12]

Hierarchical Authority and the Modal Future

As noted above, the use of the future tense is a frequent locus for debates over the future in romance. It is thus necessary to explain one particular feature of Middle English tense to appreciate how these romances link the concept of the future with expressions of authority and hence with social class. This feature of Middle English is the association of modal meanings related to desire, will and compulsion with the grammatical future tense.

English, historically, lacked a 'colourless' future tense, that is, a tense which indicated only the time of the action.[13] As a result, several verbs, including *shall* and *will,* were used to create a periphrastic future tense, but this future tense took on the modal meaning of the verb used, which might be of causal relationship, obligation, or necessity.[14] This produces what C. B. Bradley calls the *modal future*.[15] As an example of this, in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell,* Arthur says to the loathly lady Dame Ragnell, 'Gawen shalle you wed' (398). This statement is not solely a factual prediction of future action but, in terms of its modal meaning, it is an imperative and indicates compulsion. It is an example of what Bradley calls 'the *shall* of superior authority in commands and laws'.[16] Such use of *shall* is evident in the regulations for the Council of the North from 1484, written in English, wherein a preface indicates the king's wishes and then proceeds to outline the council's operations in a series of statements beginning, 'Also the said council shall […]'.[17] In such statements, *shall* expresses both an indication of future tense and a modal meaning of command or compulsion.

A different formation of the modal future is evident in Gawain's statement to Arthur, also in *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell:* 'I wolle wed her at whate

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[12] This reading of the romances as vindicating aspiration but ultimately with a conservative vision is, I believe, similar to Michael Johnston's reading of these texts; cf. *Romance and the Gentry*, 20-1, 150.

[13] C. B. Bradley, 'Shall and Will—An Historical Study', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 42 (1911), 11-17.

[14] Bradley, 'Shall and Will', 18.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Bradley, 'Shall and Will', 15.

[17] A. R. Myers, ed., *English Historical Documents 1327-1485,* vol. 4, *English Historical Documents* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969), No 360 (pp. 558-59).

time ye wolle set' (367).[18] Once again, the tense of this statement is future, but the modal *will* differs from *shall* in that it implies volition rather than compulsion. Both Arthur and Gawain envision a wedding in the future, but the modal verbs they employ reflect their own degrees of authority in the situation. It is Arthur's place as king to command, and to be able to make his pronouncement about the future with a greater degree of confidence in the power of his authority to bring it about; it is Gawain's place as a subject to vouchsafe his own willingness to participate in Arthur's plan, but not to command or even to attempt to predict the final outcome. Another similar case of the use of *will* with the same colouring is found in *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, a romance which occurs in the same manuscript as *Sir Perceval of Galles*, which will be examined below. In the *Awntyrs*, Gawain says,

> 'Here my honde I you hight [give],[19]
> I woll fight with the knight
> In defence of my right,
> Lorde, by your leve.' (465-8)[20]

Here, once again, Gawain declares his intended action using 'will', and with a request for Arthur's permission. The relationship between Eglamour and the Earl Prinsamour in *Eglamour of Artois* is articulated in similar language, with a noticeable contrast in the usage of *shall* by the Earl, who holds the official and final authority in the situation, and *will* by Eglamour to express his own willingness and compliance, aspects discussed at further length below.[21] As already mentioned above, Eglamour's squire also uses the more deferential *will* to describe his prediction of the future (68).[22] The different uses of *shall* and *will* in the formation of the future tense are accompanied by other possible formations, notably *may*, as will be seen in *Robert of Sicily*. As this chapter will argue, the use of these auxiliaries and their modal meanings is remarkably consistent within the romances, that is, these different shades of meaning are purposefully employed in all the instances I have examined, without any variation suggesting haphazardness. In the case of *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, where I have compared the Thornton text (edited by Richardson) to the Cotton

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[18] In Thomas Hahn, *Eleven Gawain Romances and Tales*.

[19] *MED,* s.v. 'hōten'.

[20] In Thomas Hahn, *Eleven Gawain Romances and Tales*.

[21] The relevant passage is 187-237.

[22] In the Cotton text, the squire's speech is differently phrased but still uses the modal auxiliary *will/would* in the same way (*Sir Eglamour of Artois* in Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances,* 68).

version (edited by Hudson), despite differences in phrasing the use of modal auxiliaries is consonant between the versions, such that the claims I make for specific passages of the Thornton version of the text can be transferred almost without alteration to the Cotton version, arguing once again that the use of modal auxiliaries is significant and purposeful.[23]

In all cases, the result of the use of the modal future in Middle English is that statements which are about the future also encode expressions of compulsion, volition, and contingency. In grammatical terms, desire, authority and the future are inextricably linked. Because of this, the use of the modal future in the romances frequently both reflects and enforces (or attempts to enforce) the hierarchical structures of authority the characters hold in relation to one another. The use of the modal future also means that characters often, as part of their negotiations of authority, evince differing assumptions about what powers, more broadly speaking, actually control the future. The authority figures in the romances betray, by their language, an assumption that the future is determined by the authority which their patrilineal past has bequeathed to them in the form of social status. The less noble figures, however, often evince the view that the future is determined by their own agency, bolstered not by the past but arising from personal desire. Such views will be seen to accord with the circumstances and attitudes of late medieval readers of romance. Through these romances, differing views of the future are pitted against one another to enable nuanced explorations of how agency and authority interact, how social authority is achieved and supported, and where power over the future actually lies.

Demanding a Destined Knighthood in *Sir Perceval of Galles*

Sir Perceval of Galles is a romance which exists in only one surviving copy in the Lincoln Thornton Manuscript (Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91) from the mid-fifteenth century, produced in Yorkshire.[24] This is the same manuscript which contains the version of *Sir Eglamour of Artois* quoted above and discussed further below. *Sir Perceval of Galles* follows the young Perceval in his quest to attain knighthood. Perceval, whose own family past is unknown to him, assumes that his identity is solely a matter of personal desire, that knighthood is to be had for the asking. In demanding his knighthood from

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[23] In my analysis of *Eglamour,* below, I indicate where the Cotton version differs substantially from the Thornton text.

[24] Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue,* No. 27 (pp. 135-42).

Arthur, however, Perceval reveals that his concept of how the future unfolds is humorously out of touch with cultural structures of authority and the respect they require. Arthur's benign responses to Perceval's bravado are an attempt to educate him in the appropriate language with which to address a feudal superior when making requests about the future. By adjusting Perceval's language and demands, Arthur attempts to reinstate the patrilineal structure of authority and its control over the future. His attempts seem to fail, as Perceval ultimately gets his own way. However, at the end of the romance, the nature of Perceval's swaggering success also calls into question the degree to which he has really escaped from the authority structures he seems to flout.

Perceval's family history and upbringing establish the basis for his reliance on his own agency as the determiner of his future. His father is a reputable knight (9-16), who seems successful in a kind of 'careerism' whereby his knightly service to Arthur results in taking the king's sister as his wife (21-25), and, crucially, the acquisition not only of physical possessions ('mobles', 35) but of land as well (34). In other words, the elder Perceval succeeds in amassing what should be the foundation of a patrilineage, a stable past from which the younger Perceval should realise his identity. However, the elder Perceval is killed in a joust (141-44), and his wife leaves the environment associated with her husband's death, taking her young son to live in the woods (161-76). She removes Perceval, the heir, from his patrimony and from all ability to identify with his heritage, and Perceval, as a result, grows to the age of fifteen with a lack of cultural and practical knowledge of the world. Cut loose from society, its norms, and his own familial heritage and the identity it would supply, Perceval asserts himself early on in language that assumes his own, independent control over his future: enjoined by his mother to pray to God to make him a good man, he is enamoured of the idea of God and decides to pray instead that he may meet with God himself: 'Reghte so schall I pray!' (252). This early instance of the word 'shall' in Perceval's declarative vocabulary is indicative of his consistent approach to conceiving and demanding the future he desires.

When Perceval formulates the desire to become a knight, after meeting three knights in the woods, he goes to Arthur to make the demand for knighthood. In his negotiation with Arthur, however, he is confronted with resistance, and Arthur attempts to reform the boy's attitude towards the future. Perceval approaches Arthur just before a meal, and demands knighthood for himself, stating his request in the bald language of the modal future:

> 'Yisterday saw I knyghtis three:
> Siche on sall thou make mee
> On this mere [mare] byfor the,
> Thy mete or thou schere!' (509-12)   *Before you cut your food*

In this request, and in the negotiation that follows, the uses of *shall* and *will* become important in defining authority. Perceval's statement, '*sall* thou make mee', presumes his own agency is sufficient to stipulate his future, even though that future clearly depends on Arthur. He also asserts an authority to stipulate the timing of his knighthood: before Arthur cuts his meat. When Perceval's demand fails to be fulfilled immediately, he repeats it and resorts to the addition of a threat for failure to observe his wishes: 'Bot if [unless] the Kyng make me knyghte, / I sall hym here slaa!' (527-28). This treasonous exclamation is 'suffered' by Arthur, to the surprise of the court (529-33), for the reason that Perceval reminds him of the elder knight, his brother-in-law (539-60). However, Perceval's declaration constitutes treason according to the 1351 statute which considered it treason to 'compasse or imagine' the death of the king; the French words used ('compasser ou imaginer') seem to mean 'design or intend'.[25] What this law suggests is that, in the matter of treason at least, medieval lawmakers did consider future plans or even desires to be culpable in the same way as the action of treason itself. The identity of the traitor could be constituted by his mental and verbal handling of the future. Similarly, even though Perceval has taken no violent action against the king, his approach to the future betrays his refusal to recognise the proper relationship of authority between himself and Arthur. This dynamic continues later in the romance, where Perceval is called 'prowde' (824) and declares himself to be 'als grete a lorde' as Arthur is (814).

 The striking tone of Perceval's demands of Arthur emerges more strongly if it is compared to a similar request by another child-knight reared in the woods in another romance, the Ashmole 61 version of *Lybeaus Desconus*. Here, Lybeaus says to Arthur,

> 'I ame a chyld uncouthe,
> And come nowte of thee soughte;
> I wold be made a knyght.' (49-51)[26]

The situation and request are similar, but Lybeaus's expression of his desire is couched in respectful retractions (at his youth, and at coming unrequested), and he chooses the modal

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[25] John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29-30.

[26] *Lybeaus Desconus,* in Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*.

verb of volition: 'I *wold* be made a knight', thus acknowledging Arthur's superior authority as Perceval does not.

Arthur, though he does not refuse Perceval's request, makes it clear in his response that he notices the insubordination implicit in Perceval's use of language. Before agreeing to Perceval's request, he verbally restores the correct relation of authority:

> Than the Kyng hym hendly highte [courteously promised]
> That he schold dub hym to knyghte,
> With thi that[27] he wolde doun lighte   *provided that he would dismount*
>   And ete with hym at none. (581-84)

Here, Arthur brings his own predicted action into alignment with Perceval's request: 'he schold dub hym to knyghte', but stipulates his own condition, that Perceval eat with him, which quietly obviates Perceval's own. Where Perceval has demanded to be knighted before the meal, Arthur makes eating the meal a precondition of granting him knighthood. Moreover, he vouchsafes his own action not in the form of a vow, but using the modal auxiliary, 'schold dub', in a form which indicates a future action contingent upon this condition.[28] Arthur's rephrasing of Perceval's request allows him to grant it while demonstrating that the authority to lay out the conditions for future action lies not with Perceval but with himself, and that his own future actions are not even absolutely promised by him, but are contingent upon Perceval's capitulation to his requirements.

What these negotiations are emphatically not about is a conflict of desire or will. It is clear on multiple occasions that Arthur wants to make Perceval a knight. Arthur is favourably disposed towards Perceval from the beginning, because the first sight of Perceval the younger reminds Arthur strongly of the elder Perceval, and Arthur knows that, if this boy is really Perceval's son, he will be the one to avenge his father (545-48). Arthur thus has a stake in Perceval's future, inasmuch as the elder Perceval was one of Arthur's knights and inasmuch his avenging is of interest to Arthur for either reasons of honour or of personal relationship; his weeping when he is reminded of the elder Perceval suggests a personal investment (534-38). Perceval is also Arthur's nephew, his sister's son.[29] It is

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[27] Mary Flowers Braswell, *Sir Perceval of Galles,* gloss to line 583. This phrase is difficult to interpret, but Braswell's gloss, 'provided that', is confirmed by the *MED*, s.v. 'with' (particle), 3.a (d); this meaning is also supported by the following subjunctive 'woulde'. If, conversely, 'with thi that' is taken to mean 'so that' and thus indicate result rather than condition, which is the other meaning under 3.a (d), this meaning would seem to require a different modal verb in the following phrase, e.g. 'coulde doun lighte' or 'mighte doun lighte' instead. Therefore, I translate the line as conditional, 'provided that he would dismount'.

[28] *MED,* s.v. *shulen*, 14 a, b, c.

[29] Caroline Eckhardt, 'Arthurian Comedy', 216-17.

clear, later, when Perceval fails to return with the cup as he promised, that Arthur is worried about his welfare (1061-68), and upon hearing news of him sets out to find him (1109-24). Thus, Arthur has no basic motivation to contravene Perceval's wishes for knighthood, and never asserts such a desire. Rather, the negotiation is motivated by authority; Arthur habitually restates Perceval's demands on his own terms in order to emphasise that Perceval's future is not his own to control, but rather the king's.

In fact, Arthur represents a figure of authority in Perceval's life as more than a monarch. Viewed in light of these other roles of authority, the negotiation between Perceval and Arthur is not simply a representation of a courtly drama, but one that transfers to household settings. The king's relationship with Perceval's father, which motivates his benign patience with the boy, places Arthur as Perceval's guardian. Arthur was the elder Perceval's feudal superior, as well as being his brother-in-law, and thus the younger Perceval, because of his father's death, falls in wardship to Arthur.[30] As N. J. Menuge has demonstrated, in the romances as well as culturally, the wardship relationship often functions as a surrogate father-son relationship.[31] It is thus simultaneously a relationship of feudal authority, of surrogate paternal authority, and one that also has the potential to mimic the other roles of father and son, which include education. The fatherly speaker in *How the Wise Man Taught His Son* assumes a position of corrective authority which echoes Arthur's: this poem is found in Ashmole 61, a miscellany probably compiled slightly later than the Thornton *Perceval* text:[32]

> It was a wyse man had a chyld
> Was fully fiftene wynter of age,
> Of maneres he was meke and myld,
> Gentyll of body and of usage.
> Bycause he was his faderes ayer,
> His fader thus on this langage

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[30] For a definition of wardship, see Sue Sheridan Walker, 'Royal Wardship in Medieval England' (PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 1966), 1; Menuge, *Medieval English Wardship*, 1-3.

[31] Menuge, *Medieval English Wardship,* 32. It is a little surprising that Menuge's study does not consider *Perceval* as a romance with wardship concerns. It seems to me, however, that the romance could offer fruitful ground for exploration of some of the wardship themes Menuge enumerates, including the role of lord as a substitute father and the frequent displacement of conflict away from the biological father-son relationship and onto the ward-guardian relationship (28-9): Perceval's treasonous threats, and assault on Arthur's authority, seem an example of precisely such conflict displacement.

[32] On the date of Ashmole 61, which is not precisely known, see Shuffelton, introduction to *Codex Ashmole 61,* 2-3; Blanchfield, 'An Idiosyncratic Scribe', 4-5.

Taught his sone wele and feyre,
Gentyll of kynd and of corage. (9-16)[33]

Like Perceval, the son here is fifteen years old,[34] and like the speaker of this Ashmole
poem, Arthur instructs Perceval in 'langage' which ideally should not only edify the
fictional hearer but form a useful model for the reader. Arthur's instruction re-appropriates
Perceval's use of the modal future to correspond to the social roles of authority Perceval
ought to respect. Moreover, in the Ashmole poem, heredity and tradition form the basic
motivation for teaching: the father instructs his son 'Bycause he was his faderes ayer' (13).
Similarly, the roles which Arthur conceives for himself and Perceval also derive from the
past: the social positions that Arthur's language inculcates are based on inherited social
status and authority. These negotiations between Arthur and Perceval thus function as
Arthur's method of demonstrating to his insubordinate ward that control of the future is not
to be had for the asking, but resides according to authority derived from past lineage.

Perceval is utterly resistant to this perspective, and in fact operates by the
assumption that his own future is his to command according to his own desires. His
upbringing sequesters him from society and hence from its norms; after his father's death,
his mother flees to the woods and pledges that her son 'sall […] no thing see / Bot the
leves of the tree /And the greves graye […]' (*Perceval of Galles,* 170-71). Moreover, the
absence of his own father signifies his separation from his patrilineal past or any concept
of inherited social status. Significantly, even though he bears his father's name and desires
to become a knight, as was his father, his separation from any place where 'dedes of armes
schall be done' (167) means that his desire to become a knight arises without reference to
his father's occupation, but apparently *de novo*, out of Perceval's own personal desire.
Even before he presents himself to Arthur, Perceval's behaviour and language indicate an
assumption that his future is simply his to arrange. To the three knights he discovers in the
woods, he says, 'I sall sla yow all three' (293), threatening them with the same language he
later uses to threaten Arthur. Later in the romance, Arthur's dialogues seem to have no
effect on Perceval's assumptions about his future; he does not reform his own language or
change his demands, and continues speaking to Arthur in the same way (641-44). Scholars

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[33] In Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*.

[34] This age is considered the start of adulthood, as the Ashmole poem makes clear, and the age of fifteen
features in the romances in this way. See, for example, *Amis and Amiloun,* lines 163-65; *King Horn,* line 18;
J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988),
26-7; Mary Dove, *The Perfect Age of Man's Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 73.

differ on whether Perceval manifests a change of character or remains amusingly resistant to development; however, my argument corroborates Eckhardt's view that while Perceval's social status changes from *childe* to *knight*, there is no substantive change in his behaviour.[35] Not only this, but he evinces no substantive change in his view that he is the primary agent and authority in his own life. Ultimately, the romance seems to confirm this view: before Perceval has completed the final task that Arthur sets him, Arthur knights him (1637-40). The only reason given is that, 'Thofe he couthe littill insight, / The childe was of pith' ('Though he had little understanding, the child had vigour', 1639-40). This confirms that Perceval has made no gains in his education, but that his 'pith', his personal vigour and strength, prevent his lack of insight from being held against him. It is the ultimate triumph of Perceval's personal agency over the norms of authority and tradition which Arthur has attempted to teach him.

However, though Perceval achieves success on his own terms, and by virtue of his own personal qualities rather than his adherence to procedure, his success does not represent a satisfaction of individual desires so much as a fulfilment of the past that his upbringing has temporarily obliterated. Clearly, Perceval bears his father's name, and resembles him closely enough to remind Arthur of his father (539-44). In fact he uses his father's spear, which the reader and his mother knows, though Perceval himself does not (189-212).[36] He also, by personal prowess and 'pith', attains the same rank as his father, who won such 'wirchippe' at Arthur's court (11). Like his father, he also attains a royal wife (36), Lufamour in the younger Perceval's case (1745-48). Not only this, but the 'lande brade' which Perceval rules as a result of his marriage is an exact echo of the 'Brode londes' which his father received from Arthur (1748, 34). In fact, both the elder and the younger Perceval are successful 'careerists', but because of this the younger Perceval's ascent and acquisition seem less original and more a roundabout route to attaining the status and property to which his birth already entitled him.

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[35] Eckhardt, 'Arthurian Comedy', 205-6; cf. Glenn Wright, '"Þe Kynde Wolde Oute Sprynge": Interpreting the Hero's Progress in *Perceval of Galles*', *Studia Neophilologica* 72, no. 1 (2000), esp. 52. Wright argues that Perceval does undergo change.

[36] Putter, 'Story Line and Story Shape', 178-9.

Sir Eglamour of Artois and the Fantasy of Social Triumph

Sir Eglamour of Artois is a romance which appears in the Lincoln Thornton Manuscript along with *Sir Perceval of Galles*, though unlike *Perceval* it is preserved in several other manuscripts as well.[37] In this romance, the future also becomes the site of contested authority, which is negotiated in language similar to that already discussed in *Perceval*, especially in the use of the modal future. In this romance, Eglamour is a landless social climber who, though without the support of an illustrious past, arranges for himself a prosperous future in the form of land and a noble wife. Meanwhile, his social superiors are all without male heirs, and thus find that the patriarchal lineage on which their position is based provides no upper hand for them when faced with the struggle of wills in which Eglamour asserts himself. All of the male characters in the romance are equally concerned about ensuring the continuity of their own family lines, but ultimate success in negotiating the future falls to Eglamour. This romance clearly validates the aspirations of the landless social inferior, while at the same time expressing the anxieties and vulnerabilities of aristocratic families in the face of an uncertain future. These vulnerabilities allow Eglamour to rise in society, but simultaneously threaten his own future as much as the futures of those whom he supplants.

As in *Perceval,* the roles of authority in the romance are established early through the use of the modal future in dialogue between the Earl Prinsamour and his knight Eglamour. This not only reveals the strained feudal relationship between the two, but establishes the future as the ground for the romance's chief contest. This is the competition over whose authority and power will dictate the marriage of Prinsamour's daughter, and thus dictate the future of Prinsamour's bloodline and land. This contest occurs in the context of Prinsamour's ambiguous role as both authoritative and disadvantaged; though bolstered by the authority of his inherited title and property, and having a theoretical authority to dictate his family's future, his position is compromised by his lack of a male heir, the looming threat of extinction, and the complexity of marrying off an heiress daughter without compromising the family's status.[38]

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[37] Manuscripts are listed by Richardson, *Sir Eglamour of Artois,* ix-xiv; most relevant are the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts, which are: London, British Museum, Egerton MS 2862; Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91 (the Lincoln Thornton); London, British Library, Cotton Caligula MS A.ii; Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38.

[38] On the problems of heirs, extinction, and marriage of heiresses, see: Rosenthal, *Patriarchy*, 23, 30, 34-8; S. J. Payling, 'Social Mobility, Demographic Change, and Landed Society in Late Medieval England', *The Economic History Review,* n.s. 45, vol. 1 (1992), 70; McFarlane, *Nobility,* 78, 173-76 (tables of extinctions in

The negotiation begins when Eglamour, wanting to marry Prinsamour's daughter Christabelle, requests an audience with the earl in a manner befitting his status: 'Lord, will ȝe me here?' (207). This is an appeal to Prinsamour's willingness to hear Eglamour's request, politely phrased and acknowledging that the most important 'will' in the matter is Prinsamour's. Eglamour's next question is about Christabelle's future: 'Christabelle, ȝour doghtir free, / When *schall* scho hafe a fere?' (215-16; emphasis mine). Were Eglamour to ask, 'When *will* she have a fere?' the question would be what Christabelle's preference in the matter was. However, his use of 'shall' instead makes the enquiry one about the factual outcome of her marriage prospects. This is a subtle acknowledgement of Prinsamour's authority over Christabelle, an enquiry only realistically possible because of the assumption that Prinsamour possesses the real authority to ordain Christabelle's marital future. Prinsamour's conception of his own authority is also subtly conveyed by his reply: 'I knawe na man my doghtir sall haue, / Þat is so bryghte of ble!' (218-19). The narrator has already said that Christabelle refuses all suitors, 'will scho none' of them (77), but when Prinsamour states this fact he removes Christabelle's 'will' and replaces it with his own 'shall': he takes Christabelle's choice and removes her volition (indicated by 'will') from the situation. Instead, he frames the statement from the angle of his own authority to say that Christabelle is too beautiful for any man he knows of. It is now his authority, not her will, which governs the situation. Finally, once Eglamour has requested to marry Christabelle himself, Prinsamour again asserts authority by dictating the conditions under which he will permit this:

> The erle sayde, 'By Goddis payne,
> *Will* þou hir wyn als I the sayne
>   Wyth dedis of armes three,
> And I *sall* þe gyff þe maydyn clere […].' (223-6; emphasis mine)

Prinsamour consents to grant the will of his subordinate, but only if Eglamour complies with his requirements: Eglamour must do 'als I the sayne'. It is up to Eglamour whether he 'will' comply with the condition set forth, but Prinsamour's agreement to give Eglamour his daughter and property is contingent upon Eglamour's willingness to comply.[39] As with

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25-year increments); S. J. Payling, 'The Economics of Marriage in Late Medieval England: The Marriage of Heiresses', *Economic History Review,* n.s. 54, no. 3 (2001); Kirby, introduction to *The Plumpton Letters and Papers,* 5; see below for further discussion of Prinsamour's position and the problems of marrying heiress daughters.

[39] The Cotton version of these lines makes the conditional nature of the agreement more explicit, and reads:

Arthur's treatment of Perceval's request for knighthood, here Prinsamour consents to grant the will of his subordinate by appending a condition so that he effectively subsumes the other's will into his own. Reciprocally, Eglamour's agreement to this requirement continues to emphasise his own respectful subservience with the word 'will': 'So mot I the, / At my iournaye *wolde* I bee!' (so may I thrive,[40] I would be at my task; 229-30; emphasis mine).[41] In this early scene of the romance, the differentiation between the modal meanings of *shall* and *will* acknowledge the authority structures that both speakers recognise; Prinsamour alone can indicate what 'shall' be, both for Eglamour and for Christabelle.

Prinsamour's position and concerns are reflective of those of many English aristocratic families of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. He is an earl, which in England was a hereditary title of which there were few, and these were 'conscious of their pre-eminence'.[42] Though the story is set in Artois, the title of 'earl' clearly indicates that the social structures it replicates are English rather than continental, where the equivalent title was 'count'.[43] In theory, these aristocratic families rooted themselves ideologically in a family identity passed continuously through the male line through an accumulation of past successes.[44] Margaret Paston's injunction to her son evinces this sense of individual identity deriving from ancestors' success: 'I pray God make you as good a man *as euer was any of your kynne* […]' (emphasis mine).[45] Family tombs often evince this sense of identity as the accumulation of the past by portraying the many coats of arms connected with the family; the Chaucer tomb at Ewelme is an example of this, with twenty-four

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'Ye, syr,' he sayde, 'be Cristys payne,
Yif thou hir wynne *as I schall sayne*
        Wyth dedes of armes thre […].' (*Sir Eglamour of Artois* in Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances,* 214-16; emphasis mine)

The word *shall* here is more predictive than coercive, as Prinsamour is describing what he is about to say, but the choice of this word rather than *will* reinforces the absolute tone of his language, as already seen above with regard to Christabelle.

[40] This is a formulaic phrase indicating an oath, i.e. Eglamour's verbal agreement to perform the action; for a definition of 'the' and examples, see *MED*, s.v. 'thēn', 2.

[41] Eglamour's word 'iournaye' can refer to a general task or undertaking, as well as to combat specifically: see *MED,* s.v. 'iournei', 3, 4(a) and 4(b).

[42] Peter Coss, 'An Age of Deference', in Horrox and Ormrod, *A Social History,* 35.

[43] Coss, 'An Age of Deference', 35.

[44] Rosenthal, *Patriarchy,* 23, 30; see also Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 47. Johnston argues that one important distinction between gentry and nobility that the nobility had heritable titles and parliamentary seats, whereas the gentry often struggled to make a living from their land; this suggests a contrast between the relative stability of the aristocracy compared with the more vulnerable position of the gentry.

[45] Davis, *PL*, 1: 308 (no. 186).

different shields.[46] A set of testimonies in a Cheshire dispute describes the pervasive local presence of the Grosvenor family's arms in stained glass, on altar-pieces, in manor-houses, even on an old stone cross on a highway, which Bennett cites as an example of how a lineage should be reckoned in more than its wealth or power, but also its symbolic presence.[47]

However, this patrilineal ideal was under constant practical threat, or at least complication. It required a direct male heir to be born every generation, and to survive to majority and live long enough to bear another male heir before his own death.[48] Many studies have attempted to analyse the rates at which medieval noble families failed in the male line, and while no definitive figures can be attained, in general these studies all suggest that with a few exceptions most families failed to produce direct male heirs for more than about three consecutive generations.[49] Even discounting the 'demographic crisis' of the Black Death, many families throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries suffered extinction in the male line, or lived close to it.[50] The Beauchamp family of Warwick, for example, partly known now for their connections to the romance *Guy of Warwick*, ended in the male line in 1446 when the only heir was a daughter, and many other families similarly ended.[51] In the dukedom of Gloucester, Duke Humphrey died in 1447 leaving no legitimate children, while even at the level of the crown the same problem persisted when Richard III died leaving no legitimate children in 1485.[52] Contemporary awareness of this risk of failure is evinced by the Erpingham window, a church window in Norwich given in 1419 by Sir Thomas Erpingham, picturing his arms and those of all the lords, barons, bannerets and knights who had died without male issue in the area since Edward III's reign, thus recognising these families as a distinct group and as having a

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[46] Rosenthal, *Patriarchy*, 26; see also 27.

[47] Michael J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, 82-83.

[48] Rosenthal, *Patriarchy*, 35-8, 48-50.

[49] McFarlane, *Nobility*, 78-79; Rosenthal, *Patriarchy*, 35.

[50] Payling, 'Social Mobility', 70; McFarlane, *Nobility*, 78-79, 172-76; Rosenthal, *Patriarchy*, 34-8; Kirby, introduction to *The Plumpton Letters and Papers*, 5.

[51] Rosenthal, *Patriarchy*, 48; Michael A. Hicks, 'The Beauchamp Trust, 1439-87', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 54 (1981), 137; John Rows, *This Rol Was Laburd & Finished by Master John Rows of Warrewyk*, ed. William Pickering and William Courthope (London: 1845), No. 50; McFarlane, *Nobility*, 78-9. Other families ending due to default of male heirs during this period include the Mowbrays, the Lords de la Warre, the Dacres of Gilsland, the Lords Furnival, the Lords St. Amand, the Scropes of Masham, and the Staffords (Rosenthal, *Patriarchy*, 48; McFarlane, *Nobility*, 78-9).

[52] Rosenthal, *Patriarchy and Families of Privilege*, 49.

particular need for memorialisation in the face of extinction.[53] Poignantly, Richard, Earl of Warwick, founded a chantry in 1423, a memorialisation of lineage but with the stated goal 'that God wold send him Eyres male'.[54] This male heir turned out to be the last of the male line mentioned above. In *Eglamour,* this constant threat of extinction of the family line is embodied in Prinsamour as well as in the other three rulers in the romance, none of whom have sons: the king of Sidon has a daughter Organata (514-19), the Emperor of Rome has a daughter Dyateur (775-77), and the King of Egypt seems to be childless (he enters the romance at 892; no children are mentioned).[55]

In default of a direct male heir, lands might pass to a collateral male heir or, as in the case of Prinsamour and the other fathers in *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, the female issue would stand to inherit it: as the romance explicitly states, Christabelle is Prinsamour's only heir (25-27), and when Prinsamour initially promises her to Eglamour his lands, 'alle Artasse', are included in the exchange (227). This means that, as Prinsamour faces the failure of the male line of his family, in arranging his daughter's marriage he also arranges the future of his own family line. It might seem that marrying her to a groom of equal or higher rank would be the easiest as well as the most desirable option, but Prinsamour approaches his daughter's marriage with a sinister ambivalence about achieving success: as already described, he rejects all her suitors, and lays demands on Eglamour with the seeming intention of the knight's failure or death. Charbonneau points out the heavily veiled suggestion of incestuous tendencies in Prinsamour's protectiveness of his daughter and spurning of her suitors.[56] However, Prinsamour's self-sabotaging refusal to marry off his daughter also reflects the real conditions which complicated heiress marriage in late medieval England. As S. J. Payling demonstrates, heiresses were not always universally desirable as brides nor always able to contract advantageous marriages.[57] In fact, an heiress's father might dissuade potential suitors. He could have high expectations of the groom's rank, requirements for how the lands were to be bequeathed, or demand a large

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[53] McFarlane, *Nobility*, 145-46; Payling, 'Social Mobility', 58.

[54] Hicks, 'The Beauchamp Trust', 137.

[55] Dyateur's name is Dyamuntowre in the Cotton version (*Sir Eglamour of Artois* in Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances,* 756). On these sonless kings, see also Joanne A. Charbonneau, 'Transgressive Fathers in *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and *Torrent of Portyngale*', in *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 278 (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 248.

[56] Charbonneau, 'Transgressive Fathers', 244-45, 253, 255.

[57] Payling, 'The Economics of Marriage'.

jointure settlement for his daughter, all in compensation for the wealth she brought to the groom's family; the result of this was that the families of potential grooms were unable or unwilling to meet such demands, and heiresses often ended up married to younger sons rather than heirs.[58] Prinsamour's malicious demands of Eglamour to prove himself worthy of Christabelle thus seem a reflection of the tendency of contemporary noble fathers to make stiff demands in the marriage of their heiress daughters, demands which attempt to control the future of the lands and lineage which are nevertheless quickly escaping the aging patriarch's influence.

Prinsamour thus embodies the anxieties attendant upon the patriarchal ideal, facing the results of the failure of male issue and the resultant threat of dispersal of ancestral lands through heiress marriage.[59] However, these situational and passive threats are matched by another, in the form of Eglamour, who ultimately calls into question Prinsamour's control over the future of his family. At first, Eglamour poses no apparent threat. Eglamour's initial lack of authority, indicated in the early scenes of the romance in the use of the modal future, is matched by his lack of a 'past' in the sense that he has no inherited lands; equally, as his dialogue with the Earl shows, he has no 'future' of his own either, only that which is under the control of the Earl. At first, he capitulates to the future which Prinsamour designates for him, complying with the Earl's requirements. He completes two of the tasks (271-633), suggesting that he is submitting himself to Prinsamour's authority, and prior to the third task, wishing for rest, he remains submissive by asking the Earl for a period of fifteen weeks to recuperate before completing the next task (667-69). Subtly, Prinsamour grants him a period of rest while still asserting his authority, shortening the time to twelve weeks: 'Twelue wokes he gaffe hym þan: / No langere wold he freste' (no longer would he allow a delay; 671-72).[60] It is at this point that Eglamour emerges as a threat to Prinsamour's ability to control his future, and does so by choosing to dictate his own future himself.

First, Eglamour and Christabelle, apparently anticipating his success in the third task, plight their troth and consummate their relationship (681-84). This would constitute a legal marriage in Church law, but is expressly against Prinsamour's requirement that

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[58] Payling, 'The Economics of Marriage', 416-18, 423, 424; McFarlane, *Nobility,* 81.

[59] Charbonneau agrees that Prinsamour faces what were real threats at the time *Sir Eglamour* was written ('Transgressive Fathers', 246-8).

[60] *MED,* s.v. 'firsten'.

Eglamour complete *three* tasks first. Eglamour and Christabelle have in fact contracted the kind of consensual but frowned-upon marriage that enraged Margery Paston's family but which, under ecclesiastical interrogation, was found to be legitimate.[61] In the romance, the couple's sexual relationship becomes public knowledge when enough time passes that Christabelle's pregnancy becomes obvious (685-87). Prinsamour's aggravation is evident:

> Þe erle, brym als any bare,
> Bad Sir Eglamour make hym ȝare: *Bade Sir Eglamour make himself ready*
>   'Thi iournay commes newe!' (691-93)[62]

Though Christabelle asks her maids not to reveal her pregnancy (688-90), the mention of her change in appearance (686) and Prinsamour's anger suggest that he at least conjectures that she is pregnant, and knows that Eglamour has prematurely consummated his relationship Christabelle before completing his final task. Prinsamour orders Eglamour to assume his third task (697-708), suggesting that he is conscious that his authority has been undermined and is taking angry measures to reinstate it.[63]

In this battle of wills and authorities between Prinsamour and Eglamour, the outcome of the romance hands the clear victory to Eglamour. Prinsamour is ultimately powerless against Eglamour's assertion of will, flees to a tower and summarily dies by falling out of it, which Charbonneau suggests is symbolic of his impotence (1338-44).[64] Eglamour, in contrast, regains Christabelle and his easily-begotten son after a long separation and is the possessor of the property that Prinsamour was at such pains to control. Prinsamour's anxieties are ultimately justified, and the romance is, in Johnston's wording, a 'gentry fantasy' which affirms the aspirations of the landless, social-climbing knight at the expense of his landed superior.[65] Moreover, by the time Eglamour meets his son

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[61] Margaret recounts the interrogation to her husband in Davis, *PL,* 1: 341-44 (no. 203). In this period the Church held that consent was the decisive factor in the legitimacy of marriage, and while it did not encourage children to flout their parents' wishes, it did stand by privately contracted marriages: Keith Dockray, 'Why Did Fifteenth-Century English Gentry Marry?: The Pastons, Plumptons and Stonors Reconsidered', in *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe,* ed. Michael Jones (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1986), 63-64; Rosenthal, *Patriarchy*, 62.

[62] The Cotton version also describes Prinsamour's anger, but in slightly different words:

> The Erle brennes as fyre in care;
> 'Have don, sir knight, and make the yare
>   Thy jurnay comes all newe!' (*Sir Eglamour of Artois* in Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances,* 679-81)

[63] Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 225.

[64] Charbonneau, 'Transgressive Fathers', 258.

[65] Michael Johnston, 'A New Document', 311.

Degrebell, the boy is fifteen years old and engaging in tournaments (1078-80); what this means is that at the end of the romance Eglamour is rewarded with an almost ready-made male heir who, though not twenty-one (the age of majority) has proven his adulthood by becoming a knight, and thus stands ready—or nearly ready—to inherit without risk of extended wardship. Elizabeth Noble's study of the Stonor family indicates that, even when sons existed to inherit, they were often minors when their fathers died and the lands were held in wardship, a situation which risked the property and which medieval families were at pains to prevent; nor were the Stonors alone among medieval families in this experience.[66] The romance *Gamelyn* provides an example of the kinds of conflicts and damage to an estate which wardship could cause.[67] Thus, not only has Eglamour bypassed the problem of the other fathers in the romance, the problem of a lack of male heirs, he has even bypassed another problem of the medieval nobility, under-age male heirs. He also narrowly escapes the sad fate of a fifteenth-century Lancashire man whose inheritance case is recorded in an Inquisition Post Mortem in 1447: he died 'de herede ignorant', not knowing who his heir was.[68]

This triumph of Eglamour over Prinsamour is not only the triumph of a lower member of the gentry class over a member of the aristocracy, it represents the triumph of a gentry configuration of present and future. It has already been said that Prinsamour and the other rulers in the romance—the King of Sidon, the Emperor of Rome, and the King of Egypt—represent a class whose present identity as rulers derives from the past, a form of past which Eglamour lacks. However, the lack of male progeny in the aristocratic families in the romance renders their past impotent in relation to their future; this means that in effect they are on equal footing with Eglamour, the also pastless knight. The rules are now those of Eglamour. He construes the relationship of present to future in terms of his own

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[66] Noble, *The World of the Stonors,* 41-2; Menuge, *Medieval English Wardship*, 13, 129-30 (on abuses of wards); Rosenthal, *Patriarchy,* 36-8. For a definition of wardship, see Walker, 'Royal Wardship', 1; Menuge, *Medieval English Wardship,* 1-3. For an example of the Stonor family's experience of wardship, see Noble, *The World of the Stonors*, 42; a wardship case related to the Paston family is that of Stephen Scrope, who was the ward of Sir John Fastolf, a friend of the Pastons: Scrope complains of bad treatment and exploitation at the hands of Fastolf; see James Gairdner, ed., *The Paston Letters, A. D. 1422-1509* edited with notes and introduction, 6 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), 1:153-4; Colin Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: The First Phase,* 179; H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and Their England,* 75.

[67] In *Gamelyn,* the eponymous hero is supposed to inherit but is a minor at his father's death and thus in wardship to his older brother (*Gamelyn* in Sands, *Middle English Verse Romances,* 70-76); when he comes of age, he exacts justice on his brother partly for the waste committed against the property (81-7).

[68] William Langton, ed., *Abstracts of Inquisitions post Mortem Made by Christopher Towneley and Roger Dodsworth*, vol. 2, Chetham Society 99 (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1876), 54; see also Rosenthal, *Patriarchy*, 33.

desire and will: he contravenes the commands of his lord and contracts and consummates a marriage to Christabelle, a decision which directly leads both to the acquisition of property and to the provision of an heir, in other words his establishment amongst the aristocracy and the provision for his future there. Later, Eglamour even assumes new arms (1188-9), eschewing identification with his own familial past and asserting a new identity shaped by his recent experience. Not knowing that Christabelle has survived, he takes arms which depict a ship, a lady about to drown ('als scho drowne scholde'),[69] and a newborn child beside her (1200-09), arms which therefore stand not for his family's past symbolically, but portray literal events in his own life as a means of identification. Moreover, though Christabelle is portrayed as 'a lady als scho drowne scholde' (1202), memorialising what Eglamour believes to be the death of his incipient family, in fact Eglamour bears the image of his soon-to-be wife and child, defining his public and martial identity by reference to his self-chosen, nuclear family. By the end of the romance, when Eglamour's family is reunited, a new aristocratic line has been established, one without a lineal history in the male line and without an historic coat of arms, but with the beginnings of a future in Degrebell. This is the 'gentry fantasy' to which Johnson refers.[70] It is a fantasy in the sense of representing some of the most potent desires of aspirant medieval families, but also in suggesting the attainment of what was far from easily or universally attainable. Philippa Maddern's survey of six sample families who advanced themselves by 'careerism' finds that only two of these six, the de la Poles and the Townshends of Norfolk, show 'sustained, significant and purposive social rise'.[71] The other families' success is moderated: the estate of the Penifaders of Northamptonshire failed to raise the wealth or status of the family's younger siblings and their branch of the family; the Folewoods of Warwickshire show an advance in title without a real advance in wealth, as their accounts evince; the careerism of John Vavasour benefitted him, but he died childless and his efforts did little for the rest of his family.[72] What this suggests is that raising the status and landed wealth of an entire family line was not simply to be achieved because desired, and in this sense, represented the desirable but rarely attainable fantasy of the gentry.

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[69] I translate this line thus: 'A lady [portrayed] as if she were about to drown'; see *MED,* s.v. 'als', 2(a); 'shulen' 11(c).

[70] Michael Johnston, 'A New Document', 311.

[71] Maddern, 'Social Mobiliy', 118-121, 121.

[72] Maddern, 'Social Mobility', 118-120.

The romance does not, however, grant an unqualified triumph to this gentry production of family and future. It has already been said that Eglamour wins largely because the aristocratic families have failed in the male line, and thus act on a level playing field with Eglamour. On this level playing field, Eglamour does gain the upper hand by relying on personal desire and ambition rather than the authority of a lineal past to shape his future. However, by the end of the romance his social position is the same as that of the other aristocratic fathers, and there is no guarantee that, in future generations, his new line will not be as vulnerable to extinction as theirs was. Indeed, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England saw the creation of new noble and gentry families which died out as readily as the older ones. In the dukedom of Bedford, three successive dukes were created *de novo* for the empty dukedom and each died without any legitimate children; each might have represented a new patrilineage, but each failed.[73] In other words, Eglamour's self-shaped identity in the form of land, family and arms represents a gentry conception of how the future can be arranged, but at the same time grafts Eglamour into the aristocratic model which relies on lineage to secure the future. Within the romance, Eglamour represents a triumph of the self-ordained future, but the heirless fathers which precede him stand as a warning of his own family's potential future demise.

Robert of Sicily and the Temporary Failure of Kingly Authority

Robert of Sicily is a popular romance which articulates, in a different way, the vulnerabilities of authority.[74] Unlike Eglamour and Perceval, the hero of this romance is not a voice for the power of individual agency, but represents hereditary authority, the role occupied by Prinsamour and Arthur in the other romances. Like those other romances, however, this romance does not allow hereditary authority to stand unchallenged; the challenge comes from above in the form of divine overthrow. The romance obviously deals with a common religious theme of the proud humbled, and can be read didactically as a lesson in humility and as an exemplary narrative more than a romance.[75] However, in one

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[73] Rosenthal, *Patriarchy,* 48.

[74] Andrea Hopkins agrees that Robert's fault involves a problem of authority (*The Sinful Knights*, 187). The romance survives in ten manuscripts (Foster, introduction to *Amis and Amiloun* in *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, 6). From the late fourteenth century are Oxford, Bodleian Library, English Poetry A.1 (the Vernon manuscript); Oxford, Trinity College, D.57; Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38; London, British Museum, Harley MS 1701; London, British Museum, Additional MS 22283 (the Simeon manuscript).

[75] Foster, introduction to *Robert of Cisyle* in *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, 75, 79.

manuscript, Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38, it appears in a section with other romances, suggesting that some readers saw it as such. Read as a romance, it is a narrative which explores the vulnerability of hereditary authority and the social structures which support it. These are concerns at once relevant to the periods of contested (and thus vulnerable) kingship in the fifteenth century, but also more generally to the awareness evinced throughout the late medieval period that the power of any sovereign or lord depended on more than just his assertion of his status, and more generally still that all human authority becomes ultimately subject to divine authority.[76]

At the beginning of the romance, the King of Sicily is introduced: Robert's family includes a Pope and the King of 'Alemayne' (5-8), and Robert himself is identified as a 'conquerour' (12).[77] In other words, the romance links Robert to his position and the filial connections which make him part of what is clearly a great Continental family. Robert, however, conceives his royal power primarily in terms of the future. Robert first voices his own view of his authority when a verse is read at evensong, in which it is said of God, 'Deposuit potentes de sede, / Et exaltavit humiles' (40-41, 'He has deposed the powerful from their seats and exalted the humble'). In response to this description of divine power, Robert asserts that his power is clearly such that God is no match for him. He expresses his own authority without reference to its lineal source, but rather envisions his power projected into the future:

> 'I am flour of chivalrye,
> Myn enemys I may distruye;
> No mon lyveth in no londe,
> That me *may* withstonde.' (53-56; emphasis mine)

The word 'may' is a modal auxiliary which emphasises ability and power, denoting Robert's own perception of his ability to perform the actions he describes.[78] As with the use of the modal future, discussed above, here the modal *may* stands primarily to indicate ability and cause, but also implies the futurity of the action; Robert's envisioning of his own power rests not on his past actions but on an overwhelming confidence in his future, unchallenged pre-eminence. He assumes that the power of God, the subject of the verse

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[76] Raluca Radulescu focuses on this romance's relevance particularly to the reigns of Edward VI and Henry VI: see 'Pious Middle English Romances Turned Political: Reading *Sir Isumbras, Sir Gowther,* and *Robert of Siciliy* in Fifteenth-Century England', *Viator* 41, no. 2 (2010), 349, 356-58.

[77] In Foster, *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*. This edition uses the Vernon Manuscript as the base text.

[78] *MED*, s.v. 'mouen' (v.3); Bradley, 'Shall and Will', 14, and on the word 'may', see 8, 15.

read to him at evensong, is merely another power on par with the other human powers among which he is preeminent, without 'peer' (25), and never considers the possibility of its competing with the vision of his own superiority.[79]

Divine intervention proves him wrong, however. Just as Robert rested his case for his own power on a projection of the future, his overthrow is portrayed as the negation of his authority to order his future. Robert, having fallen asleep in church, is 'replaced' by an angel who assumes his position, so that his own subjects refuse to acknowledge him as king. When Robert approaches his palace and is questioned by the porter, he exclaims:

> 'Thou *schalt* witen, ar I go:
> Thi kyng I am; thou *schalt* knowe.
> In prison thou *schalt* ligge lowe
> And ben anhonged and todrawe
> As a traytur bi the lawe.
> Thou *schalt* wel witen, I am kyng,
> Open the gates, gadelyng!' (98-104, emphasis mine)

In this tirade, only the final 'Open the gates' is actually imperative in mood. The rest of the statements (in italics above) are modal futures, implying the futurity of the action described but consisting primarily of a modal function of compulsion. Robert clearly understands that by saying that the porter 'shall' do all that he describes, he considers himself to be decreeing it. However, to use J. L. Austin's term, Robert's commands 'misfire'.[80] The porter does not obey but defers to the angel disguised as the king. Robert, enraged at having his will ignored, resorts to a display of physical power and pummels the porter upon his return (123-8), but is ultimately thrown into a puddle (129-30) and taken to the angel, failing even in his attempt to grasp power by force.

It becomes clear that authority has been transferred to the angel, a transfer which is clearly shown in the angel's ability to use language of the future with effectiveness. The angel declares what Robert's fate will be using 'shall' in a series of statements much like those which Robert has attempted to employ without effect:

> 'Thou *schal* be schoren everichdel […]
> Thi counseyler *schal* ben an ape,
> And o clothing you worth ischape.
> I *schal* him clothen as thi brother,
> Of o clothing – hit is non other;

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[79] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 186.

[80] The term 'misfire' comes from J. L. Austin's discussion of performatives in *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962, 1975), 16.

He *schal* beo thin owne feere,
Sum wit of him thou miht lere.
Houndes, how so hit bifalle,
Schulen eten with the in halle;
Thou *schalt* eten on the ground;
Thin assayour *schal* ben an hound […].' (154, 157-66; emphasis mine)

The construction of compulsory commands using 'shall' remains the same, but in this case it is also legitimate to see this use of 'shall' having a properly predictive function, producing a series of statements which straddle the line between command and prophecy. Syntactically, the angel's use of language is the same as Robert's (commanding, ordering the future of a subject), but it is the angel's will that is carried out. Both speakers' use of the modal future expresses an intention to claim authority, but the results demonstrate that such authority, and the effectiveness of such statements, depend entirely on whether the speaker's subjects accord him the authority he claims. Robert's loss of kingship is demonstrated in his loss of the ability to ordain the future of his subordinates and finally in the assertion of another authority over him. This superior authority, divinely sent, overrides his ability to order the future not only of his subjects but even of himself; he himself becomes a subject.

As a result of his overthrow, Robert's attitude undergoes a change which can be traced in his changing approach to the future. Initially, after being made into the angel's fool, he continues making vehement and extravagant pronouncements, attempting to regain authority: 'He swor, thei schulde alle abuye, / That hym dude such vileynye' (175-76). However, subdued by three years as the angel's fool, he begins to speak about the future in a different way. The court is invited to Rome by Robert's brother, and Robert entertains hopes that his brother will recognise him:

'Allas,' quath he, 'nou am I lowe.'
for he *hopede,* bi eny thing,
His bretheren *wolde* ha mad him kyng […]. (296-8; italics mine)

Now, with reference to the future, Robert does not pronounce or command but rather hopes, a verb which variously conveys desire, expectation and belief; he also hopes for an outcome which depends on the will not of himself but of his brothers ('His bretheren wolde').[81] This contrasts starkly with his earlier declaration and demand for 'recognition' of his kingship, 'Thi kyng I am; thou schalt knowe' (99). Robert has surrendered the claim

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[81] *MED*, s.v. 'hōpen' (v.1), 1, 2.

to authority implied by such declarations as 'thou schalt', and has adopted hope instead, which puts him in a position of passivity, the sufferer (in the sense of receiving action) of the future outcome rather than its predictor or authoritative agent. Realising and renouncing his sin, he speaks about the future in terms of his own will and action: 'I nul no more; / Evere thi fol, Lord, wol I be' (362-63). He vouchsafes his action not in the assertive *shall* but with the more volitional and submissive *will*. He even submits himself to future suffering if it is God's will: 'This wo is riht that I endure, / And wel more, yif hit may be' (358-59). This statement is an admission both that he does not claim to know the future, indicated by the subjunctive '*yif* hit *may* be' (emphasis mine), and moreover that he acknowledges that it is not even in his power to bring about the particular course of events he contemplates, for he is God's 'creature' (357) and 'fol' (this phrase is repeated in each stanza of the prayer). This prayer of repentance marks the turn in events which restores Robert to his original position. It makes it clear that one aspect of Robert's pride is his attitude towards the future, speaking about it in terms of imperative and absolute prediction, and that part of his change of heart is represented in his change of attitude towards the future, contemplating it with the language of hope, contingency, personal volition, and ultimately submission of his fate to divine authority.

It is at this point that Robert is restored to his role as king, and with the authority pertaining to that role:

> Kyng Robert com into halle,
> His men he bad anon forth calle,
> And alle weore at his wille,
> As to heore lord, as hit was skille [proper]. (417-20)

Robert now has the authority to command his subjects again, and their submission to him is explicit: they are 'at his wille', a phrase used in Middle English to express the subordination of subjects to kings or God.[82] However, Robert no longer expresses his authority in the sort of diatribe he has made earlier. His position with regard to his own future, which has gone from imperatorial and definite to submissive and unknowing, now shifts to one which allows him foreknowledge on the one hand, but which, on the other hand, he handles with submission. The angel who earlier deposed him gives him warning of the time of his death, and this knowledge motivates him to write and promulgate his story (425-32). Robert has, in essence, gained a new relationship with his own future.

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[82] For example, *Havelok the Dane* (in Sands, *Middle English Verse Romances,* 271) and Mannyng's *Chronicle* (2:53). See also *MED,* s.v. 'at (prep)' 5.(e).

Where, before, he spoke about the future as being within his control, with his agency and command producing his desired vision, now he accepts a future which is imparted to him by foreknowledge, passively received by him and determined by the agency of God rather than of Robert himself. Robert's progress from pride to humility is traced in his attitude towards this future, from the attitude of a king who puts his own authority over his fate above God's, to a willing submission to a future death whose time and circumstances are dictated by an authority superior to his own.

This romance, on one level, provides a didactic sort of 'comfort' to an audience of gentry, because its narrative confirms the biblical 'deposuit potentes' theme openly stated at the beginning of the story (40).[83] Raluca Radulescu argues that, in the fifteenth century, this romance was didactically reshaped to suit an audience who would have read Robert as an example of the fate of kings who ruled pridefully: the succession of kings from Richard II's deposition in 1399 through the Wars of the Roses in the mid-to-late fifteenth century exemplified a repeated cycle of rulers who tried to exalt themselves and were cast down, and whose downfall could easily be read as divine punishment, like Robert's.[84] Focusing on this aspect of the story—the progression from pride to deserved downfall in accordance with a moral principle clearly stated—the romance is a straightforward and didactic one: it addresses itself to 'Princes proude' (1) and delivers a stern warning to them, while allowing a gentry readership to find reassurance in the just overthrow of their superior.

However, the romance also invites readers to identify with its regal central character. Radulescu also argues that Robert's story of downfall and suffering under divine punishment echoes the rhetoric of Yorkist propaganda, which cast Edward IV as suffering piously in the purging of sin.[85] This royal propaganda seems intended to induce the English population to sympathy towards the king.[86] Read in this light, *Robert of Cisyle* is not only a romance which castigates kings, but one which invites readers of whatever status to sympathise with its central figure. In other words, the portrayal of the deposed king is not

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[83] Foster, introduction to *Robert of Cisyle* in *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, 75.

[84] Radulescu, 'Pious Middle English Romances', 356-8. Judith Weiss identifies a tradition of 'ineffectual monarchs' in romance, a term which accords nicely with Radulescu's argument: see 'Ineffectual Monarchs: Portrayals of Regal and Imperial Power in *Ipomedon, Robert le Diable* and *Octavian*', in *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England*, ed. Corinne J. Saunders (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2005).

[85] Radulescu, 'Pious Middle English Romances', 358; Danna Piroyansky, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England* (Baskingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 97.

[86] Radulescu, 'Pious Middle English Romances', 358.

solely a comment on bad kingship, but can be transmuted to a model of thinking and acting for a gentry readership, as well. This is confirmed by the romance's ending, which follows the pattern of attainment of status which concludes both *Perceval* and *Eglamour*: Robert is allowed to regain his throne, mimicking the satisfaction and reward which conclude so many other romances in which knights or knights-aspirant achieve their desires for status. The story is not, in the end, damning to the structures of hierarchy which give the king his power; the story—or, in this case, God—rewards the hero by means of these structures. Rather, the transformation required is in Robert's own understanding of his place in the hierarchy.

Because Robert's ultimate reward hinges on this personal change, this romance unexpectedly uses a penitential model to promote the same emphasis on individual agency that *Perceval* and *Eglamour* do. The difference is that *Robert of Cisyle* exposes this agency at a new level. Robert already possesses the illustrious family and exalted status which Eglamour and Perceval exert their agency to attain. Robert therefore has no overt desire at the beginning of the story because he does not suffer the lack which normally motivates romance heroes: he is already in a state of satisfaction. He must suffer a divine deposition in order to experience desire. This enables the romance to probe a deeper level of personal agency in the realm of spiritual attitude: a king with worldly power becomes, in the spiritual dimension, analogous to a knight-aspirant in the usual romance plot. Where the knight must negotiate his role in relation to his feudal superior, Robert must negotiate his role in relation to his ultimate superior, God. His final reward hinges, in one sense, on his own agency, his personal alteration of perspective. With the same layered complexity as that evinced in *Eglamour* and *Perceval,* however, Robert's personal agency operates within a framework of authority that is, itself, never called into question by the romance.

Conclusion

In one sense, both *Perceval* and *Eglamour* assert that individual agency can be effective in attaining the satisfaction of personal desire, controverting established authority structures. Moreover, in *Eglamour,* it can be the instrument of effecting not only the future of a single individual, but of a whole family lineage. In *Robert of Cisyle,* agency is vindicated in another way, first when divine agency overthrows secular authority, and second when Robert himself assumes spiritual responsibility in undertaking a penitential reformation. These various interplays of authority and agency, despite their different

treatments of the relationship between authority, agency and the future, all propose that the human structures of authority supplied by the past are vulnerable. This in turn suggests that identity, as it is shaped by the pursuit and attainment of desires, has a degree of choice and agency. Inherited authority in these romances does not serve to fix the course of the future, thus allowing scope for individuals, or for God, to shape the future in ways not immediately sanctioned by the past.

As discussed in relation to *Eglamour*, the appeal of this emphasis to a gentry audience, fulfilling their 'fantasies', is evident. This interest in fantasies of personal advancement extends, however, to the urban and merchant class as well. Versions of *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and *Robert of Cisyle* both appear, for example, in CUL Ff.2.38, a book which likely belonged to a bourgeois household in Leicester, in other words an urban merchant family home rather than a country manor.[87] Such urban families, though differently positioned on the social scale, were like the county gentry in their interest in social advancement through personal effort, for example the de Merington family mentioned earlier, Coventry merchants who eventually gained a place in gentry life.[88] To them might be added the example of William de la Pole, who began life as a wool merchant and became a baronet, while his son Michael became an Earl.[89] Just as the county gentry sought advancement through service, administration, and marriage, advancement was available to ambitious city-dwellers through service to the Crown or the town itself, or through the gentility conferred by the medical and legal professions.[90] Rosemary Horrox even argues for the need to recognise an 'urban gentry', both because of these 'gentrifying' professions, and because many townsmen owned land in the country, a standard mark of gentry status, as well as because of the evidence for intermarriage between urban and county gentry.[91] She posits a 'shared culture' between the urban and county elite.[92] Clearly, then, both urban and county gentry, as well as merchants, shared an

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[87] McSparran and Robinson, *Cambridge University Library MS F.2.38,* xvi, vii; Riddy, 'Temporary Virginity', 200-1; Michael Johnston, 'Two Leicestershire Codices'.

[88] Coss, *Origins of the English Gentry*, 190.

[89] Maddern, 'Social Mobility', 118.

[90] Rosemary Horrox, 'The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century', in *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. John A. F. Thomson (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1988), 27-30.

[91] Horrox, 'The Urban Gentry', 34, 37.

[92] Horrox, 'The Urban Gentry', 37; see also Felicity Riddy, 'Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 236-7.

interest in advancement, and their shared reading material suggests a shared 'fantasy' which finds delight in flouting the patrilineal privileges of their social superiors.

Moreover, aside from their treatments of specific conflicts between gentry and aristocratic characters, these romances can equally be read as pertinent to a household context. While kingly authority would be distantly and implicitly relevant to any gentry romance audience, a household readership in city or country would experience authority directly in family and local political structures. For example, medieval family graves portray children kneeling in submission to their parents, visual examples of hierarchy as conceived within a family and experienced from childhood.[93] Evidence of marriage arrangements testifies, in some cases, to parental roles which seem to enact such hierarchies, like the calculating Sir William Plumpton, who arranged marriages for no less than ten children, or the marriage arrangements of Sir John Fastolf for his ward Stephen Scrope.[94] In the instances amassed by Carpenter of the Warwickshire gentry, the overall impression is of parents and guardians closely involved in orchestrating their children's matches, for example sending a daughter to stay with relatives in another county in the hope of finding a match under the auspices of her uncle.[95] In the case of Elizabeth Paston, clearly her brother takes the authoritative role in choosing suitors, causing some family misery during Elizabeth's resulting protracted singleness.[96] Equally, in cases like that of Margery Paston and Richard Calle, the most obvious threat to parental oversight is the agency of the children themselves, an agency which comes to the fore in *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and which was officially backed by the Church's stipulation of consent in marriage.[97] It is easy to see how a young household reader of Eglamour and Christabelle's story, thwarted in love, could take 'example' from the romance in a way which might aggravate his or her parents just as the romance characters aggravate Prinsamour. With such a 'household' reading, the assertion of agency takes place not between knight and earl, but analogous authorities: the relationship between parent and child, or apprentice and

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[93] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 82, and 81, Fig. 29.

[94] Kirby, *The Plumpton Letters*, 4, also, e.g., Appendix I, no. 2; Dockray, 'Why Did Gentry Marry?', 65-6; Gairdner, *The Paston Letters*, 1:154-55; Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 101.

[95] Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 96-119, esp. 100, 101-102.

[96] Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: The First Phase*, 178-81.

[97] Orme, *Medieval Children*, 82-3, 334. Other romances which present problems in parental control over marriage include *Sir Bevis of Hampton* and *Emaré*. On consent, see Dockray, 'Why Did Gentry Marry?', 63-4, and Margaret Paston's reluctant acquiescence to ecclesiastical support of consent in Davis, *PL*, 1: 341-44 (no. 203).

master.[98] Moreover, aside from the relationships between parents and children, medieval households—in city and country—consisted of many members besides family: servants, children of other families sent to be raised away from home, and perhaps wards.[99] Authority structures pertained to these relationships, too, for example in the indentures which contracted an apprentice to the authority of his master; these quasi-parental relationships sometimes replicated familial ones not only in authority but in paternal care, with female servants sometimes receiving bequests in their employers' wills.[100] These household servants might chafe against the authority of their masters, and aspire to ordain their own futures by their own means; Richard Calle, the Pastons' bailiff, clearly achieves this by marrying Margery. The wardship relationship of Perceval to Arthur has already been discussed, and provides yet another household angle from which the romance might be read, yet another set of authority structures which can be asserted and flouted. Indeed, hierarchical relationships existed everywhere in medieval society, meaning that any potential readers of romance, from the prosperous merchant household to the lower nobility, might have found in these texts analogies and exempla for their own experience.[101] These romances thus have the potential to appeal to a variety of audiences in different places on the social scale, of different present or desired identities, and with different authorities to which their futures are subject. Whether read for the literal social positions of their characters, or read as analogies for other types of authority relationships, they reward the vigour and ingenuity of heroes who take charge of their own futures and determine for themselves the identity they will assume.

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[98] Cf. Nicholas Perkins, *Hoccleve's* Regiment of Princes: *Counsel and Constraint* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 16; Raluca Radulescu, 'Literature', in Radulescu and Truelove, *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England,* 111. Perkins argues for proverbial wisdom as applicable to multiple realms of life, not only the one most obvious from the text itself.

[99] P. J. P. Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History 1250-1550* (London: Arnold, 2004), 10 (about infractions of apprentices living in their masters' homes), 19-20; Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), 45-60; Orme, *Medieval Children*, 312, 317, 325-6; Peter Coss argues that the family is synonymous with the household, all being under the father's headship ('An Age of Deference', 46-7).

[100] P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Women in Fifteenth-Century Town Life', in John A. F. Thomson, *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century*, 113.

[101] On conceptions of social hierarchy in the Middle Ages, see, for example, Strohm, *Social Chaucer,* x-xi, 2-21; Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History,* 3-12; Maurice Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1990), 1-3. Another facet of authority structures in the household is gender-based, due to the entrenched idea of the subordination of women running throughout scriptural exegesis, law, philosophy and science; authority, conversely, was seen as the possession of men (Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History*, 6-9).

However, this reading of the romances as revolutionary and individualistic should be seriously tempered by a few important features of these stories. In all three, not only does order reign at the end of the romance, but it is an order of the same nature, and on the same terms, as the one which prevailed at the beginning. Eglamour attains his desires for land and a wife of his choosing by flouting the patrilineal and institutional authority of his superior. However, what he attains is not 'life on his own terms' exactly, but rather a place in the established, landed, titled ranks of society; he defies authority structures not to abolish them, but to acquire for himself a place within them.[102] The romance expresses a confident irreverence towards aristocratic privilege, but never rejects it; in fact that privilege is itself what the hero desires and attains. This ambivalence pushes towards irony in the case of Perceval, who uses individual agency in the face of established authority to fulfil the identity that his lineage would have supplied him if only he had known who he was: he becomes a knight, he bears his father's name, and he regains the favour with Arthur that his father once had.[103] Although his personal agency has been the means to his success, the terms of his success are supplied by the very past and authority structures which he openly flouts. He 'rises' by personal achievement only to the estate to which he was already entitled by birth. Read in this light, the romance may be deeply ironic; alternately, it serves its purpose as a gentry fantasy by transfiguring the achievements of personal agency to posit that they are innately deserved. Perceval cannot be seen to 'hew over-high', because he claims only what is his by right. An analogue can be found in *Sir Amadace*, where the story's movement lies not in the hero 'achieving' gentility, but rather demonstrating it.[104] Finally, even the divine overthrow of King Robert does not constitute the demolition of human authority. Rather, Robert's authority is undercut temporarily as a remedy and punishment for his personal sin, and he is restored to his role at the end. It is

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[102] As Michael Johnston puts it, 'the gentry romances work within the system' (*Romance and the Gentry*, 61).

[103] Cf. James Simpson, 'Violence, Narrative and Proper Name: *Sir Degare,* 'The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney', and the *Folie Tristan d'Oxford*,' in Putter and Gilbert, *The Spirit of Medieval Popular Romance*, esp. 135. Simpson explores the idea that many romances require the hero's name to be hidden while the hero proves himself; upon completion of self-proving, the hero's name is revealed, thereby conflating a self-asserted identity with the realisation of an inherited identity.

[104] James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, vol. 2, 1350-1547, *The Oxford English Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 267; Ad Putter, 'Gifts and Commodities in *Sir Amadace*', *Review of English Studies* 51 (2000), 371–94 (esp. 372); Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 97. Putter argues that one achievement of *Amadace* is establishing the identity between knight and merchant through the handling of gifts and expenditure ('Gifts and Commodities', 375-6). For example, although he is on the verge of financial ruin, Amadace decides to live extravagantly (37-60), making a point about the link between expenditure and knightly identity.

Robert's manner of holding his position that is at fault, rather than the social structure itself. In these romances, the characters themselves often make little meaningful social progress and the structure in which they move is left intact. The 'achievements' are rather of the romances themselves, which enact an alliance of individual effort and desire with destiny.

These observations about the romances here should qualify and deepen our understanding of what these so-called gentry (and mercantile) 'fantasies' are. If these romances evince the fantasies of their readers, those fantasies are not of an overthrow of social order, but rather of targeted and individual advancement within it. This conclusion is similar to that reached by Menuge with regard to the wardship romances. Menuge argues that the romances which deal with problematic wardship situations seem revolutionary in that they give a voice to the unjustly treated ward, and thus expose the wrongs perpetrated within the wardship system; however, ultimately these romances preserve the structures of authority of patriarchal society.[105] The injustices suffered by the wards in these romances are not attributed to an injustice of the patriarchal structures which the wardship system embodies, but rather to the injustice of individuals who abuse the ward and threaten the integrity of the system; the authority structure is not blamed for the injustice, but in fact is an equal victim of it.[106] These romances allow for critique while leaving the basic social paradigm intact.

This apparent conservatism, co-existing with the energetic aspirations of the romance hero, is a problematic feature of the romances.[107] Some critics, like Stephen Knight, see it as evidence that the gentry class have been victimised by the ideology of their social superiors, the aristocracy.[108] In other words, these texts 'for' gentry and merchant classes simply reiterate the dominant ideologies of the ruling class, perpetuating the structures those ideologies support. Akin to this view are readings of the romances as 'aspirant' texts in the most derogatory sense, cultural artefacts whereby social climbers mimic 'their betters', copying the forms and values of courtly and French romances,[109] apparently ignorant that in reading such narratives they only enable their own oppression. The assumption latent in these views is that an endorsement of patrilineage or the

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[105] Menuge, *Medieval English Wardship*, 129-30.

[106] Menuge, *Medieval English Wardship,* 129-30.

[107] Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 266.

[108] Knight, 'Social Function', 103.

[109] Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', 91-2.

aristocracy is inimical to the sympathies of the gentry or merchant readers. This assumption is well exemplified in John Halverson's analysis of *Havelok the Dane,* where the 'middle-class' seems to be characterised chiefly by 'resentment' against the upper classes, and the romance's audience is classified according to a reading which identifies such resentment in the romance.[110] The problem with this reading—which simply points back to the very problem I have identified in these dually aspirant and conservative texts— is that Havelok himself is of noble birth. Halverson's conclusion results from disallowing the possibility of shared values between the nobility and the middle classes, but in so doing, he avoids confronting the central issue, which is why an audience of the midding classes would find sympathy in a romance about a noble hero who gets what he always deserved.

Recognising the possibility of shared values between gentry audiences and those both above and below them, however, enables a more nuanced appreciation of these romances' treatments of agency. Rosemary Horrox suggests that cultural similarities between the urban elite (merchants and lawyers, for example) and the county gentry may not be due to those below aping the values of those above them, but rather to a shared culture and shared interests; similarly, Riddy notes, the gentry and nobility had overlapping concerns as a result of a similar lifestyle, and Nicholas Orme reminds us that they also read the same books on governance.[111] Indeed, Peter Coss argues that throughout all ranks of medieval society, mutual dependence between king and subjects, magnates and followers, and husbands and wives (for example) stabilised these hierarchical structures.[112] Furthermore, as Radulescu comments, tensions in the English nobility in the fifteenth century were not due to a gentry threat in the form of dismantlement of social structures, but a result of the gentry's readiness to consider social structures permeable to ambitious individuals, concurrent with Edward IV's willingness to advance members of the gentry into the nobility.[113] That is, despite differences in class between merchant, gentry and nobility, it is possible to see the ways in which all three groups shared a desire for the benefits which the structure of hierarchical society provided. Thus, these romances

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[110] Halverson, '*Havelok the Dane* and Society', 142, 149, 150-1.

[111] Horrox, 'The Urban Gentry', 37; Riddy, 'Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy', 237; Nicholas Orme, 'Education and Recreation', in Radulescu and Truelove, *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England,* 66; Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry,* 88-9.

[112] Coss, 'An Age of Deference', 57-59. Cf. Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 215. Johnston argues that the romances form an imaginary space in which the real dependence of the gentry on the nobility disappears.

[113] Radulescu, *The Gentry Context for Malory's* Morte Darthur, 8, 10-11.

manifest the desire of their heroes and readers for personal advancement within the social system, but do not ultimately fantasise the total overthrow of the social order.[114]

This is clear because when the romances encourage assertive agency in their heroes, they choose to shape that agency towards attaining a stable household. As Felicity Riddy argues, it is in fact one function of the romances to portray the 'period of opportunity' available to a young man of the middling classes while he is being trained and educated, and before marriage, but simultaneously to channel that independence into the forms of marriage and family that ensured the stability of society.[115] In this way, the liberties taken by the knightly heroes of *Eglamour* and *Perceval* are an imaginative figuring of a young man's freedom in youth, but within a narrative that directs his energies towards attaining a status shaped in the form of a household. The disaster of Eglamour's relationship with Christabelle—a licit marriage but contracted outside parental consent—and her predicament as an abandoned 'single mother' are fortuitously reshaped to result in an intact nuclear family.[116] Perceval also marries (1741-48), and concludes by assuming the role of a familial protector for his mother:

> Than Sir Percevell in hy
> Toke his modir hym by,
> I say yow than certenly,
>   And home went hee. (2273-6)

The brash careerist, who swaggeringly gets just what he wants by self-assertion during his youth, concludes his career by settling down with a wife, going home, caring for his mother, and ultimately channelling his martial skills into a crusade (2281-4). It is in this sense that this gentry and mercantile fantasy can be called conservative. The values they endorse are the energetic employment of agency in establishing a gentle household and securing the lineage of the family. Such values emerge in courtesy texts which, paradoxically, cultivate a view of gentility as effortless and innate, but by their very existence testify to the need to exert agency in attaining it—as well as the possibility that it can be attained by those who have the right strategy.[117] The Ashmole 61 text 'How the Wise Man Taught His Son', which has already been quoted above, states that its purpose is

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[114] Hudson, 'Construction of Class, Family, and Gender', 90.

[115] Riddy, 'Middle English Romance', 238-40.

[116] Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 83. Johnston sees romances like these as offering the hope of the survival of the nuclear family even in the face of threat.

[117] Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 177. Johnston analyses another courtesy poem to make a similar point.

to make 'younge men' 'trew and stedfaste' (5, 6), and focuses on teaching the fifteen-year-old son the principles of worshipping God (25-7), speaking well (33-40), being gentle with his wife in a clearly companionate marriage (41-60), and keeping his efforts all in an eternal perspective (65-96), all equipping him to engage in what appears to be a bustling daily life, to 'do thi werldys besynesse' (24). In this text, the son is clearly born 'gentle' (16), but requires an education which focuses on showing him how to engage in the 'besynesse' and 'travell' (travail) of worldly life (24, 78), especially how to set appropriate boundaries and observe moderation in his giving, his marriage, and his own pride. In other words, this conduct poem teaches the young man how to be productively 'besy' and channel his energies towards the maintenance of his household. In a much different format, the romances enact the similar 'education' of their heroes, even in the case of Robert, the king who must learn to moderate his view of his own place in the world.

It is time to return to the apparent problem described above, that the romances seem to endorse personal agency on the one hand and yet finally realise the structures and rewards of traditional and patrilineal society. This reading of them should allow a clearer understanding of why that is the case. However violently they may overthrow the figures of the aristocracy (Earl Prinsamour falls to his death from a tower, and Robert is deposed by an angel), the romances do so in order to establish space for the hero to assume his own place in the hierarchy. They envisage the gentry and the aristocracy as permeable ranks, and the heroes direct their energies to forming a 'trew and stedfaste' place within them.[118] Even Perceval's radical declarations about Arthur, that he will kill the king if his wishes are not granted, and that he considers himself 'als grete a lorde' as Arthur is, are directed towards the person of the king, not the position itself: in place of the king, Perceval's language does not leave a void, but inserts himself. It is in this regard that these romances remain individualistic while retaining what could be described as a social conservatism; they structure desire according to the structures of society, but in a world amenable to their hero's goals, cooperative with his agency, indeed collaborating with him to ensure society's continuance with the promise of heirs. The romances insist upon a return to the same social order which they have allowed their heroes to upset, but they construe their 'futures' by means of an apparently cooperative providence which responds to the hero's ambitions, rather than vice versa.[119] The structure of romance, indeed, guarantees his

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[118] 'How the Wise Man Taught His Son', in Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*, 6.

[119] Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry,* 20, 83, 214-16; Faris, 'The Art of Adventure', 100.

success. This effect produces the kind of narrative which David Faris calls 'imaginatively forceful', in which the fictional world collaborates with and silently responds to the hero's wishes.[120] This is similar to Crane's argument about how insular romance 'reinterprets' the constraints of royal rule 'to the advantage' of the romance's heroes.[121] In other words, the romances imagine a world structured by the hierarchy which its readers would have encountered in their own lives, but in which that hierarchy—at least for the duration of the plot—is denuded of its ability to impose upon the hero's agency or order his future. Meanwhile, this neutralising of the power of authority structures is portrayed as something effected by the hero himself, often at first by the simple power of choosing how to speak about the future.

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[120] Faris, 'The Art of Adventure', 96.

[121] Crane, *Insular Romance*, 218.

Chapter 4: Temporal Narrative Structures and Agency

Amis and Amiloun is a romance in which two knights swear brotherhood to one another and then become embroiled in dubious moral decisions, beginning with an illicit sexual liaison and ending with sacrificing children as a cure for leprosy. Fortunately for them, God intervenes to give them a happy conclusion. The romance's moral conundrums are clear from this brief summary, yet when the narrator gives his own summary at the beginning of the romance, none of these conundrums are apparent:

> To here of þese children two
> How þey were in wele and woo,
> Ywys it is grete doloure. (10-12)

This type of narratorial summary may be familiar from the discussion in Chapter One, where it was considered as an example of narrative depth, the viewing of a story as if from a distance, enabling it to be summarised. This summary is not chronological, nor does it view the action closely enough to elucidate the circumstances or causes of the 'wele and woo': rather, it purports to take in the entire plot of *Amis and Amiloun* in a single glance. The narrator mentions the chief actors (the two knights) and gestures towards some kind of events: 'þey were in wele and woo'. Sorrow is the appropriate response. No mention is made of the knights' responsibility in bringing about their trials, nor of the happy ending, and nor are any questions raised about whether they deserve the happy ending they receive. In this example, the problem with such summaries becomes clear: they can jar with the narrative itself.

In *Amis and Amiloun*, the narrator's summary is disjoined from the narrative particularly with regard to agency. The introduction promises a story of 'wele and woo', suggesting a Boethian concept of changing Fortune which emphasises passive submission to suffering which, though it must be endured, is not especially deserved.[1] However, in the narrative, the knights' experience of 'wele and woo' hardly seems an unmerited revolution of fortune, for they are not passive sufferers of sorrow and joy but agents in producing it. The 'grete doloure' which the narrator suggests as a response to the promised tale of innocent submission to fortune seems less appropriate once the narrative is finished. Moreover, the narrator's summary omits one important feature, namely the happy ending;

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[1] See Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* for an account of Fortune which views changes from joy to sorrow as things to be endured (*tolerare*), not as results of the subject's action; *Consolation of Philosophy* in *Boethius: The Theological Tractates*, ed. and trans. H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand, The Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1918), 2.1 (pp. 172-179, Latin with facing translation).

not only does this romance have a happy ending, like most, but very likely its medieval readers—like modern ones—would already expect it even without having read the romance.[2] Thus, even at the outset, the narrator's summary may seem suspiciously partial; certainly by the end it proves quite innacurate.

The friction between the narrator's summary and the romance proper has its roots in the temporal difference between summary and plot. Or, to use the terms invoked in Chapter One and which are based on Ricoeur's discussion,[3] the difference between 'depth' and 'extension'.[4] In *Amis and Amiloun*, 'depth' is the narrator's summary: in relation to the action it sees events from a height, and relates them not chronologically but collapsed—summarised—under the binary heading of joy and sorrow: 'wele and woo'.[5] In contrast, the 'extension' is the chronological sequence which constitutes most of the romance—its plot—and narrates the knights' actions and their consequences.[6] Ricoeur considers these two types of temporality, extension and depth, to be intrinsic to all narrative, and linked to narrative's ability to translate a succession of events into a single thought.[7] It enables the incorporation of chronological events into a 'non-chronological' structure, facilitating reflection on them as a single whole.[8] The usefulness of these concepts for Middle English romance is that in these texts it is usually possible to isolate moments or sections which especially manifest one of these two modes over the other. Moreover, these two aspects of romance narratives often tend towards different meanings, as in *Amis and Amiloun*: the plot extension suggests a causation and moral agency which the moment of depth, the

[2] On the happy ending, see the Introduction, p. 13, n. 7. Fewster makes the case for the 'generic signals' of the romance genre being present in the opening to *Amis and Amiloun* (*Traditionality and Genre,* 52).

[3] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 1: 30, 84-5.

[4] Ricoeur's terminology is part of a long tradition of speaking spatially about time, evinced, for example, in both Augustine and Boethius. See Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 1:12, 13; Augustine, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, trans. William Watts, vol. 2, The Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1912), 11.15 (pp. 238-45), 11.21 (pp. 254-5); Boethius, *Consolat. Phil.* 5.5, (pp. 402-3), 5.6, (pp. 402-3), 5.4 (pp. 388-9, 396-7), 5.6 (pp. 404-5)

[5] The term 'summary' needs no elaborate explanation, but I adhere to the definition of Genette, that summary is characterised by a narrative in which the narrative time is more condensed than the time of the story (*Narrative Discourse,* 94-95).

[6] A good definition of the term *plot* as I am using it here is that of Cobley, who emphasises plot as a 'chain of causation', standing between the story events and the narrative; it is the plot which arranges events for presentation in the final product, which is the narrative telling: Cobley, *Narrative*, 5. Note that Genette uses the term *extension* in a very specific sense which is different from my usage; he uses it to describe the reach in time of the events of a series (Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 127). I am using the term here not to refer to any sort of measurement of time, but to a way of structuring of events.

[7] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:66-67.

[8] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:66-67.

summary, denies. In this chapter, the concepts of narrative depth and its opposite, extension, will be taken up in more detail and used to analyse the ways in which the romances handle agency and moral responsibility. If, as in *Amis and Amiloun*, moments of depth and extension are associated with differences in meaning, what do these differences mean? The romances under study here suggest that temporal arrangement can be a means for interrogating moral and theological ideas about agency and control over action. Moreover, the tension between extension and depth can be read as productive, pointing towards the romance's most central concerns and the cultural work it undertakes.

The two romances chosen for study here are *Amis and Amiloun* and *Sir Isumbras*. Both belong to the tail-rhyme tradition, and were probably composed in a similar period.[9] Both also represent a sub-genre of romance variously referred to as 'homiletic' or 'penitential', and one of their chief points of interest for this discussion is the way in which they integrate religious material—often saints' legends—with the generic milieu and conventions of romance. This means that while much of the subject matter of these stories focuses on issues of sin, redemption, and divine involvement with the hero's life, this subject matter is submitted to the structure and expectations of a romance: the expectation of a happy ending in *both* worldly and spiritual terms.[10] These romances provide fertile ground for the study of plot extension and depth. Their particular blending of religious and secular structures, as well as generic expectations, means that these romances can exploit sometimes differing temporal structures of cause and effect, notions of agency and responsibility for action, ideas about what being 'within time' means, and questions of divine involvement in human affairs.

Extension and Depth in *Amis and Amiloun*

Amis and Amiloun is a romance which has puzzled critics because of its use of both extension and depth. Although these are not the terms usually used to discuss the romance, employing them makes apparent one source of the critical difficulties surrounding the text: the argumentative claims made in the portions of 'depth' in the story fail to correspond

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[9] *Amis and Amiloun* appears in the Auchinleck manuscript ca. 1330 (Leach, introduction to *Amis and Amiloun,* xc; Foster, introduction to *Amis and Amiloun* in *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace,* 6), while *Sir Isumbras* seems to have been circulating before 1320 (Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances,* 7). For an account of the tail-rhyme tradition, see Purdie, *Anglicising Romance* esp. 65.

[10] Kathryn Hume, '*Amis and Amiloun* and the Aesthetics of Middle English Romance', *Studies in Philology* 70 (1973), 26.

with what the plot, the 'extension', implies. The romance uses extension to emphasise causality in time, highlighting the sequence of action and consequence which embroils the two heroes in a seemingly damning cycle. In the portions of 'depth', however, the narrator deflects blame from the knights or even casts them as positive examples. Rather than seeing this friction as a result of authorial incompetence, we should see it rather as meaningful, exploring the dilemmas and constraints of human time as well as the interaction of human experience with the timeless *potentia,* or power, of God.

The plot of the romance, its extension, centres on two knights, Amis and Amiloun, who swear an oath of fealty to one another. The plot then follows their two separate, but frequently intersecting, lives as they both attempt to stop the chain of events deriving from Amis's sexual encounter with his lord's daughter, Belisaunt. From its beginning, the romance is particularly focused on extended time and its effects and dilemmas. It is therefore important to understand how extension functions and its particular capabilities for meaning.

Extension incorporates action into a forward-moving plot. The audience experiences plot progression as a movement forward in time analogous to lived, chronological experience. Some plots, particularly those having the interlace structure noted in Continental romance, may incorporate achrony (sections out of order in order to convey episodes of simultaneous action), but this does not disturb the fundamentally chronological structure of each part of the narrative; each section of the interlaced narrative still depends on a linear structure.[11] The aspect of extension which is most important in relation to depth is not its 'accuracy' or 'realism' (its exact correspondence to the events of the story and their order and timing).[12] Rather, extension is defined by its presentation of a linear sequence significantly stretched out between beginning and end, thus manifesting a structural similarity to the chronological action.

Extension is particularly suited to encode certain types of meanings in the events which it organises for narration.[13] Extension often creates meaning in terms of what Roland Barthes calls the 'proairetic code'. When a narrative is read according to the

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[11] For Whitman's discussion of backwards and forwards temporal movement in two non-English romances, see 'Thinking Backwards and Forwards'. On achrony (or anachrony), see, for example, Bal, *Narratology,* 79-98; Genette, *Narrative Discourse,* 35-47. On interlace, see Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance*, Ch. 5.

[12] Cf. Genette, *Narrative Discourse,* 87-8.

[13] Cf. Bal, *Narratology,* 18. Narrative, like all language, 'shapes vision', hence affects the meaning of what it narrates.

proairetic code, names and actions are analysed in terms of sequence.[14] Meaning accrues to these actions and their sequence according to 'the *already-seen, already-read, already-done*'.[15] In other words, a reader infers meaning from a narrative according to experience of what such sequences usually mean, either in life or in other texts.[16] This is a useful way of understanding how romances in particular create meaning, because their actions are often narrated with little explanation or elaboration: motivations, causal connections, or overall meanings often must be inferred.[17] Some inferences can be drawn from experience of a genre, which supplies 'expectations' about the meaning of certain actions or plot patterns.[18] Other inferences may be due to the power of plot sequence itself, which Seymour Chatman argues is such that it can provoke the inference of causality without stating it.[19] Causality naturally leads to the inference of agency: not only *what* caused what, but *who* caused the events, who does the causal sequence suggest is responsible? These patterns of inferences according to the proairetic code are relevant for all narrative, but particularly for romances in light of the symbolic and allusive way they create meaning, even of a psychological, philosophical or spiritual nature, in terms of action and the external world.[20] This feature of the Middle English romances in particular, in contrast to their French sources, is sometimes levelled at them as a criticism.[21] As we shall see, however, the plot extension of the romances can facilitate sophisticated inferences of causality and moral responsibility in sequences of action.

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[14] Barthes, *S/Z,* 19.

[15] Barthes, *S/Z,* 82; Brooks comments on this concept of the 'already-read' (*Reading for the Plot,* 18-19).

[16] Ricoeur uses 'emplot' as a verb throughout *Time and Narrative,* and uses 'emplotment' to refer to the activity of drawing events into the concordant whole of a plot.

[17] Putter also argues that the romances generally operate primarily by the proairetic code ('Story Line and Story Shape in *Sir Percyvell of Gales',* 173).

[18] The idea of generic experience providing interpretive information for understanding a narrative depends on Jauss's concept of the 'system of expectations' which each reader brings to a work; see Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward and Aesthetic of Reception,* trans. Timothy Bahti, Theory and History of Literature 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982)*,* Ch. 1, esp. 22.

[19] Chatman, *Story and Discourse,* 45-6; see also H. Porter Abbot, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 37-8; Roland Barthes, 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (1975), 248.

[20] Barron, *English Medieval Romance,* 5; Corinne Saunders, 'Desire, Will and Intention in *Sir Beves of Hamtoun', in* Hardman, *The Matter of Identity,* 29. Barron's point is about medieval narrative as a whole. Andrea Hopkins's analysis of the 'penitential' romances in *The Sinful Knights* relies heavily on the assumption that characters' inner transformation can be traced in sequences of symbolic action, for example her analysis of *Sir Isumbras* (Ch. 4), and her account of the 'dramatic' method of guiding judgment (23-25).

[21] For example, this is the case in *Ywain and Gawain*, according to Friedman and Harrington (*Ywain and Gawain,* xxv); Eckhard suggests something similar about the adaptation of *Sir Perceval of Galles* ('Arthurian Comedy', 217).

Amis and Amiloun is particularly concerned with extended time in two main ways. First, the romance pays particular attention to time 'in passing', a perception of time which Ricoeur links to an Augustinian model and which is associated with the fleeting and futile nature of human experience. Second, the romance uses an Aristotelian structure of time as causality to demonstrate the inherent, but disastrous, causal nature of human experience.

The Augustinian model of time as perceived in passing is in evidence in the romance in its many references to the passage of time. This model is elucidated by Ricoeur from Book XI of Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine, attempting to understand the nature of time, approaches the subject by interrogating the mind's activity of perceiving, and ultimately concludes that time is measured by extension, which the mind measures by the activity of memory and expectation.[22] Augustine applies his concept to the example of the recitation of a Psalm, and observes that the length of each syllable is measured in relation to the others, and moving upwards in scale each part of the whole is measured in relation to each other part, while the mind remembers at each moment which parts of the Psalm have already passed, and anticipates which part of it is to come, thus traversing the recitation in time.[23] This view of time might be called 'subjective', given its focus on the perception of time rather than on its objective nature in relation to the physical world.[24] More important, however, is Augustine's focus on time as perceived 'in passing', and the consequent emphasis on time as concomitant with our inexorable progress through it, an idea which moves Augustine's meditation on time into a lamentation for the soul's dispersal and wandering, and its deprivation of the stillness which eternity represents.[25]

In *Amis and Amiloun,* this Augustinian awareness of time as constantly passing is evinced in the abundant precise indications of the passage of time; these are not only to smaller periods of days, such as the fortnight feast (common in romances), but also an unusual number of indications of longer periods of time as the story follows its two heroes from birth through adulthood. I count eighteen references in the romance to spaces of months or years, including references to characters' ages. Whereas some romances are concerned with concentrated periods in a protagonist's life, as in *Sir Cleges* or *Sir*

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[22] Watts, *Confessions*, vol. 2, 11.27 (pp. 276-8). Ricoeur's analysis of these passages is in *Time and Narrative*, 1:5-22.

[23] Ibid., vol. 2, 11.27 (pp. 276-8).

[24] Augustine is intentionally rejecting other philosophers' attempts to link the passage of time with the movement of physical bodies; Watts, *Confessions,* vol. 2, 11.24 (pp. 262-5); Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 1:14.

[25] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 1:26-7.

Degrevant, the scenes in *Amis and Amiloun* are spread out over a long space of about twenty-six years, with sometimes two or three years intervening between events.[26] For example, two years pass between Amiloun's appointment to office and the death of his parents (217); 'half a ȝere & mo' passes after the steward's attempt to convince Amis to swear troth with him (405); Amiloun is stricken with illness within three years (1548) per the prediction to that effect (1255-57), while Amis's fortunes improve during a period of two years (1525). Smaller measurements of time are also noted, for example the passage of four or five days (711), the passage of a week (737), a fortnight (866, 1178), half a year (1585), a twelvemonth (1657). Time, in this romance, is constantly at the forefront in its passing, to a degree not present in many other romances of similar length. The effect of this is continually to remind the audience that time is moving forward, and that its movement is not simply to be inferred from the development of the story's events (which, by the principle of realistic reading,[27] would *imply* the passage of time), but explicitly measured in the perception of passing days, months, and years. The treatment of passing time in this conscious way allows the evocation of certain ideas and tropes associated with passing time: the theme of mutability and decay, and the Boethian concept of changing fortune. As an example of such ideas, when the poem's narrator exclaims mournfully over Amiloun's leprosy, the temporal construction draws attention to the change between his past and his present state:

> Allas, allas! þat gentil kniȝht
> Þat *whilom* was so wise & wiȝt,
> Þat þ*an* was wrouȝt so wo […]. (1573-75; emphasis mine)

Time's passage is not emphasised in this romance purely for 'realistic' or structural effects, but to convey the changefulness belonging to temporal experience and form a context for lamentation.

The causal structure of the romance represents an Aristotelian model of time, which draws upon the principle of time's movement as inextricably linked to the physical movement of bodies. This Aristotelian model understands narrative time particularly in terms of causal relations. Aristotle's famous requirement of dramatic unity leads Ricoeur to draw attention to the way that the connection of events within an Aristotelian plot is

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[26] The scope of *Amis and Amiloun* is thus more like that of the other romances which begin with a hero's birth and follow him into adulthood, e.g. *Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton*.

[27] For the concept of realistic reading, see Bal, *Narratology,* 101.

logical rather than chronological: the wholeness of the plot requires events to be related by necessity and probability rather than pure succession.[28] Of course, causal succession implies temporal succession by a realistic reading, but in this Aristotelian model the temporal relationship of events is secondary to their causal relation.[29] *Amis and Amiloun* embeds a clear structure of action and consequence which is worth analysing in detail.

This causal structure is played out chiefly in the transfer of responsibility between Amis and Amiloun, as Amis's consummation of his relationship with Belisaunt (arguably a bad decision, as Amis himself knows) sets in motion a sequence in which blame rebounds from one knight to the other. The first act in this sequence is Amis's sexual deed, a betrayal of his faith to his lord (763-68).[30] The consequence of this is an accusation against which Amis is unable to defend himself, knowing himself to be guilty of the deed with which he is charged (769-924). In an attempt to evade the consequences of this situation, the knights agree that Amiloun will take Amis's place, being innocent and thus able to undergo the ordeal (1109-1392). His punishment for this deception, in other words its consequence, is leprosy (1540-48), and the Middle English version of the story is unique in making this causal connection clear even before the choice is made.[31] In another attempt to evade consequences, Amis murders his children as a way of curing Amiloun's disease. A pattern is clearly visible in these events: in the deception and murder which follow upon Amis's questionable sexual liaison and Amiloun's leprosy, each knight attempts to remove the penalty for past action from the other by an act which is itself more questionable than, or at least as questionable as, the original one. Treachery is followed by deception, deception by murder. The whole effect of the escalating chain of offence is to underscore the inevitability of cause and effect as a sequence from which the characters are unable to escape; neither knight is able to evade the penalty except by allowing the other to assume it.

These constraints are visible not only to the reader and narrator, but to the knights themselves. Amiloun, when he is about to undertake the ordeal in Amis's place, receives word from heaven that he will suffer leprosy for his deed (1249-72). At this point he

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[28] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 1:39-40.

[29] Bal, *Narratology,* 101.

[30] Because Amis and Belisaunt have plighted troth, the consummation of their relationship is not fornication; see the discussion of Eglamour and Christabelle, above, 119-20, and n. 61.

[31] Ojars Kratins, 'The Middle English *Amis and Amiloun:* Chivalric Romance or Secular Hagiography?', *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 81 (1966), 350-1; Ivana Djordjević, 'Rewriting Divine Favour', in *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartlidge, Studies in Medieval Romance 6 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 164-5.

recognises that he has a choice between two dire alternatives: 'He nist what him was best to don, / To flen, oþer to fiȝting gon' (1276-77). Amiloun's crisis of choice seems intentional in the Middle English version, for in other versions of this story the warning comes after the combat, whereas here the warning is placed beforehand.[32] This forges a clear causal connection between Amiloun's choice of action and the consequence that will follow, as well as making his decision one which is made in full knowledge and hence which assumes a moral responsibility otherwise absent.[33] Similarly, both knights later agonise over whether the children should be killed. Amiloun knows that this act will be his escape: 'Y miȝt aschape out of mi wo' (2243). Amis, however, knows that such 'were a dedli sinne' (2247), and even Amiloun, knowing that the murder was the instrument for his restoration, objects:

> 'Allas, whi destow so?'
> He wepe & seyd, 'Waileway!
> Ich hat leuer til domesday
> Have liued in care & wo!' (2331-4)

The knights' emotional and ethical agony—existential in character—is the product of the constraints which 'within-time-ness' (to use a translation of Heidegger's term)[34] places upon them. These moments of crisis, over both the ordeal and the murder of the children, reflect the knights' awareness of their own position as moral agents in a causal sequence, attempting to expiate the consequences of one sin but knowing that even these choices carry their own moral consequences. The knights are both free to act and yet bound by the constraints and momentum of time and causality.

By the time Amis murders his children, there are two irreconcilable forces at work in the romance. On the one hand, there is the forward movement of action and consequence, which the knights are unable to avert or even redirect, but which only leads to worse and worse suffering. On the other, there is the generic pressure on the romance to end happily, due to the 'expectation' created by its membership in the romance genre.[35]

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[32] Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre,* 67; Kratins, 'The Middle English *Amis*', 350; Djordjević, 'Rewriting Divine Favour', 164-5.

[33] See note 32, above.

[34] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 1:85.

[35] The term 'expectation' is from Jauss, *Toward,* 22. Jauss argues that the expectations of a work 'in the historical moment of its appearance' arise 'from a pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language'. See also the book by Furrow, *Expectations of Romance.*

Carol Fewster has demonstrated that *Amis and Amiloun* (whatever its hagiographical background) aligns itself stylistically with romance.[36] Happy endings prevail in the romance corpus, and the strength of generic pressure towards the happy ending is evinced in other romances where happy endings are added to source material even where they seem unsettling or even incongruent.[37] It is thus reasonable that readers of *Amis and Amiloun* would expect such an ending of this romance as well.[38] The problem is that the trajectory of the action is such that a happy ending is impossible within the causal structure of human time; that structure tends only towards greater suffering, as the knights well know. In the end, the romance can only attain its happy ending by circumventing the causal constraints of time.

This is achieved by a miraculous ending in which Amiloun is healed and Amis's murdered children are restored. Both miracles contravene the causal force of the action, 'undoing' rather than 'repairing'; that is, both reverse the effects of time rather than adding further events as a recompense. Amiloun is healed and appears 'as feire a man / *As euer he was ȝet or þan*' (2410-11; emphasis mine). There is no sign of scars left as reminders of his illness, but rather the effects of it are reversed and he is restored to his previous appearance. In the case of the children, they are discovered 'With-out wemme and wound / Hool and sound' (2419-20) as if they had never died in the first place. This is particularly striking because both Amis and his wife have suggested that God might send them more children (2337, 2393), conceiving a possible 'happy ending' but only in terms of the forward movement of time: recompense rather than reparation. The actual event involves, rather, a total reversal of the consequences. The last reparation is of Amis's moral culpability, absolved by prayer for forgiveness, which is heard and granted by Christ (2353-2364). In each of these three cases, reversal of the consequences of action is impossible, even inconceivable, apart from miraculous intervention.

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[36] Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre,* 51-60.

[37] On the happy ending as typical of romance, see the Introduction, 15, n. 6. A case of an incongruent happy ending is, as Anne Thompson argues, found in *Sir Isumbras*, where it produces a romance which loses meaning: Anne B. Thompson, 'Jaussian Expectation and the Production of Medieval Narrative: The Case of "Saint Eustace" and *Sir Isumbras*', *Exemplaria* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1993), 406. Other cases of added happy endings include *Sir Perceval of Galles*, where the Middle English translator has Perceval return to find his mother, whereas the French version lets her die (Mary Flowers Braswell, introduction to *Sir Perceval of Galles*); also, the Classical myth of Orpheus is likewise altered to incorporate a restoration (Everett, *Essays,* 9); and Malory's version of the Tristram story (Derek Brewer, 'The Nature of Romance', 20).

[38] See note 35, above.

In this way, the happy ending is achieved, insofar as the protagonists live happily until their deaths and then enjoy a heavenly bliss as their reward, while Amiloun's spiteful wife is punished. However, this is in no way an ending arising from the action of the plot, nor even one 'deserved' in terms of the action. It is exactly the sort of ending that Aristotle, concerned as he is with causal probability in a plot, forbids: 'Clearly the denouements of plots should issue from the plot as such, and not from a deus ex machina', in other words by divine intervention.[39] However, the medieval scholar John of Garland gives the issue of divine intervention a slightly different emphasis: after quoting Horace on the matter, Garland summarises his view by saying that 'a god should not be called on *unless an insoluble complication develops'* (emphasis mine).[40] In this light, the development of *Amis and Amiloun* draws attention to the impossibility of achieving the desired happy ending in any other way. Generic pressure impels the romance towards a happy ending, but the arrangement of action in time makes this ending logically and morally impossible; the plot becomes 'an insoluble complication'. Human time and human action are shown to be unable to supply their own redemption, constrained by the process of aging and disease and the cycle of ever-worsening action and consequence.

This way of understanding the relationship between the action and the happy ending allows us to approach the problem of the moral tone of the work, a problem with which several scholars have struggled. Kathryn Hume, attempting to avoid the conclusion that the author 'faltered' in presenting a coherent moral scheme, has argued that based on the romance's structure, it can be inferred that the patterns of wrong and atonement are intended to be satisfying, whether or not we find them to be.[41] Ojars Kratins argues that understanding the romance as a 'secular legend' explains its moral compass, which hierarchises multiple values much like a hagiography does, rather than attempting to reconcile them, like a romance.[42] Andrea Hopkins's view, which I think is ultimately insupportable, is in sympathy with that of Kratins and holds that there is no problem with

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[39] Aristotle*, Poetics,* trans. Stephen Haliwell, in *Aristotle, 'Poetics', Longinus 'On the Sublime', Demetrius 'On Style'*, ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell et al., The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), Ch. 15, p. 81.

[40] John of Garland, *The* Parisiana Poetria *of John of Garland,* ed. and trans. Traugott Lawler (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), 100-101 (text with facing translation).

[41] Hume, '*Amis and Amiloun*', 27-30, 28.

[42] Kratins, 'Middle English *Amis*', 354, 348.

the happy ending because the knights commit no sin.[43] Her conclusion is an attempt to reconcile the knights' actions with the absence of any penance for them, and by concluding that no sin was committed, and by focusing rather on their sufferings as tests of their loyalty, she attempts to make the happy ending acceptable.[44] However, rather than construing deception and murder as 'seeming wrong but being right' in this context,[45] it is better to understand them as wrong, but to see the happy ending not as arising out of the action but as an intervention; this also obviates the need to say, with Hume, that the structure of the action suggests that the events are supposed to be satisfactory but perhaps do not appear so to modern audiences.[46] The point is not that fidelity and angelic announcement make even murder permissible, nor that the temporary suffering of the knights represents appropriate and sufficient punishment, but rather that only intervention from a God not bound by the constraints of causality can put a stop to the incessant following of consequence upon action. The ending is, in this sense, 'undeserved', and that is part of the whole argument of the romance.

The aspect of extension in *Amis and Amiloun* has now been discussed, but nothing has been said about the aspect of depth. The question remains to be answered, then, what moments of the romance assume a more distant stance and gather the plot events together to make them available for immediate apprehension, and also what these moments imply about the meaning of those events. Moreover, the final question will be how the meanings implied in the moments of depth contrast with or corroborate the meanings discussed above and arising from the plot's extension.

First of all, I would like to recapitulate some of what I said in Chapter One about narrative depth and explore its implications. At particular moments in the romances, depth seems the predominant temporal mode: events are viewed from a greater distance, as if from a height.[47] One indicator of depth in narrative is a 'dechronologised' sequence, in which events no longer appear in the order in which they must have occurred. This is a feature which was discussed in Chapter One as a mark of the narrator's visible presence,

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[43] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 17; Foster also agrees that the narrative does not support a simple view that friendship is vindicated in these morally questionable activities: see the introduction to his edition of *Amis and Amiloun*, 6.

[44] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 18-19.

[45] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 19.

[46] Hume, '*Amis and Amiloun*', 29, 38, 41.

[47] Genette also gestures towards the idea of 'height' in narrative summary (*Narrative Discourse,* 48).

and which appears in the introduction to *Amis and Amiloun* and to many other romances. Depth can also be signalled by omission and selectivity in the presentation of events, once again the type of activity often exhibited in narrators' introductions. This is the case in the quote from *Amis and Amiloun* above. Such selectivity requires temporal distance, such that some summative aspect of the story can be presented in a single 'gathering' which can be apprehended by the audience in a single moment.[48] As is clear from the examples given, the presence of a self-announced narrator in almost all romances accentuates these shifts from linear plot extension to temporal depth, because the narrator represents an explicitly summarising voice which is removed from the action, and reminds the audience that they are similarly removed. This is the narrator in what Genette calls the 'directing' function, explicitly organising the text.[49] The formulaic introductions and conclusions of many romances, which often incorporate summaries of or reflections upon the action, embed clear and expected opportunities for a narrator to step back from his plot and condense it for re-presentation from the vantage point of temporal depth.[50]

Like plot extension, these moments of depth facilitate particular types of meaning in the actions they relate, especially overt ideologies and interpretation. It is often at these points that the narrator most forcefully selects and interprets as the 'focalisor' of what is narrated.[51] As discussed in Chapter One, romance narrators not only announce themselves as 'I' but use the moments of depth to make value judgments, like the *Amis and Amiloun* narrator who considers the knights' lives to represent 'wele and woo', and analogously (though with very different meaning) ascribes their heavenly rewards at the end of the romance to their 'trewþ and […] godhede' (2506). Such interpretations are a direct result of the depth which the narrators assume, but are by no means necessarily concordant with the interpretations implied by the plot extension itself.

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[48] The concept of 'gathering' events as if viewed from a 'height' in fact has precedent in Boethius, for in his discussion of divine foreknowledge, cited above for its use of spatial metaphors, Boethius also describes superior knowledge as that which is higher, 'summae […] scientiae', 'highest knowledge' (*Consolat. Phil.*, 5.4, p. 396). The image of God viewing creation from a higher and more all-encompassing vantage point, to which humans should also aspire, is an idea similar to the concept of 'depth' in Ricoeur's work.

[49] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 255.

[50] On the formulaic introduction, see Susan Wittig, *Stylistic and Narrative Structures in the Middle English Romances* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1978), 54-61.

[51] A focalisor is the agent through which the vision is shaped (Bal, *Narratology,* 18; Bal, 'The Narrating and the Focalizing'). Bal notes that the utterance of narration implies the narrator's presence even if the narrator does not announce himself as 'I' (*Narratology,* 21), but in the romances this type of inference is often not even necessary, for the narrator assumes a persona and often refers to himself in the first person and his audience in the second person.

Returning to the romance, it is clear that a significant moment of depth occurs in the expected location at the romance's introduction. It includes the three standard elements: a reference to God, an address to the audience, and a summary of subject matter.[52] The summary gives the following information:

> The story will be about two barons (5)
> Their fathers were barons (7)
> To hear about these children's weal and woe is 'grete doloure' (10-12)
> These children were in weal and woe (13)
> They became friends (17)
> They were made knights (19)
> They plighted troth (20)
> Where they were born (22)
> What their names were (24)

In arguing for this passage as one of 'depth' rather than 'extension', what is most important and immediately observable is that these events of the plot are taken out of all chronological order. First the two knights are mentioned (5), but we jump immediately backwards chronologically to their fathers, then far forwards to the 'wele and woo' which causes the reaction of 'grete doloure' (11-12), a reference to the further development of the plot, its tragic consequences, and the audience response which can only come *after* these events have been narrated. We then return to the knights' lives and hear that they become friends, then were knighted (17-19), but then that they plighted troth, an event which ought to occur before their knighthood. We then retrogress again to their birth and naming (22-4). Several leaps back and forth have been made here, but an overall pattern is also visible, from the birth of the knights to the central 'wele and woo' which will comprise most of their story and then returning to their birth again, which will of course provide the transition-point into the main narrative extension. It is pointless to attribute this sequencing to the necessities of rhyme, for even constrained by rhyme the poet has chosen how to arrange his material. Rather, it is more profitable to recognise, first, the chiastic structure from birth through life and back to birth,[53] but also to observe that clearly this summary of events is not to be taken as a plot outline but rather as a gathering of events which, by being chosen, are suggested to be pivotal to the story. This section is, in chronological terms, in fact 'dechronologised', but per Riceour's theory what this dechronologising

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[52] Tai, 'Is There an End?', 194.

[53] Hume, '*Amis and Amiloun*', 22.

signals is that time is here being 'deepened'.[54] The events are held together as a whole which allows the narrator and audience to apprehend them as a totality.

The interpretation the narrator ascribes to this 'gathering' is clearly Boethian: the narrator plans to tell us 'How they were in wele and woo' and 'In weele and woo how þey gan wynd' (11, 13). This pairing of the terms 'wele and woo' recurs in the context of the knights' oath of fidelity (149, 155). Encapsulating the knights' lives in this way presents them without narrative arc or causal progression, but as examples of the familiar habit of fortune. There is no end indicated to this 'wele and woo', although there is an implied emotional response, 'doloure' (12). This Boethian and tragic tone is surprising given the predominance of romance happy endings, indeed especially surprising given that, despite the odds, this romance, like the others of its genre, ends happily. One point of comparison is the opening to *The Earl of Toulous*, which summarises its story in this way: 'How a lady had grete myschefe, / And how sche covyrd of hur grefe' (10-11). This is, similarly, a brief summary of the action, but clearly points toward the happy ending; the narrator of *Amis and Amiloun,* in contrast, gives no such indication of an escape from the cycle of 'wele and woo'. If no escape is conceived, certainly 'grete doloure' is precisely the appropriate response; the narrator has suited his summary to justify it. A similar effect is achieved by the narrator in a brief passage already mentioned above, the one in which he mourns Amiloun's reversal of fortune:

> Allas, allas! þat gentil kniȝt
> Þat whilom was so wise & wiȝt,
> Þat þan was wrouȝt so wo […]. (1573-5)

Again, the narrator has focalised this moment to advocate a particular response, giving no intimation of the happy ending. This moment narrates a specific progression from health to disease, but one which exemplifies and can be subsumed under a cyclical 'wele and woo', and produces a response which, like the 'doloure' of the introduction, will ultimately prove incongruent with the ending of the romance, though it appears appropriate at the present moment.

This manner of viewing events summatively and selectively, as the narrator assumes distance from them, occurs again at the end of the romance. Here, we are told,

> Boþ on oo day were þey dede
> And in oo graue were þey leide,

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[54] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 1:30.

The knyȝtes boþ twoo;
And for her trewþ and her godhede
Þe blisse of heuyn þey haue to mede,
Þat lasteþ ever moo. (2503-8)

The narrator's distance from the subject matter is signalled by several factors. First, already a degree of dechronologising has taken place, for the previous stanza ends with the two lines, 'To-geder ladde þey her lyf, / Tel god after hem dide sende' (2495-96), mentioning the knights' deaths, but the following stanza (from which the quote above is taken), retrogresses to describe how they raised an abbey before their deaths (2497-2502). A second indication of temporal distance is the speed at which the narrative accelerates; the knights' deaths and eternal rewards are described in six lines, a pace of narrative much faster than that of the main plot extension, reducing the correspondence between the time of the events and the time of the narrative. Finally, the narrator shifts his vision out of the plot altogether and describes the knights' heavenly rewards, information the narrator cannot purport to have except by assuming knowledge which includes not only the earthly chronology of the plot but also the eternal temporality of heaven. All these features of this passage, the dechronologising, the increase in pace, and the access to the heroes' eternal fates, indicate that the narrator is becoming a more visible focalising presence and that the depth of his perspective has increased to take more into view and pay less attention to chronology. As in the introduction to the romance, the narrator has also selected what material to take into view: the ending emphasises the knights' fidelity to one another and their possession of a heavenly reward for their 'trewþ'. This emphasis on the knights' brotherhood is not an addition to the story, for it is the commitment that motivates the whole action. However, if the plot elucidates anything about the knights' *treuthe* to one another, it is the sinister side of such unconditional human fidelity, which is able to produce not 'godhede' but sin requiring divine intervention. In the romance's conclusion, however, this *treuthe* becomes an absolute virtue and is linked not to the quandaries of moral choice which it creates in human time but to the heavenly reward which it should merit in eternity.

In this romance, the story receives different treatment depending on the temporal perspective assumed towards it. The moments of depth emphasise the cyclical, the static, the absolute; from this perspective, the narrator sees events as categorisable under straightforward concepts like 'wele', 'woo' and 'trewþ', and the characters are reduced to passive exemplars of virtue rather than moral agents. This presentation, however, obscures

the sequence which articulates moral responsibility; it is the role of extension to emplot these events in a way which makes them ethically comprehensible. In the plot, the knights do not simply suffer *woo* but cause it, and for the attainment of *treuthe* to one another they sacrifice other loyalties and create a predicament which is such that God must intervene to provide the happy ending the genre requires. What the interplay of extension and depth suggests is that maintaining such absolute concepts as the virtue of *treuthe* or the knights' innocent suffering under a cycle of fortune requires the suppression of the moral responsibility which the plot reveals.

Extension and Depth in *Sir Isumbras*

Sir Isumbras, like *Amis and Amiloun*, has been considered part of the 'secular hagiography' subgenre, and tells a secularised version of the St Eustace legend.[55] Representing the confluence of two genres, it meshes together several different understandings of action and consequence to produce what Laurel Braswell calls an 'artistic synthesis' of secular and religious material; whether the poet achieves the synthesis Braswell posits is, to Anne Thompson, contestable.[56] One feature that is difficult to interpret in *Sir Isumbras* is its merging of plots and expectations from different genres, resulting in sequences of cause and effect whose meaning seems polyvalent, and where the real source of agency is not always clear. As in *Amis and Amiloun*, so in *Isumbras* there are also instances in which moments of depth present events differently than they appear in the plot itself.

This romance merges not two, but three plotlines, each of which encode their own expected sequences of action and their own conventions with regard to the causal relationship of the plot events.[57] First, there is the saint's life as found in the St Eustace legend which forms the romance's source. This story tracks the progression from paganism and conversion through trial and martyrdom, emphasising throughout the saint's patient

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[55] Hudson, introduction to *Amis and Amiloun* in *Four Middle English Romances,* 7. Other terms for 'secular hagiography' have been advanced by various scholars; on this topic, see Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 12.

[56] Laurel Braswell, '"Sir Isumbras" and the Legend of Saint Eustace', 151; Thompson, 'Jaussian Expectation', 399.

[57] Mehl recognises the presence of two of the plotlines I have identified, that of patient suffering according to God's will (the saint's life) and that of a sinner undergoing penance (*Middle English Romances,* 133).

submission to God's will, an emphasis which resurfaces in *Sir Isumbras*.[58] Second, there is the romance hero's life, which follows a pattern from prosperity to loss and finally to worldly restoration.[59] Thirdly, there is the sequence of the penitential narrative, which progresses from sin, through penance, and to final absolution.[60] The three sequences of events are indeed meshed together in *Sir Isumbras*, but as they are forced to interact within the plotline of a single romance, their incompatibility becomes clear, and it is this effect which is responsible at least in part for what Anne Thompson considers to be 'the poem's very real structural incoherence'.[61]

These generic plotlines are relevant to temporal extension because each encodes its own understanding of action and consequence. Unlike recurring motifs or symbolic allusions, which can appear in a plot like moveable 'counters' and need not appear at any particular point in the plot's development in order to have meaning, a generic plotline is identified in part by its sequence. That is, what is important is not only the presence of certain elements, for example Whetter's 'love, ladies and adventure', as constituent and necessary for the definition of romance, but the arrangement of events in a certain basic order. Even Whetter's capacious definition of romance admits a certain necessity of sequencing: the culminating happy ending.[62] A narrative containing 'love, ladies and adventure' but lacking the happy ending cannot, he says, properly be called a romance or belong to a subgenre of romance, but must belong to a hybrid genre.[63] Similarly, Vladimir Propp's classification of functions in folktales relies partly on a premise of sequence.[64] That is, the necessary motifs or themes cannot alone carry the weight of generic identification, but must precede a certain ending: a certain sequence is necessary. Not only do these generic plots mandate sequences, they also facilitate inferences about causal relationships. One clear example is that the event of suffering in a saint's life and in a penitential plot will imply two different causes: in a saint's life, its cause can be inferred to be divine testing or favour, and it will often culminate in martyrdom, as it does for Eustace;

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[58] Laurel Braswell details the relationship of *Sir Isumbras* to the Eustace legend and summarises the Eustace story in '"Sir Isumbras" and the Legend of Saint Eustace', 130-32.

[59] This pattern of the development of the hero's life is visible in many romances across the Middle English period, including *King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Gamelyn*, and *Lybeaus Desconus*.

[60] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 20.

[61] Anne Thompson, 'Jaussian Expectation', 399.

[62] Whetter, *Understanding Genre,* 50, 82, 95 and throughout.

[63] Whetter, *Understanding Genre,* 89-90, 97-98.

[64] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 22.

in a penitential model, suffering is a form of punishment caused by sin, and leads to absolution and restoration.[65] While the intertwining of these three plotlines in *Sir Isumbras* suggests, on the one hand, that they *can* be meaningfully intertwined, an attempt to evaluate their meanings by the proairetic code—the interpretive system for understanding plot events by their sequence—can produce different and contradictory meanings.[66]

Meanwhile, during the course of this romance, certain moments of depth contradict the readings which the plot extension suggests. These moments in *Sir Isumbras* are not all narratorial, but include characters' reflections on the action and its meaning. Just as a narrator can summarise or interpret the plot, so a character can take a position of 'depth' and perform the same activity.[67] These usually take the form of what Mieke Bal calls 'argumentative' statements, that is, observations or facts which are external to the narrative but which convey explicit ideologies; for example, statements about 'trewþ' and 'godhede' used by the narrator of *Amis and Amiloun*.[68] Temporally, such statements represent the assimilation of material which is external to the action into the extension of the plot. This is clearly the case with Isumbras's allusion to the book of Job, discussed below, in which a proverbial and temporally universal statement about God is appropriated into the plot so as to reflect upon and interpret the action. Such argumentative or omni-temporal statements belong under the heading of depth because they require enough distance from the plot to encompass types of universal understanding and absolutes which do not arise from the plot itself or its action.[69] Such moments of depth function, in *Sir Isumbras*, in a way analogous to their function in *Amis and Amiloun*: they obscure the structures of agency and moral responsibility that the plot extension articulates.

Early in *Sir Isumbras*, the three generic plotlines are visible, and already allow different interpretations of the action, while also in the early scenes of the romance Isumbras assumes distance from his experience and further complicates its interpretation. At the beginning of the story, Isumbras's pride for his 'golde and fe' (21) results in a warning from heaven and the loss of his wealth (40-48).[70] Isumbras's wealth, so usual for

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[65] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 20.

[66] Barthes, *S/Z,* 19.

[67] These are what Bal calls 'character-bound focalizors' (*Narratology,* 25).

[68] Bal, *Narratology,* 31-35.

[69] For the concept of remembered reading as applied to an occasion, see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* Ch. 5.

[70] In Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances*.

romance heroes, initially signals that the story is a romance; however, here material wealth is quickly subverted and transformed into not an indicator of worldly position but the cause of a spiritual vice, pride.[71] Just as leprosy can be either a punishment or a sign of favour depending on the genre of the text, material wealth is similarly polyvalent; it appears first as the usual outward sign of romance knightly pre-eminence but, by its causal relation to Isumbras's pride, becomes a cause of sin, inaugurating a penitential turn in the plot.[72] At this point two generic plotlines, romance and penitential, coexist. A third is introduced, that of hagiography, in a motif taken from the St Eustace legend, where the bird presents Isumbras with a crucial choice:

> 'The kynge of hevenn the gretheth so:
> In yowthe or elde thou schall be wo,
>   Chese whedur hyt shall be.' (46-8)

The motif of the choice is present in most versions of the St Eustace legend, and for the saint represents a conversion and turning-point, but one which is subsumed into the divine will and which Eustace accepts with the acknowledgement 'fiat voluntas tua', 'let your will be done'; in the Eustace story it is his submission of his agency to the pre-eminence of God's will which receives emphasis.[73] In the penitential plot, this choice represents Isumbras's notification of his sinfulness and, if the pattern of a penitential plot is expected, his choice to receive his 'wo' sooner rather than later represents the voluntary assumption of penance. In a penitential reading, Isumbras is an agent of more substance than in the saintly genre, for penance requires both agency in sinning and agency in assuming penance. Differently yet again, if this scene is read as belonging to a romance plot, what becomes noticeable is Isumbras's rationalisation of his decision (55-57), and his striking audacity in putting a specific name to the 'wo' of the bird's announcement: 'In yowthe sende me poverté / And welthe in myne elde' (59-60).[74] If the story is read as primarily a romance, Isumbras's boldness comes to the fore, and he appears as an active agent cannily specifying the terms of his suffering in order to maximise his control over the situation. Moreover, he dictates terms which will conform his life to the expected pattern of romance:

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[71] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 131. For other examples of romance heroes who are introduced as wealthy, see *Sir Cleges* (4-36), *Sir Launfal* (25-31).

[72] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 131.

[73] Laurel Braswell summarises this part of the Eustace legend, '"Sir Isumbras" and the Legend of Saint Eustace', 130; cf. 137.

[74] Laurel Braswell, '"Sir Isumbras" and the Legend of Saint Eustace', 138.

temporary trouble followed by final prosperity. The importance of generic plotline for all these interpretations is that the same events make sense in different ways depending on the sequence of which they are part, and the expected causal and agentive connections which the sequence implies. To recall Barthes' proairetic code, the events in *Sir Isumbras* can receive different interpretations according to which 'already-read' generic pattern they are assumed to follow.[75] The relative roles of God's authority and Isumbras's agency vary in these interpretations, and which interpretation is taken will affect how the subsequent events are to be construed, whether they are seen as 'results' of a 'cause' which is sin, whether they are under the auspices of Isumbras's agency or that of God, and whether the ultimate restoration is seen as earned or bestowed.

Chronology at least suggests that, when Isumbras's fortunes begin to dissolve almost immediately, it represents the obvious consequence of the choice he has made: it is the penance he has voluntarily assumed, or the fate he has specified for himself within the constraints of the bird's divine requirement. However, Isumbras avoids stating causal connections. When his herdsmen come to him with bad news about his losses, he assures them that he does not blame them, but never suggests that he himself is responsible. He says,

> 'I wyte nowght yow this wo,   *I do not blame you for this woe*[76]
> For God bothe geveth and taketh
> And at His wyll ryches maketh
>   And pore men also.' (93-96)

In this statement, Isumbras assures his herdsmen that the downfall of his estate is not a deserved result of any action. He ascribes events to God's unaccountable prerogative. Moreover, these lines represent depth because they are a (loose) quotation, information external to the current plot, from an entirely different, Biblical, narrative. They are also 'omnitemporal' because they represent a maxim, referring not to any specific event in time but to a universal divine habit. Most importantly, however, this comment assumes depth because the terms of the maxim (giving, taking, riches, poverty) serve as 'empty forms' which can be occupied by events within Isumbras's own experience: God gave, and has taken away, Isumbras's riches, and Isumbras himself is among the 'pore men'.[77] The way

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[75] Barthes, *S/Z,* 19, 82.

[76] See *MED*, s.v. 'witen' (v.(3)).

[77] For the term 'empty forms', see Benveniste, 'Subjectivity in Language', 226-27; and Little, *Confession and Resistance,* 4-8.

this moment of depth operates is precisely the way that Mary Carruthers describes as the 'occasionalising' of a norm, the application of a moral example from memory to a situation, an occasion: likewise, Isumbras applies a statement about God's general activity to his own specific situation as a way of interpreting it.[78] In this light, because the empty forms of the maxim are implicitly filled by the characters and events of the romance, it functions as a summary of events much like those offered by the narrator in *Amis and Amiloun*. This summary, made by Isumbras from within the story, casts his poverty not as a causal result of his pride and choice, but as an example of the activity of divine prerogative, an occurrence for which no human agent need assume responsibility.

The impression that Isumbras does not see any causal link between his choice, or even his pride, and the loss of his wealth is strengthened by reference to the book of Job, whence his maxim comes. There, it reads, 'the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: as it hath pleased the Lord so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord. In all these things Job sinned not by his lips, nor spoke he any foolish thing against God' (Job 1:21-22).[79] This allusion to Job is carried over from the Eustace legend, in which Eustace is not being punished for sin but being tried in order to be made worthy of heaven.[80] Isumbras's statement makes no claim that his sudden poverty is a punishment or penance, and this is reinforced by making this statement in the words of Job, who is known precisely for suffering without deserving it. The allusion thus implies the agency and omnipotence of God, not of Isumbras himself. The problem is that the narrator and the divinely sent bird have made it clear that Isumbras is not sinless, that his suffering is logically consequent upon his actions. Therefore, the relationship between the narrative's chronology and Isumbras's argument is contradictory. Though the temporal arrangement of the narrative promotes a reading of Isumbras's downfall as a result of his sin and of his own agency, Isumbras himself, here at least, argues for no such link. He reads his situation, in fact, as resembling Eustace's more than that of a penitent, for he sees his suffering as unconnected to sin and as a result, rather, of God's dispensation.

Isumbras provides a second interpretation of recent events shortly after, this time to his family:

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[78] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* 178-83.

[79] Here and elsewhere, I cite from the Douay-Rheims translation.

[80] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 126-27.

> 'All the sorow that we ben inne,
> Hit is for owre wykked synne:
>> Worthy we be well more.' (112-14)

Here, Isumbras does link his situation with sin in a clear statement of penitential causality: sin has led to well-deserved sorrow. However, even this statement fails to support what the plot has suggested about the cause of Isumbras's poverty, for he claims that the punishment is for '*owre* wykked synne' (emphasis mine), suggesting that, if it is merited, it is merited by his whole family, who all suffer the punishment. The narrative offers no information to corroborate the imputation of sinfulness to Isumbras's whole family, for it is Isumbras alone who is guilty of pride (34, 45). If Isumbras's family are not guilty of any specific sin, possibly Isumbras refers to a more general sinful nature, but once again the alignment of general sinfulness with punishment is a logical connection which is not part of the penitential system, which deals with specific sin after conversion and baptism. Either way Isumbras's comment is understood, his interpretation of recent events denies the causal relationship between *his* sin and *his* penance which the temporal succession implies.

The examples above are instances in which, as I have argued, the chronological succession of the narrative implies causality and the link between sin and penance, but when Isumbras himself reflects upon the events he does not read them as part of a causal chain resulting from his agency, but rather as events ordained by God. Other references in the romance reflect a similar view of the action, for example the references to Christ's will governing the travels of Isumbras and his family (152) and Isumbras's injunction to his wife, when their child is taken away, that they thank God for his will (185). Similarly, at the very end of the romance when Isumbras's children return to aid him in battle, they attribute their arrival to God's grace (746). In all these cases, the characters participate in sequences of action without permitting any ascription of agency to themselves, but rather understand God to be the overriding agent. It might be said that the narrative sequence portrays Isumbras as a penitent or as a romance hero, acting and suffering the consequences of his actions and choices, but that when he reflects upon his experience he understands himself to be a saint who is not so much an agent for virtue as a passive sufferer of God's will. In this sense, though the penitential and the romance elements of the narrative are most prominent, at surface level, the ultimate emphasis seems to fall back on that of the saint's life which forms the romance's source, and in which the saint submits

himself to suffering and eventually to martyrdom not in penance but as an example of patience.

Although Isumbras's assumption of depth, and the argumentative statements he makes in these moments, stress a reading of his role as that of a passively suffering saint, the narrator's moments of depth in the introduction and conclusion stress his role as an active and successful knight. As is usual for romance, the narrator assumes temporal distance from the action in both the introduction and conclusion. The introduction is dechronologised:

> Hende in halle and ye wole her
> Off elders that before us wer
>> That lyfede in are thede.
> Jhesu Cryst, hevene kynge,
> Geve hem alle hys blessing
>> And hevene unto oure mede. (1-6)

The narrator begins in the present by addressing the audience (with a brief reference to the story which will be told in the future), shifts to the 'eldres' of the past, appeals to Christ in a prayer both for the past heroes and then for the future of the present audience; the overall movement is from the present to the past and returning to the present, before returning to the subject of the romance itself, Sir Isumbras, in the rest of the stanza (7-10). From this position of depth, the narrator portrays Isumbras as a typical romance knight, who 'was bothe hardy and wyght / And doughty man of dede' (8-9). This portrayal of Isumbras is, of course, supported by his deeds in battle during the course of the story (424-47, 598-615, 700-741), but omits his pride and his role as a penitent, as well as his submission to suffering: in short, the narrator's temporally distant perspective, which is far-ranging enough to encompass present audience and future eternal reward, sees Isumbras exclusively as the hero of a romance and neither as a saint nor as a penitent. The narrator's vision sees the plot of a romance, not of a saint's life or penitential romance.

The conclusion to the romance, in which the narrator 'backs away' from the action to summarise Isumbras's final fate and his death and heavenly reward, maintains the partiality of the vision which the introduction establishes. Isumbras has more wealth than before, gives land generously, and 'levyd and deyde in good entente' (766). The focus is solely on Isumbras's return to worldly status and wealth, with penance or propensity to pride entirely elided; Isumbras's only moral qualities are his generosity and 'good entente' (766). This conclusion, taken with the introduction, emphasises the romance plotline of a hero who performs 'doughty' deeds and gains earthly rewards and final heavenly bliss.

In this romance, disjunction recurs between different parts of the plot extension and between the plot and the moments of depth which gather and interpret it. In particular, these disjunctions often point to the co-existence of three different generic strands of saint's life, romance, and penitential narrative. As Carol Fewster says of *Amis and Amiloun*, meanings which 'cannot' co-exist in fact do co-exist, insofar as the narrative itself forces them to do so.[81] Many of these differences in meaning have to do with agency, as was the case in *Amis and Amiloun*: in both these romances, the plot extension reveals moral responsibility which the moments of depth do not perceive. In *Amis and Amiloun*, at the centre of the questions of agency is the moral quality of the knights' *treuthe*—whether it is a laudable fidelity or a loyalty that distorts their ability to act morally—and their role in meriting the 'wele and woo' they experience. In *Sir Isumbras*, at the centre of these questions of agency are the respective roles of Isumbras and God in directing the outcome of the narrative.

This question of human and divine agency is ultimately linked to their roles in salvation, considered in the microcosmic situation of a single man's repentance from sin and restoration from poverty. Some aspects of the plot extension in *Isumbras* gesture towards a penitential structure, which clearly establishes a model of sin, repentance and absolution which requires an ascription of culpability to the sinner, as well as of a certain degree of agency in meriting his own forgiveness by performing appropriate penance. Other aspects of the plot extension suggest that it is a romance in which the hero earns his restoration, a structure delineating Isumbras's adventures in trying to restore his fortunes by feats of arms, and the impression of the story as a romance is strengthened by the use of language and the introduction of Isumbras as a knight 'hardy and wyght' (8), with the narrator emphasising his active role. However, Isumbras, and elsewhere the narrator, see events as directed by God, making God the primary agent and Isumbras's role passive and receptive in comparison. This is a romance in which the narrator, the characters, and ultimately the plot itself treat the story with fluctuating understandings of Isumbras's agency, sometimes using extension to suggest it, sometimes assuming depth to deny it, and ultimately suggesting that both the characters and the narrator struggle to form a consistent conception of God's role in directing the course of the story. Ivana Djordjevic has already shown, in relation to *Amis and Amiloun,* how contemporary theological developments can be reflected in the different versions of that romance, so it should not be surprising or

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[81] Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre,* 80-81.

implausible that issues of contemporary theological debate should surface in *Sir Isumbras*.[82] Such a theological quandary reflects debates which were taking place at the time during which *Sir Isumbras* was being written and read, and these debates had very practical consequences for the interaction of the Church and the laity in the period.

The period under consideration begins in the early fourteenth century, for a mention of *Sir Isumbras* in the *Speculum Vitae* suggests that it was circulating in England prior to 1320.[83] The earliest manuscript is a fragment dating from around 1350, and in total nine manuscripts and five prints have survived, attesting to the romance's popularity throughout the Middle English period and into the sixteenth century.[84] During this time, a theological controversy over the relationship of God's power to human involvement in salvation was developing. This controversy had begun in the late thirteenth century in Paris, but the centre of the debate shifted during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, moving from Paris to Oxford and Cambridge, and remaining a topic for debate at Oxford from the 1330s onwards.[85] Robert Stepsis argues that Chaucer at least shows some evidence of awareness about the issues involved.[86] Broadly considered, this debate centred around the difference between two types of divine power: *potentia absoluta* represented God's total omnipotent power to act according to his own will, so long as it was not self-contradictory; *potentia ordinata* represented God's normal exercise of power, subject to the rules of nature to which God willingly submitted the exercise of his absolute power.[87] The reflex of whatever position is taken on divine power will determine the agency allowed to humans in obtaining salvation. An emphasis on *potentia absoluta,* God's absolute power in all things, including salvation, de-emphasises human prerogative to earn salvation by merit. Conversely, an emphasis on *potentia ordinata,* and on God's self-

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[82] Djordjević, 'Rewriting Divine Favour', 161-68.

[83] Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances,* 7.

[84] Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances,* 11; surviving manuscripts are as follows: London, Gray's Inn, MS 20 (fragment); Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175; Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91 (the Lincoln Thornton); Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS 13 B 9 (fragment); London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A.ii; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 61; Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates' 19.3.1; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 261; Oxford, University College, MS 142 (fragment). The six surviving prints are listed by Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances,* 12.

[85] Lawrence Moonan, *Divine Power: The Medieval Power Distinction up to its Adoption by Albert, Bonaventure, and Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 6-7; John A. F. Thomson, *The Western Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Arnold, 1998), 194-96.

[86] Robert Stepsis, '*Potentia Absoluta* and the Clerk's Tale', *The Chaucer Review* 10, no. 2 (Fall, 1975), 137.

[87] Thomson, *The Western Church,* 195; Moonan, *Divine Power,* 18; Stepsis, '*Potentia Absoluta* and the Clerk's Tale', 132-37.

limiting submission to his own natural laws, emphasises the power of humans to interact with God's will within the realm of laws which permit their agency to affect their destinies. This theological debate, which carried on into the Reformation, had important implications for the operations of the Church and its role in salvation. As John Thomson describes the situation,

> The more purely philosophical theologians tended to lay stress on the intellectual arguments for God's power, while preachers and theologians with a stronger pastoral interest gave greater weight to the part which an individual had in establishing his or her own destiny.[88]

Clearly, this debate regarding the scope of God's power and the use of this power in the course of human salvation touches on all the issues of agency and earned forgiveness mentioned above. In *Sir Isumbras*, the presentation of the choice by the divine messenger suggests the operation of God's *potentia ordinata*, power expressed in the presentation of a choice which allows Isumbras to exercise his own agency within the limits prescribed by God. On the other hand, however, the *potentia absoluta* of God, his totally omnipotent power, is continually assumed by the characters, and continually forms the lens through which they view their experience. As in the St Eustace legend, the overriding principle in their understanding seems to be *fiat voluntas tua,* 'let your will be done': even as they act they consider themselves to be passive sufferers of divine will, and their successes to be dispensations of divine grace.[89]

Conclusion

These romances display repeated disjunction and tension between the perspectives they incorporate into a single narrative. In this regard, a temporal analysis reveals another facet of the tension scholars have already identified: these texts proclaim moral exemplarity while continually frustrating attempts to interpret it. Some scholars attempt to explain away this disjunction, for example when Ojars Kratins tries to rationalise *Amis and Amiloun* by reading it as a secular hagiography, whereby he says the apparent disjunctions disappear.[90] Kathryn Hume's analysis relies on the same type of argument, testifying to the poem's puzzling tensions even as she argues that, properly understood by a medieval

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[88] Thomson, *The Western Church,* 195.

[89] Laurel Braswell, '"Sir Isumbras" and the Legend of Saint Eustace', 149.

[90] Kratins, 'Middle English Amis', esp. 354.

audience, they might not appear to be so irreconcilable.[91] In contrast, Carol Fewster more fully embraces the disjunctions in *Amis and Amiloun* by highlighting how a romance style of writing can alter the signification of the didactic content of the original story.[92] Her reading emphasises the way in which the style of this romance can, in some way, force a certain subject matter into a form which contradicts the meaning it would otherwise assume:

> The force of plot and meaning, literal and symbolic levels, romance event and moral significance, are shown to work in quite opposite ways.[93]

The ultimate paradox which Fewster's interpretation confronts is that meanings which 'cannot co-exist' 'do co-exist; a set of contradictions are held together in a romance structure […]'.[94] This romance seems to propose what cannot in fact be morally proposed.[95] Fewster argues that the whole point of the poem is not ultimately to justify the heroes' actions but to 'problematise' them by stylistically justifying what simultaneously cannot be morally justified.[96]

The disjunctions in *Sir Isumbras* are arguably less ethically troubling than those in *Amis and Amiloun* and pertain more to the interaction of divine will with human agency, but the romance has puzzled many critics with the same kind of unsettling effect that *Amis and Amiloun* produces.[97] Andrea Hopkins, for example, approaches her argument for the poem's overt penitential content by acknowledging first the apparent difficulty of reading the poem in this way, given that Isumbras throughout the poem (except for his initial pride) behaves in exemplary fashion, and his sufferings at times seem more martyrdom than penance; in short, the poem's penitential themes seem inconsistent.[98] Unlike Braswell, who sees the Middle English poem as an 'artistic synthesis' of two traditions—romance and hagiography—Anne Thompson is less convinced of its success, and sees the result as

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[91] Hume, '*Amis and Amiloun*', 27-30, 28.

[92] Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre,* Ch. 2.

[93] Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre,* 78.

[94] Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre,* 80.

[95] Andrea Hopkins gestures towards a roughly similar idea; her phrase is the 'paradox—of seeming wrong and being right', though in general I have already argued against her interpretation (*The Sinful Knights,* 19).

[96] Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre,* 76.

[97] Isumbras's wars against the heathens are, arguably, ethically troubling as well, but raise questions different from the murder, treachery and false oaths of *Amis and Amiloun*.

[98] *The Sinful Knights,* 125.

'structural incoherence', once again pointing to the disjunctive features which the poem develops in the course of its poly-generic development.[99]

The heart of the puzzle in both romances is the almost painfully obvious fact that both, in their moments of depth and argumentation, and by implication of their happy endings, purport to make simple and absolute what their plots make morally and theologically complex. In both cases, there is a happy ending in both spiritual and worldly terms, regardless of what has occurred morally within the plot, and in both cases, the narrator and sometimes the characters use moments of depth to deny (seemingly) the agency which the plot extension has clearly narrated. Indeed, the whole point of Fewster's argument is that the central tension of *Amis and Amiloun* lies in the stylistic justification of what seems morally unjustifiable: the romance underwrites what its own narrative makes horrible.[100] Such various views of these romances betray a critical struggle to move beyond the sense that the romances are ideologically unreflective, and moreover that they are so incoherently compiled that their narratives often fail to substantiate the text's own proposed ideologies: the romances fail to satisfy on either ideological or narratological grounds.[101]

The readings in this chapter should help to provide some answers to this question. Namely, we should allow the disjunctions, particularly those resulting from the different temporal structures, to represent the nuanced interplay between action in time and the possibilities for reflecting upon the meaning of that action. The result is not a unitary kernel of meaning but a demonstration of the activity of marrying narrative extension—its causal implications, its revelation of moral agency, its reproduction of the changeableness of time—with temporal depth. Depth, as already noted, is a perspective available to any focalising agent (character or narrator) and, liberated from strict sequence, can access meanings which are more absolute and more universal. It is temporal depth which permits concepts like 'wele and woo', 'trewþ', and 'God bothe geveth and taketh'. None of these concepts, however they may jar with the narrative, are 'untrue' or even irrelevant, but they

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[99] Laurel Braswell, '"Sir Isumbras" and the Legend of Saint Eustace', 151; Anne Thompson, 'Jaussian Expectation', 399.

[100] Cf. Erich Auerbach's reading of Dante's *Inferno* as a text whose narrative undermines the purpose of the work: *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 201-2.

[101] The denigration of the romances' compilation and general coherence perhaps emerges most clearly in the views of Derek Pearsall, who damns the romances and their authors most when he praises them, for example when he says that *Sir Degaré* is 'a not at all contemptible example of what the professional romancer could knock together when pressed' ('The Development of Middle English Romance', 104).

differ from the narrative's implications just as the vantage points which produce them differ. The nature of this difference is best understood by returning to Ricoeur's analysis of Augustine. Augustine laments the disjunction between time, which always changes and passes, and eternity, which is 'semper stans', 'forever still', and it is from this relationship that Ricoeur derives his concept of the relation between extension and increasingly deeper, or higher, perspectives.[102] The relation between narrative extension and depth is like the relation of Augustine's time and eternity: disjunction is fundamental because time is understood by its contrast with eternity.[103] These romances, however partially, confront the gap between time and eternity by juxtaposing the narrative equivalents, extension and depth. The perspective which each offers on the same moral experience is incomplete except in relation to the other, but equally it is the relationship between the two which poses such consistent puzzles of meaning.

One analogue to this interpretation can be found in Mitchell's intriguing analysis of Chaucer's *The Clerk's Tale*.[104] Mitchell claims that *The Clerk's Tale* is 'fascinating because it is polyvalent in its moral exemplarity', complex not because it has a 'deficit' of meaning (an incoherence), but because its meanings are several.[105] Part of the puzzling nature of the story is that the Host and the Merchant construe it as a marital exemplum, even when the Clerk himself explicitly says that it is not, and when a critical reading of the story certainly makes such an interpretation seem morally 'monstrous'.[106] If such 'polyvalence' of exemplary meaning is possible in *The Clerk's Tale*, and if, as Mitchell suggests, the story is about such polyvalence and its potential for producing differing reader responses (in the Host, Merchant and the Clerk himself), there is no reason to deprive other romances of this same potential. Moreover, aside from being a romance connected to the same tradition which produced *Sir Isumbras*, *The Clerk's Tale* also takes up connected theological issues, as Stepsis argues.[107] Irrespective of whether Chaucer is

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[102] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 1:25, 28.

[103] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 1:28.

[104] The Griselda story is linked to *Sir Isumbras* insofar as both belong to a group which John Edwin Wells calls the 'Eustace-Constance-Florence-Griselda legends', which emphasise the virtues of patience and endurance: see *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1400* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1916, 1937), 112-13; also Lillian Herlands Hornstein, 'Eustace-Constance-Florence-griselda Legends', in Severs, *Manual*.

[105] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative,* 117.

[106] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative,* 122, 125-6, 129.

[107] Stepsis, '*Potentia Absoluta* and the Clerk's Tale'.

considered an unusual or a characteristic writer for his period, his portrayal of the Griselda story as an ethical conundrum requires readers of his day to employ the same ethical interpretations described here to appreciate the story. Chaucer's expectation of such reading practices suggests that they were in use at the end of the fourteenth century and hence contemporary with the transmission and reception of both *Isumbras* and *Amis and Amiloun*.

These romances provide for their engaged readers a narrative enactment of the trajectory of a human life as it meets the divine. In *Amis and Amiloun*, knightly action is viewed with great reserve, and the resources of human temporality are never powerful enough to bring about resolution; only an agent residing above human time is capable of erasing the ripple effects of the past. This view of the limits of human agency is complemented by *Sir Isumbras*. In that romance, the flux between apparent human agency and attributed divine agency suggests that the same events may appear to derive from different causes depending on how they are viewed; more importantly, the romance itself is a narrative representation of the complex simultaneity of agency that naturally results from dual belief in human free will and, in a manner of speaking, divine free will. The romance addresses the kinds of practical experience which sparks the theological debates: that human actions readily appear motivated, considered, and freely chosen, but the invisible operation of free divine agency implies that the real causality could always be fully divine, divinely permitted to be fully human, or mysteriously both. By staggering between these various attributions of agency, the plot of *Isumbras* conveys this indeterminacy. These two romances, then, in different ways, probe the experience of human agency once it reaches its own limit and meets the divine.

Conclusion

In the course of the last four chapters, romance has emerged as a genre which manipulates time in specific ways to forge relationships with its audience and consider the desires and possibilities of individual lives as they unfold in time. First, nostalgia in romance portrays a fictional past as part of the audience's own identity, and thus enables consolation through identity with the past. If the past is superior, this enables it to stand as an exemplary model; but equally, if the past is exposed as less exemplary than promised, consolation emerges from the realisation that the past expressed the same shortcomings as the present. Second, romance probes forms of autobiographical memory as a way of exploring how religious temporalities intersect with secular life. *Sir Cleges* portrays religious models of the past as practically useful, while other romances imagine the shortcomings of religious discourse in secular justice and knightly endeavour. Third, an examination of the future tense in romance dialogue reveals struggles for authority and power over the future, both empowering ambitious heroes to exert agency but also quietly questioning the true extent of this agency. Finally, taking a narrative theory perspective on temporal depth and extension reveals the capacity of some romances to stage interrogations of the relationship between human and divine action. The frictions in these romances between secular and hagiographical values and structures enables a complex treatment of contemporary debates about agency and the power of the individual.

Throughout this study, it has emerged that certain debates recur in romance studies about whether romance is a conservative genre, or whether it endorses more radical affiliations.[1] In particular, certain structural cruces of romance form the focal points for these debates: nostalgia and a backward-looking orientation toward the past; didacticism, where the narrator's moral utterances appear to circumscribe the narrative's meaning; and the happy ending, which reliably rewards the hero irrespective of his actions, and yet appears to stand as an endorsement of them. Critics who consider the romances conservative have marshalled these three features in support of the argument that romance is a regressive, authoritarian, or illiberal genre, and that it reiterates accepted views of the

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[1] Many critics have recently explored romance's more radical affiliations, opening up the genre for new and varied readings: see Heng, *Empires of Magic,* e.g. 18-35, 74, 91-98; Charbonneau, 'Transgressive Fathers'; Sheila Delany, 'A, A and B: Coding Same-Sex Union in *Amis and Amiloun*', in McDonald, *Pulp Fictions*; McDonald, 'A Polemical Introduction', 16-17; Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 272; Tai, 'Is There an End', x.

dominant rather than permitting them to be interrogated.[2] In light of this study, it seems time to undertake a reconsideration of the temporal structure of romance as one way of addressing this fundamental debate about the nature of the genre. I shall propose that the nostalgia, morality, and happy endings of romance, which so often support arguments for romance conservatism, should be fully embraced as essential to romance but without reading the genre as conservative in the usual sense. This requires appreciating the importance of temporality, which has often been neglected in romance criticism. Reintroducing temporality into the framework for interpretation reinvigorates some of the genre's characteristic features as sources of nuanced interrogation, rather than dullness and conservatism. It also incorporates the audience into the interpretive dynamic.

Nostalgia: Desire and Resistance

The nostalgia of the romances is one focus of the debate about their conservatism. In its simplest manifestation, nostalgia suggests an anti-progressive stance oriented towards the past, and hence Susan Crane directly links it with the romances' social conservatism.[3] Nostalgia also ties the romances to a concept of popular fiction as idealising the past to serve a 'conservative nostalgic politics for order and hierarchy'.[4] Nostalgia therefore seems to anchor the genre in the social realm of the popular rather than 'literary', and in the realm of regressive politics. On occasion, a critic may attempt to rescue the genre from these associations not by recuperating nostalgia itself, but by denying its presence: Ingham asserts that the romances in her study are not nostalgic, because they are 'too poignant, too deeply sad', to be nostalgic.[5] The implication is that nostalgia can be no more than a simple emotion, and that a text's performance of meaningful cultural work must be predicated on denying its nostalgia in favour of some more 'poignant' attitude towards the past and loss. However, either approach—a conservative reading of romance

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[2] For another account of this debate in romance criticism, see Arlyn Diamond, 'Unhappy Endings: Failed Love/Failed Faith in Late Romances', in Meale, *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, 67-69.

[3] Jane Gilbert, 'A Theoretical Introduction', in Putter and Gilbert, *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, 19; Rydzeski, *Radical Nostalgia,* 12-13; Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 109; Crane, *Insular Romance*, 223 (though Crane does not conclude therefore that the romances are entirely conservative in purpose). Gurevich says that the Middle Ages was a period which valued repetition and tradition, not change, in other words that the present could only seek legitimate meaning via the past (*Categories of Medieval Culture*, 98-99).

[4] Gilbert, 'A Theoretical Introduction', 19.

[5] Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 70.

nostalgia, or a denial of it—fails to take adequate account of the fruitful use made in romance of this temporal form of bittersweet pleasure.

First of all, nostalgia should not be considered a solely retrograde mode, but rather as having a social function which is to repair the rupture associated with change. In Chapter One, the function of nostalgia was linked to exemplarity and identity transformation, in other words to change. There, I argued that rather than standing as a merely conservative impulse, nostalgia in the romances serves to neutralise the threat of change which is required as the response to exemplarity. I invoked Fred Davis's study of nostalgia to argue that nostalgia equips readers to embrace change.[6] This is visible especially in the romances that propose themselves as examples for behavioural change, which might threaten a lax reader's moral *status quo*. Through the creation of nostalgia towards the exemplary model, the reader is assured that the modification of character represents a return to what has been lost. This consoling function of nostalgia establishes the romance genre as a source of reassurance to its readers in the face of broader social change or rupture.

Secondly, this study has shown that nostalgia in the romances can move away from an idealised nostalgia to a more interrogative form. Davis calls this reflexive nostalgia, which prompts reflection upon nostalgia itself and on its basis in the past.[7] In this way, the romances do not necessarily long for simple revivification of the past, but rather revivify the past for the purpose of questioning it and of interrogating the nostalgic response itself. This is evinced in the disjunction between the narrator's nostalgic summaries of events and the plot itself, as in *Sir Tryamour, Ywain and Gawain, Amis and Amiloun,* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In these romances, the idealised vision of a chivalric past is voiced within a structure that prompts its re-evaluation. This is explicitly so in *Ywain and Gawain* in the contrast between the narrator's lauding of truth and the ironic absence of this value in Ywain's conduct. It is equally implied in *Amis and Amiloun*, where the 'trewþ and […] godhede' (2506) of the heroes of the past is not what it might seem. Similarly, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the vision of past Arthurian greatness proposed by the narrator is undercut by the presentation of Arthur presiding over a cowardly court whose main goal is entertainment. In *Sir Tryamour*, the audience witnesses the process of time which transforms the hero's reputation, suggesting reflection on whether unqualified

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[6] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday,* 34-5, 104, 109-10.

[7] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 17-24, 91-3.

nostalgia can truly represent a past so distant and so altered by time. In all these instances, nostalgia in the romances is not solely idealised, but interrogative.

Thirdly, the fictionality of romance complicates its use of nostalgia, creating a relationship with the audience which is marked not only by desire but by an inbuilt resistance. The nostalgia cultivated by romance narrators is for a fiction. In cases where the narrator insists on the historical basis for his narrative, for example in *Sir Orfeo* and in Caxton's preface to the *Morte Darthur,* the function is not primarily factual but to forge the impression of continuity between the imagined past and the present-day audience, as discussed in Chapter One. Identity is more at issue than historical accuracy, and the overall concern is with the emotional relationship of audience to the past rather than their credence. A parallel example, cited by Fred Davis, is Disneyland and Disney World, both experiences which feed on and produce nostalgia in visitors for a lost 'age of innocence' but channel this nostalgia through the fictional Disney plots.[8] This nostalgia, however, incorporates more than straightforward longing and allows desire to co-exist with scepticism. Caxton's preface to the *Morte Darthur* suggests this: he gives the evidence for Arthur's historicity (xiv), but concludes by admitting that his reader is 'at […] lyberté' to judge whether the material is factual (xv).[9] He permits and indeed encourages a tension between acceptance and resistance. If his superabundance of evidence for the historicity of Arthur seems like 'protesting too much', this is because it is actually part of an elaborate game which calibrates the reader's desire for the truth of the stories, while simultaneously allowing, or even subtly encouraging, the reader to reject it as false.[10] Although the lens through which a romance narrator presents his story is one of nostalgia, and hence a

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[8] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 121-22. The recent film *Saving Mr Banks* (2013) suggests that Disney's empire serves just this function for viewers more than thirty years after Davis's writing (1979). The film portrays Disney Land as the setting of a recollection of childhood both for Walt Disney himself (Tom Hanks) and for the author P. L. Travers (Emma Thompson), a setting which itself represents a marvellous vision of innocence, figured in the excited children in the now-retro 1960s clothes familiar to me from photos of my parents' childhood. Simultaneously, however, Disney Land and the entire filmmaking franchise form the context for both Disney and Travers to recall the more painful aspects of their childhoods. The title of the film, and the theme voiced by the characters, both suggest that the idealised nostalgic portrayal of childhood fictions, indeed even the 'Disneyfied' and saccharine versions, are the means of 'saving' both the identity of the past itself and the identity of the rememberer. In other words, nostalgia is not *merely* a sweet recollection of the past, but a transformation of the past which recuperates its losses and provides present consolation.

[9] Eugène Vinaver, ed., *Malory: Works*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, 1977).

[10] See also Umberto Eco, *Reflections on the Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), 53. Eco describes writing a novel as a project of shaping the reader's desires towards the story he writes, but so masterfully that at the point of realization and resistance the reader is already trapped into desire.

perspective which implies intimately remembered factual history, the story itself is a fabrication. Unless the audience is totally credulous, the response will be a realization, too late, that the object of nostalgic desire must be rejected.[11] This type of nostalgic response is a desire for a hypothetical past which is alternately known to be false and yet wished and sometimes argued to be true.[12] Where this nostalgia occurs, it negotiates a romance's relationship with its readers in terms of vacillation, establishing tension as the frame for the whole narrative. This inhibits the unbridled loyalty to the past that would make a romance unreflectively conservative. The ambiguity of this nostalgia, combined with its social function of consolation, gives romance the constant appearance of conservatism while never letting the audience's loyalties rest for long with a simply nostalgic vision of the past.

These conclusions about the role of nostalgia suggest further avenues of research, especially in romances where the past is at stake. In the romances where Arthur plays a central part, such as the alliterative *Morte Arthure, The Avowyng of Arthur* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, as well as Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the past is both fictional construct and the reputed historical basis of a type of communal or sovereign identity. Although several fruitful studies of these romances have dealt with these issues,[13] there remains room for a study of the operations of nostalgia specifically, with a fuller appreciation of nostalgia's complexity and cultural functions. Potentially, certain romances that are deemed to be parodic, and hence retrospective on the genre itself, would also benefit from a renewed examination of how nostalgia or resistance shapes their treatment of the 'past'

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[11] An excellent analogue for this effect in romance is Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, a novel framed as historical, while amidst the game of factuality the author anticipates the reader's scepticism in his own: 'I began to think I had encountered a forgery'. The preface to the novel alternately offers and withdraws the promise of historicity, heightening the reader's emotional tension as he or she must continually resist the fiction which is continually held forth as fact. In his short book reflecting on the novel, Eco casts his readers' anticipated response as one of mingled desire and rejection, imagining them declaring, '"But all this is false; I refuse to accept it!"' Yet, Eco explains, at this point of rejection the reader is rejecting what he or she has been conditioned, by the author, to desire: the novel itself. The reader's dilemma of desire and rejection is a trap by the author. See Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (London: Secker & Warburg, 1983, 1992), 3, 1-5; and *Reflections on the Name of the Rose*, 53.

[12] In this reading I differ somewhat from Furrow's account of the 'soothfastness' of romance, which she takes more seriously than I do. However, her account of 'the pleasures of soothfastness' present a compelling reason for romance claims to historicity, suggesting that stories deemed true were seen as more pleasurable, yet another way in which what I consider the pretence of historicity feeds the pleasure of nostalgia (Furrow, *Expectations of Romance*, 184-85).

[13] Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, esp. 3; Crane, *Insular Romance*; Heng, *Empires of Magic,* e.g. Ch. 2; Barron, *Arthur of the English*.

of their own generic identity. Such self-reflective romances include *Sir Thopas, The Squyr of Lowe Degre,* and *Sir Tristrem.*[14]

Exemplarity: Narrative Structures of Morality

One central issue in the debate over romance conservatism is how the romances urge moral and religious conclusions. Those who see the romances as conservative draw attention to the genre's thematic tendency to 'validat[e] the practices of the feudally powerful', in the words of Stephen Knight.[15] In addition, the romances often present a structural conundrum, in which the narrator stands as a privileged voice whose moral dicta contain an otherwise exuberantly radical narrative. For example, this is seen in *Amis and Amiloun,* where the narrator imposes a moral which takes no account of the narrative's problems, as if his driving principle were, 'a moral no matter what, and at all costs'. This feature leads some critics to side with the narrator in their readings of the romance's ethics, producing conservative readings which propose that the narrative really is contained by its moral statements.[16] As a result, it is easy to see how romance often falls prey to the denigration directed at what Mitchell calls 'allegedly closed […] rhetoric', a relation of story to interpretation that appears morally authoritarian or coercive.[17] However, this study has argued that such readings of romance's moral rhetoric fail to allow for the genre's capacity for ethical nuance and debate. Rather, their use and adaptation of religious borrowings illustrates their complex use of moral temporality. I propose a revised understanding of how narrative and interpretation interact, through an understanding of

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[14] Both Myra Seaman and Nicola McDonald read *The Squyr of Lowe Degre* as a self-conscious narrative critique of the romance genre; see Myra J. Seaman, 'The Waning of Middle English Chivalric Romance in "The Squyr of Lowe Degre"', *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 29 (2003), 176; McDonald, 'Desire Out of Order in *Undo Your Door*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34 (2012), 256. Alan Lupack, the editor of the TEAMS edition of *Sir Tristrem,* reads the romance as a parody: see the introduction to *Sir Tristrem* in Lupack, *Lancelot of the Laik and Sir Tristrem.*

[15] Scattergood, 'The Tale of Gamelyn: The Noble Robber as Provincial Hero', in Meale, *Readings in Medieval English Romance,* 178; Anne Scott, 'Plans, Predictions, and Promises: Traditional Story Techniques and the Configuration of Word and Deed in *King Horn*', in Brewer, *Studies in Medieval English Romances*, 37-68 (51-2); Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre,* 30; Derek Pearsall, 'The Pleasure of Popular Romance', in Purdie and Cichon, *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, 18; Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 177; Knight, 'Social Function', 103; cf. Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 266.

[16] Kratins, 'The Middle English *Amis and Amiloun*', 348, 354; Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights,* 17-19; Richmond, *The Popularity of Middle English Romance*, 65.

[17] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative,* 3-4, 8-10.

how exemplarity functions in romance reading. This, too, enables a fuller appreciation of romance as a genre which allows both nuance and plurality in its moral readings.

First of all, to address the question of the romances' thematic conservatism, I would like to examine the use they make of religious temporality and moral claims. This was discussed in Chapter Two in relation to three romances which employ religious discourses to provide temporal structures for secular lives. The use made of these discourses, however, is not to limit or castigate the concerns of secular life. Even *Sir Cleges*, in which religious models are presented in a positive light, goes beyond simply parroting religious discourse. Cleges's case explores the personal emotions implicated in different models of self-conception, as well as the practical consequences for a knight whose concerns are with family, estate, and his standing with the king. In *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, the final scene uses confessional discourse to orchestrate the conviction of the romance's villains, surmounted by their execution and a moral warning by the narrator to avoid their falsehood. Once again, this romance illustrates why a conservatively didactic reading might appeal: Ramsey, for example, reads the romance as an explication of Florence's triumph.[18] However, this reading requires ignoring the detail of her 'wo' at the villains' deaths, which complicates the otherwise overt moral overtones of the ending; ultimately, the romance itself resists this moral reading. These romances use religious ideology not to constrain their stories to an accepted signification, but to stage an exploration of the conflicting demands of spiritual and secular life.

Furthermore, when the romances deal with moral issues, they rely on a model of exemplarity which involves the reader with the narrator and permits a plurality of interpretation. In the Introduction, I discussed the way in which romances respond to a reading of *narrative ethics*, rather than normative ethics. This concept is taken from Mitchell, who argues that medieval ethical discourse addresses situations by proceeding from cases, making it the role of narrative to provide not maxims but ethical stories.[19] This view meshes with Carruthers' account of the process by which material gleaned from reading can be 'occasionalised' to a particular situation for the purpose of making ethical

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[18] Ramsey, *Chivalric Romance*, 181. I see Ramsey's reading as a 'conservative' one insofar as Florence is a saintly heroine and he argues that she is personally vindicated. From another angle, that of the secular family, Ramsey's conclusion might be classed as a more subversive reading, as Florence 'establishes dominance over all the males in her life, including Emere' (181).

[19] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative,* 4-5. Dobyns' analysis of three romances from the Thornton manuscript is somewhat aligned with this model ('Exemplars of Chivalry', 20-1).

decisions.[20] This way of reading narratives frees the critic from the need to link a story to a single universal moral as the way to access its meaning. Rather, this exemplary method of reading permits a narrative to exemplify in many possible moral categories at once, relying on the reader's reception not only to classify it ethically, but also that same reader's application to extract the particular example relevant at a given time. This is Helen Cooper's 'engaged reception' of romance as a genre designed to engender active responses from its readers; not only this, but her model frames a social aspect to this active response in the form of debate.[21] This type of reception is an ideal means for sifting out the ethical nuances in romances like *Amis and Amiloun* and *Sir Isumbras*. It is also the most fruitful context for wrestling with the slipperiness of the conclusions possible for a 'social climbing' romance like *Sir Eglamour of Artois* or the ambiguous situation of Perceval, who both 'achieves' and is born to his status. Readings of these romances are multi-layered and might depend on where the reader's own social loyalties lay.

This model of engaged, exemplary reading of romance provides a solution to the issue of romance structure raised above: namely the marriage of problematic narrative structures with a rhetorical narrator who dictates a simplistic interpretation. The model of engaged, exemplary reading accepts this feature of the romances, without requiring an interpretation of them as therefore conservative. It legitimises the disjunction between a romance's stated interpretation and the ethics derivable from the plot itself, because it does not require total correspondence between them. The narrator is just one voice engaging in exemplary reading. His is a structurally privileged voice, to be sure, but he stands not as the final interpreter but as the first among many, the voice who models interpretation for an audience who then takes it up themselves. This is the role assumed by Chaucer's Clerk, who offers an interpretation which is then followed up by those of the Host and the Merchant, each taking a different angle on the story.[22] Although I am not the first to propose this model of engaged and exemplary reading,[23] it has emerged with particular clarity in the course of my study as one way in which temporality is essential to a theory of narrative interpretation and reception. Seeing the narrator not as the absolute and sole

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[20] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory,* 178-82.

[21] Cooper, *English Romance in Time*, 13.

[22] *The Clerk's Tale* in Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1142-46 (the Clerk), 1212b-1212g (the Host); *The Merchant's Prologue*, 1213-25 (the Merchant).

[23] Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative,* Introduction and Ch. 1; Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading,* xvii, 8; Cooper, *The English Romance in Time,* 13.

interpretive authority but as the first in a series of interpreters shifts an atemporal model of interpretation to a timebound one. I shall discuss this issue in medieval studies further below. For now, it remains to emphasise that the structures of romance narrative which suggest conservative rhetoric appear authoritative only according to an atemporal conception of interpretation. Taking account of the different temporal levels occupied by narrator and narrative, the interpretive moments of 'depth' do not contain the narratives but are both layered above them in a hierarchy of temporalities, as well as voiced by the narrator within the time of the text's unfolding. The narrator, operating within temporal limits, cannot have atemporal, and therefore cannot have absolute, authority.

A revised understanding of romance's productive polyvalence, and its complex dealing with its moral language and themes, suggests a clearer picture of how romance responds to ethical issues. Romance's chief mode is that of emplotment, and any abstract ethical categories are necessarily embodied in the form of sequential narrative and thus must be interpreted according to this mode. Even discourses commonly considered to pertain to the eternal or timeless—moral and religious discourse—are transformed by being emplotted into the structure of an individual, secular lifetime. Interpretation takes place at a different temporal level, but cannot deny its still timebound context. Even the most structurally privileged voice, that of the narrator, cannot fully suppress or contain his material but only represent a partial view of it. Thus, the romances I have studied here do not require 'conservative' readings in any restrictive sense. They sometimes appear conservative, and at other times radical, but these frictions are the purposeful result of movement between ethical abstractions and narrative itself, Ganim's 'gap between meaning and image'.[24] Their conservative declarations are constantly destabilised, but equally their more uproarious propositions are prohibited from taking final hold. This tension, not dissimilar to the tension between nostalgic desire and rejection, animates both romance structure and reception.

Romance Endings and Futures

The third feature of the romances which causes debate is their treatment of the future. This includes their nearly universal tendency to end happily, but also includes their drive to configure futures which correspond to the desires of their heroes and heroines.

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[24] Ganim, *Style and Consciousness*, 154.

Their insistent satisfaction of desire leads some critics to suggest that they are a genre whose interests lie in gratification, in feeding fantasies, or serving as an opiate.[25] It is true that in many cases the hero overcomes fantastical obstacles to achieve an improbable happy ending, in a world which seems to conspire in his favour: for example, Ywain's reconciliation with Alundyne.[26] In some romances, the 'shall' and 'will' of the hero seems to take precedence, for example in *Sir Perceval of Galles* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*; even in *Sir Isumbras* the punishment for pride is presented as a choice for the hero who then dictates his future; his desire directs the romance even when circumscribed by divine penalty. The happy ending also presents an interpretive problem, because it gratifies the reader's expectations of how the plot will unfold, a gratification often linked with the 'popular' in the derogatory sense.[27] The genre has a strong structure of correspondence: between the hero's desires and the development of the future, and between the audience's expectations and the conclusion of the narrative.[28] To some critics, this makes romance a genre reluctant to deal with serious issues or serious readers. However, I would like to propose a different reading of the happy ending and its function. For one thing, the happy ending serves a permissive function which facilitates the freedom of the genre to explore *un*happy material within the plot. More than this, the happy ending is uniquely created by the genre's use of temporal perspectives as a way of understanding human experience in light of eternity.

First, I am not the first to suggest that one function of the happy ending is to allow freedom elsewhere. As social and moral questions are probed through narrative, the guarantee of a certain outcome supplies a fixed framework against which the other elements of the story can play freely.[29] Part of the romances' ability to deploy their

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[25] Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances*, 54; Halverson, 'Havelok the Dane and Society', 150; Scott, 'Plans, Predictions, and Promises', 64; cf. McDonald, 'A Polemical Introduction', 12. McDonald does not take this view, but discusses its presence in romance criticism.

[26] Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry*, 20, 83, 214-16; Faris, 'The Art of Adventure', 96, 100.

[27] Eco, *Reflections on the Name of the Rose,* 60. For notes on the happy ending, see the Introduction, 13, n. 7.

[28] This is what Kermode would call a 'concord fiction', i.e. a work which gives meaning to its narrative by choosing a beginning and ending which concord with one another; see *The Sense of an Ending,* 5, 7-8, 59, 190.

[29] E.g. Richmond, *The Popularity of Middle English Romance*, 16; Heng, *Empires of Magic,* 3 (with reference to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* as a fantasy); Tai, 'Is There an End?', 19-20. Cf. McDonald, 'A Polemical Introduction', 15-16. Her view differs from mine in seeing the 'effusions' of romance as failing to be contained by the genre's ending and structure, whereas I suggest that in a certain way they *are* contained, but we are in agreement that the gratifying structure of romance is one source of its freedom and power.

'fantasy' of overthrow, disruption or change depends on the safety inherent in their closed structure; whatever transpires during the course of the narrative, it can be safely confined to one person's lifetime and cut off temporally by the finitude of divine justice in death.[30]

Second, the happy ending needs to be understood not as a result of what happens within the plot, but as a result of temporal features *beyond* the limit of plot itself. To make this clear, it is necessary to dismantle a certain misappraisal of how the happy ending relates to the rest of romance structure, and of what worldview it signifies. We are used to thinking of the happy ending in chronological terms as the endpoint of a linear sequence, a framework likely deriving from Aristotelian concepts of plot and unity.[31] Admittedly, up to the death of the hero and/or the heroine, this is what the happy ending is: it inhabits the same chronological extension as the rest of his emplotted life. However, in many romances, the happy ending reaches beyond death to an eternal bliss. *Amis and Amiloun* provides a good example:

> And for her trewþ and her godhede
> Þe blisse of heuyn þey haue to mede,
> Þat lasteþ euer moo.
>
> Amen. (2506-29)

At the point of 'þe blisse of heuyn', the story no longer inhabits the chronological extension of human time, but has shifted to eternity. No character within the plot could know the knights' eternal fates; it is only from a vantage point outside the plot, from eternity itself, that the narrator can have this knowledge. Thus, the knights' heavenly reward does not represent the chronological ending of their story, but rather a conclusion analogous to interpretation, given by a narrator who assumes eternity as his vantage point. Properly speaking, the lines describing the heroes' eternal bliss represent the romance's *upper limit*: this is a term Ricoeur uses to refer to the uppermost level of temporality included in a narrative.[32] Eternity therefore represents not the ending of the romance but its horizon, permitting the narrator to conclude the narrative *beyond* the limits of its own plot. Thus, the statement of the knights' heavenly reward is not necessarily a naïve statement of faith in the likelihood of worldly affairs ending happily. It is rather an interpretation of

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[30] This is a variation on a similar idea by Geraldine Heng, who analyses romance on the model of 'cultural rescue' which makes safe and articulated what would otherwise be unbearable or unspeakable (*Empires of Magic*, e.g. 3, 96-97).

[31] William Strunk Jr., 'The Happy Ending', *The Sewanee Review* 33, no. 1 (Jan. 1925), 38-39.

[32] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1: 86-87.

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worldly affairs from an eternal perspective, which in this context is a perspective associated with the divine.

This feature of romance is best illuminated by a detour into a work from another genre, the poem 'Vanity' in Ashmole 61.[33] This poem, eleven stanzas long, rehearses the events and material culture of contemporary life, taking a different aspect in each stanza, and concluding at the end of each that all of it is vanity. The scope of life pictured in the poem is broad, including, on one end of the social spectrum, the building of castles and cities (8-9), nobility of birth (29-32), and on the other end tilling of the earth (71-74), but the manuscript context and the specific successes envisioned in the poem suggest its middling social milieu. Strikingly, the romance pictures its audience's desires in forms very similar to those in romance: triumph in jousting (20), physical handsomeness (43-44), a beautifully apparelled lady (22), and a 'plesant and feyre' wife in an apparently happy marriage (36-37) which produces 'chylder for to be thin eyer' (39). The poem's pronouncement that 'all is bot vanyté' (70) is produced by creating miniature plots in each stanza, each ending with demise. For the nobly born, the final 'chekemate' is 'deth' (33, 34). For the happily married man with children, 'age' attenuates happiness (40-41). Masculine strength and attractiveness 'schall all pass' (49). Labour continues 'to the tyme that we dyghe' (76). This poem envisions all the successes embodied in romance, but the endpoint chosen for each small narrative is old age and death. This poem takes in a large chronological *length* of time, enough to perceive 'how this werld is turnyd up and downe' (2), but the endpoint of death which ends its chronology also represents its upper limit; unlike *Amis and Amiloun* its upper limit is confined to chronological life, much like Heidegger's 'finitude sealed by being-towards-death' which Ricoeur opposes to the upper limit of eternity in the Augustinian Christian tradition.[34] This is not to say that 'Vanity' is an un-Christian poem, but simply that no concept of eternity is encompassed by it.[35] Therefore, it can narrate small plots which correspond exactly to portions of romance— martial success, marriage, production of heirs, and the endpoint of death—and yet, based on the same chronological material, conclude vastly differently. Death is the end both of this poem and of a romance plot, yet in the romance death is placed within a structure

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[33] In Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61*.

[34] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1: 86-7.

[35] The poem makes no obvious commitment one way or another, its models being the Book of Ecclesiastes and Boethius, but there is no reason to see it as anything but a Christian poem, given its context and culture.

whose upper limit allows death to be a happy ending, whereas in 'Vanity' death is the indicator of futility. The chronology is the same; the upper limit is the crucial difference.

This look at the 'Vanity' poem, which has a series of unhappy endings, should cast some light on the nature and function of romance happy endings. The specific conditions which permit romances to end happily are a function of layered temporality rather than the imposition of an incredible interpretation onto a narrative. The 'happy ending' of the hero's marriage, children, and apparently unproblematic life thereafter is told only in retrospect, and by a narrator who has privileged knowledge of eternity. Romance is therefore a fiction which imaginatively creates a vantage point beyond the real limits of time, enabling it to perceive meanings not visible from within time.[36] What distinguishes the bleak 'Vanity' from the more optimistic (in a sense) *Amis and Amiloun* is not the theological assumptions, for in all likelihood, the theology of the culture which informs both the poem and the romance is comparable in its essentials. Both employ a Boethian concept of fortune's revolution, and both occur in manuscripts with religious material (Ashmole 61 and the Auchinleck manuscript). Yet the 'Vanity' poem makes no reference to the possibility of grace, ultimate redemption, or a providential role in human affairs—all of which would be antidotes to its bleak perspective—while in the romance all these issues are openly at stake. The crucial factor in determing the two works' outlooks is the difference in temporal structure.

This analysis suggests a more nuanced way of reading the happy endings of romance. It liberates us, first of all, from the need to minimise the happy ending in an attempt to see the genre as intellectually credible: either by arguing that the romances' disruptive plots overshadow their happy endings, or with the consolation that medieval audiences would have been less sceptical of the happy ending than modern ones.[37] Second, it liberates us from the need to interpret romance's gratifying structure as a confidence in life always being good to the hero, or as a forced attempt to satisfy desire for hero or audience (though clearly it does satisfy desire). Rather, the happy ending of romance is a result of the choice to locate its chronology within a layer of temporalities reaching to the eternal. This, in turn, enables avenues of interpretation which are otherwise closed: interpreting the life of the hero retrospectively in light of eternity and redemption, for example. Where such endings seem incongruous, rather than adopting cynicism it is better

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[36] This is how Kermode describes concord fictions (*The Sense of an Ending,* 7-8).

[37] As Whetter suggests in *Understanding Genre*, 67.

to read them as meaningful *because* of their incongruousness, as in the case of *Amis and Amiloun*. Alternatively, if the happy endings seem implausible and make us inclined to reject them, we should embrace this resistance and see the happy endings as laid down by the narrator in a tone of challenge, as we are pushed to accept what he has conditioned us to resist. (Recall the conflict of acceptance and resistance which characterises nostalgia.) If a happy ending is hard to accept in romance, it is only because the corresponding doctrine of grace is equally beyond the full compass of understanding. The romance happy ending does not attempt to explain the incomprehensibility of this working of divine power, but simply to enact it. The resulting tension, which occupies scholars with criticism, is part of a romance's encouragement of debate and fostering of a conflicted and therefore intellectually and emotionally demanding response.

The happy ending and its particular articulation in romance serves to place the genre within medieval literature more broadly.[38] The happy ending, because it stands as structural closure, despite any transgression in the plot, allows romance a special angle for representing one facet of divine justice. In this sense the romances are like other medieval genres, for example fabliaux and history, which also enforce their own closure: in fabliaux it is in the form of a comic justice, in history it takes the form of death as each figure is dismissed from the narrative in this guaranteed final step. In 'Vanity', the closure takes the form of death. Medieval texts do express a confidence in closure which may not be shared by some subsequent periods. The nature of the closure, however, is particular to each genre. Therefore, the role of romance endings among the literary culture of medieval England is to figure a specifically redemptive future, not only *because* of good deeds, but frequently *despite* them, in other words by grace. This is why so many romances conclude with the peculiar combination of quite worldly success with either heavenly bliss or prayer. To say, 'The happy ending is not deserved,' thus in one sense misses the point, given that the point of the ending is not simply to validate a sequence of chronological actions but to rise above them in vantage point. In another sense, however, this statement in fact *is* the point: it is frequently in the very nature of romance happy endings not to be deserved. The appearance of incongruence forces us towards the only explanation possible, which is the operation of grace which grants happy endings to those who ill deserve it. In this sense, the happy ending declares that human lives can, do, and will arrive at a grandly happy ending. Here

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[38] For the idea of a literary expression of worldview, see Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*; Ganim argues for narrative as a complement to philosophical debate, *Style and Consciousness*, 152.

lies the 'structural' Christianity evinced by these stories which Vitz and Putter recognise, and in my own study I am similarly persuaded of it.[39]

To appreciate fully the contribution of romance temporal structure to the generic variety of the Middle Ages would, of course, require much more study of other genres and their temporalities. This would include their use of tense, the nature of their endings, and their attitude towards the past. In particular, such a study might best begin with texts which appear in manuscripts alongside the romances, for example in Ashmole 61, which is already usefully edited in a single volume by Shuffelton. If 'Vanity' is a suggestive case, then much is to be discovered both about romance and other genres by a comparative study of their plot ordering and endings, an approach which becomes acutely relevant when carried out among the texts which inhabit manuscripts together and hence were read together by their medieval audiences.

Dramas of Thought: A Reconsideration of Structure and Audience

The nostalgia, exemplarity and happy endings of romance have been cited in support of arguments for the genre's conservatism, but it should now be clear that there are other ways to read these features as having a more complicated function. This is because so many aspects of romance which seem final, authoritative, or definitive prove to be part of the development of multiple, not always coordinating, temporalities. For example, the sentiments and morals of narrators may read like glosses which limit the narrative's meaning, while in fact they occupy only a moment of the text and reside on a different temporal level, leaving the plot as a separate entity which generates different types of meaning. The many times, tenses, and temporalities of romance prohibit the dominance of a single, unmoving position in relation to the narrative. This polyvalent temporality of romance has not always been recognised. As I shall discuss below, romance criticism has often relied on interpretive frameworks which deny temporality. Therefore, I shall propose that appreciating the role of temporality in romance is key both to engaging with these debates over romance conservatism, but also to appreciating the intellectual function of these texts for their readers. Romance temporality establishes the movement and process

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[39] Vitz, *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology,* 213; Putter, 'Narrative Logic of *Emaré*', 178-79.

which shapes one of their central functions, which is to enact and exemplify modes of thinking about experience.[40]

Asserting the importance of temporality in medieval narrative is necessary because it has often been subordinated to atemporal concepts of organisation. In criticism, gothic design in the visual arts and architecture recurs as a point of reference, going back at least to the nineteenth century in the use of 'gothic' garden planning as an analogy for the structure of the *Faerie Queene*.[41] Eugene Vinaver's seminal discussion of interlace likens it to arabesques of interlocking vines, and he completes his examples with images of such designs from manuscripts.[42] He also appeals to Romanesque architecture.[43] D. W. Robertson inaugurates his whole discussion of medieval style with illustrations from cathedral architecture, also with illustrations.[44] Other critics of various medieval works, notably Tolkien and Ernst Robert Curtius, have proposed a 'static' or spatial (diptych) structure.[45] These spatial approaches, perhaps inadvertently, eliminate temporal progression from narrative meaning and see elements of plot as co-equal, like elements of a painting.[46] Structuralist approaches overtly propose this in their subordination of time to

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[40] Similar propositions are made with regard to Chrétien's romances particularly. See Zrinka Stahuljak, Virginie Greene, Sarah Kay, Sharon Kinoshita and Peggy McCracken, *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes,* Gallica 19 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011); Eugene Vance, *From Topic to Tale: Logic and Narrativity in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); see also Whitman, 'Thinking Backward and Forward', 135.

[41] Ganim, *Style and Consciousness*, 3, 7; Richard Hurd, 'Letters on Chivalry and Romance', in *The Works of Richard Hurd, D. D., Lord Bishop of Worcester*, vol. 4 (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1811), Letter 8; repr. as *Hurd's Letters on Chivalry and Romance with the Elizabethan Dialogue*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London: Henry Frowde, 1911), Letter VIII, 118-19, 122. Page references are to the 1911 edition.

[42] Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance*, Ch. 5, and figs. IV-X.

[43] Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance*, 77-8.

[44] *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), Ch. 3; figs. 74-9, 85-90. In fact Robertson denies that this spatial discussion sees medieval narrative as temporally static; he argues the opposite, that a gothic cathedral cannot be adequately captured in the single moment represented by a photograph but must be apprehended one part at a time and hence *over time* (*A Preface to Chaucer*, 181-83). However, his part in this line of critics appealing to architecture as analogous to narrative structure still tends towards a static conception of narrative as spatially, rather than temporally, organised.

[45] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'The Monsters and the Critics', in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983; originally published in *The Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 [1936]), 28; Ernst Robert Curtius, "Zur Interpretation des Alexiusliedes", *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 56 (1936), 113-137. Both Tolkien and Curtius are cited in the useful discussion by William W. Ryding, *Structure in Medieval Narrative* (The Hague, The Netherlands: Moulton & Co., 1971), 25-6.

[46] Though, it should be noted, there is no necessity to see visual art as atemporal, for it too is perceived in time: Ganim, *Style and Consciousness,* 7. Cf. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry,* trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962, 1984), 6, 13.

atemporal structures. For example, Lévi-Strauss sees myth as an atemporal system, indeed as an '[instrument] for the obliteration of time'.[47] His supposition that 'binary oppositions' are more essential to a work than temporal order echoes the diptych structure assigned to many medieval works.[48] This is visible in medieval literary criticism in the structuralist diagrams of Chrétien's *Tristan* cited by Ryding, where the only relic of the romance's original temporal structure is the number given to the title of each rearranged story motif.[49] Susan Wittig openly states that the final step in her methodology involves removing the elements of narrative from their temporal order to uncover deeper structures.[50] Temporal sequence is relegated to near irrelevance.

Analogous to this spatial conception of medieval narrative is a philosophical view of the relation of narrative to meaning. In this view, a narrative's constituent parts, or even all the members of a genre or period, derive from and remain fixed in a relation with a moral 'as a simple, unchanging essence, subordinating the potential complexities of the narrative'.[51] Indeed, in this view meaning consists because of such fixity.[52] Not only is this universal structurally unmoving in relation to the text, but it is usually conceived as atemporal. For example, in Ian Watt's view, medieval literature is distinguished by its Platonic construction of meaning as independent of any particular time.[53] D. W. Robertson is perhaps the most famous proponent of the view that medieval literature is unified and anchored by an atemporal moral: for example that the *Canterbury Tales* unifies around a

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[47] Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 16; Wood, *The Deconstruction of Time*, 349-51; Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 10.

[48] Wood, *The Deconstruction of Time,* 349; Wittig, *Stylistic and Narrative Structures,* 8. For the diptych structure, see Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre,* 18, 21, 59, 76-7; A. C. Spearing, '*The Awntyrs off Arthure*', in *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1981), 186, 190; A. C. Spearing, 'Central and Displaced Sovereignty in Three Medieval Poems', *The Review of English Studies*, n. s., vol. 33, no. 131 (Aug., 1982), 250, 258; 'Tolkien, 'Monsters', 28 (Tolkien refers to the poem as a 'balance' rather than primarily a narrative); Curtius, 'Zur Interpretation', 589, qtd. in Ryding, *Structure in Medieval Narrative,* 26; Wood, *The Deconstruction of Time*, 349.

[49] Ryding, *Structure in Medieval Narrative*, 35, 36. The two critics are A. Witte, 'Der Aufbau der ältesten Tristandichtungen', *Zeitschrift für deutschen Altertum*, 70 (1933), 161-95; and Bodo Mergell, *Tristan und Isolde: Ursprung und Entwicklung der Tristansage des Mittelalters* (Mainz: Verlag Kirchheim & Co., 1949), 14. Mergell's book includes other similar diagrams, see 28, 47, 55, 57, 59, 62, 74, 88, 94, 153.

[50] Wittig, *Stylistic and Narrative Structures*, 8.

[51] Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, 4. Scanlon gives account of, but does not take, this view of medieval narrative meaning. For an example of this view, see Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 206-7.

[52] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding,* With an afterword by W. B. Carnochan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 21-22.

[53] Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 21-22.

central theme of love.[54] Even separate from a Robertsonian view, some of the more
didactic views of exemplarity can function similarly. I have already described how these
didactic readings of romance see meaning through the relation of the narrative to eternal
verities or common moral *topoi* like penance or the casting down of the proud.[55] Often, the
implication is that the moral precedes the narrative expression, making the narrative's
meaning both singular and predetermined. A good example of this is view is evinced in the
foreword by Wlad Godzich to Eugene Vance's book, *From Topic to Tale*. Godzich
describes how the universal can govern a romance's development:

> Thus, instead of having a story move from event to event […], a section of the
> narrative would provde *concrete and particular instantiation of a universal*
> *abstract process* such as the articulation of the particular to the whole, for example.
> The narrative would be organised around these particular concrete instantiations of
> the universal abstract patterns constituted by topics, and […] thus, ultimately, [have]
> ethical value as well.[56]

Vance does address process and temporal development and hence makes no claim that the
romances are philosophically atemporal,[57] but Godzich's preface in particular illustrates
how a reading of the intellectual aspects of romance can lead to this universalising
philosophical view. When *topoi*, morals or 'commonplaces' are seen as the governing
forces of narrative meaning, interpretation becomes an attempt to discover these static
universals amidst the effusions of narrative. This approach echoes structuralist plot
diagrams, which subordinate time and seek meaning independent of temporal structure.[58]

    The problem with such interpretations is that they flatten the temporally
multilayered structure of romance. They also ignore the disjunctions which result from its
linear development, in which knowledge at any single moment is partial and therefore
always partially in conflict with other moments. That is, the experience of reading a

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[54] Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, Ch. 5, esp. 502-3; cf. Hurd's likening of 'gothic' narrative to a set of paths
which are unified by 'a common and concurrent center' (Hurd, 'Letters', 122).

[55] E.g. Dobyns, 'Exemplars of Chivalry', 24, 31-32; Richmond, *The Popularity of Middle English Romance,*
62-65; Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, 5; Foster, introduction to *Robert of Cisyle* in *Amis and Amiloun,*
Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace, 75.

[56] Godzich, 'Forward: *In Memoriam*', in *From Topic to Tale*, x-xix (xiii). Emphasis mine.

[57] For example, Vance discusses the 'fiction of a double temporality' in Chrétien's work (5-6) and the issues
of retelling and transformation in *Yvain* (8-11).

[58] It is not, I suspect, simple ignorance of time which motivates this critical move. In my opinion, the
recourse to structuralist models is likely motivated by a desire for meaning which transcends time, a way of
anchoring particular expressions in a source of meaning which stands outside the realm of change that we
know as temporal experience. Such sources of meaning (universals), to be conceived as privileged at all,
must be conceived as removed from the exigencies of time, which is to say, they must be seen as eternal.

romance is often not the experience of discovering an elaboration towards a moral, but a sequence of divergent propositions.

In urging a more temporal and time-bound way of understanding the romances, it is important to understand what temporality means in this context. It is not flatly linear, and is therefore distinct from chronology or order. Similarly, analysing the temporality of narrative is more than distinguishing between the 'temporal' and the 'atemporal'. As Ricoeur argues, when a narrative departs from a purely chronological structure, it does not resist time and become a form of logic instead. Elements of narrative which are non-chronological are still temporal, and departures from strict chronology signal the deepening of temporality which attempts to understand more completely the nature of existence in time. In Ricoeur's own words,

> Indeed it was necessary to confess what is other than time in order [i.e. chronology] to be in a position to give full justice to human temporality and to propose not to abolish it but to probe deeper into it, to hierarchize it, and to unfold it following levels of temporalization that are less and less "distended" and more and more "held firmly" [...].[59]

In language I have used earlier, Ricoeur is saying that narrative is a way of 'gathering' chronological events—what he calls 'time in order'—from a higher position, not rejecting time but rising within it to understand more at once than is possible within the flow of experience. This is the function of the many temporal shifts in romance. These temporal shifts include the moments of depth as contrasted with the extensions of narrative. Also included are character retrospections, which 'dechronologise' experience by telling an event out of place in the overall sequence: for example, Colgrevance and Ywain's stories of folly, the confessions in *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, or Cleges's memories of his past. Temporal shifts also include the way in which interpretations change from moment to moment within the narrative, as in the case of Isumbras and the vacillating conclusions about who is responsible for events. In all these ways, it is clear that 'time in romance' is not confined to chronology, and it is far from becoming a limiting factor (as might be feared) which anchors the text's concerns in the ephemeral, the changeable, and the particular. The use of temporality in romance can furnish texts with multiple vantage points for meaning, and in so doing actually resists the limits of chronology without disavowing time, 'not [...] abolishing time but [...] deepening it.'[60] The nature of this

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[59] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:30.

[60] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:30.

deepening of time is well described by Boethius's definition of eternity, which he sees not as the absence of time but the simultaneous possession of all time: 'Eternity, therefore, is the complete possession, all at once, of endless life.'[61]

What romance achieves in total by its accumulation of different perspectives through time, and about time, is a vantage point of temporal depth, the 'simultaneous possession of time', *for its audience*. By its shifting perspectives, it 'gathers' material for the audience in precisely the same way as the narrator gathers it for his own interpretations. Therefore, through the process of romance, the privilege of the narrator—who knows the whole story and can therefore summarise it as 'weal and woe' or 'an ensaumpull'— becomes the privilege of the reader as well. This accrued omniscience liberates interpretations from a strictly timebound and partial perspective, and equips the reader for methods of thinking otherwise inaccessible. That is, how to stand back and reflect on an experience, how to remember and reconceptualise the past, how to view identity as it is shaped and developed in time and by the forces of multiple agencies, and how to understand human experience from birth to death and in its confluences with the divine. By engaging in this ascending, 'deepening' understanding of events through reading romance, the reader models precisely the methods of thinking involved and the entire narrative becomes an exemplum for modes of thought. This is much like Boethius's description of understanding, closely allied with his vision of eternity: just as God views human time 'as if from the highest [point] of things' (eternity), human understanding should be 'lifted up' 'as much as we can to the height of the highest mind'.[62] This description of the gaining of understanding is pictured as rising up, like God, to a vantage point which sees the varied drama of earthly life as it unfolds in time, but apprehends it singly.[63] This ascending understanding well describes what the reader gains through narrative: he or she thinks what the narrative enacts, and becomes able to think about the past, present, and future according to how the narrative itself 'thinks' about these modes.

There is critical precedent for seeing narrative as a form of thought. Ricoeur explains how narrative is a means of thinking about temporal experience. Experience itself, he argues, is 'confused, unformed, and at the limit mute', and certain aspects of it are

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[61] *Consolat. Phil.,* 5.6, pp. 400, 401. The Latin reads: *Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis uitae tota simul et perfecta possessio [...].* Translation is mine. For Aquinas's take on this passage, see Harm Goris, 'Interpreting Eternity in Thomas Aquinas', in Jaritz and Moreno-Riano, *Time and Eternity*, 194.

[62] *Consolat. Phil.*, 5.4, pp. 404, 405,396, 397, emphasis mine.

[63] *Consolat. Phil.,* 5.5 pp. 396-99; 5.6, pp. 399-411; Ganim, *Style and Consciousness,* 153.

impossible to grasp in philosophical speculation; emplotted events in narrative form are one way of making sense of temporal experience in a way no other discourse is able.[64] In seeing narrative as complementary to philosophical thought, Ricoeur suggests that narrative is a mode of thinking, just as philosophical discourse is.[65] In a similar vein, the romances not only narrate individuals thinking, but are themselves ways of thinking in narrative. They enact a process of intellection and understanding. Indeed, Jon Whitman has already argued just this for early European romance:

> At times, I think, the interplay of topics and tenses in early romances involves not just a way of receiving a world or presenting a point of view. It virtually enacts in narrative form certain far-reaching features of the act of thinking itself.[66]

An analogous position is taken by the authors of *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, who appeal to the Lacanian concept of 'logical time' to understand Chrétien's romances as outworkings of thought processes.[67] I would like to extend these provocative hypotheses to Middle English romance to propose that it, too, enacts 'the act of thinking'.

Not only this, but Middle English romance enacts thought in time, through time, and about time. This process of thinking is temporally structured because it moves and develops through the medium of time, but in this process time is also positively deployed, used, shaped, and potentially at stake.[68] This means that the romances not only picture individuals conceptualising their lives in time, but the texts in their entirety are acts of thought about temporality. Such a view of the importance of time has been recognised in relation to the novel, but there is no reason why, if in the twentieth century fiction has 'rehearsed, developed and expressed' a 'new experience of time', the fiction of the Middle Ages should not similarly 'rehearse, develop, and express' an experience of time.[69]

An emphasis on the reader or audience has surfaced throughout this study. This is because the temporal operations of romance continually implicate the audience in order to be realised. Romance nostalgia is negotiated not in terms of absolute dates or chronologies

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[64] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:xi.

[65] See also Ganim, *Style and Consciousness*, 152.

[66] Whitman, 'Thinking Backward and Forward', 134-35; also 131-2.

[67] Stahuljak et al., *Thinking Through Chrétien de Troyes*, e.g. 3, 164; see also Jacques Lacan, 'Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty', in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, with Heloise Fink and Russell Grigg (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006).

[68] See above, p. 21, n. 44.

[69] Currie, *About Time*, 6.

but by relating the time of the story to the time of the reader. The relationship of narrative to interpretation, because temporal and therefore not absolute, invites audience engagement, producing the exemplary mode of reading. Finally, the very structure that I have proposed for romance—the structure of movement, shifts and developments analogous to thought— only makes sense if the narrative is understood as something which *is moved through*.[70] Static, structuralist conceptions of meaning only cohere when the text is envisioned as an artefact, with little attention to its unfolding in time, and therefore minimal need for the reader as an agent in this unfolding. To appreciate temporal modes of interpretation, it is necessary to admit the reader into the dynamic.

It is crucial, however, to recognise that this does not consist primarily in acknowledging an audience's real-world existence (though this remains a fact).[71] Rather, it requires recognising that the audience is *like a character* in being intrinsic to the text's operation and in being shaped by the text itself.[72] This is not the actual audience but rather the narrative audience, a position which the actual (real-life) audience seeks to enter but which is a creation of the narrative itself.[73] In romance, this is the audience pictured by the narrator at times as 'lordyngs' or 'princes proude' or 'wives, maidnes, and alle men';[74] it is an audience which inheres in the text by being invoked in 'ye' and 'we'; and it is implicit at any moment of interpretation or moralisation. As I have said, the audience is also necessary in romance's thought-like structure of movements. Hence, throughout this study, the link between time in romance and identity in the audience is concomitant with temporal analysis. In their temporal operations, the romances both require and create their narrative audiences. Therefore, not only is 'audience identity' shaped by a romance in any exemplary function it may have in the lives of its readers, but more intrinsically, this application is preceded by the creation of an audience by and within the narrative, into which the actual audience enters. This narrative audience mediates between narrative and

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[70] James Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (Columbia: Ohio State University Press, 2007), 2.

[71] Cf. Walter J. Ong, 'The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction', *Proceedings of the Modern Lanugage Association* 90, no. 1 (1975).

[72] E.g. Ganim argues that *Troilus and Criseyde* tracks the change of the audience (*Style and Consciousness,* 79, 144). Eco, as I mentioned earlier, sees his audience as at least partly a creation of the novel itself (*Reflections on the Name of the Rose*, 48-53).

[73] For terms relating to audience, see Peter J. Rabinowitz, 'Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn, 1977): 121-141.

[74] *Sir Cleges* in Shuffelton, *Codex Ashmole 61,* 1; *Robert of Cisyle* in Foster, *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace,* 1; *Havelok the Dane* in Sands, *Middle English Verse Romances*, 2.

actual audience, not only practically enabling the actual audience to 'witness' the story, but facilitating the tensions I have described between desire and resistance, narrative and interpretation, conservative and radical: these are possible, structurally, because the audience is not a singular entity but multi-layered, with the possibility of frictions between the responses at different levels.[75]

Romance therefore emerges as a genre which particularly creates and relies on its audience, and hence which has identity shaping as one of its core activities. It achieves this through a mode of narrative which dramatizes acts of thought: the romances translate thinking about time into a narrative or dialogic format, structured according to devotional and moral models rather than in introspection or internal monologue: hence my characterisation of this thinking as a form of drama. Through this process of narrating thought in time and about time, the romances explore the effects of time on individual identity and make these models of thinking available to their audience.

Ultimately the most valuable contribution which temporal readings can make to the romance genre is a way of giving an intellectual account of the particular experience of reading romance—that is, traversing *through* it. Nostalgia, the interpretive antics of narrators, and blissful wedded endings govern the experience of reading a romance by shaping how we, as readers, think about what *has happened* and what *will happen* in the narrative. Yet these features, by their very ubiquity, can become stultifying to the scholar. Thus, much of my investigation has been propelled by personal questions dating back to my first undergraduate encounter with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, questions surrounding the temporal experience of reading romance: the peculiar way the genre has of telling what will happen before it does, of summing up huge breadths of time, of spinning a tale at length but flippantly dismissing it as but a *stounde's* worth of time, of promptly forgetting it at the end in the closing prayer. My hope for this study is that it permits these subjective experiences of reading to assume intellectual weight, and liberates the genre's characteristically frustrating features to be critically fruitful.

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[75] Rabinowitz establishes a hierarchy of four different audience levels: the actual audience (who really read the story); the authorial audience (which is the author's intended audience); the narrative audience (the position the authorial audience enters as spectator within the narrative); and the ideal narrative audience (who is the *narrator's* ideal and totally credulous audience); see 'Truth in Fiction'. See also Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction*, 4; Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 139-40.

Abbreviations

Conf.	Watts, William, trans. *St. Augustine's Confessions*. 2 vols. The Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann, 1912.
Consolat. Phil.	Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy.* In *Boethius: The Theological Tractates*, edited and translated by H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand. The Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann, 1918.
CUL	Cambridge University Library
MED	*Middle English Dictionary.* http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/.
PL	Davis, Norman, ed. *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century.* 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, 1976.

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